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ABSTRACT

The rhetorical functions of history depend on the domain in which history is used, with no connotations of interpretive priority attaching to the social or the academic realm. The appropriation of history in support of social causes as radically opposed as socialism and fascism fuels the temptation to subsume history under ideology, with the result that history is "relativized" as whatever interpretation of past events supports a particular cause. History when used as a warrant in public argument is immensely authoritative, acquiring a mythic character when divorced from factual evidence. The fact that history can by used to suit almost any purpose demonstrates how interpretive latitude allowed by uncontested terms (which are not amenable to logical dissection) can instigate widespread adherence to the principles these terms embody. Quarrels among academic historians regarding interpretation indicate that historians themselves do not use history consensually. History in public argument is not simply true--it is truth--and as an argumentative warrant provides a point for building consensus around argumentative claims. However, rhetors who advocate a position ordained by history could escape from moral responsibility, since the argument is not theirs but that of history. It would be well to remember that the power of history is no more the property of a single cause or ideology than truth is the exclusive possession of only one person. History deserves a place in public argument, but it is not the last word. (Extensive references are attached.) (NKA)

# The Rhetorical Force of History in Public Argument

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The Rhetorical Force of History in Public Argument

Recently a graduate student gave me a copy of a seminar paper he had written. The paper began with the phrase: "As recorded history demonstrates...." The student regarded history itself as sufficient evidence for his thesis. This student's paper raises questions regarding the use of history as an argumentative resource. Specifically, what concepts of history emerge when it is employed for argumentative purposes in contexts outside formal historical scholarship?

In examining the rhetorical force of history, it is important to understand that history is not the exclusive property of historians. This paper deals with history as a rhetorical device in the public forum, not in academic disputes. History, like expertise, "is appropriated in different ways by different audiences" (Lyne & Howe 143). In this essay, I focus on discourse aimed at audiences who have no special training or expertise in history. My specific objective is to examine how history acts as a persuasive device in social discourse. If "rhetorical force" is "conceived as a power transmitted through the links of a chain that extends upward toward some ultimate source" (Weaver, Ethics 211), then the rhetorical force of history can be understood by examining the role history plays in exerting persuasive power upon rhetors and audiences.

The rhetorical force of history is not singular. The antithesis of using history authoritatively is the attitude that events can recede into the past and become irretrievable.

"History" seems amenable to configuration either as an ultimate authority or as a synonym for whatever lies beneath notice. Richard Weaver, for instance, contends that the elevated conception of life emerging from contemplating tragedy serves "to keep the human lot from being rendered as history" (Language 79). Emil Fackenheim defends the relevance of Holocaust studies be arguing: "The Holocaust was not...a footnote for historians" (viii). Richard Rubenstein (1) makes a similar point when he asks: "Why not consign the story <of the Holocaust> to the dustbin of history and be done with it?" Obsolete terms are often regarded as "having only an historical significance" (Bellamy 46). Although history might be seen as "bunk" by the "contemporary masses" (Weaver, Ethics 221), it can still be used to legitimate argumentative claims. The issue this paper addresses is why and how history lends persuasive strength to a rhetor's position.

The body of discourse I examine is directed to readers or listeners beyond the confines of academia. This context surrounds what will be called in this discussion the "appeal to history" or the "argumentative use of history." History in the arena of public argument carries rhetorical force as an uninterpreted abstraction. A premise of this discussion is that historians do not fully control the scope of their subject matter once history is employed in non-academic spheres. Since "writers or speakers will not necessarily be in control of what frames are used to interpret their discourse" (Lyne 7), it might not seem surprising that history undergoes rhetorical

transformations as it is appropriated by rhetors and audiences outside academic parameters.

The rhetorical functions of history depend on the domain in which history is employed, with no connotations of interpretive priority attaching to the social or the academic realm. I do not wish to claim that a conception of history originates with academic historians and is disseminated to a wider public. The difference between "social" history and "academic" history is that the former appears as a singular, uninterpreted term in order to legitimate argumentative stances. Academic history is ordinarily pluralized by historians to affirm that history has no single meaning and that historians actively engage in interpreting their subject matter. The dialogue historians have with their subject (Davis 114) indicates that academic historians approach history through particular interpretive frameworks or "personal philosophy" (Weaver, Ethics 221). To distinguish the social from the academic use of history, I capitalize "History" when it is employed as an abstract authority to buttress rhetorical positions offered to non-specialized audiences.

## History as Authority

In the classificatory schemes of informal logic, the appeal to tradition is deemed fallacious because it appeals to "feelings of reverence and respect for some tradition that supports" a viewpoint (Damer 92). History, however, is also authoritative when invoked to sanction a particular viewpoint or action. History in public argument reflects not only a

"reverence for the past" (Damer 93) and traditional ways of doing things, but also an attempt to disqualify counterarguments.

Weaver contends that the use of History an an ultimate authority has declined, perhaps as a result of "that threshold resentment of anything which savors of the prescriptive" (Ethics 220). The tendency for History to be pluralized into "histories" by academic historians who steadfastly disagree with one another may have detracted from the univocal authority conceded to the past. The appropriation of History in support of social causes as radically opposed as socialism and fascism also fuels the temptation to subsume History under ideology, with the result that history is relativized as whatever interpretation of past events supports a particular cause.

Weaver does not examine how or why History can become the equivalent of truth. The truth equated with History is not simply an aggregate of factual illustrations supporting a rhetor's position: "History is more than the mere plural form of fact" (Haywood 139; cf. Weaver, Ethics 220). Rather than an appeal to authority, History in the public forum is the authority to which interlocutors appeal. The trust in History is not equivalent to investing historians with authority commensurate with their expertise. The appeal to History indicates a faith in the Historical process itself, apart from the interpretive powers of historians. If faith in History has waned and historians cannot speak consensually, then it is no surprise that modern rhetors and audiences frequently assume

that "history is bunk."

History, when employed as a warrant in public argument, "is immensely authoritative" and "irreproachably authentic" (Haywood 139). Authenticity of History in the abstract differs from the equation of truth with specific documented facts. History in public argument is not coextensive with actual historical incidents, since the appeal to History does not enlist data in support of an interpretation. The public use of History, therefore, contrasts with "'history proper'--the subject of the professional historian--<which> is synonymous with 'recorded history,' that is, with ascertainable facts" (Hayes 11). The employment of History in the public forum "is conceptual rather than factual" (Weaver, Ethics 220). The graduate student mentioned earlier considered his invocation of History in the abstract the terminus of argument. Enumeration of specific events which might disprove the student's interpretation would not count as counterinstances, since his argument did not rely on factual evidence.

Although it is customary to contrast factual history with myth, History acquires a mythic character when divorced from factual evidence. If myths are "believed to be true, not because the historical evidence is compelling, but because they make sense of men's present experience" (Tudor 124), then the social use of History is also to some extent mythic. Such usage emerges in Lincoln's (166) equation of patriotism with "pride in, and reverence for, the history, and government" of a nation. This "history of the nation" is one of several "strong and noble

sentiments" (Lincoln 166) binding citizens together as participants in a common cultural heritage. The veneration of History is more respect for a general sense of the direction practical action should take than an attempt to preserve or record what actually happened in the past (cf. Tudor 125). History as public myth contributes to the "forces that go to make up the collective experience and give shape to the group character of a people" (Woodward, Burden x).

The appeal to History is distinct from a universal generalization susceptible to refutation by a counterexample. The difference between appealing to history, i.e. specific incidents in the past, and appealing to History is the distinction between history as a collective noun and History as an abstraction not obtained by generalizing from specific instances. A rhetor might invoke "Versailles," "Munich," "Vietnam," etc. to make a point: "If Vietnam teaches us nothing else, it is that policies that lack roots and credibility at home are a sure course to disaster" (Goodman & Tillman E23). Sometimes a single historical occurrence becomes a synecdoche for all events of a similar type and for the sentiments attached to the original event: "So if any of us are to realize that there are times in American national life where <military> intelligence is important and patriotic unanimity of singular significance, the Battle of Normandy could well symbolize it all" (Leach H4948).

These shorthand references to events remain in the realm of history, since they invoke past events as evidence for an

argument. In effect, the appeal to specific events is an attempt to apply past experiences analogically to present or future circumstances. Specific instances of policymaking failures, for example, offer administrators a chance "to learn from the past" (Tower et al. 90). Such an appeal involves an examination of similarities and differences between past and present actions to determine whether previous experience can serve as an action guide in new situations (cf. Neustadt & May 41-57; Tower et al. 99).

The appeal to History, on the other hand, need not depend on an analogy between past and present. The rhetor appropriates History itself, not events in history. The contention that a claim or policy accords with History "is the same thing as moving toward the good" (Ellul 137), since characterizing something as Historically sanctioned also means it is approved. Bertrand Russell captures this rhetorical tendency to treat what I call History as having univocal significance: "<I>t is the province of history to tell the biography, not only of men, but of Man; to present the long procession of generations as but the passing thoughts of one continuous life..." (526). When History is employed in public argument, specificity is not a rhetorical virtue. The authority of History is not so much a matter of documentary support as it is a matter of the term's breadth.

The breadth of the public use of History is apparent in its transcendence of historiographical categories. Chaim Perelman constructs a threefold typology of history: theological, rhetorical, and philosophical (Humanities 147-148). The

theological characterization of history portrays events as manifestations of Providential will. The rhetorical category configures history in terms of how human actions are conducted and expressed, so it assigns no univocal meaning to history. According to the rhetorical view, each individual attributes meanings to his or her own actions and to the actions of others. The philosophical conception treats history as the progression of Reason or absolute Spirit.

History in the public forum combines aspects of Perelman's three categories. History has the argumentative power of a theological mandate, a command that can be disobeyed only at the expense of appearing intransigent, radical, or irrational. When Ronald Reagan claims: "Logic and history compel us to accept that our relationship <with the Soviet Union> be guided by realism--rockhard, clear-eyed, steady and sure" (State of the Union 292), the conjunction of History with logic makes a potent rhetorical pair. Making policy contrary to History would be illogical and unrealistic. History is equated with constancy and reliability, characteristics held in almost universally high esteem.

The argumentative use of History is rhetorical in Perelman's sense because of its ability to serve virtually any cause. Rhetors taking opposing sides on an issue can claim that History supports each of their positions and condemns those of their opponents. The philosophical aspect of History emerges when the interlocutor's position appears as the logical outcome of historical progression leading to a determinate--and perhaps

theologically determined--end, both temporally and teleologically. Joseph Needham uses History in this way when he identifies the progression of History with the development of more orderly and complex social and biological organization: "Life itself is essentially order and organisation; man in his societies cannot be untrue to it. History is on our side" (28). Needham's assertion that "history is on our side" is actually a rhetorical way of siding with History's authority and rationality. The next section addresses the issue of how siding with History exemplifies the use of terminological breadth to instigate social action.

## History and Incontestability

Weaver attempts to explain the antiquated style and foreignness of nineteenth-century American public address to modern observers partially on the basis of the frequent appearance of uncontested terms. These terms, despite their sweeping generality and distance from definite referents, tend to be accepted unquestioningly (Weaver, Ethics 164-167). According to Weaver, an uncontested term is one which "seems to invite a contest, but which apparently is not so regarded in its own context" (Ethics 166). Uncontested terms are typically imprecisely defined abstractions whose generality does not, within the rhetorical context they appear, militate against their rhetorical utility. Examples of terms used in this manner are "progress," "freedom," and "destiny" (cf. Weaver, Ethics 168-169).

Weaver suggests that investing orators with power to

"review our conduct, our destiny, and the causes of things in general" (Ethics 183) is one reason why uncontested terms appear so frequently in what he calls the "old rhetoric." He identifies a "substratum of agreement" which "makes possible the panoramic treatment" (Ethics 171) typifying uncontested terms. Weaver, however, indicates that this agreement characterizes a particular phase of a society's development (Ethics 171) and does not explore the catalytic role uncontested terms might play in engendering audience action.

Weaver's assumption that uncontested terms stem from the power of those who hold stewardship over judging might have some foundation; however, the occurrence of History as an uncontested term does not seem limited to the discourse of individuals vested with broad judgmental authority. Weaver's explanation of why uncontested terms appear is problematic since it fails to account for the frequency and rhetorical role of such terms in contemporary as well as in nineteenth-century rhetoric.

If rhetoric is a linguistic "inducement to action" (Burke, Rhetoric 42), then analysis of History as a rhetorical device requires an understanding of how History motivates action. In what senses does History encourage action? The fact that History can be employed to suit almost any purpose demonstrates how the interpretive latitude allowed by uncontested terms can instigate widespread adherence to the principles these terms embody. Lentricchia, referring to Kenneth Burke's appropriation of 'the people' as the central term for American Marxism, summarizes the persuasive potential of terms with fluid

meanings. "The fluidity, or undecidability, of the symbol is not, therefore, the sign of its social and political elusiveness but the ground of its hi[illegible]city and of its flexible but also specific political significance and force" (34).

The appearance and use of uncontested terms are not in themselves sufficient to assure the success of a cause. History in the public realm is more than simply uncontested; it is an ultimate source of power and authority (Weaver, Ethics 211-212). History in public argument acquires a normative character insofar as it is what Weaver would call an ultimate term (Ethics 211-232), a term to whose authority particular claims defer as a primary source of argumentative strength (cf. Weaver, Ethics 212). The quarrels among academic historians regarding the merits of different historical interpretations indicate that historians themselves do not use history consensually. History in the public forum posits a History uninterpreted and not requiring interpretation, a view "which sanctifies history by conferring on it the role of ultimate judge" (Perelman, New Rhetoric 268).

Although historians might disagree on the significance of America's experience in Vietnam, for example, it is still possible to search for the "clear verdict that history seems to have rendered" (Goodman & Tillman E23). History also is personified as an impartial and final adjudicator. Lincoln appeals to "impartial history" to decide whether slavery is morally wrong (258). Dr. Leete, a character in Edward Bellamy's novel Looking Backward, claims that nineteenth-century

businesspeople were inefficient capitalists. This conclusion "is just the verdict history has passed" on previous business practices (170). The judgment of History will be rendered regardless of attempts to evade it, since "we cannot escape history" (Lincoln 208).

The assertion that the passage of time will automatically decide controversial matters or will support a cause is allied to what Perelman calls the "pragmatic argument" (New Rhetoric 68; cf. Ellul 137). The employment of History as pragmatic argument configures History as an abstract force not to be confused with a sequence of particular events. The adage "Time will tell" expresses the power of "the silent artillery of time" (Lincoln 43) to pass judgment. The verdicts of future generations on contemporary events are "likely to be more unbiased than our own, since they will be judging without partisanship or self-interest, without rancour or animosity" (Cicero 292).

The association of temporal distance with visual perspective indicates that History in the sense of the flow of time itself lends objectivity to historical accounts which would otherwise be immersed in the biases and confusions of the moment. Past events assume a more definite meaning when understood from "the perspective of subsequent history" (Rubenstein 8). The passage of time lends comprehensiveness to retrospective analysis: "My very distance in historic time from the Holocaust may afford me the vantage point of visualizing the event as a totality rather than a fragment" (Frey 5). In

Looking Backward, Julian West's consideration of the nineteenth century after 113 years had passed allows him to understand the shortcomings of his time as no nineteenth-century observer could. Putting a matter in "historical perspective" (cf. Bauer) indicates that temporal distance yields conclusions beyond the pale of the individual perspectives of academic historians.

The message of History, unlike the histories of academic historians, does not admit degrees of likelihood or plausibility. History in public argument is not simply true, it is truth. History becomes a standard against which particular events are measured. If a claim accords with History, the claim appears univocally correct. When History teaches a lesson, the lesson assumes the tone of universal truth: "History teaches us that wars begin when governments believe the price of aggression is cheap" (Reagan, "Soviet Relations" 226).

No evidence can count as disproof once the basic assumption of History's authority has been accepted. Uncontested terms permit no refutation, not because they have strong logical support, but because they are not amenable to logical dissection (cf. McGee 13). In other words, acquiescence to the will of History involves not simply agreement, but immersion in the vision of History as a directive force commanding assent. Restated in the language of narrativity, one tale of what History ordains is customarily refuted by telling an alternative story, not by trying to erode faith in the reliability of History itself.

The way the appeal to History is countered argumentatively

reveals how History retains its authority when appropriated by a different cause. Arguments against the lessons History teaches can either draw a different conclusion from History or shift History to history and stress the plurality of historical interpretations. Haynes Johnson, for example, argues against "the teaching of history so that today's young Americans will follow the current administration's policy line" on the ground that the "lessons of history" might differ from what Secretary of Education William Bennett claims they are (A3). Johnson does not deny the authority of History; he wants to assure that its authority is not monopolized by a particular ideology.

Uncontested terms suspend critical judgment by eroding the subject-object dichotomy through which interpretation becomes possible. This phenomenon is analogous to what Gadamer calls "the medial nature of the play process" (98). Play "fulfils its purpose" when it draws the player into its realm "and fills him with its spirit" so that the player "loses himself in his play" (Gadamer 98, 92). History becomes not only the true account of past events (cf. Russell 521-522), but the framework within which present and future actions occur. In this sense, History acts as a living template, not simply as a receptacle into which anything worthless is disposed. If audiences accept the equation, indeed the merged identity, of positive values with History, then they have gone a long way toward accepting the claims supported by History. The univocal emotive connotations of uncontested terms, plus their vagueness, allow audiences to link themselves unconditionally with the forces those terms

embody. Ronald Reagan seems to deny the subsumption of individuals to History when he contends: "History is no captive of some inevitable force. History is made by men and women of vision and courage" (State of the Union 290). Although this remark makes history independent of external forces, the President uses history as History in an attempt to establish consensual support for tax reform: "Now history calls us to press on, to complete efforts for an historic tax reform..." (State of the Union 291).

## History as Persuasion

The metaphysical abstraction of History has persuasive power and helps to structure the past as a singular, continuous whole. McGee contends that the manipulation of power and structuring of reality are not solely functions of ideologies. Rather, the formulation and refinement of social reality is evidenced and often accomplished by the struggle over defining and appropriating terms which summarize a society's ultimate values (McGee 3-4, 7). McGee calls these terms "ideographs" because, like Chinese symbols, the terms themselves suffice to indicate an entire orientation or mode of encountering reality (McGee 7). Ideographs in American public address include "liberty" and "equality" (McGee 8).

In dramatistic terms, History could be understood as the scene within which ideographs are framed (cf. Burke, Grammar 3). Ideographs ordinarily appear gramatically as predicate nominatives, e.g. a claim is made in the name of liberty. History, on the other hand, lends a diachronic structure to

ideographic claims by providing a warrant for using the ideographs. Any number of specific actions may be justified by portraying those measures as ordained by the mandate of History. The generalized ground for ideographic justification of a rhetorical position could be made in terms of History, since History offers a continuous tradition out of which ideographs appear to have developed naturally. The meaning of History is not ordinarily a site of struggle, but can serve as a warrant for a definition of an ideograph which suits a social group's objectives. For example, advocacy of a course of action for the sake of promoting liberty or justice could defer to History as the basis for believing that liberty and justice are desirable goals.

History as an argumentative warrant provides a point for building consensus around argumentative claims. If we conceive of rhetoric as the linguistic means of inducing human cooperation (Burke, Rhetoric 43; Language 28), then ultimate terms serve an important rhetorical function as catalysts for unifying audiences behind shared but not necessarily specified values. This consensus-building demonstrates how History can function as a public myth, unifying audiences behind a common purpose, in this case, obedience to History or to a course of action legitimated by an appeal to History (cf. Cuthbertson 221). Lacking a long tradition of political theory and no longer loyal to the will of God as the sole directive of action, American rhetors can turn to History as a reliable authority (Woodward, Attitudes 5, 7).

Weaver maintains that since "'history' is inseparable from judgment of historical fact, there has to be a considerable community of mind before history can be allowed to have a voice" (Ethics 220-221). History as an ultimate term, however, can help to establish and maintain such community, because History does not rely on correspondence to particular facts. History in public argument operates on the presumption that audiences need have no special knowledge of historical events, since History conjures a sense of tradition not constructed empirically. Social History has the air of scientific demonstration; it commands assent because it, like the visible wounds of war veterans, is "a history...that could be read and understood alike by all, the wise and the ignorant, the learned and the unlearned" (Lincoln 42). The argumentative use of History is a deductive type of rhetorical device in which particular events come into play only in reference to a presumed heritage.

Ultimate terms can encourage unification to accomplish rhetorical objectives. Collective unificaton behind a commitment (McGee 15) facilitates social action, be this action a change or an entrenchment of the status quo. The employment of History in the public sphere can "transform the society into a community" (Farrell 11), thus providing a basis for concerted action. Antagonistic factions might bury the hatchet temporarily and establish a coalition to advance what they believe to be the cause of History. Voegelin claims that acceptance of a social order, especially if that order is seen as part of a metaphysical order, engenders "a society's common

understanding of its own order; this understanding makes it a people and enables it to move as one body, if it accepts its order as the right order" (Sebba 660).

This ability to establish a consensus is a central aspect of History when it is used outside the academic arena. Social knowledge "rests upon a consensus which is attributed to an audience rather than concretely shared. This means that such knowledge does not rest upon agreement which is both fact and known to be fact" (Farrell 6). History as an ultimate term provides a focal point upon which audiences can unify their support. As mentioned earlier, arguments about History tend to be contests regarding which position History supports, not attempts to divest History of its authority.

Ultimate terms permit and encourage identification with a speaker's cause because they reflect the ideological matrices against which the conception of collective social action is framed (cf. McGee 9). The less History depends on a specific interpretation of historical events, the greater the chance that consensual support of Historically sanctioned claims can be achieved. Lentricchia summarizes this phenomenon by remarking that the "primary lure of all myths of collectivity is that they ask people to yield to...the desire to give ourselves to something beyond our isolate <sic> individual existences" (24). Ultimately, if identification were stressed strongly enough, individuality would disappear as everyone would be subsumed in a single Historical tradition (cf. Burke, Rhetoric 20-23). This possibility represents the logical extreme of History acting as

a public myth which establishes group identity.

The appeal to History is more than a stylistic flourish or adherence to the aesthetic and moral conventions of the age (Weaver, Ethics 173-183). Invoking History in support of a cause contains an internal logic of rationalizing specific actions ideographically (McGee 13). Far more than serving only as an argumentative warrant, History offers an opportunity for rhetors and audiences to understand their own identity in terms of History rather than the reverse. In this way, History could function mythically as a way for audiences to establish a conception of themselves (cf. Edelman 14). This identity forms a basis for social action.

## Implications

When History becomes a warrant for a claim, it seems that History as a whole can direct action. Specific counterinstances to History's lessons or commands can be denied by claiming that the intrinsic message of History remains intact despite momentary failures to follow its course. The rhetorical configuration of history as History circumvents the personal element of historical interpretation. When History becomes divorced from human agency, the individual's role in shaping and understanding events is rendered less conspicuous. Although "we are the ones who speak of, for, and against facts" because "facts can never talk for themselves" (Nelson & Megill 24; cf. Muller 40), the abstraction of History transforms interpreters into receivers of the messages History offers.

Such a de-emphasis on personal contributions has affinities

with the positivistic tendency to construe the historian as "the medium through which we reach the external facts he reports" (Langlois & Seignobos 165). Rhetors who advocate a position ordained by History could escape from moral responsibility for their rhetorical commitments, since the argument is not theirs but that of History. An extreme example of this result is Fustel de Coulanges' proclamation to his students: "Do not applaud me. It is not I who address you, but history that speaks through my mouth" (Muller 39). If a rhetor takes on a "great task which events have devolved upon us" (Lincoln 181), then he or she is answerable to History and not in the public forum. This retreat from public accountability represents a latent danger in the atiitude that "I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me" (Lincoln 258). The problem is that if people "are convinced that God, Fate or History have already decided the issue," they are "to some degree, constrained to act according to necessity,...<their> deeds are not <their> own, and it becomes questionable whether <they> can be regarded as responsible for their consequences" (Tudor 129, 127). When we make "history the final judge of our deeds" (Kennedy 159), we can be creating an escape from blame for whatever might happen or taking care that we choose the most prudent course of action under the circumstances.

Another potential for abuse lurks in the public use of History. Acceptance of History as metaphysical order could be used to justify only particular ideologies and condemn

alternative ideologies as false or heterodox. To combat such repressive appropriation, it is useful to remember that ultimate terms have no truth-value. Ultimate terms are not false; instead, their meaning is primarily connotative and not referential. Although History can be employed for a variety of purposes, such enlistment of History for a cause does not automatically establish the cause's correctness. The rhetorical force of History is an argumentative resource which should not be monopolized in order to silence dissent.

The outcome of these caveats concerning History is to encourage what could be called a more rhetorical view of History. The appeal to History can be a valuable way of rallying support for a cause, but it is not the only way of progressing toward agreement. In its use as a rhetorical device, History can paradoxically become anti-rhetorical if rhetoricians are understood as voices in a dialogue with each other and with their publics (cf. Burke, "Rhetoric--Old & New" 63). The use of History need not render audiences impassive spectators to be duped by rhetors who command the resources of an ultimate term. History, because of its generality, is an ultimate term which can be appropriated for almost any cause. An effective precaution against History becoming despotic and stifling argumentative exchange would be to realize "that when the past speaks to the present, it cannot speak to everyone alive in the present, but must speak to particular groups" (Potter 164). The power of History is no more the property of a single cause than truth is the exclusive possession of only one

person. History deserves a place in public argument, but neither History nor any other rhetorical device is the last word.

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