



The Great Military Philosophers on Afghanistan

Video 11: Thucydides and his Book

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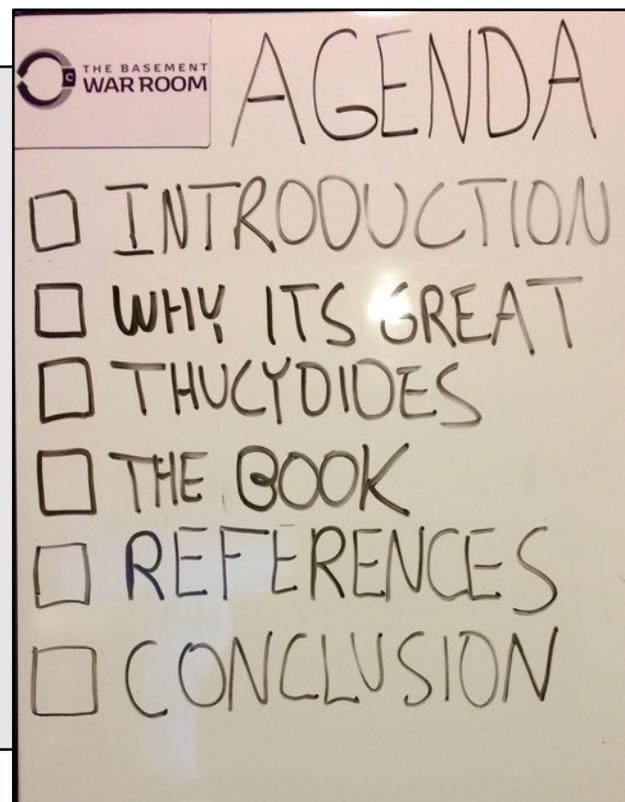
BOARD 1: AGENDA

Introduction. Thomas Jefferson wrote to John Adams in 1812 "I have given up newspapers in exchange for Tacitus & **Thucydides**, for Newton & Euclid; & I find myself much the happier."

Introduce myself. Hi, I'm John Lemay and welcome to my basement war room.

Agenda. In this video in *The Great Military Philosophers on Afghanistan Series* I'm going to explain why Thucydides is great, give some background on who he was, discuss his book, and then conclude.

Transition. So why is Thucydides great?



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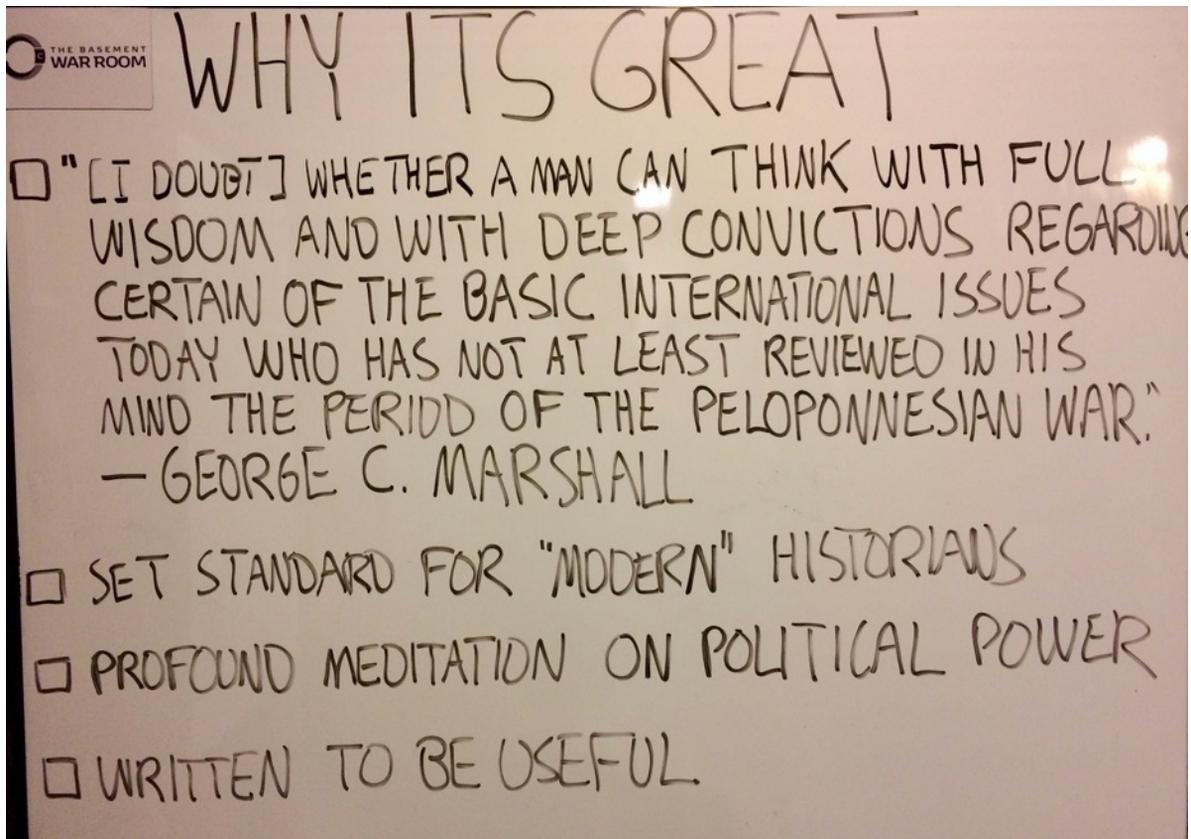
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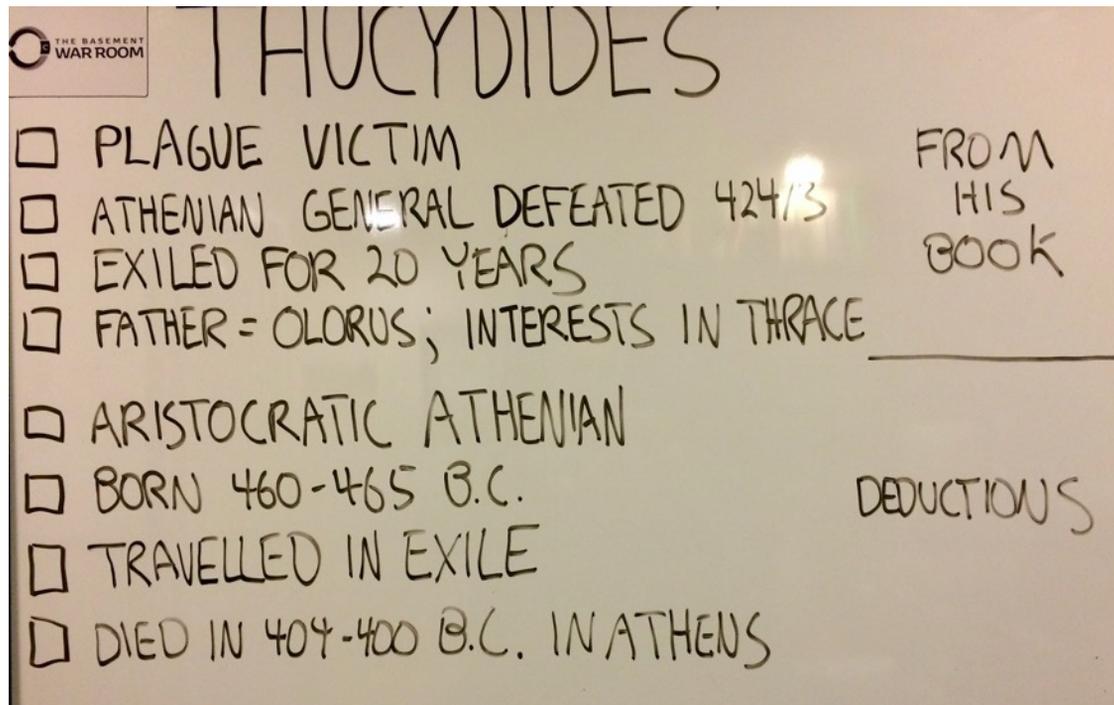
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BOARD 2: WHY ITS GREAT

- Marshall. "[I doubt] whether a man can think with full wisdom and with deep convictions regarding certain of the basic international issues today who has not at least reviewed in his mind the period of the Peloponnesian War and the Fall of Athens." - General of the Army George C. Marshall, address to Princeton University, February 2, 1947.
- Standard for Modern History. Along with Herodotus, Thucydides set the standard for objective history. "Far from permitting myself to derive it from the first source that came to hand, I did not even trust my own impressions, but it rests partly on what I saw myself, partly on what others saw for me, the accuracy of the report being always tried by the most severe and detailed tests possible. My conclusions have cost me some labor from the want of coincidence between accounts of the same occurrences by different eyewitnesses, arising sometimes from imperfect memory, sometimes from undue partiality for one side or the other." - Thucydides.
- A Military History. A detailed account of each campaign season.
- Theory. Profound meditation on political power and human nature.
- Written for Us. "But if it is judged useful by those inquirers who desire an exact knowledge of the past as an aid to the interpretation of the future, which in the course of human things must resemble if it does not reflect it, I shall be content." - Thucydides.
- "A possession for all time."





BOARD 3: THUCYDIDES

What We Know (From his book).

- He was a plague victim.
- He was an Athenian General and was defeated by Brasidas in 424/3 (Eighth Year of the War).
- He was exiled for 20 years for his defeat.
- His father was Olorus and he had mining and political interests in Thrace.

What We Think.

- He was from a Aristocratic Athenian family.
- Born in about 460 BC (or 465...).
- Travelled widely in his exile.
- Died in 404BC in Athens (or 400...).

Motivate by experience to explain the war. Thucydides was a Soldier who was defeated, became a plague victim and lived to see the Athenian Empire destroyed and Athens surrender to Sparta. This motivated him to not only record history, but try to answer the question “why” which resulted in him writing theory. His quest for “why” resulted in a profound meditation on political power and human nature much in the same way that Clausewitz’s formative experience of being defeated by Napoleon led him to write *On War*.





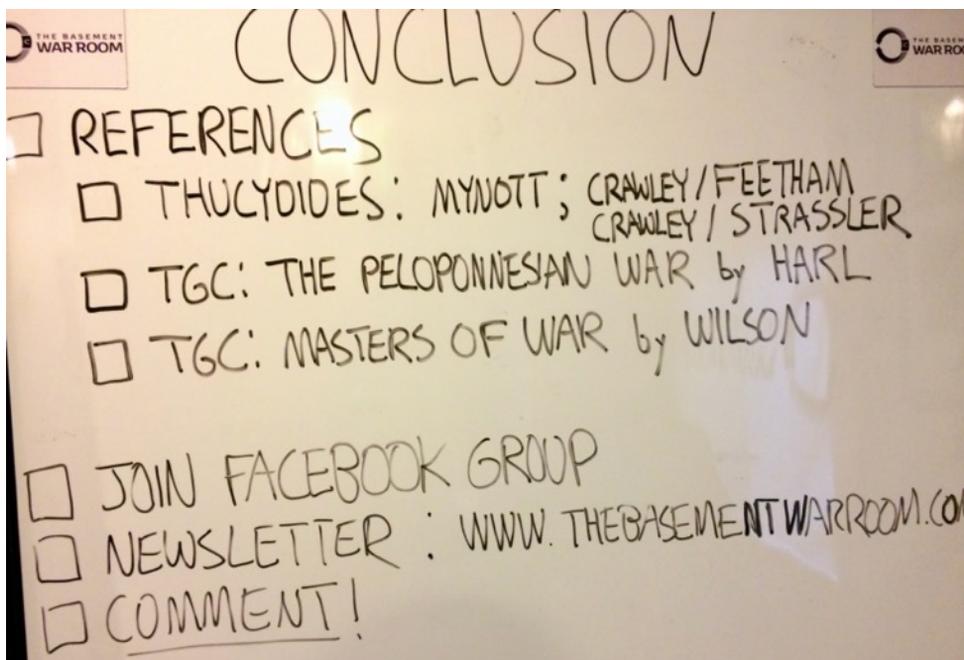
THE BOOK

- UNTITLED
- 7 MEDIEVAL MANUSCRIPTS – VARY
- NOT STRUCTURED INTO 8 BOOKS
- WRITTEN DURING THE WAR
- INCOMPLETE – 21ST YEAR OF WAR (411 B.C.)

BOARD 4: The Book

- “The Peloponnesian War” is not the name of Thucydides’ work - it is untitled.
- Only fragments of early versions still exist, what we have today is derived from seven medieval manuscripts that vary a great deal.
- Structuring it into Eight Books was done by later editors - Thucydides structured it by year of the war.
- Thucydides wrote it during the war, and took advantage of his exile to interview Spartans. He lived to see the end of the war.
- Thucydides died while writing the 21st Year of the War (411 BC), so it is unfinished.





REFERENCES AND CONCLUSION

References:

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Thucydides: The History of the Peloponnesian War. Translated by Richard Crawley and revised by R. C. Feetham. The Easton Press.

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The Great Courses: Masters of War: History's Greatest Strategic Thinkers by Andrew Wilson. The Teaching Company.

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1812. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-04-02-0334>

The George C. Marshall Foundation, *Speech at Princeton University*, February 22,

1947. <https://www.marshallfoundation.org/library/digital-archive/6-026-speech-princeton-university-february-22-1947/>

Conclusion:

- The mission of The Basement War Room is to preserve the lessons of the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars. If you would like to aid me in this mission, **please join my facebook group “Lessons of the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars.”** <https://www.fb.com/groups/WarLessons/>
- **Please share on social media and comment!**
- Additionally, if you would like a look behind the scenes of The Basement War Room, **sign up for the newsletter on my website.** <https://mailchi.mp/83e750381519/thebasementwarroom>
- Thank you for watching!

