what is history
The origins of the word “history” in different languages:

Sanskrit: no equivalent

Greek: “historia” means learning by inquiry

French: L’HISTORIE means sum total of past;

French” l’historie means an account of a piece of the past

------- what is history -------
How others have defined history? Which definition do you like best?

Any story about the human past that tries to exclude fable and error in search of truth. (John Higham)

Reasoned arguments about the past (Alan Lichtman)

History is bunk! (Henry Ford)
Here’s a definition I like from Terry Bilhartz:

Any story about a real past that is based on reasoned arguments drawn from sources from the past.

------- what is history -------
Breaking down this definition:

Any **story** about a **real past** that is based on **reasoned arguments** drawn from **sources from the past**.

- **story** *(explaining what life was like back then)*
- **real past** *(a real time and place with real people)*
- **reasoned arguments** *(arguments that are convincing and verifiable)*
- **sources from the past** *(no primary sources, no history)*
The historian’s task is to describe

the activities & thoughts of people
(understanding events)

who lived in a given time and place
(understanding historical context)

that is known to us by sources
(assessing primary sources)
A Matter of Sources

We call “sources” from the era being studied “primary sources.”

We call the works of historians “secondary sources”
History as a discipline is a relatively recent invention

What do we need to have history?

Are there limits on the scope and content of history?

Obviously there are limits to history. See the next slide.

------  what is history  ------
For example? Can History answer all these questions?

Zen questions – what is the sound of a single hand clapping?

Trivial questions – how many e’s are in KJV of the Bible?

Historical questions – who killed JFK?

Existential questions – what is the meaning of the universe?

------- what is history -------
Since history cannot answer every question, we must examine the sources and methods of history.

This is now your job. Go to THE DUEL assignment.