

Key Takeaways From “The Lessons of History” by Will and Ariel Durant

- When the universe has crushed him man will still be nobler than that which kills him, because he knows that he is dying, and of its victory, the universe knows nothing
- Man, not the earth, makes civilization
- The life of man is a portion of the vicissitudes of organisms on land and sea
- So the first biological lesson of history is that life is competition
- The second biological lesson of history is that life is selection
- Leave men free, and their natural inequalities will multiply almost geometrically
- A society in which all potential abilities are allowed to develop and function will have a survival advantage in the competition of groups
- The third biological lesson of history is that life must breed
- A high birth rate has usually accompanied a culturally low civilization and a low birth rate a civilization culturally high
- If existing agricultural knowledge were everywhere applied, the planet could feed twice its present population
- It is not the race that makes the civilization, it is the civilization that makes the people
- Moral codes differ because they adjust themselves to historical and environment conditions
- Man’s sins may be the relics of his rise rather than the stigmata of his fall
- History remains at bottom a natural selection of the fittest individuals and groups in a struggle wherein goodness receives no favors, misfortunes abound, and the final test is the ability to survive
- Nature and history do not agree with our conceptions of good and bad; they define good as that which survives and bad as that which goes under
- As long as there is poverty there will be gods
- The men who can manage the men who can manage only things and the men who can manage money manage all
- Having studied the fluctuations of prices, they know that history is inflationary, and that money is the last thing a wise man will hoard
- Every economic system must sooner or later rely upon some form of the profit motive to stir individuals and groups to productivity
- Normally and generally men are judged by their ability to produce- except in war when they are ranked according to their ability to destroy

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Taken directly out of the book

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- The only real revolution is in the enlightenment of the mind and the improvement of character, the only real emancipation is individual, and the only real revolutionists are philosophers and saints
- Though men cannot be equal, their access to education and opportunity can be made more nearly equal
- There is no certainty that the future will repeat the past. Every year is an adventure
- When the group or a civilization declines, it is through the failure of its political or intellectual leaders to meet the challenges of change
- Death is natural, and if it comes in due it is forgivable and useful, and the mature mind will take no offense from its coming
- Our problem is whether the average man has increased his ability to control the conditions of his life