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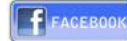
a multi-lingual journal of book reviews

January 6, 2011

ISSN 1094-5296

Education Review/Reseñas Educativas is a project of the National Education Policy Center <http://nepc.colorado.edu>

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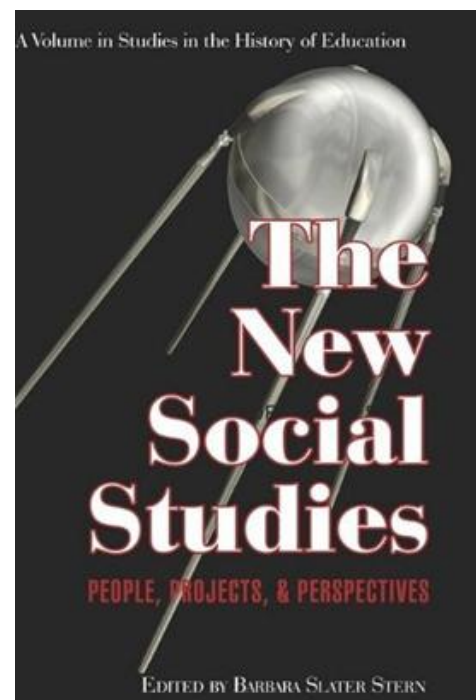
Stern, Barbara Slater (Ed.) (2010) *The New Social Studies: People, Projects, and Perspectives*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Pp. xxii + 498

ISBN 978-1-60752-219-5

Reviewed by René Luis Alvarez  
Northeastern Illinois University

Barbara Slater Stern states in her edited volume's introduction that, "The goal of this book, then, is to sample the projects and individuals involved with the New Social Studies (NSS) in an attempt to provide an understanding of what came before and to suggest guidance to those concerned with social studies reform in the future – especially in light of the standardization of curriculum and assessment currently underway in many states" (p. xiv). A closer inspection of Stern's articulated aim reveals that she actually sets out three goals for the book. As one might expect with such an ambitious endeavor, Stern is more successful in some efforts than in others.



Citation: Alvarez, René Luis. (2011 January 6) Review of *The New Social Studies* by Barbara Slater Stern. *Education Review*, 13. Retrieved [Date] from <http://www.edrev.info/reviews/rev1019.pdf>

Readers upon completion undoubtedly will have sampled projects from New Social Studies era while encountering some of the people who developed them and promoted their use. Whether readers attain any deeper understanding of what came before or receive any guidance for current and future reform projects is less certain. Indeed, including as many “People, Projects, and Perspectives” as possible in this volume of 23 essays spread across more than 500 pages dilutes most of this book’s overall potential usefulness.

To be sure, contributors to this volume reinforce some key facts, while restating often what each other has said: the New Social Studies Movement emanated from the Woods Hole Conference of 1959, which itself was a response to the Soviet Union’s launching of the Sputnik satellite a few years prior. The conference’s aim was to identify ways to reinvigorate math and science education so the United States would not fall behind its Russian rivals. Jerome Bruner put forth a summary of the conference in his work *The Process of Education*, published at the dawn of the “turbulent” 1960s. Inspired by Bruner, academics and educators from disciplines beyond math and science sought ways to revise their curricula with interdisciplinary problem-solving and inquiry-based instruction. One result was the NSS, encompassing history, geography, anthropology, economics, and political science.

A useful essay by Ronald W. Evans on the social history of NSS origins, implementation, and ultimate failure (“National Security Trumps Social Progress”) follows Stern’s introduction. Stern then gathers the remaining 21 essays under the three separate headings contained in the volume’s subtitle. Readers thus are treated to articles about six people in Section I, seven projects in Section II, and eight perspectives in Section III. As would be expected from a volume of this size, some contributions within each section rise above the others.

Anyone unfamiliar with NSS would benefit from reading Michelle Cude’s survey of the life and work of Ted Fenton. Despite its ungainly title, Cude’s “Can You Still Catch Fish with New Social Studies Bait? Ted Fenton and the Carnegie-Mellon (Social Studies) Project,” provides the uninitiated a portrait of the individual often designated as the father of the NSS. Indeed, as Cude highlights,

**Barbara Slater Stern** is Professor in the Department of Middle, Secondary, and Math Education at James Madison University. Her doctorate is from Central Florida University. She has served as Editor of the journal *Curriculum & Teaching Dialogue* for the American Association for Teaching & Curriculum.



Fenton's work did more for inquiry-based teaching than that of most others. Yet, while Fenton's stature within the movement remains undiminished, one wonders if such a designation truly is warranted. Stern's own chapter, "Hilda Taba: Social Studies Reform from the Bottom Up," reveals the life and work of an educator who, although not technically part of the NSS movement, employed inquiry-based pedagogical methods prior to its becoming the method of choice among NSS advocates. Stern, however, inadvertently downplays Taba's influence by merely surveying Taba's work as a "beacon of hope for meaningful social studies teaching and learning in an age standardization and high stakes testing" (p. 42), rather than exploring more deeply what Taba's work reveals about the state of education that prompted it in the first place.

A real value of the volume emerges from Section II, which demonstrates the wide swath of subject matter and content areas the NSS carved for itself. Despite the ambitious nature of including so many realms of inquiry, one comes to appreciate the opportunity NSS reforms presented, namely integrating trained practitioners of various social sciences and humanities – including many from the realm of higher education – into the development of elementary, middle, and secondary school curricula, an opportunity ultimately missed with the decline of the NSS. In an effort to rekindle that spirit, John Hoge surveys numerous and varied NSS projects in his chapter, "Small Projects of the New Social Studies (Bring Back the Best)," highlighting exemplars on current events and global issues such as civil rights, social inequality, the atomic arms race, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. "Somewhat rhetorically," Hoge writes, "I ask the reader to consider, wouldn't it be refreshing to have many of these same topics addressed in today's middle and high school social studies classrooms?" (p. 295). Hoge's editor seems to agree, but suggests uncritically, "In addition to the body of the chapter, the reader might be interested in searching the reference section of [Hoge's] chapter and resurrecting some of the curriculum projects listed" (p. xix). One has to wonder, however, which projects Stern would like to see resurrected. Today's middle and high school students likely could learn by exploring contemporary issues through inquiry-based instruction, but should teachers take from Hoge's reference list lessons about "Urban schools and the Negro," "The Orientals," or "The U.S. Hispano"

developed during the 1960s and implement them in twenty-first century classroom?

The ostensible aim of the chapters in the volume's third section is to provide views and insights from those curriculum designers and teachers with intimate knowledge of the development and the use of NSS projects. Unfortunately this section fails to reach its full potential. This likely is due to the section's lack of an overall focus as it includes the volume's second chapter exploring "Man: A Course of Study (MACOS)," two chapters on the teaching and learning of history by history teachers, and others on teachers in the NSS, multiculturalism, and technology. What is more, at least two of these chapters devolve into self-aggrandizing pieces as the authors of each relive their experiences with the NSS as a means to impart to readers some unspecified wisdom.

The most useful contribution to Section III, indeed, perhaps of the entire volume, comes from David Warren Saxe who critically examines James Loewen's popular and popularly-read *Lies My Teacher Told Me*. In his "Lies and History: Unmasking Academic Complacency," Saxe indicts *Lies*' "sacred cow" status "to serve as a positive exemplar of the sort of work social studies professionals ought to foster, profess, and model" (p. 407). Few if any aspects of Loewen's study escape Saxe's incisive analysis, leading Saxe to conclude that "*Lies* is a publishing phenomenon, not because of Loewen's prowess as a researcher, but for his ability to recognize the potent power of propaganda that relies on the undeniable human thirst for explanations, any explanations, that might lead us to discover who we are and how we came to be, even if the account is full of lies" (p. 428).

*The New Social Studies* is a volume in the Studies in the History of Education, published by Information Age Publishing (by way of disclosure, readers may want to know that *Education Review*'s editor is a senior advisor for IAP). Undoubtedly, scholars have needed a thoroughly researched and analytical history of the NSS. While a start, this volume unfortunately does not go far enough in satisfying that need.

## About the Reviewer

René Luis Alvarez is an Assistant Professor in the College of Education at Northeastern Illinois University. Professor Alvarez teaches courses on the methods of teaching in the secondary schools, specializing in the teaching of history. Professor Alvarez earned his PhD in American history from the University of Pennsylvania in 2008. His primary research examines the educational history of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in Chicago during the twentieth century. His other research interests include immigration and urban history. Professor Alvarez is a former Spencer Foundation doctoral fellow and also has received research grants from Northeastern Illinois University, the University of Pennsylvania, and the Illinois State Historical Society. In addition to educational methods classes, Professor Alvarez has taught courses on Mexican American history, the history of the Chicano Movement, American urban history, and college writing.



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Editors

Gene V Glass

[glass@edrev.info](mailto:glass@edrev.info)

Gustavo Fischman

[fischman@edrev.info](mailto:fischman@edrev.info)

Melissa Cast-Brede

[cast-brede@edrev.info](mailto:cast-brede@edrev.info)

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