

Introduction to History

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TA: to be announced

Why history?

- Why we study history?
- Does it have any value?
- What value does history offer?
 - Historical?
 - Epistemological?
 - Moral?
- Is the present everything?
 - Or is it just the tip of the iceberg?
- History vis-a-vis science and technology

What is history?

- History vs. past
 - Past as a temporal category
 - History as an epistemological project
 - As one of the many ways of representing and relating to the past
 - What are the other ways?
- Many notions of history
 - *Shi*: record of the past
 - *Itihaasa*: so it was
 - *Khabar/akhbar*: information/report of events

History and Science

- Is history a science?
 - Does history explain events?
 - Or does it merely describe them?
 - Understanding vs. explanation
- History as a narrative
 - History and fiction?
 - History as biography of great men?
 - Thomas Carlyle

Arguments for history

- *History repeats itself, first as tragedy then as farce*
- *Those who do not know their history are destined to repeat it*
- The necessity for historical understanding in order to know anything!
 - Is there anything we know that has no historical aspect to it?!
 - Or is history “*just one damned thing after another*”?
 - Is this true?

How is history produced?

- From facts?
- From theory?
- From the historian?
- From the archive?
- From a school of thought?

Who writes history?

- *“Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.”*
 - Chinua Achebe
- The importance of situating the historian through whom we read the past

Philosophy and History

- History of philosophy
 - Philosophy of history
- The intersecting paths of history and philosophy
 - Methods, ideas, concepts
 - cutting through disciplines
 - There is much intersection between history and philosophy in terms of the schools we're going to discuss in the course!

On the course

- We will be looking at various approaches to history, and the debates that ensue from them.
- The aim of the course is to make us *think* historically—to inculcate the importance of historical understanding in studying any
- If the present is just the tip of the iceberg, we will be diving into ‘the past’ to bring the rest of it into relief

Assessment Plan

- Short assignments: 4 x 5: 20
- Project: 20
- Term Paper: 2 x 20: 40
- Class participation: 10
- Book review: 10

Points to note

- Do the prescribed readings
 - My role ideally is that of a mediator
- Participate!
 - Feel free to ask any questions, share any insights, etc.
 - Make it an exploration
- Engage
 - In the assignments
 - Do not plagiarize!
 - It is just more fun to process one's own thoughts!

Thinking historically

- Asking historical questions (in addition to factual questions)
 - What are the conditions under which an event occurred?
 - What was going on in the minds of the people who took part in it?
 - What are the various ways in which the event can be analyzed?
 - What are the various questions that can be put to the event?
- Think of other ways in which we relate to our past?
- What are the histories that are relevant to your ‘project’?
- If there is one topic you would want to write a history of, what would it be and (why would it be that)?
- Imagine how historians of the future would write about the coronavirus pandemic?
 - Do we even remember the past 4 months?

Explore

- ***American History X* (Tony Kaye, 1998)**
 - “Analyze and interpret all the events surrounding Derek's incarceration. How these events helped shape your present perspective concerning life in contemporary America?The importance on your life, your families, whatever you want to say...”
- ***Good Will Hunting* (Gus van Sant, 1997)**
 - Bar scene
- ***The History Boys* (Alan Bennett, 2004)**
- ***The Man from Earth* (Richard Schenkman, 2007)**
- **Any other historical movies...**
 - Watch with an eye towards
 - who's the author?
 - what's the event?
 - what's the emphasis and why?
 - what's missing?

Further reading

- Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition: History of Modern India*
- Romila Thapar, *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History*
- E.H. Carr, *What is History?*
- Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay, *Historiography in the Modern World: Western and Indian Perspectives*

Podcasts

- Historically Thinking: Conversations about historical knowledge and how we achieve it
 - <https://historicallythinking.org/all-episodes/>
- The Last Archive
 - <https://www.thelastarchive.com/>
- In the Past Lane
 - <http://inthepastlane.com/>
- Practicing History
 - <https://www.jasonmkelly.com/practicinghistory>
- Itihaasa—History of Indian IT (app)

Contributions welcome....

- Add more to this list...