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AUTHOR St John, Jacqueline D.; Keller, Jane
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ABSTRACT

Based on a preliminary version of this study, project aims were to learn what college freshmen knew about presidents in office from the late 19th century to the present and to determine the students' writing levels. During the first class of each of five semesters, students enrolled in an American History Since 1985 course were asked to write one paragraph about any post Civil War president. Student evaluations of 17 post Civil War presidents (compared to only 4 in the preliminary study) were analyzed. The following categories were used to classify student statements: background/biography, integrity, leadership, intelligence, policies/accomplishments, courage, public image, value to country, historical perspectives, sophistication, and factual errors. In addition, an analysis of student spelling resulted in a listing of 75 most frequently misspelled historical terms. The bulk of the document consists of a category-by-category analysis of student responses for each president in the order chosen: Richard M. Nixon, John F. Kennedy, Jimmy Carter, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, Harry S. Truman, Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Lyndon B. Johnson, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Ulysses S. Grant, Woodrow Wilson, Andrew Johnson, Warren G. Harding, Rutherford B. Hayes, and Calvin Coolidge. Findings indicate that although students demonstrated a substantial body of knowledge concerning post Civil War presidents, attempts to communicate their knowledge were marred by their inability to communicate in written English. (LH)

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Jacqueline D. St John
Professor of History
University of Nebraska at Omaha
60th & Dodge Streets
Omaha, Nebraska 68182

Jane Keller
Instructor
Mathematics Department
Metropolitan Technical
Community College
30th & Fort Streets
Omaha, Nebraska 68103

This project developed from an inclass exercise to assist Jacqueline St John in lecture and class preparation. Its aim was twofold: first, to determine the writing level of the freshmen American history survey students and their common historical fund of knowledge relating to presidents since 1865 and second, to identify those students poorly prepared in language skills and historical writing. Students deficient in writing skills were referred to the Learning Resource Center at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO); they were also advised by the instructor that they would have to make a special effort to keep up-to-date and to secure assistance from the teaching assistant in note-taking and test preparation.

Probably the most potent motivator for the authors in writing the article was curiosity. Rather than waiting 25, 50 or even 100 years to learn what historians believed and wrote concerning the modern presidents (1865 to 1981) we believed that it would be interesting to learn what college freshmen knew or believed they knew of the late nineteenth and twentieth century presidents.

How the Data Was Collected

During the first class of each of the five semesters from the fall of 1979 through the fall of 1981, St John asked each student in the course American History Since 1865 to write one paragraph about any president from this time

period. In her directions she indicated that the students could choose their favorite president, the president that they felt was the best or the worst leader, or the president they knew the most about. This course is a one semester, freshman level survey.

Of the 386 respondents, seven students did not follow the directions and either did not write a paragraph about one president or did not select a president in the correct time period.

This paper will discuss student perceptions of post Civil War presidents, 1865-1981. The discussion of the presidents will be in the order of their frequency of student selection. Table 1 presents a summary of the number of students who chose each president.

The authors developed categories to classify the statements students made concerning the presidents. The categories and their descriptions are as follows:

#1 Background/Biography

We included in this category any reference the student made to the president's family, his experience prior to or following his presidency, his education, his political party, his campaign(s) for public office, his personal life, events leading up to his election, and the way he left office (i.e., losing to another candidate, death in office, assassination or resignation).

Table 1

STUDENTS WHO SELECTED EACH PRESIDENT BY SEMESTER*

	Fall 1979	Spring 1980	Fall 1980	Spring 1981	Fall 1981	Total
Lincoln, Abraham	3	1	5	5	6	19
Johnson, Andrew	0	1	0	0	1	2
Grant, Ulysses	1	2	0	0	1	4
Hayes, Rutherford	0	0	1	0	0	1
Roosevelt, Theodore	4	2	3	3	4	16
Wilson, Woodrow	0	0	2	1	0	3
Harding, Warren	0	1	0	0	1	2
Coolidge, Calvin	0	0	0	0	1	1
Roosevelt, Franklin	7	5	16	6	5	39
Truman, Harry	5	3	4	2	6	20
Eisenhower, Dwight	1	1	4	0	0	6
Kennedy, John	13	4	12	9	14	52
Johnson, Lyndon	5	1	2	0	0	8
Nixon, Richard	27	9	18	18	32	104
Ford, Gerald	7	5	3	7	8	30
Carter, Jimmy	1	9	8	13	19	50
Reagan, Ronald	0	0	0	0	22	22
Total students/papers						379

*Seven students did not follow the directions and wrote either on a president who was in office before 1865 or wrote on more than one president. The authors disregarded these papers in analyzing student responses.

#2 Integrity

Integrity was a difficult quality to define, although it was obvious that the students made value judgments about the character of the president they chose. Since students could choose the best or the worst president there were both positive and negative statements about the integrity of the president. To qualify for inclusion in this category the student had to make a statement about the president's honesty as a leader or as a person, his sincerity, his moral character, or his intent to do the "right thing."

#3 Leadership

Student perceptions were of the best or the worst president, or the most memorable. Thus, there were two subsections emphasizing positive and negative characteristics of presidential decision-making. To qualify for inclusion in this category, the student had to make a statement regarding the quality of the president's guidance or direction of the American government and/or nation.

#4 Intelligence

Although a most abstract attribute, student comments relative to a president's knowledgeability, comprehension, understanding and critical thinking were included in this category. It was interpreted broadly to include common sense, problem-solving ability, creative/innovative and effective thinking.

#5A Policies/Accomplishments: Domestic

We included in this category any references the students made to legislation, acts, domestic policies, or internal achievements made during the president's term of office.

In evaluating papers concerning Richard Nixon we divided this category into two parts: statements concerning Watergate and statements concerning domestic achievements or policies that were not related to Watergate.

#5B Policies/Accomplishments: Foreign

We included in this category any reference the students made to external policies, diplomacy, acts or proposals relative to foreign countries, wars, and world affairs or concerns made during the president's term of office.

#6 Courage

We included in this category any references the students made to the president's strength of conviction, his bravery, or his ability to face tough decisions with courage. There was some overlapping between this category and that of leadership.

#7 Public Image

This is a most ambiguous term to define and one that applies primarily to the "modern" presidents - those of the World War II and post World War II generation - i.e., Franklin D. Roosevelt to Ronald Reagan.

It includes such nebulous attributes as personality/personal charisma, rhetoric of the president and the American people's perceptions of the president.

Public image has come to mean a media reflection - accurate or distorted - of the man as president and the institution of the presidency. Broadly interpreted it is the popular view of the president and historically the folklore surrounding the presidents.

We included student statements describing any foreign or domestic assessment of the president as portrayed in the printed and audio-visual media.

#8 Value to Country

Several students included their personal opinions regarding the president's worth/value to the country and/or the world. Others wished that a designated past president was currently in office. We viewed this as a category where students could discuss the significance, importance and/or the long-term value of a president to the country. This category virtually excluded those presidents from Lyndon B. Johnson onward.

#9 Historical Perspective

We included in this category student statements revealing a more analytic interpretation of the presidents, historical events, comparisons of presidents, presidential policies as well as the long range implications of presidential

action(s). Again, it was more relevant to the earlier presidents excepting the "special nature" of the Nixon presidency - i.e., ". . . he didn't do anything any other president did not do except that he got caught."

#10 Sophistication

Several of the papers were well-written and illustrated not only the students' factual knowledge about the presidents but also their ability to make comparisons between presidents and to evaluate and/or interpret the presidents' contributions to the nation and the world. We felt that these statements, often quite lengthy, needed a separate category. Some overlapping occurs between this category value to country and historical perspective.

#11 Factual Errors

We included in this category factual errors the students made in areas such as dates, policies, events, order of the president, etc.

In evaluating papers concerning Richard Nixon's presidency, we divided this category into two parts: statements concerning his ending the Vietnam War and statements not dealing with his ending the Vietnam War.

#12 Historical Spelling Words

In analyzing the students' paragraphs it would be impossible to ignore the numerous spelling, grammatical and punctuation errors. We kept a list of all the words the

students misspelled, although we did not keep track of how often the word was misspelled. In all, over 400 words were misspelled in the papers we analyzed. We were especially interested in those words we felt were historical terms, names of presidents, countries, wars, etc. Students misspelled approximately seventy-five of the "historical" terms. These are listed in alphabetical order, with the correct spelling listed first and the incorrect spelling(s) after the diagonal line.

affair/afair

Afghanistan/Afganistan, afganastin, Afganastam

assassinated/assasins, assasinatin, assignted,

assassassinated, asassinated, assanated,

assassanated, assinated

Begin/Bezein

believe/belive

bureaucracy/beauacray, beauraeracy

cabinet/cabinate

campaign/campain, campins

candidacy/canidacy

chief/cheif

colleagues/collegues

Communists/communist

competition/competion

condemning/condeming

confrontation/confrentation
controversy/controvery
country's/countries
charismatic/carismatic
crises/crisises, chisises
criticized/critized, critisized
decisions/desicions
Delano/Deleno
democrat/democrate
depression/deppression
diplomacy/deplimce
economics/econimans
Eisenhower/Eisinhower, Eisenhower
electors/electiers
enterprise/interprise
executive/exectutive
experience/experance
foreign/forgein, forigine, forgien
General MacArthur/McAurther
Gerald/Gereald
government/Goverment, goverment
governor/govene
helm/hem
incident/inceident
indecisive/indesive

interest/intrest

invasion/envasion

John Wilkes Booth/John Wilkesbooth

Johnson/Johnsen

Kennedy/Kenedy

legislation/legistration

liar/lyer

Libyans/Lybian

Lyndon/Lynden

missile/missle

Nixon/Nixion

numerous/numberous

opinion/opion, oppinion

opponent/apponent

opposed/oppossed

opposition/osition

paranoid/pairinoid

policies/policys

presidency/presidensy, presidincy

president/presisent, presodent, presdent

quitting/quiting

Reagan/Ragon, Regan, Reagen, Reagon

rebels/rebles

represented/reprisented

responsible/restonible

Roosevelt/Rosevelt
scandal/scandel, scandle
scandalous/scandelees
situation/sitution
succeeded/suceeded
successor/succesor
troops/troups
Truman/Thurman
turmoil/termail
United States/United State
Vietnam/Viet-Nam, vietnam
Wallace/Wollus, Walius

In addition students did not capitalize the following proper names: Ford, Iran, Russia, Soviet Union, Watergate, and White House.

In the body of this paper we have extensively quoted student papers. We have tried to portray their writings as closely as possible to their original material.

Richard M. Nixon

One hundred and four students chose Richard M. Nixon. Thirty-nine students mentioned biographical details concerning Richard M. Nixon. The largest category of respondents, twelve, mentioned the resignation; eight mentioned Nixon's successor, Gerald Ford, and seven mentioned Ford's pardon of Nixon.

An example of comments in this category: "The combination of Nixon's resignation and pardon by President Ford made people wonder if that arrangement hadn't been discussed before Ford was appointed."

Nine students mentioned Nixon's term of office and five mentioned the time period. An example of the comment is the following: "Richard Nixon was elected President in 1968. His running mate was Spiro Agnew, an unknown. One of his campaign promises was to get the United States out of Vietnam He was re-elected in 1972 for four more years. He was President for two more years only."

Five students mentioned his political career and four commented about his candidacy at a specific time. Examples are as follows: "Richard Nixon was the Rep. candidate in 1960 against John F. Kennedy. He was defeated by Kennedy but not by a large margin"; and "Former President Nixon had a long career in politics. Being such an experienced politician he also knew many ways to reach a goal."

Three students mentioned other executive members of the Nixon Administration in the following manner: "Gerald Ford was his vice-president and Henry Kissinger was Secretary of State." Three students mentioned Nixon and his use of power. An example follows: "Richard Nixon-as a man, and as a president he needed to fulfill a great thirst for power."

Three students commented directly or obliquely about his psychological state and the consequences of his actions. An example is: "Richard Nixon was raised a very frustrated person which stayed with him throughout his years."

Three students mentioned personal data concerning him: that his wife's name is Pat, that his birthday is January 9 and that he lived in San Clemente, California, . . . in semi-seclusion with his wife (1979). Another wrote, "his personal life since his quitting office has been somewhat secluded, which is punishment enough for the turmoil he led this nation into."

Twenty-four students made statements about Nixon's honesty or integrity. Eighteen students made statements which indicate that they feel he is not honest. Their statements ranged from "he was dishonest and sneaky" to "Nixon was a crook." They wrote such statements as: "a man that had potential but used it in the wrong way"; "Richard Nixon was not a very good human being"; "he wasn't totally honest"; "His accomplishments and deeds will always be

overshadowed by his dishonesty"; "he was dumb enough to get caught in all his dishonesty"; "The dishonesty totally shot down what our system is all about in the U.S."; "But all along he was robbing everyone. bless his heart"; "his actions were that of a criminal"; "His basic morals in the area of truefulness were far from good"; and "Richard Nixon the one everyone thought he was true blue President, found out that he was not, and he found to be a lyer and everything else."

Six students wrote statements concerning Nixon's integrity which were either positive or indicated their willingness to accept his rationale for his actions. These students made the following statements: "He was a good man inside, but I believe the political system took him down"; "I believe that Richard Nixon wasn't such a bad person"; and "He covered up for his men which I consider more a quality of loyalty than criminality."

Fifty-seven students made statements about Nixon's leadership abilities. Forty-six of these statements were positive. Students used such phrases as: "one of the strongest presidents" (3 students); "handled job well"; "will be remembered favorably"; "one of the most efficient presidents"; "highly underrated" (2 students); "was a good president" (16 students); "one of the best (or excellent) presidents" (11 students); "stood out above all presidents";

"he did a great deal for this country" (4 students); "one of the most misunderstood presidents"; and "made several important contributions to the nation."

Students who wrote negative leadership statements said: "President Richard Nixon was the biggest disappointment to all America of any man I can think of"; "Richard Nixon was the worst president the USA had the Unpreledge of knowing, Because he totally screwed the country up and the left in the hands of a bumbling boob, that Nixon really knew what he was doing when he did that"; "President Nixon in my opion made a band name for the United States of America"; and "Nixon was a mistake " .

Six students commented concerning Nixon's intelligence. They made such statements as; "bugging the democratic office was a very stupid thing to do"; "Richard Nixon when in office was a very smart and shrewed politician"; "Nixon- He really was too smart for his own good. He knew what he had to be done and he knew how to do it"; and "I still feel he was extremely intelligent."

Fourteen students made statements about Nixon's domestic accomplishments such as: "He tried to keep Communism from spreading in the U.S."; "During his time in office the country was stable, Unemployment was down, inflation was down, and most people in general were living well"; "I also agreed with his pro-business economic

policies"; "In 1973, his wage and price controls were foreign to me and I had trouble understanding them, what good they would do. Possibly some good would have come had they been a blanket control, not one with loop holes for certain groups of mass producers I can remember no serious attempts to clean up the environment, however during his first office term, in keeping with national fascination, did try"; and "Our economy was certainly a lot better, our defense was probably the strongest in the world."

Sixty-four students wrote about Watergate.

Forty students commented directly concerning Watergate. The following are the descriptive adjectives and nouns used and their frequency: scandal (17); involvement (8); incident (6); issue (3); affair (2); and one each for; bit, activity, situation and controversy. There is some confusion as to whether President Nixon resigned (9) or was impeached (5).

Regarding the actual activity or activities that Nixon was involved in twenty-one students commented on the following: wire-tapping and/or bugging (10); Democratic headquarters and/or offices (4); interfering with the political campaign (2); tapes (3); bribery (1) and the Washington Post (1).

Eleven students made negative comments about Nixon's conduct and/or personal character: vindictiveness; damage;

crook; ridiculed him; mistrust of Nixon and government; and wrong.

Fourteen students made statements that were in the nature of an apology: "He made one mistake called Watergate"; "He covered up a few things but probably not anymore than some former presidents. He did many good things that outweigh anything bad that he did"; "I regret the Watergate incident because it tarnished his political abilities and prestige"; "Now we all know he was guilty of crimes in the Watergate scandal but this shouldn't be held against him"; "If not for Watergate he might have gone down as our greatest president"; "It is probably true that he was involved in Watergate, but the people of America don't know a lot of things that go on in Washington, this was just an incident that was brought out in the open"; "The only trouble was is that he got caught with the Watergate incident"; "someone involved with him in Watergate had it in for him"; "He was wrong about watergate, but his policys were good"; and "He was a very unlucky President because he was one of the very many governmental people to get caught in a scandal. With the Watergate scandal he brought a lot of history to study."

Forty-six students made statements concerning Nixon's foreign accomplishments. Students gave overwhelming positive support to Nixon's foreign policies with forty-

three students making positive statements, two making neutral statements and one making a negative statement.

Students making positive statements focused on four areas of foreign affairs: foreign diplomacy, the United States' relationship with China, ending the Vietnam War and the United States' relations with Russia.

In writing about Nixon's handling of diplomatic relations, students made statements such as: "Nixon was the best foreign policy president the U.S. has ever had and that is what this country needs now"; "I feel that of the last five presidents Nixon had the best foreign policy. He wasn't as strong as Reagan but he was a better diplomat"; "I think his foreign policies and combined efforts with Kissinger will later be recognized as helpful in our world standing."

Twenty-two students referred to Nixon's establishment of diplomatic ties with China. They made such statements as: "He also opened up relations with China by visiting their country"; "He got us in good with China. Presidents like Carter and Reagen ruined these good foreign relations"; "It seems to me that if Nixon would not have done so well in Chinese relations, the east would be very much more unstable then the present. With China on the back door of Afganistan and so on that region of the world is a bit more stable"; and "He opened the door to China which may one day be our greatest alley against soviet aggression."

Nineteen students made statements dealing with Nixon's handling of the Vietnam War. They made such statements as: "Mr. Nixon's greatest feat was the U.S. withdrawal of troops from Vietnam, without that fact we still might be fighting in that senseless war"; "He made many important contributions while in office most notably the Paris peace talks which ended the Vietnam War"; "Some people feel that he did poorly on the Vietnam situation, but he did as well as possible to try to keep pride in the United States in a war they could not win, a situation that he did not create"; "1973-74 escalation of the war, a futile attempt to end a winless war" (this is the only negative foreign accomplishment statement); "He finally managed after 15 years or so to withdraw U.S. military troops from Vietnam"; "One of his Campaign promises was to get the United States out of Vietnam"; "Nixon got U.S. out of the Vietnam war, not by winning but by just pulling out for the sake of getting out" (this is one of the neutral statements about Nixon's foreign accomplishments); "he did work to free prisoners of war"; and "He tried to establish peace in Vietnam and his efforts to have them fight their own war were just."

Six students commented concerning U.S. relations with Russia during the Nixon presidency such as: "He was very strong and tactful in the issues abroad - such as V.N., the U.S.S.R., China"; "He also avoided confrontation with Russia by setting up

arms agreements"; "He made many visits to many foreign countries, like Russia and China"; and "His efforts to stop the growth of communism are shown also in the bombing of Cambodia."

Nineteen students wrote about Nixon's public image. They made such positive statements as: "If he were to run again today I'd vote for him"; "I followed Richard Nixon the most, having arrived at a point when I cared about who was president of the United States at about the same time that he took office. He seemed to be a professional administrator and an old hand at Washington politics" (one other student refers to becoming interested in political issues at the time Nixon was in office); and "He was praised for his job in the oval office throughout his first term and was re-elected in 72 by a landslide over Walus."

Two students referred to the press' influence on Nixon: "He was persecuted by the press and his enemies"; and "I've read several books on the media's persecuting of Nixon, 'The Newswisters' and 'How C.B.S. tried to Kill a Book' and I believe that part of Nixon's Watergate blunder was because of his paranoia with the media. The polls in the '72' election had him just a few percentage points ahead. Yet he won by one of the greatest landslides ever. I regret that he was unable to direct the country through his second term, but I don't agree with some of the acts of his administration."

Five students made statements indicating that they feel that Nixon was misjudged: "Although he developed excellent foreign policies, the American people disliked him"; "A lot of Americans felt it was unfair for him to be pardoned"; "He did nothing worse than most presidents did before him, it's just that he got in the public spotlight. The American public blamed him for dirty dealings that went on in his administration, which more on the public's ignorance than on a president's ability"; "The publicity given to this incident blew everything way out of proportion and resulted in a fine man losing appointed position"; and "The tapes that were discovered in his office reduced his credibility even more in the eyes of the public."

Four students made negative statements about Nixon's public image: "The Watergate scandal probably did more damage to other countries opinions of the U.S. than anything in history"; "obviously pairinoid that people were talking about him or doing him wrong"; "Richard alias Tricky Dicky"; and "I remember everyone making political comics of his face."

Eleven students commented on President Nixon's value to the country. Five statements are as follows: "his motives were for the best interest of our nation"; "Although he'll probably be best known for his mistakes, the good things he gave to our country far out do the mistakes"; "I feel the

U.S. was a lot safer when he was President than it has been since"; "The U.S. seems to be still effected by the scandle of Nixon"; and "I feel today we really need a president like Nixon."

One student wrote an analysis of President Nixon's value to the country as follows:

I believe that Richard Nixon even though he caused a scandal in our government was a president who opened America's eyes. By being involved in Watergate along with all his other aides he showed Americans that we are not infallible and that our government is not by any means perfect. He opened our eyes to the importance of choosing a good and honest president and he made a lot of people sit up and take notice to all aspects of politicians' lives. I feel that since Watergate, Americans are beginning to pay more attention to and want more information about their potential presidential candidates or any other politicians.

Students made fifty-five factual errors in writing about President Nixon. Of these, twenty students stated that Nixon ended the Vietnam War and/or brought the troops home from Vietnam. President Nixon received the entire credit for ending the war in Spouteast Asia. Eleven students made errors relating to the date of his election, time in office or his tenure of office. Eight students believed that Nixon was impeached; one believed that he had had a trial.

Four students believed that he had lowered the inflation rate or solved the inflation problem with lower interest rates. Another student believed that he had guided

the U.S. out of a recession. Two students believed that the U.S. began relations with China during his administration and two others wrote that Nixon and "all his aides" were involved in Watergate. Two students commented on the JFK-Nixon election and made errors. Fourteen students made miscellaneous errors.

Fifty-one students made statements that were classified as providing historical perspective on Nixon's administration. All but two of these statements deal with Nixon's participation in Watergate.

Twenty-three students used the word "caught" to describe Nixon's involvement in Watergate. A sampling of their explanations for what happened to Nixon includes: "Richard Nixon was not a very good human being, All of his gains were made for himself, He used people and material for his own personal gains. There were probably a lot more like him but he was caught for his way of life. We as Americans should learn a lesson from this"; "What did this guy really do wrong . . . or right for that matter?! Most people are really misinformed as to what went on with President Nixon and his cohorts He just had one little screw up and got caught"; "The president that really comes to mind for me is Nixon. I feel sorry for him and us that he was thrown out of office. In my opinion probably every candidate in the past 50 years has some political espionage and he was

the one who was caught; Enough of that"; "Even though he wasn't totally honest, the other politicians weren't any better, and he was always trying to find out what they were doing. I think he was a good president because every thing he did, even though it was wrong, was in the best interest of the Public"; "Presidents are humans and we can not expect them to be Gods lacking in mistakes, Nixon just got caught!"; "He was criticized about cheating with taxes and stealing money and many cover ups. Well he's probably no more guilty than any other president in the past decade. I think he got a bum deal even though many would not agree"; "I believe that the 'scandals' he was involved in, were highly typical of Presidents. He wasn't the only president to be involved in scandals, he was just one of the unfortunate ones that got caught. I think that a little bit of scandal is necessary to have a successful office."

Four students indicated that Nixon's participation in Watergate led the American people to mistrust the government. Students made the following statements: "Then the Watergate scandal occurred and people began to mistrust government- most of all, Nixon. Never had they heard of a president that was guilty of a crime. All Republicans were to blame & Nixon was a crook"; "He is criticized and made the scapegoat for the lack of faith the American people have in government"; and "He made all politicians look cheap and

untrustworthy. He did make us all very aware of the humanness of the President of the U.S.A."

One student felt that the public cannot adequately assess Nixon's situation:

I feel he did nothing unusual or unjust in his efforts to carry out the responsibilities of his office. The 'average' citizen is not capable of evaluating the problems & responsibilities of such an office. Total honesty & public disclosure are ridiculous expectations of a president - many necessary decisions - for the best interest of the nation - would obviously offend a majority of the unrealistic public.

Five students wrote statements about Nixon's concern with power or his place in history. They made the following statements: "Sure he usurped powers that were not his to take, but he got things done. Sometimes I think with all the government beauracracy and red tape it is the only way. I'd like to hear a little less criticism of Richard (Tricky Dick) Nixon"; "I can only feel that his zeal for power overwhelmed him and he lost his emotional balance. For him to have brought such disgrace to our nation is inexcusable"; "He had an obsessing with his power but I think he did more good for this country than any president in the last thirty-five years he was not the first president to be involved in closed door misdealings"; and "This Inceident shows a few Things of his characteristics. His basic morals in the area of truefulness were far From good. Which leeds to his feelings about his fellow man. He didn't care about anybody

except Those in his way keeping him from the Top. And those people in his way he wanted to Eliminate. Maybe he wasn't To easy to do business with unless There was something in it for him."

Four students compared Nixon to other modern presidents. They made statements such as: "Many presidents have probably done more illegal things than he has in past years"; and "I'm sure he is not the only dishonest President in the history of the United States."

Eight students made value judgments about Nixon's place in history and his participation in Watergate. They made such statements as: "I think he was a good President because every thing he did, even though it was wrong, was in the best interest of the Public"; "I regret the Watergate incident because it tarnished his political abilities and prestige"; and "I believe we can not crucify a man for one wrong action. We must look at the good he did for the U.S. cand judge for ourselves"; "He was very private as a president which led to many rumors. I honestly feel he could have done much good for the United States if he hadn't got messed up on scandals His frustrations and temper caused many problems and it would seem if he'd kept himself under better control, especially with colleagues and the press, he'd have been much more successful in the eyes of the Public."

Three students commented concerning the involvement of others in the Nixon administration in Watergate. They made such statements as: "Everyone makes a bad call, some are just a bit bigger than others. I feel he was not the only one to blame, In fact I feel many more people were to blame than were actually believed to have been. He had the final word, but, overall he was an excellent president while he was in office"; and "people seem only to remember him for attempting to cover up a stupid mistake that his underlings made."

John F. Kennedy

Fifty-two students chose John F. Kennedy.

Thirty-six students commented about his background and personal history. Twelve students commented that he was the youngest elected president, eight knew that he was the first Roman Catholic elected to the presidency and twenty-eight commented on his assassination and death. Eleven students located his election, administration or death in the correct time period. To a lesser extent, there were comments that: He had been a senator from Massachusetts; his Vice-President was Lyndon B. Johnson; he defeated Richard Nixon in the 1960 election; Lee Harvey Oswald shot John Kennedy and was subsequently killed by Jack Ruby; he was "one of several children of the Joseph P. Kennedy family who was involved in politics"; he was shot in a motorcade in Dallas with Governor Connolly of Texas, and he was a Democrat. Three mentioned Jacqueline Kennedy and their children, a son and a daughter. One mentioned his brother, Robert, and concluded that "Kennedy's name is a great political name which will probably help his brother along in politics."

The authors' nominee for the most confused paragraph is:

President John F. Kenedy was assinated in June of 1961. His murderer was John Booth. President Kenedy was shot in the head and killed instantly. John Booth was chased into a barn and was shot in an attempt to capture him. President Kenedy was replaced by his Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson.

Seven students made comments concerning President Kennedy's integrity. Two used the term "honest", one the term "noble", another "moral" and another "good." The comments included: "he had a way of making you feel that you could really trust what he said"; "he was going to help every people in all ways"; and "it was fortunate that he was a moral man, he could have been a dictator with his abilities."

Thirty-one students commented regarding Kennedy's leadership. They used such adjectives as: best (8); successful (3); greatest (3); outstanding (1); standout (1); favorite (1); great (1); very strong (2); strong (1); good (2); and better (2) in evaluating his ability and ranking among the presidents. One student concluded that, "Kennedy had a firm hand on America & started them to their uprising in world power." One student was negative in evaluation: "I would have to say Kennedy was the pres. that wasn't too high on my list of people. He was too Liberal and for the fact he was all for giving away free inter prizes."

Three students commented about his intelligence. One said, "he was handsome and smart." Another student commented: "President John F. Kennedy-was the most smartest president in U.S. history."

Sixteen students commented about his domestic policies. There were eight comments concerning civil rights, five

relative to the space program, one in regard to organizing the Peace Corps and one regarding, "the power he developed in things as such as our Military." The comment, "his all out support of the space program was amusing," was the most ambiguous. All others were favorable, especially concerning the moon landing and his concern for the "poor and blacks."

Twenty-six made comments about Kennedy's foreign policies. There were nineteen comments about the Cuban Missile Crisis, six about the Bay of Pigs Invasion, three about involving us in the Vietnam War, one relative to the Berlin speech and Berlin Wall and one commented that "he strengthened our ties with allies such as West Germany." The following comments summarize the evaluations: "Many people dislike Kennedy for his involvement in the Bay of Pigs fiasco" and "He started us into the long Vietnam War."

Nine students commented about Kennedy's courage. One mentioned specifically his "courage & valour displayed during W.W. II" and another "this man was not afraid to tell people what to do."

Twenty-five students commented about Kennedy's public image. The following comments are most pertinent: "He was loved and respected by the American public"; "he had the ability to inspire and motivate"; "He encompassed young ideas and identified with the young people of our country: He had charisma"; "He spread love and understanding

throughout the world and fought for human rights and dignity"; and "I remember he had a nice smile and a quick wit with reporters."

There were negative comments such as the following: "The only reason John F. Kennedy was a hero in the 60's was because of his assassination"; "there are many scandals and much bad publicity about him"; and "many people respected him for his actions even though others criticized him."

Thirteen students wrote concerning Kennedy's value to the country. A few of their comments were: "Perhaps many events that have happened since then would have been different had he been our leader for several terms of office"; and "The carisma is important because it reduced the apathy toward government, and prompted the citizens to have pride in the country and to take an active part in the running of it." Another stated: "His assasination brought about a turning point and downfall in our government after losing him it seems like he was still around things would be different." Still another wrote, "I wish he was alive today to lead us again." A final comment was: "His death occured when I was a young Kid and I always hear people say that they would like a president like him. People say that he did a lot for our country."

Twelve students made factual errors in their evaluation. Seven errors related to the time period, date

of election, years in office, and date of assassination. One student believed that he was a hero of the Korean War. Others dealt with interpretation, i.e.: "He also made it possible for everyone to have equal income or equal wealth ("Share our wealth campaign"). Another stated, "his wife's name was Jackie O/Kennedy."

Six students made statements indicating a sense of historical perspective. Two examples are: "Today there is still talk of the real Killer. Some people say the only thing great about Kennedy is his trip to Dallas"; and "Lyndon Johnson was blamed and hated by the American people because of Kennedy's foolish notions . . . Kennedy started the Vietnam war By thinking it was Communists against Christianity. It wasn't, it wasn't America's business to butt in. No one knows that Kennedy started they always seem to frown on Johnsen."

Ten students commented with some degree of sophistication. Two quoted from his Inaugural Address, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." Others stated that, "Kennedy did more for the American people in 3 years than President Nixon did in 8 years"; "It is true that he did not get much legislation passed, but with Lyndon Johnson to help him with Congress . . ."; "The economic repercuseions of this social generosity is just starting to be felt in the 80's. The

governments attitude of helping all those in need was ideally sound but socially and economically damaging"; and ". . . he knew where he was going, and what he wanted to do with the country. He wanted the country to reunite and make the country strong again. Before he became president there was always a fear of a nuclear war with russia, but he gave the country security."

Jimmy Carter

Fifty students chose Jimmy Carter.

Eleven students knew the following biographical details concerning Jimmy Carter: he is from Plains, Georgia; he was raised (or owned or lived) on a peanut farm; he is a democrat; he was in the armed forces; he was elected in 1976; he ran for re-election but was defeated; his mother's name is Lillian; his brother's name is Billy; and he has a strong belief in God.

Fifteen students stated the following concerning Mr. Carter's integrity: "President Jimmy Carter is offering stability, truth, honesty, and integrity to our nation as well as abroad"; "Carter, I feel, is basically a good man, but possibly bite off a little more than he could chew"; "sincere"; "humble"; "a man with good intentions"; and "simplicity." One person, however, wrote: "He told the people of America he was a true blue boy scout. He wasn't. He was a lying fake little boy that didn't know what he was doing."

Forty-one students commented concerning Carter's leadership ability. Sixteen comments were positive or neutral (for which we have no category) while twenty-five were negative. In the spring of 1980 all students mentioning leadership made positive statements such as: "In my opinion Jimmy Carter had done an excellent job as President of the

United States. He has good leadership qualitys and has proven to be a good man to have at the hem in times of crisis"; "President Jimmy Carter is an outstanding President"; "I believe that President Carter tries to do his best. He believes in the decisions he makes"; and "President Jimmy Carter at the moment is going through the most demanding test of leadership almost anyone cout be presented . . . and if the need arises I am sure he will be a leader respected enough to lead the country."

Students' negative statements were: "overall the things I disliked about him was his weak reputation of the U.S."; "but felt the pressures and lost control of his power especially with Congress"; "All a man can do is try is best but in my opinion Jimmy Carter wasn't the man for the job at the time"; "Jimmy Carter, I believe that the man was very incompetent and should never have been elected president"; "Jimmy Carter has got to be one of the worst presidents since the Civil War"; "During Jimmy Carter's term things got worse"; and "His leadership qualities were definitely lacking." In the fall of 1980, five out of six leadership statements were negative; four of five said that Carter was one of the "worst" presidents in recent history.

Four students wrote concerning Carter's intelligence. Two students stated that he: "is one of the most

intelligent presidents we have have had"; the other two stated that his knowledge of government was "limited."

Twenty-four students made statements concerning Carter's domestic accomplishments. Seven statements were positive; seventeen were negative. The positive statements were almost neutral; for example, "Jimmy Carter with many problems, economy, labor, Iran crises and other world problems people are very quick to point out all the bad points surrounding these areas"; and "I feel that he handled domestic affairs fairly well even though he failed to keep some of his campaign promises."

Examples of the negative statements are the following: "I cannot honestly think of one positive thing he has done for our country or people. Taxes are higher, inflation is higher"; "He raised the gas price and messed around with the grain embargo"; "Interest rates are very high"; and (he) "did not want to keep up with the U.S.S.R. in the arms race he dropped us years behind them and also his human rights policy got the United States many more problems. Ex CUBA REFUGEES and also IRAN."

Thirty students writing of Carter's foreign policy accomplishments focused on four events: the Iranian hostage situation, the Camp David talks, the return of the Panama Canal, and the Russian invasion of Afghanistan.

In the spring of 1980, three students made statements about Carter's handling of the Iranian crisis; the three statements were either positive or neutral. For example: "I feel President Carter's national stand on Iran is sound and unifying for our country." By the fall of 1980, virtually all of the statements students made about Carter's handling of the Iranian crisis were negative. Sixteen of the nineteen statements were similar to the following: "I also feel this 'softness' of President Carter's decision making contributed greatly to the situation in Iran. Under a different leader I don't believe the 'crisis' would have occurred"; "With foreign affairs he talked soft and took a slow pace that inhibited the early release of the prisoners in Iran"; "The Iranian Crisis was probably his great task and that didn't get solved until an hour after he was out of office"; and "He should of been more careful when he tried the helicopter rescue." Students who wrote in positive or neutral terms regarding the Iranian crisis stated: "When Iran took American hostages in the American Embassy in Tehran; there was really nothing Jimmy Carter could do"; and "Also Iran has hostages of U S Embassy personal and their safety is utmost in Carter's mind."

Five students wrote concerning Carter's participation in the Camp David talks; they felt that this was a positive accomplishment although they speculated how long the

agreement would last. Two examples were: "The talks he had with Begin and Sadat did much to improve the relationship of the two countries but it didn't seem to last. The mid-east is once again full of problems"; and (he) "brought the Camp David agreement, but this is about all he did."

Only one of the four students commenting on Carter's return of the Panama Canal to Panama agreed with the president's action: "I feel he did a fair job in foreign matters, especially in handling such things as the Panama Canal." Three of the four students made negative statements: "Jerry Ford may have started the plan to turn over the Panama Canal, but Carter is the one who will go down in history for the treaty"; and "During the last three years he has repeatedly gone against public opinion by doing such as returning the Panama Canal."

Only one student agreed with President Carter's policy regarding the Russian invasion of Afghanistan: "and I also agree with the way he dealt with the Iranian hostage crisis and Afanistan." Four of the five statements were negative: "I fell he was weak in his dealing with russia and thier evasion of Afganastin"; and "Also when he put a grain embargo on Russia. It didn't make them withdraw their troops from Afghanistan."

Two students commented regarding Carter's courage: "he was also spineless"; and "He could have been a bit bolder in his role, but not as bold to get us in a war."

Thirty-four students made statements relating to President Carter's public image, eleven were positive and twenty-three were negative. Positive statements concerning Carter were: "He seems to be an emotional man who truly values the welfare of all human beings. Carter has worked very hard in office, and has gone through some very rough times and situations along the way. His smile always makes me feel better when watching him on television"; "How he struggled - and because of the tangled web of bureaucracy he could not complete in four years what he sincerely yearned to do"; "Like all other Presidents he tried to keep in touch with his public and to let them know what issues would be coming up with the Senate and Congress"; and "But what personally endears me to him is his simple, down home style. This new flamboyance in the White House repels me, and I like the way the Carters tried to save our money while staying in the White House."

Of the twenty-three negative statements, all comments in fall 1980 relative to Carter's public image were negative. The following statements summarize this viewpoint: "Until now President Carter has been seen by many Americans as a man lacking the ability to be a strong

leader. Having vacillated on several stands during his campaign, he has sometimes proved to be undecided on his opinion on state and world affairs"; "Unfortunately for the U.S. he is also one of the most wishy-washy politicians around"; "He made many campaign promises which were never kept"; and "The American people lost all confidence in him."

Regarding Carter's value to the country, two students wrote the following: "In this nuclear age the big stick is no longer efficient. the ultimate weapon has been made and dipolimoce is the weapon to use to fight it. With had in mind Jimmy Carter, in my opino, is a good president"; and "He was successful, though, in his bringing back of trust in the presidency. He seemed to overcome the suspicion of the Nixon-Ford era."

Students made three factual errors concerning Carter: "Because he lacked military experience"; "Jimmy Carter was sworn in the year 1976 in November"; and "he threw us into great inflation."

Eight students, however, did make sophisticated and/or value-judgement statements concerning the Carter presidency. The following are examples: "He was elected four years ago during a time when this country was very unsure about the integrity of the U.S. political system"; "President Carter has been a diplomat all the time and showed power and restraint when needed"; "He had a number of problems the

three biggest were insufficient knowledge of administrative process in the capital city, a congress unwilling to compromise or help and stubbornness of other world leaders"; and "His defense budget cutting has caused serious shortages in both equipment and manning in all branches of service. I think he's trying to make himself look good now that election time is rolling around with showing his newly developed technology to aid the services, but it's too late in the game for him."

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Thirty-nine students chose Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Twenty-two discussed his biography; specifically, tenure of office, handicap, depression, death, predecessor, successor, wife, mistress, family and date of election.

Two students wrote concerning his integrity. The first that, "he seemed to have a love & compassion & faith in Americans that was unmatched"; and the second, "he also was trusted by the people or he would not have been re-elected so many times."

Twenty-nine students commented concerning Roosevelt's leadership and used thirty-two descriptive adjectives. The descriptive adjectives and their frequency are as follows: "best" (7); "strong" (4); "good" (3); "most productive" (2); "strongest" (2); "fantastic" (2); and one each for "very good," "influence," "greatest," "liked the most," "outstanding," "most radical & powerful," "extremely impressive," "excellent," "one of the better," "stand out," "hardest job as president," and "very great."

A selection of student comments is listed: "someone to lead the people willingly up the path to recovery"; "Franklin Delano Roosevelt is one of the best presidents since the Civil War but a bit over praised by many who do not now much about the behind-the-scenes events during the Roosevelt White House years"; "He was chosen one of the

better presidents because he united the whole country during the terrible years of the depression & WWII"; "Some feel Roosevelt had too much power but at the time a strong president is what was needed to enable the U.S. to get back into shape"; and "Many persons believe that Franklin D Roosevelt was a fantastic president due mainly to the United States 'glorious Victories' in WWII fail to realize that Roosevelt started us on the way to economic problems that we suffer today."

Two students wrote about the president's wisdom or good judgment. The first wrote, "Closing the banks soon after the panic was perhaps, one of the wisest things he did," the second: "He had a good knowledge of both foreign and domestic affairs."

Thirty-four students commented about Roosevelt's domestic accomplishments and policies. Twenty students associated him with the depression or "Great Depression"; six students mentioned the New Deal; four, social security; two, "bank closing"; two, each the WPA and CCC; three, jobs; one each NRA, TVA and "relief." Two students wrote that his policies were "socialistic." Other phrases used once were: "governmental activity"; "eliminated speculation"; "services for the people"; "work programs for the unemployed"; "new social programs"; "organized all the different programs to help the people"; "put the country back on its feet";

"strong supporter of conservation & ecology"; "payed farmers not to grow their crops"; and "the programs instituted during his presidency were a much needed change."

The following is a selection of student comments: "He passed more bills through Congress than any other president except Johnson. He was known for the New Deal program which was accually a series of programs. Many of his programs were successful but only to a certain extent"; "He was president during the depression and his New Deal policies to help bring the country out of the depression though were later judged as socialistic"; "Roosevelt put into effect programs like the WPA and CCC. These programs not only provided much needed services, but also kept people's pride intact by paying them for working instead of sitting around"; and "he led the U.S. through the first MAJOR economic disaster that hit this country. He tried to relieve the problems by instigating such programs as the CCC, TVA and others. Even though he did not actually bring the country out of the Great Depression, he kept this country unified until Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, which was one of the main reasons the economy began booming."

Seventeen students commented about FDR's foreign policies and accomplishments. Sixteen mentioned World War II; one mentioned the lend-lease program; one, "talks with Russia"; and one, his "post war efforts." Students wrote

the following: "He was excellent through the second world war, traveled overseas to where the fighting actually was and gave tremendous moral support to his generals. The only thing that was bad in my opinion was the talks with Russia after the war was over"; and "In World War II he helped other countries by giving them military aid, he helped keep the allies together, and he made sure that nobody would push us around."

Five students wrote concerning Roosevelt's courage. Two comments are the following: "He had a fighting spirit . . ."; and "He displayed great amounts of stamina, courage and desire."

Eighteen students commented regarding FDR's public image. In their discussions they mentioned that he was; "an energetic inspiring person"; "he had charisma" (2); "helped keep everyone optimistic"; "hated, disliked, loved, adored or revered" (4); "calm and controlled"; "warm, fun-loving caring"; "ray of sunshine"; "socialistic"; "concerned about poor and middle class people"; "too powerful"; and "the one responsible for getting the United States into WWII." A sample indicating the ambivalence and the diversity of the responses included: "Many hated him passionately while others loved him dearly"; "Franklin D. Roosevelt was probably one of the most socialistic presidents we ever had. He took away the private running of

many freedoms that we had and let the government take over. I'm not sure yet if this is good or bad but I do believe that it was the US beginning towards socialism"; "Maybe he wasn't the best . . . but until JFK came along he was about the only leader not only loved but revered"; and "Most people felt if a president serves over two terms, he will become a dictator, but I feel it may be good, because it will unite the country."

Five students wrote concerning Roosevelt's value to the country; two comments were: "I think we need more presidents today that will do something for the good of the country"; and "I wish he was here today to give us a hand!!! We need it now more than ever!!"

Twenty-three students made factual errors in their evaluations. Many made multiple errors. There were seventeen errors of fact, five errors in chronology and five errors in interpretation. A sample of the above errors were: "When he was young he was a very sick child & was told he would never walk"; "As a result of his efforts the League of Nations was established which was followed by the United Nation"; "He did not want to serve a second term in office, but was convinced by his aides that America needed him and we did"; "He started all the national projects like the WCP, the youth camps and the state medical aid programs"; "He also set up a system whereby the stock market

would never crash again"; and "As a result to his death while in office a law was passed saying no president could hold office for more than three terms."

Two students commented with an historical perspective. One wrote: "We worked as one nation, a unit. Times were bad yet it's not particularly known or remembered as bad. Often people still reflect on that time for insight and answers." The other: "I look back at him now because we now are reliving the past. We, some people say are experiencing a Depression somewhat."

Four students wrote with a degree of sophistication. Their responses included: "Besides his spirit, his wife was a great First Lady. Eleanor was on the go fighting for women's rights. During the war, she aided women with the jobs they were to perform in the men's absences. Truly Franklin and Eleanor were spirited and courageous people in our America history"; "He was a very sick man and they (Russians) worked all over him. They should never have gotten as many spoils as they received"; "What FDR did to stabilize the country did not always jibe with the democratic system, but it worked"; and "Roosevelt served four terms, died in office in the fourth term and after he died, they made a law that said no president can serve more than two terms for fear he become too powerful."

Gerald Ford

Thirty students chose Gerald Ford.

Twenty-three students made statements about President Ford's background. One student wrote: "the biggest complaint about Ford was that he was not actually elected to the presidency; he came in through the back door after being appointed V.P. by Nixon after Agnew's resignation. He then assumed the presidency when Nixon resigned. It was bad enough not being elected as V.P." Time and again students (17 students wrote about the way Ford came to office) mentioned the unusual method of selection, by appointment, and the difficulty of replacing a president in mid-term. Other phrases frequently used were "unique" and the "burden placed upon Ford in becoming president in a non-elective manner."

Other comments were: "one of the most underrated presidents"; "he was in a hard situation when he came into office, but made the best of the situation"; "neither liberal nor conservative"; and "he did a good job of replacing Richard Nixon after the Watergate scandal." Generally, the students recognized that Ford had become president during a period of instability and "some political turmoil," "national mistrust" and that "the people were ready for a change and anyone having to do with the Nixon Administration were looked down upon."

Students knew specific details concerning his personal and political career before he became president; perhaps because he is a "native son" of Nebraska, and Omaha is his birthplace. Students associated Ford with football and knew that he had graduated from the University of Michigan and served as a member of Congress.

In addition, students mentioned the specific month and year, August 1974, when Ford became president, that he ran successfully for election in 1976, was defeated by Jimmy Carter (one said, "it's a damn shame Jimmy Carter took over after Ford") and that "he encountered a lot of criticism for the pardon he gave Mr. Nixon."

Seven students mentioned specific characteristics associated with integrity. Words such as "honest," "fair," and "conscientious" appear in the comments, i.e. "may have been the most open, honest and certainly the most likable president"; and "even though several situations looked suspicious he did what was right and proper."

Twenty students mentioned characteristics associated with leadership. Sixteen students mentioned positive characteristics of leadership and four mentioned negative to ambivalent statements concerning his leadership. Probably the most accurate summary was that "Gerald Ford was a very controversial president." The positive comments included the adjectives "high praise," "excellent," "good leader,"

"good President but not a great one," "one of the finest President," "most unique," "very capable leader," "worthy of a lot of respect," "did well considering the situation," "one of the all time great," "level-headed," "highly underrated pres," and, "deserves a special place in history for his accomplishments." Students usually gave him the benefit of the doubt concerning his leadership with a qualifying phrase, i.e. "he may not have done everything perfect, but he sure helped us all out, at least a little."

The four students who wrote negative to ambivalent statements mentioned that: "he did not have the dynamic personality that makes a great leader"; "did a very adequate job"; "did nothing spectacular in the White House, kept things in America pretty much stable"; and "an adequate President but no real super star." Another summary was: "I believe Gerald Ford was a very over-publicized president . . . he did an adequate job of managing the country, but only adequate."

Three students mentioned Ford's intelligence. A typical statement was that: "He was an intelligent man who steadied a shaken nation."

Seventeen students mentioned Ford's domestic policies. There were four comments concerning Ford's pardon of Nixon, seven each relating to Ford's restoration of the presidency and economic matters.

Regarding the pardon, one student summarized it succinctly: "In his first days in office he absolved any charges or wrongdoings of Mr. Nixon; in doing so he saved the U.S. from having to go through the disgrace of trying an ex-president."

Concerning Ford's restoration of the presidency, a student commented that, "Gerald Ford did not have as much time for the people to see him in true form because he was busy washing away the mess left by Nixon." Another wrote that, "he tried to restore faith in government after Watergate scandle." One concluded that, "he didn't make a lot of changes."

Students believe that Ford was "good economist"; "he had many Key policies such as WIN (Whip Inflation Now) and vetoed many spending bills passed by Congress"; and "the economic situation although not improved did not worsen during his term."

Students made these additional comments: "did a lot of traveling around"; "he soon brought the troops home from Viet-Nam"; "he let the military slide"; "our country had just went through a severe oil crisis and he did his best"; and brought "executive power back under control after Watergate."

Five students mentioned Ford's foreign policies. The examples were: "the U.S. along with the rest of the world

was generally at peace"; "he seemed to keep in good standing with the foreign countries"; "helped keep America out of wars that continue to plague the Middle & Far Eastern countries"; and "His foreign policy was probably based on Nixon's which was good, as Nixon had an excellent foreign policy."

In terms of courage only one student commented that, "I don't believe he had enough guts but after Richard Nixon their might of ben a slight mood or faking in the air."

Eight students mentioned public image. One wrote that, "After Ford was in office he chose to pardon Nixon fully, which was a very unpopular decision with the American public." Others commented that, "I think Ford would have been more popular if he had been more aggressive, dyanmic speaker," and "This was a case of untimeliness. I believe that if Gerald Ford were president during a different time period, he would have made a better impression on the American people." Three students commented upon his physical bearing: "He was often noted by the press for his clumsyness in political cartoons and editorials"; "Bland is a word that could describe him. His clumsiness is known to all because of the press and T.V."; and "The press took great joy in making an issue of his Klutziness."

Two students commented on Ford's value to the country. One that, "Even though he Knew that he could not reap the

benefits personally for his policy on China, he did it for the future." The other wrote, "He did nothing great for America but he did nothing to harm it. He came into office during a period of great political turmoil and he helped to keep the country as stable as possible, Keeping it from going downhill further."

Five students made factual errors in describing Ford's presidency. The errors were in the following categories: Ford was a senator from Michigan; Nixon picked him as his assistant; and, "when he was vice preident and Nixon was going out of office Ford was elected for a 2 year term."

Ronald Reagan

Ronald Reagan was not inaugurated until January 3, 1981 and therefore the only group of students who were able to select him were students from Fall 1981. Twenty-two students chose to write about Ronald Reagan.

Eight students made statements about President Reagan's background. They noted: he was 70 years old when he ran for the presidency; that he was a former Hollywood actor; he was a former state governor; he defeated Jimmy Carter to become president; and that he is a capitalist.

Two students made statements concerning Reagan's integrity. Both students indicated that Reagan knows "what he believes and is willing to fight for his belief." One student used as an example Reagan's handling of the air traffic controllers' strike.

Twenty-one of the twenty-two students who chose Reagan made a statement about his leadership skills. Nineteen of the twenty-one statements were positive. Students used such words as: "strong leader"; "has impressed me the most"; "a good president"; "a man that stands out"; "doing a good job"; "he is changing some things in government all for the best"; "a powerful person and a good ruler"; "he is going to be tough"; and "Reagan gets a first quarter exam of A+."

Only three students made negative leadership statements about Reagan. These students stated that "he is unable to

cope with situations that confront him"; that "he is a poor president"; and "what good is he doing for us?"

Fourteen students made statements about Reagan's domestic accomplishments. Students made statements about three areas of domestic concern: the economy, the military and the air traffic controllers' strike.

Students made six positive and three negative statements about Reagan's economic policies. Positive statements included: "Reagan's budget cutting will make us all a little ahead in the future"; "Reagan has a very good economic program or at the very least a new approach to a very old problem"; "he is cutting budgets to keep people from spending money that is doing nothing and using it for purposes useful to this country"; "he got on television and explained his tax-cut proposal so everybody would understand it." Negative statements about Reagan's economic policies included: "but most of the people are against his economic policies"; "First of all, the budget cut is too extensive"; and "His policies benefit the rich but hurt the poor."

Three positive and one negative statements were made about Reagan's military/defense policies. Students stated: "He is going to build up the Defense system to keep countries from ever thinking about taking what the U.S. has"; and "what really sticks out the most and impresses me though is his military policies which call for a strong

united America, one which will soon be the leading superpower of the world forever." The one negative statement about Reagan's military plan is "he is pushing for WW III."

Five students commented about Reagan's handling of the air traffic controllers' strike. Four students felt that he handled the strike well by "not backing down on his decision." One student felt he should not have fired them.

Three students commented about Reagan's foreign accomplishments. All three made statements referring to his build up of the U.S. military and two mentioned his firm stand against the "Lybians" or "libyans."

Two students commented about his courage; both referring to his strength of conviction.

Eleven students referred to Reagan's public image: "not wishy-washy like Carter"; "firm and predictable"; "The people like him and his method of ruling"; "gives strength and confidence to the American people."

One student made an error in stating that "with the budget cuts he has eliminated BLOCK funds."

One student made a fairly sophisticated observation: "He should not have tried to cut back on so much all at once. It took our people a while to get used to living like we are and its going to take awhile for us to get used to

cutting back on the benefits from the government and we all benefit from government funds."

Two paragraphs may be of interest in their entirety:

Ronald Reagon - Pres. Reagon is a strong leader, seems to come across as mr. hardass, but yet caring and gentle with Americans. I Think Reagon with not completely redue the government & society but with help improve. Our pride & glory got shot after losing Vietnam and CIA - I agree with you has to much say so in our affairs and making national decisions. I have Through an interesting teacher in High School not tell us want the CIA has done but showed us, in a way of letting us make our own conclusions. I hope & Think That by putting Reason in he will mold our society into a stronger pride & degnaty. Also another comment that hurt the USA was exPres Carter, Reagan has a lot of work to do.

Ronald Regan:

It amazes me that in a time many considered to be close to the point of no return for this country, a man like Regan would appear on the scene.

For so long now I have felt the country would fail economically as well as in its use of foreign policy. Deficit spending and raising taxes excessive government controlls, excessive subsidy and welfare spending all coupled to create something other than a free nation. Our foreign policy was so unpredictable and unknown to me that I was afraid to go to VietNam. What were the goals of the country? I didn't know. I knew what mine were, to be free to get on with life, unhindered.

Reagan came along one day as if out of the blue and has started to reverse the countrys direction. The first "Capitalist" President I've ever known about. He is firm and predictable on his programs and goals to reverse the country to what it was meant to be. Regan gets a first Quarter exam A+ from me.

Harry S. Truman

Twenty students chose Harry S. Truman. Nine made biographical statements indicating that he: was a Missouri politician; became president when Franklin Roosevelt died; was a high school graduate; dropped the atomic bomb on Japan; was elected in the 1948 landslide over Dewey; used "vulgar" language; was married to Bess; was known for his "toughness" and "brassness"; and was associated with the phrase "Give 'em hell, Harry."

Twelve students commented that Truman was an honest man and president by indicating that "he preserved the quality and respect of the office of the president," and that "people always knew where he stood on issues." An additional ambivalent comment considered as negative was the descriptive phrase was that he was "a man many people hated while in office."

Fifteen of the seventeen students commented favorably about his leadership indicating that he was a strong leader capable of making decisions at critical times.

Only two students remarked specifically regarding Truman's intelligence stating that "he knew what this weapon (atomic bomb) could do, and he knew the alternative"; and "he handled all of his responsibilities very well."

Few students, three only, mentioned any facts relating to Truman's domestic accomplishments. The most significant was his immigration policy.

Twelve students wrote concerning the decision to drop the atomic bombs on the Japanese viewing the decision as the "most important" and "hardest" decision of any modern day president. Three of the students evaluated the Truman decision thusly: "He demanded surrender from Japan. The Japanese did not respond, so that left him with no choice but to end the war quickly and without debate"; "I liked his tough guy foreign policy and the fact that he had the guts to drop the bomb on Japan proves to me that he believed in this country and would go to any extent to protect it"; and "The first thing I think of is he okayed the atomic massacre of Japanize citizens. Then I try and justify this to myself. On one hand he had a means to end the war by accepting the Japanize Surrender. Yet he chose to bring them to their knees to loose face. A fate as bad as death to the Japanize."

Other foreign policy statements related to "increased U.S. involvement in Korea"; "helped in the peace treaty and starting a world wide Council of allies"; and that he was involved in the change from "a war time economy to a peace time one."

Eleven students mentioned the president's courage usually relating this to his positive leadership and decision-making ability. Two students specifically remarked on his "courageous" behavior in the dismissal of General McArthur.

Eight students again related Truman's decision-making ability in another aspect of the modern presidency, public image, by writing that: "He wasn't afraid of what people would think of certain decisions he made"; "he seemed like any other American, not flashy, more like 'the man who lives next door'"; and "he seemed to be a part of, and related best to the common working man."

Typical of the six students who commented concerning the president's value to the country are these statements: "After he left office people all started to look back and were pretty impressed with the backbone"; "Truman had all the making of a president and we need someone like him today"; and "Although Truman started the support of the Southeast Asia countries, which would increase with the next Four presidents, i believe history will & does show that he made the correct deceision at that time."

Five students made factual errors. One apparently believed that Truman was a "Habidasher" immediately before he served his presidential term. Another believed that Truman "put America on a sound economic base after the

depression" while still another stated that "he had no choice on entering the U.S. into WWII."

Four students wrote more sophisticated statements regarding Truman's presidential tenure. The two categories are statements concerning Truman personally and about the decision to drop the bomb. An example of each respective category includes the following: "While he didn't always agree with Roosevelt's 'new deal'--his administration was responsible for carrying out some of those policies"; and relative to the use of the atomic bomb, "This event changed the lives of everyone in the world. Up to this time warfare had not been so all encompassing--now a nation had the potential of killing off entire cities, Small countries, etc with one bomb."

Abraham Lincoln

Nineteen students chose Abraham Lincoln and knew a great deal of biographical detail about him. They knew that he was: the sixteenth president of the United States; responsible for helping blacks secure their freedom; led the nation during the Civil War; born of very poor rural Midwestern parents; relatively inexperienced politically; a "simple man, kind and intelligent"; lost one of his sons in his youth; was elected to two terms; assassinated while viewing a play in the Ford Theatre by John Wilkes Booth.

Although only two students specifically mentioned Lincoln's integrity, what they described was that Lincoln was elected president because of his "calmness and understanding," and his position on "human rights." Thirteen of the nineteen respondents made positive statements concerning his leadership. One stated, "I would have to consider this man as being one of the greatest, if not the greatest president in our history." Others believed that Lincoln was the "best president this nation has ever had." Synonyms used to replace "best" were: "outstanding" and "excellent." One student mentioned but did not explain the statement that "Abe Lincoln was probably the most hated President during this time period."

Students were somewhat more ambivalent concerning Lincoln's intelligence. One student wrote that "he liked to

read alot"; another that "he learned to read and write at an early age so from then on taught himself through books gathered from others"; and that the ability to deal with problems stemmed from his "total control and understanding." The best evaluation stated that "the greatest crime of all the Civil war was the killing of Lincoln, which didn't allow the world to see the wisdom this man would have used in reconstructing our United States of America."

When students discussed his accomplishments, they concentrated exclusively upon his domestic policy; no student mentioned anything relative to his foreign policy. To them his most "important" accomplishments were: freeing the slaves; the Emancipation Proclamation; preserving the Union; fighting a "war between the states"; and desiring to reconstruct the Union without being too harsh towards the South. Reuniting the country was an important aspect of Lincoln's domestic program: "and he did so with a firm hand and a clear concept in mind what had to be done to reunite this country."

Four students described Lincoln's courage without explaining what the term meant. One said, "he was faced with many problems that no other president had ever faced or would ever have to face again up to now." Another that, "he dared to change policy and used his position to enforce it" and "he did what he had to in spite of pressures to the

contrary." Two other students wrote that: "he wouldn't back down to anything, he knew how to defend and conquer with self-respect," and that "his valor and respect for the rights of all men, not just a chosen few, but all men is most admural."

Six students commented regarding Lincoln's public image. One stated, "he was a man for all people; he worked for the people and always tried to please them; he usually did." Another remarked that Lincoln was "one of the most inspiring persons . . . to ever to have held the office of president." According to another "he had a keen way of talking with the average people" and "people of that time were looking for a leader who would change the course of our land; Lincoln was such a man." The most interesting comment was that, "President Lincon was controversial."

Though nebulous, ten students felt that Lincoln was valuable to the country in the following ways: he made the United States a free place in which to live; he was "vital" to subsequent history; had he "finished his term the Civil rights movément would not have been needed" and he "changed the way of America and our way of Life . . . helped to shape what America is all about, Freedom." One student also recognized that Lincoln led the nation "through probably the most turbulent time in our history," and another that his planning helped the North win the Civil War.

Errors of interpretation and fact were diverse:

"Abraham Lincoln was the sole binding force that preserved the Union throughout and after the Civil War; his mild mannered sense of responsibility for unity bonded this country in a solid mold never to be cracked again." One student believed that he had been elected unanimously; another that he "led the East to a victory in the Civil War." Still another believed that Lincoln "United South & North America." The usual errors occurred regarding the beginning of his administration, 1863, and that he was somehow involved in reconstruction.

Under the category "sophistication" students wrote the following comments: "Most of the Presidents were from the Atlantic Coastal States or from the Southern states"; "I learned that he wasn't exactly what history made him up to be"; "With women's rights, blacks rights, air controllers rights, it seems we should look upon the past for a target or goal to shoot for; a united America"; "I learned in a Black Studies course that it was not in his heart to free the slaves but for more of a personal and strategical benefit to himself and his presidential position"; and "I don't think anyone has the right to own a human being, just because they are black."

Theodore Roosevelt

Sixteen students chose Theodore Roosevelt.

Five students made the following statements about Theodore Roosevelt's background: he became president as a result of the assassination of McKinley at the turn of the century; he was born in New York City; he was sickly as a child and as a result became very athletic as an adult to overcome this; his family was wealthy; he started his own party when the Republican Party did not nominate him; and the teddy bear is named after him.

Five of the six students who wrote about Roosevelt's leadership believed that he was a strong and forceful president. They wrote statements such as: "Teddy Roosevelt was probably the backbone president of the United States. He was ever president should be like. He knew how to handle world problems. Roosevelt showed the world that the United States was strong and powerful in its actions . . . "; and "I feel Theodore Roosevelt was the best president since 1865." One student indicated dissent without explanation: "Roosevelt is considered by many to be one of America's greatest presidents. I however do not agree entirely with this statement."

Only one student wrote about Roosevelt's intelligence. He stated: "Also from a military standpoint he was nobody's fool."

Nine students mentioned Roosevelt's domestic accomplishments including: labor and business reforms; labor laws shortening the work day and week; laws improving safety and working conditions; efforts in controlling monopolies; beginning the National Park system; and being a conservationist.

Six students mentioned Roosevelt's foreign accomplishments including: fighting the Spanish American War; building and funding the Panama Canal; and his "Speak softly and carry a big stick" policy.

Four students made the following statements concerning Roosevelt's public image: "His image as an 'American hero' becomes more evident each time his presidency is studied"; "President Roosevelt was a rugged individual however he ran the nation in the same rugged manner"; and "He was one of the most outspoken presidents up to that time . . . Teddy Roosevelt was a 'work-a-holic.' He was outgoing, as well as outspoken."

Three students made statements concerning Roosevelt's value to the country. One student stated that, "he was a very productive president." The second student wrote: "Many times Roosevelt acted in an imperialistic and militaristic manner. This has over the years caused much tension between the United States and Latin American relations. In this sense I do not consider Roosevelt one of

the greatest presidents." The third student felt that Roosevelt's long lasting contribution was in the area of "Recreation and Physical Education."

There were seven factual errors such as: "Theodore Roosevelt was born in N. Y. sometime in the early 1800's"; "Some social reforms were old-age pensions, education"; "Among his activities were being a one time Texas Ranger"; "Yellowstone National Park being the first national park in the United States"; and "Roosevelt did not want Cuba to go communist." Two students wrote that Theodore Roosevelt started the New Deal and got the U.S. out of the depression.

Lyndon B. Johnson

Eight students chose to write about Lyndon Baines Johnson.

Three of the four students commenting about his background, indicated that he became president as a result of John Kennedy's assassination. Two students referred to his being a wealthy Texan and owning a ranch near Austin. One student indicated that there is a large library at the University of Texas campus in his honor and another mentioned that he was a Democrat.

Students were split in their evaluation of President Johnson as a leader. Two students considered him "one of the best Presidents" while two other students considered him among the worst presidents.

In terms of domestic accomplishments students focused on Johnson's "war against poverty" and his Civil Rights legislation. One student mentioned the student rebellions of the times.

All five students who made statements concerning his foreign accomplishments referred to his escalation of the Vietnam War. No other statements were made about foreign relations.

Only two students referred to President Johnson's public image. One student said "he was a very power hungry type of person." Another student stated that "Johnson did

not appear frequently on television nor give frequent press interviews."

Students made only two factual errors about Mr. Johnson: "Lynden Johnson was president from 1963 to 1968," and "he did cause the Vietnam War to get so out of hand like it did."

Students made some sophisticated statements about Johnson. One wrote: "He decided not to run for another term because of the split & damage his Vietnam policy caused." Another student stated "Although there still are a great many racial problems in the U.S. he was one of the first Presidents to attempt to make any great strides."

One paragraph is repeated in its entirety:

L. B. Johnson: He inherited the presidency when Kennedy was assassinated. He was faced with many problems among them the Vietnam War, inflation, and student rebellions. He is not thought of as a great president, but considering the insurmountable problems he faced, he could have been a much worse one.

Dwight D. Eisenhower

Six students chose Dwight David Eisenhower and all commented on his background and biography. Four associated Eisenhower with the second World War and his military rank as a general. The comments were: "I am also fascinated that an army general made it to the seat of the supreme commander"; and another wrote, "Dwight D Eisenhower was a 3 star general in the United States Army previous to his presidential term. During his time as general he led the United States to victory in WWII. Somehow he collected the nickname Ike, during his campaign he was widely known by this nickname." One student stated, "People remember him on our coinage and also stamps, I'm not sure that's true of every president."

One student commented regarding President Eisenhower's integrity: "I feel that he was an upstanding individual; he loved his country, fought for it and believed in it."

Four students made statements regarding his leadership: "I believe Dwight D. Eisenhower to be the best president or best leader for any country"; "I feel that Eisenhower was a good president"; and "He had the leadership that this country needed . . . I think he was great and gave the needed compassion to mankind."

One student was ambivalent in the evaluation: "This man was in no way an outstanding president, but during his

term he did more for the people (He kept them happy) than he did against them."

The student commenting regarding the president's courage stated, "He seemed that he had backbone or believes in his views."

Three students wrote regarding Eisenhower's public image: "Ike or president Eisenhower sticks out in mind the most probably because of the movies I've watched concerning his era and the second W.W."; "Having been a general, people looked up to him and listened to what he had to say"; and "I also state this . . . because of hearing older people, who were alive during his presidency, talk about him and his policies."

Two students wrote concerning President Eisenhower's value to the country: "I believe that he was honestly concerned about the American people and wanted to work for the people to give them a better country"; and "His attitude towards people and above all, life, are attitudes I, someday may see in a future president of the U.S.A."

Ulysses S. Grant

Four students chose Ulysses S. Grant.

They made the following statements about his biography and background: he was elected because he was a hero of the Civil War; he liked to drink and smoke; and he was a general.

One student felt that Mr. Grant was a "pretty tough president" but the others felt "he was politically naive" specifically, that "while Grant was quite obviously a leader of men he was not the type of leader that worked comfortably under the pressures--glaring of White House bearsay" and that he "appointed friends he had known from the war and before in reward for what he did for them."

One student wrote of Grant's domestic accomplishments: "The four years he served was a time of marked corruption like never before in history. Although not directly involved, members of his cabinet & friends took advantage of him--using him to escape large corporate taxes and other such forms of corruption dealing with government money."

Three of the four discussed Grant's public image. Two of them dealt with his image as a drinker and smoker. One student commented that he was elected because of his popularity as a war hero and that "he was largely criticized as a schemer and one out to make a buck at the peoples expense."

The paragraphs dealing with Grant were actually quite sophisticated, particularly in comparing Grant to other modern day presidents. For example: "For years to follow, I think the public became more aware of the qualities, skills and abilities it takes to be president. However, after World War II, they did the same thing by voting Eisenhower into office because of his military excellence."

Woodrow Wilson

Three students selected Woodrow Wilson.

They chose him because they found him either the "best president" or "very admirable." One student wrote that Wilson was adaptable to the nation's contemporary industrialization. Two made statements concerning Wilson's participation in World War I and commented on his willingness and eagerness to achieve a lasting peace without vindictiveness. Another felt that Wilson's value to the country was in his attempt to establish an "organization of the world countries." Another, however, erred in attributing to him the purchase of Alaska.

The following paragraph is an example of a well written and sophisticated commentary relative to the Wilson presidency:

I think Woodrow Wilson was the best president since 1865. I say this because he was the only world leader in a world gone mad with war fever who fought to keep his country out of that war. When he could no longer keep the United States free of the conflict he sought to win a lasting peace, free of the vindictiveness of our European allies. He saw far ahead of others the need for an organization of the world countries and fought to make this a reality, despite his failing health. His work was impeded and finally destroyed by the short-sighted men who opposed him. It took another, more horrible war to prove the rightness of his positions.

Andrew Johnson

Two students wrote on Andrew Johnson and their entire paragraphs are included:

Andrew Johnson - I felt sorry for Andy. He may not have kept his campaign promises and he may have made a few mistakes; but, I believe he sincerely tried to turn around the tide he had started. The impeachment trials must have been a great humiliation, and he must have went through a great period of helplessness. He went from being an honored and powerful man to a scared and helpless one. For these reason President Andrew Johnson was my favorite.

President Johnson became president after Abe Lincoln was assassinated in 1865. He carried on many of Lincoln's plans although during his reign there were many conflicts concerning the right of Blacks. He wanted (I think) to have equal rights for the blacks and that includes voting rights. During this time many many people disagreed, especially the Southerners and Republican party. Johnson was there to witness the 14th and 15th Amendment which did give special rights to Blacks. I think he had a lot to do with the Reconstruction Period and mainly with equal rights to the blacks. I feel he did a good job, and he tried hard. He was though a very rude man to important people, he thought a lot of himself.

Warren G. Harding

Two students wrote on Warren G. Harding; both paragraphs are interesting and are included in toto:

Warren Harding--This man has always interested me as a man who should not have been president. Although he was presumably intelligent enough, He had a poor choise of friends that led to his downfall. His administration was as corrupt as any since Grant. Although Nixon certainly out did most presidents it was not directly Hardings fault as it was Nixon's. He ran a front porch campaign because of lack of campaign funds so more or less his fine appearance and lack of serious oposition got him in. He was poorly advised by friends, taking adyantage of him. If I remember right he even rejected honest help from people trying to advise him because of his lack of good faith. Fortunately he governed in a time of prosperity with no major crises, domestic or abroad. Possibly with his lack of leadership he could have trully brought this country down had a major crises arose. I believe with a better cabinet and more common sense he could have at least been a passable president. He rose to the top thanks to friends and ultimately they were his downfall. I believe the pressure that goes with the presidency caused his death while in office. The scandals got the best of him.

I think the most unique president the U.S. has ever had is President Harding. On a scale of one to ten, with one being the worst & ten being best, I would say he rated about a -50 at least. The only reason Harding was ever put into office is because he was so easily manipulated. He was quite the playboy although he was married. I don't believe he was very bright - in fact, when asked to accept the candidacy for president, he was also asked if there was anything detrimental in his background that might be bad for him. He said no . . . 5 minutes later he called his present mistress and asked her if she thought they'd been discreet enough. Harding death is a rather big puzzle - no one knows for sure how he died. They said it was food poisoning but it could have been deliberate.

Rutherford B. Hayes and Calvin Coolidge

Students were not impressed with either Rutherford B. Hayes or Calvin Coolidge. One student each wrote on these presidents. Their respective views of Presidents Hayes and Calvin Coolidge are listed below in their entirety:

I'm selecting this President for the purpose of showing people today that today's Presidents are not the only ones who were manipulated by big business. This occurred during President's Grant and Hayes terms more commonly known as the "Spoils System" which was a phrase given to these men's terms of how they were used by big business.

Of all the president's I've studied, Calvin Coolidge is by far the most insignificant. To my knowledge he never did anything significant or anything of much importance. The only information I know about him comes from a research paper I did on the twenties. As far as I know his nickname was appropriate--Silent Cal.

Students Who Did Not Follow the Directions

Seven students did not follow the directions and wrote either on a president who was in office before 1865 or wrote on more more than one president. Two students wrote on Thomas Jefferson; one student selected George Washington; another wrote one paragraph on Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Kennedy; another wrote a paragraph on Franklin Roosevelt and one on John Kennedy; and, one student wrote a paragraph on no president.

Conclusion

An often reiterated cliché is that America's future depends upon its youth. For a society as youth-oriented as the United States, it is ironic that we have not been as concerned about our children's education as we might be. As a nation, we should be proud of our historic traditions in providing a public, tax-supported education through high school for every child regardless of race, sex, ethnic, religious or socioeconomic background. Have we, however, in our pragmatic quest to "Americanize" and acculturate millions of children emphasized quantity rather than quality?

Quantity rather than quality is not the sole problem. Diversification of curricula is another problem. In addition to attempting to educate every child in America, we have also imposed on the schools the responsibility to teach, in addition to the three Rs, such diverse subjects as drivers' education, marriage and the family, and health/exercise classes.

As stated in "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative of Educational Reform" the "secondary school curricula have been homogenized, diluted and diffused to the point that they no longer have a central purpose. We have a cafeteria-

style curricula in which the appetizers and desserts can easily be mistaken for the main course."¹

Should we be surprised or alarmed, therefore, when graduates of our secondary schools have little understanding or appreciation of our history? Specifically, a critic states:

In 1969, about 88 percent of graduating high-school seniors had taken history for credit; the current figure is running at 40 percent and emphatically is not holding at even that dismal figure. Most of those who do take history take American history, adjuring the study of Western Civilization - the primary source of our culture and morality . . . Implicitly conceding we are raising up a nation of historical illiterates, the wonder folks at the New York State Education Department have announced their intention to drop history from the high school curriculum. They want to replace it with courses that fit the glove of specialization more snugly . . .²

With specialization students rarely understand the broader or universal ramifications of decisions. Without some understanding of our history, it is impossible to comprehend the problems of today, let alone the impact of current decisions on the future.

John D. Maguire, president of Claremont (California) University Center and Graduate School, and chair of the

¹U.S. Department of Education, National Commission on Excellence in Education, A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, ED 1.2; N21, 1983.

²Ross MacKenzie, "Schools Turn Out Historical Illiterates," (Tribune Company Syndicate), Omaha World Herald, June 10, 1983, p. 19.

Council for the Improvement of Liberal Education, a recently established organization of the Association of American Colleges, states: "Virtually every discipline has become overspecialized. We have lost sight of the broader moral, ethical and cultural dimensions that help people to become flexible thinkers and good citizens."³

Citizenship was at one time one of the main purposes of public education. How can the young men and women of the 1980's learn to make responsible decisions at the ballot box if they have little or no exposure to significant historical markers such as the suffrage of women, the voting rights act, or the amendments to the Constitution?

Unfortunately, the term social studies is much like a generic label, one never knows what the curricula involves. Therefore, national intellectualization of educational reforms might not insure increased knowledgeability of American History and World History or guarantee increased proficiency in critical thinking and essay-writing.

History, critical thinking and essay-writing are difficult to teach and difficult for students to master. For that reason, it is far easier for teachers and students to include and too often emphasize the "social" aspects of the "studies", i.e., sociology, psychology, life

³"Educators: Liberal Arts Is a Disaster Area," (The Los Angeles Times), Sunday World-Herald, January 22, 1984, p. 23

experiences, and current events. The educators who compiled "A Nation at Risk" should perhaps have advocated the more thorough-going reform of modifying social studies including more of history, rather than emphasizing quantity - three years of Social Studies. The "Five Basics" should be: English, History, Mathematics, Science and Foreign Languages; the emphasis for all would be competent instruction by teachers and disciplined study by students.

This article entitled, "Student Perceptions of Post Civil War Presidents: A Survey Conducted at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1979-1981" demonstrates in a specific manner students' factual knowledge of the presidents, interpretive analysis of the presidency and essay-writing ability. Said study of the success and failure of freshman level students at a large, midwestern, urban, public university in the above areas of competency is an attempt to confirm or refute contemporary public, private and media discussions relative to high school educational standards. To that extent, this report should be viewed as only one aspect of the national study of excellence in education.

The students whose responses comprise the body of this paper demonstrated a substantial body of knowledge concerning the post Civil War presidents. This is not to say that individual papers were not depressing to read - as

one student wrote, "I don't know anything about any president - that's why I am taking this class." It is hard to believe that a student could gain college entry with so little knowledge of our presidents (the authors recognize that it is possible that the person simply did not wish to write the paragraph). In some papers, students made serious efforts to judge the worth or contributions of their chosen president. What generally undermines their attempt to communicate about values is their inability to write a cohesive, grammatically correct paragraph. It appears to the authors that the students' ideas are like chicks breaking out of the egg - struggling very hard against a difficult environmental impediment - the written English language.

What can be done to remedy this situation? First, students desire to communicate their ideas, knowledge and values but they cannot. Second, students obviously need a great deal more experience in writing.

The authors, however, do not believe that English teachers should bear the sole responsibility for improving writing skills. Individuals learn to write by writing not just in English or history class, but in every class. Surprisingly there is some evidence that computers may actually encourage and aid in the study of writing. Computers apparently communicate better in written English

than in spoken English. Word processor programs are among the most popular software packages being sold today and may be one tool that will assist students in learning to write more effectively.

Since this inability of students to communicate in written English is a major problem of American society, the solution should be many faceted and creative. Thus, if we desire the "informed electorate" Jefferson recommended as vitally necessary to the republic, we must as individuals and as a society, come to terms with the problem. Let us begin now.