

HISTORY: WHY AND HOW

I. What is History?

- A. Widely accepted definition: History is the study of the past.
- B. Better: History is the story of the important people and events of the past.
- C. Best: History is the study of *the world we live in* by looking at its past to see how it came to be the way it is, especially through the actions of important people.

II. Why Do We Study History?

A. The proper reason to study history is to better know and understand the world we live in.

- 1. When people think that history is about *the past*, they study it to learn *about the past*, and they lose sight of how the past is connected to the present. This leaves people feeling that history just does not matter. *But it does!*
- 2. The story of the most important people and events from the past helps us to understand how the world came to be the way it is now. It also teaches us important lessons about how human beings can thrive on Earth. Finally, it can inspire us to lead the best lives we can by applying those lessons in our own personal context.

B. Becoming More Aware of the Interconnected World We Live In

- 1. One of the features of the world we live in now that is the most challenging to understand is that people in every part of the world are connected to everyone else in the world somehow.
- 2. We don't often feel this connection, or its importance to our lives, especially when we are young, and we are rightly absorbed by all the challenges of simply "growing up" wherever we may live. It can seem like the wider world is too big, too complex, and too far away to worry about.
- 3. One of the tasks of history education, then, is to help us see more clearly what our place in the world is, and develop a desire to better know the world we live in. History's job, in effect, is to help you by saying "***You are here! So get busy! There is a whole amazing world out there for you to know!***"
- 4. One reason this matters so much is that the connections between us as human beings are so many, so complex, and non-optional. For most of human history, people were not connected in this way, but we don't have a choice about the fact that things are this way now. They are, and if we want to pursue our happiness in this world, then we need to know and understand it as well as we can.
- 5. One of the ways we can see how connected we are to the rest of the world is by thinking of the distant places our extended families live, the countries we have visited during our lives, and simply by looking at the "**Made In**" label on the

products in our house. Each of us has products from every continent in our homes: olive oil from Italy or Tunisia, cars and electronics from Japan, towels with Egyptian cotton, clothing and appliances from China, foods from central America, etc.

6. In addition to family links, travel, and trade, we are connected to one another through a global communication network, including the Internet and cell phones.
7. The degree of connectivity between peoples is so great that we use the word “*interconnected*” to express the point. To be connected means there is a link *between* people (or things); “inter” also means “between”; so the word “interconnected” means “involving a high degree of *betweenness*” or “being connected in multiple and complex ways.”