

## A STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

I consider my teaching and research objectives to be pretty much the same. Early in my undergraduate days I took my cue from the British historian, E.H. Carr. He observed that learning from history was never a one way process. He said that: "to learn about the present in the light of the past, means also to learn of the past in the light of the present." He contended that "The function of history is to promote a profound understanding of both the past and present through a study of the interrelationship between them."

I think that is a useful proposition to keep in mind when teaching or writing history. For example, in lecturing on the diplomacy of the American Revolution and its immediate aftermath, I point out that the new United States of America faced many of the same problems which bedevil nations recently emancipated from colonial domination. There were for the United States the same pressing needs for capital or foreign investment and the same unhappy situation of a country engaged largely in producing raw materials to be consumed by other more advanced nations. The Americans labored under a burden of foreign debt and struggled to avoid being a satellite of one or more of the great powers, England, France or Spain. I suggest to students that, although, the United States was born over two-centuries ago, one may be able to learn from its national experience. By the same token, one may gain some insight into the American plight in the 1780s by a study of diplomatic and economic problems confronted by small, weak, underdeveloped nations today.

Also, it is one thing to teach a student a lesson for a day; but if one can encourage him or her to learn by creating curiosity, they are more likely to continue the learning process as long as they live. I attempt to stimulate students' imaginations, that is to stimulate their ability to imagine themselves in other settings and other bodies than the ones they find themselves in, which is crucial, I think, for general human awareness. I was also trying to do that in my book, *Memories of the Forgotten War, the World War I Diary of Pte. V.E. Goodwin*. "Look, imagine what it would have been like to be in the situation of a Vickers machine gunner like Vincent Goodwin in the front line, to know that you would have to go on until you were killed, or wounded or until you arrived in Cambrai, or Valenciennes, or Mons—or Berlin before you got your reprieve. Think how it would have changed your life if you had been in that situation!"

In *Memories of the Forgotten War*, I was striving to stimulate the imagination largely of younger people the way, for example, I try to stimulate their imagination in the classroom when I ask them for a moment to imagine themselves as war widows, or mothers or sweethearts of veterans in 1919. "Would you have supported Article X, the Collective Security Article in the Versailles Treaty when it carried with it the risk of Canadian involvement in

another war in Europe or elsewhere in the 1920s and beyond?" That kind of mental gymnastics stretches the mind and it stretches the moral capacity, I think.

Every generation writes its own history. Since the days of recorded history, historians have attempted to portray the past as it actually happened. Today we recognize that the bare facts of the past may be determined with some measure of accuracy, but the interpretation of those facts will vary according to the time and place of the interpreter. History therefore is always partially subjective. This subjective nature or element in history helps explain the varying nature of the questions each generation of students asks as it turns to the past. I try to bear in mind, while lecturing or writing, that today's students labor to find answers to problems quite different from the ones my childhood or college generation faced. They seek, for example, to find answers to questions emerging from the chastening experience of two world wars and several bitter smaller ones.

Now from the perspective of a 65-year-old, one sees the universality of war whether it be the ancient Grecian Wars, Korea, Vietnam, El Salvador or Iraq and Iran. And I (and I think my students, too) do not see any end to it, given the world's population explosion and man's greed. Mankind does not seem to have changed one whit. I feel—and I sense that my students feel—the oppressions of the human predicament much more than my college generation did. There is today more awareness of the frightening limitations of man's capacities to cope with the problems confronting him—limitations which I believe, impress themselves upon all sensitive human beings. Those are facts which I try to keep in mind whether in the lecture hall or at my writing desk.

I attempted, in writing *Memories of the Forgotten War*, to capture a universal glimpse of war, as well as the specific Vincent Goodwin. I sought to help answer some of the questions students ask. I hoped to make it more difficult for people to talk again about body counts the way we heard them talking during the Vietnam War, as if the people being killed were not human beings, no matter how loathsome and offensive they—the enemy—might appear to be. It was clear that many of the Germans Vincent Goodwin's 2nd Motor Machine Gun Brigade fought in 1918 were largely pathetic peasant boys inducted at the age of sixteen and seventeen—many too young to shave—and they had no idea what was going on. They were terrified of their officers and forced to be there, and Canadians like Vincent Goodwin had to kill them. It was that point about the war, in addition to the point about its being a very "good war, or Great War," a necessary war, that I was trying to convey. Namely, that even in a "good war" you have to do terrible things and you have to understand why those things are terrible.

These are my scholarly objectives, including teaching and research—to stimulate in students a sense of historical curiosity and encourage development of an enquiring mind. It is a gift to be able to toss out ideas and have people learn from them—or change their attitudes because of them. And I firmly believe that attitudes are caught, not taught, caught like you catch a cold. As

a teacher I am quite aware of how much power one has to shape the future. In looking back over thirty years of university teaching I would hope that my students and former students might say of me, “He builded better than he knew.”

*David Beatty, Mount Allison University*

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## « Le Site du Savoir » : un site internet pour publier les travaux d'étudiants !

La publication des travaux d'étudiants du premier cycle universitaire est encouragée par de nombreux professeurs et institutions. Cependant, cette tâche s'avère souvent plutôt difficile. Dans un souci de faciliter la publication des travaux d'étudiants du Baccalauréat, David Tousignant et Alexandre Laurin, tous deux étudiants respectivement à l'Université de Montréal et à l'Université Queen's, ont mis sur pied le « Site du Savoir ». Le site offre un lieu sécuritaire et dynamique où les étudiants du premier cycle universitaire, et éventuellement ceux du collégial, peuvent

publier leurs meilleurs travaux et ainsi favoriser les échanges. Ce site est sérieux et ses gestionnaires ont mis en place un processus assurant qu'il ne devienne pas une source de plagiat. Pour consulter les travaux d'étudiants, il faut d'abord devenir membre en faisant parvenir un travail de bon calibre au webmaître. Le site, « la première encyclopédie faite par des étudiants », vise à devenir un lieu riche de diffusion de la connaissance.  
<http://www.savoir.net>.

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## ANNOUNCING A NEW JOURNAL!

The electronic Journal of International History (eJIH) will be launched in 1999 with the aim of encouraging research into Great Britain's international policy since 1870. The editors welcome contributions from historians working on a wide range of areas, such as: foreign trade, cultural diplomacy, propaganda and intelligence issues. The eJIH will be published four times a year (March, June, September and December). This will be an innovative publication, available only over the Internet and

provided free of charge to readers. For authors it will provide the opportunity to publish an article without the delays of established academic journals in printing the final version. Contributions should be sent to: Institute of Contemporary British History North Block, Room 357, Senate House, Malet Street, London WC1A 7HU, e-mail: [icbh@icbh.ac.uk](mailto:icbh@icbh.ac.uk).  
[Http://www.ihrinfo.ac.uk/icbh/eletron.htm](http://www.ihrinfo.ac.uk/icbh/eletron.htm).

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## L'histoire acadienne

The groupe de recherche en histoire économique et sociale de l'Université de Moncton (GRHESUM) announces that a new web site devoted to Acadian history is now online. The « Fenêtre virtuelle sur l'histoire acadienne » is a virtual centre of documentation and information on Acadian and New Brunswick history. [www.cuslm.ca/~clio/fenetre](http://www.cuslm.ca/~clio/fenetre).

Les membres du Groupe de recherche en histoire économique et sociale de l'Université de Moncton (GRHESUM) annoncent la mise en ligne d'un site web consacré à l'histoire acadienne. La Fenêtre virtuelle sur l'histoire acadienne est un centre de documentation et d'information virtuelles sur l'histoire de l'Acadie et du Nouveau-Brunswick. [www.cuslm.ca/~clio/fenetre](http://www.cuslm.ca/~clio/fenetre).