

The POINT!

E-Letter for Western Pennsylvania Social Studies Educators

Vol. 14 No. 12

December 2021



The Holiday Season

One of the oldest holiday celebrations centers around the winter solstice. Perhaps this was seen as the end and beginning of the year as the longest night and shortest day promised better things ahead. We know that ancient peoples recognized the winter solstice from monuments such as Stone Henge, Newgrange Tomb in Ireland, and medicine wheels of Native Americans. Scandinavians celebrated the month of Juul with the Yule log to help the sun warm the world. Sweden has St. Lucia bringing light back to the world. Dong Zhi is an ancient East Asian feast in December celebrated in China and Korea. Japan has To Ji while Shab-e Yalda is celebrated in Iran. Pakistanis have Chaomaos and Hindus call it, Makar San Kranti. December seems to invite a celebration of light in most ancient cultures. Hannukah also is a feast of lights which usually falls in December.. Kwanza, a harvest feast, also has a light up tradition.

Ancient Rome celebrated Saturnalia with lavish parties over the winter solstice. It was this celebration that became Christmas after Constantine's 313 A.D. Edict of Milan allowed Christians to freely live in the empire and follow their faith. Then around 350 A.D., Pope Julius I established Christmas on December 25, as the birthday of Christ bringing light to the world. Hopefully it would replace the drunken parties of Saturnalia. Over the years it has adopted practices and customs of many cultures. including gifting, and is responsible for the livelihood of many people.

The New England Puritans banned Christmas citing its relationship to Saturnalia and the fact that the exact date of Christ's birth is unknown.

In much of Europe. New Years Eve is celebrated as Sylvester in Honor of Pope Sylvester I who died on New Years Eve in 335 A.D.

So Happy Holidays to all !



Dong Zhi

Soldiers & Sailors Hall!

Soldiers & Sailors Memorial Hall & Museum houses a vast collection of primary and secondary documents and military artifacts. It is their mission to promote the use of these educational items and create an understanding for all groups who visit the museum. They provide a rich learning experience for all people by exploring the deeds and sacrifices of ordinary citizens during extraordinary circumstance



Classrooms Without Borders

Love With No Tomorrow: Tales of Romance During the Holocaust

Book Launch with author, Mindelle Pierce, Rabbi Micah Becker-Klein, and Dr. Michael Berenbaum

A HANUKKAH CELEBRATION

Wednesday, December 1, 2021

4:00 PM Eastern Time

Zoom | [Click here for more information](#)

REGISTER

People Love Dead Jews

Weekly Book Discussion with Dr. Josh Andy

Tuesday, December 7, 2021

4:00 PM Eastern Time

Zoom | [Click here for more information](#)

REGISTER

A Conversation with Hadar Galoon

playwright, actress, screenwriter, and comedian

Monday, December 16, 2021

4:30 PM Eastern Time

REGISTER

Confronting the Complexity of Holocaust Scholarship:

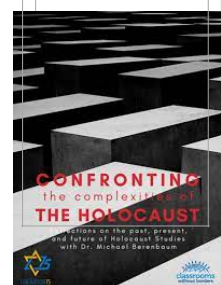
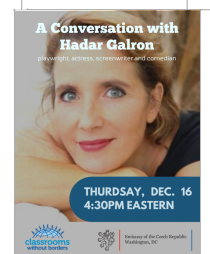
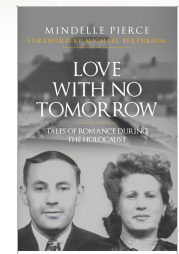
Reflections on the Past, Present, and Future of Holocaust Studies

Wednesday, December 8, 2021

3:00 PM Eastern Time

Zoom | [Click here for more information](#)

REGISTER



Be kind both to bad and good, for you don't know your own heart. Sarah Winnemucca, Northern Paiute author, activist, educator

The Point

For
Western Pennsylvania
Social Studies Educators
EDITORS

Leo R. West
John Lerner

The Point is the
e-newsletter
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the teaching and learning of social
studies in Western Pennsylvania

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Why school librarians are important to students

Librarians make a critical difference in schools by, among other things, offering diverse, creative materials for students and teachers, as well as enhancing digital literacy and nurturing a joy of reading, writes Karen Gavigan, an information science professor at the University of South Carolina. In this commentary, Gavigan cites research about the important role played by school librarians in addressing equity issues among students, including those who are Hispanic, nonwhite and non-native English speakers. **Full Story:** The Conversation (11/8)

Why students need lessons in democracy, civics

Lessons on democracy may be more challenging in the current political climate, but such instruction is important and must not be avoided, says John Rogers, an education professor at UCLA and co-author of a study published in the Democracy & Education journal. While acknowledging the difficulty facing educators and district leaders, Rogers says students need to develop the "capacity to solve problems together, to dialogue with one another, even when they don't agree." **Full Story:** K-12 Dive (10/21)

Research continues on value of gifted classes

Many programs for gifted students concentrate on enrichment activities while keeping student instruction at grade level, rather than teaching advanced material, according to a 2019 survey. Experts question the value of gifted programs in general, citing inequity in racial distribution and unclear evidence that they improve student achievement. **Full Story:** The Hechinger Report (10/18)

What "cemetery scientist" is learning about farm workers


Karen Byrne's research for a cemetery's History Walk turned into a growing project to learn more about the itinerant workers who lived on Sugar Beet Row -- a street of temporary homes for immigrants hired in the 1920s and '30s to harvest sugar beets in Mason City, Iowa. Byrne, whose volunteer efforts now include a role as "cemetery scientist," started her research at a grave marker for a mother and son, and her continuing work has uncovered a school attended by students after harvesting was finished. **Full Story:** Globe Gazette (Mason City, Iowa) (10/24)

Teen philanthropy ignited a nonprofit leader's passion

The Judaic value of tikkun olam, nonprofit board service as a teen and the support of the Jewish community inspired Emma Mayerson to pursue a career in philanthropy and start the Alliance for Girls in Oakland, Calif. Mayerson learned budgeting and other skills as a teen board member and now uses those skills to lead an organization dedicated to empowering girls and gender-expansive youths. **Full Story:** J. The Jewish News of Northern California (10/18)



Poll: Students of color prioritize college

Black, Hispanic and Asian teenagers were more likely than white teens to say it is important to graduate from college, according to a Washington Post-Ipsos poll. Data shows that of the 14- to 18-year-old students, close to 90% of Black, Asian and Hispanic teens say it is "very" or "fairly" important to graduate from college -- compared with 75% of white teens.  **Full Story:** The Washington Post (tiered subscription model) (11/5)



What prevents preservation of Black historic sites?

Chronicling the stories of Black settlements called freedom colonies -- created as a haven from violence during Reconstruction and Jim Crow -- provides an opportunity to broaden the narrative, says Andrea Roberts, the founder and director of the Texas Freedom Colonies Project. In this interview, Roberts explains some challenges faced in preserving historic sites in Black communities, including a narrow criteria. **Full Story:** KUT-FM (Austin, Texas) (10/28)



1619 Project creator: Oppose "anti-history laws"

Nikole Hannah-Jones, the journalist who created The 1619 Project for the New York Times Magazine, has asked North Carolina educators to speak out against what she called "anti-history laws." Keynote speaker at the recent The Color of Education Summit, Hannah-Jones told the 1,600 people attending the two-day virtual event that educators and parents need to speak out against efforts to restrict instruction about racism, anti-racism and Black history. **Full Story:** The News & Observer (Raleigh, N.C.) (tiered subscription model) (10/27)



Report offers insights on diversity from Black teachers

School leaders can start improving diversity among teachers by surveying parents, so they can share their voices, say more than 100 Black educators who contributed to a report from Teach Plus and the Center for Black Educator Development. Leaders can create a more culturally inclusive environment if they "work collaboratively with the practitioners who know the students best -- teachers," says Iesha Green, an educator in Arkansas. **Full Story:** The 74 (10/)



N.C. city acknowledges 1898 massacre of Black residents


Events this week in Wilmington, N.C., are commemorating the massacre of Black aldermen, owners of businesses and residents of the city on Nov. 10, 1898. Considered the only successful coup d'etat in US history, the massacre by a white mob left as many as 250 people dead, including Joshua Halsey, for whom a service was held Saturday at a cemetery where a headstone was added to his unmarked grave. **Full Story:** National Public Radio (11/10), Star-News (Wilmington, N.C.) (11/6), CNN (11/8)



There are notes between notes, you know.

Sarah Vaughan, jazz singer

Video lesson teaches about 1864 Sand Creek Massacre

Two Colorado English teachers, who are also twin brothers, created a YouTube lesson for high-school students to learn about the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre. The 35-minute video details the Colorado event, in which the US Army attacked and killed 230 Native Americans, most of them women, children and older adults.  **Full Story:** KUSA-TV (Denver) (11/8)



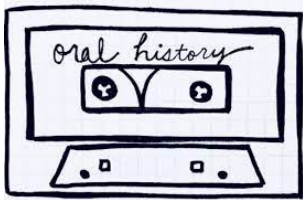
Leaders add early release days to ease teacher burnout

Extra early release days, the promise of days off if inclement weather days aren't used and a cadre of permanent substitutes are among the ways some superintendents are battling teacher burnout. Jared Smith of the South Tama County Community School District in Iowa, for example, considered programs such as mindfulness but says what teachers need most is time "to plan for class and time to collaborate." **Full Story:** District Administration (11/9) Students build SEL, relationships with oral histories



Students build SEL, relationships with oral histories

Middle- and high-school students across varied literacy and language levels can enhance their social and emotional skills through lessons built around oral history, including the sharing of experiences and active listening, write Cliff Mayotte and Erin Vong, both of the Voice of Witness nonprofit. In this commentary, they write about oral history activities, such as artifact interviews, that they say create "space for the lived experiences of students and their communities to become a central part of the curriculum." **Full Story:** Edutopia (11/5)



Veteran seeks 2 "Donut Dollies" from Vietnam War

US Army veteran and former science teacher Jim Roberts has been searching for 50 years for two "Donut Dollies," women photographed after being flown by helicopter into remote combat zones during the Vietnam War to visit small groups of service members to talk, play games and offer a respite from their experiences. Roberts, 75, says he wants to thank the two women, who were among more than 600 who participated in the American Red Cross program during the war in Vietnam. **Full Story:** The Washington Post (tiered subscription model) (11/11)



Unstructured play, invention builds students' minds

The Innovation Station program at Brookwood Elementary School in Georgia features a well-stocked makerspace and encourages students to identify real-world school problems and use STEM to create solutions. Educators from the school described the program in a recent SmartBrief webinar and talked about the school's quarterly, tech-free Day of Play.



That's all it took to solve problems -- just sense. Gary Paulsen, writer 1939-2021

Landmark case could change school funding across Pa. going to trial

A landmark case challenging how Pennsylvania pays for public education and highlighting deep disparities between wealthy and poor districts goes to trial Friday, with the potential to affect every student, school, and taxpayer throughout the state.

The lawsuit — brought seven years ago by six school districts, including Delaware County’s William Penn; parents, including one from Philadelphia; and the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools and the NAACP-Pennsylvania State Conference — alleges Pennsylvania’s school funding is both inadequate and inequitable, violating the state constitution.



■ School library collections questioned in some districts

Los Angeles Times (tiered subscription model) (11/8)

... the latest uproar over school libraries comes as conservatives attempt to ride a wave of “white backlash” among supporters of former President Trump to victory in next year’s midterm election. The strategy appeared to work in the closely watched Virginia governor’s race Tuesday, where Republican newcomer Glenn Youngkin beat former Democratic Gov. Terry McAuliffe after promising to ban critical race theory in schools



Why are adults pushing students to join social media?

Students are sometimes pressured to join social media platforms -- from peers as well as some teachers, athletic coaches and school clubs. This column explores the reasons behind the requests, including convenience to communicate with a group along with sharing images and videos, and suggests alternatives, such as Remind, GroupMe, Flipgrid, Band and PhotoCircle to help communicate in a safe way with students. **Full Story:** The Wall Street Journal (11/6)



Guard ends assignment driving Mass. school buses

National Guard members on Friday completed their service to 13 Massachusetts school districts, logging almost 330,000 miles since mid-September. "The Commonwealth is grateful to the men and women of the Massachusetts National Guard for answering the call and supporting the safe transportation of students in communities across Massachusetts," said Gov. Charlie Baker. **Full Story:** WBTS-TV (Boston) (11/8)



Schools alter schedules due to staffing shortage

Some school districts are making the difficult decision to schedule last-minute closures or alter holiday schedules because of staffing challenges. Daniel Domenech, executive director of AASA, the School Superintendents Association, says educators are taking planned and unplanned paid time off, but there are not enough substitute teachers to staff classrooms. **Full Story:** The 74 (11/10)

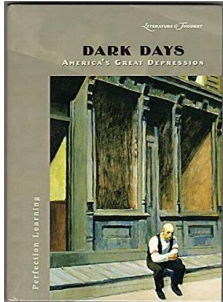
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ANTHROPOLOGY		
ARTS		
CHEMISTRY		
CIVILIAN JUSTICE		
DANCE		
DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING STUDENTS		
ENGLISH AND LITERATURE		
ENGLISH STUDIES		
GERMAN		
HISTORY		
LANGUAGE		
PHYSICS		
PSYCHOLOGY		
RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT		
SCIENCE		
SPANISH		
STUDENT LEADERSHIP		
THEATRE		
WORLD LANGUAGES		

*We must go on, because we can't turn back. Robert Louis Stevenson,
writer, poet, essayist*

Book Review

\Dark Days: America's Great Depression *Literature and Thought Series*. Perfection Learning. 2018. (Soft cover \$15.95.

Leo West



One of a series of *Literary Approaches to History* that includes *American Frontiers*, *Civil Rights*, *The Harlem Renaissance*, *The Civil War*, *The Holocaust*, *The Immigrant Experience*, and *Vietnam and the 60s*, *Dark Days* teaches critical thinking. With selections by Studs Terkel and Dorothea Lange, Eleanor Roosevelt as well an Oral History project by an Amherst High School Senior, Jackie French Collier among others, this book provides some excellent material for gaining an understanding of the Great Depression. Bank failures, factory closings, bread lines, the New Deal, the CCC, the WPA, hobos, and migrants all come into view as the book unfolds.

Separated into clusters, the 160 pages unfold to help students evaluate, summarize, analyze, and synthesize information. As one born just before the great depression began, this volume brought back memories and would do much to help students as well as teachers understand the twentieth century.

Education Week

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Nobody else can make the sound you make.

Yo-Yo Ma, cellist