

**Noah Frazer**

**2021 Recipient of the Tay Valley History Scholarship**

*Explain the importance of understanding history in today's society.*

The importance of understanding history in today's society is that it gives us a reference for the human condition itself.

Our society is a complex tapestry woven in a fabric made of human interactions on large and small scale alike. Where fields such as psychology may seek to explain the smaller-scale interactions, history can show us how the actions of governments, policymakers, and corporations can affect the world as we know it. As George Santayana said ever so eloquently, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

We can see the mirroring of events throughout the political and social jungle, driven by powerful people who have chosen to be ignorant of history. In one of the most obvious, frightening, and ongoing events, Donald Trump's flirting with the far right has returned white supremacist groups to prominence. This is similar to when his predecessor, Woodrow Wilson, screened *The Birth of a Nation* at the White House in 1915, reviving the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in the United States.

The first motion picture to be screened at the White House, *The Birth of a Nation* glorified the KKK. With the president's perceived approval, they were able to transform themselves from a loose collection of autonomous local chapters into a national organisation. The following decades saw lynchings, cross-burnings, and whippings as the pestilence of white supremacy ravaged the American South.

It is because of this history that we know we have to be concerned about the actions of former president Donald Trump. These include his refusal to condemn the brutality of the far-right agitators in 2017 during the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, as well as his request during the 2020 election campaign that the alt-right Proud Boys "stand back and stand by." These actions have led to an increase in the presence of hate groups, and if no action is taken to quell them, history suggests that events will again escalate to the level of lynchings, cross-burnings, and, potentially, terrorist attacks.

The importance of understanding history is not limited to predicting the future of political organisations and ideologies; it can also be used for other, relatively commonplace concerns, such as the economy and human migration. With an innate understanding of people and the societies they create, history's importance can truly be made clear. While one can argue that we do not need to know the names of every ancient king or lost city, and can simply take pleasure in ancient wonders as tourist attractions, it is comprehending the intricate sociological gears that move our world forward that proves the necessity of understanding the past in our modern world. After all, we're only human, and we tend to make the same mistakes again . . . and again.