

The State of American Historical Education: The Forgotten Subject

Emma Norton, *Utah State University* | Dustin Crawford, *Utah State University*

I. Introduction

The Question: How has American historical education within the United States evolved? Are students more knowledgeable of history now, or in past years?

The Goal: To understand the state of American historical education within the U.S. by comparing history textbooks and analyzing standardized test scores.

What was looked at:

1. Ten U.S. history textbooks from the following years: 1876, 1899, 1911, 1925, 1932, 1938, 1956, 1983, 1994, 2010

2. NAEP reports on U.S. History for all years in which scores were reported and data could be found

What is NAEP?

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is known as the Nation's Report Card. Beginning in 1969, NAEP assesses 4th, 8th, and 12th grade students in major subject areas.



Emma Norton
Utah State University
History Department
e.a.norton@aggiemail.usu.edu



UtahState
University

II. Approach

1. Compare the introductions of U.S. History textbooks to understand the purpose behind the history being taught.
2. Compare what is taught in textbooks regards to the American Civil War and slavery to determine the consistency in teaching.
3. Analyze NAEP results for U.S. History to determine trends in student's historical knowledge.

III. Results

NAEP assessed U.S. History in 1986, 1988, 1994, 2001, 2006, 2010, and 2014. Of these years, only results from 1994, 2001, 2006, and 2010 are comparable. A different framework for testing was established in 1994, and only eighth grade was reported in 2014.

In 1988, half of eight grades students reported that they had never studied the period of 1945 to present. In 2010, thirty seven percent of students reported that they had never studied the period of 1945 to present.

Reasons for writing U.S. History Textbooks:

- Instill a love of country
- Make good citizens
- Show the cause of events
- Tell a story
- Present the facts

Some textbooks present the cause of the Civil War as a States' Rights issue and others as an issue of slavery.

Some textbooks romanticize slavery while other recognize the brutality.

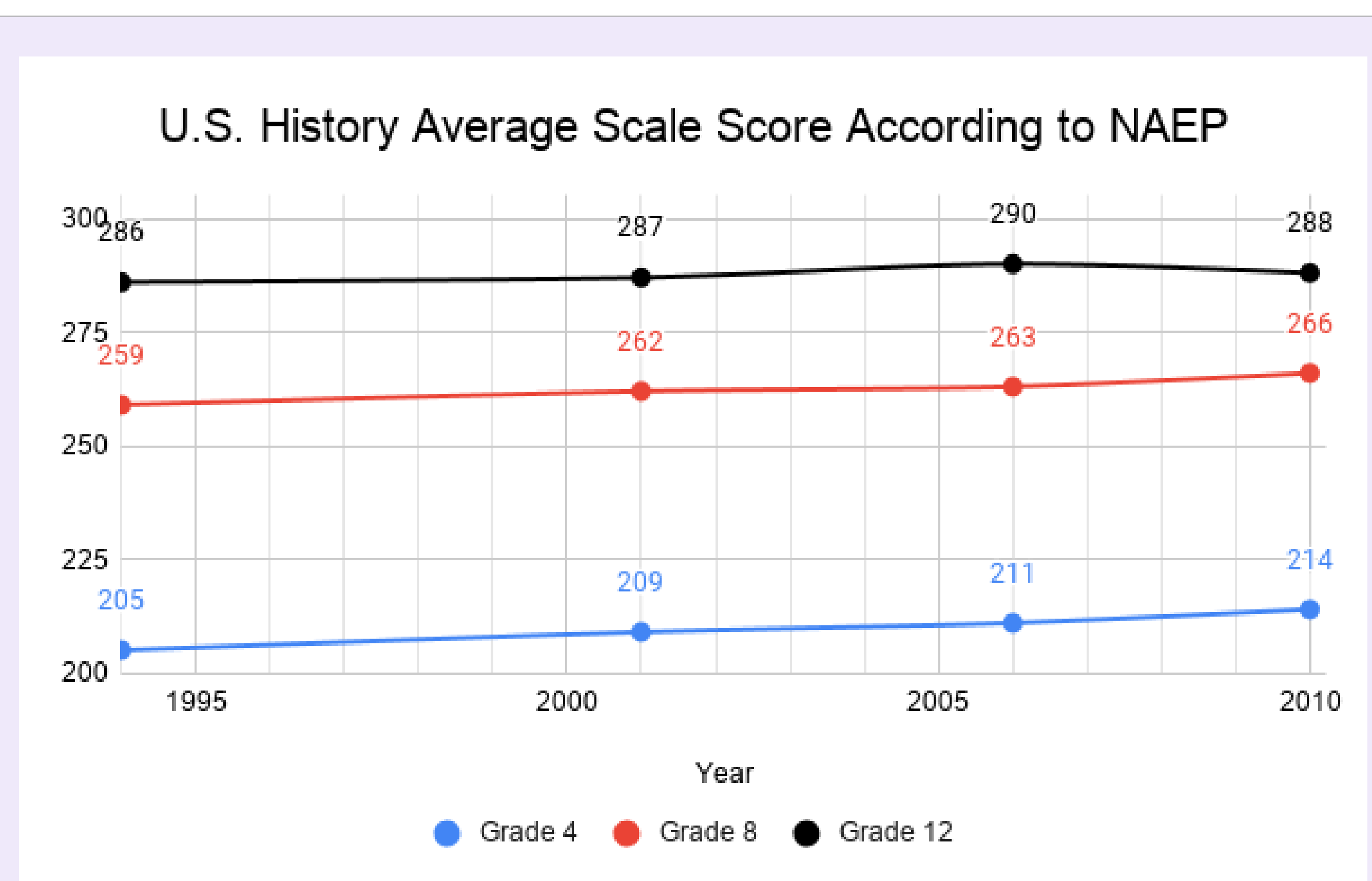


Figure 1 – In general, the average composite scale score for U.S. History in 4th, 8th, and 12th grade students slowly increased between 1994 and 2010.

IV. Conclusions

U.S. Historical education is filled with inconsistencies. U.S. History is reported at irregular intervals and far less often than other subjects reported by NAEP. Due to a lack of standardization in reporting until recent years, along with the fact that different information is reported in different years, it is hard to do a comprehensive analysis of students' knowledge of

history across years. Different textbooks portray the same event in different ways and are written for different reasons. Since students are not learning recent history and care is not taken to create consistent teachings and analysis of historical education, this leads to the conclusion that U.S. history is the "forgotten subject".

Emma Norton

Professor Dustin Crawford

Spring SRS 2020

5 April 2020

Works Cited

Bailey, Thomas A. *The American Pageant*. D.C. and Heath Company, 1956.

“Civil War Casualties.” *Civil War History*, American Battlefield Trust,

<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/civil-war-casualties>. Accessed 26 Oct. 2019.

Clark, Marion. *Westward to the Pacific*. Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932.

Current, Richard N., et.al. *American History: A Survey*. 1959 Sixth Edition, Volume I: To 1877,

Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1983.

Gordy, Wilber Fisk. *History of the United States*. 1922. Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1925.

Guerber, H.A. *Story of the Great Republic*. New York. American Book Company, 1899.

Henretta, James A., and David Brody. *America: A Concise History*. Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2010.

Jordan, Winthrop D., and Leon F. Litwack. *The United States: Brief Edition*. 1979. Prentice-

Hall, Inc., 1994.

Knowlton, Daniel C., and Mary Harden. *Our America, Past and Present*. American Book

Company, 1938.

Muzzey, David Saville. *American History*. Ginn and Company, 1911.

NAEP Data Explorer. The Nation’s Report Card,

<https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/xplore/NDE>. Accessed 26 Mar 2020.

National Center for Education Statistics. *The Condition of Education: A Statistical Report on the Condition of American Education 1975*. Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education, 1976.

National Center for Education Statistics. *The Condition of Education 1988-1989*. Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education, 1989.

National Center for Education Statistics. *The Condition of Education 1991*. Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education, 1991.

National Center for Education Statistics. *The Condition of Education 1996*. Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education, 1996.

National Center for Education Statistics. *The Condition of Education 2012*. Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education, 2012.

National Center for Education Statistics. *The NAEP 1994 Technical Report*. Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education.

National Center for Education Statistics. *The Nation's Report Card: U.S. History Highlights 2001*. PDF file, U.S. Department of Education.

National Center for Education Statistics. *The Nation's Report Card: U.S. History 2001*. PDF file, U.S. Department of Education, 2002.

National Center for Education Statistics. *The Nation's Report Card: U.S. History 2006*. PDF file, U.S. Department of Education, 2007.

National Center for Education Statistics. *The Nation's Report Card: U.S. History 2010*. PDF file, U.S. Department of Education, 2011.

National Center for Education Statistics. *The U.S. History Report Card: The Achievement of Fourth-, Eight-, and Twelfth-Grade Students in 1988 and Trends from 1986 to 1988 in the Factual Knowledge of High School Juniors*. U.S. Department of Education, 1990.

National Education Goals Panel. *The National Education Goals Report: Building a Nation of Learners, 1993*. Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education, 1993.

National Education Goals Panel. *The National Education Goals Report: Building a Nation of Learners, 1995*. Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education, 1995.

National Education Goals Panel. *The National Education Goals Report: Building a Nation of Learners, 1996*. Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education, 1996.

National Education Goals Panel. *The National Education Goals Report: Building a Nation of Learners, 1997*. Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education, 1997.

National Education Goals Panel. *The National Education Goals Report: Building a Nation of Learners, 1991-1992*. Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education, 1992.

Ridpath, John Clark. *History of the United States; Prepared Especially for Schools on a new and Comprehensive Plan, Embracing the Features of Lyman's Historical Chart*. A.L. Bancroft & Co., 1876.