



Doing History

Research and Writing in the Digital Age

SECOND EDITION

MICHAEL J. GALGANO
James Madison University

J. CHRIS ARNDT
James Madison University

RAYMOND M. HYSER
James Madison University



WADSWORTH
CENGAGE Learning®

Australia • Brazil • Japan • Korea • Mexico • Singapore • Spain • United Kingdom • United States



WADSWORTH
CENGAGE Learning®

Doing History: Research and Writing in the Digital Age, Second Edition

Michael J. Galgano, J. Chris Arndt, and Raymond M. Hyser

Senior Publisher: Suzanne Jeans

Senior Sponsoring Editor:
Ann West

Assistant Editor: Megan
Chrisman

Editorial Assistant: Patrick Roach

Media Editor: Lisa Ciccolo

Marketing Program Manager:
Caitlin Green

Design Direction, Production
Management, and Composition:
PreMediaGlobal

Manufacturing Planner: Sandee
Milewski

Rights Acquisition Specialist:
Jennifer Meyer Dare

Cover Image:

PC Tablet: © vm/iStockphoto

Statue of Herodotus:

© Hemera/Thinkstock

© 2013, 2008 Wadsworth, Cengage Learning

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of this work covered by the copyright herein may be reproduced, transmitted, stored, or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including but not limited to photocopying, recording, scanning, digitizing, taping, Web distribution, information networks, or information storage and retrieval systems, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

For product information and
technology assistance, contact us at **Cengage Learning**
Customer & Sales Support, 1-800-354-9706

For permission to use material from this text or product,
submit all requests online at **www.cengage.com/permissions**
Further permissions questions can be e-mailed to
permissionrequest@cengage.com

Library of Congress Control Number: 2012931473

ISBN-13: 978-1-133-58788-0

ISBN-10: 1-133-58788-7

Wadsworth

20 Channel Center Street
Boston, MA 02210
USA

Cengage Learning is a leading provider of customized learning solutions with office locations around the globe, including Singapore, the United Kingdom, Australia, Mexico, Brazil, and Japan. Locate your local office at **international.cengage.com/region**

Cengage Learning products are represented in Canada by
Nelson Education, Ltd.

For your course and learning solutions, visit **www.cengage.com**

Purchase any of our products at your local college store or at our
preferred online store **www.cengagebrain.com**

Instructors: Please visit **login.cengage.com** and log in to access
instructor-specific resources.

Printed in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 16 15 14 13 12



What Is History?

Every semester in undergraduate historical methods classes across the country, students are asked, “What is history?” Students respond in a variety of ways. “History is everything that has happened in the past.” “History is our interpretation of the past.” “I saw a movie about the American Revolution last night, but it certainly wasn’t historical.” “If you understand the past, you can predict the future.” Each answer may contain some kernel of truth, but none seems to describe precisely what history is. Further reading and class discussion sometimes clarify, but occasionally muddle, the issue. Perhaps the better question would be to ask, “What is history and why do we seem to care so much about it?” In short, what is history, why is understanding history important, and how has our understanding of the past evolved over time?

Throughout the ages, various cultures have told stories about their past. Part entertainment, part chronicle of events, part myth and popular memory, history might offer knowledge about important traditions or teach a moral lesson, but little more. It was not until the nineteenth century that scholars began to recognize the study of the past as a discipline that could provide a perspective for understanding the world in which one lives. As such, **history is not a collection of facts about the past whose primary value is to improve one’s skills while playing trivia games; it is an interpretation of the past based on the weight of the available evidence.** Despite the controversy between those who see history as a science that uncovers universal laws and those who see it as a humanity that engages a combination of reason and imagination to recreate the past, large numbers of well-educated individuals—from political leaders, to businessmen, to lawyers—turn to history for the sense of perspective it provides. Popular claims aside, history cannot predict the future (if it could, professional historians would spend less time in archives and more time at the racetrack),

but it can convey a sense of what is deeply rooted in a culture and what is ephemeral, and by extension what is important and what is not. Historical understanding provides one with a powerful tool for critically thinking about the world in which one lives. And historical interpretations are subject to change. Fifty years ago most American historians believed that the overwhelming majority of colonial Americans were liberal, meaning that they embraced individual rights and participated in early forms of capitalism prior to the American Revolution. More recent research on early America has shown that many colonists placed community values before those of the individual and had only a rudimentary stake in early capitalist enterprises. This reinterpretation challenges Americans armed with an understanding of the past to reconsider a belief that America was born democratic and capitalist. The informed public has a need to understand how past events gave direction to the historical trajectory leading to the present. Only then can one make sense of the factors that give rise to and influence the way people think and act in the contemporary world. History conveys a perspective that enables individuals to understand how a culture or society arrived at the particular historical moment, how it views itself, how it sees its place in the world, and by extension, the likely range of reactions of a society or culture to future events.

THE MISUSE OF HISTORY

Unfortunately, many seek to misuse historical understanding of the past for their own purposes. In some cases, those pursuing pet ideological—particularly political—agendas seek to twist history to suit their own ends. This often is achieved by a variety of means, including tendentious selection and use of evidence (or cherry-picking the facts), choosing myths that suit the argument, or distorting the evidence to achieve the desired end. Such an approach to history may involve imagination, but it is anything but historical, lacking a reasoned or even reputable examination of the evidence. One of the most common misuses of history results from popularly held views about the past. Such views of the past are **popular memory**. Popular memory in Germany, for example, maintains that the German people were not enthusiastic in their support of Nazism, while historical knowledge shows considerable public support for the Nazis in the 1930s. But because of history's powerful ability to legitimize activities or policies, totalitarian regimes such as the Nazis and Soviets sought to abuse history to serve certain political ends. History, which by definition implies historical consciousness, is based on the careful evaluation of available evidence that must be understood within the context of the time it was produced. Such analysis may lead to divergent views from other historians who simply interpret the evidence differently, but it remains an interpretation based on the weight of the evidence.

HOW MUCH CAN WE KNOW OF THE PAST?

In the centuries before the Enlightenment, Western intellectuals conceived of the past as shaped primarily by God's intervention. The late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed a growing awareness of the distinctiveness of the historical past and the process of change over time. The period also embraced a sense of progress characterized by a rejection of the distant past. Since the emergence of a modern historical consciousness in the nineteenth century, the question of how much can be known about the past has challenged those interested in the important lessons history can suggest. Historical knowledge is limited in two ways: by the available sources and by the approach taken by individual historians.

The primary limitation on what can be known of the past is relative to the quantity and quality of available evidence. For some events, particularly those that are more recent, there is a profusion of evidence that can at times be too much for even the most experienced historian to master. For example, anyone studying the role of the Catholic Church in World War II would be overwhelmed by the volume of available primary sources housed in the Vatican Library. But the paucity of evidence often places limits on historians' ability to understand the past. When dealing with the distant past or with groups that left few or no records, it becomes necessary to examine the scarce written evidence in new ways or to use evidence other than the written word. For example, there is an abundance of evidence on President Lyndon Johnson's decision to expand United States involvement in Vietnam, but there is far less material discussing the life of a Chinese peasant during the eighth century CE¹ Tang dynasty in China. Limitations in the quality of evidence, even when there is a relative abundance, may still leave some questions unanswered. But as much as historians might like to establish a sequence of events and motives beyond a shadow of doubt, the threshold for making historical claims is not quite this high. Historians often have to infer from the evidence and make guarded assertions about the past of which they can never be absolutely certain. To make such assertions requires a thorough knowledge of the evidence as well as the ability to imagine some details that may not be directly supported by the existing evidence but that are suggested. Chapter 4 will examine how the historian analyzes such primary sources.

A long-standing philosophical dispute within the profession further limits knowledge of the past. Historians have occasionally made bold proclamations about their discipline, claiming that by employing the scientific method and avoiding personal biases they could uncover historical truths and laws. Still, others dissent, saying that the past has too many variables that allow for little more than the historian's informed impression of the past. Generally, historians fall somewhere on a continuum between these dialectical approaches. At one end of the spectrum are **positivists**, who see history as a scientific endeavor. The positivist approach to history argues that the historian can maintain some semblance of

1. CE refers to the "common era" and is the preferred method of indicating the period traditionally referred to as AD. BCE refers to "before the common era" and has replaced BC in use among historians.

objectivity when evaluating evidence to produce a truthful account of the past that meets a standard for accuracy similar to the hard sciences. Such historians would assert that history is a social science. The second approach to understanding history is known as **historicism**, which derives from the idealist school of philosophy and takes a humanistic approach to the discipline. Historicist-minded historians believe that human societies are too complex, with far too many variables, to be studied like a natural science and that historians' points of view make objectivity difficult. Instead, historicists recognize the distinctiveness of the past and offer an interpretation based on available evidence and the interpretive imagination to offer a carefully reasoned vision of the past based on the weight of the evidence. Such historians see the discipline as a humanity.

Historians from either end of the continuum would agree that an understanding of the **historical context** of a particular time period is imperative. This context, which might be seen as the setting of a period, involves the social, cultural, political, economic, and technological milieu of the day. Among the questions historians should ask are:

- What were the values and beliefs of the time period?
- What type of economy existed; how was wealth distributed?
- What type of political system existed; what did the social structure look like; what was the relationship between genders or differing classes or different ethnicities?
- What were the religious values and mentality of the studied time period?
- What was the basic technological level?

Historical consciousness must be firmly rooted in an understanding of historical context. For example, some Civil War enthusiasts muse that if Confederate military leaders had followed Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson's advice to pursue retreating Union forces following the Battle of Manassas in 1861, Southern armies could have taken Washington, D.C. While such reasoning seems plausible today with the battlefield only a 30-minute drive from the U.S. capital (except during rush hour traffic), such assertions ignore the mid-nineteenth century reality that reaching Washington would have required battle-weary troops to run the equivalent of a marathon after a hard day of fighting—something few inexperienced soldiers (and even fewer Civil War buffs) could accomplish. Only through the establishment of such a context can a historian make sound and fair judgments about the historical past.

THE PROBLEMS OF HISTORICAL INQUIRY

The failure to place events in their appropriate historical context is one of the greatest causes of an **ahistorical** or nonhistorical perspective. Popular conceptions of history are often rife with such ahistorical perspectives. One of the greatest threats to historical understanding is **presentism**, where one assumes that present attitudes and beliefs were the same as those in the past. Such approaches to history are common, but they misread the past by denying what is different or

unique about it. Present-minded approaches to history also assume that the circumstances available to historical characters were similar to those of today and that people in past ages would have reacted to these conditions much as a contemporary person would. England's King Richard the Lionheart should be condemned for his massacre of 2,700 Muslim prisoners in 1191. But one should avoid charging him with a violation of human rights since such concepts did not emerge in Europe until the Enlightenment. Instead, one must remember that in the eyes of contemporaries Richard's participation in the Third Crusade actually provided some legitimacy for his actions. One might still condemn the behavior, primarily as a violation of the Christian virtues Richard swore to defend, but it needs to be done with respect to the historical context.

Another problem for historians relates to **point of view**. A point of view might be something as benign as a mild preference or what one tends to find more believable, or it may be a preference that is closer to a prejudice that influences how one collects and weighs evidence. For example, a historian of American Indians in the modern period would likely possess a very different point of view about Custer's Last Stand than a historian who lived in the late nineteenth century. But can historians balance a point of view with an honest and thorough handling of the evidence? If not, should a historian be allowed to let personal views run amok, interpreting a narrowly selected body of evidence in ways that result in little more than a reflection of the author's own prejudices and self-absorption? Certainly not. But conversely, the holy grail of objectivity is an impossible one to grasp and difficult even to envision. The conflict between subjectivity and objectivity is one of the central debates among historians and one not easily resolved. Historians will always have a point of view that may deeply influence the way they collect and interpret evidence. Whereas historians might find it impossible to eschew their own points of view, they must be aware of their prejudices and guard against letting these intrude into their approach to historical study. Scholars must also be aware of the point of view of particular sources they read. Just because an author of a particular source has certain prejudices does not mean that the source is invalid; it simply means that it must be analyzed with knowledge of the particular point of view and how it may influence the source produced. The tension between objectivity and subjectivity, and the related question of point of view, is best resolved by conducting as exhaustive a search for materials as possible and then offering a critical but fair evaluation of that evidence. The evidence might be tested against a **hypothesis**, or **theory**, but one should avoid simply looking for convenient facts to support a pet idea. Historical research and writing requires hard work, self-knowledge and self-restraint, an understanding of historical context, rigorous analysis of sources, and constant writing, editing, and rewriting before any evidence of historical understanding may be attempted.

THE STUFF OF HISTORY

The methods used by historians to learn about the past are nearly as varied as the number of historians. All historians make use of two general categories of sources. Most students are already familiar with **secondary sources**, which are

chronicles or interpretations of events written after the fact. Books (often referred to as **monographs** because they comprise an extended essay written around a central theme), biographies, and **scholarly journal articles** are perhaps the types of secondary sources that students are familiar with, but the list of secondary sources also includes historical dictionaries and encyclopedias, websites, lectures, and reviews. Secondary sources provide historians, both experienced and beginning, with two very important types of information:

- Secondary sources are useful in providing background information about a topic.
- Secondary sources help to provide **historical context**.

Reading a secondary source can convey a strong sense of a time period and the individual, theme, or event discussed—information that is essential for developing a historical understanding of the period. Because no secondary source is perfect in capturing the essence of a moment, it is essential to read several of the best secondary sources on a subject to begin to capture the flavor and feel of a period. Chapter 3 will explore the identification and evaluation of secondary sources.

Secondary sources also provide a sense of historiographical context. **Historiography**, or the study of the history and methodology of historical interpretation, is of great interest to historians. A careful reading of several secondary sources can convey a sense of how the important questions that preoccupy historians and their resulting interpretations have evolved over time. Evolving methodologies, coupled with changing values and beliefs, affect the types of questions historians ask of the past. An understanding of historiography demonstrates what questions have received considerable or scanty attention and reveals aspects of the past that demand scrutiny. For example, prevailing views toward the institution of apartheid in South Africa came under global attack during the era of decolonization. Possessing a different mindset than their predecessors and armed with new methodologies that enabled them to go beyond the accounts of white South Africans, a generation of historians revolutionized our understanding of the institution.

In addition to developing a mastery of the secondary sources, a historian must conduct an exhaustive search for **primary sources** that can be carefully analyzed. Primary sources are the forms of evidence contemporary to the event or process described. Although secondary evidence is essential to the historian, primary sources are the stuff from which history is written. Historians have traditionally used written primary sources, some of which are published, and others that are in manuscript form. These include diaries, official records, private correspondence, newspapers, memoirs, autobiographies, tax records, census materials, and wills. More recently, historians have begun to expand this list of sources to include cartoons, movies, fiction, architecture, art, and cultural artifacts. Historians use primary sources to piece together an interpretation of the past that can be supported by the weight of available evidence. It might be best to think of secondary sources as serving as a guide and introduction to a particular topic, but

the primary evidence is the actual material from which one can make generalizations and assertions.

THE HISTORY OF HISTORICAL WRITING: AN OVERVIEW

Although the public generally conceives of history as a nonfiction **narrative** largely devoid of interpretation, historical study requires interpretation. Because of this, historical interpretation has changed over the years. Historical understanding as currently conceived began in the early nineteenth century with the Romantic Movement and the associated rise of romantic nationalism. At a time when German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel offered the concept of the *volkgeist* (loosely translated as “spirit of the people”), it became important to discern what that spirit was. History, with its emphasis on the common experience that bonded a people together, became a pillar of this new ideology. In some nineteenth century countries, historians played important roles in fashioning how a culture thought about itself, nowhere more so than in Czechoslovakia, where the historian František Palacký became the father of Czech nationalism.

It was also during the nineteenth century that a modern way of thinking about the past and writing history was born. While the roots of this approach can be found in the ideas of eighteenth and early nineteenth century philosophers, the first to offer an approach to the study of history was Leopold von Ranke, a German scholar. While Ranke was more interested in looking to the past to discover the handiwork of a Christian god, his sense that each past age was distinct (a concept known as **historicism**) and that past events shaped what came later brought about the first understanding of history’s significance. Ranke argued that while the historian could attempt to understand the past on its own terms, it required a certain leap of imagination. More important than Ranke’s philosophical position was his methodology, both as a historian and an instructor. Ranke’s method, which in turn became the standard for the profession, rested on rigorous examination and critical evaluation of written primary sources synthesized into a scholarly presentation for a research seminar. This seminar enabled students to more fully engage the sources and deconstruct the weaknesses of one another’s ideas in order to produce a more accurate representation of the past.

Ranke’s method survived, but his philosophical approach to history came under attack by the late nineteenth century. In an era when science seemed capable of unlocking all of the universe’s secrets, historians enlisted scientific approaches in a quest for truth. For example, Karl Marx developed a universal theory for understanding the past based on its relationship to the means of production and class struggle, while Henry Adams applied the Second Law of Thermodynamics to understanding the Jefferson and Madison administrations. The seminar survived, but the earlier historicism of Ranke had yielded to

a **positivist** interpretation of history. **Positivism** claimed to be objective and, in the extreme, argued that by using the scientific method historians could efface themselves of their biases, report what had occurred, and ultimately uncover laws of human behavior. By claiming to be scientific, historians could confidently make truthful claims about the past.

If the positivists were right, ultimately all historians would come to the same conclusions because they sought objective universal laws. But such a claim would be hard to support. The first serious attacks against positivist-minded historians came from the **Progressive** school. The Progressives included important philosophers such as John Dewey; the most important progressive historians were Charles Beard, Carl Becker, and James Harvey Robinson. Progressive historians, reacting against the certitudes of late nineteenth century thought, sought to examine the historical roots of social problems. They shifted attention from the study of politics and the state to the study of society. In addition, the methodologies of the emerging social sciences were especially attractive to the Progressives. This increasingly interdisciplinary approach, coupled with a shift of focus, led to controversial findings. Beard's *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* replaced the historical orthodoxy that viewed America's founders as great men who disinterestedly implemented the American system of government with an interpretation that the founders pursued a stronger central government as a means to secure their own financial interests. Robinson's efforts led to the creation of the "new history," which sought to more carefully examine society. By the 1920s, studies of everyday life appeared in both U.S. and European history. The Progressives' skepticism about the scientific claims of earlier historians ultimately led Carl Becker to claim in his 1932 presidential address to the American Historical Association, entitled "Everyman His Own Historian," that history is "an imaginative creation" derived from individual experience. Such statements reveal the growing relativism embraced by historians who believed that the author's point of view often colored the final interpretation.²

Historical writing took a decidedly different turn following World War II. The effort required to defeat the Axis powers caused historians to reflect on the common values that united Americans rather than the differences that divided them, so they began to look for that common thread of unity. The events of the Cold War reinforced this theme. The so-called **consensus** historians would assert that despite some differences, Americans had throughout their history been united around the concept of liberal democracy. Louis Hartz's *The Liberal Tradition in America* and many of Richard Hofstadter's works emphasized the basic agreement on core liberal (individual political and economic rights) principles from America's founding to the present. The consensus historians were challenged on a variety of fronts during the 1960s. The growth and democratization of the academy

2. Charles A. Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1913); James Harvey Robinson, *The New History: Essays Illustrating the Modern Historical Outlook* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1912); This essay appeared as Carl L. Becker, "Everyman His Own Historian," *The American Historical Review* 37, no. 2 (January 1932): 221–236; Arthur M. Schlesinger and Dixon Ryan Fox, series eds., *History of American Life*, 12 vols., (New York: Macmillan Co., 1927–1944).

(community of professional historians) generated far more scholarship than in previous generations, and the types of questions being asked changed dramatically as well.³

Several schools of thought emerged during the 1960s that transformed how historians saw the past. One of the most important of these was Marxism. Although always evident in historical study, Marxist approaches to history had been something of an intellectual backwater in Great Britain and the United States before World War II. But the splintering of the British Communist Party in 1956 enabled new forms of Marxism and Marxist historiography to flourish. Most important among the early British Marxists was Edward P. Thompson. His study, *The Making of the English Working Class*, carefully chronicled the rise of the English working class unified by a class consciousness, persuasively arguing that it was tied to the greater structure of production. The importance of this work rested both with its subject matter, which shifted attention from rulers to the less articulate members of society, as well as its dynamic presentation of class relationships in nineteenth century Britain. The work is also distinguished by the kinds of evidence used to present its historical argument. Thompson's work deeply influenced the study of labor in postcolonial societies throughout the world. The emergence of Marxism in British historical writing also clearly influenced a second, somewhat related intellectual movement in the United States, the New Left.⁴

New Left historians in the United States drew inspiration from the Students for a Democratic Society's (SDS) call for the rejection of impersonal corporate society and sought a similarly inclusive, democratic interpretation of the American past. The New Left view of history saw more conflict than consensus in studies that broke new ground in the examination of slavery, race, ethnicity, class, and later gender. Many New Left historians embraced the methods of social scientists, believing that such approaches offered greater certainty for historical claims than could be made by previous generations of historians. In particular, the use of statistics and mathematical models held out the promise of realizing the positivist dream of uncovering historical truths.⁵

A third approach to history that challenged tradition was the Annales school. The Annales approach to history began with French historians Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch in 1929. Rebelling against the focus on politics and

3. Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955); Hofstadter's two most important works that set the stage for the consensus school are Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948); *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F. D. R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955).

4. Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963).

5. The term *New Left* became popular during the 1960s to categorize an emerging generation of historians who criticized the consensus school of the previous decade. These revisionists ran the gamut from disillusioned liberals to Marxists. Some of the more prominent New Left historians are Eugene Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Society and Economy of the Slave South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965); Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976); Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of American Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900–1916* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963); and William A. Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: Dell Publishers, 1962).

government, *Annales* historians sought to write “total history” that examined history over *la longue durée* (the long term). Their interest in studying the rhythms of everyday life and recapturing the *mentalité* of an era is perhaps best captured in the works of Febvre’s student Fernand Braudel. The *Annales* approach to history influenced a growing number of British and American historians. The focus on change over the long term was particularly congenial to those whose focus was on the history of previously inarticulate groups such as slaves, women, and workers using a new array of sources such as diaries, wills, and census data.⁶

The simultaneous emergence and overlapping interests (and conclusions) of these three schools (Marxist, New Left, and *Annales*) led historians of one approach to borrow promiscuously from the others. Combined, these trends helped give rise to a wave of the new histories. Perhaps most significant was the “new social history.” What characterized the new social history, whatever the approach, was the interest in previously inarticulate groups as a means to both democratize and flesh out the historical understanding of the past as well as the identification of new methods for reconstructing the past. Social historians sought to reconstruct lives previously unrepresented but also to uncover historical social structures as well. Each of these trends that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s made varying claims to recreate the past in an objective manner. But the variability of their findings undermined such claims.

The social scientific approach borrowed by all three schools, and the claims of scientific objectivity made in particular by Marxists and New Left American historians soon came under attack. The book that questioned historians’ claims of objectivity and truth-seeking was Thomas Kuhn’s *On the Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Kuhn showed that scientific explanations of how the universe works, such as Sir Isaac Newton’s theory of gravity, were not immutable truths but instead the best interpretations that could be made based on the available evidence. Kuhn demonstrated that, over time, scientists uncovered information that challenged important theories of how the universe worked, but the theory would hold with some qualifications until the weight of dissenting evidence forced a reinterpretation. According to Kuhn, the truth was merely what appeared to be true relative to one’s point of observation based on the available evidence. In challenging the truth claims of the hard sciences, Kuhn created doubt for those making similar claims in history and the social sciences. Such relativism and skepticism opened the door for **postmodern theory** that came into vogue in recent years.⁷

6. The *Annales* school emerged with the establishment of the journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* (*Annals of Economic and Social History*) in 1929. The *Annales* school is closely associated with founders Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, trans. L. A. Manyon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); *The Historian's Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam (New York: Vintage Books, 1953); Lucien Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*, trans. Beatrice Gottlieb (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); and Febvre’s student, Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 3 vols., trans. Siân Reynolds (New York: Harper and Row, 1972) and *Civilization and Capitalism: 15th to 18th Century*, 3 vols., trans. Siân Reynolds (New York: Harper and Row, 1982–1984).

7. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

HYPOTHESIS AND THEORY

The public's image of what constitutes history might actually be closer to non-fiction literature than what most historians do for a living. While nonfiction narratives of the past will always be popular with the reading public, few professional historians today approach history in such a manner. Nonfiction literature alone, while highly informative and entertaining, often falls short of the discipline's claims of offering a critical perspective of the past. The modern historian must do more than merely recite the facts and recount tales of past events. But how does one discern patterns from the complex, convoluted mix of evidence about the past? One of the most common ways in which historians attempt to make sense of this jumble is through the use of a **hypothesis**. Much as a scientist makes preliminary observations and develops a hypothesis to test in a laboratory, the historian should begin to develop a hypothesis after preliminary reading of important secondary sources. **This hypothesis, or central question, must then be tested against the primary evidence. It should not become an end to be proven by a careful selection of only that evidence that fits a preconceived notion or pet argument.** For example, some preliminary reading about the causes of the American Revolution might suggest that a hypothesis focusing on ideological conflicts between Parliament and colonial elites was a key factor in the Revolution. But if an examination of the evidence points in other directions, it may be necessary to modify the developing argument or change it altogether. Ultimately, a hypothesis will evolve into a **historical argument** (sometimes called a **thesis**) that is based on the weight of the evidence. But how does one develop a hypothesis? Many historians find theory a useful tool to develop central questions to test against the evidence.

Theory is useful in that it helps to give form to the questions asked of the past and imposes some discipline on the historians' approach to the evidence. The use of theory remains controversial to some, who assert that it is often imposed on the past, resulting in selective cherry-picking of evidence to suit the theory. If used responsibly with a full examination of all evidence, however, such an approach can result in new ways to understand various aspects of the past. Indeed, even historians who eschew the use of theory and prefer to provide a narrative that stands alone often espouse views that are vaguely informed by theory. As such, theory is a tool for understanding, not a replacement for critical analysis and synthesis of the evidence.

The varieties of theory are numerous. Although this text will not carefully review each theory or privilege one approach above another, it is important that beginning scholars have some appreciation of major theoretical approaches. Some of the most important theories traditionally employed by historians are rooted in the works of Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim.

Karl Marx's ideas are often dismissed today because of the economic and political failures of communism in the late twentieth century, but as a tool for understanding the past, Marx has been highly influential. According to Marx, a society could only be understood through examining its means of production. His scientific view of history held that all elements within a society—its values, ideology, politics, social structure—resulted from the means of economic

production. Such an approach may seem rigidly determinist, but it does provide a metatheory for understanding the dynamics of a past society. Max Weber was a German sociologist writing in the early twentieth century. His most famous work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904–1905), responds to Marxist claims of economic materialism by pointing out the ideological factors that contributed to early capitalism as a rational form of modernization. Weber's ideas contributed to the emergence of modernization theory, which looked at social upheaval and dislocation as part of the modernization process. Émile Durkheim, also a contemporary of Weber, responded to problems he saw in Marxist analysis. Writing in late nineteenth century France, Durkheim's emphasis on changing long-term processes and their impact on individuals and communities provided inspiration for the Annales school.⁸

More recently, historians have turned in other directions for theories to aid the process of historical understanding. Anthropology has made important contributions. Clifford Geertz disagreed with the scientific claims of his own and other disciplines. Rather than uncovering laws of a culture through careful observation of methodology, Geertz argued that one can uncover meaning (rather than causation) through "thick description" that set behavior in a context that made it understandable to an outsider. Victor Turner's studies of symbols and rituals provided yet another approach for understanding culture. These ideas provided historians with greater interpretive freedom and helped to popularize the study of cultural history. These approaches also led some historians to shift their efforts from uncovering cause and effect to a search for meaning.⁹

One of the most controversial theoretical approaches is **postmodernism**. Postmodern theory was largely a French creation most closely identified with the philosophers Jacques Derrida and sometimes Michel Foucault. Emerging in post-World War II (and soon to be postcolonial) France, it challenged widely held assumptions about the ability to reason. Amorphous in nature and difficult to characterize, postmodernism often rejects historians' ability to produce accurate truth claims about the past. For postmodernists, fragmentary evidence and the inability of an observer to escape his or her point of view makes the past unknowable. Instead, they believe that history is little more than an aesthetic representation of the past that reveals more about the author than the period discussed. At face value, such claims appear to question the very legitimacy of historical inquiry as traditionally practiced and imply that the doctrine of rational inquiry rooted in the Enlightenment is something of a dead letter. One of the most common applications of the postmodern approach is seen in the linguistic turn, most often associated with American literary historian Hayden White. First

8. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, ed. Friedrich Engels, trans. Samuel Moore, Edward Aveling, Marie Sackey, and Herbert Lamm (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952); Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, trans. George Simpson (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1949); Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons, with a foreword by R. H. Tawney (New York: Scribner's, 1930).

9. Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," "Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight," *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, comp. Clifford Geertz (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974).

emerging with the new literary historians during the 1970s and 1980s, proponents of the linguistic turn argue that the instability and fluidity of language hides more about the past than it reveals and that interpretation of narratives reveals more about the author than about the narratives in question. Proponents of this approach ultimately deem the past unknowable from the perspective of scientific truth and instead deconstruct texts to recover multiple, often obscure meanings. From their perspective, there is no historical truth.

Although extreme applications of such ideas might seem ahistorical and even illogical, the implications of postmodern theory have actually been important to historians. For example, postmodernists have pointed out the elasticity of meaning for categories of analysis such as gender, race, class, and ethnicity. Many historians influenced by postmodern ideas have begun to more carefully examine the meaning of these culturally defined concepts and the context that defines them, greatly enriching historical understanding.¹⁰

THE HISTORICAL ARGUMENT

History then, is clearly the search for a usable past that can help us make sense of the world in which we live. And given the numerous theoretical and methodological approaches employed by historians, a cursory review of historical writing on any period will reveal a wide variety of historical interpretations. Ultimately historians develop what some might call a thesis or hypothesis about how and why events transpired as they did. We prefer to use the term *historical argument*. By *historical argument*, we do not imply that historians spend a good portion of their time shouting at one another (although this does occur at the occasional professional conference). Instead, a historical argument is simply a historian's explanation of cause and effect or the meaning of an event that is based upon the weight of the evidence. While it may seem as if the discipline of the evidence would drive most arguments in the same direction, the differing ways in which individual historians weigh that evidence allows for a wide array of interpretations.

THE VARIETIES OF HISTORY

Because educated people believe that history provides a sense of perspective to understand the present and how society arrived at a particular point in time, there are many different types of history. Traditionally, the dominant area of

10. Jacques Derrida is often called the "father of postmodernism." His major works include Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973); Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970); *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972); Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975); *Topics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Keith Jenkins, *Refiguring History: New Thoughts on an Old Discipline* (London: Routledge, 2003).

historical inquiry has been **political history**. Believing that important questions in a society were ultimately determined in the political arena, political historians tend to examine the great statesmen and their impact in shaping events or to look at the rise of political parties or ideologies. Political history practiced in such a way relies on readily available forms of evidence such as state papers, autobiographies, memoirs, and newspapers chronicling the leading figures of a particular period. **Military history**, **diplomatic history**, and the **history of empire and colonialism** were in many ways derived from political history, with a focus shifted from great political leaders to generals, foreign policy leaders, or colonial officials. Another traditional approach employed by historians is to examine the great ideas that influenced a culture or nation. **Intellectual history** examines the great philosophers to understand the ideas that they contributed. In some ways, the early study of **religious history** fused these approaches in the examination of leading clerical figures, religious institutions, and beliefs.

Each of these approaches offers important insights into the topics they examine, but they suffer from what some would later refer to as a “top down bias.” The problem with focusing on leading figures of society is that often many groups are left out of the story. Historians eager to understand the conditions that shaped past lives often look to **economic history**. This approach not only sheds light on past economic trends and conditions, but borrowing methodology from economists offers a higher threshold of certainty in the claims one could make about the past. In some ways, economic history opened the door to **social history**. Although initially written as a narrative to describe the everyday lives of people, in the last 40 years social historians have sought to understand history from the bottom up as well as trying to understand the demography, social structures, and *mentalités* within a society. Social history eventually wrote many groups into history, including racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants, African Americans, women, the family, workers, and more recently gays and lesbians. Many of these oppositional histories have, as their opponents often claim, a political agenda that seeks to use history to advance a present-day issue, but similar claims could easily be made of the elite-centered history practiced by earlier generations of historians. Simply put, if history helps to provide perspective, then the types of questions raised will always have political overtones. Social historians have made immense contributions to fleshing out the historical record and in offering a deeper and richer context to what is known of the past. They have helped answer the question, “Whose history?”

While the emergence of social history has greatly enriched the understanding of past societies, its main contribution may have been methodological. In order to uncover the history of the inarticulate, social historians turned to non-traditional forms of evidence such as demographic data (census and tax records), wills, and oral history, and employed methodologies from the social sciences to reconstruct the past lives of these groups. The emphasis of many of these

monographs has been on group or collective biography.¹¹ While more traditional branches of history may have criticized the use of such forms of evidence, it was not long before political historians were looking at voting records to determine mass political behavior, military historians were examining the cultural aspects of a nation's approach to war, intellectual historians were carefully setting important thinkers in their social and cultural milieu, historians of colonialism were examining the response of the colonized, and religious historians were trying to discern the faith of the common people. **Cultural history**, as practiced by followers of the Annales school and more recently by proponents of post-modernism, has emerged as an important approach to understanding the past. The interpretation of cultural artifacts carefully placed within a historical context has offered profound new insights into the historical past.

Finally, the areas that historians focus on are virtually unlimited in scope. Some historians carefully examine an event or a specific cultural setting in an effort to better understand the past. Such studies tend to focus intently on the local and the particular and extrapolate from there. Other historians may focus on a narrow subject but look at change or persistence over an extended period of time. Yet other historians look broadly at trends within a society that are part of a larger regional or even global perspective.

THE PUBLIC AND HISTORY

Given the important role that history plays in helping people understand their place in the world, the search for a usable past cannot be confined to the walls of the academy. Historians must be evangelical with their discoveries. Besides, the public has a real thirst for historical knowledge. Nothing proves this point more than the popularity of the History Channel. The History Channel shows both the problems and promise of historians' effort to reach a mass audience. Some shows offer speculative (and in some cases crackpot) approaches to important historical events, spinning highly questionable arguments supported with questionable use of evidence; others offer well-researched and carefully reasoned arguments presented in a visual format. As a consumer of historical knowledge, it is important to use the same techniques of historical criticism (outlined in Chapters 3 and 4) as one would use when reading secondary or primary sources.

The implications of social and cultural history have helped fuel the proliferation of living history museums and historical buildings that carefully reconstruct past lives for present consumption. This has contributed to the rise of **public history** as yet another field of historical inquiry. But again, not all museums and interpretations are created equal; some are supported by the

11. The technical term for collective biography used by historians is *prosopography*.

force of deep research and historical reasoning, thereby enriching the public, while a handful of others offer little more than flimsy opinions that merely stoke popular memory rather than offering anything resembling historical understanding.

THE INTEGRITY OF HISTORY

Historians continuously seek as accurate an understanding of the past as they can find. Given the important role that history plays within a society, few things are more paramount than the level of integrity involved in this search. Certainly, historical arguments will differ, but one must be scrupulous in citing the sources. And one cannot select from those sources the ones that support a pet notion or belief, but instead the historian must consider all of the evidence that is available. One of the ways in which historians can demonstrate such scrupulousness is through the citation of sources. Careful and detailed citing of sources not only underscores this integrity but also provides a roadmap for other historians to retrace. The antithesis of this integrity can be found in the age-old problem of **plagiarism**. Plagiarism is act of presenting someone else's work or ideas as one's own. As such, it is a fundamentally dishonest act that strikes at the heart of intellectual honesty and integrity. Often, plagiarism results from cutting and pasting from websites, books, or periodicals in which a dishonest student pieces together the work and ideas of others as his or her own. Such efforts in the age of the Internet are foolhardy, however, given the proliferation of computer programs such as TurnitinSafely or Viper that enable one to easily discover what is original and what is "borrowed." So how does one avoid plagiarizing? Taking good notes that clearly show what is quoted from a source and what is paraphrased is helpful, but the best piece of advice is to carefully cite from the sources consulted.

THE WORLD OF HISTORY

The approaches employed by historians and the types of questions that historians ask about the past are numerous and varied. Most historians' inquiry into the past focuses on some combination of place (such as a region, nation, or subcontinent), time period, or theme. Most historical writing began by focusing on the nation-state. Although **national history** may not be as popular as it once was, in many areas, particularly the United States, it remains a staple of the profession. **Regional and local history** is in many ways a subgenre of national history. Some historians have moved past the boundaries of the nation-state to examine historical events from a continental or global perspective. **World or global history** has increasingly displaced the traditional study of **Western civilization** as an undergraduate staple while simultaneously redefining how historians of all types think about their area of study. Focus on global regions such as the Atlantic

world or the Islamic world offers historians the opportunity to see a larger picture. The practice of using a particular theme to discern a larger picture has contributed to the growing popularity of **comparative history**.

Historians often categorize themselves by their periods of expertise. Traditionally, historical periodization was pegged to political movements or dynasties or, in the case of premodern periods, broad expanses of time characterized by similar institutions that reflected the idiosyncrasies of a particular place. In the United States, historians claimed to be experts on the Colonial Period or the Gilded Age; in Britain, there are Tudor–Stuart specialists, and in both could be found ancient and medieval scholars. Increasingly, social and cultural historians—with their interest in looking at change over time—have stretched, redefined, and in some cases shattered traditional periodization. Thus, the Age of Jackson has increasingly given way to the Market Revolution, and the Victorian Era has been supplanted by the Industrial Revolution. Many historians refuse identification with a time period. Instead, their primary approach is thematic, leading them to identify themselves as scholars of gender history, economic history, or religious history. Regardless of field or approach, all historians are united in their efforts to add to knowledge of the past through a rigorous approach to historical research, analysis, and writing.

THE HARD WORK OF HISTORY: RESEARCH, ANALYSIS, WRITING

No introduction to the study of history would be complete without a discussion of the requirements of producing a historical essay. Even after carefully reading and rereading the secondary literature; after hours and hours of painstaking research in libraries, archives, museums, government offices, and online; after consideration of the historiography, methodology, and theory; the historian's work has only begun. No serious actor appears on stage after one rehearsal, no serious athlete competes for a championship after one practice, and no serious historian presents his or her conclusions after one draft. The process of producing history is, as the old aphorism claims, "1 percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration."

Writing history should be thought of as a conversation with both the secondary and primary sources, and indeed with yourself and what you think about the event in question. The only way to make sense of what one really believes and what can be legitimately asserted about the past is to work these ideas out critically. For the seeds of an idea about the past to bloom into a full-blown interpretation, it will be necessary to commit one's ideas to paper in a preliminary way, to constantly test these ideas against the evidence, to subject one's developing argument to other historians who can point out strengths and weaknesses, and to constantly respond to this ongoing conversation through more drafting and editing. But remember, no essay is perfect—at some point, either because of a deadline or perhaps your own weariness, you will have to

complete it. However, if you follow the advice found in the ensuing chapters, you will be rewarded with a sense of self-satisfaction that results from a demonstration of acute skills of research, analysis, and synthesis and from mastery of the subject matter.

SUGGESTED READINGS

- Appleby, Joyce, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob. *Telling the Truth about History*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1994.
- Brown, Callum. *Postmodernism for Historians*. New York: Pearson/Longman 2005.
- Himmelfarb, Gertrude. *The New History and the Old: Critical Essays and Reappraisals*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987.
- Iggers, George G. *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005.
- Molho, Anthony and Gordon Wood, eds. *Imagined Histories: American Historians Interpret Their Past*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- Novick, Peter. *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Wilson, Norman J. *History in Crisis?: Recent Directions in Historiography*, 2nd ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999.