

Unit 2 History and Memory

Section 1 Unit Materials

Questions To Consider

Question 1.

What are some of the different ways individuals and groups remember and represent the past?

Question 2.

What are some of the causes that prompt professional historians to reinterpret and ask new questions of the past?

Question 3.

What are some of the ways twentieth-century world historians have helped to shape collective memories of the past?

Question 4.

Why is commemoration of the past a source of conflict, and how do individuals and groups challenge the collective memories of other individuals and groups?

The Big Picture

How is this topic related to Increasing Integration?

Shared remembrance, also called social memory, integrates people at many different levels — from the family to the nation to the international arena.

How is this topic related to Proliferating Difference?

Different individuals and groups often have competing social memories because of their different experiences and perspectives. These competing social memories (also called counter-memories) can challenge and even change dominant versions of the past.

Unit Purpose

- Individual and collective memories are the substance of history, whether that history is of the family, community, nation, or world.
- Representations of the past — including written archives, monuments, museums, and oral stories — help construct social memory, but they can also be challenged by competing counter-memories.

- History, as a form of social memory, is dynamic and always changing because different people record it for different purposes and audiences.

Unit Content Overview

All people seek their origins in what came before them; they derive their identities from both individual and collective memories. The past can be recalled and retold in many ways, whether it is through the written word, history, myth, legend, oral tradition, art, or performance. History is often told as a linear narrative, with a beginning, middle, and end. Human memory is more elusive – vivid for some experiences, faint for others – and not necessarily linear. However, both history and memory are selective, changeable, and open to contestation and competition. Both are expressed in multiple voices and are continually altered. Just as social memory is molded by community experiences and contemporary concerns, historians too reinterpret the past in response to shifting concerns and questions shaped by the world they inhabit. In the ever-changing landscapes of history and memory, it is as important to know what has been forgotten as to understand why and how an event or a person has been remembered.

This unit explores questions about how our notions of historical memory have changed over time and in different places. Both individual and collective identities are closely tied to how the past is remembered. Individual identities derive in part from family experiences recalled and recounted over generations, along with genealogical records – from handwritten names in family bibles to computerized official documents that certify birth, marriage, and death. Community identities – from village to nation to planet – are rooted in shared remembrance of collective experiences, and are defined by the ways that remembrance is reconstructed and represented. Nations in particular make use of – and often reinvent – the past to construct national identities. Textbooks teach national history in schools; national museums house historical artifacts; and national libraries archive written records of the past. People also collect and preserve artifacts and records of local histories, and they display these community histories in local museums, on the World Wide Web, and even in school classrooms.

Unit References

Susan E. Alcock, "Archaeologies of Memory" in *Archaeologies of the Greek Past: Landscape, Monuments, and Memories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 1-35.

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David Lowenthal, "Distorted Mirrors," *History Today* 44, no.2 (February 1994): 8-12.

William D. Phillips, Jr. and Carla Rahn Phillips, *The Worlds of Christopher Columbus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Mary Nooter Roberts and Allen F. Roberts, "Luba Art and the Making of History," *African Arts* 29, no. 1 (Winter 1996)

Linda Schele and Mary Ellen Miller, *Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art* (New York: George Braziller, 1986).

Stephen J. Summerhill and John Alexander Williams, *Sinking Columbus: Contested History, Cultural Politics, and Mythmaking during the Quincentenary* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1992).

Global Historical Context

- Time Period: 1500–present
- Like Unit 1, this unit is designed to provide an overall framework for the study of world history. However, most of the case studies concern the period after 1500, and can be used to illustrate issues resulting from European-American contact (Columbus and the reinterpretation of the Maya) or the competing historical memories of colonialism and World War II (Korean National Museum).

AP Themes

- Explores interactions in economics and politics through the international exchanges brought about by the Columbian encounter and World War II.
- Examines change and continuity through the various ways historical memory has changed over time about Christopher Columbus, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the legacy of Japanese imperialism in Korea. Change and continuity are also addressed through the way scholarly opinion about ancient Mayan society has changed in light of new archaeological and linguistic evidence.
- Discusses cultural and intellectual developments in the Americas and Korea by looking at the cultural impact of shifting historical memories about Columbus, World War II, and Japanese imperialism, and by looking at the intellectual impact of scholarly reevaluations about Mayan culture.

Related Units

- Unit 1. Maps, Time, and World History: What tools do world historians use in the study of history? This unit begins the study of world history by examining how geographical and chronological frameworks have shaped the understanding of world history and been used to chart the past. It is related to Unit 2 because it demonstrates that historians — and the histories they tell — are shaped by their own world's concerns and intellectual frameworks.
- Unit 6. Order and Early Societies: How do diverse political structures and relationships distribute power and material resources? Through the rise of the Chinese empire, Mayan regional kingdoms, and the complex society of Igbo Ukwu, this unit considers the origins of centralized states and alternative political and social orders. It is related to Unit 2 because it demonstrates how historians can learn new things about the past through archaeology.
- Unit 13. Family and Household: What does the study of families and households tell us about our global past? In this unit examining West Asia, Europe, and China, historians focus on how families and households provide windows into the private experiences of world societies — and explore how these private experiences sometimes become models for ordering the outside world. It is related to Unit 2 because it illustrates the important role of the family as an entity with its own memory and history.
- Unit 26. World History and Identity: How have global forces redefined both individual and group identities in the modern world? This unit examines the transnational identity that emerged from the Chinese diaspora and compares it to a newly re-defined national Chechen identity forged through war with Russia. It is related to Unit 2 because it

demonstrates how individual and collective memories are important components of identity even — or especially — in our own time.

Section 2

Video-Related Materials

Video Segment 1: Commemorating Columbus

This segment looks at the changing ways Christopher Columbus has been remembered and commemorated in the Americas and in the world. Until recently, Columbus was revered as an intrepid explorer and civilizer in many parts of the world, not least the United States. But in the last four decades the historical record — once based solely on Columbus’s own words — began to be enriched by new scientific and archaeological evidence. This evidence helped scholars understand the dramatic impact Columbus’s voyages had on the indigenous peoples of the Americas. Increasingly, Columbus became symbolic of an encounter that raised uncomfortable questions about conquest, colonialism, and destruction of peoples and habitats. These new interpretations ensured that the 1992 American quincentenary celebration of Columbus’s arrival in the Americas was a highly contested affair. Indigenous groups from the Americas refused to celebrate Columbus Day, and they actively protested its commemoration. Overall, this segment demonstrates how changing historical views can change or revise even long-held shared historical memories.

Video Segment 2: Changing Views of the Maya

This segment demonstrates both how new evidence can transform the ways historians interpret the past and how history and memory can be recalled and represented in ways alien to most westernized scholars. It looks first at historical interpretations of the Maya, who were once believed to be a peace-loving rural people. This interpretation, however, was based only on material evidence at Mayan ruins and on the opinions of a few scholars, and it did not take into account the meanings in Mayan glyphs. Once scholars were able to decipher Mayan glyphs — beginning in the 1970s — historical interpretations of the Maya shifted dramatically. Today, historians view the ancient Maya as a bellicose urban people. They were ruled by deified kings obsessed with lineage and conquest, who resided in densely populated cities supported by sophisticated farming that included extensive canals and raised-field agriculture. This change in historical interpretation was made possible through the study of Mayan written language — even though it was centuries old — and the change has revolutionized this field of historical study.

Video Segment 3: Memory and Museums

Memory can be preserved in many ways. This unit explores some methods of remembering, including physical devices, architecture, and museums. It begins with the Luba people of central Congo, who use elaborate carvings, memory boards, and scarification to mark, remember, and retell the past. Until recently, professional historians viewed peoples without written records as “without history” because the historians’ perceptions of history were shaped overwhelmingly by their own experiences in a literate culture. This segment then moves to monuments and museums to explore how they can collect, preserve, and interpret the past. First, it looks at the destruction of South Korea’s National Museum on August 15, 1995, during the fiftieth anniversary celebration of Korea’s independence from Japan. The museum edifice was built during Japan’s colonial rule of Korea with the labor of more than 50,000 Koreans. Although the building had once housed Korea’s national treasures, from a Korean point of view it was a monument to the Japanese oppression of the Korean people, and its destruction was presented in Korea as a restoration of Korean national pride.

Perspectives on the Past: Rigoberta Menchu’s Story

What is the relationship between individual and collective memories? Where is the line between truth and fiction in these memories? The case of Rigoberta Menchu, a Guatemalan resistance fighter whose autobiography details the struggles of her people, raises both of these questions. Menchu’s story has been attacked for making claims that go beyond her personal experience, but

it has been defended as true to the collective memory of her people. It demonstrates that, frequently, what is "true" is often a matter of perspective, both in memory and in history.

Video Details

Who Is Interviewed

- Peter Winn
- Gary Nash
- Candice Goucher

Primary Source Materials Featured in the Video

- Samuel Eliot Morison, historian
- Linda Schele, art historian and epigrapher
- Rigoberta Menchu, recipient of Nobel Peace Prize

Program Contents

Begins	Ends	Contents
00:00	01:33	Show tease, show opening credits
01:34	04:05	Program overview/introduction
04:06	12:45	Video Segment 1: <i>Commemorating Columbus</i>
12:46	17:37	Video Segment 2: <i>Changing Views of the Maya</i>
17:38	23:54	Video Segment 3: <i>Memory and Museums</i>
23:55	26:15	Perspectives on the Past: <i>Rigoberta Menchu's Story</i>
26:16	28:25	Show close and program credits