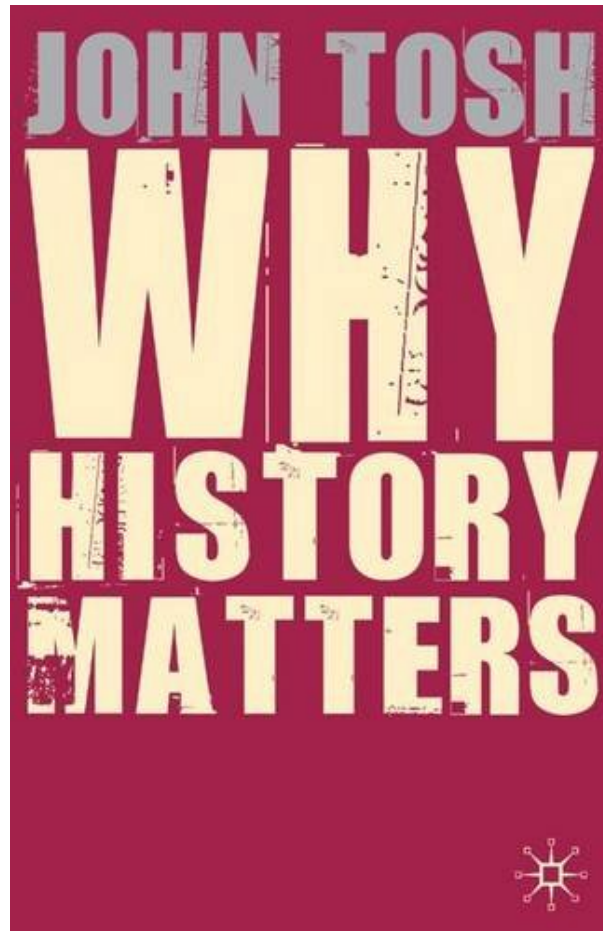
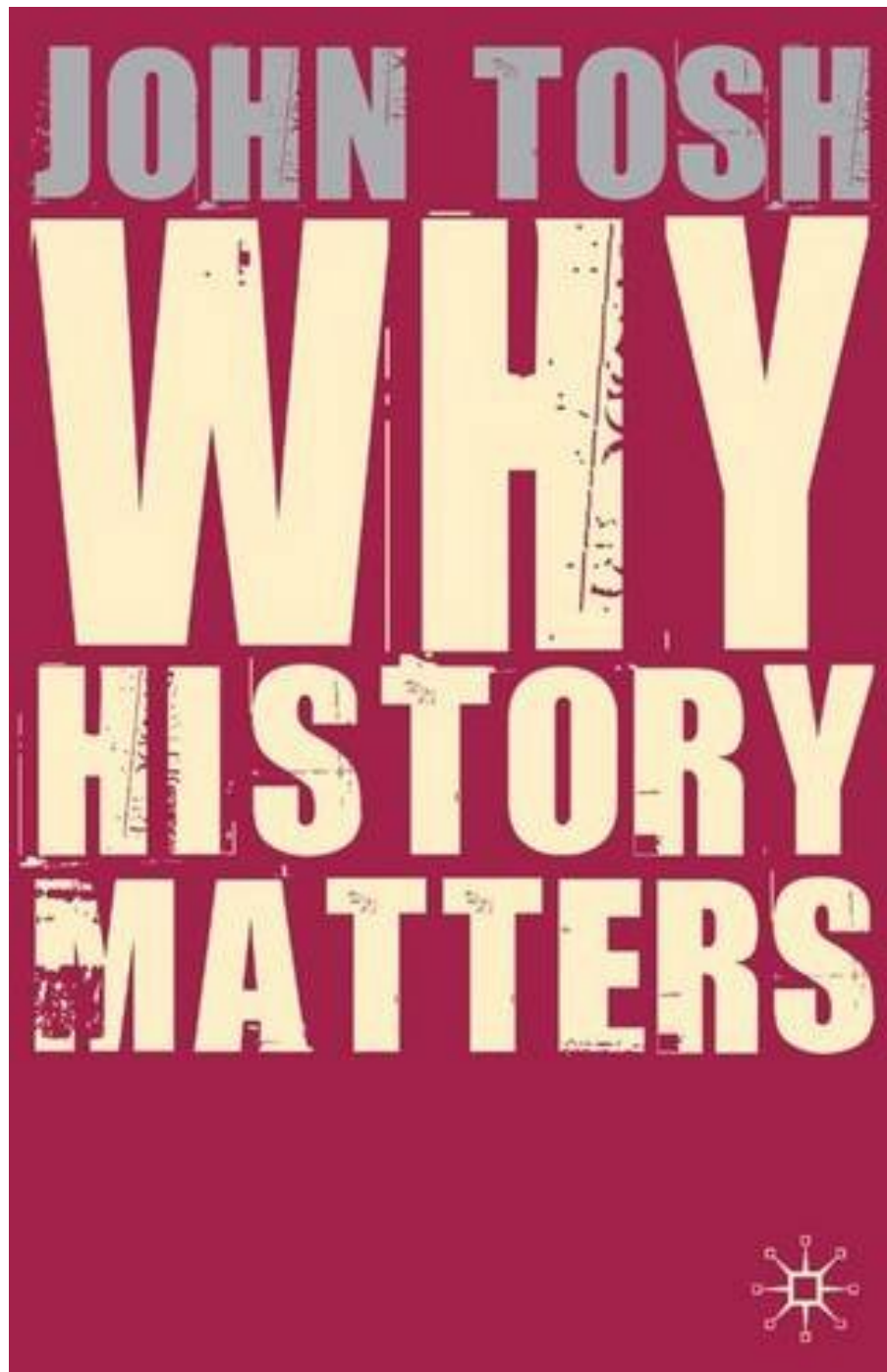


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## About the Author

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Good argument, though blighted by ignorance of economics and axes to grind

By Sirin

Why History Matters should be read by everyone who is a teacher or student of history. There are innumerable books on historical themes, but few which make an effort to justify the study of the subject at a time when history in schools is threatened by debasement by the citizenship lobby and vocational course providers.

Tosh argues that history is a lively and relevant subject, emphasising the need to study historical themes to make sense of the current world. He invokes plenty of good examples to illustrate his argument - from the occupation of Iraq in 1917 to the consensus in British Government over the formation of the NHS in the 1940s when Conservatives and Labour agreed on several of the tenets of the new institution.

Tosh is a man of many niche interests and prejudices. Nothing wrong with this, of course, but he does hammer home a cliched and one dimensional argument undermining those who uphold the nuclear family as the basis of social life, claiming the 'Victorian' happy family never existed in practice and was merely an edifice of social and female oppression. His political bias is all the commonplace liberal left tolerance for everything, and plenty of money that must grow on trees to pay for it all. He is unaware of the trade offs between personal responsibility and welfare that must be adhered to in order for civil society to be a fair and functioning one. And his views on September 11 could be straight from a Guardian editorial:

'Fred Halliday pointed out that the attack only made sense when it was seen as a convergence of a number of processes, not all of which had previously been considered together: the growth of Islamic fundamentalism; the collapse of central power in several Islamic countries; the resentment against US intervention in the Middle East, especially since the Gulf War; and the instability of international relations since the end of the Cold War'.

Oh yeah? US pulls out of the Middle East, the international order stabilises and those rational thinking Jihadist types will leave us alone. The hell they will. They want some dark and barbaric conception of an Islamic caliphate, not a quiet and isolationist America.

Aside from the naive liberal pap of his political view, Tosh's argument is worth considering. He evaluates the worth of history from a number of angles, including public history and the ability of the subject to arm powerfully informed citizens. And this is an argument that badly needs to be made.

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