

Historians Politely Remind Nation To Check What's Happened In Past Before Making Any Big Decisions

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WASHINGTON—With the United States facing a daunting array of problems at home and abroad, leading historians courteously reminded the nation Thursday that when making tough choices, it never hurts to stop a moment, take a look at similar situations from the past, and then think about whether the decisions people made back then were good or bad.

According to the historians, by looking at things that have already happened, Americans can learn a lot about which actions made things better versus which actions made things worse, and can then plan their own actions accordingly.

"In the coming weeks and months, people will have to make some really important decisions about some really important issues," Columbia University historian Douglas R. Collins said during a press conference, speaking very slowly and clearly so the nation could follow his words. "And one thing we can do, before making a choice that has permanent consequences for our entire civilization, is check real quick first to see if human beings have ever done anything like it previously, and see if turned out to be a good idea or not."

"It's actually pretty simple: We just have to ask ourselves if people doing the same thing in the past caused something bad to happen," Collins continued. "Did the thing we're thinking of doing make people upset? Did it start a war? If it did, then we might want to think about not doing it."

In addition, Collins carefully explained that if a past decision proved to be favorable—if, for example, it led to increased employment, caused fewer deaths, or made lots of people feel good inside— then the nation should consider following through with the same decision now.

While the new strategy, known as "Look Back Before You Act," has raised concerns among people worried they will have to remember lots of events from long ago, the historians have assured Americans they won't be required to read all the way through thick books or memorize anything. Instead, citizens have been told they can just find a large-print, illustrated timeline of historical events, place their finger on an important moment, and then look to the right of that point to see what happened afterward, paying especially close attention to

whether things got worse or better.

"You know how the economy is not doing so well right now?" Professor Elizabeth Schuller of the University of North Carolina said. "Well, in the 1930s, financial markets—no, wait, I'm sorry. Here: A long, long time ago, way far in the past, certain things happened that were a lot like things now, and they made people hungry and sad."

"How do you feel when you're hungry? Doesn't feel good, does it?" Schuller added. "So, maybe we should avoid doing those things that caused people to feel that way, don't you think?"

Concluding their address, the panel of scholars provided a number of guidelines to help implement the strategy, reminding the nation that the biggest decisions required the most looking back, and stressing the importance of checking the past before one makes a decision, not afterward, when the decision has already been made.

While many citizens have expressed skepticism of the historians' assertions, the majority of Americans have reportedly grasped the concept of noticing bad things from earlier times and trying not to repeat them.

"I get it. If we do something bad that happened before, then the same bad thing could happen again," said Barb Ennis, 48, of Pawtucket, RI. "We don't want history to happen again, unless the thing that happened was good."

"When you think about it, a lot of things have happened already," Ennis added. "That's what history is."

In Washington, several elected officials praised the looking-back-first strategy as a helpful, practical tool with the potential to revolutionize government.

"The things the historians were saying seemed complicated at first, but now it makes sense to me," said Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX), who reversed his opposition to oil-drilling safety regulations after checking past events and finding a number of "very, very sad things [he] didn't like." "I just wished they'd told us about this trick before."



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