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History Repeats Itself

 The saying that history repeats itself is common to anyone who has ever taken a history class. We are able to take past events and study them. With access to past documents and archaeological findings, we are able to recreate scenes from history and decipher the inner workings of the people who lived during the time. Historians are able to answer the questions who, what, when, where, and why an event occurred and the answer to the last question “Why?” is what makes history valuable when analyzing current events or predicting what may happen in the future. History repeats itself. There is an event that is fresh in many minds around the world that could be related to the Crusades of the Middle Ages. This event is the attack on Paris by ISIS. In fact, Chloe Valdary with The Wall Street Journal reported that an ISIS magazine referred to Christians as crusaders and that ISIS “vowed to kill every Crusader possible.” This division and war on religion is not the first of its kind. There was also Hitler’s persecution on Judaism and the Egyptians enslaving the Jews. These patterns are why studying events of history can potentially lead to understanding, predicting consequences, or creating possible solutions to present crises.

 Unlike analyzing current events, one is able to study past decisions and observe their consequences. There are many sources of evidence that can aid in the event’s reconstruction and understanding of the decisions made during that time. For example, a historian could analyze the decree of Pope Urban from 1095 during the Crusades where he said “now that you are aroused in divine correction…you must help your brothers living in Orient”(169). One could use this decree as a window into the motivation the Crusaders had for attacking those of another religion. Other sources that could serve as a window into culture could be first-hand reports of the Crusades in letters, ruins of towns that were pillaged, or records of the cost of the weapons and armor. All of these seemingly common reports from the time are tools that we can use to adapt the mindset of people who have been dead for thousands of years.

Even though the Crusades happened just under a millennium ago, they were motivated by religion. This is still a common motivator for the current world population, whether it is the stance on abortion, gay marriage, celibacy, etc. History repeats itself. In the case of the Crusades, they originally were motivated by religion, but after falling into debt, they turned and attacked people who shared that same religion. In the case of ISIS, Graeme Wood wrote that from different reports “we can gather that their state rejects peace as a matter of principle; that it hungers for genocide.” Another event linked with the term “genocide” is Hitler’s push for genocide. History has provided us with two events similar to these ISIS attacks. These events can be seen as a pattern. We are given records and witness statements to two similar events that could present insight to our present crisis. These resources could hold the key as to how this terrorist group could be defeated.

Delving into these resources and putting oneself in the mindset of a person from another culture is very valuable to any individual, whether one is looking at the past or present. When acting as a global citizen, this trait is critical. There are many different types of people in the world and all of them think differently. When making any global decisions, one must take the facts and make reasonable deductions from them, but the key word is reasonable. An example of an unreasonable deduction is since all of the Crusaders were Christian, all Christians were Crusaders. An example of a reasonable deduction would be that most of the Crusaders were Christians, but the act of a small group of them does not permit one to create a stereotype of the entire religion. There must be adequate support for your reasoning and being able to recognize when you possess a stereotype or preconceived notion that is unfair to a group of people is a big part of growing as a global citizen. One must be able to put themselves into the mindset of others in order to make accurate judgements and decisions. Interpreting history is doing exactly this. It forces the reader to open their mind and put themselves in a time period and mindset different from their own.

History repeats itself. Studying the past not only teaches us to adopt an open mind to culture, but it can also teach us about consequences of past decisions that could be made again. There is much to be learned from primary sources and as new technology develops. Some methods allow us access to new information that can be interpreted. Whenever someone reads or observes something from another time they are experiencing another culture. They are peering through a window that could cover thousands of years to an event that is similar to activities of a current event. These relationships can help us understand the inner workings of our current culture and mindset in comparison to history. History repeats itself. As global citizens, it is our responsibility to learn from past mistakes and not allow history to repeat itself by making the same ones. History is not only meant for people who have been dead for many years. Analyzing past event can bring understanding about the past, present, and future. History repeats itself. Why not learn from it?

Research Reflection Fall 2015

 When I registered for HIST 180, I was unsure of what to expect. I have never experienced a history class like this one before. This class not only taught me about European history up until 1648 as the name of the course depicts, but it also taught me research skills that I can use in other areas, not just history. I was able to practice note-taking, forming research questions, and locating supporting materials through the use of resources available at MSU. While conducting research for the Athens game and food project, I was able to practice and focus my personal approach to researching. These experiences made me realize that I already had researching skills, but those skills had rarely been tested or used extensively in my high school career. Besides learning about the cultures that I researched, I learned about how I preferred to conduct research based on my skills and this is the most important knowledge that I will carry with me throughout my future career.

 When working on any project, essay, or speech, I always prewrite to organize my thoughts and ideas. I found that this is very valuable and potentially time-saving especially when conducting research. Prewriting helps me focus on what I already know and what information I need to find. My prewriting includes what my topic is, how I can break it into categories, supporting information I already know, and what supporting information I still need to find. Once I have a plan of what I am looking for, I use multiple resources to conduct my research. So far I have used MavScholar, other online databases through the university, Google Scholar, and also normal Google searches to build my background knowledge or find alternate search terms to use in reliable databases. Once I find a source that is helpful to my argument, I read it through and take notes by organizing them under the different categories that I created in my prewriting. For each source that I use, I take notes on a different page. This helps me distinguish my sources when writing and visually organizes my information. After finding sources and taking notes, I outline my essay or speech with the new information from my sources. Throughout this lengthy process when handling sources I have come to appreciate primary sources more than secondary ones.

 I found primary sources to be more helpful when conducting this research because both assignments this semester were focused on understanding another culture. It is true that secondary sources are able to provide generalizations about the time period, but I feel that the best way to understand a culture in depth is to experience it. Primary sources are the closest representations of history and cultures of the past. When using primary sources, I was able to make my own deductions after reading them and gain insight into the mindset of past societies. I found secondary sources are valuable to use when in need of understanding about a large area or lengthened time period, because the research has already been synthesized for your use. Another use of secondary sources is their bibliographies. Even if one does not find that specific article relative to their research, they could track down relative sources in the bibliography. Both primary and secondary sources are necessary to create a well-rounded project.

 As I mentioned earlier, these assignments have made me realize that I do possess research and note-taking skills, but they had not been tested previously during my high school career. When I reflect on the semester, I realize that conducting research merges multiple skills together: analytical skills, comprehension, use of databases, note-taking, organization, etc. When conducting this research, I was surprised at how much these skills were merged leading up to the final presentation. The most important thing that I learned throughout this class was how to use the resources available to me on campus. There are librarians and many easily-accessible online resources that students can use to conduct research, such as e-braries, catalogs and databases. I now have experience with using these, but I am nowhere near an expert. This is something that I feel I can improve upon in the coming semesters.

 Conducting research in this context is very different than anything I have done before and it has shown me areas that I can work to improve as I progress. After completing these projects, I realize there are a few things that I need to improve. For example, I need to improve my use of secondary sources to support my deductions from primary sources. I was able to adequately use primary sources and draw conclusions from the sources, but I can strengthen my future conclusions by supporting them with ideas from secondary sources. Another area that I would like to improve in future projects is to use reference librarians in the library. They have many years of experience and a great resource to have at MSU, but I did not expand my use of resources beyond the catalogs, e-braries, and databases. Using secondary sources and utilizing the reference librarians are two things that I want to improve upon in the future.

 Throughout this semester, I have grown in many ways. I have found that I have grown as a researcher among other things in HIST 180. I have practiced my note-taking, organization, public speaking, and many other skills since August in ways that I had not anticipated. This class challenged me to step outside of my comfort zone and do something different. I was able to pursue what I was interested in and make the projects my own. When forming research questions and finding sources that would answer those questions, I learned to focus my searches to work efficiently and find alternate keywords to find the support I needed. I finished this class as a better student and will carry what I learned about myself and different cultures beyond college. I now realize that when analyzing cultures from another time you carry the same mindset as if you were analyzing people from them present. Above all, this class has made me more open-minded to different cultures not only from the past, but to those around me.

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