

History's Ethical Crisis: An Introduction

Joanne Meyerowitz

In the past few years, public accounts of misconduct by historians have suggested that we may have an ethical crisis in our profession. For those readers who missed the multiple allegations of lies told, passages plagiarized, and evidence misrepresented, the bare-bones outlines of the most prominent cases are as follows. In spring 2001, the press reported that the historian Joseph J. Ellis had fabricated stories during classroom lectures at Mount Holyoke College. The stories involved his own activities in the 1960s, most notably false accounts of military service in Vietnam. Ellis issued a written apology, and Mount Holyoke suspended him without pay for a year. Early in 2002 journalists trained their investigative skills on the historians Stephen E. Ambrose and Doris Kearns Goodwin, both of whom had replicated numerous passages from other authors' books but failed to place the appropriated words in quotation marks. Ambrose and Goodwin acknowledged the borrowings but claimed they had occurred through inattention rather than from intent.¹ Meanwhile, the historian Michael A. Bellesiles's *Arming America* invited attention with a controversial argument disputing the prevalence of gun ownership in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The book won high-profile reviews in general publications, initial praise from various historians, and a major prize but aroused the ire of advocates of gun ownership, including the National Rifle Association. Soon it also attracted the microscopic inspection of scholars who dissected the evidence that supported its argument. In the summer of 2002, a committee appointed by Emory University, Bellesiles's employer, concluded an in-depth investigation, which found "sloppy scholarship," "unprofessional and misleading work," and "evidence of falsification." Bellesiles subsequently resigned from the Emory faculty. He granted that he had made errors in his work, but he denied that he had fabricated or willfully misrepresented evidence.²

¹ On Ellis, see, for example, Walter V. Robinson, "Professor's Past in Doubt, Discrepancies Surface in Claim of Vietnam Duty," *Boston Globe*, June 18, 2001, p. A1; Patrick Healy and Walter V. Robinson, "Professor Apologizes for Fabrications," *ibid.*, June 19, 2001, p. A1; and David Abel, "College Suspends History Professor," *ibid.*, Aug. 18, 2001, p. A1. On Ambrose, see, for example, Fred Barnes, "Stephen Ambrose, Copycat; The Latest Work of a Bestselling Historian Isn't All His," *Weekly Standard*, Jan. 14, 2002; David D. Kirkpatrick, "Author Admits He Lifted Lines for '95 Book," *New York Times*, Jan. 6, 2002, p. 22; and David D. Kirkpatrick, "As Historian's Fame Grows, So Do Questions on Methods," *ibid.*, Jan. 11, 2002, p. A1. On Goodwin, see, for example, David D. Kirkpatrick, "Historian Says Publisher Quickly Settled Dispute," *ibid.*, Jan. 23, 2002, p. A10; and David D. Kirkpatrick, "Historian Says Borrowing Was Wider Than Known," *ibid.*, Feb. 23, 2002, p. A10. All of the articles were read online via LexisNexis (Nov. 2003).

² Michael A. Bellesiles, *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* (New York, 2000); Stanley N. Katz, Hanna H. Gray, and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Report of the Investigative Committee in the Matter of Pro-

In the unfolding drama of the recent cases, the *Journal of American History* had its own small part. In 1996 we published an essay by Bellesiles, "The Origins of Gun Culture in the United States, 1760–1865," which laid out the arguments later developed in his book. As the book came under scrutiny, scholars returned to the article and found flaws in its table 1. One author went so far as to claim: "This entire scandal might have been avoided in 1996 with more conventional editing at the *JAH*."³ The article had gone through our usual peer review and editing process, but we had not, of course, sent our editorial assistants to the various archives to check the author's primary research. For that, we had relied, as all journals do, on trust. Nonetheless, our editors, peer reviewers, and staff could and should have noticed the flaws in table 1, such as the failure to include the sample size in each of the table's cells, to indicate which counties were used to construct each regional category, and to note the exact locations of the county records used. In our office, the Bellesiles controversy led to reassessment of our vetting and editing processes and refresher instructions on how to read and edit quantitative materials.

But the *Journal's* role in one recent case is less important than the larger issues raised. Taking the cases together, the constellation of alleged misdeed suggests we should think seriously about the neglected field of historical ethics. Is unprofessional or unethical conduct on the rise, and, if so, why? Are historians' ethics under heightened scrutiny, and, if so, why? How might we use the scrutiny—heightened or not—to improve the practice of history? What are the central ethical concerns facing professional historians? Does the American Historical Association's *Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct* provide an adequate code of ethics for historical practice?⁴ Do we need to publicize it, enforce it, or revise it? Are there different ethical standards in different genres of history? And how might we teach historical ethics to our students? To begin the conversation, we invited a few scholars and editors to write short essays. We did not ask our contributors to research or rehash the specifics of recent cases. Instead, we asked them to ponder the larger issues and address the following question: "How does (or should) the current ethical crisis change or challenge the way we think about, teach, read, write, and publish history?"

fessor Michael Bellesiles, 10 July 2002," pp. 17, 18, 19, available online at <http://www.emory.edu/central/NEWS/Releases/Final_Report.pdf> (Nov. 2003). For Bellesiles's response, see <http://www.emory.edu/central/NEWS/Releases/B_statement.pdf> (Nov. 2003). On Bellesiles, see also David Mehegan, "New Doubts about Gun Historian Research to Receive Hard Critique Today," *Boston Globe*, Sept. 11, 2001, p. A1; Robert F. Worth, "Historian's Prizewinning Book on Guns Is Embroiled in a Scandal," *New York Times*, Dec. 8, 2001, p. A13; and the articles in the forum "Historians and Guns," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 59 (Jan. 2002), 203–68. The newspaper articles were read online via LexisNexis (Nov. 2003).

³ Michael A. Bellesiles, "The Origins of Gun Culture in the United States, 1760–1865," *Journal of American History*, 83 (Sept. 1996), 425–55; James Lindgren, "Fall from Grace: *Arming America* and the Bellesiles Scandal," *Yale Law Journal*, April 26, 2002, p. 2198, available online at <<http://www.law.northwestern.edu/faculty/fulltime/Lindgren/LindgrenFINAL.pdf>> (Nov. 2003).

⁴ American Historical Association, *Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct*, 2003 edition, available online at <<http://www.theaha.org/pubs/standard.htm>> (Nov. 2003).

The Historians' Dilemma

Elliott J. Gorn

Against a backdrop of routine dishonesty from America's leaders, it seems like academic navel gazing to discuss "the ethical crisis in history." Recent corporate corruption—Enron and the rest—certainly dwarfs our poor power to add or detract. Indeed, the scandals in the Catholic Church over sexually abusive priests make us seem by comparison like, well, choirboys and -girls. Then there was the last presidential election, an ethical breakdown that would have made Richard Daley (the elder) blush. And of course since the election we have been subjected not just to lies—the phantom weapons of mass destruction, the absurd linking of Saddam Hussein with Al-Qaeda—but to an ongoing degradation of democratic political discourse.

And these are the easy ones. We have not gotten to the ethics of corporate executives' salaries, new tax laws that will surely bankrupt the nation, money-soaked elections that drown democracy, a prison system that makes China look like the human rights poster child, a so-called Patriot Act that shreds our Bill of Rights, etc., etc., etc. Historians' ethical dilemmas are small by comparison. But they are not unrelated to these larger crises.

A recent *New York Times* article described a study conducted by psychologists exploring the values and ethics of selected young professionals. The researchers bemoaned the lack of good mentoring for scientists, journalists, and actors, by which was meant, I think, that no one ever laid a fatherly hand on youthful shoulders and said do not tell lies, my son; cheat not, my daughter. But read a little deeper. The young subjects of the study were well aware of ethical issues. In fact, their so-called mentors were the problem. Senior scientists and managers in highly competitive (and lucrative) fields such as genetic engineering pushed their charges to publish findings prematurely, and sometimes young scientists interpreted the pressure to produce as an invitation to bend the protocols of good research. Similarly, youthful journalists spoke eloquently about fairness, objectivity, and their profession's mission to keep the public informed, but they saw themselves as not living up to these ideals. This was not merely a matter of personal failure: "They feel under the thumb of powerful editors, whose concern to best the competition all too often seems to dominate traditional journalistic values of fairness, objectivity and serving readers."¹

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¹ Sara Rimer, "Finding That Today's Students Are Bright, Eager, and Willing to Cheat," *New York Times*, July 2, 2003, p. B8.

From the mentors' point of view, what others might call ethical lapses, character flaws, or personal weaknesses were in fact great strengths. The only real rule for them was "don't get caught." We live in an age when the marketplace has been raised to transcendent, almost holy, status. Winning is everything, and winning often means cutting corners to outsell the competition. But unquestioned faith in the virtue of markets often blinds us to their corrosive impact on ethics.

What does any of this have to do with the history profession? Historians do not compete in the same marketplace as genetic engineers or newspaper journalists. But our lives are enmeshed in job markets, tenure markets, course evaluation markets, publishing markets—places where competition allocates scarce resources—which can have deleterious effects. In point of fact, the scholarly realm is a good place to think about ethics because, though some may like to believe that we live in ivory towers, colleges and their employees never wholly escape the pressures and corruptions of the larger world.

What prompts historians' collective hand-wringing are a few relatively high profile cases that emerged in recent years. It could be argued that the charges of plagiarism, sloppy scholarship, and fraudulent research actually reveal the health of our profession. After all, the malefactors were discovered, outed, even punished. Some of them were not academic historians at all, but popular writers. Still, there is the haunting feeling that more shoes might drop, even our own. Puritan-like, we look into our hearts: "Was I really as assiduous, as careful in the archives as I should have been? Did I fail, O God of Documents, in my slothfulness or my overweening pride, to put everything in quotes, to cite all sources accurately, to represent the evidence fairly?" Such uneasiness keeps us honest. We search for the blackness within because self-scrutiny is the scholar-pilgrim's high road to salvation. What begins as neurosis ends in a reasonable approximation of integrity. At least most of the time.

When the Joseph Ellis case broke—recall that in the classroom this gifted teacher claimed to have been a star high school athlete, a Vietnam War veteran, and a 1960s activist, none of which was true—the question I kept hearing from colleagues was whether his difficulties with reality affected his scholarship. The question reveals our gods. Ellis might have lied to a few students, people seemed to be saying, but did he do anything really bad, like lie in print? Professors are, after all, people of the book. Besides, in the logic of scandals, serious problems in his writing (where, to my knowledge, no one has accused him of falsifying evidence) would have raised the stakes. To mix some metaphors, finding a smoking gun in one of Ellis's books would make the episode so much juicier. "Character" had become a loaded word during the Clinton presidency; here was a scholar who wrote about the Founding Fathers in that very idiom, only to be exposed as less than chaste.

I think we might have missed something more here. Struggling with issues of veracity in his own life, Ellis clearly was attracted to historical subjects who could not have been more explicit about the importance of honor, even as they often failed to act honorably. Rather than merely pointing fingers at Ellis and his corked bat, it would be more useful for us all to open the whole issue of the wellsprings of our topics, ideas, assumptions—of why we as individuals do what we do for a living, of how

we select the subjects we write and teach about, of the relationship of who we are as individuals to what we do as professionals. No one ever asked me in graduate school why I wanted to be a historian, but maybe they should have. My answer—anyone's answer—might be a very private one, nobody's business really, but the question itself is a critical one, for it shifts the issue from merely being careful with our footnotes to being honest with ourselves about why we entered this calling in the first place.²

Ellis, it should be noted, remains a very successful author, at least as measured by sales, advances, and so forth. So was Stephen Ambrose, despite the plagiarism scandal that assailed his reputation shortly before he passed away. Ambrose managed to crank out enormous numbers of books because he wrote quickly, employed assistants, and worked heavily from secondary sources. He focused above all on telling stirring stories. His books were and are so successful in part because of his knack for selecting exciting topics and his ability to give his subjects clear, dramatic expression. Whereas Ellis embraced the sacred origins of American mythology—there was a time when a group of gifted men (*men*, damn it) saw further, deeper, more profoundly than all others and bequeathed us our nation and its freedom—Ambrose appealed to the populist side of our national narrative. Most special about his subjects was their unspecial origins, the fact that at first glance they were such unlikely heroes. Ambrose never tired of reminding us that decency and valor often had humble origins.

Of course the plagiarism charge sullied Ambrose's reputation among professional historians, but it was not as if he was already a hero to the professoriate. While many of Ambrose's works offered absorbing introductions to topics (he wrote on so many subjects), among academic historians he was seen mostly as a popularizer. His works tended to be quite whiggish; one turned to Ambrose for reassurance about the goodness of America and Americans, not for an edgy sense of irony, let alone a tragic view of history. When the plagiarism scandal broke, all of the attention to Ambrose's theft of words missed an important point about his relationship to the historical profession. He was not a gadfly, as the intellectual's vocation has been conceived since Socrates. Quite the contrary; Ambrose wrote reassuring works, though sometimes about disturbing subjects. He still sells very well in the big chain bookstores, not because he wrote brilliantly (actually, his prose usually feels a draft away from polished and several shy of elegant), but because he told large numbers of people what they wanted to believe about history—that America was not perfect but fundamentally good, that Americans were not always triumphant but successful when it mattered most. Above all, his work was patriotic.

What unites Ellis and Ambrose is that both were—are—well-established authors in the history marketplace. Neither wrote what might be called cutting-edge history. On the contrary, they became name-brand authors to large publishing houses because they reliably delivered narrative history on topics (politics, war, leaders) for which there is a substantial target audience. Their work has had the great virtue of educating hundreds of thousands of readers, far more than most professional histori-

² Introspective work melding scholarship with memoir frequently appears in other humanities and social sciences, but not so often, it seems, among historians. For a very interesting set of brief essays, see the round table "Self and Subject," *Journal of American History*, 89 (June 2002), 17–53.

ans ever dream of reaching. But they did that at the cost of sticking closely to a pretty narrow range of topics, sources, and interpretations.

I would not for a minute imply that doing history that appeals to a wide audience necessitates less than honest methods and practices. But commercial publishing can entice writers to work quick and dirty and to choose subjects and approaches for their popularity. And the desire to appeal to students can tempt teachers to adopt more exciting classroom personae. But there are shoals on the other side too, whether we note them or not. Whom should we write for? How should we teach? What compromises should we make to reach an audience? Bolder still, how can we *as a profession* take initiatives to become more active—in museums, radio, the Web, film, as well as books, newspapers, and magazines—in the cultural life of the nation and in engaging important public issues? Like it or not, most monographs could be rewritten by William Shakespeare then edited by Mark Twain and they still would not sell. Nor should they. And most sound history lectures would not rouse the masses of our students. Our work is not necessarily so difficult or arcane, but it is highly specialized, and the questions we ask often make sense as part of larger debates that the uninitiated do not know or care much about. Academic historians spend most of their time engaged in internal conflicts; we go into battle with the heavy artillery of primary sources and protect ourselves with the armor of theory. All of this means that much of our work—in journals, at conferences, in monographs, and in the classroom—has a who-is-the-smartest-in-the-class ring to it, which is driven, in part, by an academic marketplace that rewards us with tenure and promotion, status and salary. And it *is* a marketplace, with its own prejudices and distortions, no less than the marketplace represented by Borders or Simon and Schuster.

Which brings us to Michael Bellesiles's *Arming America*.³ His truly was an academic book, with plenty of footnotes and tables, much number-crunching, and lots of references to arcane academic sources. *Arming America* did not sell nearly as well as any of Ambrose's or Ellis's offerings, but it did surprisingly well. No doubt this was because Bellesiles told a story that many people wanted to hear, though a complex and controversial one. The consensus of historians who know the field well seems to be that at crucial moments Bellesiles was cavalier at best—some say downright dishonest—with his use of sources. At the same time, much good scholarship remains in the book. When it first came out, I certainly did not read *Arming America* as critically as I should have, at least in part because I was sympathetic to its argument. And it took a while to sort out the facts because the debate over the book grew so vitriolic and partisan. But once again, when we get past the initial frenzy and the ensuing acrimony, another point emerges: Here, it seemed, was an example of a respected professional historian asking the sorts of questions that are valuable for illuminating not just the dead past but the living present. The irony is that, far more than most of us, Bellesiles was doing something very worthy: Engaging an important public issue and bringing a historian's perspective to bear on it. Now that the controversy has settled down, it will be interesting to see how colonial and early national historians

³ Michael A. Bellesiles, *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* (New York, 2000).

weigh the damage. How much of *Arming America's* argument—most of it, none at all—is salvageable? Will historians' voices ever be so prominent again in public debate on issues surrounding Americans and their guns?

All of these cases concern the question of audience, of historians' relationship to the public inside and outside of the academy. These three individuals went beyond the normal boundaries of the profession—teach class, publish monograph, go home. One might even argue that, in telling his stories in the classroom, Ellis did nothing more than create a stage persona, much like an actor. The difference, of course, is that everyone knows that actors adopt guises (at least they are supposed to know it), while professors are assumed to be seekers and purveyors of truth—knowable, transparent truth. For whatever reasons—money, fame, adulation, just plain carelessness—all three men crossed a line then had their comeuppance.

The key phrase here is “for whatever reasons.” At their most banal, these stories of notable historians gone askew can seem like bad TV soap operas in which those with ill-gotten gain are laid low. If the ethical crisis in history is merely a handful of cases in which individuals stepped over the line separating honest from dishonest teaching and scholarship, then discussing it can produce sadness, smugness, feelings of schadenfreude, but not much enlightenment. But if we think a bit more broadly about appropriate versus inappropriate professional behavior and allow the subject to throw some light on the larger issue of the relationship of American intellectuals to their audiences, it becomes much more interesting.

To engage many readers with good history strikes me as highly ethical. We are not, after all, mere antiquarians; most of us believe that history gives insight, offers a window onto meaning, has explanatory power. It is a depressing irony that some of the very historians who reached out to a larger audience than the usual academic one violated important ethical standards. But it should not surprise us that the place where some of the problem entered was in the transformation of history into commodity, into goods for sale. Expanding that marketplace metaphor helps us think a little more deeply about our troubles. Not only books that appropriated others' labor were sold under false pretenses. Also on the market was a puffed-up personal past, designed to win the admiration of students at an elite liberal arts school, the sort of place where professors feel strong competitive pressures to be popular. And in the marketplace of ideas, dubious evidence brought academic fame, prestigious awards, and intellectual cachet, at least for a while. What is interesting is not that some individuals cheated but that, initially at least, they were rewarded, feted, respected. Competitive marketplaces—for book sales, teacher reputations, scholarly prizes—liked what they saw and delivered the goods.

Once we start thinking about our profession this way, other issues emerge. For a generation now we have trained far more graduate students than there are jobs. Among the reasons for this are the desire for teaching assistants, graders, and adjunct faculty, all of whom help universities cut costs and reduce the teaching load of regular faculty. In other words, self-interest encourages our complicity in some pretty dubious labor practices. Tenure decisions are also market-driven, and they cut to the core of our sense of fairness, which is why they can become so toxic. Faculty at the Uni-

versity of Michigan want to know what the University of California–Berkeley requires for tenure these days, and administrators routinely invoke “peer” institutions to ratchet up standards. But unless expectations are continually clarified for individuals coming up for tenure, it all seems like the old bait and switch of retail lore. Further up the food chain are the “stars” (what an absurd word applied to academics) for whom ambitious institutions compete. At worst, deans and provosts, acting out the unexamined machismo of the academy, use such hires to make their reputations and then move on. Of course the intellectual life of a college can be enhanced by big hires, but the costs—forgone junior faculty appointments, financial aid packages, and so forth—never seem to get calculated.

Despite the hazards, professional agoraphobia is not an option. Rather than retreat to the safety of our journals and monographs, we need more than ever to examine the relationship between good historical practice and the marketplace for jobs, for academic rank and standing, for prestige and prizes, for grants and fellowships, for student approval, and for book contracts and sales. We belong in the public square, and we are in it whether we like it or not. In fact, we should seek new outlets for our wares because we believe that, at their best, they bring with them intelligence, understanding, even wisdom. But historical insight includes the knowledge that the marketplace can be as corrupting as it is exciting and therefore requires our vigilance. And that is the historians’ dilemma: How to stay immersed in the world yet maintain critical distance from it; how to engage our audiences with broadly important subjects yet not pander to them; how to participate actively in democratic discourse yet not be seduced by the sounds of our own voices.

Plagiarism and Professional Ethics— A Journal Editor's View

Michael Grossberg

As my contribution to this round table, I want to discuss the problem of stolen words and ideas and our collective responsibility to prevent such thefts. I do so primarily from my perspective as the editor of a history journal because, over the last few years, plagiarism has been my most direct encounter with the ethical problems that now seem to be plaguing our discipline. While it is not clear whether instances of plagiarism are on the rise, it is clear that our concern about it and other forms of ethical misconduct is growing. The high-profile plagiarism cases of Doris Kearns Goodwin and Stephen Ambrose have led to greater concern and scrutiny of all our work. And the advent of digital technology, particularly the Internet, has increased our sense of the vulnerability of our scholarship to misappropriation. I want to probe the problem of plagiarism to suggest how this new ethical sensitivity challenges the way we think about the connection between our scholarship and our professional responsibilities. Specifically, I want to argue that we must increase our sense of collective ethical responsibility and our determination to enforce the basic values and beliefs of our scholarly community.

The *American Historical Review* has not escaped the recent epidemic of ethical problems. In two instances book reviewers wrote and told us that the authors of the volumes they were reviewing had borrowed words and ideas from the reviewers' own books. Trying to find a way to address their concerns compelled me to confront plagiarism both as a particular editorial problem and also as a part of the larger ethical crisis confronting our discipline.

Perhaps my biggest surprise was realizing how ill equipped I was to deal with the issue. After more than twenty years in the classroom, I had, of course, dealt with numerous instances of student plagiarism. Though it is very important to address such student misdeeds in a rigorous manner, I think that in terms of both motivation and consequences they are a problem qualitatively different from the misappropriation of others' work by fellow professionals. In retrospect, I realize that I brought to the problem of plagiarism by professionals a vague sense of what constituted this type of academic misconduct and a general belief that it was one of the most abhorrent ethical violations a historian can commit. Like the late United States Supreme Court justice Potter Stewart's famous quip about pornography, I thought I would know pla-

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giarism when I saw it, and thus I would also know what to do about it. I was wrong on both counts.

My struggles began when I tried to determine the meaning of plagiarism. Obviously, the easiest form of plagiarism to identify and condemn is the direct pilfering of words. And yet we all know that plagiarism extends beyond taking sentences to the misappropriation of ideas. As a guide to the complexity of the subject, I turned to our discipline's most authoritative pronouncement: the "Statement on Plagiarism" by the American Historical Association (AHA). Fittingly, it defines plagiarism broadly to include

more subtle and perhaps more pernicious abuses than simply expropriating the exact wording of another author without attribution. Plagiarism also includes the limited borrowing, without attribution, of another person's distinctive and significant research findings, hypotheses, theories, rhetorical strategies, or interpretations, or an extended borrowing even with attribution.

And the statement warns that, while the most obvious abuse is the direct appropriation of another person's language, "more subtle abuses include the appropriation of concepts, data, or notes all disguised in newly crafted sentences, or reference to a borrowed work in an early note and then extensive further use without attribution. All such tactics reflect an unworthy disregard for the contributions of others."¹

The statement certainly helps us understand the nature of the act of plagiarism, particularly the necessity of accepting a broad definition. Its basic tenets can be restated in the words of the lawyer and former book editor Laurie Stearns: "The essence of the modern understanding of plagiarism is a failure of the creative process, through the author's failure either to transform the original material or to identify its source." Consequently, at its most fundamental level, plagiarism is "intentionally taking the literary property of another without attribution and passing it off as one's own, having failed to add anything of value to the copied material and having reaped from its use an unearned benefit."² It is this violation of our discipline's standards that makes the act a concern for all of us.

And yet, as I learned from my recent encounters with charges of plagiarism, the AHA definition does not fully capture either the experiential meaning or the contested nature of plagiarism. Grappling with charges of plagiarism led me to identify with the victims and to share their sense of being wronged. I did so, in part, because like many others I too have felt the anger and powerlessness of seeing my ideas and research appropriated by someone else and presented as her or his own without granting me the authorial acknowledgment I thought I deserved. That shared sense of being wronged made me understand anew that, like the characters in *Fahrenheit 451*, our books and articles constitute our intellectual personae in fundamental ways. They are elemental parts of our self-definition as scholars, and thus we feel their misappropriation as a personal violation.³

¹ American Historical Association, "Statement on Plagiarism," in *Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct* (Washington, 2003); for the full statement, see <<http://www.theaha.org/pubs/standard.htm>> (July 30, 2003).

² Laurie Stearns, "Copy Wrong: Plagiarism, Process, Property, and the Law," in *Perspectives on Plagiarism and Intellectual Property in a Postmodern World*, ed. Lise Buranen and Alice Myers Roy (Albany, 1999), 7.

³ Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* (New York, 1953).

But I also felt the uncertainties of claiming my written words and ideas as my property, particularly the tension between such a claim and the equally critical commitment we have to the free exchange of ideas and the free flow of information. Property rights claims to scholarship can undermine scholarly communication in history and all disciplines. And thus, as in all struggles between ardently held but contending ideals, we must find a reasonable and reasoned balance between protection and access.

Yet finding such a balance has proven elusive since the initial concern with plagiarism emerged in post-Gutenberg Europe. The literary critic C. Jan Swearingen revealingly points out that Martin Luther was not just one of the first writers to embrace the Gutenberg revolution, he was also one of the first authors to oppose legal restrictions on the use of published work. "Much like defenders of internet freedoms of access and speech today," Swearingen contends, "Luther and others objected that copyright laws would limit the free circulations of ideas and knowledge that had been made so widely and instantly available to larger numbers of readers by the capability of the printing press." And the frequent borrowing of the ideas and words of others by early modern European authors and playwrights, most notably William Shakespeare, alerts us to a past in which authorial property claims were treated quite differently. Ever since the Elizabethan playwright Ben Jonson first used the word plagiarist to designate literary theft, however, such sentiments and experiences have been challenged by individual claims of ownership.⁴

The fervency of those claims increased markedly during and after the eighteenth century. The mass production of books and magazines and the authorial livelihoods they enabled made plagiarism both easier and more attractive. And concern about plagiarism grew further, as historians of the book have argued, under the sway of Enlightenment and romantic ideas that elevated the status of the individual author through an understanding of knowledge as a human, not divine, creation. Such views gave new importance to notions of authorial originality and genius and the need to foster and protect them.⁵ The understanding of words and ideas as property was also strengthened by the creation of copyright laws that penalized the theft of entire works. This confluence of technological, intellectual, and legal change promoted a notion of exclusive and exclusionary authorial rights that gave plagiarism its modern meaning.⁶

Only in recent years has the contest between access and ownership been renewed in a sustained manner. Postmodern anxieties about the nature of authorship and

⁴ C. Jan Swearingen, "Originality, Authenticity, Imitation, and Plagiarism: Augustine's Chinese Cousins," in *Perspectives on Plagiarism and Intellectual Property in a Postmodern World*, ed. Buranen and Roy, 20. The *Oxford English Dictionary* designates Ben Jonson as the first to use the word plagiarist; see Thomas Mallon, *Stolen Words: Forays into the Origins and Ravages of Plagiarism* (San Diego, 2001), 6, 10–12.

⁵ See, for example, the studies of the issue by Martha Woodmansee and her collaborators, whose books include Martha Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics* (New York, 1994); Martha Woodmansee and Peter Jaszi, eds., *The Construction of Authorship: Textual Appropriation in Law and Literature* (Durham, 1994); and Martha Woodmansee and Mark Osten, eds., *The New Economic Criticism: Studies at the Intersection of Literature and Economics* (London, 1999).

⁶ For discussions of these issues see Mallon, *Stolen Words*, 38–39; and Swearingen, "Originality, Authenticity, Imitation, and Plagiarism," 20–21.

assertions of the cultural contingency of all social constructions have fostered concerns about making excessive claims of property rights in our intellectual creations. The writing theorist Susan H. McLeod warns us,

We ignore the recent, local cultural history of copyright and plagiarism at our peril. The notion of stealing ideas or words is not only modern, it is also profoundly Western. Students from Middle Eastern, Asian, and African cultures are baffled by the notion that one can "own" ideas.⁷

Despite clashing contemporary understandings of plagiarism, grappling with it also reveals our interdependence as scholars. The historian Maurice Isserman reminds us that "repeating the words of those who came before us is essential to intellectual endeavor." Indeed, recognition of that historiographical reality led the historian Richard Jensen to defend the late Stephen Ambrose, now one of the usual suspects hauled out in our disciplinary lineup of plagiarists:

I have looked at all their allegations, and not one meets the AHA test. In no case has Ambrose ever tried to deceive the audience or falsify evidence. Scholarship involves a chain of researchers stretching from the original documents, through editors of letterpress editions, to many fellow scholars. Every historian relies on this chain; any deceit or manufacturing of bogus sources is an egregious sin. Ambrose used the chain correctly.⁸

Such a defense underscores not only the contested nature of plagiarism but also our fundamental reliance on the scholarship of our colleagues as we craft our own arguments about the past.

And yet it is because of that scholarly trust that we must increase our vigilance and prevent "reprehensible replication" despite lingering uncertainties about the precise meaning of plagiarism and the legitimate extent of exclusive claims to our words and ideas.⁹ The AHA statement is prescriptive, not simply descriptive. It not only defines plagiarism but importantly goes on to insist that as historians we each have a fundamental responsibility "to oppose deception." It cautions that

All historians share responsibility for maintenance of the highest standards of intellectual integrity. When appraising manuscripts for publication, reviewing books, or evaluating peers for placement, promotion, and tenure, scholars must evaluate the honesty and reliability with which the historian uses primary and secondary source materials. Scholarship flourishes in an atmosphere of openness and candor, which should include the scrutiny and discussion of academic deception.

The elusive nature of plagiarism means that those responsibilities cannot be delegated to others. Each of us must be prepared to act.¹⁰

⁷ Susan H. McLeod quoted in Swearingen, "Originality, Authenticity, Imitation, and Plagiarism," 21. And see Lise Buranen and Alice Myers Roy, "Introduction," in *Perspectives on Plagiarism and Intellectual Property in a Post-modern World*, ed. Buranen and Roy, xviii.

⁸ Maurice Isserman, "Plagiarism: A Lie of the Mind," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 2, 2003, p. B12. Richard Jensen, "The Plagiarism Problem," *OAH Newsletter*, Aug. 2002 <<http://www.oah.org/pubs/nl/2002aug/jensen.html>> (Aug. 5, 2002).

⁹ Mallon, *Stolen Words*, 2.

¹⁰ American Historical Association, "Statement on Plagiarism."

I discovered, however, that a willingness to accept that responsibility does not simplify the task. Instead, I learned that devising effective remedial action against plagiarism is as difficult as identifying the act itself. And thus I came to understand what the literary agent Donald Lamm meant when he declared that plagiarism is “easier to decry than to prevent, easier to detect than to litigate.”¹¹

The genesis of the AHA statement itself is a cautionary tale in the perils of policing plagiarism. As the author and literary commentator Thomas Mallon chronicles in *Stolen Words*, the statement grew out of accusations of serial plagiarism leveled against the Texas Tech University historian Jayme A. Sokolow during his 1981 tenure candidacy. He stood accused of borrowing words and ideas from a number of historians and using them in various articles and then a book manuscript. His primary victim was Stephen Nissenbaum. Critics charged that Sokolow's manuscript for *Eros and Modernization: Sylvester Graham, Health Reform, and the Origins of Victorian Sexuality in America* (published in 1983) had borrowed far too liberally and inappropriately from Nissenbaum's 1968 dissertation, a work that became *Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America: Sylvester Graham and Health Reform*.¹² According to Mallon, however, fear of litigation and a truncated sense of professional responsibility kept the charges largely under wraps.

No direct accusation of plagiarism was leveled by the department, the university, or the AHA or in book reviews in scholarly journals such as the *American Historical Review* (AHR). Nor were members of the historical community notified in any systematic fashion. Instead, a solution was worked out by the AHA in which the AHR and the *Journal of American History* published a letter from Sokolow admitting insufficient documentation but not outright plagiarism. Nissenbaum could only protest: “At every point I had hoped and trusted that a judgment would be made. Instead, at every point the only action taken was based on self-protection and a refusal to name the offense.” In the end, the AHA “Statement on Plagiarism” was the primary professional response to the case, but, as Mallon observes in his damning critique of our discipline, “It is an exceptionally forthright document, all the more so in view of the timid response actually made by the organization to one of the cases that prompted it. In fact, it has all the courage of the abstract and hypothetical.”¹³

Our duty is to make the statement's words meaningful professional commitments. It is a responsibility that manifests itself in different ways as we perform our various disciplinary duties as undergraduate and graduate teachers, researchers, reviewers, public historians, and administrators. Each role requires a particular kind of action;

¹¹ Donald Lamm quoted in Danny Postel, “In the Wake of Controversies, Historians Debate Causes and Prevalence of Plagiarism,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Jan. 6, 2003 (accessed online July 30, 2003).

¹² Mallon, *Stolen Words*, 144–93. The book manuscript was later published as Jayme A. Sokolow, *Eros and Modernization: Sylvester Graham, Health Reform, and the Origins of Victorian Sexuality in America* (Rutherford, 1983). The book was based on a dissertation: Stephen Nissenbaum, “Careful Love: Sylvester Graham and the Emergence of Victorian Sexual Theory in America, 1830–1840” (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1968). Stephen Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America: Sylvester Graham and Health Reform* (Westport, 1980).

¹³ Jayme A. Sokolow, letter to the editor, *American Historical Review*, 90 (Feb. 1985), 274; Jayme A. Sokolow, letter to the editor, *Journal of American History*, 72 (June 1985), 222–23. Nissenbaum quoted in Mallon, *Stolen Words*, 184. *Ibid.*, 187; see also *ibid.*, 243.

each entails a particular set of difficulties. As I have learned, the ethical responsibility of journal editors to expose scholarly deception is a particularly useful illustration of the challenges we all face in fulfilling this commitment.¹⁴

Journal editors have a specific obligation to police scholarship for plagiarism. The proper course of action to be taken by an editor confronted with a charge of plagiarism is not so clear, however. Should an editor try to determine the validity of the charge her- or himself? Should the editor ask the person making the charge to do so? And, if the charge is validated, do editors have a fundamental responsibility to broadcast that finding in book reviews? By letting other editors know about the offending book in some other fashion? If we broadcast such a finding, will we be subject to a suit for libel? Indeed, what are the fiduciary responsibilities of editors in such a situation to their journal and, in relevant situations, to the journal's sponsoring organization? How should those duties be balanced with editors' ethical obligations to identify plagiarism and spark debates about it?

In finding such a balance, I realized, legal fears provoked by charges of plagiarism are particularly troubling. Plagiarism is an ethical misdeed, but it is not necessarily a legal violation unless it veers into copyright infringement. As Laurie Stearns explains: "Plagiarism is not a legal term, and although an instance of plagiarism might seem to be the quintessential act of wrongful copying, it does not necessarily constitute a violation of copyright law." Unlike plagiarism, however, libel certainly is a legal matter. Fear of libel suits hovers over the entire subject of plagiarism because of the calamitous consequences of calling someone a plagiarist, as the jurist and commentator Richard Posner explains: "The label 'plagiarist' can ruin a writer, destroy a scholarly career, blast a politician's chances for election, and cause the expulsion of a student from a college or university." As a result, any attempt to deal with specific accusations of plagiarism inevitably pulls editors and everyone else involved into what legal scholars call the shadow of the law.¹⁵ It is a very chilly place, where threats of litigation stifle needed disciplinary debate and action. Yet we cannot let such fears prevent us from meeting our obligations; instead, we must devise reasonable, defensible, and effective policies that allow us to do so.

As one example of such an attempt, I want to chronicle the effort to create such a procedure at the *AHR*. It began when we discovered that the journal had no direct method of dealing with accusations of plagiarism. In fact, uncertain procedures and legal fears combined to deter us from publishing reviews that made charges of plagiarism. With the support and assistance of the AHA and the journal's board of editors, we decided to take a more aggressive approach to the problem. We did so by revising the *AHR*'s book review guidelines, because reviews are the primary medium for raising concerns about plagiarism. The existing guidelines simply stated: "We do not dictate the content of reviews, but we do delete passages that are, in our judgment, *ad*

¹⁴ For another version of this argument, see Michael Grossberg, "Taking Other People's Words," *editing history*, 18 (Spring–Summer 2002), 1.

¹⁵ Stearns, "Copy Wrong," 6. Richard Posner, "On Plagiarism: In the Wake of Recent Scandals Some Distinctions Are in Order," *Atlantic Online* <<http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2002/04/posner.htm>> (July 30, 2003). For a discussion of the concept of the shadow of the law, see Michael Grossberg, *A Judgment for Solomon: The d'Hausseville Case and Legal Experience in Antebellum America* (New York, 1996).

hominem attacks on an author.” We crafted a new approach to plagiarism this past year by adding the following directives to those lines:

These include unsubstantiated or libelous allegations of plagiarism. However, we also accept the responsibility to publish responsible charges of misappropriated scholarship. Such claims must be documented with examples of parallel texts or of instances of the unattributed use of other scholars' ideas and arguments. Such judgments are made in accordance with our fundamental responsibility to promote the freest possible discussion of the articles and reviews published in the *AHR* and our responsibility to uphold the American Historical Association's Standards of Professional Conduct, which require all historians to maintain “the highest standards of intellectual integrity” and to evaluate “the honesty and reliability with which the historian uses primary and secondary source material.”¹⁶

The new policy applies both to book reviews and to letters to the editor about reviewed books.

The revised book review guidelines express our conviction that the disciplinary gate-keeping role of editors must include this responsibility as well as the more conventional one of overseeing the publication of peer-reviewed scholarship. They are specifically intended to perform that duty by focusing attention on the evidence of misappropriated words and ideas and not on mere allegations of plagiarism. That approach, we think, offers legal protection to the journal and accuser while also creating a clear obligation to be fair to the accused. The new policy is also premised on the assumption that publicity and open debate is the best way to handle ethical problems such as plagiarism. Such charges should be addressed in the court of professional opinion, not the court of law. And the policy complements the recent decision of the AHA to cease adjudicating particular grievances and instead foster general discussions of professional problems.¹⁷

Plagiarism, of course, is only one aspect of our current ethical malaise. As we all know, in the past few years historians have also appeared in the news for lying in the classroom, conducting sloppy research, and fabricating evidence. Placed in this broader context, plagiarism might seem like the ethical lapse that is easiest to identify or at least to substantiate. But, as I have tried to suggest, plagiarism too is a complex and complicated problem that defies simple solutions. Equally important, it is linked to these other ethical problems because the primal misdeed is one of deception. Like the others, it strikes at the heart of our work as scholars and teachers by undermining our trust in one another.

And also like those other ethical problems, plagiarism offers one final lesson as well. It can never be addressed effectively by simply turning journal editors and book and manuscript reviewers into a disciplinary police force. Rather, as I have tried to suggest by chronicling some of my experiences dealing with the complications of identifying and policing plagiarism, each of us in our varied roles as teachers, schol-

¹⁶ “Book Reviewing in the *AHR*” <<http://www.historycooperative.org/aht/guidebkrv.html>> (July 30, 2003).

¹⁷ For the first published review under the new policy, see Vincent Vinikas, review of *Stronger than Dirt* by Juliann Sivulka, *American Historical Review*, 108 (June 2003), 851–52. For a statement on the decision to cease adjudication, see “AHA Announces Changes in Efforts Relating to Professional Misconduct” <http://www.theaha.org/press/PR_Adjudication.htm> (June 5, 2003).

ars, and public historians must make a commitment to the basic standards of ethical conduct in our discipline, which include preventing the misappropriation of other people's words and ideas. We must do so to ensure that we all work within a common set of ethical standards as we write, teach, and edit. We must do so because ethical misconduct such as plagiarism is an offense against our entire community that undermines our scholarship and our teaching. And we must do so despite the difficulties and complications, because ultimately the only effective solution to a problem such as this is a renewed commitment to collective vigilance and collective action.

A Heartbreaking Problem of Staggering Proportions

Richard Wightman Fox

In spite of all the recent news about plagiarism in history writing, I doubt there is any more intellectual fraud among historians today than there was in the past. It makes the headlines today not because there is more of it, but because famous popular historians were caught red-handed. The sad spectacle of Joseph Ellis claiming other people's experiences as his own (in his Mount Holyoke College lectures) helps magnify the revelations about Stephen Ambrose and Doris Kearns Goodwin inadvertently using other people's words as their own. Historians' foibles also make news because they appear to be riding a wider cultural wave. One cultural icon after another, from the Nobel Peace Prize winners Martin Luther King Jr. (1964) and Rigoberta Menchu (1992) to Bob Dylan and the formerly august *New York Times*, is at least accused of publishing borrowed or fabricated work. The news gets amplified further because it is so useful in the ongoing culture wars. Do a Web search for "King plagiarism" and note the glee with which some Web sites are still publicizing the revelations made over a decade ago by Clayborne Carson and his colleagues at the Martin Luther King Jr. Papers at Stanford University.¹

When I ask my students what they know or think about all this, they typically say three things: they have heard about some of it, they understand that stealing other people's words is wrong, and they think that knowing it is wrong will not stop (other) students from doing it. Given their difficulties in writing and their huge workloads outside of class as well as inside, many students will plagiarize to survive. Insofar as they plagiarize to cope with hectic schedules, they resemble popular historians who have claimed that urgent deadlines contributed to their innocent error of mistaking note cards filled with other people's work for original thoughts of their own. I suspect that some students plagiarize because they find it thrilling to cheat and get away with it. In any case, there is nothing new about students plagiarizing. Students were buying term papers long before the Internet. We need to punish students for plagiarism whenever we detect it, but there is a larger battle to fight.

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Thanks to Casey Blake and Joanne Meyerowitz for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay. Readers may contact Fox at <richwfox@yahoo.com>.

¹ On Martin Luther King Jr., see the round table, "Becoming Martin Luther King Jr.—Plagiarism and Originality," *Journal of American History*, 78 (June 1991), 1–123.

The heartbreaking problem of staggering proportions is not that so many students plagiarize, and not that students do not know what plagiarism is, but that so few students grasp what constitutes the true opposite of plagiarism: a well-conceived and well-developed work. Too many students graduate as history majors without ever having tried to write scholarly essays using primary and secondary sources to forge arguments of their own. I think the best response we can make to the plagiarism crisis is to use it to educate our students about what they should do, rather than just railing about what they should not do. We can take a leaf from Gerald Graff's response to the literary canon wars of the 1980s and 1990s: teach the conflicts. In the process we can sharpen our understanding of what counts as "originality" or "excellence" in our own work.²

Is the first sentence of the previous paragraph, and the title of this piece, plagiarized? Not if you are familiar with recent American literature. Plagiarism is contextual: if you know I am borrowing from Dave Eggers, or can easily find out, then I am not stealing or borrowing, I am asserting that we historians are part of a general intellectual and literary world. The fault is not in me, but in whichever readers do not know their literary stars. Nor do I need to give a citation to William Shakespeare for that last bit of theft. Even if I were to use his exact words—the fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves—it would not be plagiarism since we like to think we all know such literary staples. Intellectual work depends upon an evolving body of common knowledge, including exact or approximate verbal expressions, which a community of thinkers and writers can take for granted. There is no reason *not* to mention Dave Eggers or Shakespeare, except that mentioning them will appear silly if "most" readers are assumed to know the provenance of the phrases.³

The *New York Times* rock critic Jon Pareles says Bob Dylan did not plagiarize when he lifted at least twelve passages from the English translation of Junichi Saga's *Confessions of a Yakuza* for his album "*Love and Theft*." (The cagey Dylan, as Pareles notes, put quotation marks around the title that he presumably took from academia's own Eric Lott, though he did not say whom he was quoting.) It is one thing, argues Pareles, for a scholar "purporting to present original research" to borrow a person's words without giving credit. It is another for an artist such as Dylan to write "songs that are information collages." His works "are like magpies' nests, full of shiny fragments from parts unknown." "Originality," says Pareles, is not the measure of great art. The measure of great art is the quality of one's imitation, the mix of "admiration and iconoclasm, argument and extension, emulation and mockery."⁴

In the music and art worlds this argument is nothing new. An essay "On Plagiarism and Imitation" over a century ago in *Camera Notes* makes the same case for art

² Gerald Graff, *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education* (New York, 1993).

³ Dave Eggers, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (New York, 2000); William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, I, ii, 139–40.

⁴ Jon Pareles, "Plagiarism in Dylan, or a Cultural Collage?," *New York Times*, July 12, 2003, p. A13. Bob Dylan, "*Love and Theft*" (audio CD; Columbia CK 85975, 2001); Junichi Saga, *Confessions of a Yakuza: A Life in Japan's Underworld*, tr. John Bester (New York, 1995); Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York, 1993).

photography that Pareles makes for Dylan's music. "Borrow as much as you like. But be certain that you master the accumulations and accreted experiences of others to such an extent that they have become your own." The historian Casey Blake informs me that Dylan has borrowed much more extensively from other sources, in *"Love and Theft"* and the rest of his work, than Pareles indicates, but that such borrowing is routine in "every one of the musical traditions in which he works (folk, blues, country, rock, gospel). Folklorists and musicologists wouldn't blink at any of this."⁵

What if we grant Pareles's contention that artists do not have to be original to be great? Do we want to accept his presumption that scholars all do or should pursue something called original research, from which borrowing without credit is barred? What constitutes originality for scholars? Short of uncovering previously unknown documents, do we all have to be as original as Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, who looked, in *A Midwife's Tale*, at the much-perused Martha Ballard diary and saw whole worlds of experience that other scholars had missed? One of David Brion Davis's most creative works is his reader on *Antebellum American Culture*, done with the assistance of then-graduate student Steven Mintz. The originality is in the selection and organization of the documents. The pre-Civil War words come alive because of Davis's conception of how they fit together. They amount, he showed, to a house divided against itself. (When Abraham Lincoln delivered his "house divided" speech in 1858, he did not have to tell his Protestant audience in Springfield, Illinois, that he was borrowing from Matthew 12:25.)⁶

One of the best undergraduate research papers I saw in six years of teaching at Yale University was Karen R. Frankel's study of the nineteenth-century New Haven work-ingman Michael Campbell. As a senior, Frankel did a fine thesis (advised by Jean-Christophe Agnew) that combined critical commentary with excerpts from Campbell's manuscript diary. One of William James's best essays, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," is heavily composed of long quotations (all attributed) from other writers. The same is true of his *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. In *The Predicament of Culture* James Clifford points out that nineteenth-century scholarly conventions permitted much more extensive quotation than we allow ourselves today. Perhaps we should rethink the Procrustean bed of individual genius—the historian as unmoved mover—into which many of us force our scholarly ambitions.⁷

Stephen Oates's *With Malice toward None* (1977) is a terrific biography of Abraham Lincoln. It is scholarly, and it has reached a large popular audience. Is it "original"? In 1991 its originality was challenged by a literature professor, who charged Oates with plagiarism for copying many phrasings from Benjamin Thomas's biogra-

⁵ Sadakichi Hartmann, "On Plagiarism and Imitation," *Camera Notes*, 3 (Jan. 1900), 108. Casey Blake to Richard Wightman Fox, e-mail, July 18, 2003 (in Fox's possession).

⁶ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary* (New York, 1990); David Brion Davis, *Antebellum American Culture: An Interpretive Anthology* (Lexington, Mass., 1979).

⁷ Karen R. Frankel, ed., "Work and Ethnicity in the Gilded Age: The Diary of Michael Campbell" (History Department senior essay, Yale University, 1982). William James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology, and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals: On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings; What Makes Life Significant* (New York, 1899); William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York, 1902). James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988).

phy *Abraham Lincoln* (1952). Oates asked twenty-two fellow scholars to examine the case, explaining that there is a tradition in work on Lincoln of using certain stories and leaving them in the same language that other writers have used. "If there are similarities between my book and Thomas's," he said, "it is because both biographies draw from [a] common text or body of writing and information." In effect Oates was applying a Pareles-style argument to himself: gather the fragments of past historical writing and forge them into a new work with a passion and fire all your own. Plagiarism or not, *With Malice toward None* is an original book.⁸

At the time of the controversy I thought the twenty-two historians (including C. Vann Woodward, John Hope Franklin, David Donald, William McFeely, James McPherson, and Eric Foner) who exonerated Oates of the plagiarism accusation were wrong. They said that Oates had appropriated no ideas or language without attribution. I knew that Oates had given Thomas general credit in his footnotes, but he plainly took some of Thomas's exact language, changed a word here or there to make it his "own," and then proceeded without putting Thomas's remaining words in quotation marks. That struck me as plagiarism. I do not know any longer if it is or is not, but that does not seem to me the most important question.⁹

Now I wonder why we force ourselves to erase the traces of other authors in our texts. Why not just use Thomas's words and give him credit in the text? I do not think it would have detracted from the force or originality of Oates's book to give Thomas credit in the text of *With Malice toward None* for the stories and phrasings Thomas had written twenty-five years earlier. It would not have prevented readers from realizing that Oates had mastered the accumulations and accreted experiences of others to such an extent that they had become his own. Since we historians are nonfiction writers who create texts, not paintings, photographs, or songs, we have the opportunity to do something novelists, artists, and musicians cannot ordinarily do. We can put the names of our colleagues or predecessors into our texts at no cost to either the originality or the dramatic force of our creations.

I can see the twenty-two historians' implicit argument for not fetishizing quotation marks and for restricting plagiarism to cases in which one author does not credit

⁸ Stephen Oates, *With Malice toward None: The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 1977); Benjamin Thomas, *Abraham Lincoln: A Biography* (New York, 1952). Stephen Oates quoted in Edwin McDowell, "Lincoln Scholar Rebuts Charges of Plagiarism," *New York Times*, April 20, 1991, p. 115. The *New York Times* published a sidebar comparing the Thomas and Oates texts along with its news article by Philip J. Hilts, "When Does Duplication of Words Become Theft?," *ibid.*, March 29, 1993, p. A10. The article summarized the official findings of the American Historical Association (AHA) in the case (in a sign of our postmodern times, the AHA recently gave up being an investigative and quasi-judicial body). The AHA ruled, according to the story, that the Oates biography was "derivative to a degree requiring greater acknowledgement of Benjamin Thomas's earlier biography" and "strongly" recommended that future editions of *With Malice toward None* give Thomas more credit. This article is a fine document to use in "teaching the conflicts." See also Alice Dembner, "Split Verdict for Historian on Charge of Plagiarism," *Boston Globe*, Dec. 18, 1993, p. 13; Denise K. Magner, "Professor Did Not Adequately Attribute Material in Book, History Group Says," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 27, 1992, p. A15; and Denise K. Magner, "Verdict in a Plagiarism Case," *ibid.*, Jan. 5, 1994, p. A17. For a fascinating case study of the AHA's travails with another plagiarism episode, see Stephen Nissenbaum, "The Plagiarists in Academe Must Face Formal Sanctions," *ibid.*, March 28, 1990, p. A52. The case is also featured in Thomas Mallon, *Stolen Words: Forays into the Origins and Ravages of Plagiarism* (1989; San Diego, 2001).

⁹ The 22 historians' statement was summarized in "Historians Rebut Plagiarism Charge," *New York Times*, May 1, 1991, p. C16.

another author at all. But I will hold out for exact citations whenever exact language of any length is borrowed. That practice will reward authors for giving more than the minimum amount of credit to other writers living and dead. And it will spare them from the time-consuming labor of tinkering with another author's prose in order to make it legally, commercially, or ethically their own. I do not want to single Oates out for special criticism here, since at one time or another most of us have done exactly the same thing. I cite the example of his work only because (thanks to his choice of a sacred national icon as his subject) it became a widely publicized case.

Students generally know what plagiarism is, but too many of them think that the opposite of plagiarism—writing good history—means doing *no* borrowing from others. That misconception reinforces another one from which many of them still suffer: that the best history is a presentation of facts with no interpretation. Even if we rooted out plagiarism, we still would not have solved the deeper problem: too many of our students finish college thinking that a work of history is well written when its author's "opinions" have been suppressed. One of my undergraduates in a research seminar last semester had trouble understanding what I meant by developing an argument in his paper. He told me that another history professor had warned him against putting his own opinions in his written work. I told him I did not want his opinions either. I was asking for an interpretation based on evidence and logic. We could combat intellectual sloth as well as plagiarism if we had every history major write at least one research paper containing an argument refined over successive drafts.

We need to tell our students how we professors go about thinking and writing so they stand a better chance of developing those skills themselves. We get together with our friends and colleagues and we discuss, debate, disagree. We share drafts of what we write. We borrow each other's language as well as ideas. I have been learning from conversations with David Brion Davis, Robert Westbrook, and Jackson Lears since the 1970s. There is no telling how many of my ideas have come straight from them, though I could list quite a few. In his now famous exchange on antislavery with David Brion Davis and John Ashworth, Thomas L. Haskell calls the "hegemony" notion "a feather pillow, perfect for catching falling Marxists." I grew so attached to that line that I have used it or adapted it to other contexts a hundred times, giving Haskell the well-deserved glory.¹⁰

We should borrow more, not less, and give credit whenever we are able. Unless we are Laurel Ulrich or one of a handful of others, originality for us historians (as for most writers, artists, and musicians) is a creative reworking of what other scholars or historical figures have already said. We will not always be able to tell who they are or by what chemical reaction their ideas became our ideas. When we do know who they are, let's name them. Our students need to know that good thoughts do not always happen as a result of native genius or divine infusion. They occur because we listen to

¹⁰ Thomas L. Haskell, "Convention and Hegemonic Interest in the Debate over Antislavery," in *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation*, ed. Thomas Bender (Berkeley, 1992), 206. In his own text, Haskell credited Erasmus Darwin as his source for the phrase (for Darwin, Unitarianism was a pillow for falling Christians).

smart people, respond by trying out new versions of what we hear, and invite criticism to make our ideas clearer. It only adds to one's own stature to acknowledge receipt of thoughts from someone else, as long as one then wrangles with them to infuse them with new passion and meaning. Of course one will never know how much one is borrowing from one's main teachers. If you read the essays of William James and then read Ralph Waldo Emerson's, your jaw eventually drops. James, who generously named anyone of whose influence he was conscious, had no idea how much of Emerson he was recycling.

We should give our own Emersons, great and small, credit in our lectures and in our texts—in the body of our texts, not just in footnotes, and not just when we quote directly. Our students need to hear that we feed on one another's brilliance and pray that someone will someday find something we have said or written worth repeating. They need to learn that our goal as scholars is not just to communicate our ideas—they know that already—but to sharpen and deepen them in conversation and contestation with our peers, a group that includes even our undergraduates whenever they accept the challenge to think with us.

When I was a junior at Stanford University I had a class in early church history from the crusty perfectionist William Clebsch. I wrote a short paper on Clement of Alexandria in which I argued that he anticipated the Reformation by holding that people's efforts to attain salvation on their own were "futile." When Clebsch marked my paper he made a lot of corrections. One of them I have always remembered. He crossed out "futile" and penciled in "unavailing." That semester in Clebsch's class I felt for the first time that I was in conversation with a professor on a scholarly question. That year was a turning point. I began to think of myself as someone who could actually produce scholarship. I felt elated: suddenly there was a whole world of other scholars making ideas into papers, essays, and books. I knew I was not close to being on their level, but I also felt I was beginning to do the same thing they were doing.

In the "plagiarism" statement that you put on your syllabi, tell your students what they can and should do as well as what they cannot do. On my syllabi I put some version of the following:

Don't claim the ideas or words of someone else as your own. Do use the ideas and words of others to help develop your own. Do have friends read and comment on drafts of your papers. Always give explicit credit when you use anyone's exact thoughts or language, whether in paraphrasing or quoting them. Give an acknowledgment to someone who's helped you overall. Intellectual work is about developing and sharing your ideas, and it's about taking note of and praising other people who have shared good ones with you.

Feel free to use any of that statement yourself. And let me know which other means you have employed to help students see that historical writing is not the absence of plagiarism but the presence of borrowing from, debating with, giving credit to other scholars living and dead.

Honest History

Joyce Seltzer

Recent incidents of plagiarism in historical writing have shaken the relationship between historians and their readers, provoking us to reflect upon the assumptions inherent in that relationship. Such an inquiry has a particular significance to me as an editor of books of history. I assume that the history I read and publish is honest, that is, that the author has created the work of history conscientiously and by fair means and that it represents his or her voice, research, and interpretations. Most important, I assume that the historian has aimed to capture some historical truth, to the best of his or her ability and in accordance with professional ethics, in order to preserve the past and draw meaning from it for the present. Charges of plagiarism and other professional laxities challenge these assumptions.

The basis of the relationship between a historian and an editor, of necessity, must be trust. Although a publishing contract formalizes that trust, it remains essentially a good faith commitment by each party to expend his or her energies toward the successful completion and publication of the work. The historian is expected to deliver a manuscript that captures his or her own intellectual point of view and to develop and substantiate it with thorough research and rigorous analysis. I trust that the historian has benefited from an immersion in primary sources and will provide an account that is informed by those sources, insightful as to their meanings, and imaginative in recapturing their context and intent. Although secondary sources can be critically important to the historian's task of reconstruction, it is the fresh encounters with primary sources that afford truly novel interpretations. I, and readers in general, trust our guide to the past to treat sources with the greatest respect.

Trust is a difficult quality to define or measure, but it is vital to the author-editor relationship. For the author, trust implies confidence that the editor will become intellectually engaged in the project, will work to make it as strong and effective as it can be, and will care deeply about its execution and publication. For an editor, trust derives from an author's vision, experience, sense of purpose, realistic goals, and candor about the potential and limitations of the project. The latter is most important, influencing how the author conceptualizes the scope and trajectory of a project, and it tells the editor whether the author has done sufficient research and reflection to make the project viable.

The honesty of the work is the historian's responsibility and obligation. No one other than the historian can ensure it. The job of the editor cannot replicate the work

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of the author in this respect. I have neither the time nor the resources to verify an author's sources. I can query a source when it seems inadequate, inconsistent, or inappropriate, but I cannot establish its provenance. Nor can I necessarily know whether evidence was taken out of context or otherwise distorted to fit the author's argument. This is the historian's professional responsibility. Breaking faith with the publisher, and indeed the public, on this issue is a taint not only on any specific work or author but also on the status of the profession itself. If two or three well-known and accomplished historians are found to have used the verbatim words of others without attribution, a question arises: how many others might be committing similar dishonest acts? The offense undermines public respect for the profession as well as for our historical legacy. It becomes incumbent upon us to search for the conditions that might give rise to it and to seek some remedies.

Clearly, the ultimate responsibility for ethical failure rests with the historian. Yet there are pressures bearing on professional conduct that may help to explain it. Primary among these pressures is the academic community's imperative to publish or perish. Tenure and promotion decisions depend on publications, and, in most history departments, that means books rather than articles. Writing any book is difficult, writing history perhaps even more so. It takes a great deal of research, reflection, and analysis to produce a solid and original work of history. It can rarely be accomplished in a year or two and, more likely, will take at least three or more years to complete. For some, this challenge presents enormous obstacles, whether due to heavy teaching schedules, administrative duties, or familial responsibilities. Most will struggle to do their research and writing in a reasonable amount of time while meeting their professional and personal obligations. A few, who are perhaps more ambitious, impatient, or simply insecure, will seek shortcuts by delegating research to others without close supervision and control, by borrowing extensively without acknowledging their debt, and/or by selectively skimming sources to find support for provocative theses. All such methods are a dereliction of the individual historian's obligations and deserve the profession's censure. The academic pressure that might have prompted such conduct, however, also deserves to be reexamined in light of current publishing realities.

The economic constraints on scholarly publishing are severe, and, consequently, the very specialized monograph is an endangered species. Although its narrow scope and appeal might not make it any less valuable, its very specialized nature does make it less publishable in book form. This presents a problem for the university department and, in fact, for the larger university community itself. Is the department or the university willing to subsidize works that are not economically feasible for a press to produce or to come up with an acceptable alternative means of publication, either in article form or online? Here, the Organization of American Historians might choose to follow the example of the Modern Language Association in appointing a committee to review the widely perceived crisis in scholarly publishing and to make recommendations to address the situation. The first step, however, is for departments of history to acknowledge that the pressure to publish in book form sometimes clashes with a press's demand that a book be economically viable. This may not ensure ethi-

cally responsible behavior, but it will certainly contribute to diminishing the pressure to publish at any cost.

Such pressure does not come from the academy alone. It also comes from the lure of profit and celebrity. Nothing sells as well as a prize-winning or successful author, and so a publisher, or an agent, might promise a great deal of money as an advance for a next work. We should all applaud the increasing popularity and desirability of historical narratives among commercial publishers and the public they seek to satisfy. The offer of fame and fortune, however, may be irresistible enough to cause a historian to commit himself or herself to deliver a manuscript in less time than the work requires. With enough money up front, the historian can hire assistants to complete much of the research while he or she pulls the material together into a workable narrative. But handling the sources is the critical work of the historian. Whoever reads the sources determines what is important and what is not. The notes gathered by a surrogate researcher reflect that individual's experience and sensibility. When historians use other people to do their research, they are trusting others to judge context, meaning, and significance. These are the skills we expect from seasoned historians. The much-publicized cases of plagiarism concerning recently published works by Stephen Ambrose and Doris Kearns Goodwin point up one of the most serious professional risks in using paid researchers: how does the historian control for the use or abuse of the sources by assistants who often are considerably younger and less experienced?

When commercial success and profit are principal goals, time is not the only constraint that may lead historians to take professional risks. A premium is placed on the historian's ability to entertain readers. The need to entertain can tempt an author to sacrifice analysis for story line, significant historical personages for colorful characters, and a genuine search for meaning for an inspirational message. Although such dramatic devices need not be dishonest, they can lead historians to distort or dissemble their findings in order to write a successful and appealing story. It becomes hard to find the line between history and a form of fiction; the boundaries blur between one genre and another. Entertainment and enlightenment are not mutually exclusive, nor are they synonymous. The primary mission of historians is to recapture and reinterpret past human experience using their profession's methodologies of research and reflection. Some readers may find such historical writing entertaining, others may not, but its primary goal must be historical authenticity or historicity, which cannot be confused with historical verisimilitude.

As we move along a spectrum of unethical behaviors in the writing of history, from plagiarism and the fabrication of sources through to the abuse and distortion of sources and on to the fictionalizing of lives and events, the terrain gets murkier and more difficult to evaluate. Writing history requires imagination to create an accessible narrative, but that narrative needs to serve historical knowledge and not distort it. A compelling story might tempt a historian to omit certain evidence that contradicts or undermines a major character or an outcome. An ideological conviction might cause a historian anachronistically to apply to the past current terms such as "whiteness" or "feminism" that carry all the freight of those terms as used in the present. A passion-

ate belief or agenda may cause a historian to resist flexibility and change no matter what the sources suggest. Some of these acts are less conscious than others, but all have to be guarded against.

On a more prosaic level, online research has created many potential risks for historians. Working with sources online is not the same as handling the sources directly, feeling the paper, seeing the print, and noting the broader context of the source. Someone has had to transcribe or scan this source, and we need to allow for an intermediary's input in terms of selection, judgment, or care. Although much has been made of students' cut-and-paste plagiarism in writing papers, there is an enormous risk of unacknowledged borrowing on the part of scholars as well when working online. New technologies make some things much easier, but they also make it harder for historians to stay close to sources and to remember from whence they came.

By highlighting some of the pressures bearing on historians to publish for promotion or for profit, I in no way mean to rationalize dishonest behavior. Individual historians who commit professional misdemeanors, whether plagiarism or a fictionalization of the past that strives to entertain more than to enlighten, must be held responsible for damaging the profession and its mission. All of us would like to bring history to life for contemporary audiences by bringing into relief the universal dimensions as well as the historical particularities of the human condition and by underscoring history's contemporary meanings and relevance, but at what price? We cannot stop listening to our sources and striving to capture them in their own historical light and time. If we do, we will simply be rerunning our own lives and experiences in historical garb, and there will be little benefit to the exercise.

Beyond the individual stands the university and its departments and our professional organizations. History departments need to rethink their criteria for tenure and promotion. Faculty members need to assume full responsibility for the future, often the fate, of young historians and to recognize the merit of achievements other than that of publishing a book-length manuscript, for example, the publication of refereed journal articles, online publications, and excellence in classroom instruction. The Organization of American Historians and the American Historical Association can step in and help map out a new road to follow vis-à-vis publications by appointing fact-finding committees and sharing their reports with members. Although this organizational concern will not preclude individual misdemeanors in the writing of history, it will do much to encourage a more realistic understanding of the substance, seriousness, and weight of professional achievements in their multiple expressions.

Despite the pressures from the academy, from publishing houses, and from readers themselves, most historians continue to struggle to recapture in writing a part of the past in the fullness of its time, place, and meanings. And some will manage to convey that past authentically and compassionately so that it reaches out to us and helps us better to understand not only that past time but our own time as well. That is the gift of honest history. It revitalizes us and our society. It is the promise of that vision that should guide the ethics and behavior of the profession.

An Honor System for Historians?

Emma J. Lapsansky

What are the responsibilities of today's scholars of history? How do we articulate those responsibilities? How do we monitor and sanction the behavior of those of us to whom our society has entrusted its classrooms, its media, and its museums, historic sites, archives, and other cultural institutions? How do we restore America's tarnished faith in professional historians?

Over the last several decades, we have witnessed dramatic changes in the way we conceive of, document, deliver, and define history. We even have a whole new vocabulary to describe what historians do. Cliometrics, oral history, public history, material culture, social history, docudrama, nuanced narratives, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities are concepts that would have been meaningless when Frederick Jackson Turner declared the frontier closed or when W. E. B. Du Bois helped set new standards for citation and documentation in his 1890s study of the Philadelphia Negro.¹

Today's scholar is often competing for the eyes, ears, and loyalties of a wide and heterogeneous audience. No longer writing only for the uniformly educated professional, today's academic historian often seeks to speak to anyone, with any background, who wants to know about the past. The advantage is the democratization of history—the discipline that helps to discern who and what we are. This democratization has increased the number of Americans who can see themselves, their families, and their communities in the historical narratives they encounter. Even the old-style museums—conceived of as philanthropic institutions to “uplift” the public, but often so arranged as to exclude or alienate much of that public—have been reconfigured to embrace concepts such as inclusive and diverse. The old-boy straitjacket that emphasized the heroism and nobility of white male leaders, while choking out women, children, and minorities, family life, workers, and the environment, has—for many writers and readers—expanded to embrace a more textured story in which the villainous, greedy, and debauched sides of our heroes are housed alongside their nobility, their children, their employees, their medical histories, and their sex lives in a dizzying kaleidoscope of historical texts, chat rooms, movies, museum exhibitions, mini-series, Web sites, historic sites, listservs, videos, theme parks, simulations, e-

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¹ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (Madison, 1894); W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia, 1899).

books, DVDs, electronic archives, historical reenactments, and online news delivery systems.

We have aimed to demystify what the History Channel calls history's mysteries, and many in our society are proud of our ability and willingness to take the courageous step of looking behind the mysterious and awe-inspiring veneers to uncover mortal beings with lofty ideals but with human failings. We have demonstrated our sophistication and our sturdy self-reliance by relinquishing our need for larger-than-life heroes, contenting ourselves instead with public figures who admit to being somewhat ordinary. We have raised informality to an art form. We have created a society of first-name familiarity, dressed-down Fridays, and undressed heroines. We have removed gloves and hats from women, ties and vests from men, and patent leather shoes from little girls because we have come to know that gloves may cover talons, ties and vests may disguise hearts full of corporate malice, and patent leather shoes may carry illicit drugs in false heels. Dignity and character, we insist, cannot be applied or seen from the outside; they must be cultivated from the inside, where they are invisible. External formalities, far from demonstrating these qualities, may actually obscure them. I was—and am—among those who refuse to be dazzled by gilt.

To be sure, the old formality, focusing on the noble aspects of historical narrative, still reigns on many campuses and in many cultural institutions. But the new egalitarianism, where “the people” hold the authority and get to tell part of the story, now carries a strong voice. Journalists and genealogists, social activists, even former first ladies have joined the chorus of those chronicling “living history.” It is fundamentally a good thing that our world is populated with what I call accidental historians. Their presence enriches the dialogue about who we are as a culture and a people, and it challenges professional historians to make what we do as lively and engaging as the work of these new storytellers who have captured the public's eye and ear.

But the broadened dialogue is not without costs. Modern historical practice and the wide availability of historical delivery systems—the history and biography channels, museum exhibitions, documentary films, history Web sites, historical reenactments, to name a few—sometimes means that *everyone* holds authority and is responsible, and hence *no one* is responsible or holds authority. One of my favorite colleagues is fond of pointing out that people love history; they just hate and mistrust *historians!* Have those of us who were trained to attend to and teach history lost control, credibility, and authority over its practice? If so, how did this happen, and what can we do to regain it? What *are* the responsibilities of today's scholars of history, and how do we meet them honorably?

First, some thoughts on how we got to the authority-responsibility-credibility impasse: from at least the early twentieth century, we American historians have been stripping ourselves of heroes. While stopping short of physically pulling down statues in the public squares, we nevertheless have symbolically sanded down our wooden heroes, peeling off their shiny lacquer to expose the personal economic interests of the Founding Fathers, to reveal Thomas Jefferson's inward struggles and his outward sexual exploitations, to gaze at Franklin D. Roosevelt's exploits with women and Booker T. Washington's megalomania. In an atmosphere that brought us sunshine

laws, we spotlighted Woodrow Wilson's medical history and John F. Kennedy's dependence on pain-killers. This, too, is probably a good thing, since a democratic society depends upon the ability of its citizens not only to have access to the truth but also to have confidence in the information they receive. But this, too, is not without costs. With the technological ability to wiretap, film, audiotape, videotape, rewind, interview, microfilm, replay, reinterpret, quantify, digitize, document, and deliver online, which enables us both to dissect discrete elements of the American story and to reorder, recombine, and reconstruct these elements in myriad ways, we often find ourselves in the posture of yellow journalism, searching so diligently for evidence of deceit that we are disappointed if we find none.

These past few eye-opening decades were the years that shaped many of us, as citizens and as scholars. Convinced—and I still hold that conviction—that the truth shall make us free, we learned to probe platitudes, discern dissembling, and demystify detail, and we sought to bleach the tinted lenses through which we had heretofore gazed at the Founding Fathers on their pedestals. Like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, we decided to step behind the crystal ball and the smoke to get a look at the wizard.² We complimented ourselves on being able to complicate—to “problematize”—the simple narratives of our forebears. Those forebears left us a legacy of one-dimensional heroes presented as models of unimpeachable integrity. In pursuit of believability and accessibility, we have shrunk our oversized heroes down to human scale. But now that we do not have those heroes, have we also stripped away the values they symbolized—honesty, character, courage, humility?

The irony is that, in recent years, the strong light and magnifying lens that crusading historians have used to ferret out questionable behavior and motives among old heroes has been turned back on the behavior of practicing historians. Most of us spend long years researching dissertations, articles, and books, and long hours preparing meticulously for lectures and classroom discussions. Thus we are deeply distressed by recent front-page stories of historians misrepresenting their credentials in job applications, lying about themselves in classrooms, publishing others' research as if it were their own, or making claims based upon research and statistics that they cannot document. It is difficult to say how much of the front-page news is sensationalism and how much is real. Nor is it easy to assess what portion of the misdeeds results from negligence rather than malevolence. What is clear is that some historians, like others in our society, have dishonored their profession, brought negative publicity to their community, and increased the likelihood that people will love history but distrust historians.

I think it is clear that we need to get started on a rich conversation about what it means to take seriously the trust that has been placed in us. It is hard to be passionate about this topic without sliding down the slippery slope of self-righteousness, but I am reminded here that the small college community where I am privileged to live has an honor code, a contract that each student signs—and by which faculty and administration are bound as well. The honor code asks of us something that is at once very

² L. Frank Baum, *The Wizard of Oz* (Indianapolis, 1900).

simple to describe and not at all simple to carry out. The honor code asks us to behave with integrity, and to do so *all the time*. And as if that were not enough, it asks us to hold others in the community to the same standard, confronting anyone who seems to be in violation of the code and following through with a lengthy investigation and calling-to-task of anyone believed to be in violation. The honor code is cumbersome. There are trials, briefs, public apologies, and requirements for making amends to the community.

The Haverford College honor code, which must be reinstated annually by student vote, is designed to remind community members that integrity is not something one adopts at a given moment and then takes for granted. Integrity and ethics are a way of being and belonging to which one must commit oneself repeatedly. Some years it takes several meetings and several votes to get the honor code renewed. Sometimes apathy, or disgruntlement with the code's effectiveness, or frustration with how time-consuming is its enforcement, keeps the community from easily renewing it. There is often much debate and much hand-wringing; in several of my fourteen years at Haverford, the honor code has barely escaped being consigned to the scrap heap.

Does the Haverford honor code work? Well—of course—it does and it doesn't. It *does* create an atmosphere and a framework that invites all members of the college community to hold themselves to a high standard of integrity. But it *does not* result in every person behaving honorably all the time. Hence, there is the need for honor code juries and sanctions. The honor code sometimes *does* scare away prospective students who do not wish to risk the possibility of having to "rat" on a friend. Hence the justifiable accusation that its success is artificially weighted by the self-selection of the student body, faculty, and staff. It *does* sometimes result in letters from alumni confessing to college misdeeds that have lain heavy on their consciences for many years. Hence the college community's faith that the honor code experience can have lasting impact. It *does not* completely eliminate plagiarism or theft, but it *does* keep alive on campus a rich conversation about what it means to be a responsible citizen. Does such a conversation have value for the situation now faced by historians?

What can we do, what should we do, to restore public trust? What are our responsibilities and limitations? The issues are myriad and thorny. At stake are individual careers and the collegiality and morale of an intellectual community. We have learned (I hope) from the McCarthy era how devastating and demoralizing unsubstantiated accusations and embittered investigations can be. And our publicity-hungry society has produced multiple examples of unscrupulous accusers who seek to raise their own status by throwing mud at the shining reputations of some in the limelight. But we have also learned how destructive it can be when individuals can, with impunity, make bogus claims about their credentials, their experiences, and their research. Somewhere between witch-hunt and myopic denial lies a middle ground that sets a standard of behavior, which, when breached, is met with sanctions.

But who is responsible for applying sanctions, for investigating an allegation of wrongdoing? Who should set the guidelines for investigation and presentation of the

case and for appeal? Is this the job of the home institution? The press? Professional organizations? Should a suspected wrongdoer be suspended from all duties pending the investigation? Should she or he be stripped of honors earned in some other aspect of her or his scholarly production? Do we cease to use the textbooks or attend the public lectures of a scholar accused of misconduct? What does this imply about the constitutional promise that one is innocent until proven guilty? What are the profession's actions should the accused be cleared of charges? Should professional sanction extend to personal misconduct as well as professional misdeeds? What is the place of humility and compassion in our rush to judge our peers? Finally, what is the place of humility, friendship, compassion, and collegiality in the process of sanctioning a peer? I do not think there are easy answers to these questions, either. Surely there is a long list of questions we have not thought of yet. And the honor code leaders at Haverford will tell you that whoever is charged with these responsibilities will spend long hours and sleepless nights in deliberation both about the misdeed and about the form atonement should take.

Still, maybe it is time to think about an honor code for historians. Maybe some of the formality and ritual we cast off in our search for honesty might be restored in the form of a commitment ritual when students enter graduate programs, akin to the ritual "white coating" that happens when students enter medical school. Maybe, at the start, we need to begin to instill in the next generation of historians the fragility of the community trust we assume when we put ourselves forward in classrooms and in publications. Like the medical student we might commit ourselves to "first, do no harm," to ourselves, our multiple and diverse audiences, or our colleagues. Maybe it is time to restore at least enough formality to replace the guilt with a little guilt.

Suppose an applicant to a graduate program in history was asked to sign (or at least to read) a statement that acknowledges the damage done to one's friends, colleagues, and fellow citizens when one dishonors one's profession. Suppose that statement included some reminders about plagiarism, about honesty before students in the classroom, about careful documentation and citation in research. Suppose each faculty member with whom the student works committed himself or herself to making a public statement about integrity at the start of each semester's courses. Suppose each dissertation defense were to end with an invitation to the candidate to make a public commitment to uphold ethical professional standards. Suppose membership applications for professional organizations included a similar statement, with an invitation to sign such a commitment, including an agreement to confront a colleague who seemed to be breaching the standards of conduct. Would these things stop every thoughtless or devious practitioner from misbehaving? Surely not, but they would certainly raise the level of consciousness and perhaps increase the atmosphere of seriousness about the subject, just as strong organizational statements condemning sexual misconduct have provided a launching pad for public discussion about this breach of ethical behavior.

Neither the honor code at Haverford College nor the Hippocratic oath restrains every individual from wrongdoing or negligence every time. But both forms of public commitment set a standard and constitute a reminder that breaches of trust harm

not only the individual but also the communities of which that individual is a part. At the least, if we consider a similar code or oath for historians, we may open conversations about how to set and monitor ethical standards in our own professional communities.