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Midwest History of Education Society Annual Meeting. Midwest History of Education Society.

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Historians in the Heartland: Professional Conference as

The 2003 annual meeting of the Midwest History of Education Society (MHES) was evidence of the resurgence of the Society. After meeting for several years at Loyola University of Chicago, the venue for the 2003 meeting was the Best Western Inn. Other changes related to the Society include the transfer of editorship of the Society's journal, the American Educational History Journal (AEHJ) from Joseph Watras (University of Dayton) to independent scholar and current MHES president Mark McKenzie. Previously, the University of Dayton generously supported the journal, which is–in addition to providing an outlet for scholarship–vital to the mission of the Society. This year, the journal is being published by Information Age Publishing, Incorporated. All papers presented at the MHES are eligible for publication, but final selection is based on peer review. For more information, go to `http://mhes.org`. <p> The current vice-president and 2003 Program Chairperson is O.L. Davis, Jr. (University of Texas-Austin). The first session, scheduled for 8:00 am on Friday, was attended by more than twenty people who engaged in a lively discussion afterward. This trend continued through the last session on Saturday. Approximately eighty people were in attendance at the meeting, of which sixty-seven were listed as presenters. Their institutional affiliations suggest that the annual meeting draws participants from the South, mid-South, and Northeast. In fact, there was a relative absence of historians from institutions in the adjacent states of Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin. <p> The conference is not "regional" in the sense of focussing specifically on educational problems related to the Midwest or even Chicago. And although tours are often difficult to arrange, it might have been helpful (if only through brochures or websites) to point out specific aspects of Chicago's educational history such as the Dewey School and Roosevelt University. In addition, several special collections in the area contain important materials relevant to educational history (for example, the Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago). <p> The MHES meeting serves as a forum for works-in-progress, dissertation studies, and finished pieces by advanced scholars. As is the case with any professional meeting, the quality of the scholarship ranged widely. The effectiveness of the proposal review process, however, was evident. In at least two instances, presenters made reference to reviewer feedback. <p> As an unthemed conference, the program of the MHES provided insight into current topics of interest to historians. In the area of biography there were interesting papers on social activists such as labor organizer Rose Russell (paper by Martha Kransdorf, University of Toledo), citizenship school teacher Septima Clark (paper by Thandekile Mvusi, Jackson State University) and Chicago librarian Charlemae Rollins (paper by Holly G. Willett, Rowan University). Among others, there were sessions on pedagogy, teacher education, twentieth-century campus life, textbooks and the teaching of history, and the post-1945 period. It was not surprising to find papers related to the legacy of the decision in the case of Brown v. Board of Education due to the impending fifty-year anniversary of the Brown case. While only two sessions were devoted specifically to Brown and its ideological descendant, affirmative action, at least six-

teen papers dealt with African American educational history in some form, including an insightful paper entitled "Fifty Years Beyond Brown: Separate and Unequal in Kansa City, Missouri" by Donna M. Davis. <p> Papers about affirmative action programs at majority white institutions often found their counterpoint in the discussions afterward, with the sharing of personal stories of retrenchment. Although colleges and universities may be outwardly affirming, all too often nothing is done to alter the internal institutional culture or to provide administrative role models. Non-whites still find themselves faced with the choice of working in a hostile climate or moving to a "friendlier" institution (for example, an historically black college or university) in exchange for a lower salary and a heavier teaching load. <p> A contradiction was also apparent with regard to topics related to curriculum history, particularly in the area of the social studies. At issue is the role of social studies in a politically conservative climate. As one presenter pointed out, there has been a conflation of nationalism and patriotism since 9/11 that affects faculty, students, and curriculum, albeit in different ways. Conversations between sessions confirmed that many of us who teach in the social foundations classroom find the going to be very difficult, indeed. At least three broad questions related to professionalism were generated by the sessions: 1) what is the relevance of a liberal education for students who are increasingly occupationally driven; 2) what is the nature of teacher professionalism within the context of the Patriot Act; and 3) what is likely to be the legacy of the standards movement and No Child Left Behind? The 2003 Annual Meeting did not provide answers to these questions; but, as any Chicago Cubs' fan knows, there's always next year. <p> Professional conferences exist for the dissemination of research findings, for the support and growth of a specific field of inquiry, and for networking. It occurs to me that they also act as "safe spaces" in which to share concerns and to redefine our roles not only as educational historians, but also as college and university faculty. In this period of national redefinition, it seems appropriate to invoke the words of W. E. B. Dubois, a historian, for solace: "Given a chance for the majority of mankind, to be educated, healthy and free to act, it may well turn out that human equality is not so wild a dream as many seem to hope." (p. 154)[1] <p> Notes <p> [1]. W.E.B. Dubois, "The Revelation of Saint Orgne the Damned". In <cite>The Education of Black People: Ten Critiques, 1906-1960</cite>. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001 (original ed. published 1973): 135-162.

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