I. **Introduction**: Our knowledge of history and how we feel about it are influenced by our cultural backgrounds. As a result of the U.S. cultural orientation to the future, Americans often ignore history.

A. In intercultural encounters, differences may become hidden barriers to communication.

B. The influence of history on our interactions is frequently overlooked, but many intercultural interactions involve a dialectical interplay between past and present.

C. Although European American students often want to de-emphasize history, many current situations cannot be understood without knowing their historical background.

D. Further, how we think about the past influences how we think about ourselves and others.

E. A dialectical perspective enables us to understand how history positions people in the different cultural places from which they communicate with and interpret others' messages.

II. **From History to Histories**: To understand the dialectics in everyday interaction, we need to think about the histories that are part of our various identities.

**A. Political, Intellectual, and Social Histories**

1. Some people restrict their notion of history to documented events.

2. **Political histories** are written histories that focus on political events.

3. **Intellectual histories** are written histories that focus on the development of ideas.

4. **Social histories** are accounts of the everyday life experiences of various groups in the past.

5. **Absent history** is a historical event that was never recorded.

6. An absent history is not an insignificant history, but acknowledging absent histories requires more complex thinking about the past and the ways it influences the future.

7. Absent history also results from concealing the past, such as when governments make contemporary decisions to seal off access to documents that might provide better insights into the past; if documents are not available, we cannot know the history.

B. **Family Histories**

1. These occur at the same time as other histories, but on a more personal level.

2. Often they are not written down, but passed along orally from one generation to the next.

3. Families vary in their knowledge of and feelings of importance for their family histories.

4. Many family histories are deeply intertwined with ethnic-group histories.

C. **National History**

1. The history of any nation is important to its people.

2. This history is taught formally in school, and we are expected to recognize certain historical events and people.

3. National histories give people a sense of who they are and solidifies their sense of nationhood.

4. Even if people do not fit into their national narratives, they are expected to know them in order to understand references used in communication.

5. We rarely receive much information about the histories of other nations unless we study other languages.

6. Historical contexts shape language.

D. **Cultural-Group Histories**

1. Cultural groups in each nation have their own histories.

2. These may be hidden, but they are related to the national history.

3. They are not always part of the national history, but they are important in the development of group identity, family histories, and the contemporary lives of these co-cultures.

4. The authors feel that history should be viewed as many stories about the past rather than as one story on a singular time continuum.

5. Ignorance of others' histories may lead to potential misunderstandings.

III. **History, Power, and Intercultural Communication**

Power is a central dynamic in the writing of history. A culture's power structure influences what information is transmitted as history and how it is transmitted.

**A. The Power of Texts**

1. History is vital for understanding identity, but it is only accessible to us in a textual, narrative form.

2. Not everyone has an equal chance to write and produce historical texts.

3. Sometimes lack of access to political participation and forbidden languages have made it impossible to write histories.

4. The language we use influences our understanding of history, as evidenced by the connotative differences between “internment camp” and “concentration camp.”

5. When we are taught history, we are also taught a particular way of viewing the world.

6. The availability of political documents and how they reflect powerful inequities influences what is written as history.

7. The seeming unity of the past, the linear nature of history, is merely a reflection of a **modernist identity**, grounded in Western tradition.

**B. The Power of Other Histories**

1. The **“grand narrative”** refers to the all-encompassing story of a nation or of humankind.
2. Global migration may make it more difficult to determine who IS and who is NOT a part of an individual culture as diversity increases.
3. Melissa Steyn (2001) notes how the "**grand narrative**" in South Africa led to the establishment of Apartheid. During Apartheid, individuals were required to register their race, using one of four categories.
4. In this period of rapid change, the grand narrative of the past has lost credibility, and we are rethinking cultural struggles and cultural identities.

4. Histories that have been suppressed, hidden, or erased are being rewritten as cultures that were dominated in the past are being empowered.

5. This restoration of history enables us to examine what cultural identities mean and to rethink the dominant cultural identity.

**C. Power in Intercultural Interactions**

1. Power is the legacy of past history and leaves cultural groups in particular positions.

2. We are never "equal" in intercultural encounters because history has left us in unbalanced positions, and though we may chose to ignore it, this imbalance will still influence our interactions and identities.

IV. **History and Identity**

**A. Histories as Stories**

1. Although people are tempted to ignore all the levels of history that affect them, this only masks their influence.

2. Telling stories is a fundamental part of the human experience.

3. Histories are stories we use to help us make sense of ourselves and others.

4. A strong element in our U.S. cultural attitudes encourages us to forget history.

5. The desire to forget history tells us significant information about how our culture negotiates its relationship to the past and about how we view the relationships of other cultures with their pasts.

6. Ignoring history can sometimes lead to wrong conclusions about others that reinforce stereotypes.

7. It is a paradox that even if we ignore history we cannot escape it.

B. **Nonmainstream Histories**

1. People from nonmainstream cultural groups have had to struggle to retain their histories.

a. They have not learned them in school, but the histories are vital to their understanding of who they are; these nonmainstream histories are important to the various cultural groups because these histories play a large role in defining their cultural identities.

b. Nonmainstream histories may stand alongside the grand narrative or they may challenge the grand narrative.

c. Mainstream U.S. history has neither the time nor space to include all **ethnic histories** and **racial histories**.

d. Some people feel these histories question or undermine the celebratory nature of a national history.

e. Injustices by one culture to another are also frequently suppressed (for example, Japanese internment).

f. Such a history may have a significant place in the development of a racial or ethnic community, but may not be an academic history.

g. However, these histories act as markers in the maintenance of cultural identity for many groups of people (for example, Japanese, Jewish).

h. Ethnic and racial histories are never isolated but are interwoven and place cultural groups in differential power positions: sometimes the victim, sometimes the victimizer, and sometimes both.

i. Blanchot (1986) suggests that we have responsibilities for histories that happened even before we were born.

j. Displacement of populations is part of the history of every migrating or colonizing people.

k. All our lives are entangled in the web of history from which there is no escape, only denial and silence.

2. Gender Histories

a. Feminist scholars have insisted that much of the history of women has been lost.

b. Although there is interest in women's history today, **gender histories** are difficult to document because of restrictions against women's access to public records.

3. Sexual Orientation Histories

a. Much of the **sexual orientation history** of homosexuals has been suppressed.

b. This happens when people try to construct a specific understanding of the past and may prevent us from acknowledging significant historical lessons.

c. Relationships with the past are tied to issues of power.

d. People have even tried to reconfigure Nazi history, with homosexuals as the perpetrators rather than the victims, to motivate negative attitudes toward gay identity.

e. While it may appear unclear how sexual histories influence national identities and cultural identities, the controversies that arise over these histories illustrate the need to view the past in particular ways.

4. Diasporic Histories

a. Also overlooked in intercultural communication are the international relationships many racial and ethnic groups have with people who share their racial and ethnic heritage and history.

b. These relationships resulted from migrations, slavery, transnational capitalism, religious crusades, and so forth.

c. It is important to recognize transnational cultural groups-diaspora.

d. A **diaspora** is a massive migration caused by war, famine, or persecution that disperses a unified group.

e. **Diasporic histories** chronicle these migrations.

f. Sometimes these migrations cause people to cling more tightly to their group's identity, though with time people tend to acculturate to their new home countries.

g. History helps identify the connections among people who have been affected by diasporas and other transnational migrations.

5. Colonial Histories

a. A better understanding of the dynamics of intercultural communication today comes from understanding colonial histories.

b. Colonialism has been significant in determining what languages are spoken in various countries today.

c. Many nations have attempted to resist the influences of colonialism by reclaiming their native languages.

d. The languages we speak are determined by the histories of the societies we are born into.

e. Colonial history is filled with incidents of oppression and brutality.

f. As a result, many advocate a position of **postcolonialism**, which is an intellectual, political, and cultural movement beyond colonialism that calls for independence not only of colonized states but of colonialist ways of thinking. Understanding postcolonialism is a helpful way of understanding relationships between history and the present.

6. Socioeconomic Class Histories

a. Though frequently forgotten, class issues and economics motivated many people to emigrate to the United States.

b. People who are socioeconomically privileged also emigrate.

c. These histories are helpful in understanding interactions and politics between different groups.

7. Religious Histories

a. Religion is a force that has been instrumental in the shaping of the planet, and

religious conflicts have led to wars.

b. Historical references to religious events can create cultural coflicts when brought

into communication.

V. **Intercultural Communication and History**: A number of perspectives are important for understanding relationships between communication and history.

**A. Antecedents of Contact:** It is important to recognize that we bring elements of our personal histories into each intercultural interaction including:

1. Childhood experiences concerning other cultures.
2. Historical myths about other cultures.
3. The language we speak.
4. The tendency to be affected by recent, vivid events.

**B. Contact Hypothesis**

1. The **contact hypothesis** is the notion that better communication between groups of people will occur if they are simply put together in the same place and allowed to interact.

2. Though this notion has no historical support, many public policies and programs in the United States and abroad are based on this hypothesis.

3. Allport (1979) and Amir (1969) have tried to identify conditions under which the contact hypothesis holds true. Their studies and subsequent ones show that the histories of the groups heavily influence the outcomes of contact and that eight conditions must be more or less met for contact to facilitate positive attitude change and intergroup communication.

a. Members of both groups should be of equal status both within and outside of the contact situation.

b. Strong normative and institutional support for contact should be provided.

c. Contact should be voluntary.

d. Contact should not be superficial but have the potential to extend beyond the immediate situation and to occur in a variety of contexts with a variety of individuals from both groups.

e. Cooperation within groups should be maximized, and competition between groups should be minimized.

f. An equal number of members from each group should meet.

g. Group members should have similar beliefs and values.

h. Individuation of group members should be promoted.

4. This list helps us understand how domestic and international contexts vary, and it is easy to see how the history within a nation-state may lead to conditions and attitudes that are more difficult to facilitate.

5. This list is incomplete, and meeting each condition does not always guarantee positive outcomes when diverse groups of people interact.

6. It simply represents a starting place.

**C. Negotiating Histories Dialectically in Interaction**

1. To negotiate histories in our interactions, we need first to recognize that we have them (both known and hidden) and to understand the role they play for those with whom we interact.

2. We need to understand the role histories play in the identities we bring into the interaction.

3. Sometimes the past-present dialectic operates along with the disadvantage-privilege dialectic, and we need to think dialectically about history and class.

4. Both dialectics affect our view of the past, present, and future.

5. Who we are today is greatly influenced by how we understand the past, as well as by the ways we live and the culture we believe to be our own.