

# History to plan for the future

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**"Today more than ever, in an era marked by fake news and fears for the present and the future, the work of historians entails a strong civic responsibility. We must feel prompted to engage with society, to share knowledge, and to transform specialist knowledge into a common good." Our interview with Margherita Angelini, professor at the Department of Classical, Linguistic and Educational Studies of the University of Enna "Kore," on the theme of the Study Week FBK-ISIG 2025**

**Prof. Angelini, which historians stood out for their civic commitment during the second half of the twentieth century in Italy?**

After the fall of fascism, Italian historiography was marked by a strong ethical and civic dimension. Many historians viewed research not only as an academic activity but also as a responsibility toward society and the democracy under construction.

Several scholars combined their scientific work with active participation in public life. Each of them, from different political and cultural perspectives, interpreted history as a tool for civic formation: from Federico Chabod to Enzo Collotti and Claudio Pavone, to name just a few of the most well-known figures.

Alongside these names, other important historians emerge, such as Bianca Ceva, a protagonist of the Resistance and among the founders of the National Institute for the History of the Liberation Movement, or Franca Pieroni Bortolotti, who opened up research to the history of women. In more recent years, historians such as Luisa Passerini and Anna Bravo have introduced new languages and methods, opening the discipline to more plural and inclusive perspectives.

**In which areas has this commitment been expressed, in particular?**

The civic commitment of these historians has manifested in many areas. First, in the world of cultural institutions and research, with the creation of institutions such as the Institutes for the History of the Resistance, the Gramsci Foundation, and the Feltrinelli Library, which helped intertwine historiographical reflection with the democratic life of the country.

A second key area was education, both in schools and universities. The debate on the introduction of contemporary history into curricula—formalized only in 1961—was driven precisely by historians who considered the teaching of recent history a pillar of citizen education.

Many scholars also engaged in public life as journalists, parliamentarians, activists, or disseminators. They participated in major debates on national identity and memory, always maintaining a critical and constructive perspective on institutions.

### **How has this affected society?**

The interweaving of historical research and public engagement has had a decisive impact on the political and civic culture of Republican Italy. Post-war historians helped shape a new idea of citizenship, based on responsibility, dialogue, and awareness of one's roots.

Since the 1970s, historians have expanded this legacy, introducing themes related to gender, memory, oral history, and subjectivity into the public debate.

### **Is this still a current commitment for those who do historical research today? "Without a doubt, yes."**

Today more than ever, in an era marked by fake news and fears for the present and the future, the work of historians entails a strong civic responsibility. I believe that this awareness remains fundamental in our profession: *we must feel called to dialogue with society, to share knowledge, and to transform specialist knowledge into a common good.*

Studying the commitment of historians of the second half of the twentieth century has taught me that participating in the construction of the present means not giving up complexity and critical thinking, but trying to transmit them. Promoting the study of history means opposing simplifications, without falling into the idea of an eternal present.

That is why history is so important in schools: its teaching should be strengthened because it provides students with tools to understand social dynamics, the evolution of civilizations, and the paths that have shaped the world in which we live. Only in this way can young people develop the critical awareness needed to act consciously and plan for the future. As Giuseppe Galasso recalled, doing the work of a historian—and I would add, the work of a teacher—is, first of all, an act of civic conscience

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