

November 2022

A statement on artificial intelligence

Historians, humanities scholars & educators call for education, collaboration & historical perspective in the development of A.I. technologies

We must not repeat the mistakes of the past



Why we're speaking now

The past six months have seen numerous statements on artificial intelligence (A.I.) by governments, tech executives, journalists and ethicists.

Yet, the voices of historians and humanities scholars have largely been absent from the public sphere.

Until now.

The History Communication Institute (HCI) represents a community of historians, humanists, educators and thinkers around the world.

We have analyzed and studied A.I. advancements with a keen eye towards the present *and the past*.

We believe our voices must be at the table with governments, private corporations and civil society as artificial intelligence enters all aspects of our lives.

This statement incorporates our voices into the public conversation.



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A historical perspective is needed

We agree that artificial intelligence has the potential to bring great benefits to society.

We also agree that it has the potential to cause great harms.

As historians, humanities scholars and educators, we have studied how new technologies often have unintended consequences that can exacerbate social inequities.

History reveals how new technologies can:

- Widen societal divides between those with access and those without;
- Worsen inequalities by concentrating power and wealth in the hands of the few;
- Perpetuate existing power structures that disadvantage certain populations;
- Destabilize democracies through disinformation, surveillance and repression by authoritarian regimes, corporations & governments.

A.I. will be no exception if the ability to benefit from these technologies is limited to a select few--and the profits from A.I. are solely reaped by private companies and governments.

Investments in education, literacy, training and democracy must be made to ensure that artificial intelligence will not cause lasting damage to society.

Education--not solely regulation

Any solution to the challenge posed by A.I. must include commitments to education, not solely calls for more regulation.

In public hearings and media coverage, too much of the discourse has focused on regulation, and not on education.

Attention must be paid to ensuring the creators of these technologies have a well-rounded humanities education that informs their work, one that includes historical literacy and a historical perspective.

Investment must also be paid to equipping the users of these technologies, of all ages and backgrounds, with the media literacy, historical literacy and skills and training they need to decipher human-made content from machine-generated content, and to be critical thinkers able to navigate a complex 21st century media environment.

We broadly call for:

- Sustained investments in education, media literacy, historical literacy, humanities and history education commensurate with the massive investments in artificial intelligence.
- Collaboration with historians, humanities scholars and educators in the development of A.I. tools, to ensure they align with democratic principles and adapt to and integrate the lessons of history.
- Consultation with historians, humanities scholars and educators throughout the process by which A.I. tools are released and commercialized, so as to carefully and diligently evaluate the risks and develop training and literacy tools that can aid all of society.

Collaboration with historians is essential

Specifically, we urge:

1

New partnerships between tech, governments, and historians and humanities scholars around A.I.

Why it's needed: A.I. will reveal aspects of our humanity that will surprise us and unsettle us, as well as amplify elements of humanity that can cause great harm to each other and the planet. Historians, humanities scholars and educators possess a unique expertise and experience to analyze A.I. tools and contextualize their effects on the human condition. To-date, tech and government have largely ignored historians and humanities scholars as the race to create new A.I. products has intensified. There is a responsibility to include tech development, procurement and deployment processes that include historians, ethicists and humanists on design, development and testing teams. There is a responsibility to fund the work of historians and humanities scholars to understand what A.I. is doing to us, before it is too late.

2

New funding for educators to develop A.I. learning and literacy tools.

Why it's needed: For too long, history and the humanities have been underfunded and under-supported. Now, these institutions and individuals are under-prepared to mitigate the effects of A.I. on their students and stakeholders. In classrooms worldwide, educators are seeking resources to help devise new lesson plans, testing, training and information literacy resources for their students. Companies and governments should fund historians, humanities scholars and educators who can create these urgently needed resources and foster an A.I.-literate citizenry across all races, classes, ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds.

3

New partnerships with historians, scholars and educators to stem the flow of misinformation and disinformation.

Why it's needed: A.I. tools allow the rapid generation of texts and images that will lead to an even greater proliferation of false and harmful information in the public sphere. Tech and government have a responsibility to work with historians and humanities scholars to mitigate the effects of this information before it becomes catastrophic for democracy. We urge tech companies to be proactive in collaborating with historians and educators to develop tools and strategies to discern misinformation and disinformation, as well as teaching methods that can be used in K-12 and college classrooms. At the same time that companies are investing in refining models, they should simultaneously be funding scholars, educators and teachers to develop training materials using those models that can be deployed in schools that foster a media and historically literate citizenry capable of being discerning information consumers.

4

More transparency on what A.I. can and cannot do.

Why it's needed: Tech companies and governments should be forthright in what A.I. can do and what it cannot. A.I. is not a substitute for historical or humanistic knowledge, and as it does not cite its sources, cannot be marketed as a credible source. A.I. tools should be a means to direct information consumers to better and richer historical data and content, not to displace it. While companies publish research papers about their work, there remains much that historians, scholars and the public do not know about how these models operate and how companies make decisions about how and when to release certain models. Given the transformative effects these tools are having on society, we call for greater transparency about the decision-making processes and risk calculations companies are making. We urge companies to explain in plain English how their models reproduce their inputs; more information on what their models are actually doing; and what factors the models weigh more heavily than others in order to produce their results. Transparency will allow historians to better understand the effects of these tools on society and mitigate their harms before they become widespread. This did not happen with social media platforms in the previous decade; we urge tech companies to avoid the mistakes of the past.

5

A renewed commitment to mitigate societal inequities.

Why it's needed: History shows that new technologies can exacerbate societal divides and inequities. A.I. technology will be no exception if the power to benefit and capitalize on these technologies remains limited to a select few. History shows us that unequal access and a growing wealth divide can destabilize democracies and perpetuate inequalities. Tech companies should be upstanding corporate citizens, and invest profits from A.I. back into society and already disadvantaged communities. Our social fabric requires it.

History will remember the A.I. pioneers of today as either Carnegies who used their wealth to enable history, museums, libraries, philanthropy and the arts to flourish—or as Robber Barons who plundered society for their own gain.

We urge companies and governments to be on the right side of history.

Historians, humanities scholars and educators have an important role to play.

We stand ready to work alongside you.

Published by:

**HISTORY COMMUNICATION INSTITUTE
JUNE 2023**

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