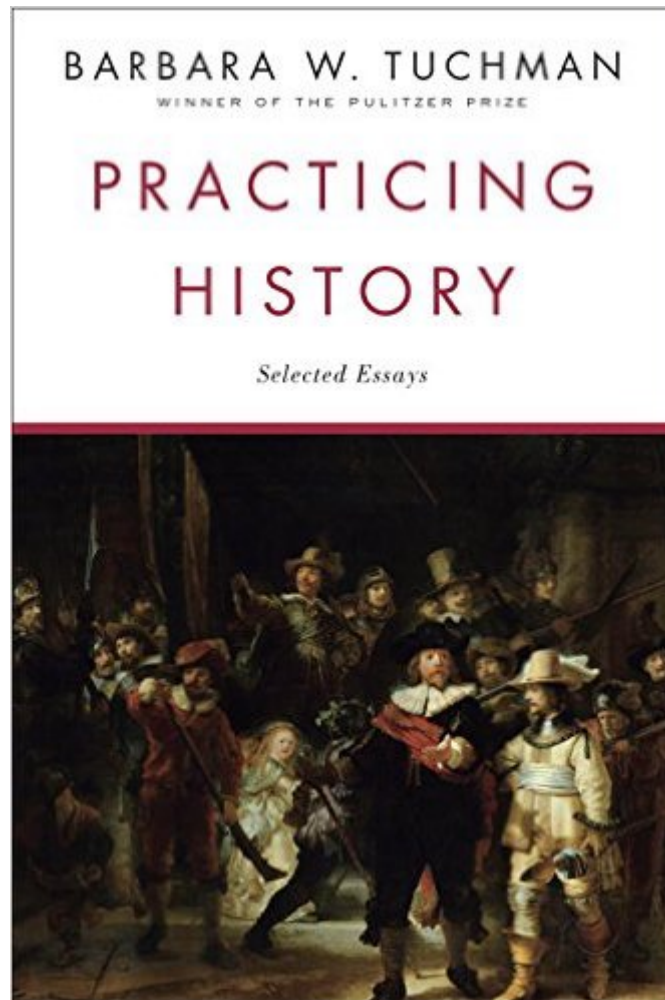


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# Practicing History: Selected Essays



## Synopsis

Celebrated for bringing a personal touch to history in her Pulitzer Prize-winning epic *The Guns of August* and other classic books, Barbara W. Tuchman reflects on world events and the historian's craft in these perceptive, essential essays. From thoughtful pieces on the historian's role to striking insights into America's past and present to trenchant observations on the international scene, Barbara W. Tuchman looks at history in a unique way and draws lessons from what she sees. Spanning more than four decades of writing in *The New York Times Magazine*, *The Atlantic*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Harper's*, *The Nation*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*, Tuchman weighs in on a range of eclectic topics, from Israel and Mao Tse-tung to a Freudian reading of Woodrow Wilson. This is a splendid body of work, the story of a lifetime spent practicing history. • *Praise for Practicing History* • "Persuades and enthralls . . . I can think of no better primer for the nonexpert who wishes to learn history." *Chicago Sun-Times* • "Provocative, consistent, and beautifully readable, an event not to be missed by history buffs." *Baltimore Sun* • "A delight to read." *The New York Times Book Review*

## Book Information

Series: Practicing History Selected Essays by Barbara W Tuchman

Paperback: 352 pages

Publisher: Random House Trade Paperbacks (August 12, 1982)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0345303636

ISBN-13: 978-0345303639

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.8 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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Best Sellers Rank: #344,616 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #90 in Books > History >

Historical Study & Educational Resources > Essays #156 in Books > History > Historical Study &

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## Customer Reviews

"Practicing History", by Barbara W. Tuchman, sub-titled "Selected Essays". Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, 1981. This book is a collection of essays written by the noted Historian, Barbara W. Tuchman (e.g. "The Guns of August"), over the course of her long career. In my humble opinion, for

the novice historian, the most interesting essays are, "The Historian as Artist" (pages 45-50), "The Historian's Opportunity", (pages 51-64). In these two essays, Ms. Tuchman challenges the budding historian to not only collect facts, dates and events, but rather to write History so the end product is as engaging as modern novel, BUT, based upon excellent scholarship. Ms. Tuchman is a proponent of "narrative" History, where the facts "...require arrangement, composition planning just like a painting - Rembrandt's 'Night Watch'" (page 49). These two essays would enhance any course in Historiography. Some of her remaining essays are a bit dated, but provide keen insight into the times, as in Tuchman's "Japan: A Clinical Note", (pages 93-97). Her essays on Israel tend to be a bit chauvinistic, in the sense that the author's objectivity slips and she can find very little wrong with the budding Jewish state in what was once Palestine. The essay, "Perdicaris Alive or Rasuli Dead" (pages 104-117), is very entertaining, particularly if you are interested in New York's Teddy Roosevelt. All in all, the first section of this book, (called "The Craft"), includes essays that should be required reading for a student beginning graduate work in History.

These essays allow the reader to enjoy Barbara Tuchman's incisive historical analysis and sharp wit in small doses. Most of the essays were written in the 1950s or 1960s or even earlier, but they are still fresh and pointed. Reading Tuchman is like listening to your favorite history professor. She'll tell a dramatic story and finish up with some wry observations that will keep you thinking long after.

Although a collection of essays the coherence of her work is commendable. No one can read history in the same light after reading her book. Ms. Tuchman is truly a master who weaves a web around her readers. The canvas of her book is stupendous and her grasp is awesome covering ancient Greece to modern times. Truly remarkable. (Naushad Shafkat)

This should be compulsory reading for everybody in positions of power and influence. The essays may have passed into history, but their verities remain. The anguish caused by political and commercial stupidity and its by-product of war would be lessened if power brokers learnt from history. War is folly, as this great historian wrote many years ago. Will people ever learn? I cannot use the word 'humanity' when I think of what we do to others.

I love the feeling that I'm picking the brain of BWT. Her methods of writing and observations are worthwhile for a lifetime. The humility the author has toward fact gathering benefits all her readers. This collection is first a delight to any fan of the woman herself, and second a tool for learning about

good history writing. A bonus third point is for history novices like me- a crash course on several topics of interest. A "crash course" from Barbara Tuchman is possibly an experience of the most concise, informative and comprehensive summary on a subject you'll find.

Somewhat dated, perhaps. But, Mrs. Tuchman's insights in "Practicing History" are timeless in key points on the myth of objectivity and keeping the historical context of events in view. In our day, history seems dependent on the historian's political slant with few exceptions and Mrs. Tuchman speaks to that trend years before it became so obvious. Her words also speak to the growth of the post-world war one cynicism that seems as prevalent (perhaps more so) a century later. So-called "professionals" of all fields are sometimes easily offended or threatened by what Mrs. Tuchman calls "independent" communicators in their field. Attempting to dismiss or marginalize the independent/amateur is not a response to the issues they raise. Only an independent could have written this book and challenged the "professional" establishment. And few independents have the credentials to do so as Mrs. Tuchman has. This book is ideal for communicators in the field of history and historical fiction. Whether one agrees with her or not, dismissing Mrs. Tuchman is no option for the serious historian - professional or independent.

Like most essay collections, there are those in "Practicing History" that don't interest an individual reader and some that they value. I found that the ones I learned from and, or enjoyed in this book definitely outnumbered the former. Ms. Tuchman's essays on the value of history to one who studies it and ones on the responsibilities of the historian are worth reading and rereading. The lessons she finds in her study of disastrous governmental and diplomatic blunders, often deliberate and self-serving, are valuable lessons, but I think her understandable anger about these blunders in Vietnam and WW II China are repeated too often in multiple essays. I must say that Ms. Tuchman, with her deep study of these fiascos and the understanding of the terrible consequences of them has every reason to be furious. I just got tired of reading about them. I recommend reading "Practicing History" , "The Proud Tower", and "Guns of August". Likely the rest after I read them myself.

Tuchman is one of the great American Historians of the 20th Century. The topics she has researched and then written about covers much of the history of Europe since the 1400s (the black death) to the present. This is a very interesting collection of essays on history. Tuchman is a great editor as well as a historian.

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