*Americans ignore history, for to them everything has always seemed new under the sun. The national myth is that of creativity and progress, of a steady climbing upward into power and prosperity, both for the individual and for the country as a whole. Americans see history as a straight line  
and themselves standing at the cutting edge of it as representatives for all mankind. They believe in the future as if it were a religion; they believe that there is nothing they cannot accomplish, that solutions wait somewhere for all problems.*

In writing about the Vietnam War, Frances FitzGerald (1972), a journalist, con- trasted the U.S. orientation to history with the Vietnamese cultural orientation. This difference in orientation to the past framed the Vietnam conflict in a very narrow way for the United States. This contrasts greatly with the Vietnamese view of his- tory, especially in the context of their struggles against outside aggression over thousands of years.

You may think it odd to find a chapter about history in a book on intercultural communication. After all, what does the past have to do with intercultural interac- tion? In this chapter, we discuss how the past is a very important facet of intercul- tural communication.

The history that we know and our views of that history are very much influ- enced by our culture. When people of different cultural backgrounds encounter one another, the differences among them can become hidden barriers to com- munication. However, people often overlook such dynamics in intercultural com- munication. We typically think of “history” as something contained in history books. We may view history as those events and people, mostly military and political, that played significant roles in shaping the world of today. This chapter examines some of the ways in which history is important in understanding inter- cultural interaction. Many intercultural interactions involve a dialectical interplay between past and present.

We have found, in the classes we teach, that European American students often want to deemphasize history. “Why do we have to dwell on the past? Can’t we all move on?” they ask. In contrast, some other students argue that without history it is impossible to understand who they are. How do these different viewpoints affect the communication among such students? What is the possibility for meaningful com- munication interactions among them?

On a larger scale, we can see how history influences intercultural interaction in many different contexts. For example, the ongoing conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians makes little sense without an understanding of the historical relations among the different groups that reside in the area. Historical antagonisms help explain the present-day animosity felt by many Pakistanis toward Indians. Disputes over the Kashmir region, Indian participation in the struggle for inde- pendence of Bangladesh, and conflicts over the Himalayas underscore deep-rooted bases for strife.

How we think about the past very much influences how we think about our- selves and others even here in the United States. Judith went to college in south- ern Virginia after growing up in Delaware and Pennsylvania. She was shocked to

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encounter the antipathy that her dormitory suitemates expressed toward northerners. The suitemates stated emphatically that they had no desire to visit the North; they felt certain that “Yankees” were unfriendly and unpleasant people.

For Judith, the Civil War was a paragraph in a history book; for her suitemates, that historical event held a more important meaning. It took a while for friend- ships to develop between Judith and her suitemates. In this way, their interactions demonstrated the present–past dialectic. Indeed, this exemplifies the central focus of this chapter: that various histories contextualize intercultural communication. Taking a dialectical perspective enables us to understand how history positions people in different places from which they can communicate and understand other people’s messages.

Earlier in this book, we set forth six dialectical tensions that we believe drive much intercultural interaction. In this chapter, we focus on the history/past–present/ future dialectic. As you will see, culture and cultural identities are intimately tied to history because they have no meaning without history. Yet there is no single version of history; the past has been written in many different ways. For example, your own family has its version of family history that must be placed in dialectical tension with all of the other narratives about the past. Is it important to you to feel positive about who your forebears were and where they came from? We often feel a strong need to identify in positive ways with our past even if we are not inter- ested in history. The stories of the past, whether accurate or not, help us under- stand why our families live where they do, why they own or lost land there, and so on. We experience this dialectical tension between the past, the present, and the future every day. It helps us understand who we are and why we live and commu- nicate in the ways we do.

In this chapter, we first discuss the various histories that provide the contexts in which we communicate: political, intellectual, social, family, national, and cul- tural-group histories. We then describe how these histories are intertwined with our various identities, based on gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, and so on. We introduce two identities that have strong historical bases: diasporic and colonial. We pay particular attention to the role of narrating our personal histories. As you read this chapter, think about the importance of history in constructing your own identity and the ways in which the past–present dialectic helps us understand different identi- ties for others in various cultural groups. Finally, we explore how history influences intercultural communication.

**FROM HISTORY TO HISTORIES**

Many different kinds of history influence our understanding of who we are—as individuals, as family members, as members of cultural groups, and as citizens of a nation. To understand the dialectics in everyday interaction, we need to think about the many histories that help form our different identities. These his- tories necessarily overlap and influence each other. For example, when Fidel Castro came to power in Cuba in the 1950s, some Cubans left Cuba and came to the United States. Today, the families that departed and those that have stayed

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**political histories**

Written histories that focus on political events.

**intellectual histories**

Written histories that focus on the develop- ment of ideas.

FIGURE 4-1 In the United States, the history of racially segregated facilities extends well beyond drinking fountains. Drinking fountains were not segregated by sexual orientation, gender, or some other cultural dif- ference but by race alone. What are some other facilities that were once racially segregated? How does that history help us understand race rela- tions today? Do you know how your family experienced racial privilege and discrimination in the United States? (© *Bettmann/Getty Images*)

have a complex relationship and a desire to reunite. “When Mr. Obama fulfilled that promise with a policy change in 2009, a rush to Cuba began. Now more than 400,000 Cuban-Americans go annually. When Mr. Castro later signaled a shift of his own, no longer calling exiles gusanos, or worms, [...] the divide between Cuban and Cuban-American, between exile and loyalist, eased further away” (Cave, 2016). Political histories tell the story of that exodus but not necessar- ily the story of every family, even though many families’ histories were very much influenced by that event. Identifying the various forms of historical con- texts is the first step in understanding how history affects communication. (See Figure 4-1.)

**Political, Intellectual, and Social Histories**

Some people restrict their notion of history to documented events. Although we can- not read every book written, we do have greater access to written history. When these types of history focus on political events, we call them **political histories.** Written histories that focus on the development of ideas are often called **intellectual histories.**

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Some writers seek to understand the everyday life experiences of various groups in the past; what they document are called **social histories.**

Although these types of history seem more manageable than the broad notion of history as “everything that has happened before now,” we must also remember that many historical events never make it into books. For example, the strict laws that forbade teaching slaves in the United States to read kept many of their stories from being documented. **Absent history,** of course, does not mean the people did not exist, their experiences do not matter, or their history has no bearing on us today. To consider such absent histories requires that we think in more complex ways about the past and the ways it influences the present and the future.

Absent history is also the result of concealing the past. One important way that this happens is when the past is deliberately erased or hidden. Until July 2016, the U.S. government had kept 28 pages of the 9/11 Commission’s report hidden or unavailable to the public. Under tremendous public pressure, the U.S. government finally released the hidden 28 pages. In contrast, the report that looked into the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba has remained classified and unavailable to the public. Our understanding of the history and the role of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) remains a part of hidden history. After so many decades, many people wonder why the role of the U.S. government in this invasion should remain a part of absent history.

**Altered history** is another way that influences how we see ourselves and others. In altered history, the past is changed to fit particular worldviews and interests. In this sense, history is not a series of facts to be memorized, but a place where the past can be used for present interests and goals. Altered history is not the same as alternative history. Alternative history is a fictional genre in which authors try to speculate on what the world would look like if particular scenarios in the past had happened, for example, the South won the Civil War, Germany and Japan won World War II. Altered history is often presented in textbooks where “There is a constant tension between those who believe that textbooks exist to promote fervent patriotism and those who believe that they exist to promote dispassionate analysis” (Gardner, 2014). Recent textbook controversies have erupted over the ways that the past is portrayed not only in Japanese textbooks, but also Korean, Chinese, German, U.S. American, and Saudi Arabian, among others. Another recent revelation is that the ancient Egyptian pharaoh, Hatshep- sut, was one of several early female pharaohs. In 2016, the Egyptian Minister of Antiquities announced recent research that: “In the reign of Thutmosis III, all mentions of her name were erased and all representations of her female figure were replaced by images of a male king, her deceased husband Thutmosis II” (Izadi, 2016). In this case, the past is not erased, but altered to construct a differ- ent, gendered view of the pharaohs.

**Family Histories**

**Family histories** occur at the same time as other histories but on a more personal level. They often are not written down but are passed along orally from one genera- tion to the next. Some people do not know which countries or cities their families

**social histories** Writ- ten histories that focus on everyday life experi- ences of various groups in the past.

**absent history** Any part of history that was not recorded or that  
is missing. Not every- thing that happened in the past is accessible to us today because only some voices were documented and only some perspectives were recorded.

**altered history** Some- times historical events are changed in order to serve particular ideological goals.

This communication practice results in a revised history.

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**family histories** Histo- ries of individual fami- lies that are typically passed down through oral stories.

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**national history**

A body of knowl- edge based on past events that influ- enced a country’s development.

emigrated from or what tribes they belonged to or where they lived in the United States. Other people place great emphasis on knowing that their ancestors fought in the Revolutionary War, survived the Holocaust, or traveled the Trail of Tears when the Cherokees were forcibly relocated from the Southeast to present-day Oklahoma. Many of these family histories are deeply intertwined with ethnic-group histories, but the family histories identify each family’s participation in these events.

Sometimes, family histories shed some light on well-known figures. In his autobiography, *Dreams From My Father,* Barak Obama recounts his family’s history from his mother’s family in Kansas and their migration to Hawaii to his father’s Kenyan family and his connection to them. Although he did not have much contact with his father’s family until after his father passed away, his visit to Kenya thrust him back into that part of his family history. More recently, on a visit to Ireland, Obama went to the town where his forebearer, Falmouth Kearney, a shoemaker, lived before immigrating to the United States in 1850 (Mason & Halpin, 2011). His family history is one of immigration and migration that is one part of U.S. history.

Michelle Obama’s family reflects a very different family history that is entwined in another part of the nation’s story: slavery. *The New York Times* traced her fam- ily history and found: “the more complete map of Mrs. Obama’s ancestors— including the slave mother, white father and their biracial son, Dolphus T. Shields—for the first time fully connects the first African-American first lady to the history of slavery, tracing their five-generation journey from bondage to a front-row seat to the presidency” (Swarns & Kantor, 2009). Think about how these family histories inform us and the Obamas about their past, as well as their place in the United States and in the world.

You might talk to members of your own family to discover how they feel about your family’s history. Find out, for example, how family history influences their perceptions of who they are. Do they wish they knew more about their family? What things has your family continued to do that your forebears probably also did? Do you eat some of the same foods? Practice the same religion? Celebrate birthdays or weddings in the same way? The continuity between past and present often is taken for granted.

**National Histories**

The history of any nation is important to the people of that nation. We typically learn **national history** in school. In the United States, we learn about the founding fathers—George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, Alexander Hamilton, and so on—and our national history typically begins with the arrival of Europeans in North America in the 16th century.

U.S. citizens are expected to recognize the great events and the so-called great people (mostly men of European ancestry) who were influential in the development of the nation. In history classes, students learn about the Revolutionary War, Thomas Paine, the War of 1812, the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln, the Great Depression, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and so on. They are told stories, verging on myths, that give life to these events and figures. For example, students learn about Patrick Henry’s

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“give me liberty or give me death” speech even though the text of the speech was collected by a biographer who “pieced together twelve hundred words from scattered fragments that ear witnesses remembered from twenty years before” (Thonssen, Baird, & Braden, 1970, p. 335). Students also learn about George Washington having chopped down a cherry tree and confessing his guilt (“I cannot tell a lie”), although there’s no evidence of this story’s truth.

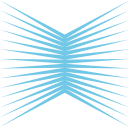
National history gives us a shared notion of who we are and solidifies our sense of nationhood. Although we may not fit into the national narrative, we are expected to be familiar with this particular telling of U.S. history so we can understand the many

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**THE FIRST SLAVERY MUSEUM**

The history of slavery is an important part of U.S. history. Why is there no federally funded museum about slavery? One man’s approach is to undertake the project himself.

*“A nation builds museums to understand its own history and to have its history understood by others, to create a common space and language to address collectively what is too difficult to process individually. Forty-eight years after World War II, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum opened in Washington. A museum dedicated to the September 11 terrorist attacks opened its doors in Lower Manhattan less than 13 years after they occurred. One hun- dred and fifty years after the end of the Civil War, however, no federally funded museum dedicated to slavery exists, no monument honoring America’s slaves.” Thirty-five miles west of New Orleans, along Louisiana’s River Road, John Cummings, a wealthy white man, purchased the Whitney Plantation with the goal of telling the story of slavery. Among the plantations along River Road, the “most conspicuous are those that have been restored for tourists, transport- ing them into a world of bygone Southern grandeur—one in which mint juleps, manicured gardens, and hoop skirts are emphasized over the fact that such grandeur was made possible by the enslavement of black human beings.” In contrast, the Whitney Plantation has been turned into a museum about slavery. “What makes slavery so difficult to think about, from the vantage point of history, is that it was both at odds with America’s founding values—freedom, liberty, democracy—and critical to how they flourished. The Declaration*

*of Independence proclaiming that “all men are created equal” was drafted by men who were afforded the time to debate its language because the land that enriched many of them was tended to by slaves. The White House and the Capitol were built, in part, by slaves.” Cummings feels that the history of slavery is too important to ignore and notes, “But just in case you’re worried about people getting distracted by the pretty house over there, the last thing you’ll see before leaving here will be 60 beheaded slaves.”*

Source: From D. Amsden, “Building the first slavery museum in America.” *New York Times,* February 26, 2015. Retrieved April 15, 2016, from http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/01/magazine /building-the-first-slave-museum-in-america.html?\_r=0.

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**cultural-group histories** The history of each cultural group within a nation that includes, for example, the history of where the group originated, why the people migrated, and how they came to develop and maintain their cultural traits.

references used in communication. It is one way of constructing cultural discourses. Yet U.S. students seldom learn much about the histories of other nations and cultures unless they study the languages of those countries. As any student of another language knows, it is part of the curriculum to study not only the grammar and vocabulary of the language but also the culture and history of the people who speak that language.

Judith and Tom both studied French. Because we learned a great deal about French history, we understand references to the *ancien régime* (the political system prior to the French Revolution in 1789), *les Pieds-noirs* (colonial French who returned to France during the struggle for Algerian independence in the mid-20th century), *la Bastille* (the notorious prison), and other commonly used terms. The French have their own national history, centering on the development of France as a nation. For exam- ple, French people know that they live in the *Vème République* (or Fifth Republic), and they know what that means within the grand narrative of French history.

When Judith lived in Algeria, her French friends spoke of *les Événements* (the events), but her Algerian friends spoke of *la Libération*—both referring to the war between France and Algeria that led to Algerian independence. When Tom lived in France, he also heard the expression *la Libération,* but here it referred to the end of the German occupation in France during World War II. Historical contexts shape language, which means we must search for salient historical features in communicating across cul- tural differences.

**Cultural-Group Histories**

Although people may share a single national history, each cultural group within the nation may have its own history. The history may be obscure (hidden), but it is still related to the national history. **Cultural-group histories** help us understand the identities of various groups.

Consider, for example, the expulsion of many Acadians from eastern Canada and their migration to and settlement in Louisiana. These historical events are cen- tral to understanding the cultural traits of the Cajuns. Their neighbors, the Creoles, have been displaced by a more recent historical event, Hurricane Katrina. It remains unclear how the hurricane will shape Creole culture. “With their geographic under- pinnings swept away, many New Orleanians of Creole descent are trying to figure out how best to preserve a community separated from both its birthplace and home base” (Saulny, 2005, p. A13). The forced removal in 1838 of the Cherokees from Georgia to settlements in what eventually became the state of Oklahoma resulted in a 22% loss of the Cherokee population. This event, known as the Trail of Tears, explains much about the Cherokee Nation. The migration in 1846 of 12,000 Latter Day Saints from Nauvoo, Illinois, to the Great Basin region in the western United States was prompted by anti-Mormon attacks. These events explain much about the character of Utah. The northward migration of African Americans in the early part of the 20th century helps us understand the settlement patterns and working conditions in northern cities such as Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, and New York. These cultural histories are not typically included in our national history, but they are important in the development of group identity, family histories, and contemporary lives of indi- vidual members of these cocultures.

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We prefer to view history as the many stories we tell about the past, rather than one story on a single time continuum. Certainly, the events of families, cultural groups, and nations are related. Even world events are related. Ignorance of the his- tories of other groups makes intercultural communication more difficult and more susceptible to misunderstandings.

**HISTORY, POWER,  
AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

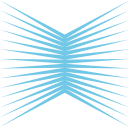
Power is a central dynamic in the writing of history. It influences the content of the history we know and the way it is delivered. Power dictates what is taught and what is silenced, what is available and what is erased. Let’s look at what this means.

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**STUDENT VOICES**

*I am the fourth generation of females raised in Philadelphia. My great-grandmother raised me until she died, when I was 13. Her mother was a slave who had  
19 children. Charlotte, North Carolina, was the place my great-grandmother said she was born. I care because my grandmother had personal information about why blacks should be glad slavery is over. She encouraged my family to make use of*

*all of the benefits of freedom. She always said, “Get an education so you can own something, because we couldn’t own anything. We couldn’t even go to school.” So that is why she moved to the city of Philadelphia. She made getting an education a reward instead of a joke.*

—Marlene

*I was born and raised in Pakistan, and lived there until I was 7 years old. I remem-  
ber growing up there very well, but I also remember very well when we moved out  
of Pakistan. I am basically the first generation in my family to grow up outside of Pakistan. Today most of the immigrants that live in the United States moved here a very long time ago. They have ancestors that came to the United States a long time ago. That is not the case with my family. In addition the immigration to the United States for my family was different in the fact that at first we moved to Canada and then we moved to the United States.*

—Waleed

*My family immigrated to the United States for a better life. I didn’t realize that my family history had so much involvement with the history I learned in class. For instance, my great-grandfather was an orphan who rode the orphan train west from New York until a family chose him and his brother to work on their farm. I also had a member  
of my family die during WWII, some lived in Chicago during the Chicago Fire, and my great grandpa was a rural mail carrier who used a horse and buggy to deliver the mail. Something I didn’t know before was my grandpa, who now works for Burlington Northern, started out as an apprentice telegraph operator. . . . He has come quite far from that!*

—William

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FIGURE 4-2 Memorial Day services are being held by internees at the Manzanar Internment Camp for U.S. Americans of Japanese ancestry during World War II. Although the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the internment of U.S. citizens based on their ethnicity, the U.S. government later apologized. (*Courtesy Francis Stewart Gallery/National Park Service*)

**The Power of Texts**

History is extremely important in understanding identity. Think about all of the sto- ries about the past that you have been taught. Yet, as literature professor Fredric Jameson (1981) notes, although history is not a narrative at all, it is accessible to us only in textual, narrative form. However, people do not have equal access to the writing and production of these texts.

Political texts reflect the disparities of access to political participation in various countries at various times in history. Some languages have been forbidden, making the writing of texts difficult if not impossible. For example, U.S. government Indian schools did not permit Native American children to speak their native languages, which makes it more difficult for people today to understand what this experience was about.

With regard to the language we use to understand history, think about the dif- ference between the terms *internment camp* and *concentration camp.* In 1942, at the height of World War II, after President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, anyone of Japanese ancestry—whether they were U.S. citizens or not—was rounded up from a restricted zone, including parts of Arizona, Oregon, and Washington and all of California, and placed mostly into 10 camps. (See Figure 4-2.) The U.S. fed- eral government used both terms in the 1940s, but the historical weight of the German concentration camps of the same era, in which millions of Jews perished, often casts a

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shadow over our understanding of the U.S. concentration camps. Denotatively, the use of the term *concentration camp* is correct, but connotatively, it invokes quite different responses. You may wish to keep this in mind as you read Chapter 6, which discusses the importance of language and discourse in intercultural communication.

When U.S. Americans are taught history, they also learn a particular way of looking at the world from their history textbooks. This worldview, as James Loewen (1995) tells us, reinforces a very positive white American identity. In his analysis of history text- books, he notes, “History is furious debate informed by evidence and reason. Textbooks encourage students to believe that history is facts to be learned” (p. 16). Yet these “facts” are often wrong or portray the past in ways that serve the white American identity. For example, he analyzes the way in which Native Americans are depicted in history texts:

*Even if no Natives remained among us, however, it would still be important for us to understand the alternatives forgone, to remember the wars, and to learn the unvarnished truths about white–Indian relations. Indian history is the anti- dote to the pious ethnocentrism of American exceptionalism, the notion that European Americans are God’s chosen people. Indian history reveals that the United States and its predecessor British colonies have wrought great harm in the world. We must not forget this—not to wallow in our wrongdoing, but to understand and to learn, that we might not wreak harm again. (p. 136)*

But the prevailing value of teaching history lies not in serving the future but in rein- forcing a positive cultural identity for white Americans. How does power function in determining which stories are told and how they are told?

**concentration  
camp** A place where governments have interned people from various religious or ethnic groups who usually did not have trials and were not convicted of any crimes.

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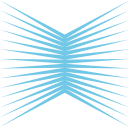
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**POINT** *of* **VIEW**

The internment, or mass imprisonment, of Japanese Americans by the U.S. government in the 1940s has led to much discussion about the right term for these camps. What difference does it make if we call them “concentra- tion camps” or “relocation centers”? This entry from the *Encyclopedia of Japanese American History* provides food for thought.

**Concentration camps.** *Euphemistically called “relocation centers” by the War Relocation Authority (WRA), the concentration camps were hastily constructed facilities for housing Japanese Americans forcibly removed from their homes and businesses on the West Coast during World War II. Located in isolated areas of the United States on either desert or swamp- land, the camps were usually surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by armed sentries. Although these sentries were presumably in place to pro- tect the inmates from hostile outsiders, their guns usually pointed into the camps instead of away from them. Most inmates were transported to their camp by train from an assembly center between April and September 1942. In all, over 120,000 Japanese Americans served time in these camps.*

Source: From B. Niiya (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Japanese American History: An A-to-Z Reference from 1868 to the Present* (New York: Checkmark Books, 2001), p. 142.

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**modernist identity**

The identity that  
is grounded in the Western tradition of scientific and political beliefs and assump- tions—for example, the belief in external reality, democratic representation, libera- tion, and independent subjects.

**grand narrative**

A unified history and view of humankind.

The relative availability of political texts and the ways that they reflect powerful inequities are reinscribed in the process of writing history. History writing requires documentation and texts and, of course, is limited by what is available. In writing history, we often ask ourselves, “What was important?” without asking, “Important to whom? For what purposes?” Once texts are written, they are available for teach- ing and learning about the past. But the seeming unity of the past, the linear nature of history, is merely the reflection of a **modernist identity**, grounded in the Western tradition.

**The Power of Other Histories**

We live in an era of rapid change, which causes us to rethink cultural struggles and identities. It may be difficult for you to envision, but at one time a unified story of humankind—the **grand narrative**—dominated how people thought of the past, present, and future. The grand narrative refers to the overarching, all- encompassing story of a nation or humankind in general. Because of the way it is built, this grand narrative organizes history into an understandable story that leads to some “truths” over other possible conclusions. In the story of human- kind, the grand narrative was one of progress and an underlying assumption that developments in science, medicine, and education would lead to progress and better lives. This is no longer the case. French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard (1984) writes:

*In contemporary society and culture—postindustrial society, postmodern culture—the grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation. (p. 37)*

More recently, communication scholar Dave Tell (2008) has analyzed how a grand narrative about the murder of Emmett Till arose. Tell argues that an article in *Look* magazine about the murder is key to establishing the narrative of Till’s murder, which played an important role in the rise of the civil rights movement.

In the wake of continuous wars and global conflicts, global warming, failed promises of liberation, new diseases such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and bird flu, and other events that challenge what we know and what has changed, the master narrative no longer seems as believable to many. In its place are many other narratives that tell different stories. In the context of intercultural communica- tion, the master narratives of many cultures and nations are also undergoing recon- sideration, and many new narratives are emerging.

In her work on the constructions of white identity in South Africa, communi- cation scholar Melissa Steyn (2001) notes how the grand narrative in South Africa served white interests and led to the establishment of **apartheid.** Although racially restrictive laws existed in South Africa for many years, the South African govern- ment instituted a rigid framework for regulating race in 1948. This system, apart- heid, lasted until it was dismantled from 1990 to 1994, but only after a long struggle against it. Under this apartheid system, everyone was required to register their race in one of four categories: black, white, Indian, and colored. These categories were

**apartheid** A policy that segregated peo- ple racially in South Africa.

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used to restrict where people could live (e.g., blacks were permitted to live on only 13% of the land, although they constituted 60% of the population), employment, access to public facilities (e.g., hospitals, ambulances, educational institutions), and other aspects of public life. Although they were numerically a minority, whites dominated this social system and accrued most of the benefits of it. To do so, they needed to tell a master narrative in which this system seemed to make sense. It was only under tremendous domestic and international pressure that the system was dismantled (Bureau of African Affairs, 2005; Guelke, 2005; Thompson, 2001). The popular film *Cry Freedom* (Attenborough, 1987), starring Denzel Washington as Steven Biko, a black leader, highlights the struggle and consequences of apartheid. Steyn writes:

*In drawing on the master narrative, interpreting it and adapting it to the par- ticular circumstances in which they found themselves in the country, whites were able to maintain their advantage as the dominating group that controlled the political, material, and symbolic resources of the country for three centu- ries. (p. 43)*

By telling and retelling one view of the past, white South Africans were able to cre- ate a society in which a white minority dominated.

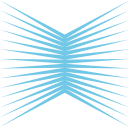
In place of the grand narrative are revised and restored histories that previously were suppressed, hidden, or erased. The cultural movements making this shift possi- ble are empowering to the cultural identities involved. Recovering various histories

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The way that Japanese history is taught in Japan has been a source of contro- versy in Japan and outside of Japan. Because there is no agreement on the events in the 1930s and 1940s, the controversy is unlikely to end anytime soon. However, there are consequences to the absence of coverage, or when they are covered, of this period in history. Think about how any understanding of history is important in creating cultural identities and influencing international relationships.

*Japanese people often fail to understand why neighboring countries harbor a grudge over events that happened in the 1930s and 40s. The reason, in many cases, is that they barely learned any 20th century history. I myself only got a full picture when I left Japan and went to school in Australia.*

*Without knowing these debates, it is extremely difficult to grasp why recent territorial disputes with China or South Korea cause such an emo- tional reaction among our neighbors. The sheer hostility shown towards Japan by ordinary people in street demonstrations seems bewildering and even barbaric to many Japanese television viewers.*

*All this has resulted in Japan’s Asian neighbors—especially China and South Korea—accusing the country of glossing over its war atrocities.*

Source: From M. Oi, “What Japanese history lessons leave out,” *BBC Magazine,* March 14, 2013. Retrieved April 15, 2016, from http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-21226068.

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is necessary to rethinking what some cultural identities mean. It also helps us rethink the dominant cultural identity.

For example, on June 30, 1960, at the signing of the treaty granting indepen- dence to the former Belgian colony of the Congo (formerly Zaire), the king of the Belgians, Baudouin, constructed one way of thinking about the past:

*All of our thoughts should be turned toward those who founded the African emancipation and after them, those who made the Congo into what it is today. They merit at the same time our admiration and your recognition since it was they who consecrated all of their efforts and even their lives for a grand ideal, bringing you peace and enriching your homeland materially and morally. They must never be forgotten, not by Belgium, not by the Congo. (Quoted in Gérard- Libois & Heinen, 1989, p. 143)*

In response, Patrice Lumumba, who would become prime minister, offered a differ- ent view of Belgian colonialism:

*After eighty years of colonial rule, our wounds are still too fresh and too deep to be chased from our memory. . . . We have known the ironies, the insults,  
the beatings to which we had to submit morning, noon, and night because we were negroes. Who will forget that they spoke to Blacks with “tu” certainly not because of friendship, but because the honorary “vous” was reserved only for speaking to whites. (p. 147)*

Lumumba’s words created a different sense of history. These differences were clear to the people of the time and remain clear today. In this way, the grand narrative of Belgian colonialism has been reconfigured and no longer stands as the only story of the Belgian Congo.

**Power in Intercultural Interactions**

Power is also the legacy, the remnants of the history that leaves cultural groups in particular positions. We are not equal in our intercultural encounters, nor can we ever be equal. Long histories of imperialism, colonialism, exploitation, wars, genocide, and more leave cultural groups out of balance when they communicate. Regardless of whether we choose to recognize the foundations for many of our dif- ferences, these inequalities influence how we think about others and how we interact with them. They also influence how we think about ourselves—our identities. These are important aspects of intercultural communication. It may seem daunting to con- front the history of power struggles. Nevertheless, the more you know, the better you will be positioned to engage in successful intercultural interactions.

**HISTORY AND IDENTITY**

The development of cultural identity is influenced largely by history. In this next section, we look at some of the ways that cultural identities are constructed through understanding the past. Note how different cultural-group identities are tied to history.

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**Histories as Stories**

Faced with these many levels or types of history, you might wonder how we make sense of them in our everyday lives. Although it might be tempting to ignore them all and merely pretend to be “ourselves,” this belies the substantial influence that his- tory has on our own identities.

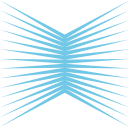
According to communication scholar Walter Fisher (1984, 1985), storytelling is fundamental to the human experience. Instead of referring to humans as *Homo sapiens,* Fisher prefers to call them *Homo narrans* because it underscores the importance of nar- ratives in our lives. Histories are stories that we use to make sense of who we are and who we think others are.

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**PASSING AS WHITE**

In the United States, people of color have historically passed or tried to pass as white because of the racial discrimination faced by racial minorities. Today, some Asian Americans are employing the same strategy in an effort to gain admission to a number of elite colleges and universities. For decades, a num- ber of Asian American groups have charged that Harvard, Yale and other elite institutions discriminate against Asian Americans in admissions. Some Asian American organizations have again filed a racial discrimination complaint with the U.S. Department of Education, focusing on Brown, Dartmouth and Yale—all lvy League institutions (Belkin, 2016). They charge that these institutions have a cap on Asian American admissions and discriminate against high achieving Asian American applicants. Sara Harberson (2015), a former associate dean of admis- sions at an Ivy League institution, writes: “racial stereotyping is alive and well.” She notes that Asian American students are expected to be at the top of their class and have the highest test scores and when they do, they can end up on wait lists or be rejected. In response, some Asian American students do not check the “Asian” box on their applications as a strategy to deal with this situation (Some Asians, 2011). Although no one knows how many Asian American applicants try to pass as white, passing as white is nothing new in the history of the United States due to the racial situation in the past and the present. Will it continue to be necessary in the future?

Source: Belkin, D. (2016, May 23). Asian-American groups seek investigation into Ivy League admissions. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from http://www.wsj.com/articles/asian-american -groups-seek-investigation-into-ivy-league-admissions-1464026150

Harberson, S. (2015, June 9). Op ed: The truth about ‘holistic’ college admissions. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-harberson-asian-american -admission-rates-20150609-story.html

Some Asians college strategy: Don’t check ‘Asian.’ (2011, December 4). *USA Today*. Retrieved from http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/education/story/2011-12-03/asian-students-college -applications/51620236/1

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**hidden histories** The histories that are hid- den from or forgotten by the mainstream representations of past events.

**ethnic histories** The histories of ethnic groups.

**racial histories** The histories of nonmain- stream racial groups.

It is important to recognize that a strong element in our cultural attitudes encourages us to forget history at times. French writer Jean Baudrillard (1988) observes:

*America was created in the hope of escaping from history, of building a utopia sheltered from history. . . . [It] has in part succeeded in that project, a project it is still pursuing today. The concept of history as the transcending of a social and political rationality, as a dialectical, conflictual vision of societies, is not theirs, just as modernity, conceived precisely as an original break with certain history, will never be ours [France’s]. (p. 80)*

The desire to escape history is significant in what it tells us about how our culture negotiates its relation to the past, as well as how we view the rela- tions of other nations and cultures to their pasts. By ignoring history, we some- times come to wrongheaded conclusions about others that only perpetuate and reinforce stereotypes. For example, the notion that Jewish people are obsessed with money and are disproportionately represented in the world of finance belies the history of anti-Semitism, whereby Jews were excluded from many profes- sions. The paradox is that we cannot escape history even if we fail to recognize it or try to suppress it.

**Nonmainstream Histories**

People from nonmainstream cultural groups often struggle to retain their histories. Their are not the histories that everyone learns about in school, yet these histories are vital to understanding how others perceive them and why. These nonmainstream histories are important to the people in these cultural groups, as they may play a sig- nificant role in their cultural identities.

Nonmainstream histories sometimes stand alongside the grand narrative, but sometimes they challenge the grand narrative. As we saw earlier, some nonmain- stream histories are absent histories, as these histories have been lost or are not recoverable. Sometimes these nonmainstream histories are **hidden histories,** as they offer different views on the grand narrative and, therefore, have been sup- pressed or marginalized in our understanding of the past. Let’s look at some of these nonmainstream histories and how these views of the past help us better under- stand different cultural groups.

***Racial and Ethnic Histories*** Mainstream history has neither the time nor the space nor the inclination to include all **ethnic histories** and **racial histories.** This is especially true given that the histories of cultural groups sometimes seem to question, and even undermine, the celebratory nature of the mainstream national history.

When Tom’s parents meet other Japanese Americans of their generation, they are often asked, “What camp were you in?” This question makes little sense outside of its historical context. Indeed, this question is embedded in understanding a par- ticular moment in history, a moment that is not widely understood. Most Japanese

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Americans were interned in concentration camps during World War II. In the after- math of the experience, the use of that history as a marker has been important in maintaining cultural identity.

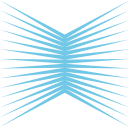
The injustices done by any nation are often swept under the carpet. In an attempt to bring attention to and promote renewed understanding of the internment of Japanese

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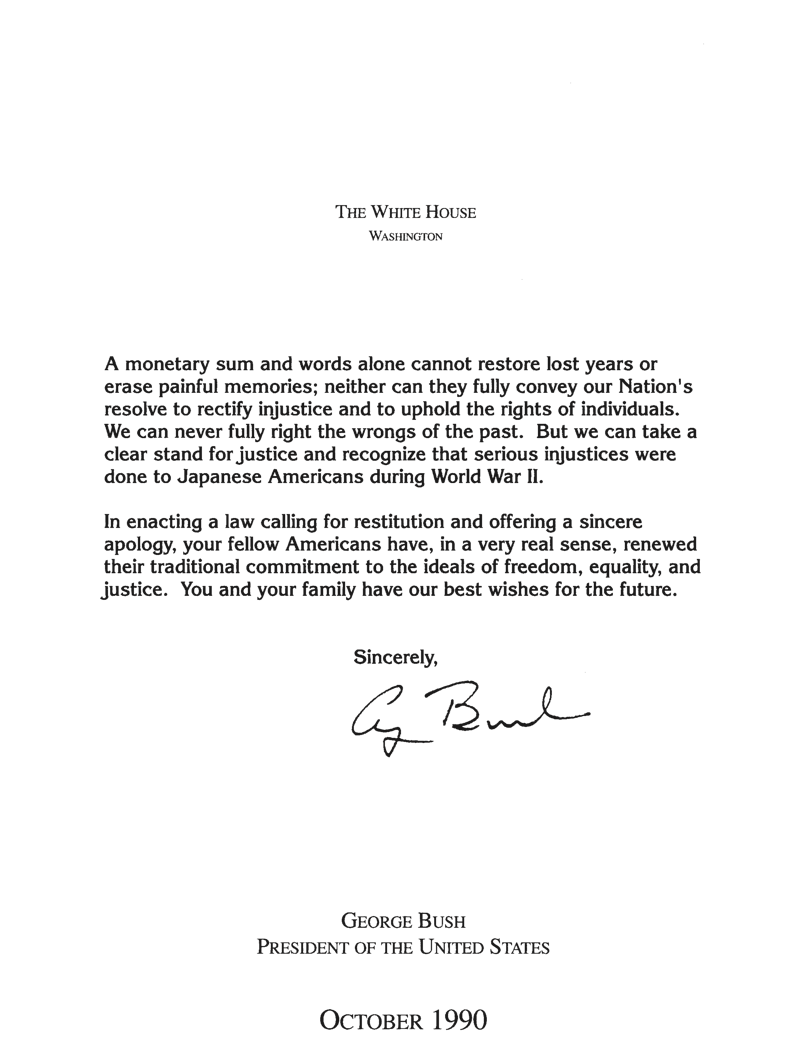
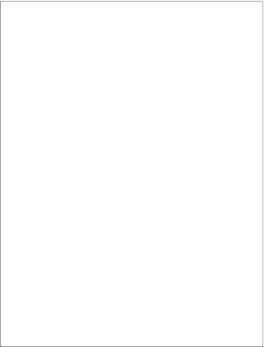
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This letter from the president of the United States was sent to all of the sur- viving Japanese American internees who were in U.S. concentration camps during World War II. In recognizing that there is no way to change mistakes made in the past, what does this letter do? If you were to compose this letter, what would you write? How should we deal with the past to construct better intercultural relations in the future?



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Americans during World War II, academician John Tateishi (1984) collected the stories

of some of the internees. He notes at the outset that

*this book makes no attempt to be a definitive academic history of Japanese American internment. Rather it tries to present for the first time in human and personal terms the experience of the only group of American citizens ever to be confined in concentration camps in the United States. (p. vii)*

Although not an academic history, this collection of oral histories provides insight into the experiences of many Japanese Americans. Because this historical event demonstrates the fragility of our constitutional system and its guarantees in the face of prejudice and ignorance, it is not often discussed as significant in U.S. history. For Japanese Americans, however, it represents a defining moment in the development of their community.

While Pearl Harbor may feel like a distant historical event, the internment of Japanese Americans has drawn important parallels to the treatment of Muslims after 9/11. Because of the fears that arose after these events, “In recent years, many schol- ars have drawn parallels and contrasts between the internment of Japanese-Americans after the attack on Pearl Harbor, and the treatment of hundreds of Muslim noncitizens who were swept up in the weeks after the 2001 terror attacks, then held for months before they were cleared of links to terrorism and deported” (Bernstein, 2007). “When a federal judge in Brooklyn ruled last June that the government had wide latitude to detain noncitizens indefinitely on the basis of race, religion or national origin” (Bernstein, 2007), a number of Japanese Americans spoke out against the broad ruling and the parallels it had to their cultural group’s historical experience.

Similarly, for Jewish people, remembering the Holocaust is crucial to their iden- tity. Since the Holocaust, survivors and others have insisted on the importance of “never forget” as a way to have the Holocaust make a difference in the contemporary world. Jeff Jacoby (2016), a journalist whose father survived the Holocaust, ponders the future of the “never forget” movement and speculates that:

*It was always inevitable that the enormity of the Holocaust would recede in public awareness. [...]Accounts of what was done in Treblinka did not prevent mass mur- der in Cambodia or Bosnia or Rwanda. Holocaust remembrance has not inocu- lated human beings against treating other human beings with brutality. [...] I have always taken the Holocaust personally, and always will. But the world, I know, will not. Eventually, everything is forgotten. Even the worst crime in history.*

In an effort to keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive, people have built monuments, museums, captured the oral histories and voices of survivors, and worked to document as much as possible. But like other horrors in the past, will the Holocaust also become just another event in history books? What does that mean about how history shapes our present and future?

Ethnic and racial histories are never isolated; rather, they crisscross other cul- tural trajectories. We may feel as if we have been placed in the position of victim or victimizer by distant historical events, and we may even seem to occupy both of these positions simultaneously. Consider, for example, the position of German American Mennonites during World War II. They were punished as pacifists and

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yet also were seen as aggressors by U.S. Jews. To further complicate matters, U.S. citizens of German ancestry were not interned in concentration camps, as were U.S. citizens of Japanese ancestry. How we think about being victims and victimizers is quite complex.

French writer Maurice Blanchot, in confronting the horrors of the Holocaust, the devastation of the atom bomb, and other human disasters, redefines the notion of responsibility, separating it from fault. In *The Writing of the Disaster,* Blanchot (1986) asserts,

*My responsibility is anterior to my birth just as it is exterior to my consent, to my liberty. I am born thanks to a favor which turns out to be a predestination— born unto the grief of the other, which is the grief of all. (p. 22)*

This perspective can help us face and deal with the different positions that history finds for us.

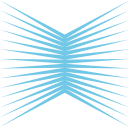
The displacement of various populations is embedded in the history of every migrating or colonizing people. Whether caused by natural disasters such as the drought in the Midwest during the Great Depression of the 1930s or determined by choice, migrations influence how we live today. Native peoples throughout most of the United States were exterminated or removed to settlements in other regions. The state of Iowa, for example, has few Native Americans and only one reserva- tion. The current residents of Iowa had nothing to do with the events in their state’s

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**STUDENT VOICES**

*I used to feel very guilty in history classes, learning about the tragedies white Europeans have committed against other races. Even though my ancestors immigrated to the United States after the abolition of slavery and the conflict with Native Americans, I still felt like I was somehow part of this historic problem. It wasn’t until one of my upper level courses that the teacher told the class that guilt does not help anything, but awareness and conscious efforts to combat lingering historic problems can make a difference to members of disadvantaged minorities, and this is what matters.*

—Evangeline

*When I came to the United States, I was surprised to meet so many Americans who were very proud of their family histories. They knew a lot about the accomplish- ments of their families over many struggles in the past. I didn’t know as much about my family’s history; I never really thought much about it and it took me a while to feel comfortable interacting with the American students.*

—Li Wei

*I was in Germany for a few hours in April. My boyfriend is Jewish, so lately I have been thinking about how the Holocaust has affected his family. I found myself angry at every German in the airport. I knew that I was placing a ridiculous stereotype on the German people.*

—Angela

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**gender histories** The histories of how cul- tural conventions of men and women are created, maintained, and/or altered.

history, but they are the beneficiaries through the ownership of farms and other land. So, although contemporary Iowans are not in a position of fault or blame, they are, through these benefits, in a position of responsibility. Like all of us, their lives are entangled in the web of history from which there is no escape, only denial and silence.

***Gender Histories*** Feminist scholars have long insisted that much of the history of women has been obliterated, marginalized, or erased. Historian Mei Nakano (1990) notes:

*The history of women, told by women, is a recent phenomenon. It has called for a fundamental reevaluation of assumptions and principles that govern traditional history. It challenges us to have a more inclusive view of history, not merely the chronicling of events of the past, not dominated by the record of men marching forward through time, their paths strewn with the detritus of war and politics and industry and labor. (p. xiii)*

Although there is much interest in women’s history among contemporary scholars, documenting such **gender histories** is difficult because of the tradi- tional restrictions on women’s access to public forums, public documents, and public records. Even so, the return to the past to unearth and recover identi- ties that can be adapted for survival is a key theme of writer Gloria Anzaldúa (1987). She presents *la Llorana* (the crying woman) as a cultural and historical image that gives her the power to resist cultural and gender domination. *La Llorana* is well known in northern Mexico and the U.S. southwest. This legend tells the story of a woman who killed her children and who now wanders around looking for them and weeping for them. Her story has been retold in various ways, and Anzaldúa rewrites the tale to highlight the power that resides in her relentless crying. This mythical image gives her the power to resist cultural and gender domination:

*My Chicana identity is grounded in the Indian woman’s history of resis- tance. The Aztec female rites of mourning were rites of defiance protesting the cultural changes which disrupted the equality and balance between female and male, and protesting their demotion to a lesser status, their denigration. Like la* Llorana, *the Indian woman’s only means of protest was wailing. (p. 21)*

Anzaldúa’s history may seem distant to us, but it is intimately tied to what her Chicana identity means to her. In a similar vein, transgender history can reconfigure the contemporary cultural context. For example, Susan Stryker (2008) focuses on “the collective political history of transgender social change activism in the United States—that is, on efforts to make it easier and safer and more acceptable for the people who need to cross gender boundaries to be able to do so” (p. 2).

***Sexual Orientation Histories*** In recounting his experiences as a young man whom the police registered as “homosexual,” Pierre Seel (1994) recounts how police lists were used by the Nazis to round up homosexuals for internment. The incarceration

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and extermination of gays, as members of one of the groups deemed “undesirable” by Nazi Germany, is often overlooked by World War II historians. Seel recalls one event in his **sexual orientation history:**

*One day at a meeting in the SOS Racisme [an antiracism organization] room, I finished by getting up and recounting my experience of Nazism, my deporta- tion for homosexuality. I remarked as well the ingratitude of history which erases that which is not officially convenient for it. (p. 162)*

*(Un jour de réunion, dans la salle de SOS Racisme, je finis par me lever et par raconter mon expérience du nazisme, ma déportation pour homosexualité. Je fis également remarquer l’ingratitude de l’histoire qui gomme ce qui ne lui convient pas officiellement.)*

This suppression of history reflects attempts to construct specific understandings of the past. If we do not or cannot listen to the voices of others, we miss the significance of historical lessons. For example, a legislative attempt to force gays and lesbians to register with the police in the state of Montana ultimately was vetoed by the gover- nor after he learned of the law’s similarities to laws in Nazi Germany.

The late Guy Hocquenghem (Hocquenghem & Blasius, 1980), a gay French philosopher, lamented the letting go of the past because doing so left little to sustain and nurture his community:

*I am struck by the ignorance among gay people about the past—no, more even than ignorance: the “will to forget” the German gay holocaust. . . . But we aren’t even the only ones who remember, we don’t remember! So we find our- selves beginning at zero in each generation. (p. 40)*

**sexual orientation history** The historical experiences of gays and lesbians.

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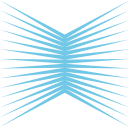
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In the face of historical wrongs, there may seem to be little that can be done to correct things that happened in the past. Spain, however, is attempting to make amends for its past by allowing Sephardic Jews (Jews who trace their roots to the Iberian Peninsula) to apply for dual citizenship with a law that came into effect in October 2015.

*The measure aims to correct what Spain’s conservative government calls the “historic mistake” of sending Jews into exile in 1492, forcing them to convert to Catholicism or burning them at the stake.*

*Historians believe at least 200,000 Jews lived in Spain before the Catholic monarchs Isabella and Ferdinand ordered them to convert to the Catholic faith or leave the country. Many found refuge in the Ottoman Empire, the Balkans, North Africa, and Latin America. They risked the death penalty if they returned to Spain.*

Source: From “Spain passes law awarding citizenship to descendants of expelled Jews,” *The Guardian*, June 11, 2015. Retrieved April 15, 2016, from http://www.theguardian.com /world/2015/jun/11/spain-law-citizenship-jews.

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How we think about the past and what we know about it help us to build and main- tain communities and cultural identities. And our relationships with the past are intimately tied to issues of power. To illustrate, the book *The Pink Swastika: Homo- sexuality in the Nazi Party* attempts to blame the Holocaust on German gays and lesbians (“Under Surveillance,” 1995). This book, in depicting gays and lesbians as perpetrators, rather than victims, of Nazi atrocities, presents the gay identity in a markedly negative light. However, stories of the horrendous treatment of gays and lesbians during World War II serve to promote a common history and influ- ence intercultural communication among gays and lesbians in France, Germany, the Netherlands, and other nations. Today, a monument in Amsterdam serves to mark that history, to help ensure that we remember that gays and lesbians were victims of the Nazi Holocaust as well.

In the United States, Bayard Rustin is often forgotten, despite his enormous contributions to the civil rights movement. “His obscurity stemmed not only from amnesia but also from conscious suppression” (Kennedy, 2003), despite his major role in U.S. history. *The Nation* (2003) observed: “Rustin helped found the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). He advised Martin Luther King Jr., organized the 1963 March on Washington and wrote several essays that continue to repay close study. Through- out these pursuits, Rustin expressed a gay sexuality for which he was stigmatized as a sexual criminal, a smear that crippled his ability to lead the movements to which he passionately contributed ideas and inspiration.”

Abraham Lincoln’s sexual history has also been a major point of contention over a number of years (see Table 4-1). Psychologist C. A. Tripp’s book *The Inti- mate World of Abraham Lincoln* once again raised the possibility that the for- mer president’s sexual history included men. While we may never know whatever really happened, the concern over this history underscores the way it may influence our national history. The Lincoln case points to the difficulty in understanding this type of history. The words, *homosexual, heterosexual,* and *bisexual* did not exist during Lincoln’s era; therefore, those words would not be used to describe his pri- vate life. Among other examples, Tripp points to a member of Lincoln’s body- guard, Captain David V. Derickson, who would come over to the White House and sleep in the same bed with Lincoln. Is this evidence for how we might understand this sexual history? On the one hand, it seems odd for Captain Derickson to come to the White House and sleep in the same bed with Lincoln; however, “as many historians have noted, same-sex bed sharing was common at the time and hardly proof of homosexual activities or feelings” (Greenberg, 2005). There is no general agreement about Lincoln’s sexual history, but more importantly, the debate over how we should think about Lincoln points to the power of these histories in under- standing our national identity.

***Diasporic Histories*** The international relationships that many racial and ethnic groups have with others who share their heritage and history are often overlooked in intercultural communication. These international ties may have been created by trans- national migrations, slavery, religious crusades, or other historical forces. Because most people do not think about the diverse connections people have to other nations

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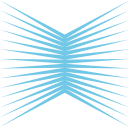
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**TABLE 4-1 HISTORICAL CONTROVERSY: ABRAHAM LINCOLN’S SEXUALITY**

**Year Event**

1924 Carl Sandburg alludes to

Lincoln’s homosexual tendencies using euphemisms

of the day like “streak of lavender.”

1999 Prominent gay activist Larry

Kramer claims to have acquired a journal of one of Lincoln’s lovers.

2004 C. A. Tripp makes the

definitive claim that Lincoln was gay in his 2004 biography.

2008 Charles E. Morris publishes an

account of Lincoln’s sexual history and  
an analysis of reactions to the topic (Morris, 2008).

**Reaction**

This claim was not central to Sandburg’s work and was widely dismissed.

Many historians and commentators rail against Kramer and his claim to have found the journal.

Controversy erupts over Tripp’s objectivity, his research, and the topic.

**Outcome**

Lingering questions over Lincoln’s sexual history (Nobile, 2005).

Kramer has kept the journal private, but the controversy has lived on (Lloyd, 1999).

Most historians continue to claim that Lincoln was heterosexual, while some question this claim (Brookhiser, 2005).

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Sources: From P. Nobile, “Broken promises, plagiarism, misused evidence and the new gay Lincoln book published by the Free Press,” *The History News Network,* January 10, 2005. Retrieved from http://hnn.us/articles/9514.html; C. Lloyd, “Was Lincoln gay?” *Salon.com*, May 3, 1999. Retrieved from http://www.salon.com/books/it/1999/04/30 /lincoln/index.html; R. Brookhiser, “Was Lincoln gay?” *The New York Times,* January 9, 2005. Retrieved from http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F05E5D6 1439F93AA35752C0A9639C8B63; C. E. Morris III, “Profile,” 2008. Retrieved from http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/communication/faculty/fulltime/morris.html.

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**diaspora** A massive migration often caused by war, famine, or persecution that results in the dispersal of a unified group.

**diasporic histories**

The histories of the ways in which interna- tional cultural groups were created through transnational migra- tions, slavery, religious crusades, or other his- torical forces.

and cultures, we consider these histories to be hidden. In his book *The Black Atlantic,* scholar Paul Gilroy (1993) emphasizes that to understand the identities, cultures, and experiences of African descendants living in Britain and the United States, we must examine the connections between Africa, Europe, and North America.

A massive migration, often caused by war or famine or persecution, that results in the dispersal of a unified group is called a **diaspora.** The chronicles of these events are **diasporic histories.** A cultural group (or even an individual) that flees its homeland is likely to bring some customs and practices to the new homeland. In fact, diasporic migra- tions often cause people to cling more strongly to symbols and practices that reflect their group’s identity. Over the years, though, people become acculturated to some degree in their new homelands. Consider, for example, the dispersal of eastern European Jews who migrated during or after World War II to the United States, Australia, South America, Israel, and other parts of the world. They brought their Jewish culture and eastern European culture with them, but they also adopted new cultural patterns as they became New Yorkers, Australians, Argentinians, Israelis, and so on. Imagine the communication differences among these people over time. Imagine the differences between these groups and members of the dominant culture of their new homelands.

History helps us understand the cultural connections among people affected by dia- sporas and other transnational migrations. Indeed, it is important that we recognize these relationships. But we must also be careful to distinguish between the ways in which these connections are helpful or hurtful to intercultural communication. For example, some cultures tend to regard negatively those who left their homeland. Thus, many Japa- nese tend to look down on Japanese Canadians, Japanese Americans, Japanese Brazilians, Japanese Mexicans, and Japanese Peruvians. In contrast, the Irish tend not to look down on Irish Americans or Irish Canadians. Of course, we must remember, too, that many other intervening factors can influence diasporic relationships on an interpersonal level.

***Colonial Histories*** As you probably know, throughout history, societies and nations have ventured beyond their borders. Because of overpopulation, limited resources, notions of grandeur, or other factors, people have left their homelands to colonize other territories. It is important to recognize these **colonial histories** so we can better understand the dynamics of intercultural communication today.

Let’s look at the significance of colonialism in determining language. His- torically, three of the most important colonizers were Britain, France, and Spain. As a result of colonialism, English is spoken in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Belize, Nigeria, South Africa, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Zimbabwe, Hong Kong, Singapore, and the United States, among many places in the world. French is spoken in Canada, Senegal, Tahiti, Haiti, Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Niger, Mali, Chad, and the Central African Republic, among other places. And Spanish is spo- ken in most of the Western Hemisphere, from Mexico to Chile and Argentina, and including Cuba, Venezuela, Colombia, and Panama.

Many foreign language textbooks proudly display maps that show the many places around the world where that language is commonly spoken. Certainly, it’s nice to know that one can speak Spanish or French in so many places. But the maps don’t reveal *why* those languages are widely spoken in those regions, and they don’t reveal the legacies of colonialism in those regions. For example, the United Kingdom

**colonial histories**

The histories that legitimate interna- tional invasions and annexations.

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maintains close relations with many of its former colonies, and the queen of England is also the queen of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the Bahamas. But some colo- nial relationships are not close, such as the relationship with Ireland (see Figure 4-3 on page 152). And others are changing, as both Australia and Jamaica are consider- ing ending the British monarch as their heads of state (Botelho & Brocchetto, 2016; McKenzie, 2016).

Other languages have been spread through colonialism as well, including Portu- guese in Brazil, Macao, and Angola; Dutch in Angola, Suriname, and Mozambique; and a related Dutch language, Afrikaans, in South Africa. Russian is spoken in the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Tajikistan. In addition, many nations have reclaimed their own languages in an effort to resist the influences of colonialism. For example, today Arabic is spoken in Algeria and Vietnamese is spoken in Vietnam; at one time, French was widely spoken in both countries. And in the recently independent Latvia, the ability to speak Latvian is a requirement for citizenship.

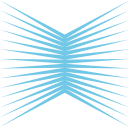
The primary languages that we speak are not freely chosen by us. Rather, we must learn the languages of the societies into which we are born. Judith and Tom, for example, both speak English, although their ancestors came to the United States from non-English-speaking countries. We did not choose to learn English among all of the languages of the world. Although we don’t resent our native language, we recognize why many individuals might resent a language imposed on them. Think about the historical forces that led you to speak some language(s) and not others. Understanding history is crucial to understanding the linguistic worlds we inhabit, and vestiges of colonialism are often part of these histories.

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When the Commonwealth of Virginia passed the Racial Integrity Act of 1924, it “didn’t just make blacks in Virginia second-class citizens—it also erased any acknowledgment of Indians [...]. With a stroke of the pen, Virginia was on a path to eliminating the identity of the Pamunkey, the Mattaponi, the Chickahominy, the Monacan, the Rappahonnok, the Nansemond, and the rest of Virginia’s tribes” (Heim, 2015). There are important consequences to the absent his- tory of Indian tribes in Virginia. Until recently, Virginia had no federally recognized Indian tribes. “In order to receive federal recognition, and be eligible for the hous- ing, education, and health-care funding that comes with it, Indian tribes need to meet several criteria heavily weighted to historical documentation” (Heim, 2015). Claim- ing Pochahontas as one of their ancestors, the Pamunkey tribe worked for decades to make their case for federal recognition. This small tribe initially received federal recognition in July 2015, but that was put on hold as a legal challenge was made to their new status. In February 2016, the challenge was denied and the Pamunkey became Virginia’s first and only federally recognized Indian tribe. Given the erasure of Indian history in Virginia, will any other tribes in Virginia be able to gain federal recognition? In what other cases have people been impacted by absent history?

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Postcolonialism is useful in helping us understand the relationship between his- tory and the present. In struggling with a colonial past, people have devised many ways of confronting that past. As explained in Chapter 2, postcolonialism is not sim- ply the study of colonialism, but the study of how we might deal with that past and its aftermath, which may include the *ongoing* use of the colonial language, culture, and religion. For example, many companies are locating parts of their businesses in India because of the widespread use of English in this former British colony. How should people in India deal with the ongoing dominance of English, the colonizer’s language, but also the language of business?

For example, Hispanics or Latinos/as share a common history of coloniza- tion by Spain, whether their families trace their origins to Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and so on. Although Spain is no longer in political control of these lands, how do those who live in the legacy of this history deal with that history? In what ways does it remain important, as a part of this cultural identity, to embrace the colonizer’s language (Spanish)? The colonizer’s religion (Catholicism)? And are there other aspects of Spanish culture that continue to be reproduced over and over again? Postcolonialism is not simply a call to make a clean break from that colonial past, but “to examine the violent actions and erasures of colonialism” (Shome & Hegde, 2002, p. 250). In this case, that interrogation might even mean reconsidering the category “Hispanic” that incorporates a wide range of groups that share a Spanish colonial history but do not share other histories that constitute their cultures. The legacy of this cultural invasion often lasts much longer than the political relationship.

***Socioeconomic Class Histories*** Although we often overlook the importance of socioeconomic class as a factor in history, the fact is that economic and class issues prompted many people to emigrate to the United States. The poverty in Ireland in the 19th century, for example, did much to fuel the flight to the United States; in fact, today, there are more Irish Americans than Irish.

Yet it is not always the socioeconomically disadvantaged who emigrate. After the Russian Revolution in 1917, many affluent Russians moved to Paris. Likewise, many affluent Cubans left the country after Castro seized power in 1959. Currently, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services office administers the EB-5 visa pro- gram that allows foreign investors to secure permanent residency (a green card) in the United States if they meet certain requirements (creating a new business, creat- ing a certain number of jobs, and investing a certain amount of money). Called the EB-5 Immigrant Investor Program, this visa program is an example of how socio- economic class can influence international migrations. Many other countries also offer similar programs.

The key point here is that socioeconomic class distinctions are often overlooked in examining the migrations and acculturation of groups around the world. Histori- cally, the kinds of employment that immigrants supplied and the regions they settled were often marked by the kinds of capital—cultural and financial—that they were or were not able to bring with them. These factors also influence the interactions and politics of different groups; for example, Mexican Americans and Cuban Americans, as groups, frequently are at odds with the political mainstream.

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***Religious Histories*** In the past, as well as today, religion is an important histori- cal force that has shaped our planet. Religious conflicts have led to wars, such as the Christian Crusades nearly a thousand years ago. Religious persecution has also led to migration of various religious groups to new places. In the United States, one example of this movement are the Mormons, who left New York, settled in Illinois, and then left to go to Utah. Many French Huguenots (Protestants), persecuted by French Catholics, left France to settle primarily in North America, South Africa, and elsewhere in Europe.

Because many of these religious histories remain controversial, they are viewed differently, depending on with which side one identifies. Even recent historical events, and how they are interpreted, can create religious conflict. In August 2010, a New York City commission approved the construction of a mosque near “Ground Zero,” the site of the former World Trade Center. This created a national controversy over the proposed mosque and the role of Islam in the attacks on 9/11. For many Muslims, the 9/11 attackers were extremists, much like the extremists in many other religions. For many non-Muslims, the 9/11 attackers were acting as Muslims. In a speech made at a White House dinner, President Obama stated:

*Now, that’s not to say that religion is without controversy. Recently, attention has been focused on the construction of mosques in certain communities—particularly New York. Now, we must all recognize and respect the sensitivities surrounding the development of Lower Manhattan. The 9/11 attacks were a deeply traumatic event for our country. And the pain and the experience of suffering by those*

*who lost loved ones is just unimaginable. So I understand the emotions that this issue engenders. And Ground Zero is, indeed, hallowed ground. But let me be clear. As a citizen, and as President, I believe that Muslims have the same right  
to practice their religion as everyone else in this country. (Applause.) And that includes the right to build a place of worship and a community center on private property in Lower Manhattan, in accordance with local laws and ordinances. This is America. And our commitment to religious freedom must be unshakeable. The principle that people of all faiths are welcome in this country and that they will not be treated differently by their government is essential to who we are.*

In this example, we can see that different views about the role of religion in the past can create contemporary controversies. Although religious freedom is an impor- tant American cultural value, as noted by President Obama, that cultural value can be in tension with other views on what happened and why on 9/11.

**INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND HISTORY**

One way to understand specific relationships between communication and history is to examine the attitudes and notions that individuals bring to an interaction; these are the antecedents of contact. A second way is to look at the specific conditions of the interaction and the role that history plays in these contexts. Finally, we can examine how various histories are negotiated in intercultural interaction, applying a dialecti- cal perspective to these different histories.

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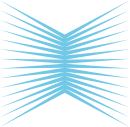
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The flying of the Confederate battle flag at the South Carolina capitol build- ing points to the complexities in dealing with the past. History, although it is past, continues to shape contemporary life. The slaughter of nine African American churchgoers in Charleston by a white gunman who wrapped himself in the Confederate flag again raised the issue of flying the flag, but this time, the political decision was made to take it down. The removal of the flag, however, did not erase the conflicted feelings that many South Carolinians have about the Confederacy and the flag. The flag, as a symbol, points to a much more contested history.

*The banishment of perhaps the most conspicuous and polarizing symbol of the Old South from the seat of South Carolina government Friday morning was the culmination of decades of racially charged political skirmishes.*

*[...]*

*At issue were vexing questions about how a state that was first to secede from the Union—and then later raised the battle flag in 1962 when white Southerners were resisting calls for integration—should honor its Confederate past.*

*It was a conversation that seemed like it might never end here, until it was hurried to a resolution by unspeakable horror: the massacre of nine black churchgoers in downtown Charleston last month, and a gathering sense of outrage and offense that was felt even by many white conservatives who had previously supported the flag. The arrest of the alleged gunman, 21-year-old Dylann Roof, who posed proudly with the flag and apparently posted a long racist manifesto online before the massacre, was the flag’s final undoing.*

Source: From R. Fausset and A. Blinder (2015, July 10), “Era ends as South Carolina lowers Confederate flag,” *New York Times.* Retrieved April 16, 2016, from http://www.nytimes .com/2015/07/11/us/south-carolina-confederate-flag.html.

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**Antecedents of Contact**

We may be able to negotiate some aspects of history in interaction, but it is impor- tant to recognize that we bring our personal histories to each intercultural interac- tion. These personal histories involve our prior experience and our attitudes. Social psychologist Richard Brislin (1981) has identified four elements of personal histo- ries that influence interaction.

First, people bring childhood experiences to interactions. For example, both Judith and Tom grew up hearing negative comments about Catholics. As a result, our first interactions with adherents to this faith were tinged with some suspi- cion. This personal history did not affect initial interactions with people of other religions.

Second, people may bring historical myths to interactions. These are myths with which many people are familiar. The Jewish conspiracy myth—that Jewish people are secretly in control of U.S. government and business—is one example.

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Third, the languages that people speak influence their interactions. Language can be an attraction or a repellent in intercultural interactions. For example, many people from the United States enjoy traveling in Britain because English is spoken there. However, these same people may have little desire, or even be afraid, to visit Russia, simply because it is not an English-speaking country.

Finally, people tend to be affected by recent, vivid events. For example, after the terrorist attacks in San Bernardino, Brussels, Paris, and the Boston Marathon, interactions between Arab Americans and other U.S. residents were strained, characterized by suspicion, fear, and distrust. The media’s treatment of such catastrophic events often creates barriers and reinforces stereotypes by blurring distinctions between Arabs, Muslims, and Palestinians. Perhaps recent histories, such as the police shootings of African Americans, such as Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, and others, as well as the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement are more influential in our interactions than the hidden or past histories, such as the massacre in 1890 of some 260 Sioux Indians at Wounded Knee in South Dakota or the women’s suffrage movement around the turn of the 20th century.

**The Contact Hypothesis**

The **contact hypothesis** is the notion that better communication between groups of people is facilitated simply by bringing them together and allowing them to interact. Although history does not seem to support this notion, many public policies and pro- grams in the United States and abroad are based on this hypothesis. Examples include desegregation rulings; the prevalence of master-planned communities like Reston, Virginia; and many international student exchange programs. All of these programs are based on the assumption that simply giving people from different groups oppor- tunities to interact will result in more positive intergroup attitudes and reduced prejudice.

Gordon Allport (1979) and Yehudi Amir (1969), two noted psychologists, have tried to identify the conditions under which the contact hypothesis does and does not hold true. The histories of various groups figure prominently in their studies. Based on these and subsequent studies, psychologists have outlined at least eight conditions that must be met (more or less) to improve attitudes and facilitate intergroup communica- tion (Schwarzwald & Amir, 1996; Stephan & Stephan, 1996). These are particularly relevant in light of increasing diversity in U.S. society in general and the workforce in particular. The eight conditions are as follows:

1. Group members should be of equal status, both within and outside the con- tact situation. Communication will occur more easily if there is no dispar- ity between individuals in status characteristics (education, socioeconomic status, and so on). This condition does not include temporary inequality, such as in student–teacher or patient–doctor roles. Consider the implica- tions of this condition for relations among various ethnic groups in the United States. How are we likely to think of individuals from specific ethnic groups if our interactions are characterized by inequality? A good example is the interaction between longtime residents and recent immigrants in the

**contact hypothesis**

The notion that better communication between groups is facilitated simply

by putting people together in the same place and allowing them to interact.

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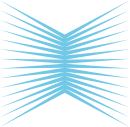
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In an April 23, 2012 press release, the White House announced that President Obama would be giving posthumously Jan Karski the Presidential Medal of Freedom. President Obama said:

*We must tell our children about how this evil was allowed to happen— because so many people succumbed to their darkest instincts; because  
so many others stood silent. But let us also tell our children about the Righteous Among the Nations. Among them was Jan Karski—a young Polish Catholic—who witnessed Jews being put on cattle cars, who saw the killings, and who told the truth, all the way to President Roosevelt himself. Jan Karski passed away more than a decade ago. But today, I’m proud to announce that this spring I will honor him with America’s highest civilian honor—the Presidential Medal of Freedom.*

On May 29, 2012 when the award was made, President Obama said:

*Fluent in four languages, possessed of a photographic memory, Jan served as a courier for the Polish resistance during the darkest days of World War II. Before one trip across enemy lines, resistance fighters told him that Jews were being murdered on a massive scale, and smuggled him into the Warsaw Ghetto and a \*Polish death camp\* to see for himself. Jan took that information to President Franklin Roosevelt, giving one of the first accounts of the Holocaust and imploring to the world to take action.*

After President Obama’s laudatory remarks on all of the recipients of the Presiden- tial Medal of Honor, an immediate uproar ensued over the use of the term, “Polish death camp.” The asterisks are marked on the White House press release, along with an apology for using those words., as they are historically inaccurate. The Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk explained: “When someone says “Polish death camps,” it’s as if

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Southwest, where Mexican Americans often provide housecleaning, garden- ing, and similar services for whites. It is easy to see how the history of these two groups in the United States contributes to the lack of equality in interac- tion, leads to stereotyping, and inhibits effective intercultural communica- tion. But the history of relations between Mexican Americans and whites varies within this region. For example, families of Spanish descent have lived in New Mexico longer than other European-descent families, whereas Arizona has a higher concentration of recent immigrants from Mexico. Intergroup interactions in New Mexico are characterized less by inequality (Stephan & Stephan, 1989).

2. Strong normative and institutional support for the contact should be provided. This suggests that when individuals from different groups come together, positive outcomes do not happen by accident. Rather, institutional encourage- ment is necessary. Examples include university support for contact between

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U.S. and international students, or for contact among different cultural groups within the university, and local community support for integrating elementary and high schools. Numerous studies have shown the importance of commit- ment by top management to policies that facilitate intercultural interaction in the workplace (Brinkman, 1997). Finally, institutional support may also mean government and legal support, expressed through court action.

3. Contact between the groups should be voluntary. This may seem to con- tradict the previous condition, but it doesn’t. Although support must exist beyond the individual, individuals need to feel that they have a choice in making contact. If they believe that they are being forced to interact, as with some diversity programs or affirmative action programs, the intercul- tural interaction is unlikely to have positive outcomes. For example, an air traffic controller was so incensed by a required diversity program exercise on gender differences that he sued the Department of Transportation for

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there were no Nazis, no German responsibility, as if there was no Hitler. That is why our Polish sensitivity in these situations is so much more than just simply a feeling of national pride.” In his analysis of the speech, David Frum more directly explains that “the camps were German, German, German: ordered into being by Germans, designed by Germans, fulfilling a German plan of murder.” And he concludes: “The medal to Karski was to be part of the process of laying painful memories to rest. It was intended too to strengthen the U.S.−Polish relations that the Obama administration had frayed in pursuit of its “reset” with Russia. Instead, this administration bungled everything: past, present and future.” In response, the White House amended the posted speech with: “\**Note–the language in asterisks below is historically inaccurate. It should instead have been: ‘Nazi death camps in German occupied Poland.’ We regret the error.*”

How we communicate about the past can have tremendous impacts on contem- porary and future intercultural relations. It is difficult to know how much damage was caused to U.S.−Polish relations, but this example highlights the importance of thinking about how you communicate about the past.

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FIGURE 4-3 Irish dissident Republicans hold a protest close to Dublin Castle as Britain’s Queen Elizabeth II made a historic address in Irish toward the end of her second day of her State Visit to Dublin, Ireland, May 18, 2011. The Queen began her speech in Irish by addressing “A hUachtarain agus a chairde.” The Queen said it was impossible to ignore the weight of history, as so much of the visit reminds people of the complexity of the his- tory between both countries. She said the relationship had not always been straightforward and that the islands had experienced more than their fair share of heartache, turbulence, and loss. (*© Chris Jackson/Getty Images*)

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$300,000 (Erbe & Hart, 1994). A better program design would be to involve all participants from the beginning. This can be done by showing the ben- efits of an inclusive diversity policy—one that values all kinds of diversity, and not merely that based on gender, for example. Equally important is the mounting evidence of bottom-line benefits of diverse personnel who work well together (Harris, 1997).

1. The contact should have the potential to extend beyond the immediate situation and occur in a variety of contexts with a variety of individuals from all groups. This suggests that superficial contact between members of different groups is not likely to have much impact on attitudes (stereotypes, prejudice) or result in productive communication. For instance, simply sitting beside someone from another culture in a class or sampling food from different countries is not likely to result in genuine understanding of that perszon or appreciation for his or her cultural background (Stephan & Stephan, 1992). Thus, international students who live with host families are much more likely to have positive impressions of the host country and to develop better intercultural communication skills than those who go on “island programs,” in which students interact mostly with other foreigners in the host country.
2. Programs should maximize cooperation within groups and minimize competi- tion. For example, bringing a diverse group of students together should not involve pitting the African Americans against the European Americans on separate sports teams. Instead, it might involve creating diversity within teams to emphasize cooperation. Especially important is having a superordinate goal, a goal that everyone can agree on. This helps diverse groups develop a common identity (Gaertner, Dovidio, & Bachman, 1996). For instance, there is a successful summer camp in Maine for Arab and Jewish youths; the camp brings together members of these historically conflicting groups for a summer of cooperation, discussion, and relationship building.
3. Programsshouldequalizenumbersofgroupmembers.Positiveoutcomesandsuc- cessful communication will be more likely if members are represented in numeri- cal equality. Research studies have shown that being in the numerical minority can cause stress and that the “solo” minority, particularly in beginning a new job, is subject to exaggerated expectations (either very high or very low) and extreme evaluations (either very good or very bad) (Pettigrew & Martin, 1989).
4. Group members should have similar beliefs and values. A large body of research supports the idea that people are attracted to those whom they perceive to be similar to themselves. This means that, in bringing diverse groups of people together, we should look for common ground—similarities based on religion, interests, competencies, and so on. For example, an international group of mothers is working for peace in the Middle East. Although members represent different ethnic groups, they come together with a shared goal—to protect their children from military action between the warring factions in the region.
5. Programs should promote individuation of group members. This means that they should downplay the characteristics that mark the different groups (such

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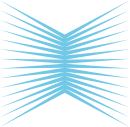
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**POINT** *of* **VIEW**

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When we look back, we see that many wrongs have been perpetrated against some people for the benefit of others. For those who benefited from the wrongs of the past, how should they address these wrongs? Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. is an example of the complexity of dealing with the past.

*[I]n the fall of 1838, no one was spared: not the 2-month-old baby and her mother, not the field hands, not the shoemaker, and not Cornelius Hawkins, who was about 13 years old when he was forced onboard.*

*Their panic and desperation would be mostly forgotten for more than a century. But this was no ordinary slave sale. The enslaved African Americans had belonged to the nation’s most prominent Jesuit priests. And they were sold, along with scores of others, to help secure the future of the premier Catholic institution of higher learning at the time, known today as Georgetown University.*

*Now, with racial protests roiling college campuses, an unusual collection of Georgetown professors, students, alumni, and genealogists is trying to find out what happened to those 272 men, women, and children. And they are con- fronting a particularly wrenching question: What, if anything, is owed to the descendants of slaves who were sold to help ensure the college’s survival?*

*[...]*

*At Georgetown, slavery and scholarship were inextricably linked. The college relied on Jesuit plantations in Maryland to help finance its operations, university officials say. (Slaves were often donated by prosperous parishio- ners.) And the 1838 sale—worth about $3.3 million in today’s dollars—was organized by two of Georgetown’s early presidents, both Jesuit priests.*

*[...]*

*What has emerged from their research, and that of other scholars, is a glimpse of an insular world dominated by priests who required their*

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as language, physical abilities, or racial characteristics). Instead, group mem- bers might focus on the characteristics that express individual personalities.

This list of conditions can help us understand how domestic and international contexts vary (Gudykunst, 1979). It is easy to see how the history within a nation- state may lead to conditions and attitudes that are more difficult to facilitate. For example, historical conditions between African Americans and white Americans may make it impossible to meet these conditions; interracial interactions in the United States cannot be characterized by equality.

Note that this list of conditions is incomplete. Moreover, meeting all of the con- ditions does not guarantee positive outcomes when diverse groups of people interact. However, the list is a starting place, and it is important to be able to identify which conditions are affected by historical factors that may be difficult to change and which can be more easily facilitated by communication professionals.

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**Negotiating Histories Dialectically in Interaction**

How can a dialectical perspective help us negotiate interactions, given individual attitudes and personal and cultural histories? How can we balance past and present in our everyday intercultural interactions?

First, it is important to recognize that we all bring our own histories (some known, some hidden) to interactions. We can try to evaluate the role that history plays for those with whom we interact.

Second, we should understand the role that histories play in our identities, in what we bring to the interaction. Communication scholar Marsha Houston (1997) says there are three things that white people who want to be her friends should never say: “I don’t notice you’re black,” “You’re not like the others,” and “I know how you feel.” In her opinion, each of these denies or rejects a part of her identity that is deeply rooted in history.

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*slaves to attend Mass for the sake of their salvation, but also whipped and sold some of them.*

*[...]*

*Mismanaged and inefficient, the Maryland plantations no longer offered a reliable source of income for Georgetown College, which had been founded in 1789. It would not survive, Father Mulledy feared, with- out an influx of cash.*

*[...]*

*Father Mulledy promised his superiors that the slaves would continue to practice their religion. Families would not be separated. And the money raised by the sale would not be used to pay off debt or for operating expenses.*

*None of those conditions were met, university officials said.*

*Father Mulledy took most of the down payment he received from the sale—about $500,000 in today’s dollars—and used it to help pay off the debts that Georgetown had incurred under his leadership.*

*In the uproar that followed, he was called to Rome and reassigned. [...]  
Meanwhile, Georgetown’s working group has been weighing whether*

*the university should apologize for profiting from slave labor, create a memorial to those enslaved, and provide scholarships for their descen- dants, among other possibilities, said Dr. Rothman, the historian.*

*“It’s hard to know what could possibly reconcile a history like this,” he said. “What can you do to make amends?”*

Source: From R. L. Swarns (2016, April 16), “272 slaves were sold to save Georgetown. What does it owe their descendants?” *New York Times.* Retrieved April 16, 2016, from http://www .nytimes.com/2016/04/17/us/georgetown-university-search-for-slave-descendants.html?\_r=0.

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Sometimes it is unwise to ask people where they are “really from.” Such questions assume that they cannot be from where they said they were from, due to racial charac- teristics or other apparent features. Recognizing a person’s history and its link to her or his identity in communication is a first step in establishing intercultural relationships. It is also important to be aware of your own historical blinders and assumptions.

Sometimes the past–present dialectic operates along with the disadvantage– privilege dialectic. The Hungarian philosopher György Lukács wrote a book titled *History and Class Consciousness* (1971), in which he argues that we need to think dialectically about history and social class. Our own recognition of how class dif- ferences have influenced our families is very much affected by the past and by the conditions members experienced that might explain whom they married, why they lived where they did, what languages they do and do not speak, and what culture they identify with.

Two dialectical tensions emerge here: (1) between privilege and disadvan- tage and (2) between the personal and the social. Both of these dialectics affect our view of the past, present, and future. As we attempt to understand ourselves and our situations (as well as those of others), we must recognize that we arrived at universities for a variety of reasons. Embedded in our backgrounds are dialec- tical tensions between privilege and disadvantage and the ways in which those factors were established in the past and the present. Then there is the dialectical tension between seeing ourselves as unique persons and as members of particular social classes. These factors affect both the present and the future. In each case, we must also negotiate the dialectical tensions between the past and the present, and between the present and the future. Who we think we are today is very much influenced by how we view the past, how we live, and what culture we believe to be our own.

**INTERNET RESOURCES**

http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/remembering/  
The American Radio Works has compiled information and documents relating to segregation in the United States and posted them online. Students can listen to accounts of segregation and retrospective analyses as well as read many detailed accounts. There is also a section that outlines key laws of the Jim Crow era.

http://www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/  
The National Archives has set up this webpage to help you research your family history. You can see what kinds of records they hold and how you might go about doing this research.

http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2016/2/17/building-bridges/  
This is a website about the Japanese diaspora in the Western Hemisphere, hence it is available in English, Japanese, Portuguese, and Spanish. The entire website is worth exploring, but this particular page makes important connections between Asian Americans and Arab Americans. It underscores the ways that the United States has

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Chapter 4 / History and Intercultural Communication **157** changed and remained the same regarding race, racial profiling and stereotyping, and

national security.

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/jefferson/true/  
This webpage explores the evidence and controversy over the possible sexual relationship between Thomas Jefferson and one of his slaves, Sally Hemmings. Here you can read about the DNA evidence, as well as the reaction from historians and descendants. Here you can see an example of a contested intercultural history and its importance for the contemporary world.

www.ushmm.org/museum/ www.ushmm.org/research/center/

The first web address is for the United States Holocaust Museum. The museum website offers many exhibits related to the Holocaust that are viewable online. The second  
web address is specifically designed for university students. This section includes a searchable database for tracing Holocaust survivors and archiving information.

**SUMMARY**

* ⬛  Multiple histories are important for empowering different cultural identities.
* ⬛  Multiple histories include:
  + ⚫  Political histories
  + ⚫  Intellectual histories
  + ⚫  Social histories
  + ⚫  Family histories
  + ⚫  National histories
  + ⚫  Cultural-group histories
* ⬛  Histories are constructed through narrative.
* ⬛  Hidden histories are those typically not conveyed in a widespread manner and are based on race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, diaspora, colonialism, socioeconomic class, and religion.
* ⬛  People bring four elements of personal history to intercultural interactions:

⚫ Childhood experience

⬛

Historical myths  
Language competence  
Memories of recent political events

⚫  
⚫  
⚫  
Contact hypothesis suggests that simply bringing people from diverse groups together will only work if certain conditions are met:

⚫ Group members must be of equal status and relatively equal numbers.

Contact must be voluntary, extend beyond the superficial, have institu-

⚫  
tional support, and promote similarity and individuation of group members.

There should be maximum cooperation among participants. ⬛

⚫  
A dialectical perspective helps negotiate histories in intercultural interaction.

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**158** Part I / Foundations of Intercultural Communication **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What are some examples of hidden histories, and why are they hidden?
2. How do the various histories of the United States influence our communication with people from other countries?
3. How do you benefit or have been disenfranchised in the telling of certain histories? How do you take responsibility for the histories from which you benefit?
4. What factors in your experience have led to the development of positive feel- ings about your own cultural heritage and background? What factors have led to negative feelings, if any?
5. When can contact between members of two cultures improve their attitudes toward each other and facilitate communication between them?
6. How do histories influence the process of identity formation?
7. What is the significance of the shift from history to histories? How does this shift help us understand intercultural communication?
8. Why do some people in the United States prefer not to talk about history? What views of social reality and intercultural communication does this attitude encourage?

**ACTIVITIES**

1. *Cultural-Group History.* This exercise can be done by individual students or in groups. Choose a cultural group in the United States that is unfamiliar to you. Study the history of this group, and identify and describe significant events in its history. Answer the following questions:

1. What is the historical relationship between this group and other groups (particularly the dominant cultural groups)?
2. Are there any historical incidents of discrimination? If so, describe them.
3. What are common stereotypes about the group? How did these stereotypes originate?
4. Who are important leaders and heroes of the group?
5. What are notable achievements of the group?
6. How has the history of this group influenced the identity of group members today?

2. *Family Histories.* Write a brief personal narrative that tells the story of your family history. This may require additional research or conversations with family members. You may want to focus more on one parent’s side, depending

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Chapter 4 / History and Intercultural Communication **159** on how much information you can find or which story has more meaning to

you. Try and trace this story back to its furthest beginning.

a. How did your family come to live where they currently live?

b. Were there any great historical events that affected them and the decisions they made (e.g., slavery, the Holocaust)?

c. How does this history have meaning for you?

**KEY WORDS**

absent history (125) altered history (125) apartheid (132)  
colonial histories (144) concentration camps (131) contact hypothesis (149) cultural-group

histories (128)

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