

What Do You Mean It's Not There? Doing Null History

Edward Janak

ABSTRACT

What happens when a researcher arrives at an archives, only to find that the materials requested are not in the repository? This article argues that when applying Eliot Eisner's concept of the null curriculum (what is missing is just as important as what is present), the absence of materials is just as significant to a researcher as the contents of present materials. To accomplish this, it uses a case from a larger study of General Education Board (GEB) funding in the US West comparing the holdings of the Rockefeller Archive with those in the state of Texas. Ultimately, archivists and researchers should do null history to recognize that rather than setting limitations on the project, a lack of evidence instead can be used to expand the project by applying the principles of the null curriculum. This article is not intended to be an interrogation of the archives themselves, but another lens through which the researcher can view (and an archivist can prompt) both the holdings and lack of holdings. The article is not meant to argue the semantics around the absence of the phrase "null curriculum" from the fields of history or archives; instead, it is meant to open the door to conversations about silences and the power of the archive.

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KEY WORDS

Null curriculum, Archival silences, General Education Board, Philanthropy

What happens when a researcher arrives at an archives, only to find that the materials requested are not in the repository? This project is a study of General Education Board (GEB) funding in the US West. The GEB provided funding to many states for a variety of projects and state-level positions. Before providing funding at the state level, the GEB required the states' departments and boards of education to approve their projects; as such, the GEB extensively corresponded with state departments and boards. The Rockefeller Archive Center (Sleepy Hollow, NY) holds hundreds of linear feet of materials regarding GEB funding involving correspondence between the GEB and state superintendents, state board members, and multiple universities.

As described by Tom Rosenbaum, "The Archive Center is the repository for . . . a number of other collections, for the records of Rockefeller-inspired philanthropy, and for the records of the Rockefeller family. . . . The Archive Center is a center for the study of philanthropy, and from that standpoint the records of Rockefeller philanthropies are maintained here. The dates are not part of the story. The GEB records were maintained at the offices of the Rockefeller Foundation until the Archive Center opened."¹ Judith Sealander gives a more detailed explanation. Beginning in 1950, Congress began debating the tax exemptions for charitable institutions in the United States; rules were established in a 1954 revision to the tax code and passage of the Tax Reform Act of 1969; the latter, in particular, meant Congress "had the right to demand that charitable organizations open their books." As a result, foundations had to "become more skilled at convincing the American public of their utility. They could no longer afford to be perceived as secretive. In 1974 the Rockefeller Archive Center, the largest and by far the most important archival institution holding foundation records, opened its doors to the public."²

Texas, in particular, has several linear feet of correspondence archived in the Rockefeller Archive. However, the Texas State Library and Archives in Austin holds no such materials. When I was in the Texas State Library seeking any materials regarding the GEB, I provided a list of dates and correspondents relevant to Texas I had come across in the Rockefeller Archive to one of the eminently helpful archivists. After searching the Texas databases, the archivist burst out, "Okay, something has to be there! What do you mean it's not there? How can it not be there?" It is conventional thinking to assume that the work of a historian is to "know all the evidence" and that a historian "should never consider less than the total of the historical material which may conceivably be relevant"³ to the project. However, the absence of materials is just as significant as the contents of present materials when considering all the evidence. Rather than set limitations on the project, a lack of evidence instead can be used to expand the project by applying the principles of the null curriculum which, briefly defined, refers to the concept that what is not there is just as meaningful

as what is there. From a curricular point of view, this means that the content teachers do not explicitly cover in their classrooms is just as significant as the content they do cover. From an archival point of view, this means that what archives do not contain or retain (for a variety of reasons) is just as significant as what they do.

There is an inherent power in memory, and archives often become the site of creation and negotiation around memory-making, among their many other purposes. This power plays out on a variety of levels; as Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook explain, “Archives are not passive storehouses of old stuff, but active sites where power is negotiated, contested, conformed.”⁴ Archives wield power over accountability and public policy debates as well as over historical scholarship and collective memory. They further argue “memory is not something found or collected in archives, but something that is made, and continually re-made.”⁵ And memory is shaped both by what is present and what is not; things not impacting synaptic connections are just as significant as those that are, and these considerations must be taken into account for, as Eisner reminds us, “ignorance is not simply a neutral void; it has important effects on the kinds of options one is able to consider, the alternatives one can examine, and the perspectives from which one can view a situation or problem.”⁶

David J. Flinders, Nel Noddings, and Stephen J. Thornton present a hierarchy of null curricula based on Eisner’s work: “This hierarchy extends from the exclusion of entire disciplines to the omission of particular bits of information,”⁷ all of which can be found—or, rather, not found—in Texas, a state classified by the GEB as both western and southern. This article explores the concept of applying the null curriculum to history, using the lack of archival holdings in the state as a case in doing null history. It explores how the GEB was involved in Texas, what archival materials are absent in Texas, and, finally, how this absence can be interpreted. This article is not intended to be an interrogation of the archives themselves, but another lens through which the researcher can view (and an archivist can prompt) both the holdings and lack of holdings.⁸ Indeed, as detailed by Verne Harris, archives will only ever contain a sliver of a sliver of what has happened. Those responsible for activities must have first decided to create records, then retain them, and then transfer them to an archives. This article is not so much concerned with the size of the sliver, or even that “this sliver of a sliver of a sliver is seldom more than partially described”;⁹ instead, it considers what happens when there is no sliver when one could exist.

The General Education Board in Texas

Launched and originally funded by John D. Rockefeller Sr., the General Education Board was incorporated in February 1902 and granted a Congressional Charter via Act of Congress on January 12, 1903, sponsored by Nelson Aldrich (R-Rhode Island), Rockefeller's grandfather. As outlined in promotional literature, initially, it dedicated itself to two fields:

Southern education. . . . assisting state governments and higher institutions to undertake studies, experiments and demonstrations in public education designed to adapt school programs to the life interests and opportunities of the students; studies dealing with significant southern interests and problems; qualitative development of selected institutions, more especially in the physical and social sciences; and the improvement of personnel. Special programs in Negro education relate to supervision and promotion of public schools, basic development of selected higher institutions, and the training of staffs.

General education. . . . research and experimentation looking toward the improvement of education at the secondary level to meet the conditions that social change has imposed upon the schools and colleges. As a means of providing information about the growth and development of boys and girls which is needed in planning for educational improvement as well as in preventative medicine and mental hygiene, the Board has also provided aid for a limited number of research projects in the study of adolescence.¹⁰

As explained by Raymond Fosdick in his overview of the board, initially the intent was for the GEB to serve as a clearinghouse both for research and for funding "by other interested parties as well," thus the name as "General Education Board" rather than "Rockefeller Education Board." However, it readily became apparent that other philanthropists devoted their money to other areas; Fosdick somewhat cheekily explained that other philanthropists questioned why they should "be beguiled into making such gifts when the Rockefellers seemed able to pay all the bills?"¹¹

The GEB served multiple functions targeted toward improving education: funding positions in state departments of education, providing funds for faculty positions in universities, overhauling medical school education, funding schools serving marginalized populations, providing scholarships for graduate students to study in established universities, providing scholarships for teachers to attend summer institutes, using the public schools to spread agrarianism and fight the boll weevil, and conducting and publishing research on contemporary educational trends.

The GEB was extensively involved in education in the first half of the twentieth century. Nationwide, it spent \$324,632,958 over the span of sixty-two years; \$8,433,541 went to supporting public education and \$62,675,363 to supporting

the education of African Americans, both public and private.¹² Texas received funds to support a variety of projects statewide: K–12 schools serving African American students; universities serving both white and African American populations; teacher training for teachers of all races in summer schools and state institutes; and state-level positions including the supervisor of county training schools and supervisor of “Negro schools.” Interestingly, the GEB classified Texas as both southern and western;¹³ as such, it was targeted by both aspects of GEB funding—its Southern Education Program and its General Education Program. By 1919, for example, the GEB had divided the United States into five distinct regions for providing funds to colleges and universities as part of its General Education Program: New England, Middle Atlantic, southern, middle western, and western states. Universities in Texas were included in the western region alongside the states of California, Oregon, Washington, Colorado, the Dakotas, and Nebraska. However, to provide funds for African American schools in the state such as Bishop College, Texas was also classified as southern and thus eligible to provide funds via the GEB’s Southern Education Program.¹⁴ As a rural, agricultural state, Texas warranted much attention from the board in four areas: agents working in state offices, institutions serving African Americans, increasing access to higher education, and supporting people who served as cultural bridgers and brokers.

First, the GEB funded state agents. To the members of the GEB, one of the largest obstacles to improving education in the United States was “the defective organization of the office of state superintendents of education” that “suffered from the lack of trained administrators and clearly defined goals and procedures,” and which were attempting to govern a system of “public education mushrooming across the country.”¹⁵ To this end, the GEB provided “a series of direct grants to state departments of education for the establishment and maintenance, over a period of years, of special administrative divisions, such as divisions of schoolhouse planning and construction, information and statistics, school libraries, county administration and supervision, and teacher training.”¹⁶

In Texas, the GEB had long-term support of employees who worked in the State Department of Education. Their efforts included funding a supervisor of “Negro schools,” a Division of School Planning, and a Division of Information and Statistics. These offices had the almost impossible task of standardizing education across Texas, a state with 254 counties and three types of school districts: independent, common, and community. For reference, in 1907, Texas had 617 independent districts, 7,000 common districts, and 13 community districts.¹⁷ Agents in these divisions split their time between touring the state to gather information and share best practices, and publishing and disseminating statewide bulletins.

Second, because the GEB classified Texas as a southern state, African American institutions that taught in the Hampton-Tuskegee mode were eligible for support, particularly those engaging in teacher training. The GEB would provide matching funds for schools serving African American populations to construct new buildings, particularly those devoted to industrial work; to purchase land, particularly those devoted to the teaching of agriculture; and for providing housing for, and supplementing the salaries of, teachers. The work of the Southern Program extended to funding summer institutes for African American teachers. In Texas, these conferences focused on training in agriculture extension, but also included work around music teachers, librarians, curriculum development, athletics, and rural education of both African American and white teachers.

Third, as part of its General Education Program, the GEB took an interest in supporting the spread of higher education throughout the West. The men who oversaw the program set forth criteria for spending: a large and growing population in the area of the school; at least one rail line; a lack of proximal competing institutions sapping funds; and strong community and/or denominational support. They would not give grants to fully fund a program but would provide matching funds (typically on a 1/3 to 2/3 match ratio) not given until the base had been raised.

In Texas, starting in 1917, several universities received funds from the GEB: Austin College (Sherman), Baylor University (Waco), Simmons College (now Hardin-Simmons University, Abilene), Southern Methodist (Dallas), Southwestern University (Georgetown), and Texas Christian University (Ft. Worth). Not only private universities received funding; while the General Education Program discouraged GEB funding of public institutions, through it, both the University of Texas and Texas A&M University received GEB funds. The GEB also supported African American colleges: Bishop College (Marshall), Texas College (Tyler); and Tillotson College (now Huston-Tillotson University, Austin).¹⁸

Fourth, akin to its program of sending southern state agents to Tuskegee University to work with Booker T. Washington as a model, the GEB embraced women and people of color by funding their trajectories throughout graduate school. The GEB hoped they would become “bridgers and brokers” among people back in their states. As pointed out by Lynne Getz et al., the GEB actively sought out figures who would “encourage cultural pluralism. They presume negotiation, not coercion, and they explain in part how or why a dominant culture often adopts many elements of a minority culture. But cultural bridges and brokers exist not only between dominant and subordinate cultures, but also between various minority cultures themselves.”¹⁹

In Texas, the GEB was instrumental in supporting and funding two profoundly influential people who would serve as bridge figures and cultural

brokers: George I. Sanchez and Annie Webb Blanton. Sanchez moved to Texas from New Mexico in 1940 to produce an education system that would support his vision: "He did not believe that Hispanos should lose their identity and be completely absorbed within Anglo society, but he did want Hispanos to accommodate modern industrial society and thrive within it."²⁰ By contrast, Blanton was the first woman nominated—let alone elected—president of the Texas State Teachers' Association, as well as being elected state superintendent of schools at a time when women were not allowed to vote in anything but primaries in Texas, all of which she accomplished before deciding to return to school to earn her master's and doctoral degrees.²¹ After holding office, in 1926–1927, she received a \$1,500 scholarship from the GEB to pursue her doctorate at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. However, her work as a bridger between government and women most characterized her work in office, which included getting a law passed equalizing pay for men and women and ensuring that women held equal numbers of administrative positions throughout the state, among many other accomplishments.

Null Curriculum in Archival History

The GEB provided extensive funding to the state. The Rockefeller Archive contains extensive documentation of correspondence with different agencies in Texas, including the State Board of Education and the state superintendents. The State Archives in Austin houses all correspondence of these agencies from this time period. However, relevant GEB correspondence is absent from the selected materials—including minutes of the State Board of Education, biennial reports from the state superintendents, and correspondence of all superintendents in office during GEB funding. This absence is extremely noticeable considering the documentation of other philanthropic agencies of the time.

This absence is worth consideration. Elliot Eisner's concept of the null curriculum is rooted in the fundamental belief that "schools teach far more than they advertise. Function follows form. Furthermore, it is important to realize that what schools teach is not simply a function of covert intentions; it is largely unintentional. What schools teach they teach in the fashion that the culture itself teaches, because schools are the kinds of places they are."²² Therefore, the null curriculum focuses on "what schools do not teach. It is my thesis that what schools do not teach may be as important as what they do teach."²³

As defined by Christy Moroye, "The null curriculum (Flinders et al. 1986; Eisner 2002) describes what is missing. It includes intellectual processes and subject matter, as well as affect. The null curriculum might include singular topics or perspectives as well as entire fields of study."²⁴ If it is true, as set forth by Marek Tesar, that archives possess a "productive power" whose

“guardians . . . execute this power over visitors and researchers” by deciding “what they will archive, display and allow researchers to see, and how this will be done,” then, by definition, they “cannot be considered to be neutral.”²⁵ Indeed, this notion has been covered extensively in archival literature; for example, Schwartz reminds us that as archives are a space of knowledge, they are also a space of power.²⁶ The topic was twice taken up in Society of American Archivists presidential addresses. Randall Jimerson discussed the archives as places of “knowledge, memory, nourishment, and power” that protect, preserve, legitimize, and even sanctify documents “while negating and destroying others.”²⁷ Mark Greene reminded archivists to wield the power they hold for the betterment of their archives; archivist power comes “by shaping the historical record, by promoting freedom of government information, by protecting rights, by educating young minds, by affecting the way scholars apprehend and understand the materials in our repositories.”²⁸ Therefore, Moroye’s definition of null curriculum—having to analyze what is missing—is critically important.

Analyzing this positionality is therefore necessary; in the case of Texas, use of the null curriculum provides one means of analysis. As early as 1986, Flinders et al. concluded “that the notion of a null curriculum does have a number of worthwhile applications in particular areas of curriculum development.”²⁹ For example, J. Dan Marshall, James Sears, and William Schubert use it to explain that examination of curricular decision-makers is an example of null curriculum in the field of curriculum history.³⁰ Practitioner journals have picked up on the trend as well in fields ranging from science and science education,³¹ to arts- and humanities-based education,³² and even fields such as physical education and religious studies.³³

So, why not the field of history? The question is not meant to be rhetorical or to simply raise semantic issues about the absence of the phrase “null curriculum” from the field of history. It opens the door to conversations about silences and the power of the archive. Lynée Lewis Gaillet argues that seeking information across content areas “offers a logical way to more thoroughly understand alternative research methods and create mutually satisfying ways to gather and interpret data across disciplinary divides.”³⁴ So, why not apply its practical applications as set forth by Flinders et al. to history: “First, attention to the null curriculum helps assure a thorough and deliberative consideration of relevant alternatives for content selection. Second, it encourages us to reexamine goals and selection criteria in light of content. And finally, the null curriculum may be useful in bringing into sharp focus our knowledge of implementation possibilities.”³⁵ Eisner reminds us that “what students cannot consider, what they don’t know, processes they are unable to use, have consequences for the kinds of lives they lead.”³⁶ Likewise, the materials archivists cannot consider, the historical facts they do not know, and the methodological processes a historian thusly

becomes unable to use have consequences on the scholarship they produce and the understanding of the topic by their field.

Ian Grosvenor and Martin Lawn explore the issue of examining what is missing through photographic holdings, arguing that using images would “test the documentary approach” to doing history “as it would both enhance the reading, producing a deeper context about the particularities of classrooms, their relations, spaces, and technologies, but it would also challenge the documents, their points of construction and their usage.” Ultimately, readers and viewers need to remember that images are “not neutral, waiting for interpretation” but rather are “an actor, bearing messages.”³⁷ However, they argue that photos merely “illustrate a history, an idealized present or a projected future” and are “rarely used as an exploration of an idea or of the site from which they are extracted.”³⁸ Missing is an analysis of the context surrounding the photos themselves. Also missing is the question of what was not photographed—why did the photographer choose certain subjects? What is missing from the photographic archive? What do these decisions say about the photographer and his or her time?

Joan Schwartz argues that photography has served to bridge place (allowing for surrogate travel) and time (becoming a device of memory) in an attempt at fixing the present. However, doing so has “implications for shaping both individual and collective memory and identity.”³⁹ Early photographers had an eye on posterity and widespread consumption, similar to contemporary conversations about accessibility of archival holdings online. They also had a sense of photographic truth, a notion of infallibility of images captured, of visual truth and scientific correctness. So too do many researchers consider archival holdings to be infallible snapshots of time. Just as photos were used as a form of “virtual witnessing” or “photographic witnessing” that could be cataloged, so are records used as a form of archival witnessing. Schwartz concludes, “important parallels can be drawn between the impartiality of photographs and archives as evidence of reality, between the invisibility of photographers and archivists as mediators in the representation of reality. . . . It is, therefore, not just the photographic imagination, but the archival imagination at stake here.”⁴⁰ Archival principles reflect the spirit of their times; researchers should consider that both the presence and the absence of holdings reflect the times in which they were collected and the times that have happened since.

Elisabeth Kaplan and Jeffrey Mifflin extend this theme to both the information contained in the archives and archival descriptive tools. Among the many recommendations Kaplan and Mifflin make to archivists is “Preservation policies presume that information contained in the documents is worth preserving. Making the informational content of archival documents, including visual materials, accessible requires the creation of adequate descriptive tools, in the

form of finding aids, catalog records, and guides.” Ultimately, the authors ask, “What is the worth of carefully preserved or digitally scanned materials if their information is not accessible to researchers?”⁴¹

Grosvenor reminds readers, “Photographs have an uncertain status being at the same time very often both exhibition objects (held by museums) and documentary sources (held by archives).”⁴² He argues that, particularly when looking at images of marginalized peoples, the viewer often has a “second gaze that moves beyond appearances, and to which we need to be sensitive” because the viewer can share “a level of recognition and connectivity that goes both before and behind the image.”⁴³ Can one use this second gaze to see what is not there as much as what is there, particularly when considering archival materials that impact marginalized populations?

In some ways, the concept of null history should be familiar to historians, as it resembles conversations regarding silences in history. No better expression of this idea can be found than that by Maurice Blanchot, who wrote “to be silent is still to speak.”⁴⁴ Jay Winter defines *silence* as a “socially constructed space in which and about which subjects and words normally used in everyday life are not spoken,” reminding readers that “there is a difference between the sayable and the unsayable, or the spoken and the unspoken, and that such a distinction can and should be maintained and observed over time.”⁴⁵ Pioneering historian Mark Smith explains that silence should take “an important- and telling-place” in aural history because “listening for moments of silence and the redefinition of noise and sound can reveal pivotal shifts in the political realm and social structure.”⁴⁶ Admittedly, many possible reasons explain why particular records may not exist in an archive—the agency unit may not have created or retained detailed records, materials may have been transferred, and retention schedules may have been followed, among others. Whatever the reason, thinking about the null means considering that gaps in the archival record—silences in the holdings for whatever reason—may reveal social and political shifts over time, particularly when noted in public archives.

Educational history has taken on these notions of silence as null as well; *Paedagogica Historica* devoted a special issue to educational soundscapes. Two articles are particularly relevant to the concept of silence: Joyce Goodman describes how, historically, students were taught to be aware of both sound and silence in a music curriculum. Goodman describes “silence as promise” and reminds that “the fluxes of sound and silence that inhere in the sonic material of indeterminism” can be used to “counter the ‘necessity and determinism’ of prevalent education arrangements.”⁴⁷ Pieter Verstraete and Josephine Hoegaerts cite Angélique d’Oultremont to remind readers that “silence is something that needs to be actively produced and thus cannot be reduced to a mere natural phenomenon. It is something that belongs to our social and cultural world;

something that only exists by means of and through the activity of sense-making.”⁴⁸ So too must we consider the null curriculum in archival holdings as something actively produced; choices to include things in primary documents, as well as secondary decisions surrounding acquisition, retention, preservation, and deacquisition, are ultimately social and political and have deep ramifications for scholarship in the long term.

Considering silences as null crosses over into education beyond historical scholarship; some scholars look to silence in source materials as a means of reframing their research. Alis Oancea, for example, used gaps in research on teacher education to “untell the story.” Oancea rightfully points out that much research tells stories that have involved “selective filtering . . . through the treacly sieves of policy and politics. Once told, it needs untelling, through the careful picking out of threads that were not part of the official story.”⁴⁹ Board omissions of discussions clearly fit this description.

Doing Null History: Texas as Case Study

Doing null history is a two-step process: discovering what is missing (where is the null, the void?) and drawing inferences from these gaps (what does the null mean?). In this case, where are the gaps in the history of GEB involvement in Texas and what do these gaps say? In spite of the extensive presence of the GEB, state officials hid, if not fully ignored, evidence of its funding. For example, before the GEB would fund any position in a state, it required a formal letter of acceptance/invitation from the State Board of Education. This correspondence from Texas can be found in the Rockefeller Archive; however, these actions were never noted in the official State Board minutes. The minutes of the State Department of Education are meticulously cataloged in their original, leather-bound, handwritten condition by the Texas State Department of Archives. However, beginning with the 1916 minutes, no evidence of any of this correspondence exists, almost as if these boards purposefully kept cooperation with the GEB off the record. In this instance, the archives cannot contain what was never produced; if the Board of Education never documented its work with the GEB in its minutes and did not keep its correspondence, this would present a substantive gap in the archival holdings that would be unknown to most state historians.

Nor was information any more forthcoming in the state superintendent of education biennial reports. This is interesting as funds received from other philanthropic groups, such as the Jeanes and Rosenwald Funds, were noted and thanked. The GEB funded multiple positions within the State Department of Education for almost half a century. The work conducted by these offices was transformational in Texas educational history. The bulletins produced by these

offices and distributed to educators around the state credited the GEB with their inception.

However, the first mention of the GEB in a biennial report came in 1922 under Superintendent Annie Webb Blanton who had strong ties to the board throughout her career. Supervisor of Colored Schools L. W. Rogers detailed that “the training schools have received substantial financial aid from the General Education Board, in the form of financial assistance in the erection of shops and teachers’ homes, in the purchase of industrial and other necessary equipment, and for supplementing the salaries of teachers.”⁵⁰ However, Rogers neglected to mention that his entire department would not have existed without GEB funding; more interesting, within his report, the Slater and Rosenwald Funds received separate subsections detailing their financial support, but not the GEB.

In 1925, the GEB paid for a group of educators, with the cooperation of the State Department of Education and the State Legislature, to engage in a statewide survey of schools, the first of its kind. Superintendent Marrs’s report provides the closest to an acknowledgment of GEB backing; addressing state legislators who were reading his report, Marrs wrote, “I earnestly commend its report for your careful consideration, and trust that by means of the information furnished our State may be able to profit from the advice and suggestions of these disinterested, non-resident, professional educational leaders.”⁵¹

While extensively detailing the work of the people in positions paid for by the GEB, state superintendents neglected to mention the funding source of these positions, often until the GEB cut off funding and the superintendent was forced to seek it from the legislature. For example, anticipating the 1931 cutoff date of GEB funding, beginning in 1929, Superintendent Marrs began giving the GEB credit for its funding in his biennial report. He cited the valuable work of its agents in the areas of “School Plants” and “Negro Education,” priming the legislative pump to assume financial responsibility of these offices. This was to little avail, however. By 1935, Superintendent L. A. Woods was telling the legislature outright that the GEB was discontinuing financial support and that the state had to take over funding. Regarding the School Plant Division, he wrote, “The General Education Board has indicated that the grant for this work will not be renewed by said Board. . . . This Board has definitely indicated that this grant will not be renewed.” Later in the same report, Woods wrote, “The General Education Board feels, however, that its support has been given long enough to demonstrate conclusively that such a service is essential to proper schoolhouse planning and a proper function of the State. It has indicated that after the expiration of the present grant in June 1935 it will not be renewed.”⁵²

Just as state superintendent reports are of little use in detailing GEB efforts in Texas explicitly, neither do the state newspapers help to show GEB intervention. The first half of the twentieth century shared the present popular

fascination with celebrities—during this time period, the Rockefellers were people of note. As such, when the GEB was involved with projects, it often drew the attention of media statewide—in most states other than Texas. Interestingly, Texas newspapers would cover the comings and goings of Rockefeller, but rarely if ever the work of his philanthropies—even though they were so involved in Texas education.

Even the work of a Texan biographer falls into the trap of null history regarding GEB intervention. While correspondence of Annie Webb Blanton held in the Rockefeller Archive reveals her active solicitation of funds and her striving to improve the education of African Americans in Texas—and the GEB funding Blanton's education later in her career—her biography provides only casual reference to the GEB. Indeed, Debbie Mauldin Cottrel—a native Texan who studied and taught at UT—mischaracterizes Blanton's relationship with the GEB while in office as follows:

... she did use funding from the General Education Board in New York to add to the rural education division of the Department of Education a supervisor and stenographer for black schools. . . . Blanton summarized her attitude toward black education in 1923, when she wrote of the supervisor of black schools: "Perhaps his most important work is to arouse the negroes to efforts towards self-help in the improvement of their own schools. To aid them to help themselves, and to arouse their pride in their own schools, is a more important service than that of assigning to them temporary donations."⁵³

In fact, Blanton was the first state superintendent to solicit funds from the GEB, seeking and getting funding to provide three positions serving the African American community and hiring one black employee in the process. Later in the biography, Cottrell mentions Blanton studying at Cornell with George Works, who led a statewide survey of public education in Texas. She leaves out that the GEB was the impetus behind this survey, funding Works while completing his survey based on those conducted previously by GEB agents. Clearly, the null history of GEB in Texas impacted this version of Blanton's story.

Once the gaps have been noted, the second step of doing null history is drawing inferences from the null set. This is atypical in historical research—and likely to disconcert many historians—as, instead of using direct evidence found in archives to support an argument, the researcher is looking at the lack of evidence. In the Texas/GEB case, the inferences begin with asking why the GEB was so excluded from Texas history. Looking at greater trends in Texas history suggests several possible reasons. GEB business may have been considered too inconsequential to be recorded in the State Board of Education minutes. As their positions were political, the state superintendents may not have wanted a record of their dealings with a northern philanthropy, particularly in light of the anti-Rockefeller bias that swept the country after the Ludlow Massacre.⁵⁴

Or, most likely, it might be rooted in notions of Texan exceptionalism⁵⁵ to the point that public figures could or would not admit they received assistance from any outside agency, public or private. Acknowledging GEB-paid officers in the state government was different from acknowledging the work of the Jeanes and Rosenwald Funds, which paid the African American communities directly for teachers and schools and whose contributions were detailed in the annual reports.

Conclusions: Null History and Texan Exceptionalism

If Eugene Provenzo is correct that the “hidden and null curricula, as they manifest themselves in various ways in the schools, represent subtle and deeply influential forces in the shaping of attitudes and beliefs,”⁵⁶ then it is safe to assume that looking at what is not in a state archives reveals the attitudes and beliefs regarding that content. If archival holdings are a pathway to recording memory, two issues exist: first, is what is reflected in the memories helped in their creation by archives, and second (and most relevant to this discussion), what are the actual archival holdings? It can be argued that the null GEB set exemplifies the beginnings of Texan resistance: the absence of mention of GEB involvement throughout Texas history documents can be seen as proof of Texas’s general resistance to federal intervention in education. Throughout its history, whether under the guises of maintaining autonomy, states’ rights, or local control, Texas has forged a path of state exceptionalism via resistance to federalism—downplaying the acceptance of, or reliance upon, northern philanthropy can be easily seen as an extension of this mentality.

This argument is borne out by later evidence: for example, as early as 1929, State Superintendent S. M. N. Marrs lamented the state’s refusal to participate in the Federal Industrial Rehabilitation Act. Passed by Congress in 1921, the law allocated \$154,779 to Texas, but the state refused to ever take the money. In his biennial report, Marrs chastised the state legislature, writing, “As this law was enacted in 1920, and has been in force continuously since that time, Texas, by neglecting to accept its provisions will have forfeited, in the nine years ending July 1, 1929, \$398,669.50 of Federal money and has failed to discharge her plain duty to many of her unfortunate citizens.”⁵⁷ It is not a stretch to believe that a legislature that would refuse federal funds already allocated to the state would also look down upon taking private funds from northern outsiders likely deemed interlopers.

In another example, the GEB supported a Division of Research and Accounting. This group tried to streamline the accounting practices of the thousands of school districts across the state following national guidelines; the state legislature even wrote demands for such measures into two state bills. However,

as detailed in a biennial report, the efforts of the office were “in accordance with the procedures set up by the National Office in Education a number of years ago. In this connection, it is to be noted that Texas is one of the last States to embody, in its reporting system, the suggested forms of procedures recommended by the National Committee about fifteen years ago.”⁵⁸ Once again, Texas bucked a national trend due to its belief in its own exceptionalism.

Considerations of null history also overlap with notions of collective memory. For example, James Wertsch describes how collective memory emerges when “a representation of the past is distributed among members of a collective, but not because of the existence of a collective mind”; key to this distribution are “textual resources employed by members of a group.”⁵⁹ If collective memory comes largely from shared texts, then so, too, would the shared absence of texts (null history) impact collective memory. The absence would reinforce notions of exceptionalism.

Wertsch further discusses the role of accuracy in collective memory. He notes the divide between using collective memory to create an accurate version of past events and using collective memory to create a usable version of past events that can be “harnessed for some purpose in the present.” This is particularly true when considering collective identity; while some might be in favor of accuracy “no matter how threatening to its identity commitments,” others prefer “presenting a coherent identity” even if it requires “sacrificing objectivity and accuracy.”⁶⁰ In many cases, particularly in Texas, it is more convenient to the collective narrative to leave out the GEB from collective memory of the development of educational institutions.

This is particularly true in places that exhibit strong collective exceptionalism, such as in Texas; to include GEB correspondence in the state archives is to admit that Texas relied on external help, particularly from northern philanthropists. To admit such could be tantamount to an insult to state pride. For context, the GEB funded three southwestern states heavily: Texas, New Mexico, and Oklahoma. The state superintendent reports of both Oklahoma and New Mexico extensively detail GEB funding within the states, unlike in Texas. When state superintendent correspondence in the other two states was preserved, GEB correspondence was included. There are extensive educational documents and correspondence from the inclusive years; the exasperation of the Texas archivist at the relative lack of GEB correspondence detailed in this article’s introduction is telling. (“What do you mean it’s not there?”)

Furthermore, as explained by Roy Baumeister and Stephen Hastings, groups often distort collective memory to flatter, if not to deceive, themselves. In the case of this discussion, this is not an issue of archivist decision-making/intentional silencing, but rather of the materials themselves: the recordkeepers in the first half of the twentieth century simply did not acknowledge the GEB.

While acknowledging that groups will revise their self-appraisal in light of facts to acknowledge guilt or wrongdoing, particularly when faced with egregious historical wrongs, more often when “the reality of events does not always fit that desired image, it is necessary to choose between revising the image and revising the meaning of events.”⁶¹ As further detailed, “Probably the easiest and most obvious way to distort collective memory involves the selective omission of disagreeable facts.”⁶² GEB funding, a challenge to the dominant narrative of exceptionalism and rugged individualism, would be a disagreeable fact indeed.

Whether rooted in Texan exceptionalism or political considerations of the day, the relationship between Texas and the GEB is notable for its absence of documentation. Null history can focus on various factors: whether officials created particular records, whether the officials retained them, and whether the officials transferred the records to an archives. Admittedly, null history is not applicable to every situation where materials are missing—the vagaries of archival holdings such as budgetary concerns, storage space, unfortunate accidents such as fire or floods, donations of materials by public and private agencies, deaccessioning over time, and, ultimately, what archivists consider “of worth” often hold the answer to why the proverbial needle is missing from the archival haystack. But null history can (and arguably should) also look at how archivists decide to retain and provide access to certain records, as well as how they privilege, and silence, certain stories based on how they organize and describe records. While it is easy for a historian to walk away from a seemingly empty archival search, if null history—analyzing what is missing and considering the implications—is considered, a seemingly empty project can take on much more significance. It could add a layer of context, a means of “releasing meanings, tending mystery, opening the archive” to the process of “creation of remembering, forgetting, and imagining.”⁶³

Archivists, as Terry Cook and Joan Schwartz remind us, are active players in constructing history in contemporary society, as “performers in the drama of memory-making.”⁶⁴ These dramas far too often were scripted years ago and are just repeated. However, incorporating the null is a way of updating the script, of transgressing the current. Memory is not just shaped by what is present, but by what is absent as well. Considering the null can lead a researcher to ask questions that a straightforward archival search would not reveal and shift what might be perceived as a fruitless search into fruitful scholarship. It can lead the researcher to present a fuller picture. It is one way archivists and researchers can rewrite the “drama of memory-making” for the twenty-first century.

NOTES

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- ³ Geoffrey R. Elton, *The Practice of History* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 60.
- ⁴ Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, “Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory,” *Archival Science* 2, nos. 1–2 (2002): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435628>.
- ⁵ Cook and Schwartz, “Archives, Records, and Power,” 1.
- ⁶ Elliot Eisner, *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan College Publishing Company, 1994), 97.
- ⁷ David J. Flinders, Nel Noddings, and Stephen J. Thornton, “The Null Curriculum: Its Theoretical Basis and Practical Implications,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 16, no. 1 (1986): 35.
- ⁸ A summary of recent interrogations of archives can be read in Joan Schwartz, “‘Having New Eyes’: Spaces of Archives, Landscapes of Power,” *Archivaria* 61 (2006): 1–25.
- ⁹ Verne Harris, “The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory, and Archives in South Africa,” *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 65, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435631>.
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- ¹² General Education Board, *General Education Board Review and Final Report 1902–1960* (New York: General Education Board publishing, 1964), 81.
- ¹³ For more on the GEB’s approach to the West and what that said about its definition of race, see Edward Janak and Mark Helmsing, “Problematizing Philanthropy: How a Historical Study of the General Education Board in the US West Puts the ‘Social’ in Race and Region as Social Constructs,” *Race Ethnicity and Education* 20, no. 2 (2017): 277–88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2015.1110343>.
- ¹⁴ *Annual Report of the General Education Board 1919–1920* (New York: General Education Board, 1921).
- ¹⁵ Fosdick, *Adventures in Giving*, 115.
- ¹⁶ Fosdick, *Adventures in Giving*, 122.
- ¹⁷ R. B. Cousins, *Biennial Report of the State Department of Education, for the Year ending August 31, 1907 and August 31, 1908* (Austin: Von Bockmann-Jones Co, 1909), 17.
- ¹⁸ List of universities funded collected from General Education Annual Reports 1917–1935.
- ¹⁹ Lynne M. Getz, Judith Raftery, and Eileen Tamura, “Bridging Borders, Brokering Divides: Confronting the Limits of Cultural Assimilation,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era* 9, no. 2 (2010): 224, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537781400003947>.
- ²⁰ Lynne M. Getz, “The Quaker, the Primitivist, and the Progressive: Three Cultural Brokers in New Mexico’s Quest for Multicultural Harmony,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era* 9, no. 2 (2010): 251–52, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537781400003972>. For more on George Sanchez, see Carlos K. Blanton, *George I. Sanchez: The Long Fight for Mexican American Integration* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).
- ²¹ Joyce G. Crouch, “Annie Webb Blanton: Poised for Leadership,” *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin* 77, no. 3 (2011): 40, 43. For more on Annie Blanton, see Debbie Mauldin Cottrell, *Pioneer Woman Educator: The Progressive Spirit of Annie Webb Blanton* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1993).
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- ²⁴ Christy Moroye, “Complimentary Curriculum: The Work of Ecologically Minded Teachers,” in *The Curriculum Studies Reader*, ed. David J. Flinders and Stephen J. Thornton (New York: Routledge Press, 2013), 381.

- ²⁵ Marek Tesar, "Sources and Interpretations: Ethics and Truth in Archival Research," *History of Education* 44, no. 1 (2015): 102, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2014.918185>.
- ²⁶ Schwartz, "'Having New Eyes,'" 323. This point is taken up far more extensively in Schwartz and Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power, 1–19.
- ²⁷ Randall C. Jimerson, "Presidential Address: Embracing the Power of Archives," *American Archivist* 69, no. 1 (2005): 20, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.69.1.r0p75n2084055418>.
- ²⁸ Mark Greene, "Presidential Address: The Power of Archives: Archivists' Values and Value in the Postmodern Age," *American Archivist* 72, no. 1 (2009): 20, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.72.1.k0322x0p38v44l53>.
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- ³⁰ J. Dan Marshall, James T. Sears, and William H. Schubert, *Turning Points in Curriculum: A Contemporary American Memoir* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Publishing, 2000), 4.
- ³¹ Arezoo Assemi and Mostafa Sheikhzade, "Intended, Implemented and Experiential Null Curriculum," *Life Science Journal* 10, no. 1 (2013): 82–85, <https://doi.org/10.7537/marslsj100113.13>; Gaell Hildebrand, "Diversity, Values and the Science Curriculum," in *The Re-Emergence of Values in Science Education*, ed. Deborah Corrigan, Justin Dillon, and Richard Gunstone (The Netherlands: Brill Sense, 2007), 45–60.
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- ³⁵ Flinders et al., "The Null Curriculum," 40.
- ³⁶ Eisner, *The Educational Imagination*, 103.
- ³⁷ Ian Grosvenor and Martin Lawn, "Portraying the School: Silence in the Photographic Archive," in *Visual History: Images of Education*, ed. Ulrike Mietzner et al. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005), 107.
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- ⁴¹ Elisabeth Kaplan and Jeffrey Mifflin, "'Mind and Sight': Visual Literacy and the Archivist," *Archival Issues* 21, no. 2 (1996): 123, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/45762>.
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- ⁴⁵ Jay Winter, "Thinking About Silence," in *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, Ruth Ginio, and Jay Winter (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 4.
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- ⁴⁷ Joyce Goodman, "Experimenting with *Sound and Silence*: Sonorous Bodies, Sonic Selves, Acoustic Topographies, and Auditory Histories of Schooling," *Paedagogica Historica* 53, no. 5 (2017): 541, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2017.1335334>.
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- ⁵⁰ Annie Webb Blanton, *Twenty-Second Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Texas, School Sessions of 1920–21 and 1921–22* (Austin: Von Boeckmann-Jones Co, 1923), 136.
- ⁵¹ S. M. N. Marrs, *Twenty-Third Biennial Report State Department of Education, 1922–1924* (Austin: Von Boeckmann-Jones Co., 1925), 34.
- ⁵² L. A. Woods, *Twenty-Eighth Biennial Report State Department of Education 1932–1933 and 1933–1934* (Austin: Von Boeckmann-Jones Co, 1935), 18, 116.
- ⁵³ Cottrell, *Pioneer Woman Educator*, 67.
- ⁵⁴ On April 20, 1914, the Colorado National Guard and a set of Colorado Fuel and Iron Company guards were called out to suppress a strike taking part in Ludlow, Colorado. The guards circled the tent city in which the miners were living and, at dawn, opened fire. Between nineteen and twenty-six people were killed, including women and children. John Rockefeller owned the mining company and was publicly deemed responsible for calling for the massacre. Many politicians and most of the media of the time perceived the Ludlow Massacre to have been Rockefeller-sanctioned. It brought federal scrutiny to all Rockefeller boards, and the GEB was legally forbidden by federal statute from contributing to programs receiving federal aid. With a federal ban on working with the GEB, it is possible that the Texas government felt similar anti-Rockefeller bias and therefore eliminated references to his board from its correspondence. The impact of the Ludlow Massacre on GEB funding is described in Edward Janak, "Bracketing and Bridling: Using Narrative Reflexivity to Confront Researcher Bias and the Impact of Social Identity in a Historical Study," *Philanthropy and Education* 1, no. 2 (2018): 86–89.
- ⁵⁵ For recent works on Texan exceptionalism, see John E. Dean, *How Myth Became History: Texas Exceptionalism in the Borderlands* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016); Glen Sample Ely, *Where the West Begins: Debating Texas Identity* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2011).
- ⁵⁶ Eugene F. Provenzo, "Hidden and Null Curriculum," in *Encyclopedia of the Social and Cultural Foundations of Education*, ed. Eugene F. Provenzo Jr. (New York: Sage Publications, 2008), 394.
- ⁵⁷ By refusing these funds, Texas walked away from the 2018 equivalent of \$2,170,000. S. M. N. Marrs, *Twenty-Fifth Biennial Report Education in Texas, Scholastic Years 1926–27 and 1927–28* (Austin: Von Boeckmann-Jones Co, 1929), 14.
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- ⁵⁹ James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 21.
- ⁶⁰ Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, 31.
- ⁶¹ Roy F. Baumeister and Stephen Hastings, "Distortions of Collective Memory: How Groups Flatter and Deceive Themselves," in *Collective Memory of Political Events: Social Psychological Perspectives*, ed. James W. Pennebaker, Dario Paez, and Bernard Rimé (Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997), 277. This point is further explored in terms of forgetting in chapter 3, "The Vagaries of Forgetting," in *Lost Time: On Remembering and Forgetting in Late Modern Culture*, ed. David Gross (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000).
- ⁶² Baumeister and Hastings, "Distortions of Collective Memory," in *Collective Memory of Political Events*, 280.
- ⁶³ Harris, "The Archival Sliver," 85.
- ⁶⁴ Cook and Schwartz, "Archives, Records, and Power, 171–72.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Edward Janak is an associate professor and chair of the Department of Educational Studies, Judith Herb College of Education, University of Toledo. A graduate of SUNY Fredonia ('92, BA, English) and the University of South Carolina ('96, MEd; 2003, PhD), Janak is a researcher in foundations of education using life writing methodology. The author of *A Brief History of Schooling in the United States*, his current line of research explores the impact of General Education Board funding on marginalized populations of the US West.