

April 7th, 2004

Telling the Truth About History

I quite enjoyed the book *Telling the Truth About History*. The content of the book was quite interesting and enjoyable to read, but more importantly, the book inspired me to think more about what I think of history. After reading the book, I sat for a while thinking about my thoughts on history. A couple of sections that I identified with came from the chapter on “Competing Histories of America.” The first quote that I found to be quite interesting, and mirrors some of my own thinking was *Historians fashion the nation’s collective self-understanding*. I believe that this statement has a great deal of truth to it, which is one reason for my desire to be a history teacher. There is a possibility that this is simply something that historians think to make themselves feel important, but I feel that historians do play a large part in how people view their country, they certainly have shaped how I feel about it.

Another statement that came from the same chapter was a quote “‘Tis all in pieces, all coherence is lost.” This statement is quite similar to part of the discussion from last week when we were talking about Plato to NATO versus specialization. I find that sometimes in my history classes, so much of the time is focused on specialization, that the big picture gets lost along the way. There is no doubt that specialization allows a historian to see what people were like, what an average person’s life was like. To me, though, this information is useless as history if I do not have a very good understanding of the times in general, and the big events. If all I want to know are the details, then I am a sociologist, because if I don’t have a clear view of the big picture, what I’m studying could very well be happening now, not in the past. Another part of the book that has

been a recurring topic in our class is whether things are relative to a certain time, like pain. This is very similar to Herder's argument that each culture and every historical epoch has to be understood on its own terms.

The last part that I found interesting, and had to mention was the little bit about Leopold von Ranke. I found it interesting that at the University level, history is taught in the same fashion as in the 1830's. Ranke invented the "seminar" in which students were taught how to read and dissect historical documents. To me, that sounds very much like this class.