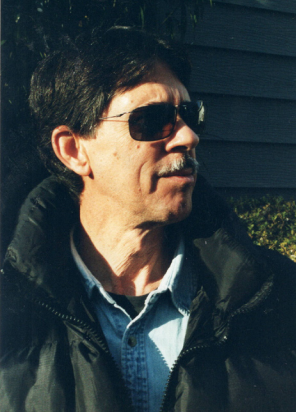


“Why We Should Care About History, Explained to me by Paul Bowman”

By Richard Burrill, 2023



Anthropologist and Essayist
Paul Bowman.
Burrill photo, 2007.

At our 15th Ishi Gathering and Seminar in Oroville in 2019, sponsored by the Butte County Historical Society, anthropologist and essayist Paul Bowman and I both recall when one unnamed seminar participant who sincerely asked our panelists during Q and A, “Why are you interested in the past?” Then he asked, “Why should I care about history?”

Paul felt that both questions asked were good ones. It bothered Paul that no one answered his questions.

At a subsequent dinner together, Paul shared with me his answer in a nutshell. Paul mused how history is so broad and has so many valuable aspects that normally, it is hard to explain. Paul began how “History is a data base.” On 9/06/2022, Paul Bowman wrote me his full answer:

History is a data base; a compendium of error, strife and pitfall. It is also a record of ideas and know-how, perseverance and achievement. History is what puts things in perspective; it also allows the tracking of trends and prediction of outcomes. The purpose of history is to caution, to guide, and to inspire.

Wow! Such a concise answer for what I should look for when reading a trustworthy classic of U.S. history.! So immediately, I decided to apply Paul’s formula for myself. I obtained and read my own

copy of *Narrative Of The Life Of Frederick Douglass: The Original 1845 Edition* (The Autobiographical Classics Of Frederick Douglass). Printed by Amazon. This primary source is only 155 pages, and very readable. I encourage every U.S. history teacher to assign this book to their students.

Frederick Douglass, the famous former slave, guided and cautioned me about his life experiences. I also became forever inspired by his first hand accounts,

Frederick Douglass **cautioned** me that “Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy” [They being identifiable by those slaves who were “peculiarly enthusiastic” p. 27] “The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears” [p. 28].

Frederick Douglass **guided** how the chances for discovering an escape route to Philadelphia, was “tenfold greater from the city than from the country” [Note: Pennsylvania, in 1780, became the first state to abolish slavery by statute]. Douglass sailed from Baltimore [Maryland] in the sloop *Amanda*. “On this passage I paid particular attention to the direction the steamboats took to go to Philadelphia.” Of utmost importance was learning that “on reaching North Point, they went up the bay, in a northeasterly direction” [p. 54].

Frederick Douglass’s actions also **inspired** me. He explained that his “success for finally finishing how to read was by making friends of all the little white boys whom he met in the street.” Douglass brought out before the boys, a book he had secreted on his person, He finished learning how to read by reading sentences together. “The “little urchins” he bribed with pieces of bread, who, in turn, gave Douglass “that more valuable bread of knowledge.” [p. 45]

Also, in 1833 when still a slave at about age sixteen, Frederick Douglass “found the resolve to fight” his **slave breaker** named Edward Covey. “This battle with Mr. Covey,” recalled Douglass, “was the turning-point in my career as a slave.” He was determined to be used no longer.

When Covey returned for more abuse, Douglas wrote, "I seized Covey hard by the throat, and as I did so, I rose. My resistance was so entirely unexpected that Covey seemed taken all aback. He trembled like a leaf." [Next] "We were at it [fighting] for nearly two hours." Covey never again "laid the weight of his finger upon me in anger." He didn't want to get hold of me again. "No," thought I, "You need not; for you will come off worse than you did before." [p. 69].

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Richard Burrill: From that day forward, when I study American history, I use the Paul Bowman formula, and I am better for it.

Author and Adjunct Instructor *Emeritus*, Richard Burrill, has begun teaching American cultural literacy by producing Audio Books. Visit his revised and being updated website, Ishifacts.com, for the latest details. Also provided is Burrill's Selected Bibliography of WHAT EVERY AMERICAN NEEDS TO KNOW.

IMAGINE! When, we the people, possess a 'global' shared history of humanity, we will be more informed. More of us will be potentially able to listen better to each other. There is also the real potential that we shall be able to communicate effectively with one another. Ideally, in time, we will no longer be strangers.

All good suggestions for what we the people, need to know, regardless of status, will be applied. This vision is worth a try!

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