

“We are *Made By History*”: Historians, Op-eds, & Public Perceptions of History

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Introduction

Started in 2017, the Made By History (*MBH*) political history blog section of the *Washington Post* provides historians with a credible and accessible platform to connect current political events to their historical roots.



Conclusions

- *MBH* keeps up with the 24-hour news cycle to turnover high-quality history that is accessible right when it’s relevant to current national debates
- The *MBH* publishing model—a history blog with unlimited op-ed space operating under the *WaPo*—is significant and novel in itself
- Contributors consider writing an op-ed when a current event directly relates to their own research
- Contributors hope op-eds both demystify the role of the historian and provide readers with historical perspective that will help them better understand the present
- *MBH* contributors do not view this work as “scholarly,” but also realize the need for work to be accessible on blogs, social media, etc.
- Writing clearly, concisely, and quickly—to keep up with the news cycle—for a public audience is a skill that gives historians immediacy and flexibility
- Measuring the success of the *MBH* blog and its impact on public perceptions of history is difficult
- The best history is interdisciplinary at heart

Research Questions

How is the *MBH* blog changing the way historians communicate history and engage with the public? What does this say about the emerging possibilities for new forms of scholarship?

Methodology

1. Digital History theory and scholarship
2. Analysis of *MBH* content
3. Online interviews with 6 recent blog contributors
4. Analysis of contributors’ professional background

Participating Contributor Professional Background Analysis

Participating <i>MBH</i> contributors are historians	83%
Participating <i>MBH</i> contributors are university-level professors	83%
Participating <i>MBH</i> contributors have significant training in their field (hold a PhD or are PhD candidates)	100%
Most recent contribution to <i>MBH</i> is directly related to their demonstrated area of expertise/area of interest	100%

“*MBH* signifies to historians that engagement with today’s politics is a best practice... it elevates History within politics, as well as politics within History.”

—Rebecca Brenner Graham (interview participant)

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