

History as Chaos (?)

Each Generation of Historians Has an Obligation to Revisit the Former Generation's Views: Revisionism and the Emergence of New Perspectives.

The study of history, or the mere reading of a book on the history of some event, places that reader *inside* the context of when the book was written, what the author's purpose was in communicating certain facts while diminishing others, what the author's values are or were, and how he or she sees the world itself. A committed Russian Communist writer from the 1920's will laud the advances of the young, thriving Soviet Union. An Italian Fascist will take issue with the perspective of the Russian. An American historian writing on the American Civil War may have starkly different views on the causes of the war, the role of slavery, and etc. The end products, whatever their theses, continue the importance of the ongoing, inter-generational dialogue that is the lifeblood of historical scholarship. To use a phrase that we all know maybe too well; "it is the constant sifting and winnowing" that affords the best of scholarship.

Historical revisionism is the means by which the historical record, the history of a society, as understood in its collective memory, continually accounts for new facts and interpretations of the events that are commonly understood as history. The historian and American Historical Association member **James M. McPherson** has said:

"The fourteen-thousand members of this association, however, know that revision is the lifeblood of historical scholarship. History is a continuing dialogue, between the present and the past. Interpretations of the past are subject to change in response to new evidence, new questions asked of the evidence, new perspectives gained by the passage of time. *There is no single, eternal, and immutable "truth" about past events and their meaning*".

The unending quest of historians for understanding the past – that is, *revisionism* – is what makes history vital and meaningful. Without revisionism, we might be stuck with the images of Reconstruction [1865–77] after the American Civil War [1861–65] that were conveyed by D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* [1915] and Claude Bowers' *The Tragic Era* [1929]. Were the Gilded Age [1870s–1900] entrepreneurs "Captains of Industry" or "Robber Barons"?

Without revisionist historians, who have done research in new sources and asked new and nuanced questions, we would remain mired in one or another of these stereotypes. Supreme Court decisions often reflect a "revisionist" interpretation of history as well as of the Constitution.

From Wikipedia

Damien Wilson – Chaosians Group Discussion, April 2022