

America's future is linked to how we understand our past. For this reason, writing about history, for me, is never a neutral act. By writing, I hope to awaken a great consciousness of racial injustice, sexual bias, class inequality, and national hubris. I also want to bring into the light the unreported resistance of people against the power of the Establishment: the refusal of the indigenous to simply disappear; the rebellion of black people in the antislavery movement and in the more recent movement against racial segregation; the strikes carried out by working people all through American history in attempts to improve their lives.

To omit these acts of resistance is to support the official view that power only rests with those who have the guns and possess the wealth. I write in order to illustrate the creative power of people struggling for a better world. People, when organized, have enormous power, more than any government. Our history runs deep with the stories of people who stand up, speak out, dig in, organize, connect, form networks of resistance, and alter the course of history.

History can help our struggles, if not conclusively, then at least suggestively. History can disabuse us of the idea that the government's interests and the people's interests are the same.

History can tell how often governments have lied to us, how they have ordered whole populations to be massacred, how they deny the existence of the poor, how they have led us to our current historical moment—the "Long War," the war without end.

It is easy to be overwhelmed or intimidated by the realization that the war makers have enormous power. But some historical perspective can be useful, because it tells us that at certain points in history governments find that all their power is futile against the power of an aroused citizenry.

There is a basic weakness in governments, however massive their armies, however vast their wealth, however they control images and information, because their power depends on the obedience of citizens, of soldiers, of civil servants, of journalists and writers and teachers and artists. When the citizens begin to suspect they have been deceived and withdraw their support, government loses its legitimacy and its power.

We have seen this happen in recent decades all around the globe. Awakening one morning to see a million angry people in the streets of the capital city, the leaders of a country begin packing their bags and calling for a helicopter.

① Look up and write your own definition of "hubris":

② For what reasons does the writer write?

③ What does understanding history do for us?

④ Using context → clues, the examples given in this paragraph are describing what situations?

This is not fantasy; it is recent history. It's the history of the Philippines, of Indonesia, of Greece, Portugal and Spain, of Russia, East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Romania. Think of Argentina and South Africa and other places where change looked hopeless and then it happened. Remember Somoza in Nicaragua scurrying to his private plane, Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos hurriedly assembling their jewels and clothes, the shah of Iran desperately searching for a country that would take him in as he fled the crowds in Tehran, Duvalier in Haiti barely managing to put on his pants to escape the wrath of the Haitian people.

Change in public consciousness starts with low-level discontent, at first vague, with no connection being made between the discontent and the policies of the government. And then the dots begin to connect, indignation increases, and people begin to speak out, organize, and act.

Today, all over the country there is growing awareness of the shortage of teachers, nurses, medical care, and affordable housing, as budget cuts take place in every state of the union. A teacher recently wrote a letter to the *Boston Globe*: "I may be one of 600 Boston teachers who will be laid off as a result of budget shortfalls." The writer then connects it

⑤ Look up and define "indignation":

⑥ The writer explains our "challenge". What are the two sides of this challenge?

to the billions spent for bombs, for, as he puts it, "sending innocent Iraqi children to hospitals in Baghdad."

There are millions of people in this country opposed to the current war. When you see a statistic "40 percent of Americans support the war," that means that 60 percent of Americans do not. I am convinced that the number of people opposed to the war will continue to rise while the number of war supporters will continue to sink. Along the way, artists, musicians, writers, and cultural workers lend a special emotional and spiritual power to the movement for peace and justice. Rebellion often starts as something cultural.

The challenge remains. On the other side are formidable forces: money, political power, the major media. On our side are the people of the world and a power greater than money or weapons: the truth.

Truth has a power of its own. Art has a power of its own. That age-old lesson—that everything we do matters—is the meaning of the people's struggle here in the United States and everywhere. A poem can inspire a movement. A pamphlet can spark a revolution. Civil disobedience can arouse people and provoke us to think. When we organize with one another, when we get involved, when we stand up and speak out together, we can create a power no government can suppress.

We live in a beautiful country. But people who have no respect for human life, freedom, or justice have taken it over. It is now up to all of us to take it back.

Discuss: What will you do to take our country back?