

## *History & Memory, Theme 2: PERSPECTIVES ON THE PAST*

### **Transcript of Audio Clip**

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All history, even ancient history is contemporary history, because each generation and group rewrites that history in the light of their own values, perspectives, experiences and concerns.

So that even a history of the ancient Maya can be seen as having political implications for today.

The historian may feel under external—and internal—pressure to shape their histories accordingly.

This is even more likely when the subject is a contemporary history of trauma and where the sources for this history are largely human memory.

Memory, individual and collective, is an important source for history — especially, for relating and analyzing the historical experience of individuals and groups who are unlikely to leave written documents.

But memory can be a slippery source, particularly where traumatic or controversial events are "remembered."

Years later, people often "remember" not only what they did, but what they wish they would have done — not what a group did, but what it should have done.

Individual and collective memories can also mix and merge in ways that raise questions of historical truth — the answers to which are often complex and not always clear.

Rigoberta Menchu, the Maya activist who received a Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 for her work in defense of indigenous peoples of Guatemala, wrote a famous autobiography recounting the atrocities that she — and they — suffered.

It has been attacked for making false claims as to what she personally saw and experienced and defended as an accurate account of the collective experiences of her people.

BOTH are true.

The question for the historian is: What is the value of her testimony as a historical source?

It is a question that different historians will answer differently.

Those answers will shape their histories in different molds, creating a clash of historical interpretations.

That is why History — and Memory — are contested terrain