

1. Mark A. Kishlansky, *Parliamentary Selection* (Cambridge, 1986), 105. (Electronic Reserve [EL], His 5000)
2. Newton E. Key, "Whig interpretation of history," based on my article in *A Global Encyclopedia of Historical Writing*, ed. D.R. Woolf (New York, 1998): 941-2; and "A Tory (Toraidhe) Interpretation of History?: The Use of History in Sermons from the Celtic and Colonial Fringe, 1660-1720" (American Historical Association Conference, Chicago, Jan. 2003). (EL)
3. Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The History of England*, vol. 1 (1848), in *World History by the World's Historians*, ed. Paul R. Spickard, Kevin M. Cragg, & James V. Spickard (Boston, 1998): 340-7. (EL)
4. G.M. Trevelyan, *The English Revolution, 1688-1689* (London, 1938), 3-10, 128-31. (EL)
5. H. Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (New York, 1931, 1965), v-vi, 1-18. (EL)
6. Available from JSTOR or WilsonSelectPlus (linked on EL)
  - a. Adrian Wilson and T.G. Ashplant, "Whig History and Present-Centred History," *Historical Journal*, 31, 1 (1988): 1-16. JSTOR. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2639234>
  - b. Keith C. Sewell, "The 'Herbert Butterfield Problem' and Its Resolution," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64, 4 (2003): 599-618. JSTOR. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3654223>
  - c. Gertrude Himmelfarb, "Whigged Out," *New Republic* 231, 15 (2004): 30-41. WilsonSelectPlus Full Text.

### Introduction and questions for discussion

In a few paragraphs Mark Kishlansky discusses the sentence, "History prefers the incipient to the vestigial." Read the sentence, memorize it, and be prepared to tell the seminar what it means. Is that a good thing? Is it avoidable? The next reading is a brief overview based on one I wrote for an encyclopedia. If the high point of the Whig Interpretation is the Victorian historians such as Macaulay and the early twentieth century historians like his nephew George Macaulay Trevelyan, the origins lie much further back, in the late-seventeenth century (admittedly, the debate has centered on later WIH).

I realize you might not know the origins of Whig and Tory during the Exclusion Crisis of 1679-1685. During this period, the Whigs attempted to pass a bill excluding the brother to then King Charles II, James, duke of York from the succession to the throne because of his Catholicism and his high-handed defense of royal prerogative; while Tories abhorred organization of the populace against the constitutionally and divinely sanctioned royal line of succession. The Whigs failed, and James II succeeded to the throne in 1685, but the Exclusion Crisis a harbinger of the "exclusion crisis" of the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89. And, in November 1688, William of Orange sailed across the Channel with a large army and the support of many Whigs and Tories to oust James II from the throne. The Convention Parliament in 1689 gave a Bill of Rights to William and Mary (the latter the daughter of James and the one with some claim to the throne—if you ignore that he had a young son that was being raised Catholic) at the time of their accession, thus suggesting that England had moved from absolute to constitutional monarchy. [If you are still confused, might I recommend the relevant chapter of Robert Bucholz and Newton Key, *Early Modern England* (2004)?]

The selection from Macaulay is a grand overview (perhaps too grand—he only finished the 1685-1703 portion of his projected history of England up the Great Reform Act of 1832 before he died). He began his history, which focused on 1688-89, in 1685, "when the crown passed from Charles the Second to his brother." Why begin then? What sort of history does this imply? How would it change if he began it earlier? He mentions "having descended below the dignity of history." What does this mean? Does history have no dignity? He notes some failings of historians. For example, he notes that many are "constantly looking backward with tender regret." Is this a failing? How do you combat it? Is the historian at fault to imagine that people of the past were the same, fundamentally, as now? Or is the failing to be found in imagining that they were always different and, indeed, worse? Which is Macaulay's failing? Is this anachronism? (It should be noted that Macaulay less often made such grand pronouncements and usually focused on the nitty-gritty of day-to-day narrative as his set piece on the

landing of William of Orange during the Glorious Revolution, from his *History of England* in the bibliography below.) We focus more on 1688-89, albeit from a bird's-eye view, in the introduction and conclusion from George Macaulay Trevelyan's brief summation of the Glorious Revolution. Does Trevelyan modify the Whig Interpretation of his great-uncle? Do either Macaulay and Trevelyan hold to the medieval eschatological or teleological view of history? Evidence? If not, what do they use?

Most people know the Whig Interpretation from Butterfield's critique of it in a very brief book from 1931 (selected is about 10%). Are there "verdicts of history" (2)? Does history give us a message? Are there "useless things" (15) in history? What does this mean? What is the "alternative line of assumption" (16) that historians can take? How would you characterize the side that the W.I.H. consistently undervalues? Ultimately, Macaulay and Butterfield force us to try to think about what are we doing by researching and writing history.

Wilson and Ashplant re-examine Butterfield. They feel he identified a correct problem, but that "Whig" was too narrow a term for a much wider problem. What is the problem? How does the division between relics, sources, and evidence help explain the problem? Is there a way around this problem? Keith Sewell approaches what J. G. A. Pocock referred to somewhat jokingly as *das Herbert Butterfieldproblem*: the seeming contradiction between the anti-progressivism of *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931) and the Whig form of progressivism in *The Englishman and His History* (1944). Sewell is a bit dry as a stylist, but he clearly quotes Butterfield, and we will be focusing on Butterfield, at least on the problem(s) he raises. Finally, Gertrude Himmelfarb reviews the biography *Herbert Butterfield: Historian as Dissenter* by C.T. McIntire in *New Republic*. If you know Himmelfarb's work (or know the editorial slant of *New Republic*), you may ask why this review concludes by noting that Butterfield's *WIH* "remains, for all its flaws, a valuable corrective to some of the dominant modes of history today" (41). Are conservatives more inclined to a WIH or an anti-WIH? Liberals? [Note: please **read at least 2 of these last 3 articles**: if your last name ends A-H, you must read and be ready to discuss Wilson and Ashplant; if your last name ends I-P, be ready to discuss Sewell; if your last name ends Q-Z, be ready to discuss Himmelfarb.]

### Position paper question (3 pages):

Butterfield never mentioned Macaulay/Trevelyan, but they are clearly his chief targets (he claimed he was attacking only Lord Acton, but, as Mandy Rice-Davies once said, "he would say that, wouldn't he?"). Compare and contrast a WIH with an anti-WIH about the goals of history. If possible, suggest how you might compare and contrast a Whig an anti-Whig (Tory?) Interpretation of a particular event (focus on a particular year or less—I'd prefer the year was 1688 or thereabouts, but focus on what you know). What might the anti-Whig emphasize that the Whig did not emphasize? What might you leave out? What style or method would you use? Do either of the approaches allow one to get past the trap of present-centeredness?

7. Additional Readings (not required for discussion)
  - a. Adrian Wilson and T.G. Ashplant wrote a follow-up article (to that above), "Present-Centred History and the Problem of Historical Knowledge," *Historical Journal*, 31, 2 (1988): 253-74.
  - b. Annabel Patterson, *Nobody's Perfect: A New Whig Interpretation of History* (New Haven: Yale, 2002), esp. 11-17.
  - c. Jonathan Clark, "More imperfect than others" (a review of Patterson, *Nobody's Perfect*), *Times Literary Supplement* (14 March 2003): 3
  - d. Annabel Patterson, "Whiggism Today" (a reply to Clark), *Historically Speaking* (June 2003), 5.
  - e. For the paper, if you want to focus on 1688, read Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The History of England* (1848-61), ed. and abridged by Hugh Trevor-Roper (Harmondsworth, 1968): 249-60.
  - f. David Cannadine, 'Trevelyan, George Macaulay (1876–1962)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, May 2006 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36554>, accessed 25 Aug 2008]