

## Trail Notes, Spring 2020

Dear Colleagues,

In a 2000 article entitled “Economic Lessons of the Kobe Earthquake”, the Purdue University economist George Horwich borrowed the concept of “accelerated depreciation” to describe how disaster events may have unexpected benefits when they lead to the rapid replacement of obsolete structures and assets with more innovative and productive ones. It is a term relevant to our current societal reset as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In April, the National Association of Scholars produced a report entitled *Critical Care: Policy Recommendations to Restore American Higher Education after the 2020 Coronavirus Shutdown*. The report suggests that, like a responsible aid donor, the federal and state governments should make sure that their aid to higher education comes with conditions attached. Not surprisingly, the conditions favored by the NAS focus on restoring intellectual diversity, free speech, due process, academic rigor, the search for truth, and political neutrality to our colleges and universities. These prescriptions apply at the state level as well, and we at the Oregon Association of Scholars have a role to play in ensuring that any bail-out of Oregon’s major public universities should likewise be dependent on improving the lax oversight of spending in higher education. As the

question of public monies returns to the agenda as a result of COVID-19, we as scholars and concerned members of the public should use the opportunity to shine a light on whether taxpayer funds in Oregon are being used to advance or retard the principles to which our public universities profess attachment.



*Oregon Log Raft, 1902*

In January, the OAS hosted a talk in Portland by Dr. Mary Grabar on her new book *Debunking Howard Zinn: Exposing the Fake History That Turned a Generation Against America*. Dr. Grabar’s book is particularly relevant in Oregon where Zinn’s *A Young People’s History of the United States* is the required middle or high school American history textbook. One does not know whether to laugh or cry at the idea that a committed communist’s distortionary and more often outright dishonest work is used

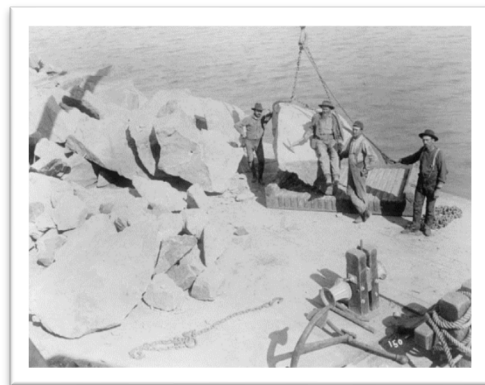
to inform Oregon's young people about the nation they inhabit. It is the sort of conspiracy-oriented and cynical work that Soviet propagandists were famed for, and today appeals to radical teachers and rebellious youth more interested in agit-prop than truth. Dr. Grabar's talk was given a fair advance [article](#) in *The Oregonian*, and the audience who came to the talk were well-mannered and curious. It was by all accounts a successful event. A group of surly anti-fa students sat at the back of the room, and defaced the room booking sign, but otherwise probably felt out of their depth amidst the intelligent debate taking place. Eventually, they slouched out of the room without causing a disruption. As part of the talk, the OAS sponsored a "Save the Children From Howard Zinn" [book drive](#): a dozen donors came forward to donate copies of the book, three of which went into the Washington County library system and three more to student groups at PSU.



*Andrew Kan & Co. Store, Portland, 1890*

The NAS has always interpreted its mission broadly to include the concerns surrounding public education in all its forms. One area that is of obvious concern is the K-12 education system. In Oregon this is a pressing matter. Several parents groups have recently approached us for help on what they see as the radical drift in Oregon public education. The OAS has contributed to this

debate in the past with our testimony opposing misguided legislation on "[ethnic studies](#)" and "[genocide](#)" in Oregon classrooms. These are only one part of a broader agenda that seeks to use the K-12 system to indoctrinate children into the latest thought liberations of the left on sexuality, gender identity, American history, individual virtue, race, and much else. In February, the Director of the Oregon Department of Education, Colt Gill, gave his full-throated endorsement to the 1619 Project of the *New York Times* that seeks to recast all of American history as nothing but a horrible legacy of slavery. We [called](#) him out on it. We also released a Power Point [presentation](#) on the various problems in April, which is now on the OAS website. It will be continually revised and updated as a resource for both parents and legislators.



*Harbor Work in Coos Bay, 1890*

What is the outlook for public education and higher education in Oregon after COVID-19? In an April [article](#) in *American Greatness* entitled "The Great Reveal", NAS founder Dr. Stephen Balch writes that the extraordinarily panicked and sheepish reaction of the American public to state-mandated lockdowns must in part be attributed to the effects of college educations on our working age population. The citizens who grew up in the college

environment have learned to genuflect to “experts” so long as those experts express views with which they already agree. They also respond with hysteria rather than reasoned and iterative deliberation in the face of risks and threats. They have little understanding of their actual rights as practiced, while often parading in the streets to protect rights that they perceive as under threat. And they are all too happy to consign the American way of life to the dustbin in search of some new anti-capitalist utopia. I wrote a [policy brief](#) criticizing Governor Brown’s executive order on precisely those grounds. The Governor is acting like a Dean of Student Life, sheltering fragile Oregonians from mostly non-existent threats with safe spaces and clampdowns on basic rights. Oregonians are about to find out how much they miss capitalism when the bills come due. COVID-19 is not just a challenge for American higher education, it is a reflection of it. That is why the NAS report *Critical Care* is so timely. To prevent another catastrophic policy mistake that acts out of fear and hysteria, costing far more lives than it saves, we need to rebuild the foundations of the American citizenry through higher education. The photos in this month’s newsletter fit that bill nicely: they are of hard-working Oregonians around the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a reminder of the pioneer spirit that may flicker yet somewhere in the heart of our state.



*Oregon Boundary Commission, 1858*

The state affiliates of the National Association of Scholars are critical players in the efforts of the organization to hold public education, and broader public issues concerning scholarship and research, to account. The NAS could never hope to keep on top of the variety of issues and concerns in each state, and affiliates also provide a greater sense of community for NAS members. Yours truly is honored to have been asked to join the Board of Directors of the NAS this year, and I will focus my energies mainly in helping Peter Wood and his amazing staff to support the work of state affiliates. What have we learned in the four years since the Oregon Association of Scholars was launched? I would highlight two lessons that jump to mind. First of all, there is a hunger in the educated public for voices of reason and sanity when it comes to debates on education and debates that involve complex claims rooted in academic research. The OAS has attracted the most attention when it weighed in as a voice of reason on issues as wide as grade inflation, diversity statements in hiring processes, and the value-added of a university education. Later this year, we will be producing a new report on donations by university faculty and staff in Oregon to political parties, providing the sort of empirical data that it credible in our partisan civic square. A second lesson is that an organization requires organization: money, time, membership, a good website, active communications, and all the rest. I appreciate the support of OAS members in all these respects (and am always looking for more!).

Thanks for all you do!

Bruce Gilley

OAS President

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