For decades, historians have been immersed in deep introspection as they critically evaluate the nature of historical knowledge. Some of the more influential works that span the last half century include E.H. Carr’s *What is History?*, Herbert Butterfield’s *The Whig Interpretation of History*, Jean-Francois Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition*, Hayden White’s *The Content of the Form*, Peter Novick’s *That Noble Dream*, Keith Jenkin’s *Re-thinking History*, and Margaret MacMillan’s *Dangerous Games: The Uses and Abuses of History*. This list is neither exhaustive nor considers every iteration of debates waging within historiographic writings across the globe. However, these titles are invoked as evidence of the ongoing reflective trend among professional historians who continue to debate questions regarding objectivity, truth, and the neutrality of historical narratives. The current of thought that connects this ongoing enterprise to better appreciate the epistemologies and ideologies of historical writing is the nascent recognition that the discipline entails constructing renditions of the past that are inevitably contingent and never absolute in their truth nor definitive in their analysis. Instead, historical texts are inherently subjective and, as such, cannot hold a monopoly on truth. Moreover, historical meaning is not innate. Rather, historians ascribe meaning and purportedly neutral facts are selected and organized, only becoming imbued with significance once assigned by a historian. In this sense, historians are becoming increasingly aware of the elusiveness of certainty and are coming to embrace a heightened awareness that historical narratives depict the past in a manner that is inevitably colored by contemporary perceptions. Instead of definitive master narratives, many historians concede that manifold historical versions exist that complement, challenge, and contend with one another.

Related to these meditations on the constructed nature of history is the recognition that knowledge depicting the past contributes to perceptions of present reality. In particular, historical knowledge engenders the cultivation of collective memories that, in turn, enable the construction of collective identities. In texts such as Benedict Anderson’s seminal *Imagined Communities*, scholars contend that group identities are neither static nor eternal and the characteristics associated with a community’s constitution are not essential. Instead, groups and their identities expand, contract, and are reconfigured over time. Additionally, collectivities are never monolithic. Collectives enjoy intragroup plurality and dynamism that enables the constant evolution of identity. Yet, historical narratives are often employed as a mechanism through which collective identities are produced, reinforced, and internalized as natural and fixed. Triumphalist narratives that treat collectives as organic and irrefutable are often presented as objective and illuminating an undeniable reality. In sum, even while historical accounts are constructs and collective identities are imagined,
narratives are often written and consumed in ways that presuppose understandings of the past and collective identity as immutable.

The aforementioned scholarship and debates have been circumscribed to scholarly discourses occurring at an academic level. They revolve around professional historians’ deliberations regarding the intersection between national identity and historical narratives. With the notable exception of Terrie Epstein’s *Interpreting National History*, there is much less consideration of the role of schools, in particular K-12 education, in contributing to the production of collective identities through history education and the narratives disseminated to and imbibed by students in classrooms. Historical discourses failed to consider the ubiquity of schooling versus the distance of professional historical scholarship from large segments of society. While a small stratum of society reads historical nonfiction, a considerably more substantial segment of a given nation’s population enjoys some amount of formal schooling. This schooling tends to serve as the most prolonged and substantive exposure to history education for many people who do not voluntarily pursue historical study and, as such, one of the sites of collective identity formation in society.

It is this understanding that history classrooms have existed as one of the myriad mechanisms of socialization that informs *History Education and the Construction of National Identities*, edited by Mario Carretero, Mikel Asensio, and Maria Rodríguez-Moneo. The editors and fellow contributors to the volume, organized into five sections, problematize history education, employing international comparisons to evoke a global appreciation of this phenomenon. The text is the third volume in the *International Review of History Education* edited by Peter Lee, Rosalyn Ashby, and Stuart J. Foster and published by Information Age Publishing. Presenting a constellation of theoretical and empirical chapters that elucidate the dimensions of the topic, the volume houses the collection of papers presented at the international seminar “Understanding History and the Construction of Identities in a Global World: Denationalizing History Teaching?” organized by the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain.

In the introduction to the text, the editors illuminate the salient themes of the volume and establish the theoretical bedrock for the subsequent sections. Acknowledging that “the teaching of history is still intimately related to the construction of individual identity and the transmission of collective memory” (p. 1), the editors go on to meticulously deconstruct the desirability of this reality in the 21st century when emergent identities such as world citizenship are attractive and unfettered by the negative connotations of nationalism. As such, the editors frame the topic of history education as being at a crossroads where the status quo appears to be incongruent with geosocietal shifts and new modes of identification. Important is the recognition that in order to influence identity formation, historical narratives tend to sanitize the past by positively depicting nations, avoiding controversial topics, and marginalizing countervailing accounts.

It is with this understanding of history education in mind that the contributors to *History Education: Theoretical Issues* introduce the nation as the focal point of much of the history education taught around the globe. They question its ongoing hegemony in a globally interconnected world replete with burgeoning forms of identification that challenge the supremacy of nationhood as a salient identity form. Jonathan M. Hansen broaches the subject of “de-nationalizing” history by speaking to the confusion and dilemmas that such an undertaking entails. Next, Stefan Berger problematizes national history without rejecting it outright as a sound representational form of depicting the past in schools. For Berger, national histories as they currently exist are laden with exclusionary features and ahistorical claims resulting in “an analytical tension between the need for the national and the simultaneous imperative to transcend it” (p. 34). National histories that positively depict one collective tend to negatively represent perceived outsiders, reducing
them to the status of “others.” Instead of rejecting national histories, Berger seeks to diagnose and redress these unsavory features of national histories so they can become “more self-reflective, laying open their own perspectivity and relativity, allowing for a plurality of national perspectives” (p. 43). Stuart Foster then addresses the issue of narratives found in textbooks, as these accounts tend to take on a normative status. Foster claims that “the history curriculum and history textbooks often serve as the principal means to influence, if not control, how children understand their nation’s past” (p. 51). Foster takes aim at textbooks that introduce highly ideological official narratives that serve to exclude counter-narratives while depriving students of a disciplinary understanding of history as knowledge that is constructed and contested. Foster concludes that “students should learn history not as a fixed story underpinned by vested social or political agendas, but because it provides them with the tools to evaluate the competing stories and evidence they encounter and it instantiates the values of an open democratic society” (p. 59).

Section Two: Purposes of History Education pivots toward empirical research in history education across the globe, examining the divergent uses of history in various settings. Maria Grever attempts to reconcile the political need for collective cohesion with the reality that historical interpretations are pluralistic and less cohesive than is politically desirable. Grever contends that allowing students to entertain multiple interpretations is not detrimental but can be advantageous. With this argument, Grever attempts to join together two seemingly irreconcilable versions of history education, rendering them compatible and symbiotically connected. Grever writes, “Becoming aware of different perspectives concerning the same historical subject matter constitutes the possibility of common history” (p. 86). In the following chapter, Keith C. Barton compares national history in the United States, Northern Ireland, and New Zealand. This comparison exposes how national history is not uniformly taught across the globe. Barton explains that history education in the United States is highly nationalistic, eclipsing and even displacing world history. This is in contradistinction to Northern Ireland where social cleavages preclude a singular narrative from being told in schools. As a result, history education is more disciplinary and less overtly nationalistic as schools do not wish to foment antagonisms between Unionists and Nationalists by endorsing one narrative over the other. Lastly, Barton explains how peripheral history education is in New Zealand where it is an elective subject that is more Eurocentric than nationalistic. In the following chapter, Nicole Tutiaux-Guillon explores how French curriculum is ostensibly not nationalistic but the narrative of progress introduced in history classes tends to be ethnocentric. Lastly, Peter Seixas explores what it means to teach students to think historically in a multinational Canada. Such an objective is confounded when different epistemologies result in different forms of historical consciousness. Seixas discusses indigenous forms of historical understanding, how those differ from the forms of history education endorsed in schools, and the problem of integrating them into schooling.

Section Three: Students Ideas and Identities orients the research toward students to better ascertain youth’s perceptions of the past, the sources of their identity development, and alternatives to identify formation as the objective and outcome of history education. Mario Carretero, Cesar López, Maria Fernanda González, and María Rodríguez-Moneo explicate the features of master narratives as exclusionary, replete with heroes, laden with values, and depicting the nation as essential. They then introduce empirical evidence from studies with students in Spain and Argentina, finding that students tend to consider nations to be eternal rather than modern formations. Next, Avishag Reisman and Sam Wineburg present findings from a curriculum designed to engender students’ historical disciplinary skills as a way to promote participatory democracy. By analyzing texts, Reisman and Wineburg contend that students are asked to actively interpret rather than passively
receive state-sanctioned narratives. Such a historical consciousness allows students to be active learners while transforming the history classroom into a space for contemplation rather than mere identity construction. Michelle J. Bellino and Robert L. Selman evaluate the apparent contradiction in rigorous historical thinking and ethical reflection, attempting to reconcile the two in the history classroom. Angela Bermúdez introduces the findings of an empirical study that sought to better understand how the values and emotions embedded in narratives that students have internalized can either become a bulwark against historical thought or a means for further reflection. Bermúdez introduces students’ conversations about the Los Angeles Riots and how their positioning on this topic was a complicated interplay of invoking and negotiating narratives consistent with their values and identities.

Section Four: Museums and Identities reminds readers that history is not only consumed in schools. History is also found in a broader cultural apparatus and received through cultural pedagogies that exceed the confines of schools. Marisa González de Oleaga compares museums in Argentina, Paraguay, and Spain, underscoring the fallacy of popular perceptions that museums are neutral spaces that speak to unimpeachable historical truths. Instead, González de Oleaga deconstructs each museum exhibit to expose subjectivities and nationalistic configurations of artifacts. Next, Mikel Asensio and Elena Pol compare different museum frameworks in Spain, paying particular attention to new history museums that are grounded in the local experiences of often marginalized and silenced communities.

Lastly, Section Five: Collective Memories and Representations of Past and Future further explores the cultural spaces of memory, the transformation of memory, and the changing meanings ascribed to the past. Sabine Moller challenges the perception that history and memory are dissimilar with history being “true” knowledge and memory being biased impressions. Moller elucidates how this has meaningful implications for the study of history in Germany where East Germany’s history is depicted as bleak and despairing even though this narrative may be incongruent with family memories. Moller concludes that history education cannot result in the imposition of an authoritative narrative that displaces other versions of the past. Instead, conflicting accounts can be coopted into an educational experience that affords students the opportunity to recognize the nature of history as a construct that is never definitive. Kyoko Murakami introduces the contentiousness of memory’s transformation over time. Murakami uses the example of World War II veterans and British-Japanese reconciliation to expose how veterans’ personal memories were not identical, singular, or always in alignment with broader collective understandings of the war and international relations in the post-war era. Helen Haste and Amy Hogan present the findings of a study that relate students’ perceptions of the past to their visions of the future. Jaan Valsiner concludes this section by speaking to the psychological need for historical narratives as they provide meaning and coherence.

Each of the five sections concludes with a commentary chapter that distills the disparate topics and findings of each of the preceding chapters. These commentaries remind the reader that each chapter is not discrete but can be subsumed into a nexus of research. These commentaries serve to make explicit the relatedness between chapters that present research conducted across the globe in different educational contexts. As a whole, the text offers an eclectic array of history education theory and research that bridges the divide between historiography, nationalism studies, and education. In doing so, the relationship between history education and national identity construction is explicated and called into question as a viable mode of education in a global age.

This volume has considerable value for history educators and students. Its theoretical contribution to history education is a catalyst for reflecting on one’s own epistemological orientation and how that translates into classroom practices. Generating such self-awareness among teachers can transform classrooms into spaces for deliberation.
wherein multiple narratives can be introduced and deconstructed. Such a learning environment does not negate identity-forming narratives. Instead, it introduces them alongside other historical accounts that may, in turn, give voice to other interpretations originating from communities that are not always represented in school knowledge. Such a classroom lends itself to inclusivity and intellectual rigor as students are exposed to more diverse forms of historical knowledge and asked to critically interact with texts rather than simply memorize narratives as though they were an infallible truth.

About the Reviewer

Daniel Osborn is a doctoral candidate studying History and Social Science Education at Boston University. His research looks at the representation of non-Western peoples in social studies classrooms. He can be reached at djosborn@bu.edu.