

Study Session One: The Study of Historiography

Introduction

This study session introduces you to the whole concept of historiography. It explains the term in details and, examines the utility of history i.e. the benefits or advantages derivable from the study of history.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 1

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 1.1 Understand what is meant by "Historiography"
- 1.2 Appreciate the usefulness of history in any society e.g. Nigeria.
- 1.3 Appreciate the significance of historiography.
- 1.4 Evaluate the significance of history
- 1.5 Assess the benefits a country stands to gain from the study of its history

1.1 The meaning of the concept historiography

'Historiography' is a broad term which has a wide usage and embraces a number of issues. We shall first look at what historiography is not before defining it.



Image Title: Historical measurement tools

Source

Historiography is not exactly the same as the collection of historical evidence or the editing of historical sources. It is also not restricted to the exercise of historical thought and imagination or the criticism of historical writing. It is much more than the philosophy of history or the history of history writing. But, it is related to all the above concepts and it overlaps some of them. In other words, it is much more than all the above ideas. So what is historiography?

1.1.1 Historiography as a tool of historical writing

The term, historiography has a broad usage. In the first place, it is seen as the craft of writing history therefore, it is the art of historical writing. It is the means for communicating in writing what the historian thinks he knows about the past.

In another sense, the crop of historical writings available in an area or a nation is also referred to as historiography. Thus when we speak of Chinese historiography we could be referring to all, or at least the known written histories of the people of China; and Nigerian historiography would mean the available historical works on Nigeria.

1.1.2 History: An Act discovering past actions

Historiography in another aspect is preoccupied with other men's interpretation of history. It is the study of other people's understanding of the historical process and the historian's craft. By historical process, we mean the trend of past events and the historian's craft is the task before the historian, i.e., the discovery of what happened in the past.

Historiography does not deal with specific histories in the sense that it does not seek to discover what happened in the past nor give an account of past actions. That is 'history'. But it looks into what

others have said about history and how they have interpreted the past. Historiography therefore traces the trend of historical thought both in particular localities and in the world at large.

In-Text Question

Communicating in writing what the historian thinks he knows about the past.

True/False

In-Text Question

True

1.2 History and historiography as intertwined concepts

It is important to state that historiography is the subject matter of history. In other words, without the study of the past called history, there would be nothing like historiography. Historiography is thus seen to be derived from history. This brings us to the necessity of history. In the next portion of this study session, we shall examine the justifications for history as an academic discipline and as a worthwhile pursuit.

1.2.1 The necessity of History

In the first place, history is necessary because it provides societies with knowledge about themselves. It is only through knowledge of its history that a society can have knowledge of itself. A society or a nation without recollection or self knowledge, according to **Arthur Marwick**, a distinguished historian, is a society adrift.

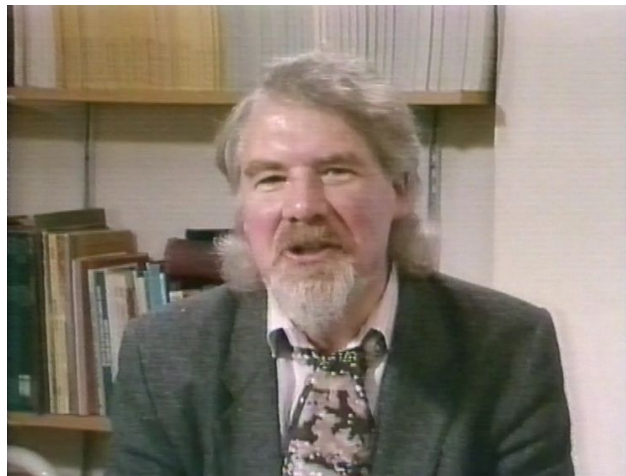


Image of Professor Arthur Marwick

Source

A society has to know itself and understand its relationship with the past and with other societies and cultures. History meets this need. It makes people aware of the character of their own time. This it does by providing them with information about their past which they can study as well as compare and contrast with other peoples' experiences.

1.2.2 Conquering curiosity through History

The major result of history is that, it familiarizes us with variation in social forms i.e. .it educates us on the varieties of life, and so cures us of a fear of change.

However, history does not only provide societies or nations with knowledge about themselves, it also meets the need of the individual man. Most individuals have an inborn curiosity and sense of wonder about the past. History satisfies this curiosity by providing the necessary information about the past.

1.3 Illuminating the past and present through History.

Apart from providing knowledge, history also helps us to understand the present. To ignore history is to refuse to understand the present.



A study of history equips us with the knowledge of the past, which we can use to weigh and evaluate the present. For instance, the present political scene in Nigeria can only be understood if one is familiar with our past.

The yearnings of the people for a stable Third Republic; the apathy to military government; the nervousness of the military government about any disruption of their transition to civil rule

programme; and the general political atmosphere in Nigeria can only make sense to somebody who is familiar with both the remote and the immediate historical developments in the country.

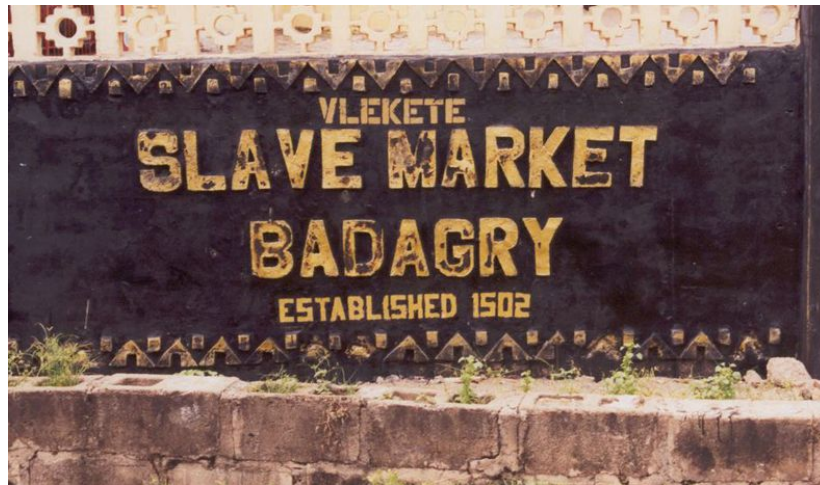


Image Title: Vlekete slave market. Showing History of Slave Trade in Nigeria

Source

1.3.1 Problem solving method

In this sense, history is useful in meeting new situations and in solving the problems of the present. This is because a full understanding of human behaviour in the past makes it possible for us to solve the problems of the present more intelligently.

1.3.2 A bridge of all disciplines

As a mediating discipline, history is also very useful and important. This is because everything has a history. You have the history of medicine, of banking, of legal practice, of teaching of religion, of commerce etc. History, as a discipline thus covers a wide range of issues. A nurse would definitely find a knowledge of the history of nursing in her locality very useful, while a military personnel could also find the history of the force very invaluable. History therefore, becomes a meeting ground for different disciplines and this makes it fascinating.

1.4 Fundamental Justification of the past

From all what have been said about the necessity of history, one thing comes out clearly as being the fundamental justification for the study of history, and that is the fact that man must know his past to be better equipped to handle the present.



Figure 1.1: Showing how history help us understand the past, present and future

Source

1.4.1 History as a study of man's activities

Historiography is a term derived from the study of history and it has many usages. It is the study of the writing of history and it also refers to the body of literature that exists on the history of any particular people considered in terms of the ideas it contains. And lastly it is a study of other men interpretations of the past.

1.4.2 Why History is studied

In the study session, we also discussed the reasons why we need to study history. All the reasons revolve round the point that we need to study history to be able to have knowledge about our past and the past of other peoples.

1.4.3 Understanding the society through History

The study of history makes us understand ourselves and our age better and it prepares us to be able to handle present problems intelligently. Knowledge of the past of other people gives us a model against which we can compare and contrast our own societies.

1.5 Understanding Human institutions through History

History acquaints us with the diverse kinds of organization of human societies and cures us of a dread of change in society. And, as a mediating discipline, history is relevant to all aspects of life.

Summary of Study Session 1

In Study Session 1, you have learned that:

1. Historiography is the collection of historical evidence.

2. The editing of historical sources.
3. Historiography is the study of history writing
4. Historiography helps the craft of writing history
5. The yield of such writing considered in its rhetorical sense and the study of other men's interpretation of history.

Self Assessment Questions (SAQS) for Study Session 1

Now that you have completed this session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on self-Assessment Questions at the end of this module.

SAQ 1.1 (Tests Learning Outcome 1.1)

Why do we study History?

SAQ 1.2 (Tests Learning Outcome 1.2)

What opportunity does history give us?

SAQ 1.3 (Tests Learning Outcome 1.3)

Can it be said that the neglect of History affects the growth of societies?

SAQ 1.4 (Tests Learning Outcome 1.4)

Does history give knowledge about the past societies?

SAQ 1.5 (Tests Learning Outcome 1.5)

What impact can history have on policy formulation of the contemporary societies?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Question (SAQs) for Study Session 1

SAQ 1.1

History is studied because it provides us with a useful knowledge about the past.

SAQ 1.2

History gives the opportunity to illuminate the past through the eye of the present

SAQ 1.3

The neglect of history creates the contemporary problems bedeviling modern societies in Africa; this neglect makes these problems intractable as this impedes the business of statecraft.

SAQ 1.4

The knowledge of other societies through history did not only provide adequate information about these societies, but the leeway to solving problems confronting the society with a sense of history.

SAQ 1.5

The knowledge of history helps a society to formulate viable and progressive policies capable of withstanding socio-economic problems inherent in the business of nation-building.