


provide a rich source of reading. They are out of print but readily accessible. For primary students: the Landmark Books, published by Random House, in the 1950's and 60's, with individual titles covering many of the important events of U.S. history in interesting fashion. For secondary students, I recommend the 50-volume Yale Chronicles of America series published in the 1920's. The quality, of course, is uneven, but a large number of subjects are covered, many of them having dropped out of present-day consciousness. Homeschoolers ought also to have handy books that many have already discovered: Thomas DiLorenzo's *The Real Lincoln*, Thomas Woods' *Politically Incorrect Guide to American History*, and Kevin Gutzman's *Politically Incorrect Guide to the Constitution*. These works expose the host of lies, old and new, that circulate for truth in American discourse. (I thought I was the ideal person to write the *Politically Incorrect Guide to the War Between the States*, but the publisher wanted a writer who was younger and better-looking.)

All that being said, young people should be led away from the all-too-common American tendency to place the United States at the top and center of world history. America is far too young and unchastened a human experience to deserve or receive the attention of a great historian (although John Lukacs's *Outgrowing Democracy* makes a start). Aside from the European-educated Lukacs, there are perhaps only two American historians that can be considered world-class: the brilliant but warped Henry Adams, and the valiant anti-imperialist Charles

A. Beard. "Conservative" historians (*i.e.*, Republican Big Business flacks) have sought to discredit Beard, but his works (such as *The Rise of American Civilization* and *Pearl Harbor studies*) remain highly relevant and readable).

I would not encourage much advanced reading in American history until after exposure to the great ancient historians and to the sophistication of the best European writing. (One might start here with Jacob Burckhardt's *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy* or Johannes Huizinga's *The Waning of the Middle Ages*.) And for understanding what history is and does, read John Lukacs's *Historical Consciousness* (preferably the first edition).

A particularly nasty and dishonest left-wing group, which has appointed itself watchdog of other people's opinions without any intellectual or moral qualification for the role, has damned me as a "revisionist" in regard to the era encompassing the War Between the States. They mean to make folks recoil from me in horror as kin to those notorious "revisionists" who deny Nazi atrocities. I am not a revisionist, but note that their assumption is that there is only one valid opinion, deviation from which is a crime. This bit of agitprop is pure Soviet tactics. It used to be that revisionism was thought of as the occasional change of historical perspective, an inevitable and benign thing that indicated a healthy intellectual life. When our present Culture Masters condemn disapproved historical viewpoints, they do not mean "revisionism" but the offense that the commies call "deviationist." 

Post Card

by William Baer

"Hello!" This one's from Montego Bay:
"Glad you're not here." She never signs her name
but sends a different card each Valentine's Day,
for fifteen years. The message is always the same,
and all the cards are beautiful: Marseille;
Nazaré; Hilton Head, Carolina;
Maui; Acapulco; St-Tropez;
Casçais; and even the wall of China.
But what did he do? She'd left him without a word,
then, every summer, mails her forget-me-not,
and though he knows it's stupid, even absurd,
he craves forgiveness for he knows-not-what,
and wishes her nothing but love, which was, he knew,
exactly what she wanted him to do.

David Hume: Historian

The Core of the Bookshelf

by Donald W. Livingston

Intellectual historians commonly group Voltaire, Edward Gibbon, William Robertson, and David Hume as the four greatest 18th-century historians. If limited to only one of these authors, we would do well to begin with Hume. For one thing, Hume is the only thinker in history who has achieved world-class status as a philosopher and as an historian. We are inclined to think of him today as a philosopher, but in his own time he was famous as an historian. He is still listed in the British Museum as "David Hume, Historian." Hume's *History of England* became a classic in his lifetime; it went through over 160 posthumous editions—some in printings of 100,000 copies.

The History of England is a six-volume work that begins with Roman Britain and ends with the Glorious Revolution of 1688. But Hume wrote it backward, beginning with the period that most interested him, that of the Stuart kings: James I, Charles I, Charles II, and James II. The Stuarts were a Scottish family, and Hume was a Scotsman. Like the rest of his countrymen, he had to come to terms with how the Scottish kings had been received in England. Mary Stuart was executed by Queen Elizabeth; a rebellion occurred against Charles I, who was executed for treason; and another revolution occurred in 1688 in which James II was driven from the throne and Catholics were forever forbidden to hold the crown. Even in Hume's day the legitimacy of the Protestant regime was still a question for many. Hume's main purpose in writing about this period was to provide a more comprehensive account—one that would do justice to both sides, explain the constitutional crisis that had run for some 40 years, and reconcile his countrymen to the constitution of liberty that had emerged from the conflict.

As he continued the history back to Roman Britain his focus expanded, revealing two larger stories: the rise of constitutional liberty in Britain and the gradual rise of civilization in Britain after the collapse of Rome. Both stories contain critiques of Whig self-conceptions dominant in the England of Hume's time. English Whigs viewed themselves as unique in having a constitution of liberty, and

much of the world agreed. Voltaire and other French intellectuals greatly admired the British constitution. Whigs offered two reasons for this achievement. The first was the theory of the ancient constitution, in which liberty is a feature of the English national character going back to the Saxon forests. The history of England has been the story of how unpatriotic factions—the Normans, the Tudors, and lately the Stuart monarchs—have tried to subvert it. Every conspiracy, however, was blocked by patriotic heroes who have preserved the ancient constitution down to the present, where new factions now threaten it.

Hume sought to go beyond this destructive historiography of conspiracy by calling attention to what Hayek would later call the principle of "spontaneous order": the idea that social and political orders emerge as the result of individual human actions but are not intended by anyone or by any faction. This principle had been sketched out earlier by Spinoza and Mandeville, but it was refined and given wider application by Hume and Adam Smith. The market price of apples is an objective fact, but it was not intended by anyone or by any faction. Although Hume applied the principle of spontaneous order to the whole of human life, including morals, aesthetics, language, constitutional law, and civilization, he was not dogmatic about it. He never denied the reality of heroic individuals to effect dramatic changes within the traditions they had inherited. He presents Alfred the Great as an instance of just such a hero: "[F]ortune alone threw him into that barbarous age."

Applying the idea of spontaneous order to constitutional history, Hume tried to show that the historiography of the "ancient constitution" is false. Four distinct constitutions are discernible in English history, and the connection between them is not descent from an original, but a complex story of gradual change, violence, circumstances, and the unintended results of human action. Order emerges, but it is not the result of defeating a conspiracy to usurp an ancient constitution. So Hume's story of the English constitution is one of discontinuity, not continuity. This meant that the Stuart kings were not the conspirators that English Whig historians made them out to be. Though flawed in certain respects, they were defending the constitution they had inherited and had a duty to defend. Social and other changes were occurring, which neither the king nor the Puritan fanatics recognized.

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