Most teachers recognize the critical need to establish a strong conceptual stage or foundation for students to build upon throughout the learning process. Those students that fail to acquire the requisite knowledge and conceptual foundation often struggle to understand new material, because they lack the cognitive framework or schemata necessary for deeper understanding and comprehension. The National Standards for History refer to this framework constructed in the minds of students as "mental scaffolding." The study of American history is greatly enhanced by careful and comprehensive construction of mental scaffolding. As such, the critical period for American history is the point at which we begin our survey history courses, the Pre-Columbian and colonial period. Perhaps the importance of the pre-Columbian era in American history is best summarized by some of the key architects of the National Standards for History:

The study of American history properly begins with the first peopling of this continent some 30,000 years ago, and then proceeds to the epic events of the late 15th century when three worlds met: when Europeans, the inhabitants of North and South America, and the peoples of Africa entered upon a historic convergence that was to shape much of modern history in over half the world.
These same authors of the *National Standards for History* also noted the important role the study of the colonial period plays in providing the foundation for understanding major political, economic and social developments in subsequent periods of America’s national history:

The study of the colonial era in United States history is essential for all students.... Without an understanding of the seedtime of the American nation, it is almost impossible for students to understand such critical developments as the formation of our political institutions and values; our economic system; our multi-ethnic and culturally diverse composition; our troublesome history of slavery and the enduring problems of race that were its legacy; and the special sense of destiny or mission in the American culture....

Just as the study of United States history is enhanced through the careful and comprehensive examination of the Pre-Columbian and colonial period, so too can the Internet enhance the learning opportunities accorded to students. In particular, students can greatly benefit from the availability of historical resources on the World Wide Web. These resources serve to build or refine each of the five elements of historical thinking outlined in the *National Standards for History* and address a number of “History’s Habits of the Mind.” This article outlines one approach to integrating specific web resources into the history curriculum to facilitate the development of student historical thinking, utilizing the *National Standards for History* as the overarching curricular framework.

.02 Curricular and Instructional Framework

Although there are a myriad of state standards and social studies documents which teachers must attend to, nearly all classroom history teachers are familiar with the following national history curriculum initiatives: National Center for History in the Schools' *National Standards for History*; National Council for the Social Studies' *Curriculum Standards for Social Studies*; and Bradley Commission on History in Schools' "Habits of the Mind." Therefore, the framework used to define the themes and organize Internet resources germane to pre-Columbian and colonial America will reflect these national history standards. The primary organizing curricular paradigm, however, will be the National Standards for History, in particular the following eras and themes:

**Table 1: National Standards for History**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Era-Standard</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Era 1 - Standard 1</td>
<td>Comparative characteristics of societies in the Americas, Western Europe, and Western Africa that increasingly interacted after 1450.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Era 1 - Standard 2
How early European exploration and colonization resulted in cultural and ecological interactions among previously unconnected peoples.

Era 2 - Standard 1
Why the Americas attracted Europeans, why they brought enslaved Africans to their colonies, and how Europeans struggled for control of North America and the Caribbean.

Era 2 - Standard 2
How political, religious, and social institutions emerged in the English colonies.

Era 2 - Standard 3
How the values and institutions of European economic life took root in the colonies, and how slavery reshaped European and African life in the Americas.

While the National Center for History in the Schools' National Standards for History focuses solely on the teaching of U.S. and world history, that is not the case with the NCSS standards. The National Council for the Social Studies' Curriculum Standards for Social Studies attempts to encompass all of the disciplines which comprise the social studies, including history. The theme and performance expectation in the NCSS standards that is addressed in these teaching activities and web sites is as follows:

Table 2: NCSS Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Expectation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>Systematically employ processes of critical historical inquiry to reconstruct and reinterpret the past, such as using a variety of sources and checking their credibility, validating and weighting evidence for claims, and searching for causality.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Bradley Commission on History in Schools developed the final historical framework used to guide the design of the themes and selection of World Wide Web resources. In their book Historical Literacy: The Case for History in American Education the commission identified a set of "perspectives and modes of thoughtful judgments" the study of history should encompass. Two of these "habits of the mind" addressed in these web sites are as follow:

Table 3: Bradley Commission/NCHE Habits of the Mind

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distinguish between the important and the inconsequential, to develop the &quot;discriminating memory&quot; needed for a discerning judgment in public and personal life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read widely and critically in order to recognize the difference between fact and conjecture, between evidence and assertion, and thereby to frame useful questions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and assertion, and thereby to frame useful questions.

All of these standards serve as a guideline for classroom history teachers to structure their utilization of Internet and World Wide Web resources in an organized and comprehensive manner. In addition, this framework is one all history teachers in the United States are familiar with, given the use of nationally recognized standards. The value, however, of any curricular framework or web site rests, as it should, with the individual classroom teacher. As one historian once put it, "Rhetoric aside, for most academics the development of the Internet is valuable only to the extent that it assists them to do what they have always done--teach, research, and publish." 8

The use of Internet and World Wide Web resources in the teaching of pre-Columbian and colonial American history can serve to not only enhance the growth of student historical thinking skills, but also to provide students with a multimedia means to achieve a greater degree of academic empowerment. This same observation was made a few years ago by former National Council for the Social Studies president Howard Mehlinger, who noted the following:

It is no longer necessary to learn about the American War of Independence by sitting in Mrs. Smith's classroom and hearing her version of it. There are more powerful and efficient ways to learn about the Revolutionary War, and they are all potentially under the control of the learner. 9

.03 Pre-Columbian American Societies (Return to Index)

Prior to discussing the "Great Convergence," all history teachers recognize the need to provide students with opportunities to examine pre-Columbian American history. Certainly, the debate surrounding the 500th anniversary of Columbus' landing in this hemisphere served to remind us all that American history did not begin in 1492 and it was incredulous to promulgate that premise in K-12 history curricula. While that position is all but universally recognized today, there are still questions to be answered concerning what salient individuals, events, themes and issues to address in teaching this period of history. Although there are numerous responses to this pedagogical query, the focus of this article will remain with the curricular approach outlined in the National Standards for History. The chief architects of the standards remind us of the how important this period is for future student understanding:

Although the Europeans were the active forces for change at this time, students will not grasp the import of the "great convergence" without understanding the extensiveness and complexity of the societies of pre-Columbian American and West Africa--regions that were to be centrally involved in the events following 1492 and, like Europe, were to undergo profound changes as a consequence. Developing accurate perspectives on these pre-1492 societies will dispel stereotyped images of American Indians and Africans and prepare students for the complexity of the often violent meeting of
Although there are numerous resources available on the World Wide Web to utilize in teaching this, as well as any, period of American history, their credibility and utility varies greatly. The Internet resources examined below represent the type of web sites history teachers and students benefit from the most. Their individual content and design are reviewed, as well as their application to teaching historical thinking skills and content outlined in the National Standards for History. These particular web sites focus on events, individuals, issues and themes identified in National Standards for History Era 1, "Three Worlds Meet," Standard 1, "Comparative characteristics of societies in the Americas, Western Europe, and Western Africa that increasingly interacted after 1450."  

**First Nations Histories** [http://www.dickshovel.com/Compacts.html](http://www.dickshovel.com/Compacts.html)

This site, maintained by Lee Sultzman, provides history teachers and students with short histories of nearly 50 Native tribes. In addition, a bibliography of print resources is available to assist students in their research projects. Perhaps the most valuable resource for young researchers is the listing of current contact information (e.g., addresses, phone and fax numbers) on those Native tribes that still reside in the United States and Canada.

**WWW Virtual Library-American Indians** [http://www.hanksville.org/NAresources/indices/NAhistory.html](http://www.hanksville.org/NAresources/indices/NAhistory.html)

Another valuable resource for classroom teachers is available at this portal, maintained by Karen M. Strom. Hundreds of Internet sites are indexed according to the region in which the Native tribes were indigenous. In addition to these regional history sites, there are also links to Internet resources containing Native American history timelines, oral and written accounts, and photographic archives.

**On This Date in North American Indian History** [http://members.tripod.com/~PHILKON/](http://members.tripod.com/~PHILKON/)

The name of this site developed by Phil Konstantin, a member of the Cherokee nation, is somewhat misleading. While there is a daily listing of events in Native American history, that is not the greatest pedagogical asset available on this web site. Teachers will find the links page, listing over 7,000 web sites dedicated to Native American tribes and history, an invaluable tool for developing lesson plans, home page links or student research projects.

**Native Americans-Internet Resources** [http://falcon.jmu.edu/](http://falcon.jmu.edu/)
James Madison University's Internet School Library Media Center sponsors this portal for educators. While there are numerous links to sites containing primary and secondary resources on Native American history, there are some differences between this site and other portals reviewed earlier. In addition to links to historical documents and e-texts, this web site also provides K-12 classroom history teachers with links to specific teaching resources, such as a link to an Internet site that cross references Native American history topics with Virginia's SOLs.

.04 Age of Exploration (Return to Index)

While the characterization of Christopher Columbus is the subject of heated debate among historians and the public at large, what is certain is that he embodies the dichotomy that the age of exploration and discovery represents. The following passage in Columbus' diary illustrates this point in a hauntingly prophetic manner:

They...brought us parrots and balls of cotton and spears and many other things, which they exchanged for the glass beads and hawks’ bells. They willingly traded everything they owned.... They do not bear arms, and do not know them, for I showed them a sword, they took it by the edge and cut themselves out of ignorance.... They would make fine servants.... With fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want. 12

Although the period or age of exploration is quite expansive, the following Internet resources focus on many of the individuals and events that epitomize the importance of this period as it relates to American history. The issues and themes addressed in these web sites represent the same knowledge and conceptual foundations the National Standards for History call for in Era 1, "Three Worlds Meet," Standard 2, "How early European exploration and colonization resulted in cultural and ecological interactions among previously unconnected peoples."13

The European Voyages of Exploration http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/HIST/tutor/eurovoya/index.html

The University of Calgary's History Department has designed one of the most comprehensive multimedia accounts of European explorers. The site contains a number of features teachers and students will find of great interest. Besides a short written narrative, the site contains a number of primary source materials, maps, paintings, photographs of historical artifacts, and illustrations. All of these resources are linked together to form a tutorial framework that provides for independent learning opportunities as well.
Christopher Columbus and the Age of Discovery [http://marauder.millersv.edu/~columbus/]

As mentioned previously, the quincentennial of Columbus’ voyage sparked heated debate. This site, developed and maintained by Millersville University of Pennsylvania, provides teachers and students with an electronic database of over 1,000 articles from magazines, newspapers, and journals that address the role of Columbus in history and the legacy of the "great convergence." While all of the data available at this site is textual, it still represents a valuable resource for classroom discussion, debates, and research projects.

Age of Exploration Time Line [http://www.mariner.org/age/histexp.html]

The Mariners’ Museum of Newport News, Virginia maintains this site. Although the design is rather simplistic, a hypertext time line, is contains a comprehensive collection of biographical data on a number of explorers. The time line framework is not only easy for students to navigate, but it also reinforces one of the National History Standards thinking skills, that of "chronological thinking."

1492: An Ongoing Voyage [http://metalab.unc.edu/expo/1492.exhibit/Intro.html]

In 1992 the Library of Congress unveiled its 1492: An Ongoing Voyage exhibit. This site makes many elements of that exhibit available online. Students may choose to navigate through six sections of the exhibit. As they navigate each section, they have the option to "continue the voyage" or "abandon ship" at any point in their tutorial voyage. Students, who don’t particularly care for this type of simulated navigation design, may opt to utilize the hyperlinked index, which takes them directly to the section and information they are researching.

.05 Immigration & Colonization (Return to Index)

In the decades that followed this initial contact or "convergence of three worlds," countless Europeans migrated to the "New World," motivated by a myriad of reasons, ranging from the noble to the indefensible. Although their intent varied as much as their treatment of the indigenous population, the motivation of one group, the Puritans who migrated to Plymouth, is perhaps summed up in the following passage by William Bradford, taken from Of Plymouth Plantation:

Thus out of small beginnings greater things have been produced by
Thus out of small beginnings greater things have been produced by His hand that made all things of nothing, and gives being to all things that are; and, as one small candle may light a thousand, so the light here kindled hath shone unto many, yea in some sort to our whole nation.14

The following web sites address many of the salient themes germane to this period in American history, identified in the National Standards for History Era 2, "Colonization and Settlement." In particular, these online historical resources focus on individuals, events and themes outlined in Standard 1, "Why the Americas attracted Europeans, why they brought enslaved Africans to their colonies, and how Europeans struggled for control of North America and the Caribbean."15


Although there are a number of teaching resources available at this site, developed by Virginia Tech and the University of Virginia, students will undoubtedly find the QTVR panoramas the most interesting feature. Those students engaged in research projects on Jamestown or colonial Virginia, however, will find the plethora of resources (e.g., census data, letters, maps) available at this site invaluable.

**Colonial North America: 1492-1763** [http://www.ucalgary.ca/HIST/tutor/colony/home.html](http://www.ucalgary.ca/HIST/tutor/colony/home.html)

Once again, the University of Calgary’s History Department has designed an attractive, multimedia site for history educators. In this case, the focus is on the convergence of European, African and Native American societies. As was the case with the University of Calgary site reviewed earlier, this Internet resource also contains multiple types of media, utilized to enhance a hypertext narrative. Teacher will find the images, personal accounts and Internet links, a valuable resources for designing lesson plans, PowerPoint presentations, or assigning research projects.

**AMDOCS: Documents for the Study of American History** [http://www.cc.ukans.edu/carrie/docs/amdocs_index.html](http://www.cc.ukans.edu/carrie/docs/amdocs_index.html)

Those teachers in search of primary documents for lesson plans or student research projects on this era in American history will want to include a link to this site in their home page. The site, part of the University of Kansas’ Carrie (electronic library) system, contains links to a variety of primary source materials germane to 15th, 16th, and 17th century American history. Students have access to the full text of select historical documents, such as treaties, proclamations, acts, ordinances, letters, journals, and...
Students will find the design of this site as interesting and engaging as the Jamestown site discussed earlier. The designers use the blueprint or floor plan from a 17th century house as the index for their web site, with each room containing a link to specific historical data on the Plymouth colony, 1620-1691. Teachers and students will find a number of valuable resources available at this site, including historical documents, seminar papers, legal records and brief biographies of select Plymouth historical figures.

.06 Colonial Society [Return to Index]

While it is difficult, if not impossible, to accurately portray colonial society in one broad stroke of the historians pen, there are certain characteristics that came to define what we commonly refer to as colonial America. Although Jean de Crevecoeur made the following observation during America's revolutionary period, it illustrates the same qualities that characterized colonial American society when compared with European society and the "Old World" paradigm:

The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions. From involuntary idleness, servile dependence, and useless labor, he has passed to toils of a very different nature, rewarded by ample subsistence. This is an American. 16

Although the theme of colonial society is rather broad, the following Internet resources focus on many of the individuals, events and issues that epitomize the importance of this period in American history. In particular, they address many of the topics and issues outlined in the National Standards for History Era 2, "Colonization and Settlement," Standard 2, "How political, religious, and social institutions emerged in the English colonies." 17

Teachers will find a number of useful links for teaching colonial American history at this portal, sponsored by the Department of History at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. The site contains over 100 links to Internet resources that are organized in both a chronological and thematic manner, making the site especially easy for students to navigate. Teachers will also find the links to
online journals on colonial American history and the student "research toolbox" of great pedagogical benefit.

13 Originals: Founding the American Colonies [http://www.seanet.com/users/pamur/13colony.html]

An ideal curricular framework for teaching colonial American history, at the K-12 level, is the use of the 13 British colonies as a conceptual outline. This site allows classroom teachers to integrate this teaching framework with World Wide Web resources, providing for much needed depth. Teachers and students can access a brief history of each colony and links to a variety of resources, such as online databases and historic sites' web pages. The databases for each colony are rich with primary and secondary source materials, including government documents, photographs, and maps, as well as links to state professional and historical societies.

Rare Map Collection-Colonial America [http://scarlett.libs.uga.edu/darchive/hargrett/maps/colamer.html]

The National Standards for History emphasize the need for students to draw upon data in historical maps. This site, maintained by the University of Georgia, provides classroom teachers with online access to over 60 rare maps from this period in American history, making it an ideal resource for teaching this historical thinking skill.

The American Colonist's Library [http://www.universitylake.org/primarysources.html]

One of the most expansive online collections of primary documents from this period is available on this site maintained by Richard Gardiner, a history instructor at University Lake School in Wisconsin. Teachers and students will find links to a variety of historical documents, such as journals, colonial charters, treaties, and personal writings, arranged in a user friendly chronological format. Gardiner's claim that "if it isn't here, it probably is not available online anywhere" is not far from the truth.

.07 Colonial Economy & Slavery [Return to Index]

Slavery was the most controversial, divisive, and debated feature of the colonial economy and society. The following metaphoric statement by Thomas Jefferson, perhaps better than any other, illustrates the economic
and moral dilemma that confronted the colonists, and later founders of the republic:

We have the wolf by the ears; and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go. Justice is in one scale, and self-preservation in the other. 18

There are two major foci for this particular period or theme: the colonial economic structure, and the institution of slavery. The following web sites address many of the critical individuals, events, concepts and issues of this period in American history. This theme reflects the same knowledge and conceptual foundations outlined in the National Standards for History Era 2, "Colonization and Settlement," Standard 3, "How the values and institutions of European economic life took root in the colonies, and how slavery reshaped European and African life in the Americas." 19

Quantitative Data-The Colonial Era http://www.imsa.edu/edu/socsci/jvictory/q_summary.pg.html

For those teachers and students attempting to locate quantitative data on the colonial period in American history, this site will prove invaluable. Maintained by the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy, the site is designed specifically for students attempting to get a quantitative snapshot of the colonies. Even though the data available on the site illustrates tremendous breadth, ranging from economic and census data to information concerning colonists’ diet, it does, however, lack depth. It is still an ideal teaching tool for introducing students to the type of statistical data they will encounter on other web sites and how to analyze them.


The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill received an NEH grant to digitize nearly 200 narratives of fugitive and former slaves. The result of their efforts is this invaluable site for history educators to use in their classroom teaching. These primary source materials provide students with a tremendous resource for learning about this topic from the perspective of those who lived through it. This collection of electronic materials are arranged in an alphabetical hypertext format that makes it easy for students to access and utilize in their research and/or individual study.

Excerpts for Slave Narratives http://vi.uh.edu/pages/mintz/primary.htm

Steve Mintz, of the University of Houston, provides history teachers and students with another online collection of slave
narratives. The difference between this site and the former one, however, is that Mintz has selected fewer, yet more recognized accounts typically found in printed sources. In addition, he organizes his site thematically, which may make it easier for teachers to integrate many of the selections in their teaching. Teachers, for example, could easily include hyperlinks in their PowerPoint presentations or web pages to specific accounts of the Middle Passage or slave family life and religious beliefs.


PBS has designed one of the most interesting, engaging and informative sites on the World Wide Web for the teaching of African American history. Designed to accompany the four part PBS series, of the same name, this site provides students and teachers with a myriad of textual and multimedia resources. In addition to the primary and secondary documents available at this site, teachers may also access a narrative, which is enhanced with a number of images of the period, and a teacher’s guide, making it the most teacher and student friendly site of all those reviewed.

.08 Conclusion [Return to Index](http://mcel.pacificu.edu/JAHC/JAHCI11/K12/index.html)

The teaching of pre-Columbian and colonial American history is indeed a challenge. It is not typically the historical period that attracts most students to the study of history, that "honor" being reserved for the Civil War. After nearly a decade of high school teaching, I found most students initially viewed the study of pre-Columbian and colonial American history with as much enthusiasm as they did the Gilded Age. While this is certainly not a fair assessment on the part of students, it does present an academic hurdle or challenge history teachers must overcome if they are to successfully engage students in the salient issues, events and themes germane to these periods. The online resources discussed here represent but a fraction of the plethora of web sites dedicated to the study of these two critical periods in American history. Although the quality of online resources addressing these and other periods in United States history varies greatly, just as with history tomes, it does not diminish the tremendous potential of the World Wide Web. These Internet resources have the potential to provide a conceptual hook that combines pedagogical features most students find quite appealing and engaging, such as computer technology, multimedia components, and student autonomy.

It is perhaps this final element, of student autonomy, that will prove to be most beneficial in the development of student historical thinking skills. For too long, many teachers have been unwilling to relinquish their role as informational gatekeeper. The Internet,
however, is perhaps much more democratic, granting access to more historical resources than could ever have been imagined even five years ago, all a mere mouse click away. Therefore, we must concentrate even more intently on providing students with opportunities for developing historical thinking skills and habits of the mind, such as the ability to "read widely and critically in order to recognize the difference between fact and conjecture, between evidence and assertion, and thereby to frame useful questions."  

Our charges are leaving the academic nest much earlier than before attempting to navigate the cyber sky, encountering countless historical resources along the way ranging from the invaluable to the dubious. Our goal, therefore, should be to teach them "how to fly" in this, heretofore, uncharted electronic world.

.09 Notes (Return to Index)

(Please note that ordinals below are links which will return you to the proper point in the text)


2 Charlotte Crabtree et al., eds., *Lessons from History: Essential Understandings and Historical Perspectives Students Should Acquire* (Los Angeles: National Center for History in the Schools, 1992), 51.

3 Ibid, 59.


5 National Center for History in the Schools, 76-84.


7 Paul Gagnon and the Bradley Commission on History in Schools, 25-26; Bradley Commission on History in Schools, 9.


9 C. Frederick Risinger, "Teaching History," In Joseph A. Braun, Jr., and C. Frederick Risinger, eds. *Surfing Social Studies: The Internet Book*
10 Charlotte Crabtree et al., 52.

11 National Center for History in the Schools, 77-78.


13 National Center for History in the Schools, 79.


15 National Center for History in the Schools, 81-82.

16 John J. Newman and John M. Schmalbach, 42.

17 National Center for History in the Schools, 82-83.


19 National Center for History in the Schools, 83-84.


.10 Bibliography (Return to Index)


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