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HERODOTUS, WOOSTER, AND OTHERS

By Robert J. Robertson

During the fifth century before Christ, the Greek historian Herodotus researched and recorded the story of Greco-Persian wars. He examined sources critically, covered subjects systematically, and explained events in rational rather than mythical terms. Writing to perpetuate his nation's memory of "great and wonderful actions," he produced a masterpiece of literature. In this way Herodotus earned the title Father of History.¹

Herodotus, and also Thucydides, another renowned Greek historian of the Classical age, sired thousands of sons and daughters, among them Romans, Germans, French, British, and Americans. Down through the ages they have studied and documented the history of Western civilization and others. Today, men and women in countries all around the globe practice history, a discipline now centered in universities and involving both writing *and* teaching. On campuses throughout the United States, historians study, write, and teach the story of the nation and world. In the Lone Star State hundreds of historians draft millions of words and lecture to thousands of students. In Beaumont, Texas, at Lamar University, during 2001, fifteen historians carried on the work initiated by Herodotus; those who remain, along with newcomers to the department, continue to do so today.²

The Lamar History Department in 2001 was comprised of eight professors, one lecturer, five adjunct instructors, and one teaching assistant. The professors included John W. Storey, the department chairman, plus Adrian Anderson, John M. Carroll, Howell H. Gwin, Jr., Jo Ann Stiles, Walter A. Sutton, J. Lee Thompson, and Ralph A. Wooster. Storey and the entire department embrace the noble principles of history; they believe in its practical and moral purposes, its ideals of truth and reason, and its scholarly standards of precision, exactitude, and faithfulness. They seek truth in history, but know the goal is elusive; they know history is "a work in progress," always being amended by the discovery of new facts and the exposition of fresh interpretations, always being revised to reflect the sentiments of newer generations.³

Lamar's men and women of history take a long and expansive view. Like Balboa, who "discovered" the Pacific Ocean and claimed the whole thing for the King of Spain, Lamar historians claim everything for themselves. They reach for the whole story of mankind, for all peoples, for all recorded time. They take in politics, diplomacy, and war, their traditional province, but today also embrace economics, industry, labor, science, religion, philosophy, medicine, sports, art, music, literature, and countless other fields. Lamar historians study, write, and teach all these subjects and more, and by doing so open a window on the world. They share historical vistas and viewpoints with their students and with members of the university and citizens of the town. In the classrooms of Lamar, an institution less than 100 years old, students can easily see 2000 and more years of history.⁴

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John Storey and his fellow historians carry out the essential functions of their profession: writing and teaching. But they do more; they furnish leadership to professional and student organizations and to cultural and civic groups. They serve on university committees—the Faculty Senate, Curriculum Committee, Graduate Council, and others. They advise students and sponsor student groups. They hold memberships in the American Historical Association, Organization of American Historians, Southern Historical Association, Texas State Historical Association, East Texas Historical Association, and other professional organizations. They embrace “town and gown” relationships, donating time and money to museums and symphony orchestras, and delivering speeches to the Rotary Club and other civic organizations. Jo Ann Stiles is prominent in numerous campus and community groups, including Texas Gulf Historical Society, Gladys City-Spindletop Boomtown Museum, and Walter P. Webb Society. Ralph Wooster is well known in university and professional circles, having served as dean of faculties and associate vice president for academic affairs at Lamar University as well as president of the East Texas Historical Association, the Texas Association of College Teachers, and the Texas State Historical Association.⁵

Lamar historians are experienced and productive writers. They know the labor of writing—the selection and distillation of materials, and the slow and painful work of adding, cutting, and revising. They know the rigors of scholarly publication, meeting the tests of editors and reviewers, and passing the scrutiny of fellow professionals. They publish books, articles, reviews, encyclopedias, indexes, and textbooks. John Storey (PhD, Kentucky, 1968), a specialist in American religious and intellectual history, has published more than two dozen articles and books dealing with the development and influence of religion in America. An authority on Southern Baptists, he has authored articles about Baptist leaders, theology, and social policy in the *Journal of Texas Baptist History*, *East Texas Historical Journal*, and the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*.⁶

In *Texas Baptist Leadership and Social Christianity* (Texas A&M University Press, 1986), Storey explored the blending of conservative theology and personal evangelism with “social Christianity,” programs that addressed problems related to race, alcoholism, sex, ecology, and hunger. Being interested in the influence of religion on politics, Storey published a second edition of *The Religious Right* (ABC-Clio, 2001), a reference book co-authored with Glenn H. Utter, chairman of the Lamar University government department. Storey and Utter provide encyclopedic information about evangelical, fundamentalist Christian leaders such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and Ralph Reed, their organizations, and their efforts to mobilize voters, elect officials, and influence public policy. Readers can ponder the impact of the religious right on the elections of presidents Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush. In *Religion and Politics* (ABC-Clio, 2002), Storey and Utter continued their exploration of the interaction between religion and politics, this time taking a global perspective.⁷

Lee Thompson (PhD, Texas A&M, 1996) and John Carroll (PhD, Kentucky, 1973) write history through biography, a *genre* known as “the prism of history” that provides a convenient and interesting means for telling the stories of wars, revolutions, and all manner of momentous events. Thompson, who studies Great Britain during the Victorian and modern eras, has published two books that chronicle the career of Alfred Harmsworth, a London newspaperman who became Lord Northcliffe and was known as “the Napoleon of Fleet Street.” In *Politicians, the Press and Propaganda: Lord Northcliffe and the Great War, 1914-1919* (Kent State University Press, 1999), and *Northcliffe: Press Baron in Politics, 1865-1922* (John Murray Publishers, 2000), readers see the influence of Northcliffe and his newspapers on politics and military policy during World War I. Thompson challenges readers with two renditions of the powerful and controversial Northcliffe. Was he a vain man corrupted by power and wealth who desecrated the profession of journalism? Or was he a noble leader and publishing wizard who crusaded for British victory and preservation of the Empire? Thompson presents the reader with age-old questions about the men and women of history; were they saints or sinners?⁸

John Carroll has twice employed biography in the field of sports history to illuminate changes in American society. In *Red Grange and the Rise of Modern Football* (University of Illinois Press, 1999), he recounts the story of Harold E. “Red” Grange, the Illinois University star whose much-publicized college and professional career coincided with the Jazz Age and the vast social, economic, and technological changes set in motion by World War I. Carroll explored issues of race and sports during the 1920s and 1930s in *Fritz Pollard: Pioneer in Racial Advancement* (University of Illinois, 1992). Here Carroll traces the remarkable football career of Fritz Pollard, an African American who starred at Brown University and broke other racial barriers, becoming the first important black professional player, the first black quarterback, and the first black head coach. Reading about the collegiate career of Fritz Pollard in the 1920s, Beaumonters can reflect on the experiences of Anthony Guillory, Odis Booker, Earl Dow, and other black athletes who broke the color line at Lamar University during the 1960s.⁹

Carroll has co-edited half a dozen books dealing with sports, military, and diplomatic history. He has published more than forty scholarly articles covering a variety of subjects—athletes, sports teams, international diplomacy, and the Vietnam War—in books and journals such as the *International Review of History and Political Science*, *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, and *America's Heritage in the Twentieth Century*. Walter Sutton (PhD, Texas, 1964) also contributed to the aforementioned *America's Heritage*, adding articles about the influence of the automobile and the abuse of governmental power. With a long-standing interest in British and American history, Sutton has studied the Progressive Era extensively. His articles about Robert M. La Follete, Frank Norris, Woodrow Wilson, and other figures of the Progressive years have appeared in *Mid-America*, *Journal of the West*, and *Presidential*

Studies Quarterly. With Sallye J. Sheppard, chair of the Lamar Department of English and Foreign Languages, Sutton edited *Essays on the Cultural Heritage of Southeast Texas* (1988), a publication sponsored by the Texas Committee for the Humanities. Sheppard and Sutton provide essays, bibliographies, and appendices covering demographics, economics, religion, culture, education, and performing arts in Southeast Texas.¹⁰

Jo Ann Stiles (MA, Texas, 1966) made important contributions to Sheppard's and Sutton's already-mentioned *Essays on the Cultural Heritage of Southeast Texas*; she collected and organized oral histories pertaining to the Beaumont area. A specialist in Texas history, Stiles has conducted extensive research in the Southeast Texas region, giving special attention to race relations, politics, and the oil industry. She has recorded numerous oral histories on these subjects and deposited them in the Lamar University and other libraries. She has published various articles: "The Texas Constitutional Convention," *Lamar Journal of Humanities*; "Bush, Dukakis, and Two Party Politics," *Insight*; and "Adventure into Oil: The Cartwright Oil and Development Company," *Texas Gulf Historical and Biographical Record*. Focusing again on oil, Stiles has just completed *Giant Under the Hill*, a book co-authored with Judith Linsley and Ellen Rienstra, and published by the Texas State Historical Association. Here Stiles and her co-authors recount the story of the Spindletop oil discovery in 1901, a phenomenal event that created the modern petroleum industry and transformed Beaumont and the entire Lone Star State.¹¹

Howell Gwin (PhD, Mississippi State, 1962) has broad interests ranging from classical and medieval Europe to the modern era in Southeast Texas. A student of the history of disease and medicine, he has published articles about the treatment of leprosy in *Studies in Medieval Culture* and *Lamar Journal of the Humanities*, and contributed "Medieval Academe: The Medical Masters of Montpellier" to *Essays in Honor of Dr. Harold S. Snellgrove* (University Press of Mississippi, 1983). In 1995 Gwin compiled the *General Index of the Texas Gulf Historical and Biographical Record, 1965-1994*, providing access to the scholarship of more than 100 articles covering various aspects of Southeast Texas history, including Civil War politics, the home front during World War II, and civil rights in Southeast Texas.¹²

Textbooks, essential tools at all educational levels, are among the most important books written by professional historians. Adrian Anderson (PhD, Texas Tech, 1967) has produced two Texas history textbooks, both of which enjoyed widespread popularity among teachers and have been published in multiple editions. Anderson is an authority on the history of the Lone Star State; he knows the Texas story well, including the bibliography and historiography. For colleges and universities, Anderson revised *Texas: The Lone Star State* (Prentice Hall, 1997), a book originally authored by legendary Texas historian Rupert Richardson. For public schools, Anderson co-authored *Texas and Texans* (Glencoe, 1994), working with David Armstrong, Richard Boehm, Jeanie Stanley, and Ralph Wooster. The latter volume, used in Texas

schools, was revised for re-adoption in 2002. In both textbooks, Anderson and his co-authors present the dramatic and compelling history of Texas, relating traditional and well-known facts but at the same time, in ever-newer editions, adjusting and revising the texts to reflect the latest scholarship. Here teachers and students are apprised of fresh insights about issues such as gender and race. They follow the struggle of women, African Americans, Mexican Americans, and others to achieve a share of the American dream. They see the stories of Heman Sweatt, the black Texan who won a federal lawsuit to desegregate the University of Texas law school, and Versie Jackson and Anthony Cormier, black Beaumonters who sued successfully to desegregate Lamar University.¹³

Ralph Wooster (PhD, Texas, 1954) is the department's senior member and most prolific writer. He is the quintessential historian: ardent teacher; scrupulous researcher; careful writer—a true and loyal son of Herodotus. On the Lamar faculty since 1955, Wooster has authored more than seventy articles and books, many dealing with the Civil War and the American South. Early in his career Wooster pioneered research in nineteenth-century census returns, employing the census data and other primary materials to analyze the relationship between demographics and political attitudes in Southern states. From this work, Wooster published three books; *Secession Conventions of the South* (Princeton, 1962), *The People in Power* (Tennessee, 1969), and *Politicians, Planters, and Plain Folk* (Tennessee, 1975). In his secession book, a work widely cited by national historians, Wooster explored the fateful decisions by Southerners to break the Union and start a civil war. An indefatigable student of the Civil War itself, Wooster has written extensively about the men and women, white and black, who engaged in the conflict, especially those from the Lone Star State. In this area, his books include *Texas and Texans in the Civil War* (Eakin, 1996), *Civil War Texas* (Texas State Historical Association, 1999), *Lone Star Generals in Gray* (Eakin, 2000), and *Lone Star Regiments in Gray* (2002). But Wooster's interest in soldiers from the Lone Star State extends beyond the Civil War: he is currently preparing a manuscript covering Texas and Texans in the Second World War.¹⁴

Wooster's interest in World War II was kindled between 1954 and 1955, when he served with the U. S. Army Historical Division in Europe. It continues today, as he teaches advanced courses on Nazi Germany and World War II. He recounts the story of Germany during the 1930s and 1940s, when Hitler and other fascists hijacked the government of a great nation. They corrupted the morality of its citizens, who went mad with anti-Semitism, nationalism, and militarism, and provoked a catastrophic world war that killed more than fifty million people and devastated the heartland of Western Europe. In Wooster's story of Germany, Lamar students learn of events that profoundly shaped the lives of older Americans, the men and women sometimes called "the greatest generation," who served on the battlefronts of Europe and the Pacific and the home fronts of the United States.¹⁵

Wooster is officially "semi-retired," but he remains a dedicated and ener-

getic teacher, fulfilling the dual responsibilities of the professional historian: writing and teaching. He and John Storey and their fellow professors believe in the ideals of teaching, transmitting historical knowledge to younger generations and more: promoting rational inquiry; discussing moral values; and exalting wisdom and justice. Additionally, they introduce their students to the world of historical literature; they use the best books, cite bibliographies, and discuss historiography. Lamar professors believe in the traditions of the lecture hall and the power of the spoken word; they know the vital human chemistry of teaching and learning, when the words of an earnest professor connect with the mind of an eager student, when interest is aroused, enthusiasm kindled, and reason engaged. "The most important thing," said Dr. John Gray, former Lamar president, "is the striking of a spark between a dedicated, inspiring teacher and a serious, well motivated student. If we can strike enough sparks," said Gray, "we can help light the way for a brighter tomorrow, not only for the people of Southeast Texas, but hopefully for all mankind."¹⁶

During the fall 2001 semester, Lamar historians taught classes to almost 1,600 students, about eighteen percent of the 8,900 students enrolled at the university. Students taking history registered in a dozen different courses, in forty-five different sections. More than 1,400 students took basic courses covering World Civilization, the United States, and the state of Texas, while another 250 pursued a variety of advanced courses. Fifteen graduate students pursued Master of Arts degrees in history and worked under the supervision of Storey, Wooster, and other members of the graduate faculty.

More than Great Britain, Rome, or Germany, the United States was the focus of teaching and learning at Lamar University during the fall 2001. Lamar historians taught more than twenty sections of American history and another half-dozen in related topics, including the Lone Star State, military affairs, Southern religion, and the Progressive Era. The heavy concentration on the United States derives in part from a Texas law that requires six hours (two courses) of American history for every student graduating from a state-supported college or university. Under the law, students may opt for three hours of Texas history to meet one-half the history requirement. The history mandate law was enacted June 2, 1955, when Governor Allan Shivers signed a bill authored by Senator Dorsey Hardeman of San Angelo. An early draft of the bill shows that Senator Hardeman and others wanted the American history courses to cover specific issues: national development; the free enterprise system; powers and rights of the states; rights and dignity of the individual; the Constitution and Bill of Rights; thrift and economy; the dignity of labor; and others.¹⁷

The American history mandate, along with a similar one for Texas and United States government courses, form key elements of a core curriculum required of all state-supported colleges and universities by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. The core curriculum at Lamar University, styled "Ways of Knowing," focuses on the humanities and sciences. In addi-

tion to American history and government, it includes philosophy, English composition and literature, communication, and mathematics, as well as laboratory and social sciences. Statewide, the quantitative impact of the history mandate is significant. During the Fall of 2000, when total enrollment at Texas campuses approximated 970,000, at least 100,000 students registered for American history classes. This included more than 1,000 students at Lamar University.¹⁸

The Texas mandate for American history may be unique in the United States, but the program demonstrates a commitment admired by Lynne V. Cheney and other conservative leaders. Cheney, wife of the Republican vice president and former chairwoman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, called recently for nation-wide reform of education, from kindergarten to college, to place more emphasis on American history. Speaking in Dallas on October 5, 2001, Cheney pointed to a survey of college seniors at fifty-five elite American universities that found only a third who could identify George Washington as the American general at the Battle of Yorktown. Not one of those fifty-five universities requires a course in American history, Cheney said. It is essential to study the history of the United States, she argued, "to know the ideas and ideals on which our nation was built."¹⁹

Some historians may believe Cheney's view is ill founded, that the basics of American history are covered thoroughly at the high school level and that survey courses in college level are unnecessary. Others, especially specialists in such non-American fields as Asian, African, European, or Islamic studies, may believe that Cheney's opinion is provincial, that the American story is too narrow and not fully relevant to the needs of the "globalized" citizens of the twenty-first century. But other historians, including Lamar's Storey and Wooster, do believe in the primary value of American history. While not endorsing Cheney's broader conservative philosophy, they would argue that college students are indeed informed and inspired by the history of their nation, that they benefit greatly from learning the traditional American stories: positive stories about representative government; freedom of religion; immigration; free enterprise; and the rule of law, as well as darker stories about the conquest of native Americans, the enslavement of African peoples, and the stubborn resistance to full civil rights for blacks, women, and other minorities.²⁰

Additionally, Storey, Wooster, and others believe that students learning American history learn about history itself, a discipline that is noble and grand, but like life itself complicated with maddening contradictions. Moreover, in the American story, students learn that historical truth is subjective and ever-changing, always being revised to reflect new facts and interpretations or amended to reflect the racial, religious, and gender attitudes of historians and their audiences. American history, perhaps more than any other, is subjected to such revision and amendment. Wooster points out, for example, that the historical explanation for Southern secession, an event of great national consequence, has been revised and amended many times by scholars of high repute.²¹

The continuous fine-tuning of American history is demonstrated every day in advertisements for the latest college textbooks. Houghton Mifflin, one of the nation's leading publishers, now recommends its newest version of Mary Beth Norton, *et al*, *A People and A Nation* (Brief Sixth Edition). This issue purports to enrich a traditional political, diplomatic, and economic narrative with newer aspects of social history in order to tell "the whole story" of American history. Touting this edition for its generous treatment of "everyday people, cultural diversity, work and popular culture," the publisher points to its various enhancements, such as "new coverage of slavery in the colonial period," "new attention to the role of religion in American social and political history," "stronger emphasis on women," and "enhanced discussion of the U.S. in the world." These enhancements, Houghton Mifflin would surely argue, and Lamar's faculty members would surely agree, make the traditional history of America even more important and relevant.²²

NOTES

¹Herodotus (Translated by George Rawlinson), *The History of Herodotus* (London, 1949), pp. ix-xxvi, 1.

²Even approximate numbers of college and university historians nationwide are not known; however, websites and other sources for professional associations indicate membership numbers as follows: American Historical Association, 15,000; Organization of American Historians, 11,000; Southern Historical Association, 3,200; Texas State Historical Association, 3,000; and East Texas Historical Association, 575.

³*Lamar University 2000-2002 Catalog*, Volume 46, Number 1, pp. 128-130. As of the Fall 2003, the personnel of Lamar history faculty reflected a number of changes including the addition of Dr. Rebecca Boone (Ph.D., Rutgers) and Dr. Mary Kelley (Ph.D., Texas Christian University), the retirement of Jo Ann Stiles, and the medical leave of Dr. Walter Sutton. The principles, purposes, ideals, and standards of history are discussed in W. Stull Holt, *The Historical Profession in the United States* (New York, 1963), No. 52, Service Center for Teachers of History; Samuel Eliot Morrison, *History as a Literary Art* (Indianapolis, n.d.), Reprint Series in History, H-349; Dexter Perkins and John L. Snell, *The Education of Historians in the United States* (New York, 1962), pp. 1-14; Barbara Tuchman, *Practicing History* (New York, 1981), pp. 14-64.

⁴The scope of history is discussed by Dexter Perkins, *We Shall Gladly Teach* (Indianapolis, n.d.), Reprint Series in History, No. H-311.

⁵The dual responsibilities of writing and teaching are covered by Holt, *The Historical Profession in the United States*; Jo Ann Stiles, *curriculum vitae*, 2001; and Ralph A. Wooster, *curriculum vitae*, 2001.

⁶Tuchman, *Practicing History*, pp. 14-21; Holt, *The Historical Profession in the United States*; John W. Storey, *curriculum vitae*, 2001.

⁷Storey, *curriculum vitae*, 2001.

⁸J. Lee Thompson, *curriculum vitae*, 2001. Biography as a "prism of history" is discussed by Tuchman, *Practicing History*, pp. 80-81.

⁹John M. Carroll, *curriculum vitae*, 2001.

¹⁰Carroll, *curriculum vitae*, 2001. Walter A. Sutton, *curriculum vitae*, 2001.

¹¹Stiles, *curriculum vitae*, 2001.

¹²Howell H. Gwin, Jr., *curriculum vitae*, 2001.

¹³Adrian Anderson. *curriculum vitae*, 2001. In *Texas: The Lone Star State* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 1997), 7th edition, Anderson discusses the campaign to desegregate Lamar State College of Technology, Beaumont, Texas, but does not identify the plaintiffs Anthony Cormier and Versie Jackson.

¹⁴Wooster, *curriculum vitae*, 2001.

¹⁵Wooster, *curriculum vitae*, 2001.

¹⁶Holt, *The Historical Profession in the United States*; Perkins, *We Shall Gladly Teach*; Dr. John Gray's words and portrait are displayed in the lobby of the John and Mary Gray Library at Lamar University.

¹⁷Lamar University 2001 Class Schedule, pp. 63-64; Senate Bill 254 is reported in *Houston Chronicle*, June 2, 1955. Bill file, including mark-up version and recorded votes, are on file in the Texas State Archives, Austin, Texas.

¹⁸Lamar University 2000-2002 *General Catalog*, pp. 14-16. Statewide enrollment at state-supported colleges and universities is recorded in Fall Headcount Enrollment published on website of Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, April 2001. The author has made a conservative estimate of the number of students taking American history statewide by applying a percentage derived from known figures at Lamar University.

¹⁹Ginger Logan. Sales Representative, A.B. Longman/Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers, November 27, 2001, reports that Texas is the only state that requires students to take American history, but the author has not been able to confirm this information. Remarks of Lynne V. Cheney were reported in *Beaumont Enterprise*, October 6, 2001.

²⁰John Storey interview, October 22, 2001.

²¹Ralph A. Wooster, *The Secession of the Lower South: An Examination of Changing Interpretations* (Indianapolis, n.d.), Reprint Series in History, H-343.

²²See "Brochure copyright © 2002 by Houghton Mifflin Company."