HIST 103 Approaches to the Past: Discussion Questions

Reading: Marius and Page, Short Guide, Chapter 1, pp. 1-25.

MUSTAFA SERDAR KARAKAYA

1) Although the chapter mentions that skepticism is a vital part of writing history, the same chapter also claims that no historian who studied the Soviet Union predicted its collapse before it happened. "No" is a strong word that does not really go hand in hand with the whole skepticism thing. How can we be so sure that no one really predicted that? Someone had probably figured it out before the collapse of Soviet Union happened since the world is a pretty huge place.

2) Meaning of some words (sometimes even rather simple ones) change from time to time, place to place and even from person to person. Although we must try and use them in their historical context, even that historical context mostly offers various meanings to a certain word. In that case what would be the best way to approach certain important terms with disputed meanings when trying to write about history? The term, historiography, is a good example of such a word.

AYLIN ERDOGAN

1) What is the connection between "revisionism" and asking the "why" question?

2) How can we actively question the past?

3) In which ways do the famous phrase "History repeats itself" offers the same historical understanding as the oversimplification of 19th century?

CAGIL BEKIK

1) Considering that the historical development of historiography revealed many types of historical fallacies we acknowledge today, how should we approach to the secondary sources of the previous historians who wrote their writings before these fallacies were explicitly known? Especially in the worst scenario where not many comparable independent sources from the past remained to this day on a particular subject of history?

2) In case some of the quantitative data that we utilize contradicts the other corroborated historical sources, should we use only the consistent part and never mention the conflicting data? Or should we present all of the quantitative data and note that some parts do not cohere with the qualitative historical data? In the second case should we try to infer the reason of such a discrepancy?

CEM EGE DUNDAR

1) Since we are living in a certain era with a certain level of knowledge, we label sources as plausible or non-plausible based on our understanding and knowledge of today. Do you think that the plausibility of the sources is changable, depending on the era?

2) Why the irrational explanations of the past events were much more popular among the common people through the history, when it is compared to the rational explanations?

NAZLICAN HIZAL

1) Why isn’t is possible to predict the future based on history?

2) What four standards should we look for when evaluating our sources?
FATMA ELIF ÖZSOY

1) Page and Marius agree with David Hackett Fischer's idea about using statistical method in history writing (19). How can historians decide the best statistical method? Also is it possible to evaluate a wide variety of historical documents by the same method?

2) Page and Marius gave an example shows that history can use additional information from ecology and geology (16). Which fields of science provide evidence for history writing? What do historians think about archaeological evidences and dendrochronology (tree-ring dating)?

BURCU KAVKACI

1) What makes an historian reliable?

2) Don't we still have some irrational beliefs which are alike to St. Denis' story?

MELIKE COŞKUN

1) Did religion affect the ordinary people and historians’ perspective about the historical events and how they perceive such as miracles? Did people think that those things really happened or they want to make us to believe those kind of things?

2) In history, the reason why something happens may not be obvious or to be known true reason. For instances, how World War I was started by assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinard of Austria, however we know that it was only a last trigger or excuse of beginning of the war. The question is how we can know the fundamental and real reasons of historical events? What should they do find the true reason as historians? Does anything that the real reason might be different than the visible reason come up to your mind as an example of this?

JBID ÖĞER

1) How did the development of technology affected searching primary sources? Does technology has more advantage in our surveys than its wrecks with full of pointless data?

ECE ERLAT

1) The official histories of nations play an important role in defining the identity of a country. The writing of an official history can distort the historical facts based on the nation’s imposed ideologies and create pseudohistory. In the case of Turkey, some of the social and political events can subvert the facts on official history. With the accessible and widely shared information on social media, internet and various other sources the validness and objectivity of historical researches become more concrete and less arguable. How are these developments going to affect the official history writings in the future? What is the role of official history going to be in the future? Do these information going to be implied to a less-distorted national history or are they-along with the researches-simply going to be rejected?

2) Does a universal history education for schools possible? If yes, how can it be implied globally?

EKIN EMIROGLU

1) Why do you think some historians fell into oversimplification about historical issues? Are they too lazy to think deeper or do they have hard-shell ideas?
2) What do you think about Emperor Constantine and the pope incident? Can re-evaluating the documents (primary sources) cause such results in other historical ‘facts’?

MERVE DURAN

1) “For example, legends of the saints told in the Middle Ages are filled with miraculous happenings. St. Denis was said to have been beheaded in Paris while preaching to the pagan Gauls. Legend has it walked with his head in his hands to the site that later become the monastery of St. Denis outside the city, and he set his head down there to mark the place where he should be buried.” Why did people use legends or miraculous happenings to explain the situations or real things? Can historians do anything to prevent that people believe stories of miracle? If they can do, what are these ways?

2) In the nineteenth century the word liberal was used to describe businessmen who wanted to make a place for themselves in a country ruled by an aristocracy with its power based on land. The liberals were capitalists who thought government ought to keep its hands off business. In the twentieth century the word liberal was used by Americans to describe those who wanted government to hold the balance of power between the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor. There are some words which have shift such as the word “liberal.” What are the reasons of these changing for meanings of the words?

AHMET FURKAN INAN

1) Why do you think we need to learn our past? What can history change in our understanding of the present?

2) What is the importance of geographic knowledge in historical research?

AHMET ÇAĞATAY ÜNSAL

1) Author claims that to not make historical fallacies we have to avoid making things simple. Can be an historical event simple? Is it true that trying to think about more complex reasons can cause more fallacies?

2) According to some Greek and Roman historians, history consists of patterns so this situation gives us the opportunity to predict the future. What do you think about that?

BERAY KOCABAŞ

1) Maybe it is easier in science, but in history what extent is it possible to eschew our own culture or political opinion? Especially while we interpret or evaluate recent history, how do we elude our own political opinion or avoid Ad Hominem?

2) Can we use statistics in every subdivision of history? If there is not a subdivision that we cannot benefit from statistics, which one would it be?