

**Volume 19**

**Number 007**

**History's Turning Points: A Series –**  
**History's Tricks**

**Lead: Historical study often helps reveal twists in the human journey. This series on *A Moment in Time* examines history's turning points.**

**Intro: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: In his first volume of *Reason in Common Sense*, the Spanish-born Harvard philosopher Jorge Agustín Nicolás Ruiz de Santayana y Borrás, more popularly known as George Santayana, was attempting to explain the true nature of progress. He asserted that retentiveness is an**

essential part of change, bringing something of value from the past. Absent the coach of experience, change, much less progress, cannot lead to improvement in the future. Misquoted and paraphrased in countless ways over the years, his most famous aphorism describes life unprotected by the values of past experience as like unto that among savages where infancy is everlasting. He wrote, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

Santayana’s approach to philosophy has not achieved universal acclaim, but here in this idea he gives encouragement to the historian as detective who seeks to find clues to

**what events from the past have delivered us into the world in which live today.**

**The Enlightenment French playwright and philosopher Voltaire wrote that “history is after all nothing but a pack of tricks we play on the dead.” Such a witticism sounds insightful and a bit cynical. Yet, Carl Becker cautioned that “to..(Voltaire)... it was a witticism intended to brand dishonest historians, the truth (is) that all historical writing, even the most honest, is unconsciously subjective, since every age is bound, in spite of itself, to make the dead perform whatever tricks it finds necessary for its own peace of mind.” Could in the end it be that in the words of late**

**Librarian of Congress, Daniel J. Boorstin, that “history more often is a pack of tricks that the dead play upon the living.” Next time: The tent-maker from Tarsus.**

**At the University of Richmond’s School of Professional and Continuing Studies, I’m Dan Roberts.**

**Resources**

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Martin A. Coleman, ed. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009.**

**Sattkamp, Herman. “George Santayana.”  
<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/santayana>.**

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