

Study of America's Colorful History Necessary to Paving Bright Future

1976 has been a great year for history, because the world now knows that this nation has survived 200 years of freedom.

Officially, the Bicentennial of the signing of the Declaration of Independence is supposed to continue through the Bicentenary of the Constitutional Convention, in 1987, and the Bicentenary of the first president of the United States, in 1989.

This can happen, providing we learn from history and avoid mistakes that have destroyed freedom in other nations.

In an article stressing the importance of knowing history, American Heritage magazine quotes the American philosopher, George Santayana, who said: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

How can we remember or learn from the past if we don't know our history? In the American Heritage article, three leading historians discuss shortcomings in the teaching of history.

Noting that historical time is "infinitely remote and unreal," Page Smith says, "I suspect that a good deal of the moral and spiritual confusion of our day is related to the failure of most people to feel themselves a part of history."

Eugene D. Genovese says the teaching of history ought to be easy "for our country has had a genuinely great history that could fire the imagination and engage the loyalty of young people. Yet, not many teachers present American history in a positive spirit today, at least not convincingly."

Richard M. Hunt makes a vital point in criticizing the "uglifying

view of American history" by those espousing a counter trend to the sentimental view of our past.

"Instead of portraying the colorful records of the nation's achievements and failures, some historians operating on radical and Marxist assumptions present a wholly bleached—or better stated, denigratory—picture," Hunt declared.

Thus, our history is being rewritten by certain teachers to portray un-American political philosophies. Some novelists also have taken this approach in books attempting to destroy American heroes and present others as "the real leaders."

This brings to mind the alarmingly prophetic book, "1984" by George Orwell, published in 1949. In the totally controlled system Orwell described, history was being rewritten continually to fit current political conditions and for thought control.

"Who controls the past controls the future," it was said, "and who controls the present controls the past."

If history is to be our guide, it must be honest. And history shows that free people need honest, capable leaders, too. This is not always what results when other qualifications are overshadowed by personalities to the point of oversight.

History shows that in this century charming political leaders have become misleaders, directing their nations and the world into economic disasters and costly wars.

History records that people with problems too readily follow such figures into dictatorships and disasters, if their charisma is strong and their promises too good to be true!