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Studying History

Jeremy Black and
Donald M. MacRaild

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06	05	04	03	02	01	00	99	98	97

To
Bill Purdue

Contents

<i>Editors' preface</i>	xi
<i>Preface</i>	xiii

PART I

1 The scope of history	3
Introduction	3
The uses of history	5
History and the national myth	7
Competing histories	9
History and ideology	10
Ideology and the historians	12
Ideology and sources	13
History and time	14
The relativity of time and change	16
History as 'problems'	18
The problem of description and analysis	19
The problem of controversy and debate	20
Conclusions	22
2 Varieties of history (i): 'traditional history'	24
Introduction	24
Early history	26
Beyond Europe	28
The Enlightenment and history	29
The eighteenth-century British tradition	32

The Whig tradition	33
The French Revolution	33
'History <i>for</i> below'	35
Connecting the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries	37
The age of Ranke	39
Non-European empirical traditions	41
Positivism	42
The Victorian tradition: Macaulay to Acton	42
Continental innovations	45
The New World	47
The industrial world	49
Conclusions	49
3 Varieties of history (ii): 'the New History'	51
Introduction	51
The historical antecedents of social and economic history	53
Social history: Green and Trevelyan	54
A tide of reaction? The emergence of modern social and economic history	56
The influence of the Industrial Revolution	57
J. H. Clapham	59
Lewis Namier and R. H. Tawney	61
Russia and the USSR	63
A continental revolution? The early <i>Annales</i> School in France	65
Developments after the Second World War	69
Communist perspectives	70
India	72
France and the post-war <i>Annales</i> School	72
The 1960s: 'real' new directions in history?	74
Later <i>Annales</i> and 'New Economic History'	76
Cultural history	77
A diffusion of ideas? History to the present day	78
Conclusions	81

PART II

4 Approaches to history: sources, methods and historians	85
Introduction	85

Historians and sources	87
Local history	90
Traditional history	93
Comparative history	102
‘History from below’	107
Cultural history, or the history of mentalities	111
Quantitative history	116
Conclusions	121
5 Theories and concepts	123
Introduction	123
History and sociology	124
The historical process	128
Marxism	129
Class, structure and agency	134
Gender	139
Community and identity	142
Ethnicity	146
Ideology and mentality	151
Conclusions	155
PART III	
6 Studying history	159
Introduction	159
Reading	160
Note-taking	161
The kinds of works you read	163
Effective reading	165
The structure of reading history	168
Using the sources you read	170
Conclusions	176
7 Writing history (i): the essay	177
Introduction	177
Writing: some general points	177
Writing an essay	181
Statement and evidence	188
Conclusions	191

8 Writing history (ii): the dissertation	192
Introduction	192
Choosing a topic and preliminary work	193
Groundwork for dissertations	197
Writing the dissertation	199
Conclusions	201
 9 History exams	 203
Introduction	203
Preparing properly	203
Topic assessment	204
Revision proper	205
Practising for exams	207
The question	207
Conclusions	210
 <i>Afterword</i>	 212
<i>Suggestions for further reading</i>	213
<i>Index</i>	219

Editors' preface

IF you are studying history the chances are that you are looking for a book that will not only help you come to grips with the larger themes and issues behind historical study, but also a book that will help you formulate your own ideas in a clear, analytic style. The aim of *Studying History* is to offer you guidance on how to gain both of these important skills by providing the sort of vital information you need to understand history as a discipline and also by providing practical help and tips on how to write about history.

The book is divided into three major sections. Part I deals with the scope of history and the different varieties of history, ranging from the traditional to the new. It provides you with the big picture of history, of how it has been thought of as a subject and how it has changed. Key ideas are explained and explored in a large framework so that you can gain a sense of the overall significance of history as a subject.

Part II is concerned with the sources and methods of the historian, with the sort of theories and concepts historians make use of and bring to bear on documents and evidence. Part II thus acts as a complement to Part I: the move is from the large framework to the detailed work of history and its analytic thinking.

Part III focuses on the practical business of studying history at A level or university. There is advice on how to take notes and organise your reading. Then come chapters on writing an essay and on how to tackle your dissertation. Finally there is a chapter of advice on history exams.

Each part of the book can be read separately or dipped into for information or guidance. In the first instance, however, it may well

repay you to read quickly through the book as a whole, so that you gain a sense of what history involves and how the essays you are asked to write grow out of the debates and discussions that characterise history as a subject. At once a guide to current ideas about history and a practical textbook that will develop your skills as an historian, *Studying History* is designed to help you get the most out of your course and to achieve excellent results.

John Peck
Martin Coyle

Preface

CULTURES are like individuals: they take on meaning in terms of time passing. Memories of the past are the lodestars of our thoughts, collective and individual. We cannot leave the past: our own present will be someone else's past; our past was once the present. The passage of time, and its important effects, mean that everything will one day be history; that everything has a history.

In this book we examine the multifaceted nature of history. We look at the nature of the subject, the manner in which historians have and do study the past and the way in which you can approach and study it. The book is a considered response of two practising historians, both teachers and researchers, to the complexities of the exciting and enlivening discipline of history. The range of our interests offers a number of complementary approaches and covers the major spheres of historical study. Our proactive text both explains the intellectual milieu of the historian and also supports students pursuing the subject.

The first part offers introductory statements as to the nature of the discipline. It allows students to engage with some of the key terminologies used by historians over the years and provides a clear and comprehensive overview of the discipline.

The second section focuses upon the way in which historians go about the study of history and encourages students to see themselves as engaged in the same process. It discusses the types of documents that historians use and considers the role of theory in the development of the historian's art. This section also considers how students should study themes or case-studies; structures and individuals; ideologies and mentalities. It also considers the importance of such things as facts and narratives in the writing of history. The chapters here also consider the developments of some of the most important schools of history so that

students can get a flavour of the diversity of historical understanding. Finally, this section blends the works of some key historians with an articulation of the methods and theories they employ.

The third part sets out practical advice on how to study history. It draws on examples of historical works and explains the way historians analyse and interpret them. It offers students comprehensive guidance on the variety of historical study. It explains how to study documents and texts; how to read effectively; and how to write papers, essays and longer research-based papers, such as dissertations.

Jeremy Black
Don MacRaild