



STACEY GIBO P THE PARADOX OF HISTORY

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N IRONY OF HISTORY IS THAT whether someone is aware of it or not, everything they do is dependent on and reflective of what has preceded them. It might have no interest to the person living in the present, but historical precedent has a massive influence on what they do in the here and now. History might be bunk, as Henry Ford said, but it is impossible for anything to exist without it. But what someone does in the present can repudiate the lessons of history. Making history is the breaking of the rules set by precedent. The paradox is that making history means nullifying it.

For most people, the idea or study of history is pretty boring. History in general doesn't excite the imagination of most skateboarders, and that includes the chronicles of their own art form or sport or whatever it is that skating is to them. History is what is taught in school, and that's enough of a reason for most people to be adverse to it. There are facts in history and the deeds of great men and demonized monsters who have affected the course of human events. There are the exploits of Alexander the Great and Hammurabi, of Charlemagne and Napoleon, of Toussaint L'Ouverture, of Stalin and Franklin D Roosevelt. Remote

forgotten soldier who crossed the Rubicon with Julius Caesar? What about the nameless woman who fed him or the boy who tended to his horse? They are all forgotten, but Caesar couldn't have gone on to take Rome without their help. Their contributions weren't recorded by Plutarch or Gibbon. We are taught to put faith in the construct of history that has Caesar singlehandedly winning that battle. Why not put faith in the other players and their history, the one that has fallen by the wayside?

Not only are there thousands of years of forgotten bit players whose achievements might have been monumental, but there are those who innovate and have revolutionary thoughts that go completely uncredited. Does anyone remember that Alfred Russel Wallace came up with a theory of evolution and natural selection at the same time Darwin did, and that it was only when Darwin was sent Wallace's manuscript that he went ahead with the publication of *The Origin of the Species*? Does that make Wallace any less of a radical thinker than Darwin? It is myopic to believe in the authorized version of history. There is a lot more to the past than what filters down to the present, and there are a lot of unknown individual actions in the past that changed the course of human events.

No matter how ignorant one is of history, they reap its benefits. Air conditioning and indoor plumbing and automobiles make everybody's lives easier and better. People don't have to worry about getting smallpox because Edward Jenner put cow blood into humans and made vaccination a reality two hundred years ago. These examples and billions of others directly affect everyone alive today. They make modern life possible. History and its advances are inescapable, no matter how ambiguous and untrustworthy the recording of it is.

That is the gist of the paradox. Why care about history if there is no choice about living according to its dictates? Why care about the past at all? Maybe it's worth considering the first proto-human

"STANDING UP ON AND RIDING A BUCKBOARD WAGON CAREENING DOWN THE CHATSWORTH DROP"

and uninteresting stuff to most. These are the figures who inhabit the timeline of history. They are prime movers in the textbooks. But history is a lot more fluid and broader in scope than just these famous names; it has a lot more nuance than is normally thought. History can be something of an illusion, a realm of make-believe. Napoleon, who was making it, asked, "What is history but a fable agreed upon?" Our collective past is cyclical and circular, mysterious and ultimately unknowable. It can be thought of as something that never happened, reported by someone who wasn't there. Within the chaos and deceptions of the authorized version of history are great numbers of secret and personal stories that are just as valid as those of the "great men" and their deeds. There are many unrecorded aspects of the past that are just as important as what makes it into the official story. What about the

who imagined a different time and place from when and where they were at a precise moment. That first glimmer of consciousness led down a path to flights of fancy, of humans doing more than just living at the most basic level. Those imaginings brought wheels and ships and dreams of places nobody knew existed. Places and things were realized by flights of fancy becoming real actions. Somewhere down the line a Scandinavian slid down a snowy slope on two boards attached to their feet and a Hawaiian or Latin American stood up on a board propelled by a wave. And then some kid broke the apple cart off the front of his or her scooter and rode it standing up without holding on to anything. What does all this have to do with skateboarding? Well, at some point skateboarding entered history. For the sake of argument, about forty years ago. Why should any contemporary skater care? Does it matter today that Frank Nasworthy made the urethane wheel feasible in 1973, and that all skateboarding is dependent on that breakthrough? To the skater today that's just boring history. And that's just the canonized part. What about the forgotten

aspects? What about the cowboy movie star Buck Buchanan standing up on and riding a buckboard wagon careening down the Chatsworth Drop for a 1936 *Three Musketeers* movie, prefiguring skating on an outsized skate-like platform? What about Bob Biniak doing the first frontside kickturn on vertical in 1975? Or that Paul Hoffman was on the cover of *Skateboarder* in 1978 grinding his front truck on a curb while doing a nose wheelie, predating the ollie nosegrind by twenty years? Somebody out there, back then, has done it first or at least thought of it. Precedent is irrefutable, but any skater can be

“GRINDING HIS FRONT TRUCK ON A CURB WHILE DOING A NOSE WHEELIE, PREDATING THE OLLIE NOSEGRIND BY TWENTY YEARS”

that first one to take a leap of imagination and leave the past behind.

These unheralded actions in the past are an argument against an all-encompassing model of history. It cannot be all known, and at the same time it can't all be ignored or eradicated. That was the folly of Chinese emperor Shih Huang Ti, who ordered all books written prior to his reign destroyed. He wanted to erase history. He obviously wasn't successful. History recovered. Allow some awareness for history's hidden secrets that might have some bearing on your own life.

The average skater knows a little bit about skating's history. They have some vague notions about surfers and wide boards and Tony Alva and all that outdated, uncool old school stuff. That is an advantage in skating—its lack of historical awareness. Skating hasn't been around long enough or recorded with enough scrutiny to have much of a history. It hasn't gotten petrified. Another thing skating has on its side is that it is constantly evolving. There are new tricks and new ways of doing old ones every day. Skating is truly unique in this regard. No other sport or art form has such a plethora of possibilities, such a capability to transcend its own barriers. Skating's own history is incredibly complicated and obscure because skating is constantly changing.

Skating has its own internal, organic, shifting history. It is about what I've seen and what you've seen just as much as what is on the cover of this magazine. Certainly there are important first tricks and the advances of the best pro skaters. But there is also your friend's highest ollie or the first time you did a 50-50 on a handrail. That is just as crucial and exciting and historic as any history handed down from above.

Skaters build their own personal history every day. No photos, no video, no "History." Just you and your friends and maybe the memories later. You, me, we have all seen amazing things.

My eyes have seen things I will never forget. They might not be of any relevance to anyone else, but they are a part of skating's collective history. A local named Vince doing five-foot-high backside method airs out of the keyhole at High Roller in Boulder, Colorado in 1981 is as vivid to me now as it was the day I saw it. My fingers numb, a year later I watched Joe Johnson float clean, soft frontside ollies out of his ramp in the middle of a corn field on another cold fall day in Colorado. On Oahu in 1983 I saw Stacey Gibo stand on top of a chain link fence and jump into the Off-the-Walls ditch bomb-drop style onto a ground-down, trashed Duane Peters board with tiny blue wheels, landing and barely making it to the other side while the Pacific shimmered half a mile away. Not to mention the times he slammed so hard the ditch itself seemed to shake, and he

got up and tried it again. Or seeing Mark Gonzales attempting frontside slide-and-rolls on a three-foot-high wall at a contest in Oceanside in 1987. It was during practice and he was unobserved, but I saw him try it and not make it, and it opened my mind to something I hadn't even thought of. A year later I saw Johnee Kop ollie 16 steps at a school in Point Loma. He tried it three or four times, bailing and flying through the air before rolling on the ground. Then he made it, a long, lengthy flight that blew me away. The first time I saw anyone ollie a fire hydrant was Jeff Pang in New York, late at night off Broadway. That amount of vertical lift off the sidewalk was something that expanded

parameters I had thought unchangeable. Or the exhilaration and wonder this summer of seeing Ivory Serra ollie from a quarterpipe up to a Smith grind four feet higher on a different ramp, making it look so easy, like he was rolling off a curb. Some of these people will be remembered, some won't. But I remember. It's my version of history, and it's just as valid as any other.

Other people don't have these memories; they have their own that are apart from the "history" of the greats, whether it be that of Danny Bear and Torger Johnson, Greg Ayres, Gator Rogowski, Natas Kaupas, Tom Penny, or Jamie Thomas. Each generation has its great skaters, and what they've done should get its due. They set the standard for everything that has been done and everything that will be done. Luckily each successive generation of skaters has been fairly ignorant of the history of skating, or at least indifferent to it. And that is a good thing. The irony of it all is that to go forward there has to be a break with tradition, a building upon precedent to destroy it.

There is a chance to be Archimedes, inventing the screw to raise water, to be Copernicus developing the theory that the planets revolve around the sun instead of the other way around, to be JMW Turner painting impressionist paintings before impressionism. Be a Tesla, or an Einstein. Be Chuck Yeager breaking the sound barrier, or Steve McKinney going 125 MPH on skis for the first time. They all made the conceptual or physical leap beyond what was thought possible, beyond the entrenched truths of their period. There was a time when the things the skater of today accepts as commonplace were inconceivable. Nollies? Skating switch? It wasn't too long ago that the best skaters in the world couldn't imagine doing these things; they were as inconceivable to them as the heliocentric solar system was to Copernicus' contemporaries. Ignore yesterday's history and make your own for tomorrow.

