

History as Observation

Nobody asked but ...

History is not so much the faithful recording of observed facts as it is an interview by the individual with his own memory. Everything else is hearsay. We can only know one's own history, and even then, it is much more how one felt about that history than it is about what objective things were true.

I wonder how history, as an abstract idea, will preserve that meeting in the Oval Office last week. Already there is speculation about what word was used. POTUS will see it one way, a Democratic Senator, who was there, will remember it another way, and a Republican Senator, also in attendance, will see it a third way.

What will history, a faceless mythology, say about the bogus missile crisis in Hawaii, last week. There will be as many accounts as there were people affected. And then we are loaded with a shifting consensus. Most of the reviews seem to focus on who made the error, which suggests that history will take on a simpler, overly distilled, version. It may be as simple as who was the individual fall guy, while how it might have happened gets relegated to the nondescript.

I don't trust history — mine or anyone else's — it tends to be that which has stood the ravages of time without regard to what has been preserved.

— Kilgore Forelle