

**Nigel A. Raab, *Who is the Historian?* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2016). 121 pp. \$17.95 Paperback.**

According to the publisher's web page, and again on the back of the book, this book addresses four questions: who is the historian, what do historians do, where do their interpretations take them, and what is the impact of the digital age on historical research? The publisher's blurb continues online that with an affable style the author answers those questions and in each of the six chapters addresses a specific aspect of doing history, covering the archives, the sources, and the web of the historian, and points out that historians are assisted in their work by archivists, librarians and others who help create the historian's web of activity. Readers will then learn about the nature of the historian's skills and finally the author demonstrates the value of the historian.

For this reviewer it is a welcome acknowledgement by the author that the historian depends on many other people in the universe of doing history but also acknowledges that the individual historian works alone but often also in collaboration and often outside academe. The great strength of this book is the acknowledgement that historians never really work in isolation. Historians work in a milieu that demands a much wider range of sources than ever before and their environment also includes a range of other activities sustained by archivists and others from other disciplines most plainly – and increasingly – professionals in many other disciplines. The author also acknowledges the increasing professional pressures felt by most academic historians.

In Chapter One entitled "The Spaces in Which We Work" the author explains how the historian can often find himself or herself working in those "heartless spaces" – archives and libraries – that present an in-built environment that both assists but also hinders in equal measure. Tackling archives can be a thankless task – a situation the non-historian cannot imagine? The psychology of the historian when faced with archive fever is explained with the light touch of someone who has experienced and come through. The author's style is also deft and turns what could be desperately tedious stuff about accessing archives into a fascinating journey.

Our author, in subsequent chapters, then turns to a different dimension of the sources – their organization that both helps and hinders, and their vastness which defeats simple concepts like 'the truth'. Which sources should historian's use? Documents? Novels? Films? Costumes? Letters? Photographs? Television? Physical objects? Music? Performance? The creation of silence? Diaries? But what happens after the archive? The author next addresses how do historians collaborate? And even more, how do historians collaborate in terms of interdisciplinary activities –

botany and history? Museology, fragility and history? Where does history slip the ties of the mythic? Present ideas, theories and the past? Ethnocentricity and history? And the postmodern interregnum? And then we have the digitization of the past.

Next our author addresses a major new direction for historians in terms of both accessing innovative research areas but also in turning the past into a history. The Internet has revolutionized doing history. But so has the mind set of the historian. So, what is the mind set of the historian? How many different ways can the past be turned into history? What is the connection between history, the historian and the humanities? Our author is also not afraid to confront tricky problems for historians such as relativism.

My judgment on this book? It is that I am happy to recommend it for its measured analysis and the author's addressing of issues that will make sense to both the initiated professional and the amateur. Its author recognizes the 'desperately seeking' nature of the historian in excavating the past and what it might mean *as* history.

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