

B.7 The Chinese Heartland and its Imaginaries: Essays

Thoughts on "Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party over the Past Century" [中共中央关于党的百年奋斗重大成就和历史经验的决议（全文）]

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The overlords of American historical culture periodically come to embrace the value of the quite strategic narration of history. That embrace is enthusiastically undertaken as an indispensable tool in the arsenal of their vanguard project to bring the people, over whom they believe they have an obligation to lead, to internalize a specific set of principles that rationalize the realities around them and that bends these realities, now appropriately understood, to a specific set of objectives.

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Strategic narrations of history confirm the "rightness" of the internalization and naturalization of states of mind and meaning that legitimates their overlordship (with respect to meaning making). So legitimated, the vanguard can then amplify and project their authority to lead in other sectors of American life (e.g., societal and political ordering).

In the United States, that project of official history in the service of the state (or at least in the service of factions--usually tied together by bonds of race, religion, ethnicity, and sometimes politics, then and now) tends to expose the political-cultural projects of those factions now projected onto the state. Thus projected, it is served up as some sort of inevitable rationalization of amalgamations of carefully selected and valued facts. These then are sculpted to produce meaning which then suggest the only (approved) way in which the past can be made sense of in the present and projected onto the future. The political work of history of this sort is thus exposed for what it is--the normative political project of inculcating specific values and judgments by a group given or taking the power to manage (and control) public perceptions of good and bad, right and wrong, threat and aid. The object is not the correctness of such norms and judgments but the power to control their production and to turn it into political and social power. When projected out of the collective, this becomes a powerful weapon that can turn or destabilize the collective ordering of rival states.

Official history is the way that normative values in political can travel through time from out of the past and into the future.² In this sense they become both powerful and powerfully contested.³ Power over history (again understood as the project of rationalizing the past through the application of normative assumptions also tends to rationalize or "prove" those normative assumptions by reference to the rationalization proffered as official history.⁴ The fighting for a supreme cultural authority over the meaning of history--that is its rationalization in the service of some overarching normative meaning, and in the embedding of some quite strategic baseline self-awareness as a social and political necessity for the members of the political collectives--is in this sense not merely an important political project, but one that exposes factional rifts in political communities as they develop. If the etymological roots of the term "history" is a compound of "seeing" and "knowing" then this approach to historical narrative is one that emphasizes the "knowing" as the predicate for "seeing."

² Cf. Siobhan Dickens, "Intentional, tacit, contingent: knowledge recontextualization in the official History curriculum - a Critical Discourse Analysis," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 53(5):692-710 (2021).

³ See, e.g., Cintia Velázquez Marron, "Rethinking Official History through Museum and Visitor Research," *The Public Historian* 43(3):7-41 (2021).

⁴ Cf., essays in *The Palgrave Handbook of State-Sponsored History after 1945* (Berber Bevernage and Nico Wouters (eds.); Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

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For the Americans, the great fighting over the 1619 Project⁵ against the 1776 Report.⁶ The former is championed by and through a mouthpiece media organ of certain American factions and their useful allies.

The 1619 Project is an ongoing initiative from The New York Times Magazine that began in August 2019, the 400th anniversary of the beginning of American slavery. It aims to reframe the country's history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of our national narrative.⁷

The latter is offered as an orthodox alternative by the political enemies of those societal elements concocting the 1619 Project narrative by the concoction of a meaning infusing narrative of their own. It originated in the Report produced by the President's Advisory 1776 Commission.

The declared purpose of the President's Advisory 1776 Commission is to "enable a rising generation to understand the history and principles of the founding of the United States in 1776 and to strive to form a more perfect Union." This requires a restoration of American education, which can only be grounded on a history of those principles that is "accurate, honest, unifying, inspiring, and ennobling." And a rediscovery of our shared identity rooted in our founding principles is the path to a renewed American unity and a confident American future.⁸

Its purpose was to offer a counter template for national renewal, one based the role of the family, patriotic education, free inquiry in education, positive storytelling, and reverence for the law.⁹ In the wake of the 1776 Report private collectives have been constituted to further what they view as the aims of that effort.¹⁰ Much of it focuses on the points of

⁵ Nikole Hannah-Jones, "The 1619 Project," The New York Times (14 August 2019); available [https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html] (hereafter the "1619 Project").

⁶ The President's Advisory 1776 Commission, The 1776 Report (January 2021); available [https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/The-Presidents-Advisory-1776-Commission-Final-Report.pdf].

⁷ 1619 Project, *supra*.

⁸ 1776 Report, *supra*, at p. 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-19.

¹⁰ See, e.g., The 1776 Project Pac, "Promoting Patriotism and Pride in American History," available [https://1776projectpac.com/]. This is one of a number of such organizations. This organization

a political action committee dedicated to electing school board members nationwide who want to reform our public education

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national renewal suggested in the 1776 Report. Thus, the 1776 Project PAC is a private collective the principal objective of which is the promotion of patriotism and political action.¹¹

Together, the two provide a very nice example of this type of contest for the soul of official history. Each purports to offer truth; but in reality each merely uses the forms of narrative to construct meaning. For the 1619 Project, truth and meaning in wrapped around the fundamental premise that American “democracy’s founding ideals were false when they were written, Black Americans have fought to make them true.”¹² For the 1776 Report, it is built around the notion of a national renewal built on the great principles of the Republic’s founding.¹³ This requires encoding the red-white-and-blue genes onto every generation of Americans.¹⁴ This is a project of encoding that is quite similar to that undertaken in Marxist-Leninist China¹⁵ and to similar ends: the preservation of the core premises that give each system its distinctive characteristics.¹⁶

system by promoting patriotism and pride in American history. We are committed to abolishing critical race theory and ‘The 1619 Project’ from the public school curriculum. Ibid.

See also 1776 Unites; available [<https://1776unites.com/>] (“1776 Unites represents a nonpartisan and intellectually diverse alliance of writers, thinkers, and activists focused on solutions to our country’s greatest challenges in education, culture, and upward mobility. We are a project of the Woodson Center, a nonprofit organization that has worked for decades to fight for solutions to America’s toughest problems.” Ibid (“Who We Are”)).

¹¹ 1776 Project PAC, *supra*. It describes itself as:

a political action committee dedicated to electing school board members nationwide who want to reform our public education system by promoting patriotism and pride in American history. We are committed to abolishing critical race theory and ‘The 1619 Project’ from the public school curriculum. Ibid.

¹² 1619 Project, *supra*.

¹³ 1776 Report, *supra* (“Americans yearn for timeless stories and noble heroes that inspire them to be good, brave, diligent, daring, generous, honest, and compassionate.”).

¹⁴ 1776 Report, *supra*. (“educators must convey a sense of enlightened patriotism that equips each generation with a knowledge of America’s founding principles, a deep reverence for their liberties, and a profound love of their country.” Ibid., p.17).

¹⁵ Discussed in Larry Catá Backer, “The Genetics of China’s New Era: Red .Genes and Inter-Generational Leninism--Considering “用好红色资源，传承好红色基因 把红色江山世代传下去 习近平 [Make good use of red resources, inherit the red gene, and pass on the red country from generation to generation, Xi Jinping],” *Emancipating the Mind in the New Era: Bulletin of the Coalition for Peace & Ethics* 16(1):Essay B.6 (2021).

¹⁶ Cf., Stuart Hall, “Encoding/decoding,” in *Culture, media, and language: Working papers in cultural studies, 1972-79* (Stuart Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe, & P. Willis (Eds.), Routledge, 1980), pp. 128–138) (encoding as the production of the message and decoding as its interpretation transmitted through traditional and emerging media). Clark Callahan, Scott Haden Church, Jesse King, and Maureen Elinzano, “Snapchat Usage Among Minority Populations,” *Journal of Media and*

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Truth, then, is orthodoxy, and orthodoxy is expressed in the control of meaning. Meaning is then illustrated through the narratives that are constructed by the arrangement of discrete facts in a judgment of the past in the form of a story--the essence of which is to provide a set of morals and insights. Consequently, each narrative is meant as an ideological projectile in the form of a fetish object, an instrument for the wresting of political power from an older establishment and deliver it into the hands of (in the case of the United States) a racialized assemblage of race based identities with African descendent individuals at their head,¹⁷ or into the hands of an assemblage of patriotic elements.¹⁸

Each then instrumentalizes history in the service of ideology. And each instrumentalizes ideology then serves as a means of legitimating political projects. This is undertaken by shaping the instrument--history--as a projectile that can be hurled backwards to re-imagine the past, and then forward, as the baseline for a coercive re-shaping of the future. As such, each orthodox narrative, or rather the lens shaping its content and meaning, serves as a dominant form of not merely political expression, as a means of capturing the normative foundations for such political projects and of reimagining the structures of dominance and hierarchy in American society.

Both also concentrates on the same set of input--past discrete events--and then filters them through a quite distinct set of mediating lenses. The 1619 Project sees history through the lens of race--not just as a general category, but as a quite distinct set of premises about the structural relations between European and African colonization of North America. It then uses, arranges, selects, and extracts, facts that align with that lens. Judgment arranges the past into an orthodox vision that is most useful for legitimating current ideology about the construction of history and the nature of the collective. But at every step this is a process in the service of ideological-political objectives. But the same is true of the 1776 Project, just with the application of a different lens.

The critical part of orthodox history, then, is the lens rather than the facts arranged to support the power of the lens and the projection forward of its insights into the current time and as a mechanism for re-shaping the future. It is for that reason that they are each extraordinarily controversial as history--neither is really history in the academic sense;

Religion 18(1):1-12 (2019), noted that Hall "argued that there are three hypothetical positions from which decoding a discourse may be constructed: a) dominant-hegemonic position, or a reading reflecting the preferred meaning established by the dominant group; b) negotiated code, or a reading of the dominant-hegemonic position with elements of an oppositional reading; and c) oppositional code, a reading devised to directly reject the hegemonic reading." Ibid., at p. 5.

¹⁷ 1619 Project, *supra*.

¹⁸ 1776 Report, *supra*.

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neither follow the conventions of academic historians because that is not their purpose. Orthodoxy each deliberately choose their facts and center their analysis driven by normative politics and in furtherance of their encoding project to reshape the future by reshaping the way in which the past is understood. Each then is subject to severe criticism by those who reject the ideological orthodoxies shaping the interpretive lens of each, and therefore the value or accuracies of their “histories.”¹⁹ Each is a vessel of normative and political projects into which convenient facts are poured and the rest carted off to the trash heap of irrelevance or into the societal punishment of normative apostasy.²⁰

In some ways, these contests align with the forms and objectives of, though they do not become, a very Leninist project of history in the service of the vanguard. *It is a reminder that history is ideology and that ideology is encoded in history and decodes by the vanguard.* This is expressly embraced in Chinese Marxist-Leninism;²¹ it is implicit in the battles over the 1619 Project and the 1776 Report. These are historical projects are meant to signal. They signal the ordering norms and principles on which societal-political perspectives must be grounded. These projects are also meant to encode. They establish the baselines for evaluation, accounting, and judgment. They serve as the lens through which even the most banal object is invested with meaning, with value, and with place, within an organized discourse that shapes the outer boundaries of meaning and that, in the process produces the sort of discursive taboos that are an ironic statement on the limits of the freedom of discourse within liberal democratic states. It is the American version of a rough democratic dictatorship--democracy for those who signal acceptance of a project (at least within its collective) and dictatorship for everyone else. Americans, then, should hardly be

¹⁹ For academic criticism of the 1776 Report, see Gillian Brocknell, “‘A hack job,’ ‘outright lies’: Trump commission’s ‘1776 Report’ outrages historians,” *The Washington Post* (20 January 2021); available [https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2021/01/19/1776-report-historians-trump/]; AHA Condemns Report of the Advisory 1776 Commission (20 January 2021); available [file:///Users/lcb911/Desktop/Report%20of%201776%20Commission%20Statement.pdf].

For criticism of the 1619 Project, see, Sean Wilentz, “A Matter of Facts,” *The Atlantic* (22 January 2020); available [https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/01/1619-project-new-york-times-wilentz/605152/]; Marybeth Gasman, “What History Professors Really Think About ‘The 1619 Project,’” *Forbes* (3 June 2021); available [https://www.forbes.com/sites/marybethgasman/2021/06/03/what-history-professors-really-think-about-the-1619-project/?sh=4cb4d00a7a15].

²⁰ See, e.g., Adam Serwer, “The Fight Over the 1619 Project Is Not About the Facts,” *The Atlantic* (23 December 2019); available [https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/12/historians-clash-1619-project/604093/].

²¹ See, in Larry Catá Backer, “The Genetics of China’s New Era,” *supra*.

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bothered when a Leninist party attempts far more transparently, to undertake the same sort of exercise as an act of political will.

It is in this context that one might better appreciate the great project of official history that is meant to serve as one of the culminating achievements of a century of Chinese Marxist Leninism.²² Unlike liberal democratic states where official histories are embedded within the privatized factionalism of political and social movements whose representatives people our elective state institutions, and fuel the engines of academic and administrative apparatus for the management of correct thinking, Marxist Leninist states view the crafting of official history as both a necessity, and as an inherently public political project that is of the utmost importance for the chronicling of the work of the vanguard elements of society responsible for moving the nation toward the goals the progress toward the attainment of which is the principal measure of their legitimacy. At the same time, it provides a site against which private histories may be deployed as sites of resistance--a practice that is ancient in both China²³ and the west.²⁴

Nonetheless statements of official history provide an important window on the form and character of the orthodox lens through which events may be selected, arranged and told as history, and the character of that history can then be used to understand the way that the lens helps shape the self-constitution of collective self-knowledge. As important, changes in the content, form, and emphasis of official history provides an important means of understanding the way that the lens is changing, as well as the way that those changes require a retelling of the narrative that is orthodox history.²⁵ Or better put, changes in orthodox narrative provides a means of understanding the evolution of collective self-knowledge and the way that self-knowledge requires not merely retelling the story of the nation, but in the process choosing both those objects of historical events and their interconnections important enough to become

²² 中共中央关于党的百年奋斗重大成就和历史经验的决议（2021年11月11日中国共产党第十九届中央委员会第六次全体会议通过）（Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party's Centennial Struggle (Adopted at the Sixth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on November 11, 2021)); available [http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2021-11/16/content_5651269.htm] (hereafter "China Major Historical Achievements").

²³ Haiying Yang, "The Politics of Writing History in China: A Comparison of Official and Private Histories," *Inner Asia* 3(2):127-151 (2001).

²⁴ See, e.g., Procopius: *Secret History* (Richard Atwater (trans); P. Covici, 1927; reprinted, University of Michigan Press, 1961). See generally, Brian Cowan, "The History of Secret Histories," *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 81(1):121-151 (2018).

²⁵ See, e.g., David Brandenberger and Mikhail V. Zelenov, "Stalin's Answer to the National Question: A Case Study on the Editing of the 1938 Short Course," *Slavic Review* 73(4):859-880 (2014).

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part of the fabric that defines the collective as an autonomous object worthy of its own distinctive narrative.²⁶

Like the 1776 Report, China Major Historical Achievements focuses on the political project of national renewal but one that reaches back in history to source ideological imperatives then projected forward.

The whole party must adhere to the materialistic view of history and the correct view of party history, see from the party's centuries of struggle, why we can succeed in the past, and understand how we can continue to succeed in the future, so that we can practice our original mission more firmly and consciously. The times are better to uphold and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics.²⁷

This official history, already long a tradition within Chinese Leninism, is explicit in its avoidance of neutrality, and understands the role of history as an instrument of collective self-identity and essential to the work of the vanguard as it draws on the lessons of the past to fulfill its mandate in the future, not just for the people but for its vanguard as well.²⁸ And like the 1619 Project and the 1776 Report, the China Major Historical Achievements documents uses a very contemporary lens with which to look at the past. In this case it is the lens of contradiction, and more specifically the passing of the old principal contradiction (the need to develop productive forces) for the new principal contradiction at the new era of Chinese historical development-- the contradiction between the people's growing need for a better life and unbalanced and inadequate development.²⁹

The whole party must keep in mind the fundamental issue of what the Communist Party of China is and what it is going to do, grasp the general trend of historical development, firm up

²⁶ See, Christopher Hughes, Review Essay: Rewriting the Cultural Revolution: From Centre to Periphery (Reviewed Works: Chen Boda zuihou koushu huiyi (Chen Boda's Last Oral Recollections) by Chen Xiaonong; Xizang jiyi (Memories of Tibet) by Weise), *The China Quarterly* 188:1098-1108 (2006).

²⁷ China Major Historical Achievements, *supra*, ["全党要坚持唯物史观和正确党史观,从党的百年奋斗中看清楚过去我们为什么能够成功、弄明白未来我们怎样才能继续成功,从而更加坚定、更加自觉地践行初心使命,在新时代更好坚持和发展中国特色社会主义。"].

²⁸ *Ibid.* ["Seeking truth from facts, summarizing major historical events and important experiences and lessons of the party, Unifying the thoughts and actions of the whole party at a major historical juncture, it has played an important leading role in advancing the cause of the party and the people, and its basic expositions and conclusions are still applicable to this day." ["实事求是总结党的重大历史事件和重要经验教训,在重大历史关头统一了全党思想和行动,对推进党和人民事业发挥了重要引领作用,其基本论述和结论至今仍然适用。"] *Ibid.*].

²⁹ *Ibid.* ["社会主要矛盾是人民日益增长的美好生活需要和不平衡不充分的发展之间的矛盾。"]

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ideals and beliefs, keep in mind the original mission, always be humble and prudent, not arrogant or impetuous, and work hard, to inspire forge ahead from great victories and make detours. Learn historical lessons from setbacks, not be afraid of any risks, not be confused by any interference, never make subversive mistakes on fundamental issues.³⁰

That official history, then, (1) marks the progress of the vanguard, (2) is meant to serve as the official catechism of the rationalization of history with the vanguard forces at the center, (3) is object affirmation of which is meant to serve as a social signaling of fidelity to the political economic model, (4) organizes the progress (because history here is a progress from the start of legitimacy of the lens that brings order to facts) to its current state, (5) points to the future from a very specific discursive perspective that suggests the scope of the possible, (6) identifies internal taboos and enemies, (7) provides a concrete basis for judging historical activity (and future planning) as falling within the appropriate historical path or deviating from it, and (8) provides a temporal structure for the articulation and evidence of the application, challenges and success of the vanguard's ideology, its working style, its great triumphs and the lessons from the past that will propel the vanguard to renewed success in the future.

Like the 1619 Project and the 1776 Report, this Chinese vanguard official history is meant to serve not merely as a self-reflexive exercise in meaning making, but also as the discursive foundation projected internally and abroad. It is meaning that is also encoded in its language; the language carries the worldview, and the worldview incarnates collective politics.³¹ “This struggle can be conceived as a cultural politics, a set of discursive and material practices in and through which meanings are defined and struggled over, where social norms and values are naturalized, and by which ‘common sense’ is constructed and contested.”³²

It is meant to serve as the mechanism by which the state and its vanguard can be known, and its system made accessible to those whom it is the duty of the vanguard to lead through to the next stage of Chinese historical development. Like its American variations, the official history is an essential element of education of the young, and a means of

³⁰ Ibid. (“全党要牢记中国共产党是什么、要干什么这个根本问题，把握历史发展大势，坚定理想信念，牢记初心使命，始终谦虚谨慎、不骄不躁、艰苦奋斗，从伟大胜利中激发奋进力量，从弯路挫折中吸取历史教训，不为任何风险所惧，不为任何干扰所惑，决不在根本性问题上出现颠覆性错误”).

³¹ Cf., Rafael E. Nuñez and Carlos Cornejo, “Facing the Sunrise: Cultural Worldview Underlying Intrinsic-Based Encoding of Absolute Frames of Reference in Aymara,” *Cognitive Science* 36(6):965-991 (2012).

³² Eugene J. McCann, “The cultural politics of local economic development: Meaning-making, place-making, and the urban policy process,” *Geoforum* 33:385-398 (2002), at p. 387.

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disciplining the way that the abstractions of ideology are incarnated in the life of the nation understood as a longitudinal expression moving from a starting to an idealized ending point. It is in this sense a generalized vocational tool for collective meaning.³³ It becomes more interesting official history when it is compared to those that came before--and ultimately most interesting when it, in turn is discarded in favor of another when China leaves the current phase of its development behind, as the current core succumbs to the inevitable dynamic of time and biology and a new core arises. Indeed, the official history adopted at the Sixth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on November 11, 2021 reveals more about the path forward than about the path taken to get there. But that is its purpose; to bend history in the service of politics not by changing facts but by their exquisite curation and interpretation and then by their cultural encoding;³⁴ precisely what the American official history writers attempt in the service of their own politics. A Leninist project par excellence.

Another point is worth emphasizing here. Though these projects (both the Chinese and American versions, or any other for that matter) may resemble disinformation or misinformation projects *they are neither meant to mis- or dis-inform; they are meant to induce a belief in the power and validity of the way of looking at the world that these histories manifest*. History, then, provides a very specific meaning (or rationalization) of the past through a very specific lens, one that chooses what counts as important and how what is counted (or recognized) is to be valued as a function of the fundamental premises that this history is meant to affirm by its retelling. Any leading cultural force can do this--many have. In the process, history hides as much as it reveals and it makes more rigorous analysis difficult.³⁵

Historical retelling, then is a means to an ends--and the ends is the inculcation of a belief system through which the world can be ordered an given meaning (e.g., race, Marxist-Leninism, *volk*, religion, liberal democracy etc., and their manifest destinies). To take a proffered history at face value is to embrace the underlying core premises and ideologies that it expresses. When this is done consciously then it is a political choice in furtherance of collective agendas. When it is not than error of analysis

³³ See, Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Future of Our Educational Institutions," in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche Vol. III* (J.M. Kennedy (trans), T.N. Foulès, 1910); available Project Gutenberg EBook #28146 (20 February 2009); available [<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/28146/pg28146-images.html>].

³⁴ Cf., Morteza Dehghani, Reihane Boghrati, Kingson Man, Joe Hoover, Sarah I. Gimbel, Ashish Vaswani, Jason D. Zevin, Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, Andrew S. Gordon, Antonio Damasio, Jonas T. Kaplan, "Decoding the Neural Representation of Story Meanings across Languages," *Human Brain Mapping* 38:6096-6106 (2017).

³⁵ Cf., Chih Yuan Woon, "China's Contingencies: Critical Geopolitics, Chinese Exceptionalism and the Uses of History," *Geopolitics* 23(1):67-95 (2018).

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is possible especially where one reads history across cultures.³⁶ It also produces controversy as meaning making sub collectives vie for the power to control the premises on which historical discourse is made.

If one rejects the lens then whatever the approach produces in its own service will necessarily appear to be an amalgam of mis- and dis-information or a distortion of history. It is not the information that is necessarily wrong, or history that is distorted, it is the meaning that the ordering premise imposes that is rejected. Understood in this way, one can see how history here is a critical weapon in contests among rival collectives--but history is merely the weapon and the disciplinary technique; the real prize is the inculcation of belief in the naturalness or "rightness" of a particular way of imposing meaning on the world. And that is a very important contest indeed!



³⁶ See, Geaa Leinhardt and Kathleen McCarthy Young, "Two Texts, Three Readers: Distance and Expertise in Reading History," *Cognition and Instruction* 14(4):441-486 (2009).

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