After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection Study Guide

After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection by Jams Wst Davidson

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Plot Summary

"After the Fact" is a text on the various methods a historian has at his disposal to help interpret the events of the past. The authors are both historians and History professors specializing in American history, and they draw from the history of the United States to provide illustrations of the concepts they seek to describe.

The book is subtitled "The Art of Historical Detection," and each chapter is dedicated to an individual "detection" technique that the historian can apply to more deeply explore and reconstruct events from the past. The idea of the book is conveyed in an extended introduction that looks at the life of an 18th-century diplomat named Silas Deane who died in mysterious circumstances.

After the introduction, the authors present thirteen chapters, each one using a significant episode in American history to examine the "art" of historical investigation and interpretation. They begin with the establishment of the Virginia Colonies in the 17th century as an example of how to look at contemporary evidence. The Salem witch trials are used as an example of looking at the history of a small community. Methods in interpreting the kinds of evidence that documents can provide the historian are demonstrated using the Declaration of Independence.

For 19th-century examples, the authors choose the case of Andrew Jackson and the mythology that surrounded him as an example of how theories can be used to interpret history. The type of documentary evidence that images such as engravings and paintings can provide is explained using early portraits of Native Americans as an example. The authors use John Brown's attack on Harpers Ferry in the 1860s as an example to show how psychological methods might reveal the motivations and actions of historical figures. The final example from the 19th century is the narratives of former slaves gathered in the early 20th century, which demonstrate some of the issues inherent in oral history.

The 20th century provides the authors with examples of how to examine legal processes using the case of Sacco and Vanzetti, two Italian immigrants who were executed for murder. They also look at the former Louisiana senator Huey Long to provide an example of how the theory that "great men" change history can be used. Historical models are demonstrated in application to the bureaucratic decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan at the end of World War II.

In the final chapter, the authors look at the account of two reporters on the final days of Richard Nixon's presidency. They apply some of the historical techniques they describe to an analysis of the report and use it as an example of how all of these tools can be used together by the historian to more fully understand the causes and lasting effects of historical events.

Prologue: the Strange Death of Silas Deane

Prologue: the Strange Death of Silas Deane Summary and Analysis

"After the Fact opens with a prologue about the life of the 18th-century figure Silas Deane. Deane was the son of a blacksmith who grew up in Connecticut and studied law at Yale. He went into business and later politics and was sent by Congress to France to represent the American colonies in 1776 in an attempt to arrange a formal alliance against Great Britain.

While in France, Deane and his secretary, Edward Bancroft engaged in private business enterprises that appeared to some to be exploiting his position for his own personal gain. He lost favor in America and went into exile in Great Britain. After several years Deane, nearly broke, arranged to return to America with the help of his friend, Bancroft. While on the ship journey back he suddenly fell ill and died after a week at sea.

These are the basic facts of Deane's life, the authors explain, but then they add more facts for the reader's consideration. They explain that Edward Bancroft, Deane's friend and former secretary who paid for his passage to America, had been a double agent for the British and Americans while in France and England. Bancroft, before becoming Deane's secretary, had been an amateur scientist who explored in South America and was very knowledgeable about strong natural poisons such as curare, which he was known to have a supply of in England. Furthermore, the authors suggest, Deane likely was aware of Bancroft's duplicity during the revolution and could have created an embarrassing situation for Bancroft had he told the Americans about it. It is possible, although not provable, that Bancroft somehow poisoned the food he supplied Deane with for his journey.

The authors use Deane's life as an example of the problem a historian faces in selecting evidence. What at first might seem like a minor fact, such as Bancroft's expertise in exotic poisons, may actually prove to be central to the proper interpretation of events, while the broader more widely accepted facts may not tell the whole story.

Chapter 1; Serving Time in Virginia

Chapter 1; Serving Time in Virginia Summary and Analysis

Chapter 1 examines the importance of the selection of evidence when its real importance may not be obvious at first. They use the early settlement of Virgina as an example subject.

As one of the earliest English settlements in America, the Virgina settlement is an important historical subject. Although much of the written records of the settlement have been lost, there is still a good deal of written description that survives. One of the best-known accounts is that of Captain John Smith, whose swashbuckling tale emphasizes his own importance and involvement. Other evidence is found in the dry accounts of court decisions and financial transactions, such as an order requiring Virginia settlers to plant at least 2 acres of corn and forbidding them from burning hay to dry tobacco.

This apparently straightforward rule signifies something larger was going on. The Virginia settlements were founded by the Virginia Company as a commercial venture, but never reached the expectations of the founders. One early account of the settlement describes the church and stockade in ruins and a shortage of food. This provides a clue to the larger significance of the rule about growing corn, the authors explain. Economic conditions encouraged the production of tobacco in Virginia, and soon the settlers were using all their resources to grow it, neglecting to put aside any land for producing food.

Tobacco production had another effect on the settlements. Virginian landholders were encouraged to bring servants over from England to help grow the tobacco, receiving an extra 50 acres of land for each servant they brought from England. the death rate among these newcomers to Virginia was remarkably high according to various records of the time, the authors explain, probably due to the lack of food. These servants were usually expected to work for their employer for seven years, then would have the opportunity to obtain some land of their own. In reality, many of them died before their service term was over. Slaves were sometimes available, the authors explain, but they were more expensive than servants and no more likely to survive. The economic advantage of employing servants may be the reason that slavery, while it first appeared in the Virginia settlements in the early 17th century, did not become a full-blown institution until about 40 years after the first slaves appeared.

Much of the economic and political factors that underly the early settlement of Virginia are represented in the apparently ordinary records. An historian who asks the right questions can use these basic facts as departure points for deeper understanding of historical events by looking at them in a larger context and seeking to understand their full meaning.

Chapter 2: The Visible and Invisible Worlds of Salem

Chapter 2: The Visible and Invisible Worlds of Salem Summary and Analysis

One of the questions an historian must consider is the time frame to cover in explaining something historical. Something may appear isolated in time and location, but the events that precede and come after it may be of special significance to its interpretation. Of course practical considerations keep the historian from expanding the time frame too much, for as the time frame widens the more factors must be considered. Finding the right balance is part of the job of the historian. The authors use the Salem witch trials as an example.

The facts of the Salem witch trials are that for a period of about a year beginning in 1692 the people of Salem Village, Massachusetts engaged in a series of trials of people accused of witchcraft after a small group of adolescent girls began acting in strange and unusual ways. Several people were convicted and hanged for witchcraft before the trials were stopped. The trials were isolated not only to this short period of time, but also did not appear in other New England villages or towns.

The authors briefly explain some of the historical possibilities for the witch trials. The episode began when a few adolescent girls began behaving in strange ways. They were described as sometimes writhing around, rolling their eyes and arching their backs. They reported odd sensations in their legs and stomachs and a feeling as though they were being choked. They sometimes reported seeing the image of a person from the village during their torments. This was taken as strong evidence against that person and amounted to an accusation of witchcraft. An accused witch could confess and would be forgiven, but would be expected to name others they had conspired with. Accused witches who did not confess and were convicted were tortured and hanged. This created a situation that encouraged confession and new accusations, the authors suggest, perpetuating more trials.

Several theories have been put forth as to the actual reason for the behavior of the girls. They may have been pretending at first, seeking attention, and things got out of hand. The authors note that several of the reported behaviors are similar to known symptoms of psychosis, suggesting the girls may have shared real psychotic conditions. No modern historians believe that the cause was actually witchcraft, they note.

While the events seem isolated in time and place, the authors suggest that by expanding the time frame shows an interesting aspect of the witch trials. When the homes of the people involved are plotted out on a map of the village a pattern emerges. Most of the accusers lived in the west part of the village while most of those accused of being witches lived in the east part. This suggest some kind of social divide between the

two groups, the authors explain. One possible explanation is in the pattern of expansion of Salem and similar New England towns at this time. As towns expanded, those in the outer parts kept a connection to the inner town up to a point. Once the outer areas became more built up, they sometimes split off to form new villages or towns. Salem Village was already such a place, having expanded from Salem Town. The western residents of the village were in the outer section of the village, while the eastern residents were still close to Salem Town and may have still associated with it. The patterns of the witchcraft accusations appear to have followed this same pattern of town expansion that preceded them. By expanding the time frame to include this expansion in the interpretation, an historian can begin to ask more meaningful questions.

Chapter 3: Declaring independence

Chapter 3: Declaring independence Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 3, the authors narrows the book's focus to look at a single document, the Declaration of Independence.

In May of 1776, the Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia to discuss the deteriorating relations with England. Thomas Jefferson attended, representing Virginia, and was named to a five-person committee to draft a document declaring independence. The task of writing the document was given by the committee to Jefferson, who made at least two drafts which he showed to John Adams and Benjamin Franklin, who were also on the committee and who made small alterations to the language. Jefferson then re-copied out a clean draft, which was presented to the Congress.

July 4th is now celebrated as Independence Day in the United States, however the authors point out that Congress actually voted for independence on July 2, 1776, and the resolution they voted on was one made on June 7 by Robert Lee. The formal document presented by Jefferson's committee was then debated and changed by Congress and ordered to be printed on July 4th, the date that is written at the top of the document. Printing it took some time, and it was not until August 2 that the document was actually signed by the president of the Congress, John Hancock. The other 55 delegates, some of whom had left Philadelphia for home, signed the document later.

The authors suggest a strategy for the historian to adopt when looking at a document such as the Declaration. The first step is to read it for its general meaning, then to look at how it is organized. The historian should also consider the audience for the document. In addition, looking at previous drafts to see what changes were made before the document was finalized can reveal much.

In the case of the Declaration, some of Jefferson's drafts are still available, along with suggestions and corrections made in the handwriting of Franklin and Adams. This shows some of the evolution of Jefferson's thoughts as he wrote the draft. The drafts can then be compared to the final version that was adopted to see the changes made by the Congress.

The Declaration was addressed to the King of England, who is its intended audience. After an initial justification for independence based on the natural rights of men, the document then lists several specific grievances against the King. nowhere is the English Parliament mentioned, even though it was the Parliament that was responsible for many of the legislative acts that angered the colonies. Jefferson and the Congress apparently did not want to recognize the legitimacy of the Parliament by mentioning them in the Declaration. The list of grievances were not only intended for the King, the authors

explain, but also to provide justification and motivation for the colonists themselves who would be asked to fight in support of the Declaration.

By asking and seeking the answers to these questions about a document, the historian can gain insight into the society that produced it.

Chapter 4: Jackson's Frontier - and Turner's

Chapter 4: Jackson's Frontier - and Turner's Summary and Analysis

Chapter 4 examines the role that historical theory plays in the study of history. The authors use the figure of Andrew Jackson as an example subject and begin with the "frontier theory" of Frederick Jackson Turner.

Turner was a young historian who introduced what would become an influential theory of American history in a talk given at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Turner's talk was called "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." In it, he outlined his theory that national traits that had come to be recognized as distinctly American such as individualism and democracy could be directly related to the frontier experience unique to American development. The frontier pitted man against nature and broke down the old class distinctions inherited from England and still present in the East, he argued. The frontier encouraged democratic institutions among its sparse population and even strengthened democracy in the East by acting as a kind of safety valve where dissatisfied people might go to create a more satisfactory life.

Andrew Jackson was a product of the frontier influence, Turner argued. He grew up on the frontier the son of Scotch immigrants, lived a rough-and-tumble life as a young man studying law, then moved to the frontier of what would become Tennessee to work as a lawyer and judge before eventually being elected to Congress and finally to be President of the United States, bringing with him a frontier sensibility.

Turner's theory of the study of history claimed that historians should look at factors such a geography, climate and similar elements in drawing a full picture of the past. One of his pupils, a historian named Thomas Abernethy, used Turner's approach for his own examination of Jackson. Abernethy found that the wide-open frontier that Turner had imagined where any man might stake a claim and carve out his place was in actuality mostly controlled by wealthy land speculators from the East. Jackson, while he had grown up near the frontier, aspired to be a gentleman and arrived at his first post as a lawyer and judge with two horses and a supply of expensive items. Jackson himself speculated in land with the help of some of eastern connections and lost a great deal of money.

The facts and conclusions as Abernethy found them did not support those of Turner, the authors explain, but that does not reduce the importance of Turner's theory. Theories are meant to be tested, and where they fall short or do not fully explain the facts new and more complete theories can arise. The authors provide examples of two other historians who apply their own theories to the life of Jackson. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.,

writing in the 1940s, looked only at Jackson's role as a national leader examining his influence in terms of larger national movements of his time.

In the 1970s, a historian name Michael Rogin looked at Jackson's frontier life in psychological terms. Rogin wrote at a time when American society had become more aware of minority concerns and Rogin noted that much of Jackson's frontier experience was centered around the removal of Native Americans to provide land for settlement. Rogin noted that the discussion of Native American policy during Jackson's time was presented in terms related to the family, such as the President being called the "great white father" and the natives being talked about as children who required the discipline that European settlers could provide. Rogin applied a Freudian model to these references and drew a picture of Jackson as a man who envisioned himself as a paternal figure carrying on the tradition of the founding fathers in caring for the nation.

Each of these theories focuses on different historical elements, each one drawing different, sometimes contradictory conclusions. The continual development of historical theories is important to historical study, the authors claim, even when the theories conflict or do not explain all the facts. It might be possible, they speculate, that one day a "unified" theory will emerge that takes into account all of these preceding theories.

Chapter 5: The 'Noble Savage' and the Artist's Canvas

Chapter 5: The 'Noble Savage' and the Artist's Canvas Summary and Analysis

Chapter 5 looks at how the historian might approach visual documents such as paintings and drawings. Many historians neglect the importance of visual documents, the authors claim, not giving them the same kind of importance given to other types of documents such as personal accounts and other records. As an example, the authors use paintings and drawings depicting Native Americans.

Prince Maximilian of Prussia was a somewhat eccentric nobleman who came to the American West in the 1830s to visit and learn about the Native Americans along the Missouri River. He traveled with a secretary and a young Swiss artist named Karl Bodmer. Bodmer painted portraits of several Native Americans on the trip, earning a reputation among the natives as being very talented in capturing accurate likenesses. The authors include two illustrations of Bodmer's portraits, one of a father and the other of his son. They invite the reader to look at the portraits and notice the differences in the dress of the older and the younger man. The father wears a simple buffalo robe and elk skin shirt while the son has an elaborate chest piece, a bearclaw necklace, beaded strands in his hair, and an eagle-feather fan. The authors explain that the young man's mother was from a different tribe than his father and that he is dressed in the style of his mother's tribe. This historical fact is neatly represented in the visual image. The authors also point out various elements of the young man's costume, explaining that some of the glass trade beads he is wearing were imported from Italy by American trading companies especially for use in trade with the Native Americans. Other beads are made from shells obtained through trade from the Pacific Coast. His fan came from a different tribe and as has been pointed out his style of dress is from a different tribe than the one he lives in with his father. Fully examined, the portraits provide evidence of a widespread trade and social network that converged along the Missouri River at the time.

Bodmer sought to present accurate portraits of his subjects, however other visual representations of Native Americans introduced elements that were imagined or invented. Often the artists were not drawing or painting from life but were using other artists' work to copy from, sometimes taking elements from unrelated illustrations and combining them in new works. Understanding the sources of visual documents is important, the authors emphasize.

Visual documents can also serve as a "looking glass," reflecting the intentions and attitudes of the artists themselves. They present some painted portraits of Native Americans by Charles King as examples. In 1821, several Native Americans were brought to Washington D.C. to meet with the president. King took the opportunity to

have them sit for their portraits. There was one woman among the group of visitors and she also had her portrait painted. All of the native were presented with American-style clothes as gifts, but only the woman was painted wearing a frilled dress. The men were painted in their warrior costumes. King's choice of how to depict his subjects reflected the opinions of his day that men were allowed and expected to be war-like and brave while women were expected to be domestic. Thus his visual documents reveal as much about the painter and his society as they do about the subjects.

Chapter 6: The Madness of John Brown

Chapter 6: The Madness of John Brown Summary and Analysis

Chapter 6 returns to the subject of psychological history by looking at the story of John Brown's raid on the Federal arsenal in Harper's Ferry, Virginia in 1859. Brown, along with twenty other men, plotted to take possession of the arsenal and the weapons stored there as part of a larger plan to instigate an armed slave revolt. Brown, who was white, believed that once he provided leadership and opportunity black slaves would join his revolt, forming an army that would force an end to slavery.

Brown's raid ended in a standoff with federal troops. Ten of his men were killed and Brown himself was wounded and captured. Brown was put on trial and finally executed in December, 1859. He became a polarizing figure in the days immediately before the Civil War, a hero to some and an extremist madman to others. The authors indicate that Brown's conflicting testimony at the time of his trial and his history of extreme reactions to slavery suggest a kind of mental obsession that some might consider madness, but they add that Brown at all times seemed to understand what he was doing and the potential consequences of his acts which are the modern standards often applied to determine if a person is legally sane enough to stand trial.

Aside from the legal definition, however, the authors suggest that much can be learned by looking at other clues to Brown's psychological makeup. The remainder of the chapter is dedicated to a Freudian analysis of Brown's character based on memoir he wrote about his childhood in which he tells about his early experience with his parents. His mother died while he was young and he was raised by his strict father. He grew up in a racially mixed area and at an early age recognized that black children were treated differently than white children. He also had a strong devotion to the various pets he was allowed to keep, although often his father took his pets and sold them.

Based on his own words, the authors suggest that Brown's early experiences with his father heightened his deep sense of loyalty. Having been treated unfairly by his father made him very sensitive to unfairness in larger society, especially concerning slavery. Based on descriptions of Brown by others, he was usually rational and in control of his emotions except when the subject turned to slavery. On that topic he transformed into a radical willing to kill or die.

Brown was unusual, the authors admit. Many others were opposed to slavery but did not take such a radical approach to ending it. Understanding what made Brown stand out in his society can be more fully understood by looking at his motivations and his society's reaction to it. Understanding his motivations can be better understood by looking for clues into his psychological development.

Chapter 7: The View from the Bottom Rail

Chapter 7: The View from the Bottom Rail Summary and Analysis

Chapter 7 looks at the some of the challenges in examining the history of people who exist on the fringes or in the lower classes of society. For an example they turn to the Federal Writers Project of the 1930s that set out to interview former black slaves about their experiences.

By the 1930s, the number of former black slaves still living was decreasing. The writers project sent interviewers out to find living former slaves and document their recollections. Because of their position in society, slaves did not leave many written records of their own. What was written about them at the time of slavery was told from the point of view of the southern white society that had enslaved them, or the northern white society that was faced with the challenge of reconstructing the South.

The interviews with former slaves were conducted in person, with the interviewer taking careful notes, sometimes using recordings, which were then transcribed. Some people were reluctant to speak with the interviewers, apparently having no interest in helping or in remembering the time of slavery. Many people did cooperate, however. Taken at face value, the combined transcripts of the hundreds of people interviewed paint a varied picture of slavery from the black viewpoint. Some describe the awful treatment they received or witnessed, while others describe benevolent owners who treated them as well as they treated their own family.

These narratives present some problems, however, which the authors illustrate by examining two narratives transcribed from a woman named Susan Hamlin, an elderly woman who had been a slave in South Carolina. The two narratives, transcribed at different times by two different interviewers, are very different in tone. In one of the interviews, she praised her former owner as a kind man who always made sure she and her mother were well-fed and clothed. When asked about the practice of her owner hiring her out to work in the houses of other whites and keeping the money she earned, she agreed with the interviewer that it was a fair exchange as her owner had the expense of caring for her.

In the second interview, Hamlin spoke differently about slavery. She described her father who had been separated from her and her mother and had run away from his owner after being badly mistreated. She told about owners who took newborn babies away from their mothers to be sold. Overall, the second interview focused on the darker aspects of slavery.

The authors suggest that the difference in tone between the two narratives was because of the people conducting the interviews. In the first interview they present the interviewer was a white man. He indicates in his introduction to the narrative that Hamiln mistakenly thought he was from the welfare department, which had given her assistance in the past before it had closed. He indicates that he did not correct her misconception. The second interview they present was conducted by a black man. They suggest that Hamlin tailored her story to suit her audience. In the case of the first interview, she was speaking to a white man who she thought might possibly be there to help her get welfare benefits. As a result, her story was complimentary to her former white owners and she agreed with the leading questions posed by her interviewer that she was treated fairly. The second interviewer was black, a person she may have seen as more sympathetic to her experience causing her to speak more freely about her negative memories.

The example points out the challenge faced by the historian even when looking at what appear to be original sources. The history of groups that have been marginalized is often filtered through the eyes of the dominant group.

Chapter 8: The Mirror with a Memory

Chapter 8: The Mirror with a Memory Summary and Analysis

The authors return to the subject of visual documents in Chapter 8 with a discussion of photography. The title of the chapter makes reference to the photograph as a "mirror" that not only reflects the image of the photograph but also the intention of the photographer. As an example they use an author named Jacob Riis who published a book in the 1890s called "How the Other Half Lives," a study of the slum-like living conditions in New York City's lower east side.

Immigration surged in New York in the second half of the nineteenth century and Riis himself was an immigrant from Norway who came to America in search of better prospects. Like many other immigrants, he had difficulty finding work he eventually was reduced to begging for food. He had a talent for writing and was hired as a newspaper reporter where he specialized in telling stories of the poor immigrants of New York City. In 1890, Riis published his illustrated account of life in the slums of New York.

The book created a public sensation, showing many for the first time the crowded, unclean, and dangerous living conditions of the working poor. Riis used photographs taken by himself to illustrate the book, adding a gritty realism that shocked many readers. Riis was not a professional photographer and his candid illustrations struck his readers as a truthful documentation of the conditions that he described.

While Riis was not a professional, the authors explain that his photographs still reflect Riis' own attitudes and opinions simply because of the subject matter he chose and the way in which his pictures were presented. One example is a photograph of a crowded room where several people are sleeping packed together in apparently dirty bedding. To a society that was beginning to prize cleanliness as a virtue, the image was especially shocking. Likewise, a photograph by Riis showing an entire immigrant family in their single room working at rolling cigars was disturbing to people who looked at the family home as a sacred place that should not be mixed with work and commerce.

These were the messages that Riis wished to convey and which were successfully understood by his audience. The authors look closely at the photographs and suggest further interpretation. Where Riis showed a crowded and dirty alley between two tenement houses, the authors also point out that some of the residents had flower boxes and appeared to be socializing. Where Riis wished to create a sensation over the deplorable conditions, it is also possible to see signs of people making the best of their situation and struggling to improve their situations. It is important, the authors explain, to look past what the photographer wants viewers to see in order to get the full picture.

Chapter 9: USDA Government Inspected

Chapter 9: USDA Government Inspected Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 9, the authors look at interpreting the history of political events using the development of stricter government meat inspection laws that came into existence in the early part of the 20th century under President Theodore Roosevelt.

The chapter opens with a brief summary of the events leading up to the formation of the new laws. Theodore Roosevelt had come into office in 1904 and was building a reputation as a tough-minded leader. In 1906, an author named Upton Sinclair, a socialist who wanted to show how workers in the meat packing industry were mistreated, published a book called "The Jungle" exposing the often appallingly unsanitary conditions found in the largest packing plants. Rather than raise support for the meat packing workers, the book raised an outcry from the public about the unclean conditions and adulterated meat products the plants put out with little or no standards for sanitation. Roosevelt, seeing an opportunity to gain public support while taking down one of the large corporate "trusts" that he hated, introduced new legislation that would require more strict government oversight of meat inspection. The new laws were pushed through Congress, resulting in reliable government standards for food safety.

This is the "symbolic" version of events the authors explain. Political events are often described by those involved in broad, symbolic ways that hide their true complexity. This kind of historic event usually involves members of at least two opposing sides that each wish to express things in the best light from their own point of view. The nature of the American political process in Roosevelt's time was one of deal-making and compromise, much as it still is today. The legislation that was eventually passed was not as strict as it might have been and was arrived at after much discussion among congressional leaders]. The reality of the situation was much less tidy as the symbolic representation of it suggested.

Symbols are important, however, the authors explain, for they reveal the broad outlines of an idea, an event or a movement. Political cartoons of Theodore Roosevelt became very popular, as he was a larger-than-life character who seemed to invite caricature. These symbolic cartoons hint at the events behind the surface meaning of events and can be an important source for the historian.

Chapter 10: Sacco and Vanzetti

Chapter 10: Sacco and Vanzetti Summary and Analysis

Chapter 10 looks at the high-profile case of two Italian immigrants named Niccola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. In April 1920, two men attacked a messenger carrying a large amount of cash while he walked along a sidewalk in Braintree, Massachusetts. The messenger and his assistant were both shot dead and the bandits fled. Police suspected an Italian anarchist named Mike Boda was involved in the plot and began watching him. They eventually arrested two of Boda's associates, Sacco and Vanzetti, when they arrived to pick up a car that Boda had left at a repair shop. Sacco and Vanzetti attempted to flee the police, raising their suspicion that the two men were guilty of the robbery and killings.

No direct evidence tied the men to the crime. Ballistics evidence was inconclusive. The men did not match the descriptions given by eyewitnesses. Each of them had witnesses who swore they were elsewhere at the time of the crime. Yet the men were convicted of the crimes and sentenced to be executed by electrocution. They appealed their convictions, but lost them. The case became a national issue, with celebrities and politicians calling out for the release of the men. They appealed to the governor of Massachusetts for clemency and the governor appointed a three-person board to review the case and make a recommendation. the board recommended holding up the sentence and the men were finally executed.

Looking at the case from a modern perspective, the authors explain, it seems clear that Sacco and Vanzetti did not receive fair treatment by the court, led by an openly hostile judge. The evidence against them was weak and circumstantial and strong evidence of their innocence was ignored or suppressed. Why then, the authors ask, were they convicted and executed?

The answer lies in the larger social climate of the time. Sacco and Vanzetti were Italian immigrants who held radical political views at a time when the nation was growing increasingly intolerant of the ever-increasing wave of immigrants arriving in the country. These immigrants were painted as a threat to the nation because of their radical views about politics. This suspicion and prejudice against these two self-proclaimed anarchists overrode the facts of their case. As the case became more widely-known, the men became symbolic of deeper splits in society. Polarizing events like this can reveal these splits, the authors explain.

Chapter 11: Huey Generis

Chapter 11: Huey Generis Summary and Analysis

Chapter 11 is called "Huey Generis," a play on the phrase "sui generis" which means something that is absolutely unique. The "Huey" referred to in the title is Huey Long, a former governor and senator from Louisiana. The authors use Huey Long as an example in their discussion of two different ways that historians approach significant historical figures.

On one side are "great man" theorists, as the authors call them. These historians see significant figures as leaders who change their societies and thereby change the course of history. On the other side are "social determinists" who believe that great leaders are created by their society, not the other way around.

Huey Long was a charismatic young lawyer in Louisiana in the 1920s with political ambitions. He gained a reputation for an easy-going demeanor that made him popular with people. Long was also ruthless with anyone who he felt stood in the way of his advancement, however. He ran for governor of Louisiana at the age of 31 and lost, but was successful four years later. Long was a Democrat who called for the heavy taxation of the rich and promised prosperity for the poor. He called himself "The Messiah of the Rednecks." Eager to expand his influence, he ran for senate and was elected to represent Louisiana.

As a senator, Long campaigned for Franklin Roosevelt's run for president, but once Roosevelt was elected he turned against him. Most historians agree Long had ambitions for even higher office and saw Roosevelt as standing in his way. He began to develop a movement outside the Democratic party, positioning himself as the leader. On a trip back to his home state in 1934 Long was shot and killed by a man whose father had been a political opponent of Long's.

Long's career in politics was cut short, but it was clear he was on his way to becoming a significant figure in national politics and perhaps in history. He does seem to have taken a course all his own, not one predetermined for him by his environment, as a social determinist might expect. On the other hand, they point out, although Long was one of the first politicians to make effective use of the media such as radio to create his public image it is likely that others would have discovered the media's power themselves had Long not been first. How history might have been different had Long lived is outside the scope of the historian, they argue.

hapter 12: The Decision to Drop the Bomb

hapter 12: The Decision to Drop the Bomb Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 12, the authors examine the use of models in interpreting historical events using the decision to drop the atomic bomb on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 as an example. The United States and its allies had nearly brought World War II to a close in Europe, but fighting with Japan continued. In an effort to end the war, President Harry Truman authorized use of the newly-developed atomic bomb. The bombings devastated the cities on which they were dropped, resulting in the surrender of the Japanese.

Many questions linger about the decision to drop the bombs, the authors explain. If the intention was simply to shock Japan into surrendering, would one bomb have been sufficient? Why was the second one dropped? Would it have been enough to demonstrate the bomb for the Japanese as a threat without killing anyone? Why were the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki chosen?

One way to look for these answers is for the historian to apply a model that generalizes the interactions between people and their influence on events. One such model treats people as "rational actors," meaning that people assess a situation, then take a rational action based on their assessment and their intentions and goals. This model might explain the decision to bomb Japan as a rational decision by President Truman based on his intention to end the war as soon as possible and save the lives of American fighters. The model falls short, however, as it does not answer many of the other questions a historian might have.

Another model might recognize that the decision to drop the bomb was ultimately made by one leader, but that it was an organization of people that made the decision possible. The story of the atomic weapons program began with President Roosevelt, who was convinced by advisers that Germany was working on a similar program. The secret organization that designed and built the bomb, called the Manhattan Project, was led by one person, Robert Oppenheimer, but contained a wide variety of scientists, engineers and military personnel and ultimately reported to a committee of the War Department. This committee itself was made up of people of different backgrounds and abilities. At each step of the process that led to the decision to use the bomb there were many people acting, each from a distinct point of view. A "bureaucratic" model that takes these various influences into account can answer many questions. For example, the decision of which cities to bomb was made by a committee that rejected Tokyo as a prime target for fear that destroying the cultural center of Japan would only harden the resolve of the Japanese to fight on. A list of target cities was drawn up by the committee, with Hiroshima at the top. Nagasaki was also on the list, but was not a top target. It was

chosen because on the day the second bomb was to be dropped it was a clear day in that city and the orders given the general in charge of the operation instructed him to choose the target based on the best weather conditions.

Each model is useful in explaining a part of what happened, the authors write. A historian might expect to use several models at once to interpret complex events such as the decision to use the bomb.

Chapter 13: Instant Watergate

Chapter 13: Instant Watergate Summary and Analysis

Chapter 13 is a look at the two books written by journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein about the Watergate scandal that led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon. The books, called "All the President's Men" and "The Final Days" were very popular and written in a compelling, narrative way. The first book was an autobiographical account of the reporters' own experiences uncovering the story. The second was an account of the final days within the White House, which was based on often anonymous sources.

Unlike a traditional history text, Woodward and Bernstein's book did not cite their sources. Some historians have criticized them for this omission, however a careful reading of the text can indicate the source of a piece of information. Woodward and Bernstein sometimes include small details that could only have come from one of the few people present at an event or discussion, for example. The authors spend much of the chapter dissecting some of the passages from "The Final Days" and determining who the primary sources were.

Some historians would say that the books of Woodward and Bernstein are not "history," but the authors disagree. In the most basic sense, the books are history in that they seek to reconstruct events of the past. They are not complete, however, as they focus only on a few people within a relatively short period of time. To get a complete picture, a historian should expect to use many of the techniques presented and described earlier in the book. For example, it would be useful to apply the same type of examination of the interview subjects in "The Final Days" as they suggested for the slave narratives that seemed to change depending on the circumstances. By using all of the tools at their disposal, historians can seek to gain a fuller picture of the past.

Characters

Silas Deane

Silas Deane was an American diplomat at the time of the Revolutionary War. He was set to France on behalf of the American colonies to negotiate French support against the British. Along with his secretary, Edward Bancroft, Deane used the position to increase his personal wealth. He was discredited and essentially exiled to England, where he lived in near poverty supported by his friends, such as Bancroft. After several years, Deane decided to return to America and received assistance paying for the journey from Bancroft. On the sea voyage back to America, Deane suddenly fell ill and died, possibly poisoned by Bancroft, who may have feared Deane would reveal that Bancroft had been a double agent for the British and Americans during the war.

Th authors use Deane's story as an example of a historical mystery that can be partially unraveled using various historical techniques such as establishing the background of the secondary figures, examining documentary evidence such as Deane's letters, and looking at the larger political climate of the time.

John Brown

John Brown was a radical abolitionist in the 19th century. He was arrested and tried for leading a raid on a federal arsenal in Harpers Ferry, Virginia in 1859, where he intended to take guns and other arms in support of a slave revolt. Brown was sentenced to be hanged, and his trial and execution became a rallying point for both sides of the slavery question.

Brown had a history of radical anti-slavery actions. Before his raid on Harpers Ferry he had gone to Kansas and fought against the pro-slavery raiding parties from Missouri in an effort to keep slavery out of the Kansas territory. During his trial, he was sometimes characterized as being insane, however the authors provide evidence that Brown was not insane in the modern legal sense as he clearly understood what he was doing and the possible results of his actions. Brown was certainly intensely opposed to slavery, and the authors present a possible psychological cause for his feelings by applying Freudian analysis to a memoir by Brown describing his childhood.

Thomas Jefferson

Thomas Jefferson was a representative from Virginia to the Second Continental Congress, which formally declared independence from England in 1776. Jefferson wrote the initial draft of the formal declaration, which was then partially edited by John Adams and Benjamin Franklin before being presented to the Congress, which proposed additional changes before adopting it. Early drafts of the declaration exist, which the

authors compare to the final version in a demonstration of how documentary evidence can be used to show the mindset of its author.

Andrew Jackson

Andrew Jackson was a frontier lawyer who entered into politics and was eventually elected President of the United States. Although a myth about Jackson arose about his plain-spoken and rugged frontier demeanor, the authors demonstrate that Jackson himself strove to be a gentleman and cultivated his connections with influential friends in the East.

Frederick Jackson Turner

Frederick Jackson Turner was a historian who developed the "frontier" theory of American history. Turner argued that the distinctly American experience of living on a frontier and living an independent, self-reliant lifestyle directly affected the social and political makeup of the country. While subsequent historians found fault with turner's theory, he was influential in that he was among the first historians to attempt to apply a larger theoretical framework to the interpretation of history.

Karl Bodmer

Karl Bodmer was a painter who accompanied the Prussian Prince Maximilian on a river journey up the Missouri in the 1830s. Bodmer painted several realistic portraits of Native Americans which the authors use as example of how pictorial evidence can be used in historical research.

Huey Long

Huey Long was a popular Democratic governor and senator from Louisiana in the 1930s. Although popular with voters, Long had a reputation among his colleagues for his ruthlessness. He was an ambitious politician who might have run for President had he not been shot and killed by the relative of a former political opponent.

Theodore Roosevelt

Theodore Roosevelt was President at the time of the implementation of Federal meat inspection laws. Roosevelt built a reputation as a hard-talking, energetic man who challenged the large industrial trusts, and he portrayed the new meat inspection laws as part of this effort. The authors demonstrate that the laws came about through a complex series of compromises and deals, demonstrating how political history is often more complicated than often presented.

Upton Sinclair

Upton Sinclair was the author of "The Jungle," an account of the conditions inside several American meat-packing plants that shocked the public and led to the adoption of stricter meat inspection laws.

Jacob Riis

Jacob Riis was a Norwegian immigrant to the United States who found work as a journalist after a time living in poverty. Riis wrote an influential book called "How the Other Half Lives" which used photographs to illustrate the deplorable living conditions of poor people living in lower Manhattan. The authors use Riis' choice of photographic subjects to demonstrate how pictorial evidence can reflect the attitudes and intentions of the photographer.

Sacco and Vanzetti

Sacco and Vanzetti were two Italian immigrants who were convicted of robbery and murder and executed in Massachusetts in the 1920s. Although no direct evidence connected the men to crime, they aroused suspicion because of their anarchist political beliefs. The authors use the men's case as an example of how an isolated incident can illustrate larger social attitudes.

Harry Truman

Harry Truman was President in 1945 when the United States dropped two atomic bombs on Japan, leading to the end of World War II. Although the ultimate decision to use the bombs was Truman's, the authors demonstrate that the decision was the result of a larger bureaucratic organization.

Richard Nixon

Richard Nixon was a former Republican President who resigned after it was revealed that he knew about the break-in at a Democratic office at the Watergate Hotel and had tried to thwart the investigation of it.

Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein

Woodward and Bernstein were reporters for the Washington Post who broke the story of the connection between the Watergate break-in and Richard Nixon's re-election campaign.

Objects/Places

Virginia Colony

This is an agricultural colony founded in the early 1600s what is now the state of Virginia. The colony was intended as a commercial venture, but struggled under an economy that encouraged cash crop production to the exclusion of food production.

Salem Village

This is a village in the Massachusetts Colony where several witch trials were held in the late 1700s after a group of adolescent girls began displaying unusual behavior and accused other villagers of using witchcraft to torment them.

Second Continental Congress

This is the meeting of colonial representatives in 1776 in Philadelphia where the Declaration of Independence was adopted.

Declaration of Independence

This is the document adopted by the Second Continental Congress formally declaring colonial independence from England. It was written largely by Thomas Jefferson

Tennessee

This is the southern frontier territory where Andrew Jackson practiced as a lawyer and sometimes speculated in land before being involved in politics.

Harpers Ferry, Virginia

This is the location of a Federal arsenal that was raided by John Brown and a group of his followers in an attempt to lead a slave rebellion in 1759.

Federal Writer's Project

This is a national program in the 1930s that gave work to unemployed writers. The slave narratives described in Chapter 7 were largely produced from interviewers working for the Federal Writer's Project.

Braintree, Massachusetts

This is the location of the daylight robbery and killing that led to the arrest of Sacco and Vanzetti.

Lower East Side

This ia a neighborhood on the lower east side of Manhattan Island in New York City, which was documented in the book "How the Other Half Lives."

The Jungle

This is a book by Upton Sinclair that described the filthy conditions in American meat-packing plants, which led to the implementation of stricter federal inspection laws.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki

These are two Japanese cites that were devastated by atomic bombs dropped by American forces in 1945 during World War II.

Watergate Hotel

This is the hotel in Washington, D.C. where an office of the Democratic National Committee was located. The office was broken into by burglars connected to Richard Nixon's re-election committee. When this connection was revealed in a series of articles by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, President Nixon resigned his office. The entire affair is often referred to as "Watergate" after the hotel where it started.

Themes

The Reliability of Historical Evidence

Throughout the book, the authors are continually demonstrating how the historian must assess the reliability of the available evidence. Documentary evidence, paintings, photographs and other types of evidence are all produced from the point of view of their creators. This point of view must be accounted for when looking for a "true" account of historical events as they actually happened.

As one example, the authors present a passage written by Captain John Smith, who led the Virginia Colony in the 17th century. Smith witnessed a Native American ritual of some kind and described it in writing. As the authors demonstrate, however, Smith's account was given in terms that were familiar to him and would have been familiar to his readers. He did not know the intended meaning of the ritual or the traditional roles of the people involved. He simply described the events as they appeared on the surface. His account may still be useful to a modern historian, but the events may need to be exmined further using other sources to get a full picture.

Another example the authors offer is the oral history project that recorded the experiences of former slaves in the early 20th century. They demonstrate that at least one of the former slaves interviewed presented a different type of account to an interviewer who was white than the one she gave to a black interviewer. She may have been completely truthful in each interview, but she selected the things she chose to speak about to suit the person to whom she was speaking. Neither narrative presented the full picture.

The slave narrative example also raises the issue of what kind of evidence gets preserved. The former slaves who were interviewed in the 1930s were mostly still children during the time of slavery, and may have remembered things differently than adults at the time. Those who had lived into the 1930s were also in their 80s and 90s, perhaps outliving former slaves whose harsh treatment or life of hard labor had caused them to die at a younger age. In addition to assessing the reliability of the evidence that it is available, the historian should also determine how representative the evidence is of the full picture.

The Role of the Historian

"History is a narrative reconstruction of past events," the authors explain, and creating this reconstruction is the basic task of the historian. Using the variety of types of evidence such as pictures, documents, personal accounts, photographs, etc., the historian uses the techniques described by the authors to determine what happened, who was involved, where events took place, what led to the events and what came afterward.

Reconstruction of the past is only the basic task, however. The larger role of the historian is to locate the events relative to the larger historical perspective. For example, the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti is well-documented. The description of the crimes, the testimony of witnesses and the judicial decisions are all written down and easily reconstructed in a narrative. The historian's job is to take this reconstruction and look for answers to the questions it raises, such as why these men were convicted on such flimsy evidence and why subsequent courts did not reverse the conviction or order a new trial. The investigation of these questions leads the historian into an examination of the national attitudes toward immigrants at the time of the trial, particularly immigrants who held certain political beliefs. Identifying the wider causes and implications of historical events is the prime role of the historian.

The History of Historical Methods

While "After the Fact" contains a good deal of information on actual events from American history, it also presents an account of the changes in historical methods and the ways in which historians interpret events. The historical treatment of the Salem witch trials is one example. Probably all modern historians looking at the witch trials begin with the assumption that there was not actually anything supernatural behind them. This was not always the case, the authors suggest. Only in the 19th century was the subject really taken up objectively. At that time, the popular theory was that the entire affair was brought about by a few girls playing a prank which then got out of hand, leading to the succession of accusations and trials.

This theory may have some truth, the authors admit, but it does not answer all the questions raised by the narrative of events. Some subsequent historians have applied developments in psychology to point out that many of the behaviors displayed by the supposedly possessed girls in Salem are similar to those observed in modern patients with various mental conditions. Other historians have applied modern analytical techniques to plot out where the accusers and the accused in Salem lived, suggesting that economic and social factors played a role in the trials.

Another example offered by the authors is the development of historical theories. Frederick Jackson Turner sought to apply his theory about how frontier life affected the national American character, drawing some interesting conclusions. Subsequent historians challenged his conclusions and proposed theories of their own. These theories themselves were then tested and challenged, in a continuous process. This is how it should be, the authors argue. Historical methods and theories change over time as new evidence is revealed, new analytical methods are developed, and older notions are challenged and revised. The process contributes to a greater and more comprehensive understanding of history.

Style

Perspective

The main objective of "After the Fact" is to demonstrate how various widely-accepted methods are used by historians to interpret historical events. The authors are both historians and professors of History and they bring their professional perspective to the subject matter. They take an academic approach to the description of each method, explaining how it is used appropriately and outlining the advantages and disadvantages that each method presents.

"After the Fact" is both a textbook on historical methods and an actual history book that covers several topics in American history. As such, the authors mix a historical perspective with a modern one, using examples from the past to demonstrate to current historians how they can be interpreted using modern methods. At the same time, the book describes how some of the methods they describe gained importance among historians, adding another level of perspective to the book.

All of the examples used by the authors are from American history, which is the area of expertise the authors themselves hold. As such, the book takes a distinctly American perspective by choosing significant events from the nation's history. The choice of an American perspective indicates that the authors expect their readers will probably also be American and will be at least somewhat familiar with the subjects that they cover.

Tone

"After the Fact" is presented as a text book about historical methods, but it is less formal than a typical text book. It relies strongly on examples from actual history, and spends considerable time explaining and interpreting these examples. The authors take a serious approach to these historical segments, but also digress at times and offer their own personal perspectives and opinions. The result is a tone that is often lighter than usual for a history text.

The authors also demonstrate that they prefer some historical methods over others. While they are generally even-handed in their descriptions of the various techniques they describe, some, such as psychological history, are described in greater depth than others, giving the book a distinctly personal tone.

The informality of the book is also a result of the sometimes humorous exercizes they use to invite the reader to undertake. For example, they present an account of a modern baseball game as it might have been written by someone from the 17th century in order to demonstrate how documents from the past reflect the viewpoints of the people who produced them. These passages involve the reader in the interpretation of history by appealing to well-known subjects and help keep the tone practical, but informal.

Structure

"After the Fact" is made up of an extended prologue followed by 13 chapters, each one addressing a single topic from American history. The chapters follow a generally chronological arrangement, beginning in the 17th century with the settlement of the Virginia Colony and continuing up to the Watergate crisis in the 1970s. The Prologue and Chapters 1-3 concern the colonial period, Chapters 4-7 cover the 18th century, and Chapters 8-13 discuss topics from the 20th century. Chapter 7 spans the 18th and 19th centuries to some degree, as it discusses the efforts in the early 20th century to document the experiences of former slaves from the 18th century. The book was originally published in two volumes, with the prologue and Chapter 7 repeated in each volume.

Footnotes are used only occasionally and quoted passages are not specifically cited. The authors instead include a short section after each chapter called "Additional Reading" in which they provide the sources for the information used in the main chapter and make suggestions for additional texts an interested reader might consult. The book is not structured as a complete text of American history, as it only covers selected topics. It is meant as a demonstration of how certain historical methods can be applied to topics in history. Each chapter goes into some depth outlining the topic under discussion, framed by an explanation of the method being used, the history of that method of interpretation, and often the authors' opinions on the method's usefulness.

The book is illustrated with photographs and drawings, which are often used as the subject of discussion within the text.

Quotes

"In effect, historians are seen as couriers between the past and the present. Like all good couriers, they are expected simply to deliver messages without adding to them. This everyday view of history is profoundly misleading" (Prologue, p. xiii).

"In adopting a perspective different from any held by the historical participants, we are employing one of the most basic tactics of sociology. Sociologists have long recognized that every society functions, in part, through structures and devices that remain unperceived by its members" (Chapter 1, p. 9).

"Paradoxically, the most obvious facet of Salem life that the historian must recreate is also the most insubstantial: what ministers of the period would have called the "invisible world." Demons, familiars and witches all shaped the world of seventeenth-century New England, just as they shaped the worlds of Britain and Europe" (Chapter 2, p. 35).

"The better historians are at their craft, the more likely they will focus their readers' attention on the historical scene itself and not on the supporting documents. the more polished the historical narrative, the less the audience will be aware of how much labor has gone into the reconstruction" (Chapter 3, p. 56).

"The novelty of Turner's essay resulted not from his discovery of any previously unknown facts, but because he proposed a new theory, one that took old facts and placed them in an entirely different light" (Chapter 4, p. 84).

"Bodmer's watercolors are an example of the pictorial material available to the historian for virtually any period or subject. Yet it is probably safe to say that historians, by and large, do not make use of such material as much as they might" (Chapter 5, p. 115).

"And what of the man who triggered all those passions? Had John Brown foreseen that his quixotic crusade would reap such a whirlwind of violence? on that issue both his contemporaries and historians have been sharply divided" (Chapter 6, p. 141).

"But even Botkin, for all his enthusiasm, recognized that the narratives could not simply be taken at face value. Like other primary source materials, they need ot be viewed in terms of the context in which they originated" (Chapter 7, p. 180).

"If the artless photographers of family life unconsciously shape the records they leave behind, then we must expect those who self-consciously use photography ot be even more interpretive with their materials" (Chapter 8. p. 216).

"The thunder clap that shattered the calm was the publication of 'The Jungle'. the book told a lurid tale about Chicago's meatpacking industry. It's author, Upton Sinclair, was not only a reformer but a socialist as well" (Chapter 9, p. 234).

"Even a brief examination of the trial record indicates that the prosecutors had a flimsy case, flawed by irregularities in procedure that arose before the trial began. the day

Chief Stewart ordered officer Connolly to arrest Sacco and Vanzetti he had no evidence, other than his suspicion of foreign radicals, to associate either man with the crimes" (Chapter 10, p. 266).

"Between those extremes - heroes who stand above and direct the social forces of the day and heroes who act as instruments of historical laws - there are, of course, intermediate points of view" (Chapter 11, p. 300).

"Cultural historian have recognized that trends in one field usually have parallels throughout a society. the movements toward organization and bureaucracy in science was no exception" (Chapter 12, p. 325).

"Whatever one's personal path to the past, once there, it is an intriguing place to spend time. and hte only self-respecting way back to the present leaves each of us with the responsibility of fashioning our own route out" (Chapter 13, p. 385).

Topics for Discussion

What kinds of things must a historian take into account when looking at pictorial evidence?

How can ordinary documents reveal larger elements of a society? What examples do the authors give?

What appear to be the authors' own preferred methods of historical interpretation? How can you deduce this?

What is the role of historical theory in the practice of history? What are some of the theories the authors examine?

What is the role of a historian, according to the authors?

The authors at times express their personal views regarding events or historical sources. Does this affect how we should interpret their book?

What are some modern examples of events that might be interpreted using historical methods? How do you think they will be viewed by future historians?