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The essays written on the “nexus of subject and self” were so interesting to read, and so engagingly presented, that I wish I were one of the authors, the “barefoot historians,” as Karen Halttunen called them. They are not only wonderful scholars and great writers, but they are so well connected with their subject matter that a certain passion emanates from their words, though carefully couched in erudition.

The “barefoot historian” is cast as the direct opposite of the “omniscient narrator of professional historical convention.” The latter is the role of the historian which is taught in most graduate schools. Each of the writers paid respect to their training and education but then explained the route each took in coming to the field of history by drawing the reader (me) into their life’s history. In some cases, they say, their personal comments are confined to the Preface or Introduction, but in other cases, the personal pronoun appears in the body of the text.

For some of the writers, the journey to the call of writing history grew out of a search for personal identity, racial or ethnic, as in the case of Phillip Deloria, whose parents and ancestors are a mixture of Scandinavian and American Indian. For Jacquelyn Dowd, the task of writing her mother’s obituary took her into the search for her mother’s identity, and subsequently for the histories and life stories of other women like her, Grief over her mother’s death was channeled into the process of knowing her mother through history. The result was not only a recovery of her mother’s history but of her own self-discovery. John Demos was influenced by the use of personal analysis as a key part of professional training, as in the field of psychoanalysis. He found that he had become so emotionally involved with his early eighteenth century characters that he had not maintained a professional distance. In reading a section to his wife, he was brought up short by the

negativity he had displayed. Realizing what he had done, he re-wrote a chapter. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's essay is the story of many women from her generation. Raised to be a wife, mother, cook, and hostess, she was made to feel she had nothing exceptional to say. She started writing in small ways, womanly ways acceptable to her society. Upon discovering that her writing was in demand, she wrote about women like herself, historical women whose brains and courage sustained them. Michael O'Brien's self-awareness became a tool of his brilliance as a historian. His loss of his old cat provided insight into the emotional dilemma of a nineteenth century tragedy. Yet he is sardonic in discussing the pros and cons of having done so. He wrote two passages, one using himself, and the other the "omniscient narrator." Both, of course, are well-written. The first, however, captures the human being embodied in the reader. (Me)

These writers, regardless of stance inside or outside the history, came to their subject matter by means of self-examination, self-awareness, and humility. Oh, to be one of them!