



Course Code: HIS 111

Course Title: Historiography.

DAY(S): WEDNESDAYS

TIME: 10AM-12NOON.

NAME OF LECTURER: MR. OSAHON PRESCOTT OVIawe

Course Ware: This course introduces the students to the meanings of history, the history of historical writings, and the use of history, and the relationship of history with other disciplines and African historiography. It also exposes them to the problems of writing history, limitations of writing African history, sources of history.

Intended Learning Outcomes: At the end of the course the students should be able to:

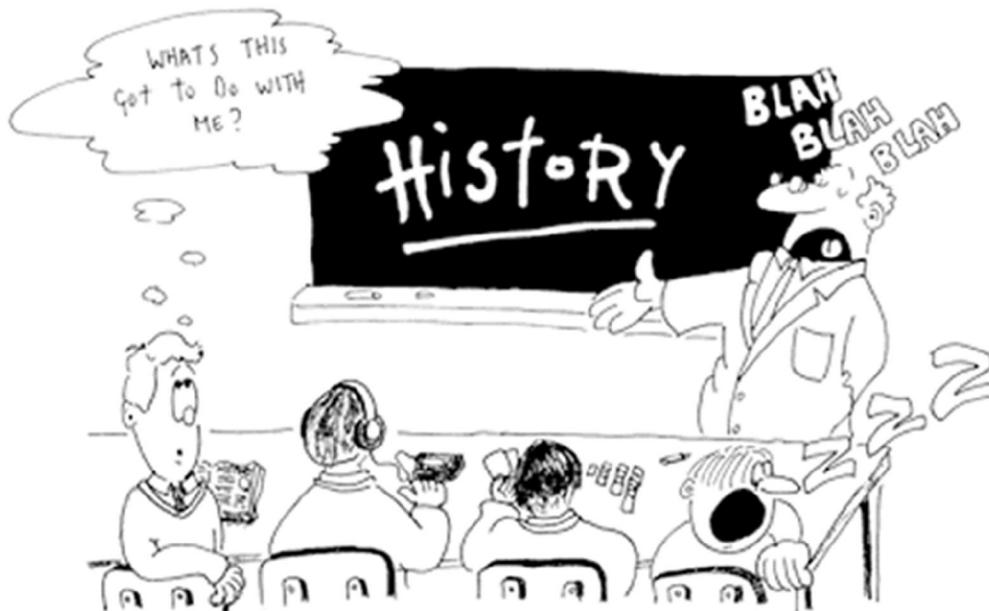
1. Define historiography and history
2. List the sources of history and explain the problems with them
3. Discuss the use of history
4. Explain the different stages of history writing
5. Itemize the problems of history writing especially African history
6. Discuss how history can benefit from the multi-disciplinary approach

Experience is d best teacher only for a fool. History is a kinder & gentler teacher.  
-Welsh Adage.

Nothing has really happened until it has been recorded. -VIRGINIA WOOLF

Each day is a little bit of history. -JOSÉ SARAMAGO, *Baltasar and Blimunda*

*When memory forgets, record remembers.-Anonymous*



The primary idea of historiography is history, the nature of history, types of history and the history of historical writing, problems of knowledge and methods of history and the training of students to become historians. It also covers the importance and use of history, problems associated with the writing of history, African historiography, its limitations and the relationships between history and other disciplines.

To begin, it is proper to attempt and highlight some definitions.

History, according to Professor Michael Omolewa, is an account of the [events in the] past which seeks to provide reasons for what happened the way they [the events] did. This means that there are explanations for every event, action or inaction of humans. Arthur Marwick defines history in three different ways. First, history connotes the entire human past as it actually happened. Secondly, it means man's attempts to describe and interpret the past. Thirdly, it is a systematic study of the past.

According to R.G. Collingwood, in his work, *the idea of History*, history itself is a method. It means the modes of investigation upon which the accounts of the past are arrived at or constructed. J. Oladele Fadeyiye, the author of *Ground work*

*Essays on History, Historiography, Archeology and Methods of teaching History for N.C.E and Undergraduate*, It is derived from a Greek word “historie” meaning inquiry or the outcome or result of inquiry.

E.H. Carr defined history as a continuous process of interaction between the past and the present. With this definition, he means the historian conducts his inquiry with the facts he has into the past which he is interested in. But to him facts are what other historians call facts because they must have been used as such by those who belong to the cult of fact. This submission is now outdated and no longer hold.

Robert V. Daniels as quoted by Professor Obaro Ikime defined history as “the memory of human group experience. Professor Ikime stressed that “if such a memory is ignored or forgotten, a people ceases... to be humans”. He maintained that without history we have no knowledge of whom we” are, and that “history gives men something to live for, struggle over and die for”. History is an act of providing accurate knowledge of the past validated through historical criticism. But a simple definition of the subject will be history is the study of past human activities and events. It is therefore an attempt to rethink the past in terms of what happened, when it happened, where it happened, why it happened and how it happened. This is in line with the rule set by Leopold Von Ranke when he said “the task of Historian was simply to show it really was . It is also an attempt to reproduce the entire past of mankind as it happened without leaving any out.

What is the nature of history? What does the historian do with history?

1. Uncovers the unknown or discovers the quiet and silent genetic origins or causes of events.
2. Answers questions.
3. Identifies the relationship between the past and the present.
4. Records, evaluates accomplishments and challenges of individuals, agencies and institutions.

How does the historian or history accomplish this task?

History or the historian studies the past from the survival which bears the mark of the past. The survival of the past are called sources or evidences. Sources are evidences from which the activities or events of the past is arrived at, constructed, deconstructed or reconstructed. In other words, sources are what the historians need to write their assignment or long essay of the past that they are interested in.

### Classification of sources

Sources can be organized into two categories. The first is primary sources. Sources organized into this category are usually a collection of reports during the time of the events or the reportage of the events by those who were part of it. These reports can be found in personal diaries, letters or correspondences, minutes of meetings, registers, legislative acts or acts of parliaments, parliamentary debates or deliberations (hansards), annual reports, memoires, accounts of travellers, dispatches, gazettes, interviews, autobiographies, and newspapers. These are written primary sources. There are also unwritten primary sources and these include the eye witness account and oral traditions.

Other sources categorized as primary include linguistic, ethnographic and archaeological findings. Those who study archaeology are archaeologists. Their duty is to excavate the ground to expose the remains that has been buried in the soil for a long time and study for how long they have been buried. Their studies are usually of a high value to the historians who use these studies for historical analysis. The linguistic findings help the historians to determine the roots of language clusters. The pieces of information provided by the linguists help the historians to have reliable information on migrations in the past and the distributions of peoples in the past.

The second is the secondary sources. These are reports or sources which depend on the primary sources for information or which reports or sources flow from the primary sources. The secondary sources according to Omolewa are second hand information. These are books and articles.

### Problems of sources of history

The task of writing history or accounting for the past devoid of flaws is a daunting one before the historian and he is aware of this. He therefore needs to be

scrupulous when collecting and synthesizing materials for his work. To do this there is need to identify some of the problems that may be hindrances to fulfilling this task. And sourcing materials especially the right ones can be a discomforting assignment especially to undergraduates and sometimes graduates of history.

The first is the problem of location(s) of materials. This poses a serious challenge to historians at all levels because no one can write anything at all if there are no materials or sources to validate claims. Since the historians are not writing comprehensions or imaginative essays, they cannot start not to talk of making progress. The historian needs to identify where to get materials for his work before thinking of writing at all. The same goes for the students of history. It should be noted that all sources are not lumped in one place, they are scattered all over the places depending on the area of interest.

There is also a problem of funds or finance. This is a very big problem for every historian who is writing an assignment or a long essay. Once the problem of material locations has been solved the next is how to get there. This requires finance. The historian needs funds to travel to materials location (this maybe a city), s/he needs money to make photocopies or even buy the books needed. Since s/he may spend some time he may also has to rent an affordable accommodation or pay for hotel depending on the number of days s/he is spending close to the place of visitation.

If the sources are primary sources that are in the archives, s/he may sometimes tip (this may cover buying lunch or giving money for recharge cards or transportation or even the three and more) to the workers to make them willing to render him/her assistance.

If the sources are primary sources that fall within oral traditions, an eye witness or a participant account s/he needs to conduct an interview(s). Therefore, s/he needs to give out money to get a willing informant(s) who will assist him/her to get the pieces of information for his/her work. This informant may have to depend on the historian throughout the periods of stay, connection and the interview(s) or for how long s/he conducts his/her interviews. This may also extend to those the historian is interviewing.

One may also stand the risk of wasting his/her finances or even time if the informant turns out to be unreliable or not willing to give you the pieces of information needed or worst provides the wrong information. The informant may also turn out become hostile especially if he cannot give you what you want after spending so much on him/her. He may allege issues against you in order to be free from you. This may endanger the historian.

Oral sources are getting scarce by the day. This is majorly due to the fact that the tradition of passing it on to succeeding generations is gradually fading away. The younger generations are no longer interested in preserving the oral traditions of origin or their culture. The old men are now few and reducing as many are already dead.

There are life threatening dangers which may arise from travelling on bad roads, resulting to accidents. There is also the possibility of encountering armed robbers and kidnappers on journeys to the location of sources. This may lead to partial or total loss of memory and ultimately death.

Loss of memory can also come from ageing. Loss of memory, either from accident or ageing poses a very big challenge to sources for the historian. It can lead to distortion of facts or events as it happened. This can be in form exaggeration or reduction of main information that are needed or total loss of information. When this happened the historian can no longer get the accurate information about the event(s) or activity(ies) of the past that is of interest to him/her.

The problem of bias can also affect sources. This can come from the materials or sources which the historian collected for his/her work or from the historian towards the sources. The problem of bias stems from the author's background, the association or group s/he identifies with as well as his nationality (ethnic or state i.e. country). For instance, the embers of most historians are fanned by patriotic desires towards their country and so they write to defend and project its course. That was what happened in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the imperial historians and writers of Europe wrote about Africa and its peoples. African achievements and culture were either miniature, destroyed or taken over. This was done to promote colonial rule and imperialism as a sign of patriotism. It was further said of Africa and its peoples that they had no history since no writing to document whatever it is

they have achieved. African writers, historians, playwrights, poets and/or story tellers in reaction to the European writers also introduced their own bias by exaggerating African greatness devoid of any external contributions especially the Caucasoid (whites).

An historian can also be biased towards his/her sources. This is usually the case when the historian does not trust the author(s) of the sources. When this happened s/he is likely to drop the sources. The distrust may arise out of personal or group quarrels or out of personal observation that the author(s) are not truthful. Again every writer has an aim in mind to fulfill when writing. S/he may be tempted to or can jettison any information that does not support his arguments towards this aim. This can lead to one sided judgments. This will affect the quality of the work as it would either be rejected or rated very poorly.

Due to ideological issues sources are becoming endangered on a daily basis. For instance, modernity and religion have tagged some of the past activities as fetish and they have been destroyed. This so called fetish activities might be the window to the past of the people concerned.

Archives and public institutions are dying out and getting fewer by the day. Same goes with the documents they seek to preserve. Most public libraries no longer have books due to stealing by some members of public who use them. Some of these materials are also lost to fire incidents, destructive insects, water, rodents and other destructive agents because no one cares any longer.

Language barrier is also a serious problem. Sources can also suffer from over dependence on outsiders to write local histories. This can happen especially when the writer is linguistically different. It therefore means that every interpretation given to any source or work is another source of its own which is usually incomplete as it lacks the ingredients of the original.

