Evan Views Of History Essay, Research Paper

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In Defense of History, was written in 1997 by Richard J. Evans, a history professor at Cambridge University, that defends history from the postmodernist theories that believe that historical truth can not be found. In this book he also attacks other historians like E. H. Carr to show why he believes the postmodern view is wrong. Richard Evans also shows how the study of history has been a progression over time.

Richard Evans started out talking about how the way people studied history has changed over time. During the medieval times, historians beleived that their purpose was to keep a record of gods works. As more historians studied history, more theories about what history is have came about. In the 1880’s Leopold Von Ranke helped define history by separating it from literature, and found ways of figuring out if a text was fake. I think Richard Evans wants to show the reader that the definition of history is still changing and that it is still important to keep studying, what history is, because the definition keeps changing in society. There is not just one way of studying history.

But there was other historians, who believed that history was a science that could be used to help predict the future.Weither history is a science is something that has been debated for a long time. Carr beleived that history was a study different from everything else, because it was the study of other people rather then objects like science studies. He beleived that the point of history was to understand the past. Richard Evans, on the other hand, beleived that history should show the moral judgment of people through their acts. This way the readers can determine moral judgments on their own because it would have more meaning. For example; historians can not say Hitler was evil. They show this by all the evil thing Hitler did during his lifetime. I think this is very important because people come to a better understanding of things when they actullly see immoral behavior raither then being told.

Also history, unlike science, does not allow information to be saved up like in science. Each historian has a different interpretation of the information so it is impossible to write a history that everyone would interpret the same. I think that Evans believes that history, can not be treated as a science because it is about human beings, who interpret facts and human nature differently.

I think Richard Evans believes that what is considered a fact can be interpreted differently but different historians. Elton beleived that a fact “was something that happened in the past, that left traces in documents, that could be used by historians to reconstruct it in the present.” (Pg. 66) Carr beleived that something did not become a fact, until they were accepted. This makes it hard to determine weither or not something is a fact, because it left up to each person’s own oppion.For example; something that happened yesterday could be a fact to one historian but not a fact to another historian. Also I think Richard Evans is saying, that facts can be manipulated and twisted to agree with some historian’s points, because they are open to interpretation. I think Richard Evans believes that facts can be interpreted differently. Historians have different perceptions on what is a fact.

Many historians believed that when they studied history they should study the reasons why things happened. Many historians beleived that there were certain causes that made certain events in history happen. But I think Richard Evans is trying to show the reader that thinking this way is wrong because events and life does not just happen because of a few causes. Many different causes and influences play a role in what happened, to people, in history. It is impossible to figure out which exact facts caused which events to happen, because there was so many involved. Postmodernism began to grow.

I think Richard Evans makes a lot of good points, proving that postmodernism is wrong and that history is still a principle looking for knowledge. The Postmodernist believe that historical truth is not possible, because history is just a fiction made out of a group of facts.

Richard Evans beleived that history was objective and that people from different backgrounds see it differently therefore will have different interpretations of the facts. He beleived that historians need to learn how to get their biasest, out of the way when recording history. For example; Carr beleived that history should be objective. But when he wrote his books about the Solviet Union he was biases and left out information. He was bias because he loved the Solviet Union. It is hard for historians to leave biases, behind when writing history because they are human it is part of their perception of life. Objective history needs to get all the facts, and look at the whole picture, not just the parts they want to look at. Also as a historian you cannot ignore some facts that do not agree with you point of view.. It is history’s job to look at the information about the past and try to understand it compared to the facts.

Also according to Evans, multiculture history has made it hard to determine the truth. Each culture group gets their own individual story, so it gets hard to determine the truth because it becomes lost in each groups story. I think he has a point here if the point of history is to just tell a story about what happened in history. But if history is supposed to help, the everyday person, understand themselves and their place in everyday society multiculture history is important for many reasons. First it allows groups to learn about their heritage and who they are as a people. It also allows other groups to understand why they have certain beliefs and values. Also I think learning about another groups history allows the groups to understand where each other is coming from as a people.

Evans talks about how if the Postmodernist are free to interpret facts anyway they want to what keeps them from changing history and covering up past events. For example; he talks about Paul De man a Yale University Professor who wrote anti-jew papers during the Holocaust. Many scholars have written history that manipulated the evidence to make him not look so bad and that what he did wasn’t actually that bad. Also many scholars in Germany have tried to use this to cover up the Holocaust. They will only look at one side of the subject so they can cover up the Holocaust. This shows that only following the postmodernist approach allows for history to be rewritten because it doesn’t rely on honest, unbiased facts. If history just follows the postmodernist views historian can rewrite history anyway they want and leave the truth out since there are so many different way to interpret history. Richard Evans beleived that the historians job is to look for the truth not just concepts of the past. When historian stop looking for the truth anything can be written because history can be interpreted in so many different ways.

The only thing I did not like about Evan book is I think he spends to much time critiquing other authors work. He spends most of the time proving Carr and Eltons work wrong instead of telling us his view. It seems like he beleives that showing how they are wrong he will show how is views are right.

Overall I think Evans makes a lot of good points and does a good job at proving that the study of history is still important and that the Postmodern movement has it’s flaws. The postmodernist will allow history be interpreted anyway. This would allow historians to manipulate and change history any way they want and let the truth get lost. It is the historians job to try and look at everything objectively without biases and prejustice and weed through history by looking at the facts that support the story. I think the most important thing Evans is telling the reader is that history is written by human beings who have different view so as a historian we need to continue studying the fundamentals of history.