

**Viewer's Guide to the 30-minute documentary
by the American Social History Project**

Private-eye Clio Malarkey investigates “how things got to be the way they are,” and learns the importance of studying U.S. history as well as the hazards of misinterpreting it. In the guise of a film-noir detective story, *History: The Big H* explores the central role played by working Americans in the nation's past and introduces other videos in the series.

**Visit the ASHP website for more information:
www.ashp.cuny.edu**

LEARN MORE ABOUT *HISTORY: THE BIG H*

Additional Resources

American Social History Project, *Who Built America? Working People and the Nation's History* (3rd Edition: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008).

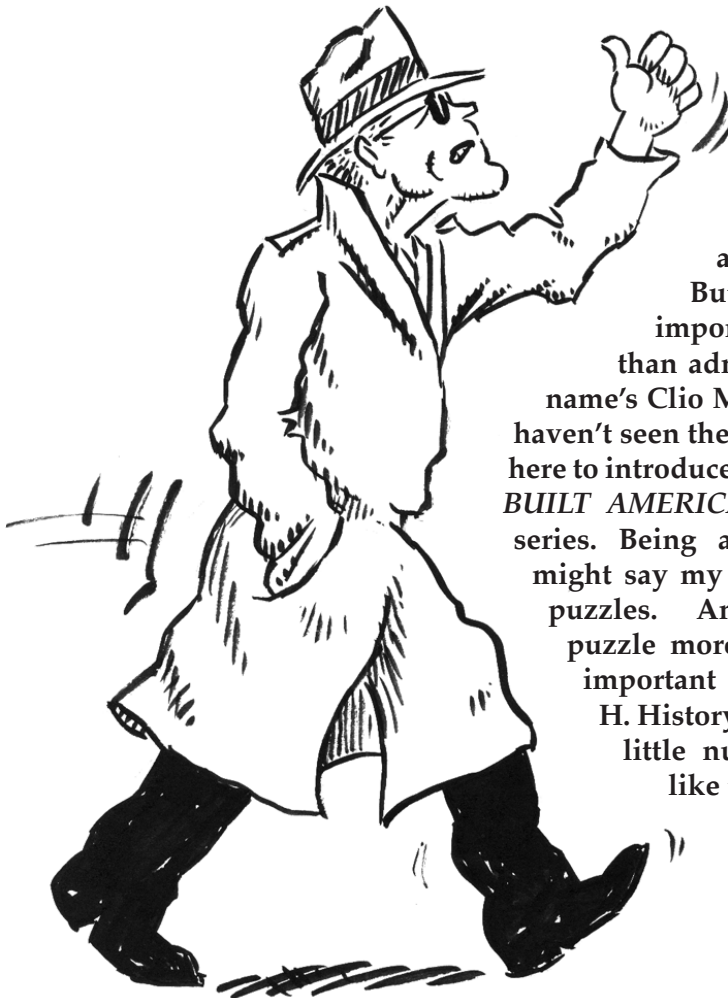
The Lost Museum - <http://www.lostmuseum.cuny.edu>

Making Sense of Evidence on History Matters site -
<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/browse/makesense/>

Do History website - <http://dohistory.org/>

Who Killed William Robinson - <http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/robinson/home/indexen.html>

Historical Thinking Matters - <http://historicalthinkingmatters.org/>



Yeah, yeah
- that's
all very nice.
But we have more
important things to do
than admire credits. The
name's Clio Malarkey - if you
haven't seen the video - and I'm
here to introduce you to the *WHO
BUILT AMERICA?* documentary
series. Being a detective, you
might say my game is solving
puzzles. And there's no
puzzle more intriguing and
important than THE BIG
H. History, that is. A tricky
little number that goes
like this...

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HISTORY?

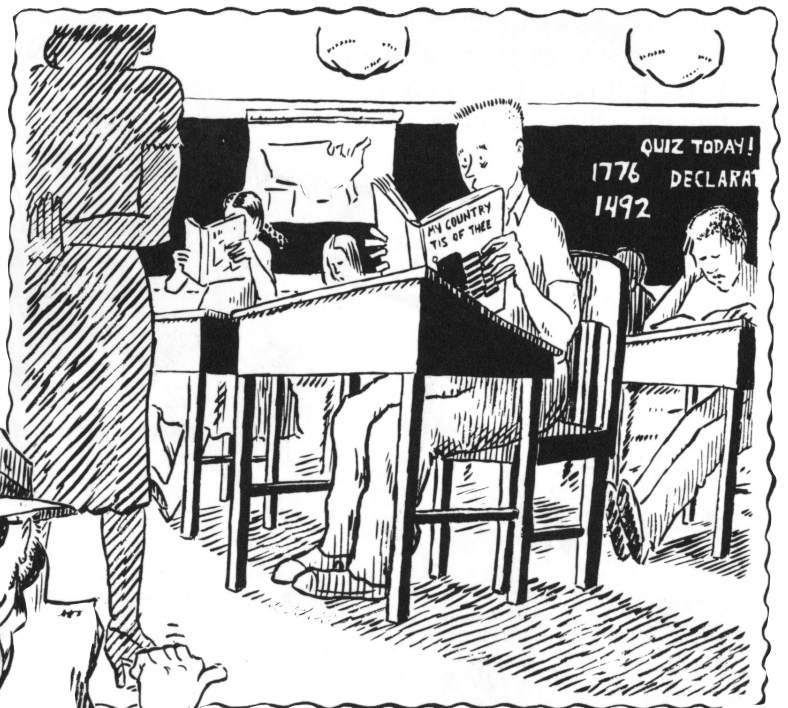
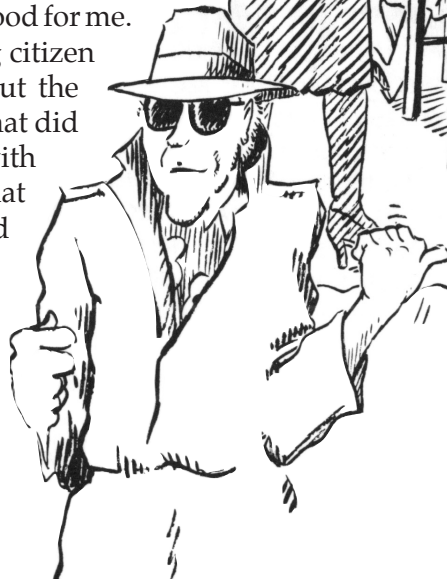
WHO WANTS TO KNOW THAT?
IT'S JUST THE HERE AND NOW-
THAT'S ALL THAT COUNTS, MALARKEY.
WHERE DOES HISTORY GET YOU?

The Mouth, one of my best "informants," said that once when I asked him about history. And it's what I used to think, too...



Back in high school, history just seemed to be stories about dead politicians, generals, and inventors. Oh yeah - and surprise quizzes. Names and dates to memorize. 1492 and 1776 - that sort of thing.

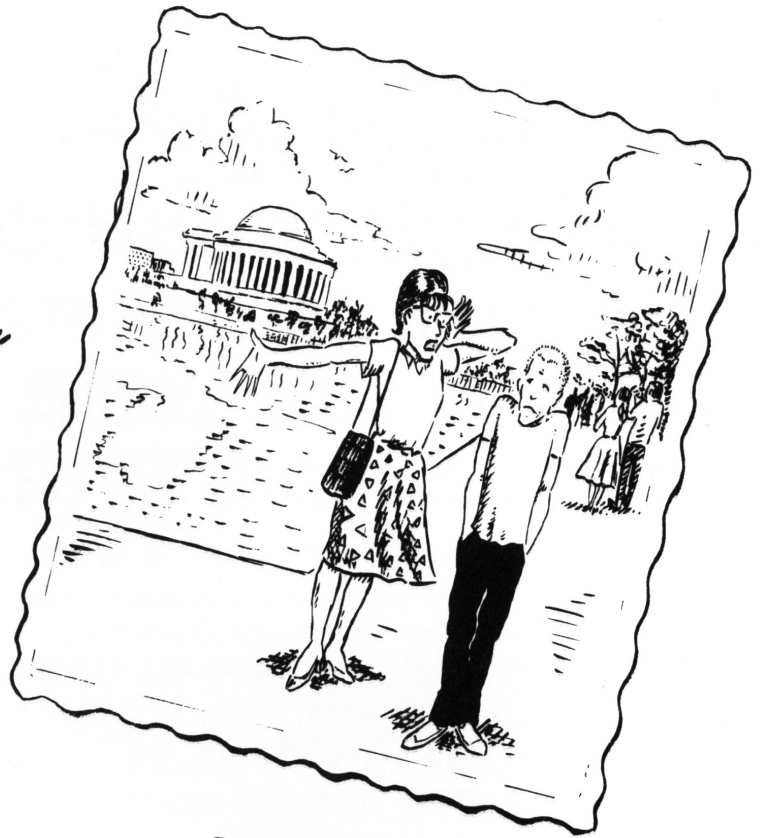
I was told it was good for me. I'd be an upstanding citizen because I knew about the nation's past. But what did history have to do with me? It was about what was dead, gone and buried.



"DEAD, GONE AND BURIED!!!
HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT?
HISTORY'S ALL AROUND YOU!"

That's what my teacher said to me on our senior class trip to Washington, D.C. And, you know, she was right.

History isn't only in textbooks. Monuments and museums, newspapers and novels, movies and the Internet – the past is celebrated in all kinds of ways. You can't eat a meal in a restaurant without getting a little history lesson on the placemat!



OK, so history wasn't "gone and buried." It still seemed dead, though. Maybe if you collected old books or guns, then I guess the past meant something. But, if you weren't into those things it looked to me like history was about things that were over, ended, kaput.

I found out I was wrong.

Take this house we saw on our senior class trip, for instance. It's called Mt. Vernon, and it belonged to George Washington. You remember him, don't you? Our First President? What you see here is the first historic building in America ever to be turned into a tourist attraction.

First this, first that – sounds like The Guinness Book of World Records, huh? And you must be thinking: if he's not trying to sell me this house, how's the history of this place any more interesting than the usual boring stuff?

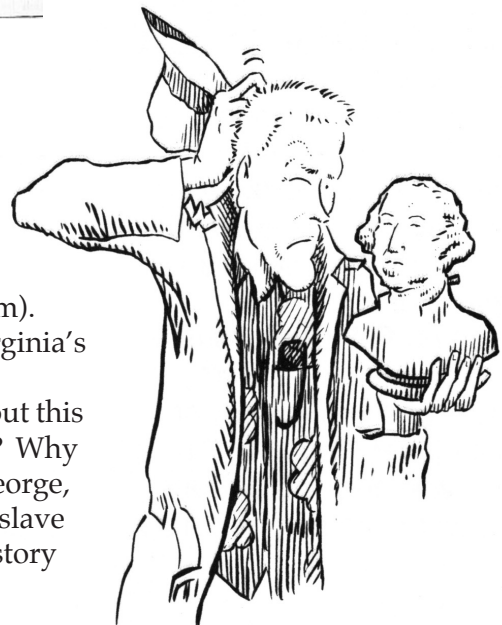


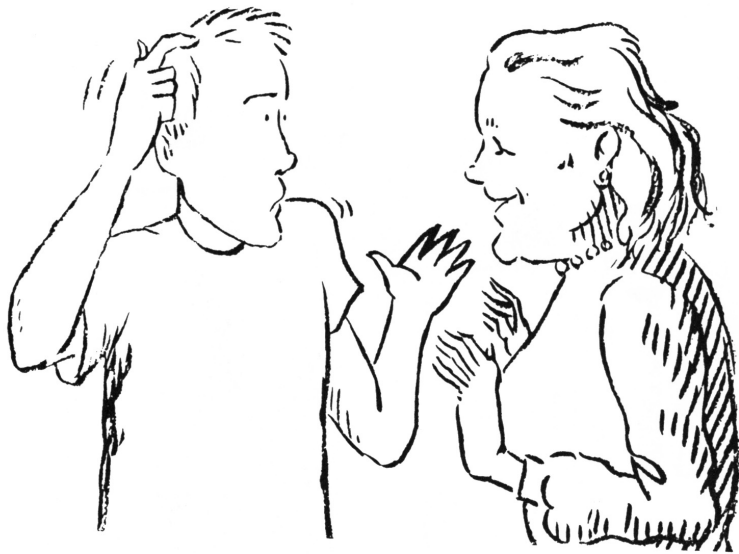
A. R. Waud, "Scenes on a Cotton Plantation: Picking" (detail)

Harper's Weekly, February 2, 1867

Well, it's not – if you only think about it as the house George Washington lived in before he was President. But, I found out later that Mt. Vernon was a large plantation worked by slaves (like the people you can meet in the *Doing As They Can* program). Mt. Vernon's slaves helped make George Washington one of Virginia's wealthiest planters.

Maybe you're still saying to yourself: So what? But hearing about this made me want to ask some questions. Who were these slaves? Why didn't I know about them before? And how could a guy like George, a hero of the Revolution and the Father of Our Country, be a slave owner? And it made me think – what else is there about this history stuff that I never thought about before?





"HOW COME I TELL MY GRANDSON ABOUT THE IMPORTANT THINGS I REMEMBER, AND HE JUST GIVES ME A BLANK LOOK? HOW COME WHAT HE LEARNS IN HISTORY IS PRESIDENTS AND ELECTIONS AND NOT WHAT HAPPENED TO ME?"



Emanuel Leutze, "Washington Crossing the Delaware," 1851.

Remember those questions that my client, Sadie, asked at the beginning of *The Big H*?

Well, lots of the history we get from textbooks and TV says that history is the story of politicians and generals... famous guys like old George. That's what a bigshot historian, Thomas Randolph Consensus, told me when I asked him about Sadie's questions. He said that "the decisions of Great Men" – mostly white men, by the way – determined the course of America's development.

If you buy Consensus' version of the past, it seems like slaves and immigrants, or for that matter, "ordinary" people like Sadie and you and me, weren't even a part of history.

Milton Multitudes, the other bigshot historian I met in *The Big H* caper, sounded different – at first. He said, sure, ordinary people were in on the bigtime historical events. But they didn't do anything that really made a difference. Multitudes said they were like extras in a movie, not the stars. I guess it comes down to the same thing as Consensus – we don't need to learn about ordinary people, 'cause they weren't important.





If I'd stuck with these guys, I never would've gone anywhere. Luckily, I got a couple of clues from Dee Dubitandum, a "social historian" I met. She showed me that studying the history of ordinary people means looking at things like jobs and families, music and religion, politics, crime, even sports! All of a sudden, history began to look more interesting.

Let's take a big development that affected everyone, like America changing from a nation of family farms to an industrial country, and see if Dee's approach makes a difference. Traditional history, the Consensus-Multitudes type, tells us that to understand this change we should focus on great inventors like Eli Whitney and his cotton gin, or important businessmen like Nathan Appleton, who owned some of the nation's first factories in the 1820s and '30s.



Winslow Homer, "The clanking shuttle to and fro," in William Cullen Bryant, *The Song of the Sower* (1871).

BUT WHAT ABOUT LUCY HALL?

Lucy Hall (the main character in the *Daughters of Free Men* program) and other New England farm girls worked in Appleton's mills. If we look at her story, we find out what it was like to work in an early factory, and how young Yankee women dealt with

this new situation. We learn about friends and families, and tension between generations. A big historical change starts to come to life – now it's about real people, with real hopes and dreams, real problems and real lives.

THE WAY THINGS TURNED OUT IN AMERICAN HISTORY WASN'T DETERMINED ONLY BY LEADERS.

Dee had another clue for me: Ordinary people do matter. They did important things that changed American history. And if you ignore their history (or maybe I should say "our" history), you can't really understand what happened or how the world got to be the way it is.

Take the American Revolution. You must know something about it – the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, John Hancock's signature, and our old friend George Washington, leading the Patriot army against the British.



W. L. Armsby, "Declaration of Independence, July 4th, 1776," engraving based on a painting by John Trumbull.

BUT WHAT ABOUT GEORGE ROBERT TWELVES HEWES?



Alonzo Chappel, "The Boston Massacre," wood engraving, c.1868.

Some moniker, huh? George Hewes was a poor Boston shoemaker, who just happens to be the "star" of the *Tea Party Etiquette* program. He wasn't famous like Paul Revere or John Hancock. But it was laborers and artisans like Hewes who died in the 1770 Boston Massacre, who dumped British tea into Boston Harbor in 1773, and who became the backbone of the Continental Army after 1776.

Through actions like these, "ordinary" Americans like Hewes helped push the colonies toward revolution. They were crucial to winning the war against Britain. And their actions helped make sure that "independence" and "equality" were part of the definition of what it is to be an American.

Speaking of wars, how about the Civil War...

You probably know about famous Civil War battles like Gettysburg and Bull Run, and Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, freeing the slaves in 1863.

BUT WHAT ABOUT NOAH BRAVE?



F. H. Schell, "Assault of the Second Louisiana (66red) Regiments on the Confederate Works at Port Hudson, May 27, 1863" (detail).

Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, June 27, 1863

So, we ought to throw out Eli Whitney, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln and study Lucy Hall, George Hewes and Noah Brave, right? **WRONG.** If you just replaced leaders with "ordinary" people, history wouldn't make sense.

The trick is to figure out both sides of the story.

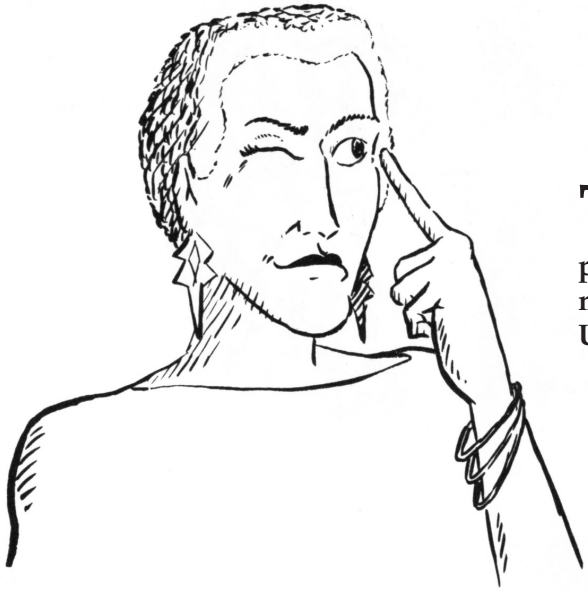


Thomas Ball, *Freedmen's Memorial to Abraham Lincoln*, 1876, Lincoln Park, Washington, D.C.

Noah Brave (a player in the *Dr. Toer's Amazing Magic Lantern Show* program), along with half a million other slaves, ran away from their masters to find the Union Army. Noah didn't just wait for President Lincoln to proclaim his freedom – he and 200,000 other black men fought for it. Together with other black soldiers, Noah helped capture Charleston, South Carolina, the birthplace of the Confederacy. By such actions, Noah Brave and his fellow ex-slaves pushed Lincoln and other Union leaders to call for the total abolition of slavery.

The lives of "ordinary" people were affected by the actions of leaders. And leaders' policies make more sense if you see how they were shaped by actions and ideas of "ordinary" Americans. To understand how things got to be the way they are, you have to look at the whole picture.

HISTORY'S NOT SIMPLE. IT DEMANDS A LOT OF LOOKING AND THINKING.



That's what Dee told Sadie and me, and she has a point. When you look at the past and try to take in the whole picture, you discover hidden moments, important events not mentioned on monuments or dramatized on TV. Like the Great Uprising of 1877.

WHAT WAS THE GREAT UPRISING OF 1877?

In July 1877, railroad workers and hundreds of thousands of working people across the country took part in a fierce rebellion. They went on strike and rioted to protest the power of the railroads and the misery of America's first nationwide industrial depression. (For more about this, check out the *1877: The Grand Army of Starvation* program.) The strike paralyzed the nation for two weeks and only ended after U.S. Army troops were called out and over one hundred Americans were killed.

If it sounds dramatic, it was. At the time, lots of people thought a new American Revolution was beginning. So why have you never heard of it?

Well, part of the reason is that historians like Consensus and Multitudes don't think it's important. They see strikes and riots as unfortunate incidents, exceptions to the general rule that



"Maryland.—The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Strike—The Sixth Regiment, N.G.S.M., firing upon the mob, Frederick and Baltimore Streets, July 20th."

Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, August 4, 1877

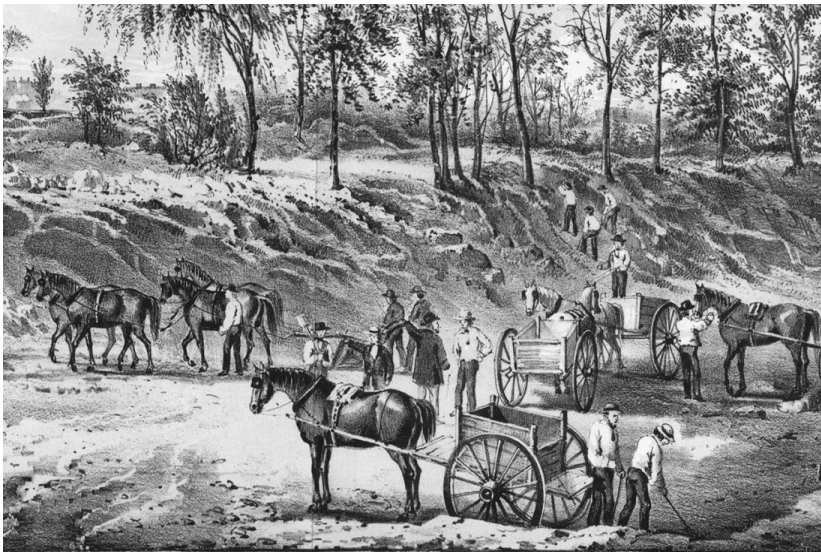
American was always one big happy family.

But the 1877 railroad strike was important. It shows that Americans were asking hard questions, like: who should profit from the growth of railroads and industry? America's modern

union movement was born out of that debate. Knowing about 1877 makes the story of industrial development look very different. Instead of seeing steady progress and all Americans pulling together, we find intense struggle over what life would be like in the

See how familiar stories start to change? Take the story about America welcoming new immigrants with open arms – you know, the Statue of Liberty and all that. Multitudes would tell us that with hard work and individual effort, immigrants got their share of the American dream.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE MULVAHILLS?



Building Central Park.

This lithograph detail shows workers, largely Irish and German immigrants, removing stone and dirt to begin the landscaping of Central Park.

Valentine's Manual, 1858

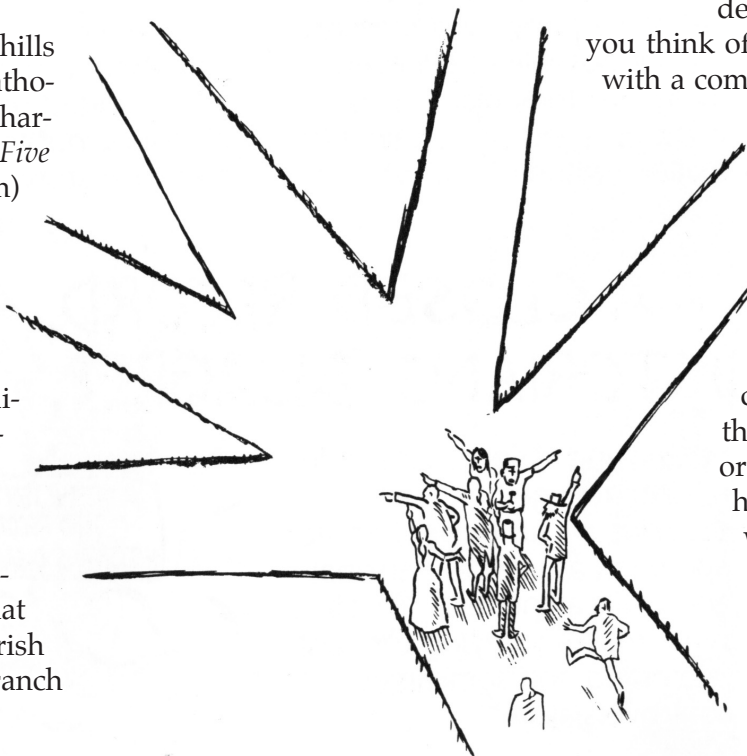
of the American working class. Only when they banded together with other workers could they effectively claim their right to a place in American society.

The point is, you can't understand American history if you think of us as one big, happy family with a common set of ideals and values.

Americans, rich and poor alike, argued about lots of things in the past. We even fought wars – like the Civil War – over our ideas about what kind of place America should be.

Once you take into account all Americans, you see that the past wasn't planned or set and that Americans often had different ideas about the way things should be. Figuring out how things got to be the way they are also means finding out the ways things could have been different.

The Mulvahills were an Irish Catholic family (and characters in the *Five Points* program) who came to New York City in 1845. They faced low wages, awful living conditions, and hostility from the city's Protestant majority. Like other immigrant groups that followed, the Irish were a new branch



ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS AND YOU'LL GET THE CORRECT ANSWERS.

You may remember Consensus giving me that piece of advice when I first met him in *The Big H*. He's right – but the problem is that he's not asking the right questions. If we spend a little time figuring out how historians do history, maybe we can find the right questions to ask.



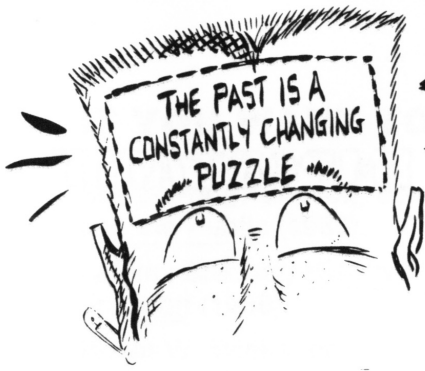
HISTORIANS CAN'T EXACTLY RECOUNT WHAT HAPPENED.

Try writing about a recent event that you were involved in – like a party, or a meeting. It's not possible to tell everything that took place. You wind up selecting certain information, emphasizing what you think is important, leaving out other things. In the same way, writing a book or making a film about a historical event is an organized selection of materials, put together to tell a particular story.

HISTORY ISN'T A CLOSED RECORD. HISTORIANS DISAGREE.

I think you discovered that when you saw *The Big H* program! Real life historians view the past from different points of view, just like Dee, Consensus and Multitudes do. Each historian emphasizes some things, de-emphasizes others, and ignores some information all together. It all depends on his or her historical approach as well as personal and political interests. That's what makes studying the past interesting and sometimes controversial.





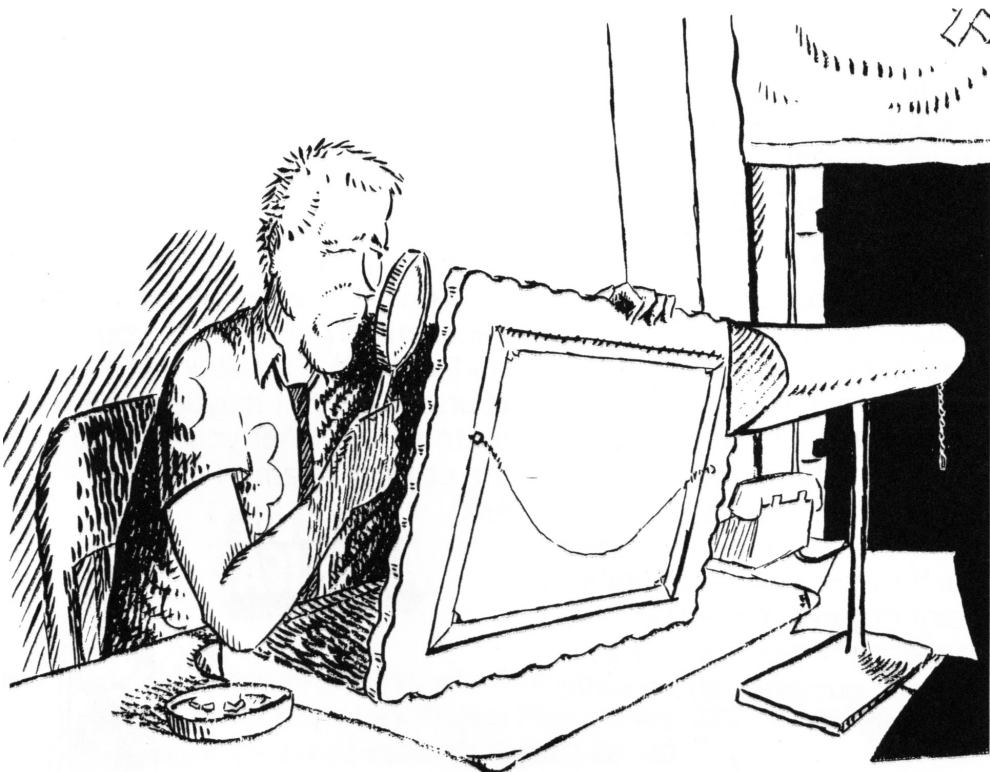
THE PAST IS A CONSTANTLY CHANGING PUZZLE.



The pieces of the puzzle are the evidence or “facts.” Historians use many different types of evidence. For a long time all evidence was written: newspaper articles, speeches, letters, diaries and testimony in government hearings. Historians like Consensus didn’t pay much attention to ordinary people in part because usually only famous people left written records.

“Social” history has shown us that different kinds of evidence are also important and useful, particularly if you’re going to find out what ordinary Americans thought and did: oral interviews, census data, fiction and poetry, songs and humor, pictures. These are just some of the sources a social historian can use to uncover what used to be hidden in the past.

ALL HISTORICAL EVIDENCE HAS TO BE CAREFULLY ANALYZED.



What does it show and what does it fail to show? How are we to figure out its meaning?

That’s where the detective work comes in. If you’re really going to find out about the past, don’t just take someone’s word for it. You have to check out what’s been included... and what’s been left out. But most important, you have to try to figure out the point of view that’s being offered about the past. Remember to ask questions, whether the history that’s presented is in textbooks or TV miniseries, on monuments or restaurant placemats, or even in the *Who Built America?* series!

SEEING IS NOT BELIEVING-- AND WHAT YOU DON'T SEE IS AS IMPORTANT AS WHAT YOU DO SEE.

That's what my historian friend, Dee Dubitandum, said about one type of evidence I've been talking about: pictures. You'll be seeing lots of pictures in the *Who Built America?* programs. Most of them are engravings or cartoons from the period that each show is about.

Pictures help us envision life in the past. But we have to remember that a picture not only tells us about its subject – it also says something about the person who made it.

Here's a cartoon of poor Irish immigrants. If you were Irish, what would you think of this picture? Do you think an Irish person drew this picture?

Here's a picture of slaves on a plantation. Do the slaves look happy? If you were a slave, do you think that's the way you would have felt?

When you look at historical pictures, keep in mind that they not only illustrate a historical event, they also reveal the art-



A Republican "Scarecrow" Fails to Staunch Southern Violence

An unrepentant southern rebel discovers the true nature of the federal government's commitment to defend African-American rights. "Come on, boys!" he shouts in this 1874 cartoon, "Old Grant's bluster about our killing Republicans is only a military scarecrow, after all."

Harper's Weekly, September 26, 1874. American Social History Project



"Clasp Hands Across the Bloody Chasm"

In an 1872 cartoon, some northern Republicans urge a reluctant African American to "Clasp hands across the bloody chasm" with a white Confederate. By 1877 most northerners were ready to let white southerners define the meaning of black freedom and equality.

Thomas Nast, *Harper's Weekly*, August 24, 1872.
American Social History Project

ist's attitudes. Whatever the pictures are about, you'll want to look at them critically and try to figure out the artist's or photographer's point of view. Remember, ask questions of pictures, just as you ask questions about what you read.

Okay. We're on the last page, and it's time to get you started. With a question, of course. One that maybe you'll try to answer after you've seen the other programs. I ask you, folks,

WHO BUILT AMERICA?



THE *WHO BUILT AMERICA?* MATERIALS

History: The Big H and nine other documentaries are a part of the *Who Built America?* series, which explores the central role working women and men played in key events and developments of American History. See also the two-volume *Who Built America?* textbook, *Freedom's Unfinished Revolution*, a high school text on the Civil War and Reconstruction, and the *WBA?* interactive CD-ROM.

Complete list of *WBA?* documentaries:

History: The Big H— This film-noir detective story introduces the history of working people and the challenge of understanding the past.



Tea Party Etiquette— Boston shoemaker George Robert Twelves Hewes narrates his experience of the Boston Tea Party, Boston Massacre, and the American Revolution.

Daughters of Free Men— Lucy Hall leaves her New England farm to work in the Lowell textile mills of the 1830s and confronts a new world of opportunity and exploitation.

Five Points— The story of 1850s New York City and its notorious immigrant slum district, the Five Points, is seen through the conflicting perspectives of a native born Protestant reformer and an Irish-Catholic family.

Doing As They Can— A fugitive woman slave describes her life, work, and day-to-day resistance on a North Carolina cotton plantation during the 1840s and 1850s.

Dr. Toer's Amazing Magic Lantern Show— The struggle to realize the promise of freedom following the Civil War is told by ex-slave J.W. Toer and his traveling picture show.

1877: The Grand Army of Starvation— In the summer of 1877 eighty thousand railroad workers went on strike and hundreds of thousands soon followed. The Great Uprising began a new era of conflict about equality in the industrial age.

Savage Acts: Wars, Fairs and Empire— The story of the Philippine War (1899-1902) and turn-of-the-century world's fairs reveal the links between everyday life in the U.S. and the creation of a new expansionist foreign policy.

Heaven Will Protect the Working Girl— Framed by the 1909 New York shirtwaist strike, this program presents a panoramic portrait of immigrant working women in the turn-of-the-century city.

Up South: African-American Migration in the Era of the Great War— Narrated by a Mississippi barber and a sharecropper woman, *Up South* tells the dramatic story of African-American migration to industrial cities during World War I.