# Time-Machine Millionaire. Episode 1: “What Kind of History?”

Last week (January 4-6 2019), the largest history association in the United States, called the American Historical Association (AHA) held their annual meeting in Chicago. The president of the association, Mary Beth Norton, is a famous historian (she is now in her late 70s). She has done much research on colonial American history, especially about the Salem Witch trials. This was a moment in early North American history where women were robbed of due process of law and convicted of witchcraft. But they were not always witches: many were convicted simply because of physical seizures and differences in religious beliefs. Because of her research, Norton believes that university history teachers need to use history classes to talk about inequality in the past. She thinks that doing this will help future generations of adults be more self-aware, sympathetic, and tolerant. She hopes students will go on to push for equality across the board.

But last week two scholars with a different attitude—**Peter Wyatt Wood** and **Ashley Thorne**, the leaders of the National Association of Scholars—also went to the AHA. They went to debate with Norton. Ever since their January 2013 investigation of college history courses in the state of Texas, they have come to believe that college courses focus way too much on problems and inequality in United States history. In their perspective, it is most important to teach the next generation to have pride in their country. This, they believe, will allow the next generation to conform with American laws, pay their taxes, encourage local industry, and support law enforcement. It will also help young men and women sign up for the military and stay involved in elections. History, in short, needs to focus on the beauty and virtue of the country as a way to strengthen it.

This is not a new debate. In fact it already happened at the exact same place and occasion in history. The year was 1893, and the young American Historical Association was having their ninth annual meeting, also in Chicago. But this time the script was flipped: it was the President of the AHA (**Frederick Jackson Turner**) who argued that teaching American history should focus on beauty and strength of the nation. He went so far as to suggest a mythology that he called the “frontier thesis.” The US was always improving as it grew. It expanded from the small New England colonies all the way across to California: men stayed strong by braving the wild and experiencing violent struggles against Indians. This experience had shaped American future, and all young learners of history should recognize their national character of independence and ingenuity came from the frontier.

But historian **Helen Hunt Jackson** was furious with this. Since the publication of her 1881, *A Century of Dishonor* (about the genocide of American Indians and the theft of their land), she had been pushing for history classes to teach more about inequality so that future massacres could be avoided. She took three of her history colleagues and went to the 1893 Chicago meeting and protested with signs at the entrance of Jackson Turner’s Presidential Address where he presented his Frontier Thesis.” She even interrupted halfway through and shouted that he had “butchered the truth!”

In this inaugural episode of Time-Machine Millionaire, we will time-travel Helen Hunt Jackson and her three colleagues into our classroom along with Jackson turner and his two co-leaders of the AHA. In addition, we will be joined by Mary Beth Norton and the two leaders of the National Association of Scholars. Your job is first to understand the main positions of each individual present. Then you are to use the wisdom of the historical figures and the ideas from James Lowen’s “Lies My Teacher Told Me” to weigh which style of teaching history is best for the college classroom.

**Contestants:**

Mary Beth Norton (AHA) and an allied colleague

Peter Wyatt Wood (NAS)

Ashley Thorne (NAS)

Frederick Jackson Turner and 2 AHA co-leaders

Helen Hunt Jackson and 3 supportive colleagues

**Readings for Preparation:**

1. Loewen “Lies” chapter (on the course website)

2. For Mary Beth Norton: use the internet to look up your biography

3. For Peter and Ashley: you will have trouble finding a biography on the internet, but read about your own association on the internet, and *definitely* read the short article that just came out yesterday: <https://www.nas.org/articles/teaching_history>

4. For Jackson Turner, you can look up your biography online or try to skim the first pages of the “Frontier Thesis” (optional at: <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/gilded/empire/text1/turner.pdf>

5. Helen Hunt Jackson: Read online about your book *Century of Dishonor*.

**Questions to write down on your “Prep Paper”:**

1. How does your character feel about the given dilemma?

2. What perspectives are present here that your historical (or present) character might not have access to? Given this, and once you hear their views in the live game, how do you imagine that you might choose to act differently in the final stage (looking for a solution)?

3. What is a creative solution to this issue that you could bring to the table?