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an average adult life, beginning at age 20, for example, old age could, by 2030, begin officially between the ages of 72 and 75. Such a change, he argues, would reduce federal spending but still allow Americans many years in the "privileged status" of old age.

Forgetting the Past

"Tot Sociology: Or What Happened to History in the Grade Schools" by Diane Ravitch, in *The American Scholar* (Summer 1987), 1811 Q St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

History is not taught in most of America's public elementary schools. Children in first through third grades learn about their schools, families, and communities; they do not study the past.

Why has social studies largely replaced history in the primary grades? The answer, says Ravitch, a historian and educator at Teachers College, Columbia University, lies in debates about elementary education conducted more than 50 years ago.

Before the 1930s, most elementary school students studied the past by reading stories about "the heroes of legend and history," from Moses and Ulysses to Peter the Great and Florence Nightingale. These stories were not only full of "romance and adventure," they also prepared students for more serious studies of history and literature in their later years.

Progressive educational reformers, led by philosopher John Dewey,



The way it was in American classrooms: Elementary school students in Washington, D.C., circa 1899, being taught about the arrival of the Pilgrims.

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attacked these traditional methods of introducing history to elementary school pupils, arguing that students should study subjects more "relevant" to their lives. For example, Paul Hanna, assigned by the state of Virginia to prepare a new social studies curriculum, said that even though students were "happy and joyful" when they pretended to be knights or Romans, it was more important to have them study "expanding environments," beginning with home and school in first grade and concluding in fourth grade with world exploration and settlement.

In 1934, the American Historical Association issued a report which endorsed the "expanding environments" curriculum. The endorsement helped ensure its quick acceptance by schools across America. Today, observes Ravitch, this approach to teaching social studies has become "the universal curriculum of the elementary school."

Yet there is little evidence that teaching social studies instead of history from kindergarten through the third grade is beneficial to students. In lieu of evidence, curriculum developers have provided a series of "rationalizations," which have never been tested.

Ravitch calls for restoring history to its place in the primary grades. By studying myths and heroes at an early age, she says, students acquire a "cultural literacy" that is lost to those who are exposed only to social studies from "basal readers." "The teachers who bring 'real books' into the classrooms," she says, "should be typical, not mavericks."

Groups Reexamined

"The Wages of Discrimination" by William R. Beer, in *Public Opinion* (July-Aug. 1987), 1150
17th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

In contemporary America, does discrimination against blacks and women as *groups* still exist? Beer, a Brooklyn College sociologist, thinks not.

While it is true that U.S. blacks and women do, on average, earn less than their white male counterparts, that fact is only part of the story, Beer contends. Black and female workers in the United States tend to be younger and have less education, relative to their white male colleagues. Women still tend to put motherhood ahead of career advancement, while blacks, as a group, suffer from a higher-than-average rate of high school dropout—a significant factor in determining wages. The "collapse" of black families has also hindered their earning potential. "A household headed by an unmarried female is bound to be poorer," Beer argues, "not just because there is only one wage earner, but because the mother often stops her schooling in order to take care of her children."

Yet, when such factors are statistically adjusted, Beer says, "there is little difference between comparable black and white households."

Women already hold a "disproportionately large share of professional jobs," while blacks have made substantial headway, considering the low number of black college graduates in the past, Beer notes. In 1985, women accounted for 44.1 percent of the employed U.S. population, but held 49.1 percent of professional positions. Black Americans, who represent 9.8 percent of those employed, make up 6.3 percent of U.S. professionals. Beer adds that the experiences of black West Indians—mostly from Trinidad,