

Quotations About History  
By Ferenc M. Szasz

The following list of quotations about history was collected by Ferenc Szasz over the course of his career. His collections have been published in the *History Teacher* over the years (see bottom of page for references). The collection below, which is posted here with his permission, is a wonderful resource, and will reward careful reading and meditation.

Historical sense and poetic sense should not, in the end, be contradictory, for if poetry is the little myth we make, history is the big myth we live, and in our living, constantly remake.  
Robert Penn Warren

History does not repeat itself. The historians repeat one another.  
Max Beerbohm

To know the truth of history is to realize its ultimate myth and its inevitable ambiguity.  
Roy P. Basler

[A]ny fool can make history, but it takes a genius to write it.  
Oscar Wilde

Do not applaud me. It is not I who speaks to you, but history which speaks through my mouth.  
Fustel de Coulanges

History must be written of, by and for the survivors.  
Anonymous

History consists of a series of accumulated imaginative inventions.  
Voltaire

The history of states and nations has provided some income for historiographers and book dealers, but I know no other purpose it may have served.  
Borne

Clio, the muse of history, is as thoroughly infected with lies as a street whore with syphilis.  
Schopenhauer

History, history! We fools, what do we know or care.  
William Carlos Williams

History is now strictly organized, powerfully disciplined, but it possesses only a modest educational value and even less conscious social purpose.

J. H. Plumb

[History] may be called, more generally still, the Message, verbal or written, which all Mankind delivers to everyman.

Thomas Carlyle

History is a science, no more and no less.

J. B. Bury

The past is always a rebuke to the present.

Robert Penn Warren

A country without a memory is a country of madmen.

George Santayana

History is interim reports issued periodically.

Anonymous

Imagination plays too important a role in the writing of history, and what is imagination but the projection of the author's personality.

Pieter Geyl

History is philosophy teaching by example and also by warning. Lord Bolingbroke

History teaches everything including the future.

Lamartine

If you would understand anything, observe its beginning and its development.

Aristotle

With the historian it is an article of faith that knowledge of the past is a key to understanding the present.

Kenneth Stamp

History is something that happens to other people.

Anonymous

Any time gone by was better.

Jorge Manrique

There is no history of mankind, there is only an indefinite number of histories of all kinds of aspects of human life.

Karl Popper

The deepest, the only theme of human history, compared to which all others are of subordinate importance, is the conflict of skepticism with faith.

Goethe

History is not melodrama, even if it usually reads like that.

Robert Penn Warren

Who does not know that the first law of historical writing is the truth.

Cicero

History has become more important than ever because of the to unprecedented ability of the historical sciences to take in man's life on earth as a whole.

Alfred Kazin

The certainty of history seems to be in direct inverse ratio to what we know about it.

Anonymous

God alone knows the future, but only an historian can alter the .past.

Ambrose Bierce

History is ultimately more important than its singers.

Michael Harrington

Whoever wishes to foresee the future must consult the past; for human events ever resemble those of preceding times. This arises from the fact that they are produced by men who ever have been, and ever shall be, animated by the same passions, and thus they necessarily have the same results.

Machiavelli

Writing intellectual history is like trying to nail jelly to the wall.

William Hessestine

History is the memory of things said and done.

Carl L. Becker

History is life; he who has not lived, or has lived only enough to write a doctoral dissertation, is too inexperienced with life to write good history.

Louis Gottschalk

History cannot give us a program for the future, but it can give us a fuller understanding of ourselves, and of our common humanity, so that we can better face the future.

Robert Penn Warren

There will always be a connection between the way men Late the past and the way in which they contemplate the present.

Buckle

History is the enactment of ritual on a permanent and universal stage; and its perpetual commemoration.

Norman O. Brown

The historian must not try to know what is truth, if he values his honesty; for if he cares for his truths, he is certain to falsify his facts.

Henry Adams

History is always written wrong, and so always needs to be rewritten.

George Santayana

What else can history teach us? Only the vanity of believing we can impose our theories on history. Any philosophy which asserts that human experience repeats itself is ineffectual.

Jacques Ellul

History is not the accumulation of events of every kind which happened in the past. It is the science of human societies.

Fustel de Coulanges

History is filled with the sound of silken slippers going downstairs and wooden shoes coming up.

Voltaire

History has to be rewritten because history is the selection of those threads of causes or antecedents that we are interested in.

O. W. Holmes, Jr.

The researches of many eminent antiquarians have already thrown much darkness on the subject; and it is possible, if they continue their labors, that we shall soon know nothing at all.

Artemus Ward

Nothing capable of being memorized is history.

R. G. Collingwood

A society in stable equilibrium is-by definition-one that has no history and wants no historians.

Henry Adams

It should be known that history is a discipline that has a great number of approaches.

Ibn Khaldun of Tunis

When a historian enters into metaphysics he has gone to a far country from whose bourne he will never return a historian.

Shailer Mathews

A man rising in the world is not concerned with history; he is too busy making it. But a citizen with a fixed place in the community wants to acquire a glorious past just as he acquires antique furniture. By that past he is reassured of his present importance; in it he finds strength to face the dangers that lie in front of him.

Malcolm Cowley

We investigate the past not to deduce practical political lessons, but to find out what really happened.

T. F. Tout

That generations of historians have resorted to what might be called "proof by haphazard quotation" does not make the procedure valid or reliable; it only makes it traditional.

Lee Benson

The past does not influence me; I influence it.

Willem De Kooning

Very deep, very deep is the well of the past. Should we not call it bottomless?

Thomas Mann

Nothing falsifies history more than logic.

Guizot

History is a great deal closer to poetry than is generally realised: in truth, I think, it is in essence the same.

A. L. Rowse

I said there was but one solitary thing about the past worth remembering, and that was the fact that it is past-can't be restored.

Mark Twain

History is a myth that men agree to believe.

Napoleon

To converse with historians is to keep good company; many of them were excellent men, and those who were not, have taken care to appear such in their writings.

Lord Bolingbroke

History is the distillation of rumour.

Thomas Carlyle

It is the essence of the poor that they do not appear in history.

Anonymous

As history stands, it is a sort of Chinese play, without end and without lesson. With these impressions I wrote the last line of my History, asking for a round century before going further.

Henry Adams

This I regard as history's highest function, to let no worthy action be uncommemorated, and to hold out the reprobation of posterity as a terror to evil words and deeds.

Tacitus

I don't believe the truth will ever be known, and I have a great contempt for history.

Gen. George Meade

History is the essence of innumerable biographies.

Thomas Carlyle

If the past has been an obstacle and a burden, knowledge of the past is the safest and the surest emancipation.

Lord Acton

History is the invention of historians.

Attributed to Napoleon

"History" is a Greek word which means, literally, just "investigation."

Arnold Toynbee

History will die if not irritated. The only service I can do to my profession is to serve as a flea.

Henry Adams

Myth, memory, history-these are three alternative ways to capture and account for an elusive past, each with its own persuasive claim.

Warren I. Susman

Inertia is the first law of history, as it is of physics.

Morris R. Cohen

The past does not repeat itself, but it rhymes.

Mark Twain

[History is] little else than a long succession of useless cruelties.

Voltaire

Man in a word has no nature; what he has... is history.

Jose Ortega y Gasset

In mass societies, myth takes the place of history.

William Bosenbrook

History is a great dust heap.

Thomas Carlyle

[History is] little more than the register of the crimes, follies and misfortunes of mankind.

Edward Gibbon

History is not a science; it is a method.

Charles Seignobos

All modern wars start in the history classroom.

Anonymous

History is the self-consciousness of humanity.

Droyson

It is very hard to remember that events now long in the past were once in the future.

Maitland

History is still in large measure poetry to me.

Jakob Burckhardt

History is a post-mortem examination. It tells you what a country died in. But I'd like to know what it lived in.

Mr. Dooley (Finley Peter Dunne)

History remembers only the brilliant failures and the brilliant successes.

Randolph S. Bourne

History will absolve me.

Fidel Castro

History in our kind of society is not a luxury but a necessity.

Patrick Hazard

In its amplest meaning History includes every trace and vestige of everything that man has done or thought since first he appeared on the earth.

James Harvey Robinson

History without politics descends to mere Literature.

Sir John Robert Seely

[History is] the most difficult of all the sciences.

Fustel de Coulanges

In schoolbooks and in literature we can separate ecclesiastical and political history; in the life of mankind they are intertwined.

Leopold von Ranke

History has a way of censoring contemporary values.

Anonymous

Anyone who is going to make anything out of history will, sooner or later, have to do most of the work himself. He will have to read, and consider, and reconsider, and then read some more.

Geoffrey Barraclough

We learn from history that we never learn anything from history.

Hegel

While the mediocre European is obsessed with history, the mediocre American is ignorant of it.

Anonymous

The voice of history is often little more than the organ of hatred or flattery.

Edward Gibbon

History is reading all that you can as fast as you can and - remembering as much as you can.

Lynn Berleffi Darr

History may defeat the Christ but it nevertheless points to him as the law of life.

Reinhold Niebuhr

History is not narration' as Thierry thought, nor analysis as Guizot thought, it is resurrection.

Michelet

Everyone falsifies history even if it is only his own personal history. Sometimes the falsification is deliberate, sometimes unconscious; but always the past is altered to suit the needs of the present. The best we can say of any account is not that it is the real truth at last, but that this is how the story appears now.

Joseph Freeman

He who has money, lives long; he who has authority, can do no wrong; he who has might, establishes right. Such is history! Ecce historia!

Gottfried Benn

Historians are to be read with moderation and kindness, and it is to be remembered that they can not be in all circumstances like Lynceus.

Quoted by Cotton Mather

Historians, it is said, fall into one of three categories:

Those who lie.

Those who are mistaken.

Those who do not know.

Anonymous

The course of History reflects a continual contest between limited, orderly processes of development and historical accident.

H. Cord Meyer

If history teaches anything about the causes of revolution-and history does not teach much but still teaches considerably more than social-science theories-it is that a disintegration of political systems precedes revolutions, that the telling symptom of disintegration is & progressive erosion of governmental authority, and that this erosion is caused by the government's inability to function properly, from which spring the citizens' doubts about its legitimacy.

Hannah Arendt

I often think it odd that it [history] should be so dull, for a great deal of it must be invention.

Catherine Morland

In a word, we may gather out of History a policy no less wise than I eternal; by the comparison and application of other mens fore-passed miseries with our own like errors and ill-deservings.

Sir Walter Raleigh

[Some historians hold that history] is just one damned thing after another.

Arnold Toynbee

Years should not be devoted to the acquisition of dead languages or .to the study of history which, for the most part, is a detailed account of things that never occurred. It is useless to fill the individual with dates of great battles, with the births and deaths of kings. They should be taught the philosophy of history, the growth of nations, of philosophies, theories, and, above all, of the sciences.

Robert G. Ingersoll

History is not a work of philosophy, it is a painting; it is necessary to combine narration with the representation of the subject, that is, it is necessary simultaneously to design and to paint; it is necessary to give to men the language and the sentiments of their times, not to regard the past in the light of our own opinion.

Chateaubriand

[History is] a useless heap of facts.

Lord Chesterfield

The supreme purpose of history is a better world.  
Herbert Hoover

A page of history is worth a volume of logic. O. W. Holmes

I am far too much in doubt about the present, far too perturbed about the future, to be otherwise than profoundly reverential about the past.  
Augustine Birrell

Happy people have no history.  
Leo Tolstoy

Purely historical thought is nihilistic; it wholeheartedly accepts the evil of history.  
Albert Camus

You must always know the past, for there is no real Was, there is only Is.  
William Faulkner

There is properly no history, only biography.  
Ralph Waldo Emerson

[History is] not factual at all, but a series of accepted judgments. Geoffrey Barraclough

History itself touches only a small part of a nation's life. Most of the activities and sufferings of the people ... have been and will remain without written record.  
E. L. Wood word

Whatever is old corrupts, and the past turns to snakes.  
Ralph W. Emerson

To look back upon history is inevitably to distort it.  
Norman Pearson

The literature of the past is a bore.  
O. W. Holmes

Life is not simple, and therefore history, which is past life, is not simple.  
David Shannon

Skepticism is history's bedfellow.  
Edgar Saltus

The moralist must praise heroism and condemn cruelty; but the moralist does not explain events.  
Georges Lefebvre

The writing of history reflects the interests, predilections, and even prejudices of a given generation.

John Hope Franklin

History would be an impossible area of human reflection if there were no recurrent attributes of human nature.

Willson H. Coates

The doctrine of the absolute uniqueness of events in history seems nonsense.

Crane Brinton

But history is neither watchmaking nor cabinet construction. It is an endeavor toward better understanding.

Marc Bloch

I know "history isn't true, Hennessey, because it ain't like what I see every day in Halstead Street.

Mr. Dooley (Finley Peter Dunne)

The historian amputates reality.

Gaetano Salvemini

"History" is the name we as human beings give to the horizon of consciousness within which we live.

Harvey Cox

I want to be as though new-born, knowing nothing, absolutely nothing about Europe.

Paul Klee

The first law of history is to dread uttering a falsehood; the next is not to fear stating the truth; lastly, the historian's writings should be open to no suspicion of partiality or animosity.

Leo XIII

Mankind are so much the same, in all times and places, that history informs us of nothing new or strange in this particular. Its chief use is only to discover the constant and universal principles of human nature.

David Hume

A complete assemblage of the smallest facts of human history will tell in the end.

J. B. Bury

It is not man's evolution but his attainment that is the greatest lesson of the past and the highest theme of history.

George Macaulay Trevelyan

History has now been for the first time systematically considered, and has been found, like other phenomena, subject to invariable laws.

August Comte

In the last resort, sheer insight is the greatest asset of all.

Herbert Butterfield

If history is a collection of events which come to life for us because of what some actors did, some recorders recorded, and some previewers decided to retell, a clinician attempting to interpret an historical event must first of all get the facts straight.

Erik Erikson

History, by appraising. ...[the students] of the past, will enable them to judge of the future.

Thomas Jefferson

The case against the notion of historical objectivity is like the case against international law, or international morality; that it does not exist.

Sir Isaiah Berlin

We cannot escape history and neither can we escape a desire to understand it.

Anonymous

History is the most aristocratic of all literary pursuits, because it obliges the historian to be rich as well as educated.

Henry Adams

History is not only a particular branch of knowledge, but a particular mode and method of knowledge in other branches.

Lord Acton

Knowledge of history frees us to be contemporary.

Lynn Write, Jr.

History should rescue past lost causes from oblivion.

Anonymous

Once historians wrote to instruct men in right examples and warn " against evil ones. Now wiser in their generation they write to instruct other historians in true methodology and to warn against false ones.

Unsigned article in the Times Literary Supplement, April 7, 1966

History is the narrative of great actions with praise or blame.

Quoted by Cotton Mather

Hope is the other side of history.

Marcia Cavell

I believe that history is capable of anything. There exists no folly that men have not tried out.

C. G. Jung

The chief practical use of history is to deliver us from plausible historical analogies.

James Bryce

It is proverbial, of course, that man never learns from history, and, as a rule, in respect to a problem of the present, it can teach us simply nothing. The new must be made through untrodden regions, without suppositions, and often, unfortunately, without piety also.

C. G. Jung

No opinion can be trusted; even the facts may be nothing but a printer's error.

W. C. Williams

History is the shank of the social sciences.

C. Wright Mills

No historian should be trusted implicitly.

G. Kitson Clark

The historian ought to be the humblest of men; he is faced a dozen times a day with the evidence of his own ignorance; he is perpetually confronted with his own humiliating inability to interpret his material correctly; he is, in a sense that no other writer is, in bondage to that material.

C. V. Wedgwood

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C. V. Wedgwood

...on the breast of that huge Mississippi of falsehood called history.

Matthew Arnold

Half the job in teaching history is in getting the students interested in the questions the Professor deems important.

Sidney E. Mead

History is only a catalogue of the forgotten.

Henry Adams

Without passion there might be no errors, but without passion there would certainly be no history.

C. V. Wedgwood

[History is] a graveyard of aristocracies.

Vilfredo Pareto

[History is] the doubtful story of successive events.

Bosanquet

If History teaches any lesson at all, it is that there are no historical lessons.

Lucien Febvre

History, to be above evasion or dispute, must stand on documents, not on opinions.

Lord Acton

History thus becomes largely a study of character. Insight into temperament is hardly less important than the probing of "original materials."

Charles F. Adams, Jr.

At a certain point one ceases to defend a certain view of history; one must defend history itself.

E. P. Thompson

Without the imaginative insight which goes with creative literature, history cannot be intelligibly written.

C. V. Wedgwood

It is clear that history differs from the other disciplines in having an approach and not an area of its own.

Leonard Krieger

[History is a] costly and superfluous luxury of the understanding.

Nietzsche

The history of the world is none other than the progress of the , consciousness of freedom.

Hegel

History, in a democratic age, tends to become a series of popular apologies, and is inclined to assume that the people can do no wrong.

A. F. Pollard

The passion for tidiness is the historian's occupational disease.

Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.

History consists, for the greater part, of the miseries brought upon the world by pride, ambition, avarice, revenge, lust, sedition, hypocrisy, ungoverned zeal, and all the train of disorderly appetite.

Edmund Burke

History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awaken.

Stephen Daedalus (James Joyce)

History is that which has happened and that which goes on happening in time. But also it is the stratified record upon which we set our feet, the ground beneath us; and the deeper the roots of our being go down into the layers that lie below and beyond the ... confines of our ego, yet at the same time feed and condition it, ... the heavier is our life with thought and the weightier is the soul of our flesh.

Thomas Mann

We have had to learn that history is neither a God nor a redeemer.

Reinhold Niebuhr

Since historical reconstruction is a rational process, only justified and indeed possible if it involves the human reason, what we call history is the mess we call life reduced to some order, pattern and possibly purpose.

G. R. Elton

I thought it necessary to study history, even to study it deeply, in order to obtain a clear meaning of our immediate time.

Paul Valery

Between history and the eternal I have chosen history because I like certainties. Of it, at least, I am certain, and how can I deny this force crushing me.

Albert Camus

History ... may be regarded as an artificial extension and : broadening of our memories and may be used to overcome the natural bewilderment of all unfamiliar situations.

James Harvey Robinson

Nothing is easier to teach than historical method, but, when learned, it has little use.

Henry Adams

To develop and perfect and arm conscience is the great achievement of history.

Lord Acton

We can be almost certain of being wrong about the future, if we are wrong about the past.

C. K. Chesterton

Happy is the country that has no history.

Anonymous

History: an account mostly false, of events unimportant, which are brought about by rulers mostly knaves, and soldiers mostly fools.

Ambrose Bierce

History is the most dangerous product evolved from the chemistry of the intellect. ...History will justify anything. It teaches precisely nothing, for it contains everything and furnishes examples of everything.

Paul Valery

What man is, only his history tells.

Wilhelm Dilthey

In history, a great volume is unrolled for our instruction, drawing the materials of future wisdom from the past errors and infirmities of mankind.

Edmund Burke

Also, what mountains of dead ashes, wreck and burnt bones, does assiduous pedantry dig up from the past time and name it History.

Thomas Carlyle

The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.

L. P. Hartley

The history of thought, and therefore all history, is the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's own mind.

R. G. Collingwood

Politics are vulgar when they are not liberalised by history, and history fades into mere literature when it loses sight of its relation to practical politics.

Sir John Seeley

In a certain sense all men are historians.

Thomas Carlyle

That which is past and gone is irrevocable. Wise men have enough to do with the present and things to come.

Francis Bacon

The things that we know about the past may be divided into those which probably never happened, or those which do not much matter. Dean Inge

The past is never dead; it's not even past.

Gwen Stevens (William Faulkner)

After the collection of facts, the search for causes.

Hippolyte Taine

Universal history, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here.

Thomas Carlyle

History is, in its essentials, the science of change. It knows and it teaches that it is impossible to find two events that are ever exactly alike, because the conditions from which they spring are never identical.

Marc Bloch

[History was] a damn dim candle over a damn dark abyss.

W. Stull Holt

History is the recital of facts represented as true. Fable, on the other hand, is the recital of facts represented as fiction. The history of man's ideas is nothing more than the chronicle of human error.

Voltaire

Pour faire de l'histoire, il faut savoir compter.  
Georges Lefebvre

Problems cannot all be solved, for, as they are solved, new aspects are continually revealed: the historian opens the way, he does not close it.  
Sir Maurice Powicke

Writing history is a perpetual exercise in judgment.  
Cushing Strout

What distinguishes the historian from the collector of historical facts is generalization.  
E. H. Carr

History furnishes to politics all the arguments that it needs, for the chosen cause.  
Romain Rolland

History is and should be a science.  
Fustel de Coulanges

Voltaire to the contrary, history is a bag of tricks which the dead have played upon historians.  
Lynn White, Jr.

History repeats itself because no one was listening the first time.  
Anonymous

History within itself cannot be transcended. ... In history itself there are only relative victories.  
Ernst Troeltsch

Since God himself cannot change the past, he is obliged to tolerate the existence of historians.  
Attributed to Samuel Butler

The value of history. ...is that it teaches us what man has done and thus what man is.  
R. G. Collingwood

History is a means of access to ourselves.  
Lynn White, Jr.

People are trapped in history, and history is trapped in them.  
James Baldwin

I, indeed, following the true law of history, have never set down any fact that I have not learned from trustworthy speakers or writers.

William of Malmesbury

One must overcome history by dogma.

Cardinal Manning

We study history in order to intervene in the course of history. Adolf von Harnack

Contemporary history is the least valuable of all kinds. The relative importance of events and persons cannot be fairly estimated till time has tested them and shown which is great and which is small.

S. O. McConnell

One ceases to be lonely only in recollection; perhaps that is why people read history.

John Andrew Rice

History, as the study of the past, makes the coherence of what happened comprehensible by reducing events to a dramatic pattern and seeming them in a simple form.

Johan Huizinga

In analysing history do not be too profound, for often the causes are quite superficial.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Not all that is presented to us as history has really happened; and what really happened did not actually happen the way it is presented to us; moreover, what really happened is only a small part of all that happened. Everything in history remains uncertain, the largest events as well as the smallest occurrence.

Goethe

History is full of delightful reversals, where the opposite of what one predicts comes true.

Edmund Carpenter

History does not usually make real sense until long afterward.

Bruce Catton

The historian must have some conception of how men who are not historians behave.

An English critic on Edward Gibbon

Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher theory than history; for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular.

Aristotle

History: a collection of epitaphs.

Elbert Hubbard

Every work of history constructs contexts and designs, forms in which past reality can be comprehended. History creates comprehensibility primarily by arranging facts

meaningfully and only in a very limited sense by establishing strict causal connections.

Johan Huizinga

Let the science and research of the historian find the fact and let his imagination and art make clear its significance.

George Trevelyan

In history there are no real beginnings.

Warren Sylvester Smith

History is not history unless it is the truth.

Abraham Lincoln

The past in the hands of historians is not what it was.

Lynn White, Jr.

My own conclusion is that history is simply social development along the lines of weakest resistance, and that in most cases the line of weakest resistance is found as unconsciously by society as by water.

Henry Adams

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Henry Adams

Historian, discover the truth and publish it.  
Inscription over the grave of Oklahoma historian Angie Debo.

[History is] an accumulative science, gradually gathering truth through the steady and plodding efforts of countless practitioners turning out countless monographs.  
Gordon Wood

Every work of history constructs contexts and designs forms in which past reality can be comprehended. History creates comprehensibility primarily by arranging facts meaningfully and only in a very limited sense by establishing strict causal corrections.

Johan Huizinga

History does not belong to us; we belong to it.  
Hans-Georg Gadamer

History is only a value of relation.  
Henry Adams

We have lost our grip on historical truth.  
Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob in Telling the Truth About History

Nothing endures but change.  
Heraclitus

The only thing new in the world is the history you don't know.  
Harry S Truman

I ain't no historian but I happen to savvy this incident.  
Charles M. Russell

History proves nothing because it contains everything.  
Emil Cioran

How real is history? Is it just an enormous soup so full of disparate ingredients that it is uncharacterizable?  
Thomas Cahill

Historical awareness is a kind of resurrection.  
William Least Heat Moon

History, facts and truth are all Divine Products, and must prevail.  
Charles A. Briggs

Tradition usually rests upon something which men did know; history is often the manufacture of the mere liar.

Jefferson Davis

For history is to the nation as memory is to the individual.

A.M. Schlesinger, Jr.

The past has always been the handmaid of authority.

J.H. Plumb

History is no more than memories refreshed.

Peter C. Newman

A new future requires a new past.

Eric Foner

Honest history is the weapon of freedom.

A.M. Schlesinger, Jr.

Whosoever in writing a modern history shall follow the truth too near the heels it may haply strike out his teeth.

Sir Walter Raleigh

When the past no longer illuminates the future, the spirit walks in darkness.

Alexis de Tocqueville

And history becomes legend and legend becomes history.

J. Cocteau

The record - history - exists only in the media, and the people who make the media, make history.

James Monaco

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past.

Karl Marx

Revisionism is a healthy historiographical process, and no one, not even revisionists, should be exempt from it.

John Lewis Gaddis

There will always be a connection between the way in which men contemplate the past and the way in which they contemplate the present.

Harry Thomas Buckle

For wisdom is the great end of History. It is designed to supply the want of experience.

Hugh Blair

A reason that the past is so hated by the young is that there is no way to be entirely free of it.

Paul Horgan

At the heart of good history is a naughty little secret: good storytelling.

Stephen Schiff

History is the record of encounters between character and circumstance.

Donald Creighton

Life must be lived forward, but it can only be understood backward.

Søren Kierkegaard

History is the new poetry.

Thomas Carlyle

My country has no history, only a past.

New Brunswick poet Alden Nowlan

[History] is little else than a picture of human crimes and misfortunes.

Voltaire

It takes three facts to make a truth.

Eugene Manlove Rhodes

[I]f one has an exaggerated view of the past, then one is obviously going to have a diminished view of the present.

Joseph Nye

History is the projection of ideology into the past.

quoted from an unnamed source by John Keegan

History teaches everything, even the future.

Alphonse de Lamartine

History never repeats itself; at best it sometimes rhymes.

Mark Twain

History isn't really about the past - settling old scores. It's about defining the present and who we are.

Ken Burns

I wonder why we hate the past so.

W.D. Howells to Mark Twain

It's so damned humiliating.  
Twain's reply

A historian has many duties. Allow me to remind you of two which are important. The first is not to slander; the second is not to bore.  
Voltaire

I am always ready to learn although I do not always like being taught.  
Sir Winston Churchill

We learn from history that we do not learn from history.  
Hegel

The consciousness of the past weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.  
Karl Marx

There is no history, only histories.  
Karl Popper

To be ignorant of the past is to remain a child.  
paraphrase from an observation by Cicero

As the primary end of History is to record truth, impartiality, fidelity and accuracy are the fundamental qualities of an Historian.  
Hugh Blair

The world is too dangerous to live in - not because of the people who do evil but because of the people who sit and let it happen.  
Albert Einstein

History is the only laboratory we have in which to test the consequences of thought.  
Etienne Gilson

The only form of fiction in which real characters do not seem out of place is history. In novels they are detestable.  
Oscar Wilde

God cannot alter the past; historians can.  
Samuel Butler

The lack of a sense of history is the damnation of the modern world.  
Robert Penn Warren

There is no history, only fictions of varying degrees of plausibility.  
Voltaire

History has thrust something upon me from which I cannot turn away.  
Martin Luther King Jr.

The one duty we owe to history is to rewrite it.  
Oscar Wilde

Novels arise out of the shortcomings of History.  
A.S. Byatt

History is too much about wars; biography too much about great men.  
Virginia Woolf in A Room of One's Own

The only true knowledge of things is the knowledge of their causes.  
Archbishop Leighton

History is a reconstruction of life in its wholeness, not of the superficial aspects, but of the deeper, inner organic processes.  
Michelet

All our knowledge - past, present, and future - is nothing compared to what we will never know.  
Tsiolkovsky

But then history does not only consist of documents.  
John Lukacs

Any historical narrative is a bundle of silences.  
Michel Ralph Trouillot

The use of history as therapy means the corruption of history as history.  
A.M. Schlesinger, Jr.

History is not a catalogue but...a convincing version of events.  
A.J.P. Taylor

History belongs above all to the man...who needs models, teachers, comforters and cannot find them among his contemporaries.  
Friedrich Nietzsche

History is an indispensable even though not the highest form of intellectual endeavor.  
Carl Becker

History is neither written nor made without love or hate.  
Theodor Mommsen

History makes some people feel good and other people feel bad.

Joyce King

History to be above evasion must stand on documents not on opinion.

Lord Acton

History is the only science enjoying the ambiguous fortune of being required to be at the same time an art.

Johann Gustav Droysen

The historian must have...some conception of how men who are not historians behave. Otherwise he will move in a world of the dead.

E.M. Forester

History at its best is vicarious experience.

Edmund S. Morgan

Every day grows more amnesiac about its recent past.

Hilton Kramer

History is the great propagator of doubt.

A.J.P. Taylor

Understanding the past requires pretending that you don't know the present.

Paul Fussell

History thus returns forever - as film.

Anton Kaes

History is often not what actually happened but what is recorded as such.

Henry L. Stimson

[History] is a closeout sale of new and old public myths.

Anton Kaes

History, in brief, is an analysis of the past in order that we may understand the present and guide our conduct into the future.

Sidney E. Mead

All history is an attempt to find pattern and meaning in a section of human experience, and every historian worthy of the name raises questions about man's ultimate destiny and the meaning of all history to which, as history, he can provide no answers. The answers belong to the realm of theology.

G.B. Caird

History teaches us that men and nations behave wisely once they have exhausted all other alternatives.

Abba Eban

Chronology, so the saying goes, is the last refuge of the feeble-minded and the only resort for historians.

Joseph J. Ellis

[B]inary opposites fit nicely the formulation of history as written, but they do little to capture the messy, inchoate reality of history as lived.

Ira Berlin

History is not history unless it is the truth.

Abraham Lincoln in a letter to W.H. Herndon, 1856

We cannot escape history.

Abraham Lincoln in Annual Message to Congress, Dec. 1, 1862

Anything is bearable if you can make a story out of it.

N. Scott Momaday

If a modern historian were to show his works to the Venerable Bede, the man might well say, well and good, but I want to know how it was that God ordained the conversion of the British Isles.

Charles W. Cole

History is, indeed, an argument without end.

A.M. Schlesinger, Jr.

"Historians are like deaf people who go on answering questions no one has asked them."  
... Attributed to Leo Tolstoy

For print versions, see:

Ferenc M. Szasz, "The Many Meanings of History, Part I," *The History Teacher*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Aug 1974), pp. 552-563.

Ferenc M. Szasz, "The Many Meanings of History, Part II," *The History Teacher*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Nov 1974), 54-63.

Ferenc M. Szasz, "The Many Meanings of History, Part III," *The History Teacher*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Feb 1975), pp. 208-216.