

# A Living Perspective on History

Jacob Liao  
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Go to [pollev.com/jacobliao040](https://pollev.com/jacobliao040) or scan the  
QR code for a pre-class survey!



# Self Introduction

Jacob Liao

耶魯大學 Yale University

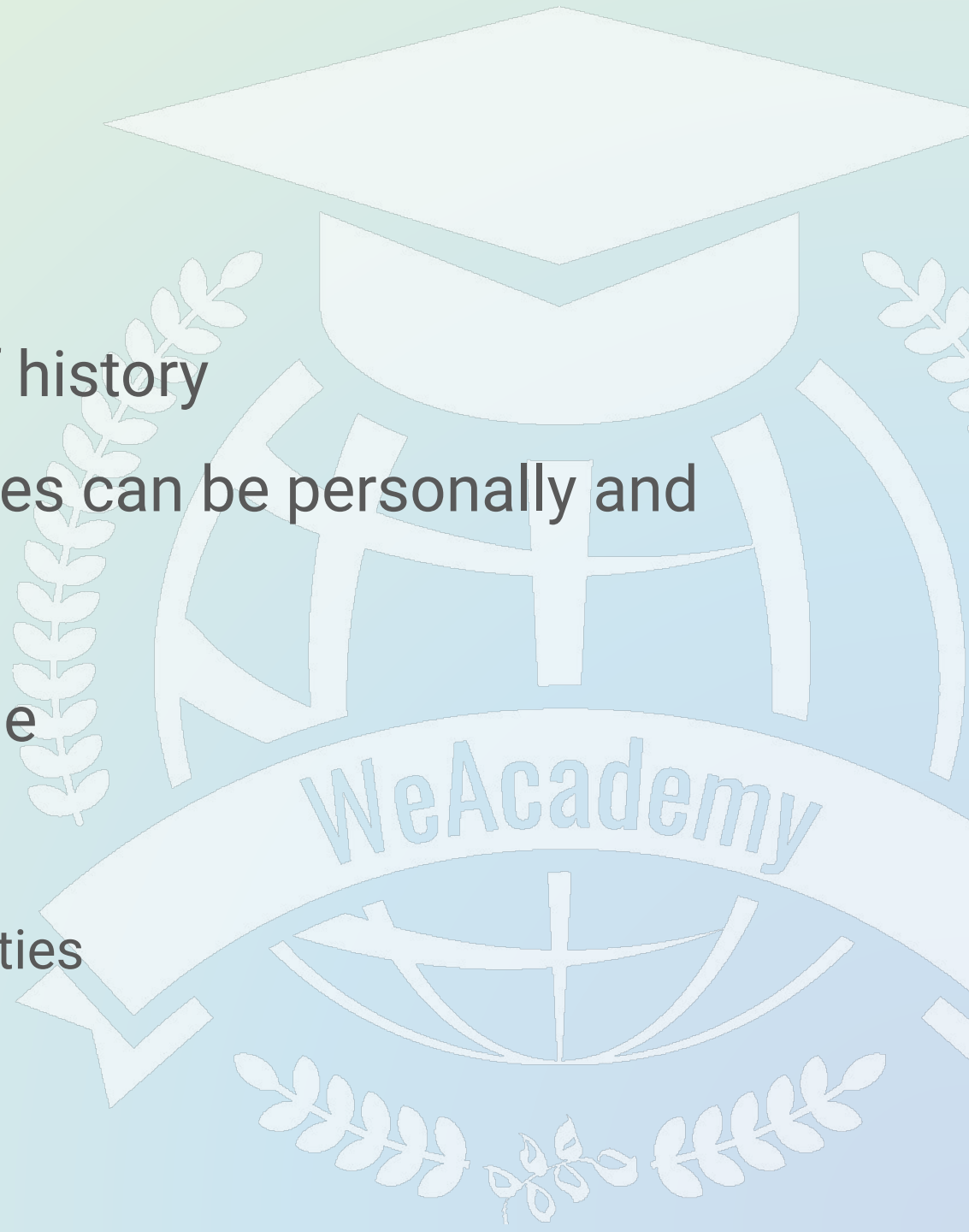
Molecular, Cellular, & Developmental Biology and Applied Mathematics

- Taiwanese American
  - Born in Palo Alto, California
  - Lived in Taiwan for 8 years
- Policy Debater in High School (CFL League)
- Yale MUN Chair for League of Arab States RB
- WEMUN EXPO Chair for ESCAP RB



# Course Goal

- Examine philosophical importance of history
- Understand how historical perspectives can be personally and politically relevant
- Want it to be as interactive as possible
  - Ask me as many questions as you need!
  - Will have two group presentations activities



# Course Guidelines

- Ask questions!
  - No question is a stupid question
- Don't say anything that will discourage other people from participating
- Discuss the slides with each other!
  - Numbered discussions: Discuss with your number!
  - Table discussions: Explain the slides to each other
  - Chinese is OK in discussion
- I will share a PDF of the slides





# Outline:

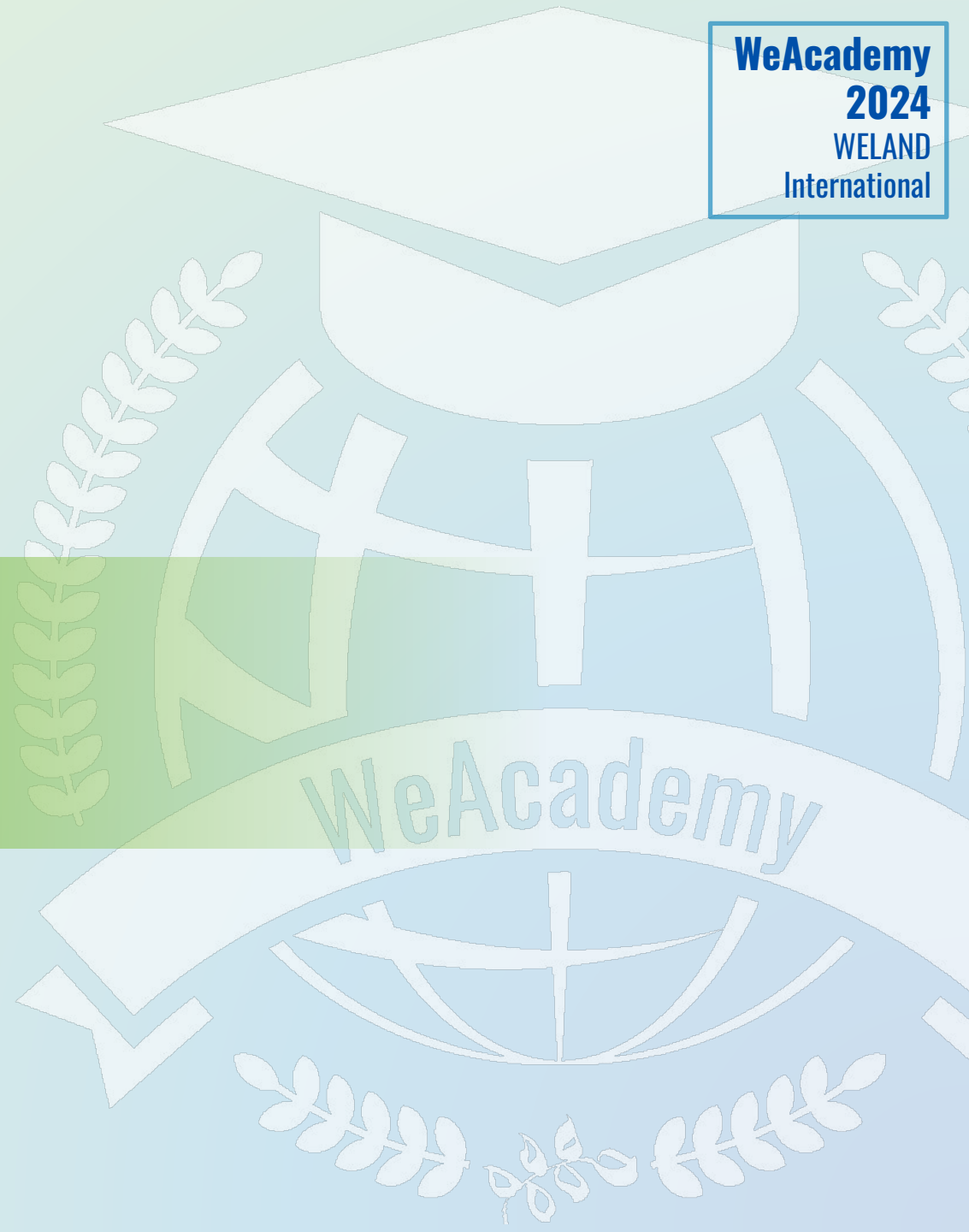
## Session 1:

- Icebreakers
- Lecture: implications of history
- Group presentations on prominent historians
- Assignment: incongruent news articles

## Session 2:

- Icebreakers
- Lecture: looking at policies
- Group presentations on policy case studies
- Q&A / Discussion (depending on time)

# Session 1



# Icebreaker



# What is history?

- Second [pollev.com/jacob040](https://pollev.com/jacob040) survey
- Dictionary definitions:
  - “the study of past events, particularly in human affairs”
  - “a continuous, typically chronological, record of important or public events or of a particular trend or institution”





# A “Historical Individual”

- Ontology: philosophical study of being
  - Classes: groups that can be described by their properties
  - Individuals: “objects” that cannot be described by their properties
- Historical individual
  - No universal properties can provide a basis for generalization
  - Someone, or something with a story



# Exercise: Spiderman as a Historical Individual

Where is he from?

How do people know him?

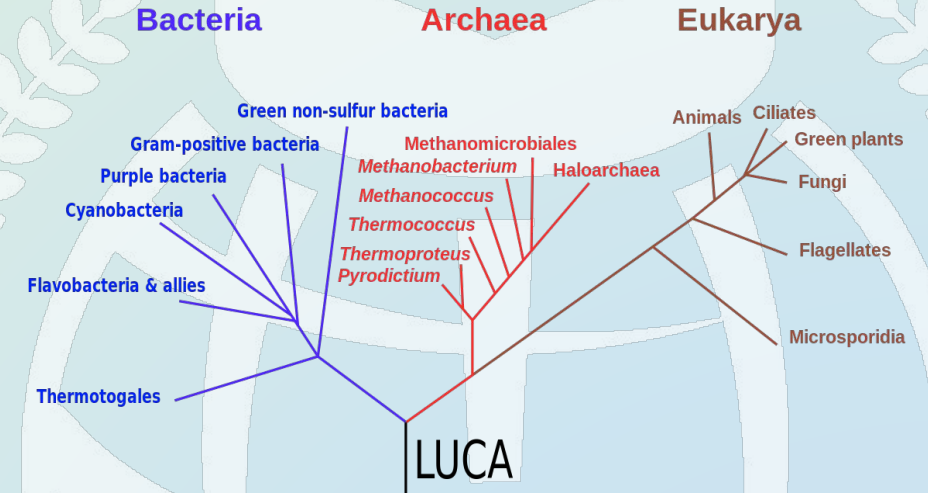
Where does he work?

What do people think of him  
(and why)?



# History (& its Nuance) Applies to Broad Disciplines

- Governance
- Science: what are we?
  - Biology: life is united by a common origin
  - Cosmology: the study of how the universe came to be
- Engineering & Mathematics: convention and precedence
- Music: different periods/cultural trends





# History is Unique to Humans

- We are the only species capable of meaningfully conceptualizing the past
  - Awareness of cause and effect
    - Elephants/Great Apes/Cetaceans/Birds also have this ability
  - Reflection of self
  - Ability to communicate our thoughts—stories may pass through time



# History is Unique to Humans

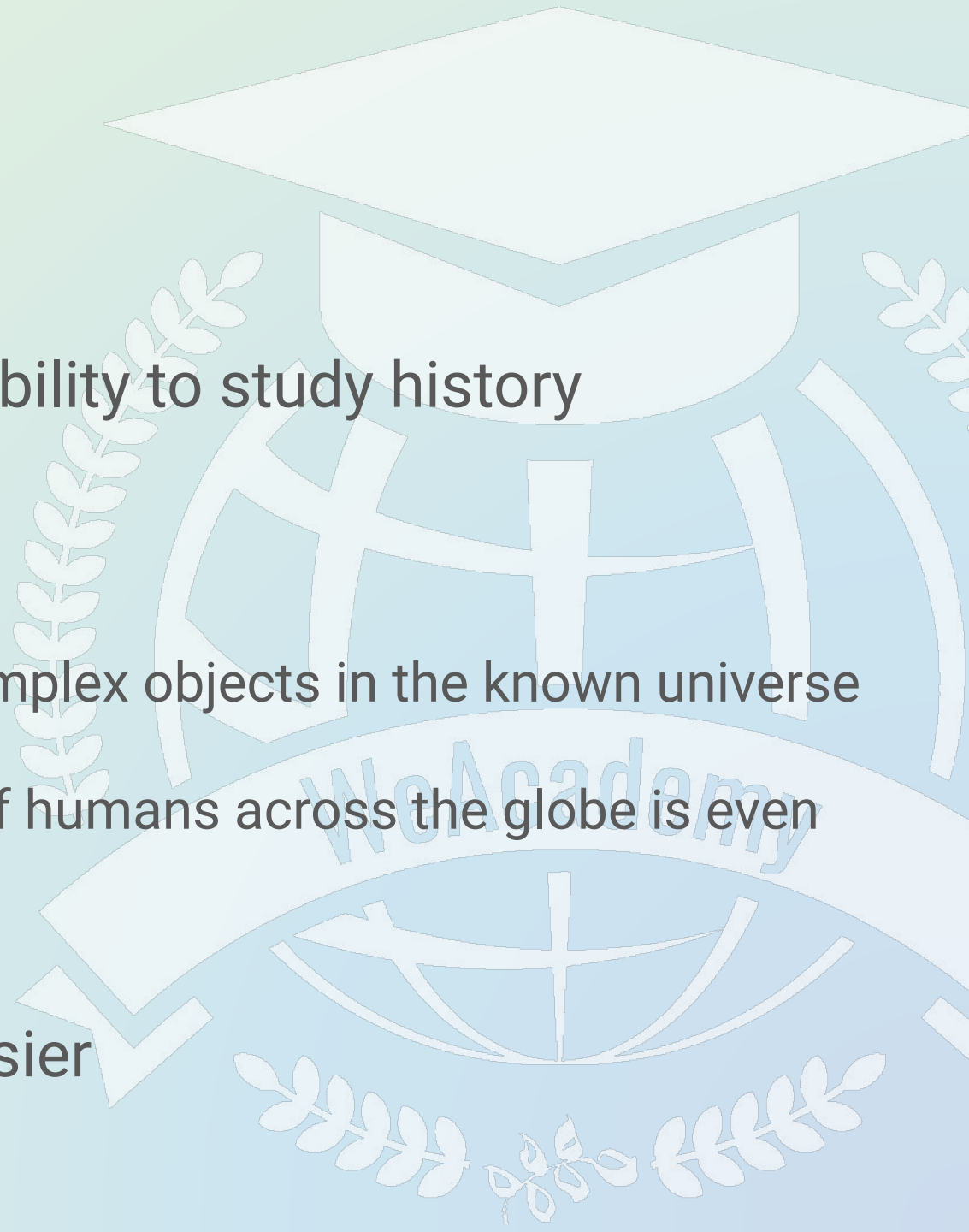
- Technologies that enable us to convey and preserve information are critical for advancing civilization
  - Ancient Mesopotamia: Bulla
  - Paper
  - Computers, electronic storage
  - The permanence of the technology itself
    - “Roman concrete”





# History makes us powerful

- We are unique—and powerful in our ability to study history
- Being a human is hard
  - Your brains are considered the most complex objects in the known universe
  - Being part of communication network of humans across the globe is even more complicated
- Using history makes your job a bit easier



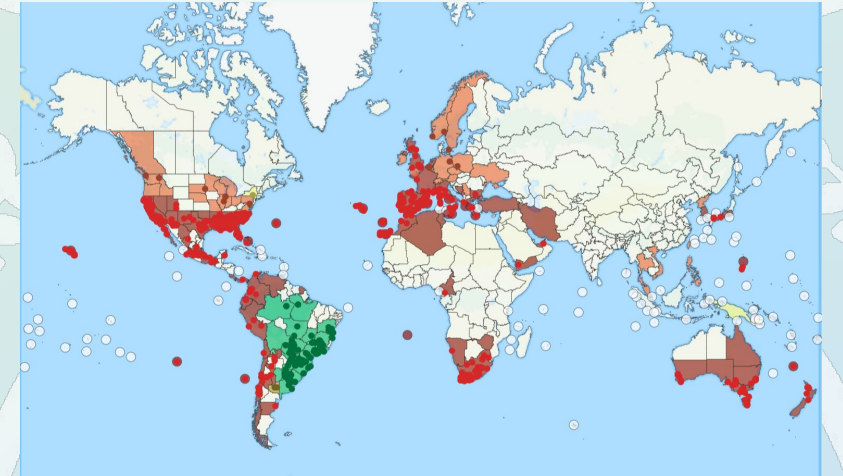
# How do we think about history?

- The study of humans and what it means to be human
  - A source of empathy
- A way to come to terms with mortality
  - History is important because existence is important
- “If only we could know the future”
- No one can perfectly chronicle of the past
  - History is **nuanced** and brief



# Argentine Ants and Xenophobia?

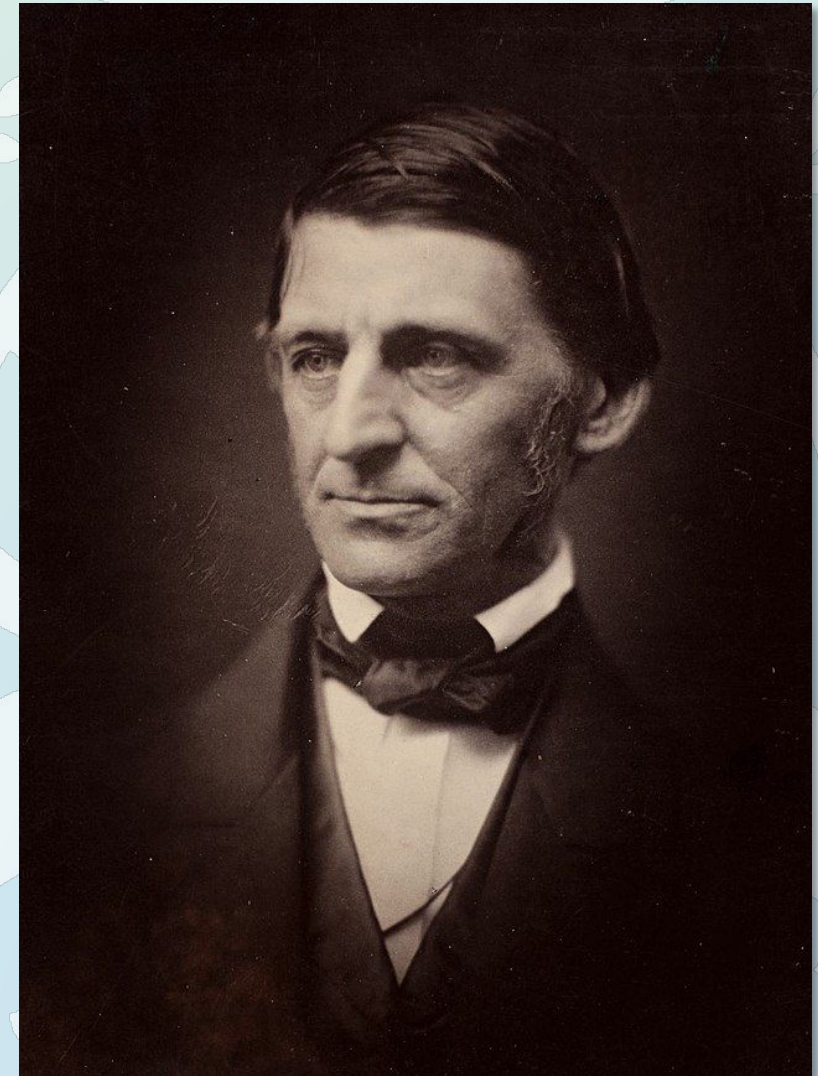
- *Linepithema humile*, very significant pest problem in the west
- Unlike many other ant species, invasive Argentine ants don't attack neighboring colonies
  - Form massive populations with billions of queens
  - Smithsonian scientist Mark Moffett termed as "supercolonies"
- Received significant pushback from Stanford Professor Deborah Gordon
  - Claimed supercolonies were conjectured from a wave of xenophobia during the 2016 US presidential elections
  - Believe that this stigmatized South American immigrants as a "cooperative group" trying to take down the US





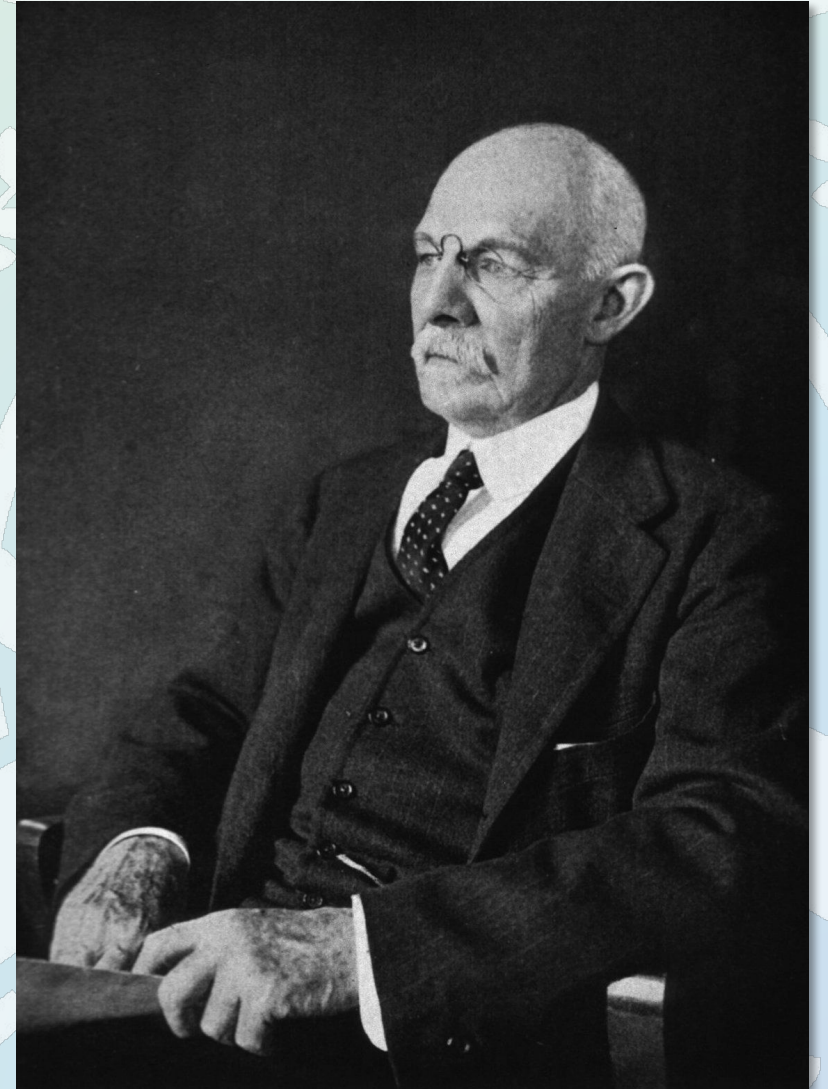
# History is based on human perspective

- Whether or not Gordon's criticism is true:
  - Our experiences and beliefs have a large impact on how we examine the world around us, even if these beliefs are subtle
- "There is properly no history, only biography" -Ralph Waldo Emerson
  - Represents not only the history itself, but also the historian
- How can we embrace this human perspective in history?
  - Acknowledge and contextualize the background



# History is Written By the Winners

- Roman victories: Livy and Tacitus
- Atomic bomb: justification of Hiroshima & Nagasaki
- Tradition: survivors tell the tale
  - “Traditional medicine”
- Treating breast cancer
  - William Stewart Halsted’s radical mastectomy



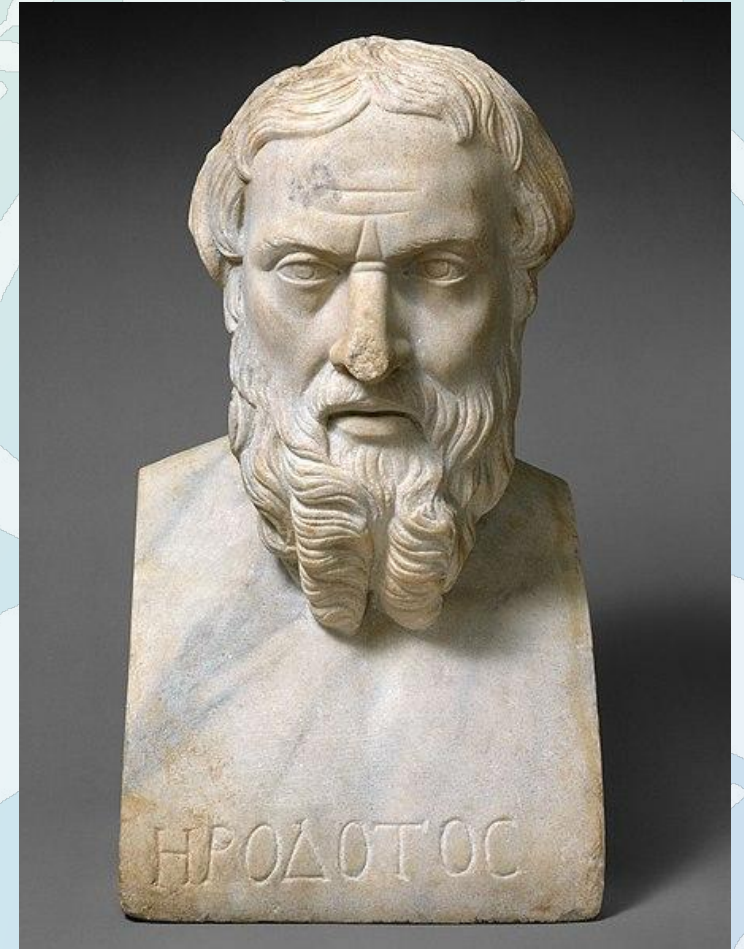


# Historians are a product of their time

- Their ideas are inevitably shaped by their experiences
  - Social, political, religious, economic, dynamics of the time period
  - Example: a politician may promote an ideal version of themselves
  - Personal identity—who they perceive themselves to be
- Will look at excerpts from:
  - Herodotus, Sima Qian, Ibn Khaldun, Howard Zinn
  - First group presentation

# Herodotus (c. 484–c. 425 BC)

- Greek geographer and historian
- Known as the “father of history”
- Included many myths and personal anecdotes in his work
- Divine intervention was a consistent theme in *Histories*



# Sima Qian; 司馬遷 (c. 145–90 BC)

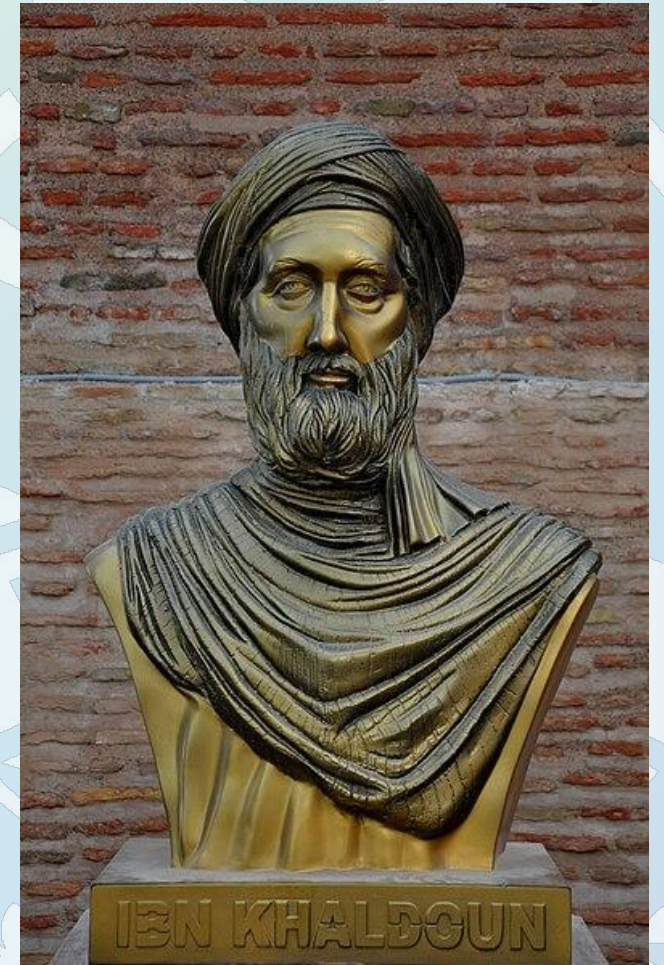
- Wrote 史記 (Shiji) with his father, chronicling 2500 yrs of Chinese history
- Known for candid assessments of Chinese emperors
- Strongly influenced by Han Dynasty Confucian values





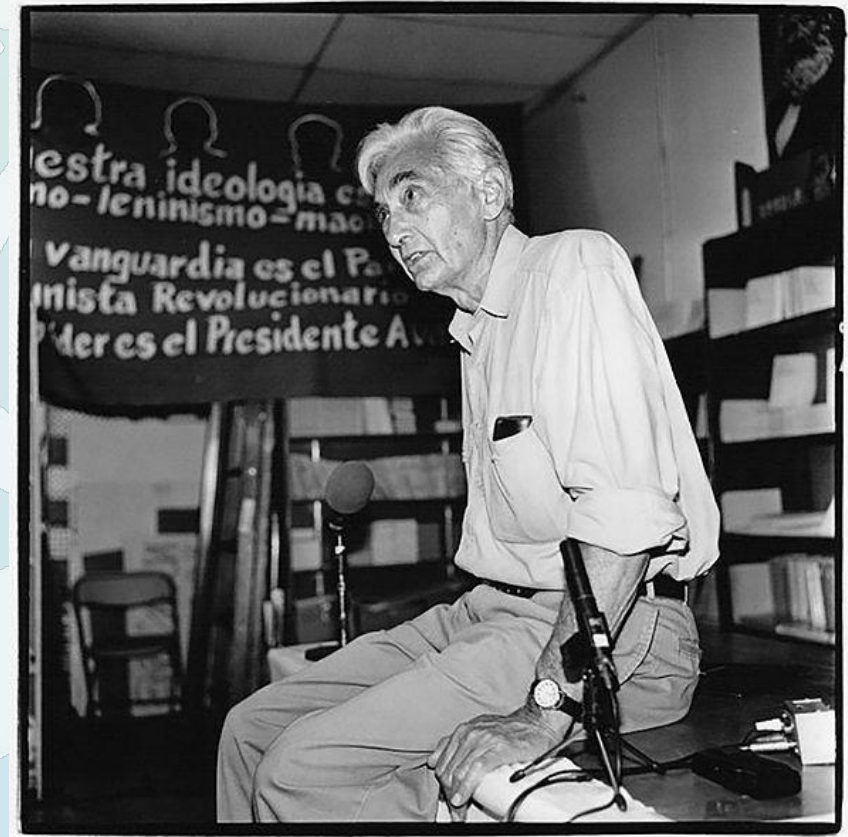
# Ibn Khaldun; (1332–1406)

- Arab sociologist, philosopher and historian
- Lived during a time of political instability and the decline of the Islamic Golden Age
- His works are considered the first volume of systematic world history



# Howard Zinn (1922–2010)

- American historian who examined how social movements drove progress in the US
- Lived during the 1960s/70s when many “radical” and revisionist movements took over the US





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# Exercise

- 5 minutes reading passages from your historian
  - ASK/Translate if you need help with vocabulary
- 5 min discussing with your group on how you think each historian's environment shaped their works/perspectives
- 3-5 min deciding who says what
- 2-minute presentations
  - Reiterate the context
  - Describe your view of the historian & their time
  - Cite textual evidence



# Presentation Guidelines

- Every person should talk!
  - Decide within the group who will say what
  - At least one sentence each
- XXXX wrote “...” this reflects/demonstrates/shows...
  - What kind of information the author focuses on
  - What kind of beliefs the author may have held
  - Whether the author had any allegiances

# Deceptiveness of the Exercise

- Predominance of male figures in history & historians
  - Reflect overarching societal, cultural, and institutional biases
- Cherrypicked excerpts from larger pieces of work
- Translations of the original work
- Lack of modern examples
  - Historical impact and perception changes significantly over time



# Nuance in the News: Who's Talking?

- Important to appreciate perspectives and differences
  - Read news from different sides of the political spectrum
- Example: Reporting on US/EU sanctions on Russia following Ukraine invasion
  - [TASS](#): Russian state-owned news agency
  - [The New York Times](#): Independent left-of-center magazine
  - [Africa Renewal](#): magazine published by the United Nations





# TASS: “US sanctions not to attain their goals, Russia’s economy is stable – embassy”

More anti-Russian sanctions will not help Washington attain its goals as the ruble strengthening proves the stability of Russia’s financial sector and its economy, Russia’ embassy to the United States said on Thursday.

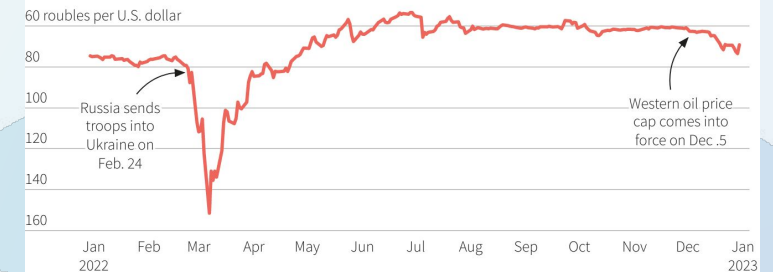
“We call on our American colleagues to drop such counterproductive policy. Measures of pressure will not attain their goals,” [Russia’s embassy] emphasized. “The continuing strengthening of the ruble prove the stability of Russia’s financial sector and its economy. Russia will attain its goals in the special military operation in Ukraine.”

Following this step, the West imposed large-scale anti-Russian sanctions. Some Western politicians admit that it is a literal economic war on Russia. Putin said on March 16 that the West’s sanction policy against Moscow has all the signs of aggression. In his words, the policy of containing Russia is the West’s long-term policy.



## Rouble's rocky ride in 2022

The Russian currency swung from a record low in March to a seven-year high in June.



Note: Dec. 30, 2022 data as at 12:20 GMT

Source: Refinitiv Datastream | Reuters, Dec. 30, 2022 | By Vincent Flasseur & Alexander Marrow

# The New York Times: “How the West Is Strangling Putin’s Economy” (Opinion article by Paul Krugman)

As soon as the war began there was a great deal of talk about bringing economic pressure to bear against the invading nation. Most of this focused on ways to cut off Russia’s exports, especially its sales of oil and natural gas. Unfortunately, however, there has been shamefully little meaningful movement on that front. The Biden administration has banned imports of Russian oil, but this will have little impact unless other nations follow our lead. And Europe, in particular, still hasn’t placed an embargo on Russian oil, let alone done anything substantive to wean itself from dependence on Russian gas.

As a result, Russian exports have held up, and the country appears to be headed for a record trade surplus. So is Vladimir Putin winning the economic war?

No, he’s losing it. That surging surplus is a sign of weakness, not strength — it largely reflects a plunge in Russia’s imports, which even state-backed analysts say is hobbling its economy. Russia is, in effect, making a lot of money selling oil and gas, but finding it hard to use that money to buy the things it needs, reportedly including crucial components used in the production of tanks and other military equipment.

Now, it’s possible, even likely, that over time Russia will find workarounds that bypass Western sanctions. But time is one thing Putin doesn’t seem to have.

# Africa Renewal: “How the Russia-Ukraine conflict impacts Africa”

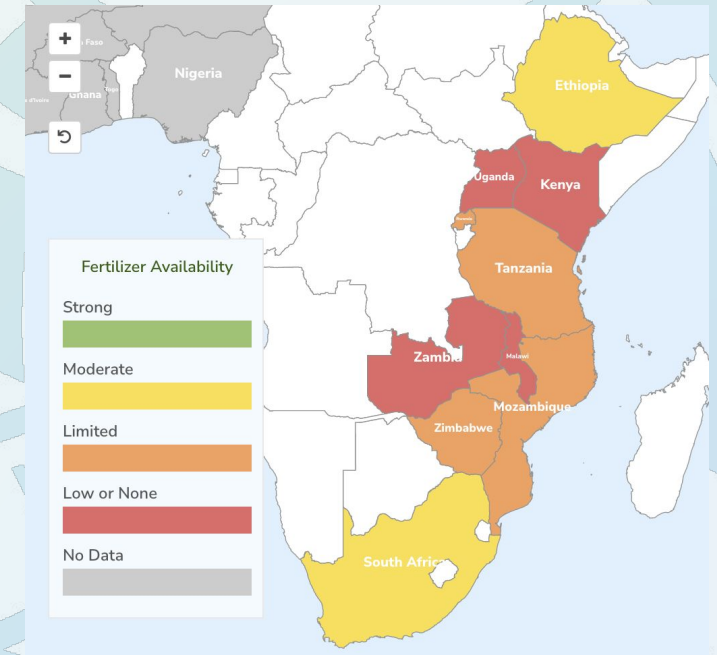
The sanctions imposed on Russia by Western countries will further exacerbate commercial flows between Russia and Africa due to the closure of vital port operations in the Black Sea. Russia is one of the world’s biggest exporters of fertilizers.

Concerns are growing that a worldwide shortage of fertilizer will lead to rising food prices, with knock-on effects for agricultural production and food security.

While the socio-economic ramifications are already substantial and the situation remains highly unpredictable, Africa must also see the current geopolitical crisis as an opportunity to reduce its reliance on food imports from outside the Continent.

African countries need to take advantage of their 60 per cent global share of arable land to grow more food for domestic consumption and export to the global market. This would lower the number of people facing food and nutrition insecurity caused by external shocks.

To avoid future food price shocks caused by rising oil and gas prices on the global market, African countries must improve their oil and gas production and exploration capability to fill any gaps that may occur as a result of supply chain disruption among the major global producers.





# Assignment for Next Class

- Find two news articles covering the same event that offer incongruent accounts/opinions/analyses
  - Can be subtle differences
  - Hint: look at articles covered by different news agencies/from different countries. Political spectrum charts may be useful. You may use opinion articles but be careful of content
- Write ~5-10 sentences about the possible discrepancy between the two articles
  - Do you think this was intended? (Hint: probably!)





# Thank you!

- Any questions?
- Anonymous feedback form:
  - Will help me understand how to help you/plan for next session

