

## WHAT IS HISTORY?

- A. Common definitions of history
- B. The idea of many pasts
- C. Ways of studying the past
  - e.g. history as past politics
    - “ “social processes/social conflicts (cf. Karl Marx)
    - “ “as the story of human progress (cf. Daniel Boorstin)
    - “ “as the story of war (the Civil War)
- D. History as an interpretative discipline
  - 1. E. H. Carr on what constitutes a historical fact
  - 2. Theories of history: some examples
    - a. G. F. Hegel
    - b. Karl Marx
    - c. F. J. Turner
    - d. Lewis Mumford
    - e. Thomas Kuhn
- E. Lines of interpretation in the history of technology
  - 1. Technology as the history of expanding knowledge/expanding systems (example: Thomas P. Hughes)
  - 2. Technology as a social force (example: Lynn White’s stirrup thesis)
  - 3. Technology as a social product; the social construction of technology (example: David Noble; Donald MacKenzie)
  - 4. Technology as a social process (example: Anthony Wallace’s *Rockdale*)

### F. What does all this have to do with the Civil War?

It is simply to say that interpretation matters. The readings and films you will be viewing this term present different historical interpretations of the Civil War. I want you to pay attention to them and tease out these differences (see last assignment re. “who got it right?”)

In fact, we are going to start out backwards so to speak by reading David Donald’s little about *Why the North Won the Civil War*, so we can reflect on that question as we move through the term and all the complexities of the larger conflict that we will encounter. So bear in mind that history is an interpretive, open-ended subject. Quite apart from the war itself, one of the primary objects of

this class is to learn how to differentiate between varying interpretations of the past, evaluate them, and come to a conclusion about which ones best stand up to scholarly scrutiny. These are tools that will come in handy in whatever professional field you choose to pursue in life.