

Topic: **WHAT IS HISTORY? WHAT IS HISTORY NOT?**

To answer these questions, evaluate each of the statements below and discuss them.

Consider: (1) What is the meaning of each statement, and is it accurate? To what extent is it, or is it not accurate? (2) What are some ramifications of the statements?

Comment, criticize or elucidate on each statement. Choose a spokesman and a secretary to take brief notes, and report your group's findings back to the class.

1. "Not to know what happened before we were born is to remain perpetually a child" (Cicero, Roman statesman).
2. "History is more or less bunk. It's tradition. We don't want tradition. We want to live in the present, and the only history that is worth a tinker's damn is the history we make today" (Henry Ford, interview in *Chicago Tribune* [May 25, 1916]).
3. "All history becomes subjective; in other words, there is properly no history, only biography" (Ralph Waldo Emerson, "History," in *Essays, First Series*).
4. "History, here I come!" (Edmund Blackadder, *Blackadder* 1).
5. "History, as an entirety, could only exist in the eyes of an observer outside it and outside the world. History only exists, in the final analysis, for God" (Albert Camus, "Historic Murder," pt. 5, *The Rebel*).
6. "History should be written as philosophy" (Voltaire, letter of October 31, 1738).
7. "History is philosophy, teaching by examples" (Thucydides, quoted by Dionysius of Halicarnassus in *Ars Rhetorica*, ch. 11, sect. 2).

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1. "If one fights in the arena forgetful of the past, success will elude him who ignores what he should know" (Pharaoh Amenemhat I, ca. 1992 BC).
2. "The shadows we see on the walls in front of us come from the flashlight we hold behind us" (David Nicoll).
3. "History . . . is, indeed, little more than the register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind. But what experience and history teach is this--that peoples and governments have never learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it" (Georg Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*).
4. "History is a lie agreed upon" (Napoleon Bonaparte).
5. "History is the present. That's why every generation writes it anew. But what most people think of as history is its end product, myth" (E. L. Doctorow, *Writers at Work*, Eighth Series).
6. "History will absolve me" (Fidel Castro, *La Historia Me Absolver*, pamphlet, 1953). [Castro used the words during his trial in 1953, referring to his unsuccessful assault on the Moncada barracks.]
7. "History cannot, like physical science, deduce causal laws of general application. All attempts have failed to discover laws of 'cause and effect' which are certain to repeat themselves in the institutions and affairs of men. The law of gravitation may be scientifically proved because it is universal and simple. But the historical law that starvation brings on revolt is not proved; indeed the opposite statement, that starvation leads to abject submission, is equally true in the light of past events. You cannot so completely isolate any historical event from its circumstances as to be able to deduce from it a law of general application" (G.M. Trevelyan, British historian, "Clio, a Muse," in *Clio, a Muse and Other Essays*)

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1. "The history of the world is the world's court of justice" (Friedrich Von Schiller, Inaugural lecture, May 26, 1789, as Professor of History at the University of Jena, Weimar, Germany).
2. "Not to know the past is to be in bondage to it, while to remember, to know, is to be set free" (Dr. Sigmund Freud).
3. "History is a pack of lies about events that never happened told by people who weren't there" (George Santayana, U.S. philosopher).
4. The history of all previous societies has been the history of class struggles" (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, sec. 1, p. 22).
6. "History is not a book, arbitrarily divided into chapters, or a drama chopped into separate acts: it has flowed forward. Rome is a continuity called "eternal". What has accumulated in this place acts on everyone, day and night, like an extra climate" (Elizabeth Bowen, British author, *A Time in Rome*, ch. 1).

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1. "World history is a court of judgment" (Georg Hegel, "World History," pt. 3, sect. 3, *The Philosophy of Right*).
2. "Progress, far from consisting in change, depends upon retentiveness. . . . Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to fulfil it" (George Santayana, philosopher).
3. "History. An account, mostly false, of events, mostly unimportant, which are brought about by rulers, mostly knaves, and soldiers, mostly fools" (Ambrose Bierce, U.S. author, "The Devil's Dictionary," in *Collected Works of Ambrose Bierce*, vol. 7)"
4. "History is the zoology of the human race" (Franz Grillparzer, Austrian author, *Notebooks and Diaries*).
5. "History repeats itself" (ancient Greek sentiment)"
6. "Every generation must rewrite history because every generation asks different questions of history" (Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside: Radical Ideas in the English Revolution*).

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1. "History by apprising them [students] of the past will enable them to judge of the future; it will avail them of the experience of other times and other nations; it will qualify them as judges of the actions and designs of men; it will enable them to know ambition under every disguise it may assume; and knowing it, to defeat its views" (Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787), query 14, p. 148).
2. "History is a child building a sand-castle by the sea, and that child is the whole majesty of man's power in the world" (Heraclitus, *Herakleitos and Diogenes*, pt. 1, fragment 24).
3. "History repeats itself. Historians repeat each other" (Philip Guedalla, "Some Historians," in *Supers and Supermen*).
4. "History is a relay of revolutions" (Saul Alinsky, U.S. radical activist, "Of Means and Ends," *Rules for Radicals*).
5. "History repeats itself, but the special call of an art which has passed away is never reproduced. It is as utterly gone out of the world, as the song of a destroyed wild bird" (Joseph Conrad, Polish-born British novelist, *The Mirror of the Sea*, ch. 8).
6. "History can predict nothing except that great changes in human relationships will never come about in the form in which they have been anticipated" (Johan Huizinga, Dutch historian, *In the Shadow of Tomorrow*, ch. 20).

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1. "I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, and that is the lamp of experience. I know no way of judging the future but by the past" (Patrick Henry, Virginia statesman)"
2. "Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe" (H.G. Wells, *The Outline of History*, 1951)
3. "History, abounding with kings 30 feet high, and reigns 30,000 years long--and geography made up of seas of treacle and seas of butter . . ." (Lord Macaulay, "Minutes of the Supreme Council of India," 1835).
4. "History seems to us an arena of instincts and fashions, of appetite, avarice, and craving for power, of blood lust, violence, destruction, and wars, of ambitious ministers, venal generals, bombarded cities, and we too easily forget that this is only one of its many aspects. Above all we forget that we ourselves are a part of history, that we are the product of growth and are condemned to perish if we lose the capacity for further growth and change. We are ourselves history and share the responsibility for world history and our position in it. But we gravely lack awareness of this responsibility" (Hermann Hesse, *The Glass Bead Game*, ch. 1).
5. "People get so obsessed with . . . the past, that they don't react to the reality but to the reflection" (Benjamin Kedar, Israeli historian).
6. "History does nothing; it does not possess immense riches, it does not fight battles. It is men, real, living, who do all this . . . . It is not "history" which uses men as a means of achieving (as if it were an individual person) its own ends. History is nothing but the activity of men in pursuit of their ends" (Karl Marx, *The Holy Family*).