"Shake this Square World and Blast Off for Kicksville": Teaching History with Post-WWII Prescriptive Classroom Films

Jessamyn Neuhaus
State University of New York at Plattsburgh

SONNY BONO, SWATHED IN A GOLD LAMÉ SUIT, faces the camera and intones a warning to the youth of America about the dangers of marijuana. I wait, a little nervously, for the class's reaction. I'm teaching a history methodology course for college majors and we are completing a section on primary sources. Today, I'm showing selections from two anti-drug postwar classroom films. Bono's *Marijuana* (1967) is a late example of such classroom films: the boom in social adjustment films made for high school classroom use in the post-WWII period peaked in the late 1950s.[1] I hope that the films will spark a productive discussion about the nature of historical inquiry, but I'm also anticipating that they will inject a bit of always-welcome humor into my classroom. Most students don't know who Sonny Bono is, but they recognize the humor of the shaggy character who appears to be completely stoned, chastising viewers to avoid becoming "weedheads." The class chuckles and I let out my breath.

I also smile along with the class at the overwrought narration that describes the protagonist's descent into addiction in *Narcotics: Pit of Despair* (1967). In that film, a menacing beatnik drug dealer preys upon the clean-cut but spineless high school student John, whose inattentive parents allow him to attend a party where he succumbs to peer pressure to "shake this square world and blast off for kicksville," with dire consequences. After

one puff of a joint, John's path to abject heroin addiction and a squalid jail cell quickly unfolds. But during our class discussion of the films, my uneasiness returns. "What might these films tell us about the past?" I ask. "That we know a lot more about drugs now," quickly replies one student, to smug nods and more chuckles from his classmates. It's obvious that the film has, at least in part, reinforced their sense of themselves as savvy media (and, in some cases, recreational drug) consumers. They've dismissed the film as ridiculous, with little to tell us about the past except that we are smarter now; to them, the film illustrates the simple-minded ignorance and innocence (and dorkiness) of an imagined past. They've just made a mistake that too often shapes undergraduate work in U.S. history: applying their individual and collective preconceptions as well as their contemporary means of understanding moving images, to their analysis of the past.

But other pedagogical possibilities exist here, and are worth exploring. An examination of prescriptive classroom films, particularly films made between 1945 and 1961, reveal a great deal about postwar society in general and youth culture in particular, as I outline in the first part of this essay. Using these films in an undergraduate history course presents some very real problems, but as I argue in the second part of this essay, using them also offers instructors at least three important opportunities for fostering student learning. First, these films can help students deepen their understanding of the postwar period through exposure to cinematically simplistic but culturally complex texts from that time. Second, they challenge students to truly engage a source from the past on its own historical terms, rather than through the lens of their contemporary media environment—they cannot "watch" these films in the same way they "watch" contemporary movies, online entertainment, or TV shows. Third, these films may help students to recognize how, at multiple sites of power and meaning, hegemonic norms emerge, or to put in more student-accessible language, to recognize the complex ways we as a society decide what is normal and desirable social behavior. In fact, perhaps no text more vividly illustrates the extent to which American society defined, maintained, and prized "normal" subjectivity in the postwar period. As journalist Michael Atkinson writes, "[T]hese movies are terrifyingly mundane fictions straight from the heart of America, longing to solve universal problems even before they arise and to attain a common social identity even if that's clearly, desperately impossible."[2]

What exactly do I mean by "prescriptive classroom films"? Filmed on shoestring budgets by a handful of independent educational film production companies beginning in the late 1940s, peaking in the mid-1950s, and petering out by 1970, the short films (usually not more than 10 or

15 minutes) are completely removed from Hollywood filmmaking of the time. Based primarily in the Midwest, educational film companies such as Coronet Films and Centron paid unskilled, amateur actors a small one-time fee to appear in the films. The films varied in terms of sound recording, script, and sound stage quality, but while some aspired to truly engaging film work and others only to the most rudimentary story telling, most classroom films were devoid of artistic merit, usually employing wooden dialogue, unimaginative camera work, and overbearing narration.

These absolutely earnest prescriptive texts gave explicit instructions to teenagers about sexuality, safety, social life, manners, and the dangers of driving, drugs, and dating. Invariably, they emphasized the necessity of fitting in, following the rules, playing it safe, and obeying and respecting one's teachers, parents, and all adult authority figures. They assumed a viewing audience of middle-class, white teenagers. Teenagers in these films attended good high schools, wore nice clothes (except when in need of good grooming advice), ate good meals, owned cars, and lived in solid nuclear families. In his definitive *Mental Hygiene: Classroom Films 1945-1970*, author Ken Smith asserts that the literally hundreds of classroom instructional social guidance films made in the postwar period and viewed in innumerable classrooms "were tools of social engineering, created to shape the behavior of their audience," arguing that "mental hygiene" best defines this type of ephemeral film.[3] While "ephemeral" in the sense that Americans only recently acknowledged the historical import and impact of these films, as Smith and others argue, the idealized, highly prescriptive world of classroom social adjustment films offers historians important evidence about mainstream American culture in general and youth culture in particular during the postwar period.[4]

Recently, it has become easier than ever for scholars to examine these films. The majority of classrooms films deteriorated or became outdated and schools disposed of them, or they simply disappeared, but interest in prescriptive mental hygiene educational films constitutes a significant part of the growing academic and archivist attention to ephemeral and orphan films.[5] Classroom films make up a notable percentage of the films first collected by Rick Prelinger, who led a movement over the past twenty years to save ephemeral films and make them available to the public and to researchers, first in CD-ROM format and then online at the Moving Image Archive.[6] His donation of over 150,000 cans and reels of ephemeral film to the Library of Congress, as well as the film archive at the Prelinger Library in San Francisco, contains a significant number of education films.[7] Ephemeral educational film collections, such as *Chalk-dust Memories*, *Hell's Highway*, and the Educational Archives series, are readily available on DVD.[8]

Educators since at least the 1930s debated the usefulness of film in the classroom, but certainly by the late 1940s, primary and secondary school teachers across the nation regularly incorporated film into the curriculum.[9] Probably the most readily recognized type of classroom film from the postwar period is from the now notorious civil defense genre, in which narrators counseled "duck and cover" techniques to schoolchildren. The epitome of these films, *Duck and Cover* (1951), featured an animated "Bert the turtle" advising watchers to kneel and hide their faces when a bright flash signaled an atomic attack.[10]

A less popularly recognized but widely circulated type of postwar classroom film featured another kind of civil defense: bolstering the patriotism and productivity of future citizens of America. Certainly, educators and Americans in general believed that molding the future generation into model citizens was an important tool in the fight to contain Communism.[11] Long before current debates about corporate sponsorship of high schools, students viewed educational filmstrips and films about dairy products, the cotton industry, and the latest appliances, as well as more general films espousing the importance of worker productivity in a capitalist economy.[12] Short films such as *Treasures for the Making* (1951), which featured jams and marmalades prepared with General Foods Corporation's Certo and Sure-Jell, and *The Dawn of Better Living* (1945), a Westinghouse production emphasizing the era of ease and convenience that postwar appliances would create, blatantly promoted certain consumer products. Other films, like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce film *It's Everybody's Business* (1954), upheld capitalist values and "the American way of life" more generally.

However negligibly "educational," product placement films usually attempted to make connections to traditional topics of study. But filmmakers and educators in the postwar period also turned to film to teach students life lessons that had little to do with reading, writing, or arithmetic. Or, at least on the surface, with national security. "Mental hygiene" classroom films focused on roughly four topics: social adjustment; drug and alcohol use; safe driving; and sexual education or "health" topics. In the world of mental hygiene films, teenagers are first and foremost in desperate need of guidance. For example, driving safety films assumed teenagers would be dangerously reckless behind the wheel. One of the educational filmmakers best known for dramatic cautionary tales, Sid Davis, took on the dangers of driving numerous times in films such as *What Made Sammy Speed?* (1957) The film answers the titular question by explaining that Sammy fatally speeds due to an "immature defiance of authority" and "a lack of a sense of responsibility."[13] *Last Date* (1950), which drew the accolades of Bob Hope and, unusually, aired on network television, tells the story of Nicky, the irresponsible young driver who believes that red lights are

"for old women and scaredy cats." He kills himself and maims the face of his girlfriend, who subsequently would no longer be dating.

Just as heavy-handed as "red highway" films like *Driven to Kill* (1948), the anti-drug classroom films that constituted the last surge of classroom film production in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s featured "teen-aged users invariably being stripped of their 'moral fiber' and sinking to a life of theft, prostitution, and the corruption of ever-younger victims in their lust for kicks."[14] Anti-drug classroom films primarily focused on the threat of drug use to white, middle-class teenagers, who seemingly lacked the willpower and the maturity to resist peer pressure. They echoed exploitation films of the time that depicted drug use as "a threat to the nation's stability" via "its encroachment into the economically and cultur-ally productive middle and upper classes."[15] As the narrator in *Narcotics: Pit of Despair* warns, when John takes his first puff at a "pot party," he "surrenders his dignity and lays his future on the chopping block."

If the world of classroom films presented innumerable dangers to teenag-ers behind the wheel and in the presence of drugs, dating and socializing also offered numerous—though less deadly—pitfalls. In this world, however, high school students could easily become well-adjusted and even obtain the holy grail of popularity by putting into action common sense advice offered by the films. Phil, the *Shy Guy* (1947), need only listen to his father, who advises: "Pick out the most popular boys and girls in school and keep an eye on them. Try to figure out why people like them." Soon, Dad is bringing in Cokes and snacks for the whole "gang," which now hangs out at the newly popular Phil's house. In *What to Do on a Date* (1951), a bumbling Nick learns that dating can be easy when you pick wholesome group activities such as bicycle trips, miniature golf, baseball games, weenie roasts, square dances, and taffy pulls. While some dating films such as *How Much Affection?* (1957) and *Girls Beware* (1961) utilized scare tactics of unwanted pregnancy, and some sex education films like *The Innocent Party* (1961) featured gruesome shots of syphilis infections, the world of prescriptive classroom films more often constructed a highly idealized version of teenage life (and sexuality) in which bemused teens, desperate simply to fit in, find encouraging role models for pleasant, man-nerly, seemingly emotionless dating and socializing.

However, an undercurrent of fear ran through these social adjustment films. Though not as explicit as the driving safety films, anxiety and con-cern about "defiance of authority" (in the words of Sid Davis) also clearly lies at the heart of all postwar prescriptive classroom films. The youth in these films—the ones who are successfully healthy, well-groomed, respon-sible, thrifty, and popular—unfailingly rely on adult guidance, whether it be a parental figure in the film or the adult narrator imparting advice. *A*

Date with Your Family (1950) featured an especially admonishing narrator exhorting teens about how to act at the dinner table. "Daughter" needs to "change from school clothes to something more festive" in order to "feel and consequently look more charming." Meanwhile, Brother and Little Brother greet their dad at the door "as though genuinely glad to see him, as though they had really missed being away from him." Above all, teenagers should strive to make the meal *pleasant*: don't "dun Dad for a raise in your allowance;" "don't monopolize conversation;" "don't discuss unpleasant topics such as gruesome sights and sounds." Remember, warns the narrator: "Pleasant, unemotional conversation helps digestion," and "the dinner table is no place for discontent."

   With its emphasis on unquestioning obedience, good manners, respect for the rules, adherence to rigid familial and gender norms, and squashing any and all discontent, *A Date with Your Family* exemplified the ways classroom films urged teen conformity to adult rules and regulations. Films like *Getting Along With Parents* (1954), *Appreciating Our Parents* (1954), *Let's Be Good Citizens at Home* (1953), *Friendship Begins at Home* (1949), and *Parents are People Too* (1954) made more explicit the underlying message of virtually all prescriptive classroom films: father (if not mother or a usually male teacher, police officer, or doctor) knows best. And, like the sitcom by the same name, these images reflected not reality, but the desires, anxieties, and ideals of the adults making the film.[16]

   Like so much Cold War popular culture, these films depicted an imagined reality articulated in opposition to the fears of the time.[17] Stereotyped as a dull and asexual era of suburban prosperity and conformity, the postwar period in fact witnessed rapid social change, from the dramatic political and social advances of the civil rights movement to the cultural earthquakes of rock and roll and the Kinsey reports.[18] Prescriptive classroom films reacted to another significant social change in the postwar period: the emergence of teenagers as a powerful consumer category and a tremendous cultural and economic force, along with subsequent adult fears of juvenile delinquency. Teenagers in fact worried adults for many reasons: they liked rock and roll; they were "going steady" for the first time (which seemed likely to encourage premarital sexual experimentation); and they had cars and spending money—unlike their parents' generation, they were growing up in era of widespread economic security. African American and white teens sometimes listened to the same music, and both the lyrical and musical content of rock and roll, as well as its potential for instituting recreational desegregation, concerned adults.[19] Just as fears of communism and the new potential for nuclear annihilation fueled McCarthyism and the emphasis on political conformity, so fears about youth culture drove adults' emphasis on social conformity for teenagers.[20] These films illustrate

how the "domestic containment" (first identified and analyzed by historian Elaine Tyler May) of the post-WWII era not only meant rigid familial and gender norms, but also overt efforts to "contain" youth as well.[21]

Films such as *Beginnings of a Conscience* (1957), *Benefits of Looking Ahead* (1950), *Control Your Emotions* (1950), and *School Rules: How They Help Us* (1957) all present protagonists who quickly learn the importance of fitting in, following the rules, and conforming in every way to laws and norms. Yet the very existence of these films suggests that adults felt that teens needed to learn this lesson more explicitly than ever before. If in fact teenagers were as eager to use their best manners and as willing to accept the absolute authority of their parents as the teens in *A Date with Your Family* or as willing to accept Father's advice (and the authoritative, suit-wearing Father was ready and able to give advice) as in *Shy Guy*, then obviously there would be no need to conceive of, produce, distribute, and force high school students across the country to watch these films. Reading prescriptive classroom films against the grain this way, a picture emerges of a postwar youth culture that alarmed adults, who responded at least in part with increasingly prescriptive classroom films. These films, by depicting a fictionalized, idealized world of rigid adherence to Cold War social norms, actually offer historical evidence of real-life breaks and fissures in those norms.

Reading these films against the grain offers today's students the opportunity to understand more clearly both the complexities of the postwar period as well as the nature of historical inquiry in general. Today high school social studies teachers and college instructors in classes ranging from introductory survey courses to advanced seminars on topics such as the Holocaust, the 1960s, and labor history, believe that incorporating primary sources into the curriculum benefits student learning.[22] The rapid growth of Internet archives in the past few years makes primary source research even easier for students to pursue.[23] Yet, as some teachers and historians point out, too often what occurs in the classroom bears little resemblance to how historians actually utilize primary source evidence.[24] In the classroom, instructors present very limited, usually fairly transparent sources, with a specific learning objective in mind—a far cry from the searching, sifting, assessing, and interpreting which historians must do in the archive.

Contemporary nostalgic popular memory of the post-WWII era presents a particularly difficult hurdle to student comprehension of primary sources. As the Hollywood film *Pleasantville* (1998) aptly demonstrated, in American popular culture, 1950s sitcoms seem to often represent the 1950s itself.[25] Undergraduate students in today's classrooms viewing mental hygiene films produced in the late 1940s and 1950s often see not a highly

idealized and prescriptive fictional world, but a slice of reality. Students routinely, at least at first, view prescriptive classroom films as actually documenting a *Leave it to Beaver* (imaginary) past, as I've discovered when I incorporate prescriptive classroom films into my U.S. history survey courses, youth culture classes, and history methodology classes. (I've also discussed these films, and shown them, during campus-wide presentations and a presentation to an AP high school history class.) But while their initial reactions are often shaped by our nation's popular nostalgic memory of the 1950s, I've found that most students are in fact able to reach a more accurate understanding of these films if I contextualize the films as much as possible into a discussion of the contradictions and tensions during the Cold War. By incorporating the films into a larger lesson that emphasizes the ways dramatic social change shaped the era erroneously stereotyped as simply dull, naïve, and conformist, I am able to provide students with analytical tools to better understand the full implications of the films.

When I ask students in my survey courses, "What were these filmmakers worried about?" they have already heard a lecture on the changing sexual mores of the 1950s (stereotyped as the era of separate single beds for married couples); watched a film on the murder of Emmett Till and read a textbook chapter on the racial tensions shaping American society and the dramatic social change wrought by the African American civil rights movement; and listened to a number of the most groundbreaking and influential rock and roll songs and discussed how such songs fostered adult anxiety about sex, race, and gender. Similarly, in my youth culture class, we've spent the semester discussing how in the twentieth century, adult fears of changing social mores and norms, particularly around sexuality, always manifest in anxiety about youth. Given this information, students can understand that adults in the 1950s felt they had real reason to worry about their white middle-class youth. I can easily enough help students perceive how *What to Do on a Date*, for example, illustrates anxieties about race, gender, and class by asking questions such as "Where do the teenagers in this film live?" (white middle-class neighborhoods and schools); "What do the girls do in this film?" (wait for the boys to ask them out; get the food ready for the gang); "Who needs to be instructed in this film?" (Nick—illustrating postwar concerns about strengthening heterosexuality and masculinity).[26]

Another way I've been able to employ these films successfully in undergraduate classes is by carefully guiding a more open-ended discussion based on the last question I always ask: "Did this film actually change or influence teens' behavior?" With this question, the class moves beyond the historical information—"What can this film tell us about Cold War culture?"—and into a discussion that quickly challenges many students'

preconceptions about the postwar period. The question about the actual influence of the film on teenagers instantly engages students: they almost all have a ready answer to the question "do teenagers do what adults want them to do?" Not surprisingly perhaps students virtually always conclude that these films could have had no real impact on what teenagers actually did. And in pointing out that the teenagers who watched these films in the classroom were much smarter than the films seem to give them credit for, today's students begin to dismantle the popular memory of teenagers in 1950s schools as sexless, hopelessly naïve innocents from an age of unquestioned "family values."[27] Immediately, they begin to think more carefully about their 1950s youthful counterparts; they begin to chip away at their own stereotypes of teenagers in the postwar period and start seeing them as real people.[28] Students can now perhaps view the function of *Are You Popular?* (1947) in terms of what kinds of teenagers some adults *wanted* in the public schools—and, implicitly, what teenagers were doing in school that somehow challenged that normative ideology—rather than seeing the impossibly wholesome teen actors in the film as true representations of real people.

When asked to consider the far simpler media environment of high school students in the 1950s, and how that might influence viewing of the film, students sometimes backtrack a bit, admitting that a classroom film could therefore have some influence. But by and large, students maintain that such films could not shut off a high school student's sex drive or prevent curiosity about drugs and alcohol. Perhaps this is because they do not see any way that such blatantly prescriptive, earnest, socially rigid, completely corny texts could possibly influence anyone. Obviously, the media environment of students in the 1950s and those of today could hardly be more different. Dating and social guidance films from the 1950s do appear as if they are from an entirely different universe given that students today swim in a pop culture sea of highly sexualized and explicit imagery.[29] It's no wonder that Nick's earnest and befuddled efforts to plan a date with Kay in *What to Do on a Date* strike students as incredibly naïve (Nick finally stumbles on the brilliant idea of inviting Kay along to help the gang organize a community center rummage sale). Thus, using old classroom films in today's history class challenges the instructor to help students understand this primary source within its historical context rather than simply watching the film from the viewpoint of contemporary media consumers.

Students today are ill-equipped to view these prescriptive films as legitimate efforts to guide and shape the behavior of teenagers (no matter how effective those efforts may or not have been) and to see the films within their historical context of the postwar period, since virtually every aspect of their own viewing environment, from today's most successful

television shows to the most memorable advertising campaigns, build upon the notion of the consumer as a knowledgeable participant in ironic, self-referential humor. Students regularly view archival images like these films, but remixed or re-enacted for maximum mocking humor or satire. Students are highly familiar with video that is clipped, taken out of context, remixed, dubbed over, and so forth, yet they are not often aware of the implications of such editing. Moreover, as conversant consumers of "reality television"—arguably the most influential TV genre today—and viewers of the most popular YouTube clips, most students accept without question the idea that we watch people on screen in order to see them make fools of themselves and to mock them. When the wooden, unskilled actors, working with terrible scripts, slapped-together scenery, and rudimentary "special effects," traipse across the screen in these educational films, many students' natural first reaction is to smirk, even laugh out loud.

But the fact that the films grab students' attention in this way, while problematic if left unexamined, helps make them effective texts for classroom use. Laughter—the initial reaction—not only contributes to a more welcoming classroom atmosphere, but also functions as an effective pedagogical tool.[30] It cuts through the mental clutter—it indicates students are paying attention and are engaged. As a recent study demonstrated, "a humorous atmosphere in the classroom positively impacted student scores on divergent thinking exercises," and, moreover, "humor increases student receptivity to material by reducing anxiety in dealing with difficult material."[31]

Historical analysis is indeed difficult—it requires students to think in new ways and to interrogate their own preconceptions. U.S. history college classes often challenge what students "know" about their country's past and in a course on historical methodology or even a really good survey course, students also encounter the new-to-them idea that "history" itself is a construct—the result not of unproblematic, clear-cut access to the true events of the past, but the result of ongoing argument and debate. I want students to laugh first not only because these films are in a very real way funny to us today, but also because laughter offers an opening into deeper, more difficult discussions about the nature of historical inquiry, including how their own place in time and space—their culture—necessarily shapes their understanding of the past.

These films then not only offer the opportunity to deepen student understanding of the postwar period, but also the nature of historical inquiry itself. I believe that this classroom activity potentially gives students a sense of truly exploring the past by analyzing primary sources.[32] It does not, of course, replicate the true research done by historians, since as the instructor, I obviously control which sources students view and I have

specific end results in mind when we discuss the sources. Yet in the sense that sources must often be read against the grain, that their meanings and what they can and cannot tell us about the past are not readily transparent and a source of debate, these films offer students a taste of how difficult but fascinating and rewarding primary source research can be.

These films also vividly illustrate in the history classroom how historians must always seek to understand artifacts from the past within the artifact's historical context. Students are in some ways sophisticated media consumers, readily understanding and appreciating a player's break in the fourth wall in a video game or the symbolic humor of "Mac" and "PC" dialoguing. Yet that same sense of ever-present viewer awareness and irony interferes with students' ability to better understand prescriptive classroom films within the postwar historical context. Ken Smith writes: "The people who made mental hygiene films were not dumb. To view them solely as a source of cheap laughs is, frankly, to miss most of the reason they're interesting."[33] Unfortunately, this is an all too real danger in the undergraduate classroom, and one that I've combated with mixed results. Not unexpectedly, history majors engaged in a course of study of the discipline more quickly grasp this lesson. Students familiar with film and media studies are often able to begin to assess the films historically too. Students who are not history majors but are fascinated with some aspect of the past, particularly youth culture, are also sometimes able to push past easy surface readings rooted in contemporary media and instead view the films through the eyes of a historian.

Similarly, I've had mixed results at best when I use old classroom films in an effort to help students recognize how, at multiple sites of power and meaning, hegemonic norms emerge. When students assert that the impact of postwar classroom films had to be limited, I ask them to then consider "Well, why were these films made, then? What did educators and filmmakers hope to achieve?" Ideally, in this light, classroom films' attempts to micromanage teenage behavior, down to "how to say goodnight" on a date (as in the 1949 *Dating Dos and Don'ts*), can be discussed as more than inept filmmaking and adult delusion about teenage sexuality. These films offer what I believe could be a fairly easily understandable example of how power functions not solely as a top-down means of repression, but at multiple sites, in multiple ways, to create the "normal," and, conversely, how subjects may resist hegemony at multiple sites, in multiple ways. For instance, the rebellion of 1950s rock and roll—its raucous, sexy disruption of mainstream culture—could become clearer to students in light of the idealized world of prescriptive classroom films and adult fantasies of placid, asexual teenagers. Although not nearly as much as I would like, sometimes students do begin to see these films in such a way. For ex-

ample, in one class, I asked students to write a response to the question, "How do you think high school students viewing this film in the 1950s responded to the film?" One student answered: "the kids felt like fighting the power; rebellious." Although somewhat awkwardly articulated, this student effectively grasped the contradictory nature of prescriptive texts and the power relations at work here. If only in a small way, these films did indeed set the parameters of rebellion for the high school students viewing them in the 1950s—they depicted the idealized conformity and adherence to the rules that many students would dramatically reject during their college years in the 1960s.

However, in all honesty, the students with whom I've shared these films rarely achieve a sophisticated level of analysis about power and prescriptive texts, either in classroom discussion or in written work such as exams or research papers. Yet I can state unequivocally that the films successfully pique the interest of many students and that the films seem to at least open up the possibility of a student someday engaging these issues elsewhere. When we view and analyze these films in my undergraduate history classes, I am deliberately (though very subtly) asking students to consider how power acts in the classroom and in the educational setting. I'm asking them to question the voice of authority. In the case of classroom films, the voice of authority is literally embodied in The Narrator (described by one contemporary journalist as the "unmodulated, comfortingly stentorian male voice" that "invariably accompanies these films") who attempted to exercise authority over the teenage students viewing the film.[34] It's absurdly easy today to recognize the voice of authority in old social adjustment films. But I believe that by practicing identifying the authority in old classroom films, students today may become more sensitive to and aware of other locales where they themselves might productively question authority—a key step in understanding how history itself is constructed.[35]

Students may more readily perceive the power relations that produce citizens, and the places where those power relations might be disrupted. They may more readily perceive that, as philosopher Michel Foucault writes, power relations "are not univocal; they define innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risks of conflict, of struggles, of an at least temporary inversion of the power relations."[36] Recognizing the possibility of "an at least temporary inversion of power relations" seems to me to be of particular import in the post-9/11 era. Recently, students in public school began participating in emergency-preparedness programs (including preparing for terrorist attacks) and viewing films created by the Department of Homeland Security.[37] Duck and cover all over again. Neither national security nor social guidance has vanished from the classroom. Middle school educators may now utilize a

DVD entitled *Developing Self-Confidence*, to name but one example.[38] It is easier to perceive prescriptive authority and adult fear in old classroom films, I tell my students, but also consider where in today's world you might encounter messages that reinforce and reinscribe the dominant ideology. If viewing postwar classroom films encourages even a few students to more vigorously question the ways youth in particular are subject to normative prescriptions for behavior, then it is well worth our while as instructors to incorporate these films into our curriculum.

Notes

1.   Ken Smith, *Mental Hygiene: Classroom Films 1945-1970* (New York: Blast Books, 1999), 11.

2.   Michael Atkinson, "Millennial Mysteries: Continuing Revelations from the Prelinger Archive," *The Village Voice*, 30 January 1996, p. 46.

3.   Smith, 12.

4.   See, for example, Teresa Mez, "Now in Art Houses: Old Education Films," *Christian Science Monitor*, 3 November 2006, p. 11.

5.   Dan Streible, "The Role of Orphan Films in the 21st Century Archive," *Cinema Journal* 46, no. 3 (Spring 2007): 124-128.

6.   Rick Prelinger, *Ephemeral Films 1931-1960*, CD-ROM, Voyager, 1994; Jim Regan, "Ephemeral Films, Resurrected on the Web," *Christian Science Monitor*, 15 March 2006, p. 25. See also the Moving Image Archive at <http://www.archive.org/details/pre-linger/>.

7.   Jason Guerrasio, "Prelinger Archive Finds a New Home," *The Independent Film and Video Monthly* 25, no. 9 (November 2002): 9-10.

8.   *Hell's Highway: The True Story of Highway Safety Films*, directed by Brett Wood, Kino Video, DVD, 2002. See also, for example, *Chalkdust Memories: Classic Classroom Films*, Passport Studios, DVD, 2007; *Educational Archives: Social Engineering 101*, produced by Ian Hendire and Derrick Scochera, Fantoma Films, DVD, 2003.

9.   F. Dean McClusky, "The Nature of Educational Film," *Hollywood Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (July 1947): 371-380.

10.   Michael Scheibach, *Atomic Narratives and American Youth: Coming of Age with the Atom* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2003); Manohla Dargis, "In Snippets, An America that Ducked and Covered," *New York Times*, 4 April 2005, sec. E, p. 3.

11.   Historians have been particularly interested in examining the complex ways Cold War anxieties shaped policy, learning, and academic freedom at institutions of higher

learning and secondary schools. See, for example, Noam Chomsky, *The Cold War and the University: Toward and Intellectual History of the Postwar Years* (New York: New Press, 1997); Barbara Barksdale Clowse, *Brainpower for the Cold War: The Sputnik Crisis and the National Defense Education Act of 1958* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981); Andrew Hartman, *Education and the Cold War: The Battle for the American School* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Jacob Neusner, *The Price of Excellence: Universities in Conflict during the Cold War Era* (Dallas, TX: University Press of America, 1995); James T. Patterson, "Education: Schools as Crucible in Cold War America," in *Reshaping America: Society and Institutions, 1945-1960*, ed. Robert Bremner and Gary Reichard (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1982); Thomas F. Richards, *The Cold War Within American Higher Education: Rutgers University as a Case Study* (Raleigh, NC: Pentland Press, 1999); John Rudolph, *Scientists in the Classroom: The Cold War Reconstruction of American Science Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Christopher Simpson, *Universities and Empire: Money and Politics in the Social Sciences During the Cold War* (New York: New Press, 1998).

12.   Danny Gregory, *Change Your Underwear Twice a Week: Lessons from the Golden Age of Classroom Filmstrips* (New York: Artisan Books, 2004), 14.

13.   Smith, 223.

14.   Ibid., 65.

15.   Eric Schafer, *"Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!" A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1950* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 225.

16.   June Frazer and Timothy Frazer, "'Father Knows Best' and 'The Cosby Show:' Nostalgia and the Sitcom Tradition," *Journal of Popular Culture* 27, no. 3 (Winter 1993): 163-172.

17.   Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York: Henry Holt, 1983); Peter Filene, "'Cold War Culture' Doesn't Say It All," in *Rethinking Cold War Culture*, ed. Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001); Alan Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995); Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

18.   Glenn Alttschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1987); Miriam Reumann, *American Sexual Character: Sex, Gender, and National Identity in the Kinsey Reports* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).

19.   Beth Bailey, "From Panty Raids to Revolution: Youth and Authority, 1950-1970," in *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. Joe Austin and Michael Nevin Willard (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Wini Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992; reprint, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Rachel Devlin, "Female Juvenile Delinquency and the Problem of Sexual Authority in America, 1945-1965," in *Delinquents and Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Girls' Cultures*, ed. Sherrie Inness (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1996). Teens' reading material was also a matter for alarm and intervention, as detailed by Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

20.   William Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo: Youth and Authority in the Postwar Era* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1990).

21.   Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988; reprint, 1999).

22.   See, for example, Charles Anderson, "Engaging with Historical Source Work," *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 5, no. 3 (October 2006): 243-263; Sandy Hoover, "Popular Culture in the Classroom: Using Audio and Video Clips to Enhance Survey Classes," *The History Teacher* 39, no. 4 (August 2006): 467-478; John Lawlor, "My Reward: Outstanding Student Projects Based on Primary Sources," *Social Education* 67, no. 7 (November-December 2003): 405-409; Peter Levy, "Teaching the 1960s with Primary Sources," *The History Teacher* 38, no. 1 (August 2004): 9-20; Christopher C. Lovett, "For Those Who Do Not Remember the Past: Bringing the Holocaust into the Classroom," *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 3-27; Anthony Pellegrino, "Teaching Conflict with Primary Sources," *Social Studies Review* 47, no. 1 (Fall-Winter 2007): 4-7; "Suggested Methods for Integrating Primary Sources into Classroom Instruction," *Social Education* 67, no. 7 (November-December 2003): 414-415; Susan Veccia, *Uncovering Our History: Teaching With Primary Sources* (Chicago, IL: American Library Association, 2003); Wilson Warren, "Closing the Distance Between Authentic History Pedagogy and Classroom Practice," *The History Teacher* 40, no. 2 (February 2007): 249-255; Gregory Wilson, "The Voice of the People: Primary Sources on the History of American Labor, Industrial Relations, and Working Class Culture," *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 107-107.

23.   Michael Eamon, "A 'Genuine Relationship with the Actual:' New Perspectives on Primary Sources, History and the Internet in the Classroom," *The History Teacher* 39, no. 3 (May 2006): 297-314; Lee Gladwin, "Teaching with Online Primary Sources: Electronic Data Files from NARA," *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 36-40.

24.   Keith Barton, "Primary Sources in History: Breaking Through the Myth," *Phi Beta Kappan,* June 2005: 745-753; Heather Owen, "Beyond the Flapper: The Problem of 'Snapshot' History," *OAH Magazine of History* 21, no. 3 (July 2007): 35-40; Joel M. Sipress, "Why Students Don't Get Evidence and What We Can Do About It," *The History Teacher* 37, no. 3 (May 2004): 351-363.

25.   J. Calhoun, "Black and White in Color: 'Pleasantville' Recreates 50s TV," *Theatre Crafts International* 32, no. 10 (November 1998): 48-51; Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

26.   See, for example, K. A. Courdileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

27.   Stacy Otto, "Nostalgic for What? The Epidemic of Images in the Mid 20th Century Classroom in American Media Culture and What it Means," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 26, no 4 (December 2005), 459.

28.   John Shedd, "Bringing Ordinary People Into the Picture," *The History Teacher* 41, no. 1 (May 2007): 25-37.

29.   See Ariel Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (New York: Free Press, 2005).

30.   B. Lee Hurren, "Humor in School is Serious Business," *International Journal of Learning* 12, no. 6 (2006): 79; Angela Provitera McGlynn, *Successful Beginning: Engaging Your Students from the First Day* (Madison, WI: Atwood Publishing, 2001), 55.

31.   R. L. Garner, "Humor in Pedagogy: How Ha-Ha Can Lead to Aha!" *College Teaching* 54, no. 1 (November 2006), 177.

    32.   Patrick Rael, "What Happened and Why? Helping Students Read and Write Like Historians," *The History Teacher* 39, no. 1 (2005): 23-32; Sam Wineburg, "Unnatural and Essential: The Nature of Historical Thinking," *Teaching History* 129 (December 2007): 6-11
    33.   Smith, 12.
    34.   Dargis, 3.
    35.   Robert Bain, "Rounding Up Unusual Suspects: Facing the Authority Hidden in the History Classroom," *Teachers College Record* 108, no. 10 (October 2006): 2080-2114; David Pace, "Decoding the Reading of History: An Example of the Process," *New Directions for Teaching and Learning,* no. 98 (Summer 2004): 13-21.
    36.   Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 27.
    37.   Mary Beth Sheridan, "Boys and Girls, Can You Say Anthrax? Agencies Use Cartoons, Games and Even Rap in Twist on Disaster Lessons," *The Washington Post*, 14 November 2007, sec. A, p. 1.
    38.   Lisa Hubler, "Developing Self-Confidence," *School Library Journal* 53, no. 12 (December 2007): 60-61.