

Lies My Teacher Told Me Study Guide

Lies My Teacher Told Me by James Loewen

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Plot Summary

Lies My Teacher Told Me is an analysis of how high school courses in American history and, more particularly, the textbooks used in teaching them are a disservice to students and the nation the texts and courses seek to protect.

Lies My Teacher Told Me is the fruit of James W. Loewen's two years of studying and comparing the contents of a dozen high school American history textbooks and the way they are used in teaching the subject today. Loewen begins by looking at how the textbooks treat Woodrow Wilson and Helen Keller: by turning them into rather sterile heroes stripped of whatever interesting facts certain forces in society (later identified as American Legion) find objectionable and taboo. Readers are awakened to how little they know about these famous names and are alerted to the fact much of history receives this same kind of cleansing.

Loewen next sets up how race is systematically misrepresented in textbooks. Textbooks skip over the verifiable "discoveries" of America before Columbus, and paint him as a scholarly explorer, hiding his more important role in genocide and slavery. The role played by European diseases in clearing the Americas of Natives is downplayed in the Caribbean and at Plymouth, where the "Pilgrim Fathers" at Plymouth are, like Columbus, mythologized and absolved of wrong. Notably, both enjoy annual festivals that perpetuate the myths. The untold story of the sorrowful fate of Native Americans everywhere at the hands of European Americans is revealed, showing how belief in the oneness and inferiority of Indian society and frontier stories reversing the roles of aggressor and victim go unchallenged. The US would be poorer had Native Americans not made the contributions which textbooks cover up.

Having revealed the racial tension that runs throughout colonial and early US history vis-a-vis Native Americans, Loewen turns to the plight of African Americans. Racism remains invisible in the textbooks, both as it is used to justify the institution of slavery and to demand its abolition. Slavery turns overtly racial for Europeans only from the time it becomes profitable (Columbus' time), and by the 19th century, it is worth fighting for as the backbone of the South's cotton-based economy. Northern whites have bought into the notion of black inferiority, it is surprising they would join the fight. Abolitionism is made in the figure of John Brown to appear crazy, while Abraham Lincoln's position cannot be pinned down because his eloquent words are not allowed to speak for themselves. He is a moderate, wobbly on black rights, dedicated above all to preserving the Union, and, when assassinated, relegated to a pedestal. The victories of Reconstruction, limited as they are by the actions of unrepentant ex-Confederates, are turned into the defeat of carpetbaggers and scalawags, in a way that will not offend the white majority.

Other taboo subjects are similarly buried in the textbooks. Social stratification is an obvious reality that is not discussed, leaving students lost in a society that would appear to help the rich get richer and the poor get poorer - except that is not the American way. Ecology suffers the same sad fate. Post-World War II government snafus in handling

foreign policy and the Civil Rights movement are portrayed as rosy government triumphs, while Vietnam and other near-current events slip "down the Memory Hole" so the story can end with uplifting, super-patriotic predictions of ongoing American progress. The result is that history, as a subject, appears irrelevant.

Having seen *how* history is misrepresented, Loewen turns briefly to explaining *why* it is handled this way. Textbook publishing is too costly a big business to risk upsetting parents, politicians, or special interest groups, so the safe pattern presented in past books is copied, thereby avoiding controversy, satisfying the majority, and turning the students off. Teachers find it safer and easier to use the approved textbooks, despite their errors, than to experiment. Many are unlettered in history and could not do so at any rate. Hope lies only in individuals who can learn how to discern historical truth in what they see and hear. This alone will create an intelligent citizenry moving forward.



Chapter 1,

Chapter 1, Summary and Analysis

Lies My Teacher Told Me is an analysis of how high school courses in American history and, more particularly, the textbooks used in teaching them are a disservice to students and the nation the texts and courses seek to protect.

"Handicapped by History: The Process of Hero-making" examines how American history textbooks make flesh-and-blood individuals degenerate into the pious, perfect creatures. Two 20th-century icons open the examination: Woodrow Wilson and Helen Keller, an important president and a "little person" about whom teachers love to talk. "Herofication" distorts both.

All recalls the movie scene where blind and deaf Keller spells "water" on Anne Sullivan's hand and all accept the moral that anyone can be helped to reach his or her potential. Few college students, however, know that Keller graduates college, studies how blindness is statistically concentrated in the lower class, and uses her fame to effect change. Keller becomes a socialist and supports progressive causes. Whether one agrees with Keller's positions or not, Americans should know the radical she is: few do.

What college students do *not* know about Wilson is even more remarkable, and includes: the Palmer Raids; his "unknown war with Russia"; and, his Latin American adventures. Dedicated to colonialism, racism, and anticommunism, Wilson refuses to recognize the Soviet Union, helps keep it out of the peace negotiations, and refuses Vietnamese self-determination. Never mind that these actions shape later anti-Americanism, the textbooks ignore them, cast them in a favorable light, and/or use the passive voice to insulate Wilson from unheroic and unethical deeds; a common device.

Domestically, Wilson uses executive order to segregate the federal government, closes the Democratic Party to blacks, and sets the tone for racial violence by whites, intensified by the release of David W. Griffith's infamous film, *Birth of a Nation*. Only four of twelve textbooks recognize Wilson's bigotry, and only one portrays it as a "black mark" on his presidency. Congress, war pressure, the "red scare", unionism, illness, and an attorney general run amok all excuse Wilson's suppression of civil rights. Herofication leaves textbooks hard pressed to explain why Wilson's handpicked successor is crushed in the 1920 election. They postulate the electorate wants a "return to normalcy", never hinting that sixty-four percent agree with Keller: Wilson is "the greatest individual disappointment the world has ever known!".

When Michael Frisch asks first-year college students to name first ten pre-Civil War non-presidents, generals, statesmen, etc., Betsy Ross usually heads the list, although her myth dates from 1876, when descendants build a tourist attraction. Frisch suggests Ross plays the Virgin Mary to Washington's Father of the County, regularly reenacted in elementary school pageants. Whether this interpretation is valid or not, it shows how

social archetypes develop. Wilson's archetype - an idealist foiled by an isolationist Senate - guarantees institutions are named after him.

Natural history museum curators know visitors bring archetypes with them, and some design exhibits to disprove inaccuracies. Textbook authors, teachers, and moviemakers ought to do likewise. Why should young Americans *not* know Wilson sends US troops to fight Russians on their soil and is a racist? Why should they *not* know Keller is a socialist? Since the early 1920s, the American Legion has opposed including in textbooks intended for immature pupils anything that suggest blunders, foibles, or frailties in heroes and patriots. Publishers see to it that blemishes are omitted. Much will be said about this systematic omission in the following chapters. Sex, religion, and social class are taboos, so Keller cannot be shown fighting for equality in health care. Wilson, widely despised in the 1920s, has been whitewashed by adulation since World War II, as policymakers of both parties follow his lead in undertaking foreign interventions.

Keller says people do not like to think because thinking requires reaching sometimes-unpleasant conclusions. Most people shy away from conflict. Bland textbooks with flat characters promote classroom harmony, and one ought not to speak ill of the dead. One should never mind that this "Disney version of history" prevents students from maturing intellectually, presents unrealistically high role models, and impedes the understanding of causality. Most first-year college students avoid listing "establishment heroes". Some, nihilistically, have no heroes, while others name underdogs. By making the great people of American history into "goody-goody" stick figures rather than "merely good", textbooks do students a disservice. Statements such as, "If Martin Luther King were alive, he'd - " suggest a contemporary need for lifelike, useable role models.



Chapter 2,

Chapter 2, Summary and Analysis

"1493: The True Importance of Christopher Columbus", disputes the canonization of America's first great hero. All twelve textbooks fill many pages about the watershed year 1492, with erroneous or unverifiable material. They overlook many pre-Columbian visitors and fail to analyze the 15th-century cultural changes that make Europeans respond to Columbus' "discovery". The Renaissance and Crusades are rightly mentioned but not put in context; while wrongly, Columbus and his sponsors are portrayed as humanists. Europe's population is shown as expanding and in need of increased trade and the Turks block the spice routes - maintaining the false archetype of a vaguely threatening Islam.

The Age of Exploration is second only to the agricultural revolution in its importance to humanity, because it opens 500 years of European domination. The textbooks, however, are vague on why it happens. They omit how it is facilitated by advances in military technology and bureaucracy, double-entry bookkeeping, mechanical printing, Christianity's blessing of those who amass wealth and dominate other people, and the decimation of native populations by diseases. Subliminally, students learn "we" (Europeans) are smarter and domination is natural rather than cultural. The theme of how students should be thinking about why the West dominates the world today is introduced. Students do not think about this question because their textbooks avoid examining the process.

Textbook authors concede Prince Henry the Navigator's precedent but seem unaware of the ancient Phoenician and Egyptian trade routes because they dare not oppose the social archetype that modern technology is an exclusively European development. That Henry is inspired by ancient information (preserved and expanded by Muslims) goes unnoted, denying readers an opportunity to study cultural "efflorescence" and challenge "Eurocentrism." An extensive table of explorations from 70,000 BCE to 1492 CE is ignored in favor of retelling the familiar tale.

Turning to Columbus, the textbooks present cut-and-dried answers that glorify him and avoid controversy. Except for the date he lands and the names of his ships, nothing can be trusted - but is stated as absolute fact. Details of local color are added. Only one textbook perpetuates Washington Irving's 1828 hoax that Columbus' contemporaries believe the world is flat but that he is a man of science. Another eleven fail to debunk the theory and many teachers believe and relay it. The enhancements serve to induce readers to identify with a "man of vision, energy, resourcefulness, and courage", and a dangerous archetype is created: those who direct social enterprises are more intelligent than those nearer the bottom.

Ignored is Columbus' true contribution: subjugating or exterminating the indigenous peoples, introducing the transatlantic slave trade, and creating a "racial underclass" in



America. At first impressed by the Arawaks, Columbus kidnaps ten to twenty-five to drum up enthusiasm for a massive, heavily armed second voyage that treats the "primitives" as the earthlings are treated in H. G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*. The Arawaks go from passive resistance to open rebellion, which only provides an excuse for a brutal subjugation. Textbooks ignore the rich primary sources that show how disruption of the Indian ecosystem and smallpox, introduced in 1516, reduce the estimated three million natives to 12,000. Only one textbook mentions genocide, but it omits Columbus' role.

Columbus' sending 5,000 slaves across the Atlantic and allowing his lieutenants to rape native women set the standard for other nations. As Native American nations are depleted, slaves are imported from Africa. Only half the textbooks mention slaveholding by the Spanish and only four come close to suggesting Columbus' involvement. Discovery of gold on Haiti brings Portugal, France, Holland, and Britain to prey on the Americas as brutally as Spain. John Smith in 1624 bases his get-tough policy in Virginia on Columbus.

Textbooks wholly overlook the "Columbian exchange": the reverse flow of materiel and ideas to Europe. It contributes to the Reformation and helps Europeans begin thinking of themselves as a "white" race. While selling Queen Isabella on his exploits, Columbus points out the Indians' admirable traits, but quickly terms them cruel and stupid when justifying his own brutality. "Cognitive dissonance" - thinking badly about those one exploits - is a useful tool for justifying bad behavior, comes to the Americas with Columbus, and reappears throughout American history, as Loewen points out in later chapters. American crops help northern Europe's population explode, which shifts power away from the Mediterranean. Syphilis is introduced, but so are over 200 Indian drugs. Gold and silver transform Europe from a land-based measure of wealth and erode the economies of the Middle East and of Africa, which is left with only one commodity: slaves. None of these geopolitical implications of Columbus' voyages is mentioned in any American textbook, because "Eurocentrism" cannot allow a west-to-east flow of ideas or wealth.

Textbooks falsely suggest because Columbus is good, (white) Americans are good. He should be shown as a balance of heroic navigator and great plunderer. Worshipful treatment indoctrinates students to a mindless and inappropriate endorsement of colonialism. The year 1492 marks a meeting of three cultures rather than a discovery by one. The "New World" is new only to Europeans and its "discovery" is a misnomer. Explorers have always needed the help of Natives: Columbus Prince Henry, Cartier, Drake, Lewis and Clark, and Admiral Peary - but this is nowhere acknowledged in the textbooks, where only Western conquerors are lauded.

Chapter 2 concludes with a comparison of two texts, one a baseless Columbus myth about getting gold from Isabella on his third try, and the other a true story of how an Arawak *cacique* warns about the source of Spanish atrocities. The first is quoted from a textbook, while the second could find no place in one because it humanizes the victims. In an era when European colonialism is no more, European Americans must stop thinking of themselves as superior, and telling the full story of Columbus could contribute to this. Textbooks offend Native Americans and people of color, overlook a

colorful idealist (Las Casas, whose writings in the 19th century Simon Bolivar uses to justify wars of liberation in Latin America), and glorify an oppressor. Students do not learn to ask the important questions and grow bored with "feel-good" history.



Chapter 3,

Chapter 3, Summary and Analysis

Loewen opens "The Truth about the First Thanksgiving" with disappointment that students never suggest 30,000 BCE as when the current US is first settled, but 1620. This shows that the Thanksgiving myth, the mythic origin of the nation, is all that matters. Students recall the religious persecution of the Pilgrims in England, the Mayflower Compact as a forerunner to the Constitution, and Squanto helping the Pilgrims to survive - but nothing about a plague.

Living under conditions that protect against the transmission of disease, Indians and Pacific aborigines are "a remarkably healthy race" before Columbus but ripe for infection by foreign microbes. British and French fishermen begin the New England infection in 1617, which within three years wipes out ninety to ninety-six percent of the coastal inhabitants (compared with thirty percent of Europeans in the "Black Plague" of 1348-50). Smallpox rages for fifteen years, killing *some* European Americans but *most* Native Americans. Whites see God as being on their side, granting them abandoned lands, while many Indians grieve their god/gods has/have abandoned them and either convert or kill themselves. Scholars debate statistics, but America may have had a population of 100 million in 1492 versus Europe's seventy million. The plague allows Europeans to settle America as they never could the more populous Asia and Africa. Many refuse to believe Natives could suffer ninety-five percent mortality, so textbooks portray Europeans settling a vast "virgin continent", either omitting numbers or any reference to disease or selecting an arbitrary number, which they present as an absolute. This denies students any sense of the furious scholarly debate in the 1960s-70s. One text mentions an epidemic but describes the situation blandly (an example of "dominance through mentioning"). The gore that high school students would relish *and recall* is omitted, so facts fail to "stick".

Textbooks incorrectly portray the Pilgrims as they do the plague, ducking the historical controversy about how they miss their original goal of Virginia and wind up in Massachusetts. The excitement students might find in contrasting possibilities is sacrificed to the need to avoid controversy. Each textbook picks a reason and sticks with it. Those that admit a highjacking scenario concentrate on the democratic spirit of the Mayflower Compact, a graceful solution that puts the Pilgrims in a dishonorable light. The navigation error and storm excuses are implausible, but both leave the Pilgrims pure at heart. Because the framers of the Constitution pay little heed to the Mayflower Compact, it hardly deserves the attention textbook authors lavish on it. The textbooks' pious treatment introduces the archetype of "American exceptionalism". Plymouth allows American culture and textbooks to ignore Virginia's founding goal of making profits and subduing the Natives (including the 1623 poisoning of 250 leaders toasting the closing of a treaty). Virginians bicker, fail to plant, and turn to cannibalism in an effort to survive - hardly the heroism a new nation requires. Textbooks mention Virginia and the Spanish settlements, but devote fifty percent more space to

Massachusetts. Thanks to this - and the Thanksgiving holiday - students remember the Pilgrims as founding fathers.

The Pilgrims hardly "start from scratch" in isolated New England. Landing at Provincetown, they scout the area and select Plymouth, which the Native Americans clear and plant before dying out. As whites do throughout the hemisphere, the Pilgrims pitch camp and appropriate fields. A colonist's journal confesses how on the second day they rob the houses and desecrate a grave, but this does not make the textbooks. Instead, the legend of an English-speaking Indian, Squanto, is shown teaching them to plant the crops that help them survive so they can celebrate a feast of thanksgiving in the fall of 1621. The textbooks fail to explain how Squanto learns English (in slavery) in favor of reducing him to an instrument of God's providence. This is reinforced every fall when elementary school children enact the *First Thanksgiving* morality play. Students are encouraged to be like the Pilgrims: good, unquestioning citizens and hard workers. The ritual dinner shows all the signs of myth as defined by Mircea Eliade and of civil religion as described by Robert Bellah, with the Indians marginalized as nearly naked guests of the starved Pilgrims rather than as those responsible for their survival. In fact, the foods served are Native American, East Coast Indians celebrate an autumnal harvest feast centuries before the "Pilgrim Fathers" arrive, and the modern celebration dates only from 1863, when President Lincoln sought to build patriotism. The notion "we" advanced (white) people provide for primitives continues into textbook descriptions of the benign care given black slaves on plantations and the myth of generous US foreign aid. This theme of misinformation is developed going forward.

The ideology of Thanksgiving is embarrassing, implying only American culture enjoys God's backing. It plays into Manifest Destiny, which allows mistreatment of Mexicans, Native Americans, peoples of the Pacific, and even Jews and Catholics. Students see little reason to study other cultures. In 1970, the Wampanoags select Frank James to speak for the tribe at the 350th anniversary of the Pilgrims landing, but when he proposes exposing the historical truth about grave robbing and massacre, he is forbidden to speak by the Massachusetts Department of Commerce. No more than the feel-good minutiae of Squanto's helpfulness may be transmitted. Feel-bad history is not necessary; but honest and inclusive history should prevail, allowing students to read both sides and discuss the implications for their life today. They could be made more tolerant rather than more ethnocentric. "Truth should be held sacred, at whatever cost."



Chapter 4,

Chapter 4, Summary and Analysis

Chapter 4 boldly opens declaring American Indians are "the most lied-about subset of our population", with textbooks presenting them, unapologetically, exclusively through white eyes. Textbooks have improved but still utilize culturally insensitive words and seek to comfort the white settlers' descendants. Acknowledging "the Original Sin" of how they have treated Indians inevitably gives whites "red eyes". Only two textbooks, however, devote over five pages to pre-contact Native societies and the authors avoid portraying Natives as "regular folks" with whom students might identify. Wanting quick answers, they ignore fresh information from specialists, and incorporate the discredited theory of a "primitive-to-civilized" continuum. Loewen notes Hitler and Columbus both demonstrate how formally "civilized" societies are more likely to resort to savage violence than "primitive" ones.

After contact with Europeans and Africans, Native societies change rapidly, both materially and spiritually. Most textbooks concentrate on the colorful Plains Indians, whose culture shifts radically after the Spanish introduce the horse, but they are just the tip of a cultural iceberg. Atlantic coast Natives' sophisticated skill sets atrophy when Europeans persuade them to specialize in the fur and slave trades. They cannot be termed "victims" because they seek their own self-interest and decide what alien cultural elements to adopt, modify, or ignore. They see the military and cultural threat. Europeans play tribes off against one another and arm them unequally, leading to an escalation in Indian warfare. As this and plagues wipe out smaller tribes, survivors merge with larger ones for protection, and new confederations and nations develop as ethnic melting pots.

Many tribes expand the existing practice of enslaving defeated enemies and sell them to Europeans. Ponce de Leon seeks not a fountain of youth but slaves for Hispaniola. New England's first African slaves arrive in 1638 in exchange for Indian slaves. Indians and Africans unite in the 1712 New York City slave revolt. South Carolina in 1708 has 3,960 free whites versus 4,100 African slaves, 1,400 Indian slaves, and 120 indentured servants, and Charleston in a single year exports at least 10,000 Indian slaves. In 1844, John Sutter's manager extols the obedience and humility of California Indian slaves, and whites hold Navajos and Apaches through the middle of the Civil War.

War and slavery destabilize Indian settlements. As they abandon agriculture, forget ancient skills, and grow dependent on trade for food, their cultures fall apart. Students should understand the anthropological terms "syncretism" and "cultural imperialism", but no textbook mentions either. Textbooks also ignore how contact changes European societies. Instead, they adhere to the archetype of a frontier line of whites pushing the Indians further west when, in reality, Indians, whites, and blacks work and sometimes live together for hundreds of years. Documents from the Virginia colony show many white and black newcomers choose an Indian lifestyle. Benjamin Franklin declares, "No



European who has tasted Savage Life can afterwards bear to live in our societies". Europeans try to stop the embarrassing flow, but whites who defect become cultural heroes (e.g., Daniel Boone), and African Americans find it a way to escape slavery. Stopping them is as futile as the communists' Iron Curtain across Europe.

Franklin explains the attraction: counsels of sages govern without force or hierarchy, individuals - including women - are amazingly free, leadership is gained democratically by merit and is retained only while esteem remains. Such Native ideas may have made their way to Europe to influence the social philosophers who in turn influence Franklin, Jefferson, and Madison. Scholars debate the extent to which 150 years of contact with the Iroquois League teaches colonials to govern a large domain, but in 1740, they suggest the bickering English colonies form a league like theirs and Franklin pleads for the Albany Plan of Union on the grounds Englishmen ought to be able to do what savages have. While this is rejected, the framers of both the Articles of Confederation and Constitution speak openly of Iroquois advice and many concepts in the Bill of Rights are owed to Indian example. How else can one explain them, coming from people whose ancestors have butchered one another over religion for a millennium?

For a century after the Revolution, Americans acknowledge Indian influences. When rebels dress as Indians at the Boston Tea Party and in anti-rent protests in the Hudson River valley in the 1840s, they do so not to create scapegoats but to honor a symbol of liberty. Only one textbook suggests any Native intellectual influence on European Americans and, amazingly, even non-controversial cultural contributions (food, words, and place names) are omitted; apparently because this would admit Natives are not "primitives". Ignoring them, however, eliminates much of what sets America apart from Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries. America's syncretism and acculturation is a two-way street except in high school textbooks. Twenty-five years after the Indian Historical Press in 1970 objects to textbooks' failure to describe Indian religions, philosophies, and contributions to thought, texts still make Native religions sound like "make-believe". While anthropologist Frederick Turner holds Native life views are healthier than Judeo-Christian ones, no textbook could even suggest this.

Textbooks overlook the "custom" of white men to rape Native women, but spread the archetypal *Little House on the Prairie* view of peaceful white settlers being brutalized by Indians. This makes it impossible to explain the virtually continual, bloody war after 1815. Textbooks no longer blame the Natives and admit brutality on both sides, but do not condemn the conquest as they do slavery. They dodge the question, which lets Western movies and novels like the "Wagons West" series by Dana Fuller Ross preserve the stereotype. College students, therefore, when asked, still characterize the Indians as "savages".

The Pequot War of 1636-37 illustrates the kind of warfare Europeans introduce, which horrifies the whites' Narragansett allies (annihilation has never been their goal in battle). Whites scoff at Indians' failure to fight to the death. Neither attitude is reflected in any textbook. The most violent Indian war, "King Philip's War" (1676) begins when whites no longer need Natives economically. In proportion to population, more die in this conflict than any other American war, but the textbooks overlook or downplay it. Enslavement



by whites leads to uprisings in present-day New Mexico in 1599 and spreads to the Southeast, where it retards Spanish settlement for a century. It largely ceases with the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee. Admittedly, there are too many wars to deal with them all, but the way the textbooks minimize them misrepresents history.

The textbooks minimize the "Indianness" of wars fought in 1600-1754 by England, France, and Spain. Even the Seven Years War (1754-63), called in America the "French and Indian War", where Indians do most of the fighting for both sides, is treated Eurocentrically. Textbooks ignore how the British Proclamation of 1763, forbidding colonists from seizing Indian lands beyond the Appalachians, helps build resolve to rebel against the crown; how in 1775, colonists send Franklin to appeal for help to the Iroquois before to the French; and how Native Americans fight in the Revolution, the War of 1812, the Mexican War, and the Civil War, generally siding against the United States, figuring they will be better treated by the enemy.

The root of the conflict is land, but half the textbooks maintain the Natives are too primitive to understand land ownership. From the Dutch paying \$24 for Manhattan to the *wrong* tribe to President Jefferson giving the French \$15 million for their *claim* to Louisiana, Europeans routinely wrongly-pay and underpay Native Americans and the real owners fight sporadically through 1890. Half of the textbook writers, apparently unaware that most treaties reserve hunting, fishing, gathering, and traveling rights to Native Americans, chide the latter's ignorance of the law. Several confess whites failure to observe land ownership conventions, but none admit land is the primary cause of the Indian wars. All but three accept President Madison's senseless pretext for the War of 1812: freedom of the seas. Why Americans in the hinterlands are most belligerent and the fact that five of the seven major land battles are fought primarily against Natives can be explained only if land is the primary concern. Canadian textbooks get this right, while American ones focus on the *Star-Spangled Banner* to build American pride. Only one frankly admits the Indians are the big losers in this war. After the War of 1812, the Indian wars become "mopping-up operations" by the US Army, whose outcome is never in doubt. After 1815, the term "American" no longer denotes Natives; it means whites. Several textbooks devote space to Geronimo's minor Plains wars (1885-86) because they fit the scenario of semi-nomadic Indians fighting white settlers. This makes their elimination inevitable and untroubling.

The textbooks omit how the continuous Indian wars reverberate in American culture. Scholars have shown how "cognitive dissonance" affects George Washington no less than Columbus after the Ohio War, and the rationalization of immorality and expediency become unofficial policy after 1815. Democracy and idealism give way to white supremacy and America seeks hegemony over Mexico, the Caribbean, and the Philippines. Europeans, originally shocked by the American atrocities on the frontier, soon follow suit in their colonies, and Hitler praises American concentration camps in dealing with the Indian problem. France, Russia, and Spain find other policies in their dominions.

Historians must "restore to the past the options it once had". White Americans never lack alternatives to exterminating Native Americans, and students should see them, but



textbooks ignore "triracial isolates," formed by white, black, and Native Americans, interracial marriages, and proposals for a separate Indian State. It is likely that the Roanoke Island settlement is absorbed into the Croatoan Indians rather than becoming the "Lost Colony" of legend, which justifies retaliation against the savages. Pocahontas is the only admissible exception of a Native entering English society, while intermarriage with the Spanish and French is acknowledged as common.

The textbooks' common theme is that when the Natives reject Europeanization they are dispossessed. This sounds like Jefferson's message to the Cherokees in 1808: settle down and behave like white people and enjoy peace. The Cherokees are, in fact, already farmers and seek citizenship. Like Indians everywhere who acculturate, they are spurned because it is not in the whites' interests to allow this. Whites from Massachusetts to Oregon pick quarrels to have an excuse for taking over Indian lands. The stereotype followed in textbooks is the primitive nomad who unfortunately falls victim to progress. Without legal rights, acculturation cannot work, and most courts disallow Native testimony.

Textbook authors' intent is to make students feel good about themselves by feeling good about the past, and in this, the Indians' tragedy is out of place. Thus, college freshmen never include the Indian wars in lists of wars. Some textbooks are beginning to acknowledge cases where whites advocate Indian rights (e.g., Roger William and Chief Justice John Marshall), but fail to reveal the suspense behind these stories. None yet mentions Christian and Whig lobbying for fairness towards Natives. Native Americans want textbooks to make clear their societies have survived, physically and spiritually, to the present day, despite plagues, warfare, and persecution. Several textbooks mention the major protests Indians stage in the 1970s.

Anti-Indian racism is on the decline and acculturation - on white terms - is now allowed, but this too poses a threat to traditional Native values. Only one textbook asks how Indian cultures can survive as distinct entities, and quotes Native American teenagers' opinions. Others cannot do this because they view Indians as frozen in the "ethnographic present"; the point of contact with Europeans. They sympathize with Indians seeking to maintain their way of life, as though there ever existed a single Indian way of life. Indians are either "progressives" or "traditionals", with none of the nuance allowed other populations. Sensitive textbooks could help non-Indians appreciate cultural assets from which they could once again learn. Even if no Native Americans survive, history textbooks ought to be honest about the white/Indian confrontation as an "antidote to the pious ethnocentrism of American exceptionalism". National pride must be tempered by "critical self-knowledge".



Chapter 5,

Chapter 5, Summary and Analysis

"Gone with the Wind': The Invisibility of Racism in American History Textbooks", develops the pervasive theme of how white Americans have dominated black Americans throughout history. Race tensions have existed since Spaniards in 1526 bring the first black slaves to the Pee Dee River in present-day South Carolina. There they rise violently and slip off to live among the Natives, while the Spaniards return to Haiti. Black/white relations doom one political party (the Whigs) and inspire the formation of another (the Republicans). They cause the Democrats for a century to label itself the "white man's party". They motivate Congress' first override of a presidential veto (the 1866 Civil Rights Act) and inspire the Senate's longest filibuster (the 1964 Civil Rights Act). They cause the South to move from solidly Democratic to Republican in 1964-72. In 1988, George Bush runs a commercial about Willie Horton to tip the election, and KKK leader David Duke runs for office. Race riots occur in major urban centers nationwide.

Whites need black slaves to make cotton, America's premier export until the end of the 19th century, profitable; this assures race is a major theme of the bloody Civil War. The postwar failure during Reconstruction to grant African Americans equal rights sets up the struggle 100 years later. Black/white relations pop up in surprising places (e.g., the Alamo, the Seminole Wars, and the expulsion of the Mormons from Missouri). Studs Terkel calls race the "American obsession", and whites tell themselves a variety of stories about slavery. The 19th century's most famous novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, shows it as an evil to be fought, while the 20th century's *Gone with the Wind* laments the passing of an ideal social structure. Until the Civil Rights movement, 20th-century American history textbooks have largely accepted the "magnolia myth" that slavery is not too bad. Today's textbooks return part way to Harriet Beecher Stowe's condemnation with ten portraying intolerable inhumanity and the others demurring that historians cannot agree on how severely slaves are treated.

The textbooks dwell on the first half of the 19th century. As the cotton gin makes slavery profitable, Southerners urge the federal government to clear their territories of Indians and develop a racist ideology. Slavery becomes a positive value, no longer to be apologized for as expediency. Abolition is a felony in the South and Southerners push the federal government to make it harder to restrict slavery anywhere. As some white Northerners lament the nation's loss of idealism, the debate over slavery widens. By admitting slavery rather than economics or political blunders causes the Civil War, modern textbooks show their publishers that the "thrall to the white South" is broken.

Americans are always startled to hear that Washington and Jefferson own slaves and that slave owning has existed in America much longer than freedom. Most textbooks downplay Northern slavery, making it appear an unfortunate but now-solved regional problem, and concentrate optimistically on the storyline of America's success as a



democracy. Slavery may be over, but racism is not, and the textbooks fail to show the enduring legacy: social and economic inferiority imposed on blacks and cultural racism instilled in whites. For students to function as responsible citizens they must understand the "social structure" and "superstructure" of racism. The superstructure, now long outlived, begins after 1450 as Europeans, through "cognitive dissonance", change Africans from exotic to hopelessly inferior and even non-human. This is easily overlaid on the social structure of the South's cotton-based economy; by the 1850s, even Northern whites consider slavery for blacks a cultural step up from the "dark continent". *Gone with the Wind* describes emancipated field hands as child- or monkey-like. In 1988, the white-supremacy novel still tops American Library Association patrons' list of best books.

Slavery has taught all Americans, black and white, that Europeans are smarter and naturally always come out on top. Only five textbooks list race in their indexes, only two discuss what causes racism, and even the best overlooks historical and scientific evidence that skin color is not automatically or exclusively a reason for discrimination. Underplaying racism deprives students of the perspective needed to deal with discrimination today or in the future. It is that good slavery is no longer "sugar-coated" in textbooks, but the failure to show white complicity in slavery forces students to guess why slavery comes about. Sadness over four million blacks slaves rather than anger at those who enslave and hold them is elicited in the textbooks - because "anything bad in American history happened anonymously".

Textbooks minimize slave holding by the faultless Founding Fathers, although half of the signers of the Declaration of Independence own slaves. Patrick Henry sincerely wrestles with the morality and economic utility of slavery, but textbooks conceal he grows rich on his slaves' backs. They concentrate on his "give me liberty or give me death" speech. Likewise, Jefferson's hundreds of slaves go unmentioned, while minute details of his politics and effete lifestyle are described. Where it is inferred he owns slaves, this is buried as accepted custom and his philosophical opposition to the institution is praised. That he advocates expanding slavery into the Western territories is ignored. Most white Americans in the 1770s are racists. There are a few idealists like Abigail Adams and some planters like Washington who free their slaves immediately or upon their death. Some free them to join the Continental Army, where their integration helps decrease racism. The number of free blacks in Virginia increases tenfold by 1800 and most Northern states abolish slavery while Southerners justify the institution. In 1829, three years after Jefferson's death, David Walker of Boston tells fellow blacks the late president is their greatest enemy for instilling white supremacy in the majority population. Students ought not to worship Jefferson but grapple with the problems he and his times face.

Textbooks overlook slavery's effect on America's early foreign policy, which waffles in Haiti depending on whether the president is pro- or anti-slavery. As Spanish colonies revolt, they look to Haiti rather than the US for inspiration. After the 1857 *Dred Scott* decision, slaveholders seal the borders with Canada, Mexico, and Haiti, and require Indian nations to return black runaways. Much of the westward expansion in 1787-1855 and the takeover of Florida are inspired by this desire. Men who want the freedom to



own slaves are behind the Texas War (1835-36) and Mexican War (1846-48). In the Civil War (1861-65), the Union recognizes Haiti and anti-slavery Mexico, while the Confederacy threatens to invade Mexico, welcomes its conquest by Louis Napoleon, and has its eye on Cuba.

Textbooks also overlook racism in domestic matters during this period. Stephen A. Douglas, looking to run a railroad across Indian lands, panders to the Southern planters who control all three branches of government, and his Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854) by allowing the people to decide whether slavery should prevail in the new territories, which brings Kansas to civil war. Because he debates Abraham Lincoln for senate in 1858 and the presidency in 1860, Douglas receives considerable space in textbooks, but the coverage resembles *Vanity Fair*, dealing in details of his clothing and speech, and boiling down his message to "popular sovereignty". In fact, debating in southern Illinois, Douglas stresses that the US is founded by and for whites and opposes any political or social rights for blacks or Indians - and Lincoln agrees. Heroification requires they be censored, but this deprives students of seeing how Lincoln overcomes such ideas.

During the Civil War, Northern Democrats, the "white man's party", protest emancipation, the recognition of Haiti, and the integration of army units. They charge Republicans have "nigger on the brain". So thoroughly are college students shielded in high school from political reality that they are shocked to hear popular lyrics of the day. Pre-civil rights textbooks portray Republicans as oppressive carpetbaggers, and black students at Tougaloo College in Mississippi in 1970 believe African Americans govern the South during Reconstruction, but since they are too recently out of slavery to do a good job, whites take over again. This is shocking and sad, for blacks *never* take over Southern governorships or legislatures, and biracial governments are less corrupt than later ones when *some* white Democrats by "force and fraud" seize power. The Confederate myth of Reconstruction survives, inadvertently, when textbooks make the "problem" of bringing African Americans into the mainstream of society, rather than integrating ex-Confederates who use widespread violence against white Republicans and blacks and hinder black progress in education. Two books suggest Yankees simply get tired of trying to help the hapless blacks and wash their hands of them. *Gone with the Wind* is still believed more than the reformed textbooks.

The period of 1890-1920 is "the nadir of American race relations" (Rayford Logan), when African Americans, North and South, revert to second-class citizenship. Civil and economic rights are systematically denied to them, and only one spells out the techniques whites use after the Compromise of 1877 to deny blacks voting rights. Frances FitzGerald mocks the "problems" approach to American history, which keeps students from seeing the causes of subsequent events. Thus, things like disenfranchisement, lynchings, and the Civil Rights movement "just happen". Because they omit a sociological definition of segregation, no textbook suggests a rationale for it or answers why "separate but equal" could not work. Caribbean black immigrants outperforming US-born blacks, show that the stigma of segregation remains. Jack Robinson is not the first black to play in major league baseball; many play in the 19th century before they are forced out in 1889. In 1911, black jockeys are banned from the



Kentucky Derby after winning fifteen of twenty-eight races. Rich and successful blacks are attacked to prevent further upward mobility.

Popular culture finds ways to rationalize whites' reaction to African Americans' losing political and civil rights. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is rewritten to portray Tom not as a martyr but as a dupe of his masters - and blacks use the term "Uncle Tom" to mean someone who sells out to the whites. Whites in blackface are popular in minstrel shows nationwide and subtly show how Harriet Beecher Stowe gets it wrong in her novel: blacks like slavery and second-class citizenship. Vaudeville and early silent movies continue the stereotype of "silly, lying, chicken-stealing black idiots". D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) shows the mess made by corrupt white carpetbaggers.

By 1892, Democrat Grover Cleveland wins the presidency by charging that the Republicans want to give blacks rights, which will let them dominate both North and South. No Democrat in Congress through the start of the 20th century votes for civil rights legislation. The Supreme Court issues a series of segregationist decisions. Wilson segregates the federal government and the KKK boasts over a million members, including Warren G. Harding. Many Midwestern and Western "sundown" towns make it clear blacks dare not remain overnight. Blacks are excluded from juries, removing the possibility of legal redress for suffering at the hands of whites. Unpunished lynchings reiterate *Dred Scott*: blacks still have "no rights a white man [is] bound to respect". Blacks know how to behave respectfully before whites.

When 20th-century migration north and west bring no relief, African American society faces a "tangle of pathology" that textbooks overlook. All mention *Plessy v. Ferguson*, some note isolated factors and incidents, and one summarizes the nadir period. Otherwise, students are given no clue as to why race relations in the US declines systematically over a half-century. They simply jump to Jackie Robinson. Textbooks authors could look to a rich literature by African Americans describing life in the period, but they refuse to let oppressed groups speak for themselves. Students do not learn that discrimination pervades the North even after World War II, so they are left wondering why blacks have not "shaped up" in over a century, while white immigrants have made their way without anything being handed to them on a platter. This both overlooks discrimination against Irish, Italians, Chinese, Catholics, and Jews, and wrongly suggests the nadir is not a matter of white supremacy.

Even as racial discrimination lessens, young people must be prepared to deal with the strongest social variable they will face in life. American society is still largely *de facto* segregated (friendship networks, churches, social organizations, and marriage). Ethnic violence is likely to continue and raise debate over inequalities in income, SAT scores, rates of imprisonment, and access to amenities. In 1990, African Americans and Native Americans still have median life expectancies six years shorter than whites. Nagging suspicions remain in the minds of both whites *and blacks* that blacks are inferior and worthy of their place at the bottom. Only "causal historical analysis" can explain the differences, but this requires racism be visible in history. Students are taught to hope the future will only get better, but this compounds the problem by making it appear racism is over. Textbook claims that the US has done more than any nation to provide equal

rights for all defies the facts, current and past. Students need no more "ethnocentric cheerleading". Polls show students brood about racism and are generally less tolerant than their parents, who watch or experience the Civil Rights movement. Being "pathetically ignorant" of history - a history where white racism is invisible - students have no perspective for understanding or dealing with race.



Chapter 6,

Chapter 6, Summary and Analysis

"John Brown and Abraham Lincoln: The Invisibility of Antiracism in American History Textbooks" examines how the radical idealism is, like racism, ignored by authors dedicated to the thesis that the victory of "right" in the US is foreordained rather than subject to contingency. The central figure in the abolitionist movement, John Brown, is depicted in textbooks from 1890 to 1970 as fanatic and/or insane, a view three modern texts continue. Seven others render him too bland to be a hero. No textbook shows sympathy for his ideals or actions.

In 1856, Brown retaliates in Pottawatomie, Kansas, for the destruction of a free-soil Lawrence, Kansas, by proslavery "ruffians"; then in 1859, he leads an attack on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Primary sources show relatives and friends, wishing to spare his life, suggesting an insanity defense at Brown's treason trial, but no one who meets him believes he is crazy. Later writers attribute to him ideological rather than psychological craziness because the goal of abolishing slavery is impossible. During his trial, people listen to him in a way no one had before, and he maintains the Bible calls for fighting the injustice of slavery. He accepts the death penalty as unjust but as furthering a greater good. Thoreau likens Brown to Jesus Christ. During the month between his sentencing and his hanging, Brown's widely circulated letters to family, friends, and journalists soften his image and gain public sympathy. Hanged, Brown is mourned throughout the North, and is lauded as a martyr and a forerunner of slavery's doom. Southerner slaveholders vow to use any means to retain their rights, including secession. "John Brown's Body" becomes a Union battle song when they do and war begins.

By the turn of the 20th century, however, as the backlash against Reconstruction destroys the last vestiges of racial idealism, Brown is depicted as insane. Only in the 1960s can white Americans accept a white person dying for black equality (because civil rights workers in several Southern states do so). Notably, the Black Power movement claims Brown is crazy to prove no white person has ever had African Americans' interests at heart, so textbooks distorting him play into the hands of black racism. His black contemporaries certainly think otherwise: Frederick Douglass proclaims him a great hero, and a black college is established at Harpers Ferry to commemorate his helping give birth to freedom. Texts need not depict Brown as a hero, but they need not tell his story in so neutral a way or denigrate his religiosity and wrongly portray it as "narrowly ignorant". Ned Turner, an African American who leads a violent 1831 slave revolt is, despite seeing visions and hearing voices, treated positively. Textbooks authors could find many motivations for Brown's abolitionism, but prefer to leave his actions unexplained. They also censor Brown's words to avoid the religious taboo.

Abraham Lincoln is highly venerated, but his ideas, particularly those on race, are glossed over. This prevents students from seeing how even great people must appease



various audiences, that racism has been "normal" throughout US history (not limited to the KKK), and that people can learn and grow. After espousing a white supremacy line in the heat of debate with Douglas, Lincoln questions how blacks can be denied liberty without destroying the Declaration of Independence. He declares slavery a matter of right and wrong. Several reasons why Lincoln accepts that African Americans are human are omitted, along with his 1835 vote against abolitionism in the Illinois House of Representatives, and his nomination for president in 1860 because of its "rock-solid antislavery" views. Instead, textbooks make Lincoln a moderate. In fact, while Lincoln makes outward gestures towards blacks, he continues an inner struggle with racism.

Most textbooks seize on Lincoln's famous letter to Horace Greeley, and by omitting the final sentence, show him as indifferent to the fate of black people. Historians know the letter's context as an attempt to rally support for emancipation. There are many signs that saving the Union is never Lincoln's sole concern. No textbook, however, makes this clear. They present the Emancipation Proclamation in "realpolitik terms": Lincoln has to do something to win European allies against the Confederacy. That Lincoln sees emancipation as a moral question is seen by its timing two months before the 1862 elections, which costs Republicans control of Congress because white Northerners cannot accept change so quickly. As with the Indian Wars and Vietnam, textbooks sidestep such questions of right and wrong.

Textbooks quote little of Lincoln's powerful speeches, including his three-paragraph Gettysburg Address. They fail to see how it provides a deeper rationale for war. As a lawyer, Lincoln knows the Constitution accommodates slavery, so he focuses on the Declaration of Independence, and its proposition "all men are created equal". He knows from history that America is not mankind's last great hope, but paints an effective picture. Shifting focus to those who are buried at Gettysburg, Lincoln suggests the fight is about black freedom. The Democratic *Chicago Times* condemns the speech for these themes. A minority of textbooks quotes the entire speech and only one asks an intelligent question about it. Even worse treatment is afforded to the masterful Second Inaugural Address, where Lincoln says explicitly that the terrible war is predestined by God to punish Americans for 250 years of evil - a theme echoing John Brown's last note. Textbooks either excerpt the "malice toward none" ending or ignore the speech entirely. The authors seem to find it as impossible that Lincoln condemns American sins as they do to believe Helen Keller could care about the class injustice. Disney's animatronic Lincoln also avoids talking about slavery. Textbooks do not help students see that ideas matter.

African Americans challenge white racism by fleeing slavery and enlisting in the Union forces. Today's textbooks all recognize the black military contribution, but only one shows how their bravery helps decrease white racism - a kind of reverse "cognitive dissonance." This is shown in Maryland's 1864 vote for abolition (the Emancipation Proclamation having applied only to the Confederate states, leaving slavery untouched in the border states). Soldiers and sailors casting absentee ballots provide the swing vote. In the 1864 election, Republicans campaign against racism and triumph widely. International support for this change in ideology is notable.



With the Confederacy founded on an ideology of white supremacy, its army enslaves free black civilians and mistreats black prisoners of war. Textbooks downplay this, lest white Southerners take offense, and claim defending states rights is why the South fights. In fact, Supreme Court Chief Justice Taney's 1857 decision that blacks have no rights whites must respect emboldens slaveholders, who push President Buchanan to enforce slavery in Kansas. Once he leaves office, Southerners want to limit federal power. Early on, Confederate President Jefferson Davis realizes states rights is destructive, seeing West Virginia break a stay with the Union and parts of Alabama and Mississippi proclaiming independence from both sides. Southern Unionists and Confederates fight one another as much as they fight the North.

The ideology that blacks like slavery is disproved, and forces must be withheld from the front lines to prevent slave uprisings. The Confederates mock the idea of black Union soldiers, but see their bravery in action. After Vicksburg, Davis proposes to free blacks that serve in the army but it is unclear why *anyone* in the South would continue fighting if blacks are recognized as human - and armed. Confederate desertions begin as early as 1862 and Sherman's army swells with ex-Confederates and ex-slaves as he marches to Savannah. Still, textbooks misrepresent Sherman as looting his way across a unified South. The North's ideological consolidation coupled with the South's ideological disintegration better explains the Union victory than shortages of resources and manpower. Davis admits that the people's zeal fails. Nevertheless, only one textbook discusses these attitudinal factors; the others cannot say what the Civil War is about.

During the nadir of race relations, whites in the South and North agree implicitly to unite as good Americans over blacks, and abolitionists become historical bad guys. In the 1920s, both the Grand Army of the Republic and United Daughters of the Confederacy complain about textbooks (both omitting mention of slavery); thereafter, both sides are shown as equally idealistic. The Stars and Bars are still publicly displayed. Some white Northerners regret winning the Civil War. Lincoln's murder five days after Appomattox elevates him to the status of martyr, and even opponents of emancipation mourn him.

Southern efforts to maintain prewar conditions by modifying slave laws to apply to free blacks are opposed by Northerners who shed blood to gain blacks' freedom. The congressional elections of 1866 are blatantly racist, and radical Republicans are sent to Washington to oppose President Andrew Johnson's attempts at accommodating the former enemies. Idealistic Republicans pass the antiracist Fourteenth Amendment, guaranteeing "equal protection" for all. Reconstruction brings to the south black volunteer teachers whose work whites violently oppose. Some demobilized Union soldiers remain in the South and some Northern would-be politicians migrate there, forming a Republican Party. Some abolitionists serve in the Freedman's Bureau and other organizations determine to help blacks obtain their rights. Almost all are Republicans. All but one textbook continues to apply the pejorative "carpetbagger" to them.

Many Southern-born Unionists, many of them Union veterans, join the Republican Party and support black equality as morally right. The Republicans push for desegregating the



University of Mississippi, offering free education to all children. Many former Whigs become Republicans rather than affiliating with their old adversaries, the Democrats. Some Southerners figure blacks are going to vote and want to get on their good side. Others hope for contracts with the new Republican-run state governments. A large portion of the white population from wealthy backgrounds joins the Republicans. All but one textbook still refers to them with the pejorative "scalawag". The two terms are coined during Reconstruction by Southern Democrats intent on defaming their opponents. They are not widely used in Mississippi's postwar newspapers, but find themselves used in today's textbooks as proper historical labels, with no explanation of derivation or connotation. One textbook deprecates Southern "regimes", a term not used elsewhere even where justified (e.g., the 1836 Republic of Texas or 1893 takeover of Hawaii). The Civil Rights movement has forced some changes in how Reconstruction is presented, more kindly, but has not removed implications of greed among those who come south to help. This motivation could be imputed to Columbus, the Pilgrims, Washington, and Jackie Robinson - but is not. Those who support black rights, vote Republican, or walk to school during Reconstruction regularly put their lives at risk. Textbooks ought to recognize the idealism of the era.

Instead, textbooks omit, radicalize, or flatten all racial idealists. Contemporary blacks deeply mourn Lincoln's passing, realizing what he has done for them - continued and brought to fruition by Brown's vision. A third of the Union population turns out to watch his funeral train pass by. One or two in 100 white college students name Lincoln as a hero, but cannot say why he is great. No one picks Brown, any white abolitionist, any Reconstruction Republican, or any civil rights martyr. They sympathize with the struggle for racial equality but look to Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X for heroes. Writing at the time of Brown's trial, abolitionist Wendell Phillips is certain the martyrs for abolition will be honored in the 20th century; he could not have imagined how history books would deal with Brown.

American antiracism has helped inspire movements advocating black and women's rights and inspired reformers in South Africa, Northern Ireland, East Germany, Iran, Vietnam, and Tiananmen Square, but these idealists are being forgotten by young Americans who read their approved textbooks.



Chapter 7,

Chapter 7, Summary and Analysis

"The Land of Opportunity" examines how high school contributes to students' ignorance about social questions. The way some textbooks include on-going issues leaves students assuming labor problems, like slavery, are solved, and that the unions are anachronistic. Although the middle class has been steadily shrinking under Reagan/Bush, textbooks maintain the US is a "middle class" country. Social mobility in colonial times vis-a-vis Europe is high; violent class conflicts like Bacon's and Shay's rebellions are ignored.

Social class largely determines the quality of one's life. From birth, children of affluence enjoy healthcare, environmental, and educational advantages over the poor. Woodrow Wilson's recommendation that schools separate a small upper class from the masses that are needed to perform manual tasks is being realized. After college, most affluent children enter white-collar jobs while most working-class children get blue-collar jobs. The affluent join organizations that increase their civic power, are able to save money and build wealth, own homes, enjoy tax write-offs, and have greater access to health care, which translates into longer life expectancies, giving them longer to develop wealth. The non-affluent merely struggle to survive.

Class determines how people think about social class: business leaders blame the poor for poverty while labor leaders blame the system. Republicans and Democrats differ primarily on this same question. This is well documented, but most high school graduates are ignorant of the facts because their textbooks show no change in American class structure since 1890 - or even 1670. Many teachers are reluctant and ill prepared to discuss social class, so "Republican history" prevails. It goes unsaid that the US government is established by rich men self-conscious of their influence, that despite the "log cabin myth," forty percent of US presidents come from affluence; that aboard the *Titanic*, a far higher percentage of third-class women passengers die than the first- and second-class; and that during the Vietnam War, the affluent receive draft deferments.

Textbooks showing 390 years of America as being a land of opportunity where people get what they deserve makes children of little means wonder at their lot - and that of their rich classmates. Making social class a "dirty little secret" lessens working-class families' willingness to discuss it; their history is forgotten, and a "subculture of shame" develops. Learning how social stratification works, by contrast, makes all less judgmental about poverty and liberates the non-affluent negative self-images. Students are fascinated to discover how wealth translates into political power and affects everything from energy policy to local zoning. Textbooks mention none of the data available on how inequality in funding schools translates into the perpetuation of a "meritocracy" that incorporates "savage inequalities". Only two texts suggest education may help improve the class system; none suggest students research the history of their



own school and community. They are content to say school is a key to upward mobility after World War II.

Textbooks deal with immigration history, but emphasize the "rags to riches" stories of individuals (less than three percent) who make spectacularly good. Economic fairness is another example of the archetype of "American exceptionalism". If textbooks cite colonial America's social equality vis-a-vis Europe, they ought to mention when inequality sets in. Some historians point to the policies of President Andrew Jackson, others to the emergence of large corporations or the Republican realignment in 1896, which by 1920 puts business in control of public policy. The gap between blacks and whites and rich and poor widens in the "Progressive Era"; then, between the Depression and the end of World War II, income and wealth grow more equal and remain so until 1981. Using levels of inequality to rank countries, social scientists rank Scandinavia near the top, Columbia and India near the bottom. Reagan/Bush policies (1981-92) have moved the US towards Columbia. Students need to consider why professionals earn so much more than industrial workers. Withholding it is wrong.

Publishers avoid the risk of being labeled Marxists by making social class taboo for authors. Since the 1940s, publishers have felt pressure from state- and local-level textbook adoption boards and committees, which in turn are lobbied by individuals and organized right-wing organizations. One of the largest, Mel Gabler's Educational Research Analysts, holds that it is un-American to formulate issues in class terms. Since Texas is such a large market, no publisher dares risk having a textbook rejected. Social Darwinism does not conform to data on intergenerational mobility in the US, but is alive in high school classrooms. Anything that does not fit this archetype is omitted.

Dedicated to heroification, textbooks authors often need no pressured to remove America's "warts", such as one percent of the population controlling forty percent of the wealth. Suggesting that the possibility unequal schooling and other mechanisms can exist to keep the upper crust the upper crust means to criticize a "beloved nation" (or admit the ninety-nine percent are lazy and undeserving). It is safer to avoid the topic. In doing so, however, they cannot explain the benefits of free enterprise. This, in turn, distorts the presentation of capitalism and democracy. Apparently, publishers and lobbyists have decided students ought to accept the social and economic status quo piously and without thinking. As voting citizens, these students will lack the tools to criticize or defend the American system. They will believe "the sky is the limit" for them and may or may not succeed. Either way, they will not understand why.

By analogy, how will girls explain that no woman has been elected president - if women have from colonial times always enjoyed equal opportunity for upward mobility and political participation? They can only conclude that females are inferior. Textbooks do, however, acknowledge sexual barriers for women and racial minorities. Only class discrimination is taboo and omitted, making high school history classes part of the holding-back of the working class.



Chapter 8,

Chapter 8, Summary and Analysis

"Watch Big Brother: What Textbooks Teach about the Federal Government" examines the textbooks' sycophancy when dealing with America's least noble actions. It begins by noting that there are two styles of textbooks. The "narrative" types, ten out of the twelve Loewen examines, focus on presidential administrations, while the two "inquiry" books use primary sources and include non-governmental issues. All imply the balance of powers has not changed since 1789 and that the federal government is people-friendly and manageable. Individuals and non-governmental bodies affect no changes in the social and economic arenas. Because the state is always heroic and clear of blemishes, textbooks become "handbooks for acquiescence".

College courses in political science depict the US as either politically motivated to maintain hegemony over other nations by any means, or economically motivated to retain an unfair proportion of the world's wealth (George Kennan's "realpolitik", 1948). High school texts discuss neither approach but instead turn history into a morality play where the US is "the international good guy", always having the best of intentions and failing only when others do not understand. The texts never define "good" but identify it with any moral, disinterested, and responsible stand American leaders take at a given time. John F. Kennedy, in 1961, states that the US alone, with six percent of the world's population, bears the burden of international responsibility. Since the 1920s, textbooks have claimed that the US is the world's most generous giver of foreign aid; untrue then and now, as a dozen European and Arab nations distribute a larger percentage of their gross domestic product (GDP) than the US.

Insignificant as a "shaper of history", the Peace Corps is described in textbooks adoringly as a symbol of American humanitarianism. Far more influential are the multinational corporations that have affected US foreign policy as far back as Wilson (Haiti, Mexico, and Russia), and more recently, in Chile, India, Guatemala, and Angola. Multinationals affect graduates' lives, in the wars and job losses they generate, and in the way they are rendering national economies - even America's - obsolete, but students hear nothing about them, because they do not fit the "good guy" approach. The Marine Corps general leading Wilson's oil-inspired Latin American adventures has famously repented, but textbooks make even them appear humanitarian.

After ignoring *why* the federal government acts under multinational influence, the textbooks cannot discuss *what* it does, such as assassinating foreign leaders and subverting governments in Iran (1953), Guatemala (1954), Lebanon (1957), Zaire (1961), Cuba (repeatedly), and Chile (1973). When other countries behave this way, the US cries "state-sponsored terrorism" and retaliates (Iraq, 1993). In 1990, Warren Cohn resigns from a State Department historical committee when he is forbidden to discuss the CIA's 1953 overthrow of Mussadegh in Iran, which is also omitted from eight textbooks. Two textbooks do an admirable job of summarizing the coup, while others



consider it - inaccurately - as an admirable act of anticommunism. The textbooks that omit discussion of 1953 have no basis for explaining the 1979 overthrow of the shah, so rife with anti-American hatred.

In Guatemala in 1954, the CIA backs the United Fruit Company's opposition to proposed land reforms and other actions that might break their monopoly; only one textbook mentions this, and casts it (inaccurately) in an anticommunist light. No textbook mentions how the US unfairly backs Christians in Lebanon (1957), but five discuss Eisenhower's sending in the Marines in 1958 to prevent "chaos" - the other validating term besides anticommunism. One claims a happy ending, overlooking the fact that Lebanon suffers civil war through the 1980s. In 1983, chaos inspires Reagan to send in the Marines again and over 200 are killed in their barracks by a car bomber. No textbooks give students any means of understanding Lebanon's ongoing troubles. Only two textbooks index "Zapre" or "Congo", and neither mentions the CIA's urging Patrice Lumumba's assassination in 1961. Again, a happy ending belies the reality of Zapre under Mobutu becoming one of Africa's most corrupt and wretched nations and turning anti-American in the 1990s. Students will not understand new chaos if it breaks out.

No textbook mentions repeated attempts (twenty-four as of 1975) on Fidel Castro's life which involve Mafia operatives during John Kennedy's presidency. "Operation Mongoose", a massive US covert action aimed at destabilizing Cuba, goes unmentioned. This silence precludes any discussion of the possibility JFK's assassination is a Cuban revenge killing. Only three textbooks mention covert actions under Richard Nixon in Chile (preventing another communist victory), and one of these buries it in a paragraph praising Jimmy Carter's human rights campaign. Historians know about International Telephone and Telegraph and the CIA subverting the 1970 elections and in 1973 financing the bloody coup that kills Allende. CIA Director William Colby and Henry Kissinger both admit US involvement, but the textbooks do not.

Textbooks do not need to include "all government skullduggery", but they ought to examine at least one in depth. Without this, students believe the myth their country is "the most peace-loving nation in the world" and are unprepared for the news when covert actions go wrong and the US has no option but embarrassed withdrawal or overt military action - and the domestic lying that inevitably accompanies either. They are unprepared to enter a public debate about alternatives to shortsighted policies that often go against the popular will. Worse, the Constitution's balance of powers are endangered when the Executive Branch lies to the Legislative about its adventures - as it does in all six examples discussed above. Eisenhower cites national security when Gary Powers' U2 is shot down spying on Russia; later, Americans learn thirty-one flights are downed over the years, costing 170 lives, whose fate the government hides from their families. During the Vietnam War, Americans believe the government is not bombing Laos, but the Laotians know better. Often security is less the motivation for lying than is fear of how Congress and the American people will react.

Presidents historically do not want to risk their popularity by trying to persuade the people to support their military policies or get Congress to declare war, as the Constitution requires. Helen Keller criticizes Wilson for not being honest about the



invasion of Russia in 1919; today's textbooks omit the dark and secret invasion. Textbooks cannot report on such events without mentioning the government covers them up, so they leave them out. The only piece of government criminality they mention is Watergate, but after congratulating the nation on preserving the checks and balances and eliminating Nixon for abusing power, they delve no deeper into the structural problem of a vastly bloated Executive Branch. Treatment of Watergate is to whitewash the government so students will respect it, but this leaves them vulnerable to shock when subsequent events occur - such as the Iran-Contra scandal under Reagan/Bush, which reveals an administration much more out of control than Nixon's.

Educators seek to inculcate blind allegiance into the next generation, morphing Stephen Decatur's "Our country... may she always be in the right" into "our country, right or wrong!". Failing to analyze any intervention leaves students to believe every action the government takes is valid. US policies are always humanitarian and enemies are never credited with being human. This creates a dysfunctional citizenry. Kennan's realpolitik may be painful to contemplate, but it is how all nations behave. Examining this cannot bring the end of Western civilization, and students who go on to college political science courses are shown the embarrassing gap.

In their discussion of US internal affairs, high school textbooks credit the government for most of what gets done, which is particularly erroneous when looking at the Civil Rights movement (1960-68). Kennedy is particularly weak in enforcing the Fourteenth Amendment and other Reconstruction-era federal laws. The FBI, founded in Wilson's day to survey communist organizations, is by the 1960s all-white and its Southern agents are precisely the kind of people from whom civil rights workers need protection. Authorized by Attorney General Robert Kennedy, in 1963 Hoover begins a campaign to destroy civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., major civil rights organizations, and their leaders. He withholds information about death threats. Hoping the federal government will protect young white civil rights workers, organizers bring 1,000 from the North for "Freedom Summer" (1964), but white supremacists continue burning black homes and churches. Only the national outcry following the murder of three civil rights workers in Philadelphia, Massachusetts, prompts the FBI to open a local office, but the wiretaps, on Lyndon Johnson's orders, do not end. Similar activities occur nationwide, targeting the Black Panthers in California and Chicago. The FBI's activities before and after King's assassination in 1968 suggest it or the CIA's involvement. Hoover approves the automatic investigation of all black student unions and examines black faculty members.

One must balance the positive achievements of the era, the Civil Rights Act (1964) and Voting Rights Act (1965), with these activities by the FBI, but the textbooks fail to do so. They are unwilling even to criticize state governments. Instead, they make the grassroots movement for equality look like a government achievement a la Allen Parker's film, *Mississippi Burning*. Everyone in Mississippi knows who kills James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, but it takes a \$30,000 bribe to get one of the conspirators to testify against the others (including the sheriff). Textbooks generally give the FBI and government credit for all milestones in the Civil Rights movement. Only two credit the nonviolent protest movement of blacks and some white



allies with forcing Southerners to prove their barbarity in defending "civilization". No textbooks recognize the courage of civil rights workers, who stand up against the mores of segregation, or suggest citizens can and often must force their government to do what is right. Instead, they show (ridiculously) JFK inspiring the 1963 March on Washington. Many black students believe desegregation is imposed upon their community rather than being the fruits of blacks' efforts. White students infer their government has been good to blacks. Textbooks' treatment of environmentalism is similar; Congress passes laws without reference to a massive crusade. Teachers do little to fix the situation, suggesting to their students that the only way individuals can influence government at any level is by voting.

Right-wing textbook critics have a "patriotism test": they must show the government does no wrong. The one textbook that rightly implies that the federal government fails to do all it could to advance civil rights is rejected by Gabler's colleague, James F. DeLong. Such pressure produces boring books, void of drama. The parents of today's high school students, having during their lifetimes seen the government repeatedly being caught in acts of misconduct and deceit, have lost their 1950s naive faith and do not agree with the presentation by textbook authors, "the last innocents in America". They know a different story, one that, combined with the daily newspaper, makes education "suspect". The archetype of "a wise and good government" implies good citizens must follow its leadership in the way citizens of the Third Reich and Central African Empire have. The US still allows dissent and, since 1776, Canada has offered refuge to Americans who cannot accept US policies. No textbook mentions this role, because they dare not suggest a principled opposition.

Many political scientists and historians hold that government actions pose a greater threat to democracy than citizens' disloyalty. Many worry that, since Wilson, the Executive Branch has grown out of control. Others see the decline of state governments as a "mockery of federalism". In the last thirty years, the FBI, CIA, State Department, and other agencies have taken over policymaking and decide what Congress and the people need to know about their activities. Textbooks encourage students to believe everything is as it should be and to stay out of the government's business. Minimizing patriotic Americans' power is overtly antidemocratic.



Chapter 9,

Chapter 9, Summary and Analysis

"Down the Memory Hole: The Disappearance of the Recent Past" examines how textbooks deal with times people still alive remember. Many African societies divide humans into three categories: those alive, the "sasha" (recently-departed, living-dead), and the "zamani" (the dead - those of whom no one has immediate memories). When reading about "sasha" events (e.g., the Persian Gulf War), Americans judge how the authors have gotten it right or wrong based on their own experience. For the distant past, they necessarily read less critically and more reverently. Because the recent past tends to be controversial, textbooks avoid it. The narrative textbooks devote progressively fewer pages to each decade since the 1930s, while the inquiry texts, seeking to make history relevant to current events, do not scrimp. The inquiry texts are out of print and the genre appears not to be commercially viable - perhaps because they allow some controversy.

Authors seem not to recall that what is "sasha" for them is "zamani" for their readers. Therefore, what undergraduates do *not* know about the recent past is growing astonishingly. That students know more about the War of 1812 than Vietnam is not their fault; the last students with direct memories of Vietnam graduated high school in 1983. The movies (*Rambo*), songs, and other elements of popular culture that deal with the recent past tend to mix fact and fiction, making it all the more important for textbooks to deal with times that affect students' lives today. Vietnam is shortchanged, not only in number of pages, but in the quality of the images included. Adults still struggle remember vividly the television and still images seared into the public consciousness in 1965-73, but they are omitted. This is reminiscent of George Orwell's *1984*, where embarrassing facts are burnt up. Leaving out the best-known images of the century shortchanges readers because the images themselves are so important to the outcome of the war. No textbooks show any damage done by the US side, including bombing, or atrocities against civilians (e.g., My Lai). Students have no criteria for understanding the antiwar movement. Two textbook authors, James West Davidson and Mark H. Lytle, co-author a book that discusses the effect of this massacre on Americans, so they cannot claim ignorance of the facts in their treatment in a high school textbooks. The omission is intentional.

The images included in textbooks are all uncontroversial generic shots or ones showing damage done by the other side. The prose accompanying them omits all the famous antiwar quotations (Martin Luther King, Jr., and Muhammad Ali), pleas for withdrawal (John Kerry), and the famous chant taunting LBJ for killing children, but quotes Johnson and Nixon about defending all the free nations of the world. Those who fight in or oppose the war are silenced. The texts evade controversy about why the US enters the war, how it alters the war, how the war is criticized at home, why the war is lost, and the lessons that can be drawn from the experience. Historians are still divided on such questions, variously citing factors like fear of repeating Truman's "losing" of China, the



"domino theory", business concerns, the racism that runs through American history since 1622, and informs Manifest Destiny, and Wilson's failure in 1918 at Versailles to listen to Ho Chi Minh. Textbooks generally avoid suggesting that events of one period effect later ones, so it is unsurprising none look for reasons the Vietnam War occurs. They also avoid presenting alternative views that invite students to draw their own conclusions. They prefer to present absolute answers for everything - even unresolved controversies. In the case of Vietnam, they simply dodge the issue: war just breaks out and the US is there to help a friend.

The authors of high school history texts tend not to be experts on the recent past, but most textbooks are multi-author collaborations, with many periods of the "zamani" being in none of the authors' fields of expertise. They boringly assume a single agreed historical perspective that their readers should memorize. Dealing with the "sasha", they have no "Olympian detachment" behind which to hide. True historians agree recent events must be constantly revised as new archival materials make the context clearer and more "objective". Previous chapters have shown how perspective changes over history. Wilson is ranked far more favorably today than in the 1920s, based not on new facts but on the Cold War's ideological needs, where the suppression of civil rights in the name of fighting communism is routine.

Columbus, too, improves as he passes from the "zamani" to the "sasha". Contemporaries criticize his mistreatment of the Indians; but by the 19th century, Americans are so used to fighting them, it seems normal. By celebration of the 500th anniversary of his landing, counter-celebrations by Native Americans are held; reminding people the explorer is also an exploiter. Contrasting the 1892 celebrations with those in 1992 is dramatic.

Since the 1960s, historians have abandoned the Confederate myth of Reconstruction and returned to the versions written while Republican governments still existed in the South. Eric Foner wisely observes, "objective scholarship and modern experience" explain the change. Chronological distance from events alone is no guarantee of accuracy or truth. The facts that do not suit tastes in the nadir period are omitted; with the Civil Rights movement, they speak anew. Objective scholarship is always linked to current experience, so textbooks writers have no excuse other than timidity for omitting the recent past. They are responsible for slighting high school students, who would probably have to read about it on their own as few teachers reach the end of textbooks. Publishers and teachers want to avoid offending parents who differently and passionately remember Vietnam. Even more controversial are the women's movement and affirmative action. Authors and teachers agree with Thumper's mom: "If you can't say somethin' nice, don't say nothin' at all". Avoiding the "lesson of Vietnam", however, leaves students unprepared to interpret current events. Not only whether or not the US should intervene in Angola, Kuwait, Somalia, Bosnia, and El Salvador is involved, but so are the legacy of government secrecy, power of the press, and sexual questions that begin in the 1960s and still reverberate today. High school students need enough knowledge to debate current questions intelligently, but their textbooks fail them.

William Faulkner says the past is never dead - or even past. Textbooks' theft of the "sasha" (living-dead) is a "wicked crime". Memorized factoids from the distant past do students little good in their lives after graduation, but "new Vietnams" are sure to be plentiful and the problems of the 1960-70s are still being worked out. Disney World's twenty-nine-minute history of the US, "American Adventure", omits Vietnam, the ghetto riots, and anything troubling in the recent past. Students deserve better than this compressed, bland approach.



Chapter 10,

Chapter 10, Summary and Analysis

"Progress Is Our Most Important Product" examines textbooks' final words to their readers. They are vapidly optimistic, ignoring opinion polls on how America is poised to meet the 21st century. They embody the social archetype of progress. Jefferson invites the "philosophical observer" to consider how, moving eastward from the Rocky Mountains, the progress of mankind from infancy to maturity can be observed. The idea of progress permeates the 19th and early 20th centuries, and is not questioned into the 1950s. Growth is equated with progress, in population numbers and signs of economic prosperity.

Textbook authors grow up in this atmosphere and naturally sell to their readers. By avoiding constant dollars, they graph rapid growth in family income and health care expenditures that belie the flattening of the 1980s. Negative factors like air pollution alerts, reliance on imported oil, and declining real wages are ignored. Faith in progress promotes the status quo and fits nicely with Social Darwinism, which implies the lower classes get what is coming to them. Referring to "developing nations" sidesteps injustice but ignores the fact the "have-not" Third World has been losing economic ground since World War I. In the last twenty-five years, US intellectuals have abandoned the idea of progress, and the public is losing faith in inevitable improvement.

No one, including textbooks authors, celebrates larger populations or excess consumption; waste is lamented as irresponsible citizenship, but it continues and accelerates in America. Sociologists see income correlating with happiness, but Americans in 1970 say they are less happy than in 1957, despite using more energy and raw materials per capita. The 1973 Arab oil embargo helps create public pessimism, as the bounds of growth appear limited. Intellectuals have been pointing to this reality since Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, confirmed by the world wars, depression, Stalinism, and the Holocaust. Modern anthropologists accept that modern society is more complex than "primitive" societies, but not ahead of or better than them in any non-technical way (e.g., religion, kinship). Since 1973, biologists have downplayed the 'tale of progress' in favor of a story of intricate branching with survivors adapting to local conditions but not achieving perfection. Textbooks ignore these matters or the ever more ominous threat of environmental ruin. Most mention the energy crises of 1973 and 1979 and the Iran-Iraq War of 1979, but point to Nixon and Carter's programs to insulate the US against dependence on foreign oil. They fail to mention that neither program works but instead suggest the crises pass. In fact, America's consumption of energy from 1950-75 has risen sharply and social scientists point out that the finite resource will run out.

Capitalism is not designed to accommodate shortages, as the OPEC producers demonstrate in 1973 and 1979 to the oil companies, which function as "keepers of the common". America has faced commons problems before, as in the common pastures of



colonial New England; the excess milk and butter resulting from an affluent farmer buying a second cow leads to overgrazing and regulation has to be enforced. Oil production will have to be enforced in the next generation. Similarly, Chesapeake Bay is yielding an unprecedented low oyster harvest, making fishermen work harder, harvest more, and yet earn less. They threaten the future of the commons at a time the UN is calling for a global system to manage the world's fisheries.

The entire economy has become global, with Americans owning and using massively more than anyone else. The US hopes to influence all nations to emulate its democracy and civil liberties, but also hopes they will never achieve its standard of living, for this would ruin the finite earth. Concerns about ecology rise daily: deforestation, ozone depletion, rising cancer rates, falling sperm counts. People are as unaware of the causes as they were years ago in understanding that DDT can cause bird extinctions. Earth could become "uninhabitable by accident", so great is humankind's power. Perhaps by their fiftieth birthday, today's students will see industrialized nations forced to accept zero-growth economies. High school textbooks do nothing to prepare students to think creatively about the future, but rather to be loyal, optimistic, and unchanging.

Most who study this problem are in Edward O. Wilson's characterization "environmentalists", but a handful of political scientists, economists, and natural scientists are "exceptionalists", who deny an environmental doomsday is coming. Modern humans may be harming the planet more than their ancestors, but they also have the means to solve the problems. They cite recovery times from earthquakes and other natural disasters and from man-made disasters like wars. Hubert London faults teachers and textbooks for overemphasizing the danger, pointing to rising life expectancy and food availability. Economist E. J. Mishan counters, "The human race can perish only once". Textbooks authors ought to present a balanced view that will encourage students to study historical evidence and draw their own conclusions. It shows Easter Island, the Canaries, and Haiti irreparably damaged ecologically by Europeans' introduction of diseases, crops, and livestock, but also shows how technological innovations have forestalled problems with shortages of everything from whale oil to silver, reclaimed polluted rivers, and restored forests. They are not mentioned as the textbooks echo General Electric's shallow motto, "Progress is our most important product" (GE is one of the world's ten worst environmental offenders).

Textbooks' concluding pages are not the only problem, for they are throughout in tone celebratory of progress. Everything has always gotten better. Even the traditional portrayal of Reconstruction is part of the upward swing, for slavery is eliminated. They, of course, ignore examples showing race relations in 1870 better than today and free of many whites' belief that blacks have no right to attention anymore because their problem has been solved. Americans are used to believing they have only grown more tolerant, sophisticated, and progressive over time, but proof to the contrary is everywhere. Who could imagine a president growing a beard in office and being re-elected like Lincoln? White males with facial hair are cut off from high positions in business and politics. This may seem trivial, but it shows that the ideology of progress is "a chronological form of ethnocentrism". Lincoln is also the last US president who is not a member of a Christian denomination when elected.



The belief in constant progress suggests falsely that societies of the past are more primitive than they. "Savagery-barbarism-civilization" and "gathering-hunting-horticultural-agricultural-industrial" are organizational schemes that denigrate the lives of all but those in the final stage. Anthropologists have long known primitive societies are more leisurely. Until Europeans introduce diseases, Natives are longer-lived and less often sick than they - and the inhabitants of the ancient Middle East, who Psalm 90 says expect to live to "three score and ten" or "four score" (70-80). Students are left not only ignorant of past societies but also oblivious to the merits of the non-Western societies of today. They assume that equal treatment of men and women is the concern of no one but Americans. Few high schools offer anthropology courses, and less than ten percent of college students take one, so such ethnocentrism must be fought in the history or social studies classroom. These, in fact, do the opposite and avoid suggesting the most progressive humans have been responsible for history's worst atrocities.

Textbooks should be challenging students to think about the American way of life from birth to death. The miracles of modern medicine are balanced by the abandonment of commonsense practices all humans have practiced from the start. Progress - left undefined - has not always been positive and paths taken have not been the only ones possible. Textbooks should devote their final pages to challenging students to discuss alternatives for their future rather than telling them the government has their interests at heart and will assure them a good life. Surveys show high schools seniors are more concerned about environmental catastrophe than their parents, showing the textbooks' cheery optimism has not rubbed off. Perhaps the subject will have to be covered in biology or health classes.



Chapter 11,

Chapter 11, Summary and Analysis

"Why is History Taught Like This?" sums up why textbooks are filled with irrelevancies and errors and avoid anything that might help students understand present or future concerns. Only the two inquiry textbooks include footnotes, while six narratives books even lack a bibliography. Clones are issued yearly with new authors named, but little or no change in content.

Textbooks publishers appeal to students, historians, education professors, and teachers, but chiefly to the interest groups and the public whose ire they seek to avoid. In 1925, the American Legion says ideal textbooks must inspire patriotism and optimism, and give equal space to each state and region. This remains the rule, despite Engle and Ochoa's 1986 call rather for selective, in-depth presentations, drawn from across the social sciences, humanities, and the students' own experience, confronting them with important questions not readily answered.

Textbook authors cannot be expected to return exclusively to primary sources, and in every generation they write with their time's blinders on, but the abundant secondary literature on which *Lies My Teacher Told Me* is based has not made its way into textbooks, media, teacher-training materials, or the schools. The US has the largest gap of any country between what historians know and what the people are taught.

Admittedly, writers must prioritize the vast materials, based on grade level, but space and time constraints cannot explain the distortion of Columbus' story and Europe's world domination. Textbooks are so uniform that 1984-like controls are imaginable. "Critical theory" points out that in stratified societies, including the US, the privileged elite seeks hegemony over institutions that shape perception of the past to maintain the status quo. Textbooks and schools that prevent students from sharpening their critical thinking serve this end. The upper class does have private clubs whose members control the multinationals, television networks, newspapers, and publishing, but they have not shown any penchant for silencing critics. Power elite theorists give the upper classes too much credit for a cultural distortion for which everyone is responsible.

Special interest pressure on publishers is a more likely cause of uniform, dull textbooks. Whether through state adoption boards or at a local level, they censor topics and treatments that may offend parents. The biggest markets, Texas and California, influence publishers most. Selection boards are generally small and politically appointed. A small staff circulates specifications and guidelines to publishers, whose submissions are distributed to members for rating against seventy-some criteria. Publishers' representatives help by pointing out their products' advantages, pushing form over content. Raters can no more than flip through the volumes, looking for readability, design appeal, ancillary aids - surrogates for quality - and assuring their state is well represented, whether warranted in the national picture or not. Since most



textbook editors are former sales representatives, they know how to market and throw in everything folks might want to see mentioned. Texts thus become "glossaries of historical events".

Next, the public gets a chance to comment on the books the committees approve. Organized groups weigh in, often requiring hundreds of corrections, factual and technical. Southern states have largely dropped requirements of using pro-Confederate terminology, but publishers still play it safe and authors often omit materials they suspect could require rewrites. Loewen knows the process from the inside: as a senior editor of a *Mississippi: Conflict and Change*, he is rejected by eleven publishers who doubt that with containing so much black history and recent events that it will sell, and fear Mississippi might retaliate by rejecting their other textbooks. The co-authors and three school districts that want to adopt the book file a successful First Amendment Challenge.

Coveting the success of *Triumph of the American Nation* (a third of the American market), publishers copy its conservative approach and, risking over \$500,000 in production costs per new book, they pass on opportunities to risk providing alternatives for niche markets (right- or left-wing, minority, labor, or feminist viewpoints). As in the former communist countries, censorship is exercised less by the state than by authors, editors, and publishers, who rarely allow anything in that state censors might disapprove. None would attempt to include materials from Chapter 2 of this book in a textbook.

Rarely do the names of a textbook's coauthors reflect who does the work, particularly titles that are reissued over half a century. Teachers and historians "rent" their names to publishers while anonymous minions do the work. Publishers insist their big-name authors "control" the books, but this does not imply that they play a major role in revisions. Publishers keep the *final* chapter and pedagogical style current but rarely introduce any new historical content.

Everyone but the authors have scapegoats for the distortions and lies of omission. Publishing executives blame the adoption boards, school administrators, and parents; parents of all persuasions blame publishers; teachers blame administrators and publishers. If the authors have, indeed, written the kind of books they want, then they are to blame. Some admit ignorance of certain events they cover, but others know better. Davidson and Lytle's college-level text demonstrates understanding of the Indian experience that is excluded from their high school text. Textbook writing has no affect on academic tenure or promotion, so there is little incentive to excellence to balance the real fear of offending publishers or adoption boards. Publishers prefer relative unknowns who are "more tractable" than the famous, and in cases where they and writers conflict, publishers usually win. By contrast, in the world of professional history, authors write for fellow historians, whose reviews will make or break the title.

Since the early 20th century, American history textbooks have been part of a "nationalist flag-waving campaign" that helps students discover common beliefs and appreciate the dominant heritage. Authors imagine - usually badly - what readers need to "feel better"



about America; and as a result, write defensively about Western civilization. Knowing they have but one shot at affecting America's future, they grow puffed up and euphoric, rein in their political and social biases, and stick with the established myths, producing long, wrong, mindless, and boring texts.

Teachers, who could en masse influence the publishers and committees to change the books, for the most part believe they are good and getting better, and are happy to present the published lies, distortions, and omissions without complaint. Many know little about history from college history courses or current by reading; they are amazed to learn people before Columbus know the world is round. Teachers shun the controversy that students overwhelmingly want discussed. Initiating discussions could lead to admitting, "I don't know" - a professional taboo. Therefore, teachers teach as they have been taught, in the "omniscient tone" of the textbooks.

Professional historical organizations in almost every decade since 1934 have urged stirring up students' minds, but overworked teachers still put forward endless factoids to memorize and stick seventy percent of the time with the textbook/supplements/teachers' manual sets that make lesson planning and exams easier, and that guarantee adequate performance on standardized tests. Familiar errors are preferable to unfamiliar but accurate information.

History teachers often identify with the materials they teach, and like the textbooks, grow defensive about the US, particularly when facing minority students. Even African American teachers are loath to criticize lest their loyalty be attacked. English teachers, by comparison, can safely discuss mildly subversive poems. Social studies and history teachers enjoy little esteem among colleagues and at the high school level are often coaches forced to "teach something". They put in longer hours than other faculty members. Sensing students at all grade levels agree that history is unimportant and irrelevant, many teachers give up trying to be creative. Relying on textbooks makes it easier for both students and teachers to put in minimal effort, since they list key ideas, terms, names, and dates to memorize. Students imagine they are learning and that testing will be "objective". Teachers feel safe from uncomfortable discussions. Fragmenting history into lists of facts assures everything will be forgotten as soon as each grading period ends.

The two inquiry textbooks examined challenge students to use primary materials and challenge ethnocentrism. Research shows such books create student interest in contemporary politics, but they also require active teaching. Teachers and administrators abandon them, leaving teachers locked into the narrative texts, which are hard to "teach against", both in terms of time and knowing what outside resources to use. Teachers feel intimidated by the famous authors' names and seek security beneath their blanket; if challenged about anything they teach, they can blame the textbook if they use it. Rejecting a given textbook can be construed as criticism of the whole chain of authority that selects it for use.

A young student teacher wants to straighten out elementary school children about the Pilgrims, but is told by her professor this is like saying there is no Santa Claus. She



perseveres, hears no parental complaints, but may be perceived as hostile and negative later in her career. American teachers traditionally enjoy autonomy in their classrooms, but some are fired for making controversial materials available, so cautious colleagues censor themselves to avoid unnecessary risks. Heroic teachers who want to present history accurately and challengingly are a tiny minority. The rest are part of the problem rather than the solution.

Because the myths of American history are woven into the fabric of society, all Americans are involved in the problem. Every time Columbus Day is celebrated or *Gone with the Wind* airs, lies are spread; but questioning them is anti-American. Some minority groups must not be mentioned and "extreme care" must be exercised when discussing officialdom in an uncomplimentary way - even if it is factual. Textbooks in other disciplines (e.g., mathematics and biology, creationism notwithstanding) undergo adoption processes and include errors, but no one questions whether they can have "scholarly integrity".

Some seek to "sanitize" history to protect youngsters against issues adults cannot solve, like sheltering them from bad weather. Age-graded censorship is acceptable to almost everyone; fifth-graders should not be subject to nightmares about Columbus severing Indians' hands or driving them to suicide. The analogy to protecting them from pornography, however, is false, for failing to tell them the truth amounts to putting forth lies, and violence is portrayed when useful. (e.g., to create revulsion against John Brown). Students cannot be shielded from the realities featured in rap songs and know those who beat Rodney King are not "Officer Friendly". Teaching otherwise renders school irrelevant. The few American that take a post-high school American history course are shocked to realize earlier teachers have lied. They feel betrayed by myths and omissions. The rest never hear the truth, which is what many adults seem to want: children kept ignorant do not become idealistic. Keeping them from obtaining the intellectual tools to challenge the values adults may or may not hold seems safe, but lying to children is a "slippery slope". What lies are to be told to whom? When does the lying end?

Deciding what to teach without reference to truth politicizes history. Why not tell different stories to different groups, if there is no anchor of truth? One publisher, by issuing a "Lone Star" edition suited to white Texans, is already doing so. Authors rarely consider such rhetorical questions and postmodernists caution against using the label "true". American textbooks are telling what white Americans consider "certain, clear, and strong" - a characterization of truth Martin Heidegger lays down while in service to Hitler. If textbooks are not true, then there is no answer to students who say American history is a waste of time.



Chapter 12,

Chapter 12, Summary and Analysis

"What is the Result of Teaching History Like This?" shows how high school students go through the classroom routine but gain no insights or power of discernment. They expend energy distracting teachers, who often go along. Their oft-proven ignorance of basic facts proves they actively *resist* learning history. They graduate lacking tools for the understanding, accepting, or rebutting of politician and media voices' historical references.

Nothing "sticks" because all emotion is removed from the presentation of history. Textbooks are pious rather than passionate, which implies history is not worthy of passion or serious study. History comes across not as drama but as boring dead facts. Teachers can make history stick by touching students' lives, but textbooks disconnect them from family and community by focusing on the remote past. Children, even more than adults, need to see how isolated facts interrelate in order to retain them. The "feel-good" way history is presented disproportionately alienates minorities and the poor, many of whom know better from their parents. Non-European students should not feel their heritage is unimportant, which is the psychological effect of the textbooks' Eurocentrism. Beginning with the Arawaks, nonwhites are "otherized". Affluent white children can feel good about their own past without making others uncomfortable. Such an approach would make the non-elite want to study.

Loewen frequently runs a "Vietnam exercise" to help affluent white audiences understand how they are affected by textbook treatment of that war. He has categorized polling data from the period and asks participants to fill in a chart of how educational level tallies with "hawkish" and "dovish" views. The audiences know the facts needed to fill in the charts correctly, but fail to apply it because they want to believe schooling is a good thing, educated with being informed/tolerant. Ten-to-one, they believe the college-educated are doves, because they are supposedly better informed. Learning the opposite is true, the participants struggle for logical explanations. Loewen then shows that higher education: 1) correlates with affluence and success, which breeds allegiance to society; and 2) socializes students to accept the rightness of society and thus to conform. Cognitive dissonance is at work at all levels of education among those going to Vietnam, for it is human nature to believe in what one does.

Polls demonstrate the "nonthinking results" of allegiance and socialization. In 1966, a 50/50 split over bombing Hanoi and Haiphong shifts to 85/15 in favor after bombing begins, while in 1968, a 51/49 split in favor of continued the assault shifts to 71/23 against when LBJ orders a halt. Public opinion follows government policy changes in all areas, showing the "silent majority" is an unthinking majority. Education encourages people to trust society rather than think about it, not only in America but also in communist Cuba and China, and is used everywhere to keep people from understanding any history-based problem.

If citizens must be able to analyze and interpret events intelligently (as one textbook declares), US history textbooks are a miserable failure. Sociologists are amazed and depressed about the consequences of such "social stupidity". Taking courses correlates with increased proficiency in almost every subject but history. Upper-middle-class students buy into a view of society that is in their ideological interests and blames those less educated for their own poverty and being hawkish on war. They feel good about having worked hard in school and earned their privileges. The working and lower classes also buy in, blaming lack of education for their dead-end jobs.

A final reason that students accept what teachers and textbooks say is short-term self-interest: they must pass tests. Many feel accomplishment even in learning something mindless and useless. They might well oppose curriculum changes that would make them work more. They are used to rote education and are not prepared for anything more authentic. The textbooks give students no incentive to appreciate history. They will learn history only when they see some point in doing so; when they find something interesting or important to their lives and futures. It will begin when teachers and textbooks stop lying to them.



Afterword,

Afterword, Summary and Analysis

"The Future Lies Ahead - and What to Do about Them" admits *Lies My Teacher Told Me* is incomplete in its criticism, but expanding it is no solution. Instead, truth must receive "mythic significance" and someone must intervene at some point in the publishing and teaching monolith. Teachers can introduce fewer topics and treat each more fully so students can see that history is not just about answers. Resources exist so teachers need not be experts. Projects such as oral histories and researching local place names and historical markers expand the scope of history, and excite and empower students. Raising questions leads students to important issues and examining sources to back up their opinions. Teaching backwards from the present can grip students' attention and challenge them to discuss what in the past causes current conditions. Anything that puts students in touch with sources can inspire them if they ask and answer five questions: 1) Why has the source been created? 2) Whose viewpoint is presented (and omitted)? 3) Is the account believable (internally consistent)? 4) Is the account backed up (or contradicted) by other sources? and, 5) How does the source want viewers/hearers/readers to feel about America?.

Lobbyists for many views are competing with right-wing conservatives to influence textbook committees, and "consumers of education" (students, parents, teachers, and concerned citizens) are demanding quality and truth. When young Americans, at all levels of society, of all races, and both, "command the power of history" they will be ready for citizenship. Jefferson says the teaching of political history can either secure or endanger freedom. The ability to identify lies and distortion is a powerful tool in a democracy.



Characters

John Brown

Christopher Columbus

J. Edgar Hoover

Thomas Jefferson

Helen Keller (1880-1968)

Abraham Lincoln

Betsy Ross

Squanto

George Washington

Woodrow Wilson



Objects/Places

The Civil War

The great mid-19th-century conflict between the Northern Union and Southern Confederacy is depicted gingerly in high school textbooks of American history because it deals with the taboo topic of race. The build-up to the conflict cannot be honestly told because that requires understanding that the Constitution has allowed slavery to be preserved for decades, and while slavery is not sufficiently profitable to be maintained in the North, it is vital to the Southern cotton-based economy. John Brown's raids, trial, and education polarize North and South; the latter making white supremacy a fundamental value worth going to war for. Secession begins after Abraham Lincoln is elected president, but the textbooks portray the Great Emancipator as a moderate on race whose primary concern is preserving the Union. They overlook or distort his eloquent words that show he understands the conflict as God's punishing the American people for the sin of slavery. Lincoln's assassination, days after the surrender at Appomattox, turns him into a martyr, venerated by all. During the nadir of race relations in the US, from 1890-1920, Southerners insist the Civil War be called the "War between the States" and the South's idealism put on a par with the North's. Since the Civil Rights movement, this has largely been written out, but the contribution of black soldiers has yet to be recognized, even though it helps lessen racism among Union veterans.

Communism

Since the end of World War I, during which the Soviet Union is formed in revolution, America has sought to weed out or contain communism. President Woodrow Wilson twice sends troops to fight on the White side against the Soviets in unsuccessful campaigns unauthorized by Congress. Helen Keller criticizes Wilson for not being honest about the invasion of Russia in 1919, and today's textbooks omit the dark and secret invasion along with any events that suggest a government cover-up. They also omit that Keller is a socialist in the era Wilson is using the "Red Scare" to violate American's civil rights with impunity. After World War II, this same fear makes possible Joseph McCarthy's witch hunts and the gradual US entry into Vietnam, for fear of losing another region to communism. Military adventures in Latin America are masked as anti-communist efforts, no matter what their (often economic) motivations are. Textbooks paint rosy outcomes despite the facts, because America is always right and communism wrong.

Gone with the Wind

Loewen takes Margaret Mitchell's 1937 novel and its 1939 film adaptation by Hollywood, both prize-winning, as perpetuating the "magnolia myth" that slavery is not too bad and the Confederate myth that Reconstruction is a "problem" of bringing African Americans



into the mainstream of society, rather than integrating ex-Confederates who use widespread violence against white Republicans and blacks and hinder black progress in education. In the 1850s, even Northern whites consider slavery for blacks a cultural step-up from the "dark continent", and *Gone with the Wind* tells later generations of the emancipated field hands being as child- or monkey-like. High school history textbooks during the nadir of race relations from 1890-1920 present Mitchell's idealization of a failed social structure as fact, but since the 1960s, the Civil Rights movement has brought the viewpoint back closer to that reflected in the 19th century's most famous novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a novel which helps precipitate the Civil War. Harriet Beecher Stowe condemns slavery as intolerable inhumanity and shows it as an evil to be fought. Still, in 1988, the American Library Association polls library patrons and finds the white-supremacy novel still tops their list of best books and students still believed it more than the reformed textbooks.

Plagues

Perhaps more than anything, plague shapes the earliest contact between Europeans and Native Americans, but the Thanksgiving myth distorts it in high school textbooks of American history. Students recall the religious persecution of the Pilgrims in England, the Mayflower Compact as a forerunner to the Constitution, and Squanto helping the Pilgrims survive - but nothing about a plague. Reaching America some 30,000 years ago, Natives spread out and live under conditions that protect against the transmission of disease. Early accounts proclaim them "a remarkably healthy race" before Columbus but ripe for infection by foreign microbes. British and French fishermen begin the New England infection in 1617, which within three years wipes out ninety to ninety-six percent of the coastal inhabitants (compared with thirty percent of Europeans in the famous "Black Plague" of 1348-50). Smallpox rages for fifteen years, killing some European Americans but mostly Native Americans. Scholars debate statistics, but America may have had a population of 100 million in 1492 versus Europe's seventy million. The plague allows Europeans to settle America as they never could the more populous Asia and Africa. Many refuse to believe Natives could suffer ninety-five percent mortality, so textbooks portray Europeans settling a vast "virgin continent", either omitting numbers or any reference to disease or selecting an arbitrary number, which they present as an absolute. This denies students any sense of the furious scholarly debate in the 1960-70s.

Plymouth Colony

The archetypal birthplace of the United States, Plymouth Colony is younger than both the Virginia colony and the Spanish settlements, but is far more amenable to the high school textbooks' goal of presenting a virtuous beginning to a truly exceptional nation. Historians debate how the *Mayflower's* 102 passengers (including only thirty-five Pilgrims) comes to land in New England, and several theories put the Pilgrims in questionable moral light. These do not make it into the textbooks, which grant too much attention to the Mayflower Compact, given the fact that the drafters of the Constitution



pay it little heed. The document, however, serves to uphold the archetype of American unique goodness. Plymouth Colony is the subject of the annual Thanksgiving celebration, which casts the Pilgrim Fathers as hosts to the ignorant Indian visitors. In fact, the Native Americans, having been looted by the whites and having lost their prepared fields to them (thanks to decimation by plagues carried across the Atlantic by earlier visitors), are responsible for the Pilgrims' survival over the first winter. The foods served on Thanksgiving (first celebrated in 1863 by President Lincoln as a means of elevating patriotism during the Civil War) are native to America, and the Indians teach the means of growing them to the Pilgrims. The textbooks piously repeat the myth rather than historical facts and elementary school pageants serve to reinforce it.

Sasha and Zamani

Loewen usefully refers to the division in many African societies of departed humans into "sasha" (the recently-departed, living-dead), and the "zamani" (those dead longer than anyone with immediate memories of them). He notes how, when reading about sasha events (e.g., the Persian Gulf War), Americans judge whether the authors have gotten it right or wrong based on their own experience. For the distant past, they necessarily read less critically and more reverently. Because the recent past tends to be controversial, textbooks avoid it, devoting progressively fewer pages to each decade since the 1930s. The sasha, however, is more relevant to students' lives and futures, so underplaying it undermines the value of studying history in general.

Syncretism

The melding of cultures newly making contact, syncretism inevitably acts in both directions, but American history textbooks invariably show Europeans teaching Natives and learning nothing from them in return. Syncretism is also inevitably voluntary; people decide what to accept wholesale, accept with modification, and reject outright. The Plains Indians' adoption of the horse from the Spaniards utterly transforms their culture. Native American forms of government in combination with Dutch traditions, the Magna Carta, and British common law influence American democracy. Determining degrees of influence is difficult but its existence ought not to be ignored - as the textbooks do.

Textbook Adoption Boards

Textbooks exist to make money for their publishers, who risk \$500,000 on each new title. Textbook adoption boards exist to evaluate titles for inclusion in the curriculum. Some states centralize the task, including the largest markets, Texas and California, while others handle it at a district level. In either case, a small staff puts out a desiderata list and distributes the texts it receives to raters, who face a monumental task and are often unable to do more than scan the books for appearance and how they handle local concerns. Publishers help them by pointing out the merits of their books. After the raters give their opinions, public hearings are held to allow parents, teachers, and others to



give their opinions. Right-wing lobbyists have always been active in pushing their views at these and are increasingly being balanced by other interest groups. Authors and publishers, anxious to avoid rewrites and/or rejection, censor the textbooks up front, resulting in a dull uniformity to all the textbooks used by American high school students.

The Vietnam War

A rebellion against French imperialism beginning at the time of World War I, the Vietnam War remains a French problem until the 1950s. When the French depart in defeat, Vietnamese enter into a civil war between pro- and anti-communist forces. The US sides with the anti-communists and is gradually drawn into a massive military presence. Loewen several times expresses amazement that high school students know more about the War of 1812 than the Vietnam War, which takes place during their parents' lifetimes. Because the war still raises controversy, textbooks authors, editors, and publishers minimize coverage and render it as positively as possible. The Vietnam War comes to be opposed by a majority of Americans as an unjust war, so ignoring why the US gets involved makes the antiwar movement a mystery. For ten years, Loewen has been inviting audiences to fill in a matrix of who at the time are "hawks" and who are "doves", based on level of education. Participants consistently get it exactly wrong because they posit education produces wisdom.

The War of 1812

A conflict between the United States and Great Britain, the War of 1812 is really about territory but is portrayed as being about maritime law. Britain wants to maintain a buffer between its Canadian territories and the US, and Americans want unlimited expansion (particularly the Southern cotton planters). Notably, most of the major battles involve Native American combatants enlisted by the two sides, and fervor for the war is greatest in the hinterlands. Were it truly about the law of the sea, New England should have been most enthusiastic, but the region was generally anti-war. Canadian history textbooks get this right, but American ones concentrate on the writing of the *Star Spangled Banner*. They must do this because they do not want to admit the Indian involvement and the fact that the Indians are the big losers in the war. After the War of 1812, the US Army is left unopposed on the continent by foreign armies and is able to turn its attention to mopping up Indian opposition to being forced onto reservations. For all this vagueness, textbooks give so much more space to this war than Vietnam that high school graduates know far more about it than an event that lasts far longer and claims far more lives and has far greater contemporary impact on their lives.



Themes

Social Archetypes

Perhaps the strongest theme running through *Lies My Teacher Told Me* is that high school textbooks of American history are riddled with false and falsifying archetypes. Some are relatively benign, like picturing Betsy Ross sewing the first flag. Others, originally intended to be benign, play into something more serious, such as Washington Irving's 1828 claim that no one before Columbus believes the world is not flat. This serves to make Columbus into a "man of vision, energy, resourcefulness, and courage", and supports the dangerous archetype that those who direct social enterprises are more intelligent than those nearer the bottom.

The most dangerous archetype is the overarching one of "American exceptionalism", which ultimately justifies the doctrines of Manifest Destiny and the American Century. Emerging from the architect of European superiority (the common viewpoint of all US textbooks), it begins piously enough at Plymouth Rock and thereafter presents American culture as unprecedented in its possibilities and achievements. Progress has been continual, with even post-Civil War racial discrimination being a step up from slavery. Adhering to the archetype of a frontier line of whites pushing the Indians further west rather than describing the reality of Indians, whites, and blacks working and sometimes living together for hundreds of years, alternatives to the Indian Wars are obliterated.

Textbooks are full of archetypes and falsifications because since the early 1920s the American Legion has opposed including in textbooks intended for immature pupils anything that may suggest blunders, foibles, or frailties in heroes and patriots. Natural history museum curators know visitors bring archetypes with them and some design exhibits to disprove inaccuracies, but textbook authors - along with teachers and moviemakers - do not. Publishers see to it that blemishes are omitted. This leaves Woodrow Wilson as the archetype of an idealist foiled by an isolationist Senate, which guarantees institutions are named after a racial bigot, an invader of foreign lands, who defies individual liberties.

The parents of today's high school students, having during their lifetimes seen the government repeatedly caught in acts of misconduct and deceit, have lost their 1950s naive faith and do not agree with the presentation by textbook authors, "the last innocents in America." They know a different story, which, combined with the daily newspaper, makes education "suspect". The archetype of "a wise and good government" implies good citizens must follow its leadership in the way citizens of the Third Reich and Central African Empire have. Meanwhile, the sunny archetype of progress assures students everything can only get better. Thomas Jefferson invites the "philosophical observer" of his day to consider how, traveling eastward from the Rocky Mountains to the Atlantic, the progress of mankind from infancy to maturity can be



observed. Growth is still equated with progress, in population numbers and signs of economic prosperity.

Cognitive dissonance

Lies My Teacher Told Me repeatedly shows major characters practicing cognitive dissonance; a psychological process whereby people convince themselves that what they are doing is justified. Most of those who serve in the Vietnam War see it as justified in early polls before the antiwar movement builds. It is human nature to believe in whatever one does. Most often, it is used by evildoers to convince themselves that those whom they exploit deserve what they get.

This handy tool arrives in the Americas with Columbus. The great explorer lauds the intellect and helpfulness of the Natives on first contact, but as he settles into the role of great economic exploiter, stealing the Arawaks' lands and either enslaving or destroying them, and then replacing them with imported slaves from Africa, Columbus begins to denigrate their intelligence and bravery. Early English settlers in Virginia continue this tradition, call the Natives they meet "ingenious," "industrious," and "quick of apprehension," until the time comes to fight them, whereupon without changing they become "sloathfull [sic] and idle, vitious [sic], melancholy [sic], [and] slovenly".

George Washington deals the same way with other Native Americans, whose views on democratic governance influence the Founding Fathers. When they fail to lay down arms after the Revolutionary War, he denounces them as "having nothing human except the shape" during the bloody Ohio War of 1790-95. This quickly leads to a general rationalization of immorality and expediency that become unofficial national policy towards Indians. Democracy gives way to white supremacy, and idealism falls victim.

Cognitive dissonance is fundamental to black slavery and subsequent civil discrimination against freed African Americans during Reconstruction and the so-called nadir of race relations, 1890-1920. Those who would mistreat fellow human beings must believe them inferior intellectually and physically and deserving of the ill treatment they receive. Even Northern whites before and during the Civil War believe the stereotype that Africans benefit from slavery as it gets them out of the "dark continent". Some minorities today continue to believe - because of the way their people have been treated in American history textbooks - that they deserve the poverty they endure. Even intimating in textbooks that American society is stratified along economic, race, and gender lines is a major taboo that is not broken, for then one would have to believe and act upon the Declaration of Independence's premise that all men are created equal and entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Eurocentrism

Lies My Teacher Told Me consistently shows high school textbooks of American history are dominated by a mindset that holds everything positive in history originates in Europe and flows thence to the ignorant outside world through enlightened explorers and

settlers. Eurocentrism prevents American history textbooks from acknowledging numerous moderate- to well-documented visits from across both the Atlantic and Pacific by non-whites prior to Columbus and enduring cultural remnants of West African habitations in Mexico and Central America. Eurocentrism cannot recognize contributions by American Natives to the political theories underlying the Bill of Rights, minor matters as foodstuffs and place names, or any flow of ideas from America back to Europe. There are indications they influence the Reformation and the Enlightenment with its emphasis on democracy. That European Americans look, sound, act, and think differently from Europeans after their encounter with Native Americans is not mentioned because the possibility is not allowed.

Eurocentrism insists God is solidly on the white man's side, and this has been accepted since the 17th century, even by some Native peoples struck down by European diseases. Pondering whether their gods have abandoned them, they are faced with a choice between converting to Christianity or suicide. Eurocentrism causes the region beyond East Coast control and the Western regions where Native Americans still live to be "frontier" or "wilderness". This makes the area seem subtly alien and, incidentally, marginalizes all non-urban peoples. Textbooks never print anything that might make Native Americans appear as "regular people" with whom readers might identify.

African Americans, of course, suffer worst from Eurocentrism, because it originally posits them as barely or subhuman and uses the psychological process of cognitive dissonance to justify enslaving and mistreating them. Eurocentrism in textbooks minimizes the contribution of all other peoples to the point students from other backgrounds are discouraged or learn to distrust whatever their white teachers tell them by parents who tell them the way things really are. Textbook publishers risk too much financially to put out niche books fairer to minority populations or to change too radically the way the old myths are told. Sufficient primary source materials and a rich secondary literature exist to make evening out the coverage possible, but the forces against this happening are formidable. The egregious errors of early 20th-century textbooks about blacks and Native Americans are gone, but their cultures and experiences are still narrated by white authors with little understanding or sympathy. Until this is corrected, the educational system cannot be equal.

Style

Perspective

James W. Loewen, a Harvard University Ph.D. in sociology, has taught at the predominantly black Tougaloo College in Mississippi before spending twenty years at the University of Vermont, and currently lives in Washington, DC, continuing his research into how people assimilate the past. Early in the book Loewen reveals how, in Vermont, he enjoys asking first-year students in his race-relations classes about what they retain from high school American history courses. For the most part, they are skeptical about the cultural heroes foisted upon them and have lost interest in the entire discipline of history, but hunger for useable role models.

Lies My Teacher Told Me (1995) is the fruit of two years studying and comparing the contents of American history textbooks at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. The book's subtitle summarizes the results: "Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong". Loewen admits he "learned" history from textbooks colored by the views prevailing before the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, and pays special attention to the changes wrought in the 1970s. He examines not only the myriad of fascinating facts the textbooks get wrong, but also the reasons why textbook publishers, textbook writers, and teachers prefer to go along with perpetuating "blind patriotism, mindless optimism, sheer misinformation, and outright lies" (cover notes) rather than dealing with the sometimes-unpleasant conclusions thinking requires. Loewen's clear intention in writing the book is to get public school teachers to abandon the deadly rote memorization approach to history, even if the textbooks cannot, for political reasons, be immediately corrected.

Loewen brings to the book direct experience with trying to buck the system, having co-written the first state history textbook to discuss integration honestly, *Mississippi: Conflict and Change*. The book wins the Lillian Smith Award for Best Southern Nonfiction but is rejected for use as a textbook by the State of Mississippi. He discusses in Chapter 11 how this leads to a major First Amendment lawsuit, *Loewen et al. v. Turnipseed, et al.* He also discusses his *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong* (1999) and *The Truth About Columbus*, which is fleshed out in Chapter 2. *Lies My Teacher Told Me* wins the Oliver Cromwell Cox Award for Distinguished Anti-Racist Scholarship and the Before Columbus Foundation/American Book Award.

Tone

Lies My Teacher Told Me is as polemical as its title and subtitle ("Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong") suggest, but readers quickly appreciate that Loewen is discussing a deadly serious topic with them. He will eventually reveal that Americans have the worst gap in the world between what historians know about their past and what they dole out to their students. Loewen demonstrates the lies are not only



extensive but are also sometimes truly perverse. The effect of turning high school students off to history leaves several generations that have no context for judging current events. It may even be intentional, for Americans have a penchant for not trusting the next generation and fear students who learn idealism will question the political and cultural status quo.

Loewen surveys the whole of American history to demonstrate how subjective the textbooks are. He explains why they are, including the complex politics and economics of publishing and teaching. He presents objectively the readily accessible historical facts which textbooks hide, distort, or sugarcoat, and makes a compelling case for telling the truth. He admits there are scholars who reject the idea of objective "truth", but argues that, at the very least, outright falsehood ought not to be acceptable. It is not tolerated in any other subject.

Right-wing readers who agree innocent minds must be protected against the unvarnished facts of history will find Loewen's book offensive, but will find it hard to dispute his well-documented findings. Others will rejoice to learn the truth, to have at hand documentation when they try to use the truth, and understand how and why the truth has come to be perverted. The writing is dense but engaging, scholarly but entertaining. The lightness with which he writes may charm even right-wingers.

Perhaps the book's most important feature is buried in the Epilogue, where Loewen suggests five questions to ask about anything one reads, sees, or hears. Following this methodology will allow individuals to separate history from myth, which anyone should find valuable.

Structure

Lies My Teacher Told Me by James W. Loewen consists of acknowledgements, an Introduction ("Something Has Gone Very Wrong"), twelve numbered chapters, and an afterword. An appendix listing the twelve American history textbooks Loewen surveys throughout the text is followed by extensive end notes providing bibliographic references and many choice bits of information that do not fit the running narrative. These are well worth reading. Finally, there is an adequate author/subject index.

Each chapter is introduced by an unusually large number of epigrams that prepare the reader to appreciate ways the subject matter covered *could* be approached in high school textbooks of American history, but are not. Chapter 1, "Handicapped by History: The Process of Hero-making", sets the stage by demonstrating what textbooks say and do not say about two early-20th century figures. Readers are awakened to how little they know about Woodrow Wilson and Helen Keller and are alerted to the fact most people in history receive this same kind of cleansing of history. This is a valuable perspective for the following chapters, which proceed chronologically.

Chapters 2-6 center on how race is systematically misrepresented. Chapter 2, "1493: The True Importance of Christopher Columbus", reveals the untold effects of genocide



and slavery at the dawn of American history; Chapter 3, "The Truth about the First Thanksgiving", moves this northward to Plymouth to show the same affects at the mythical Birth of the Nation; Chapter 4, "Red Eyes", looks sweepingly at the invisibility of Native Americans' extinction, physical or cultural; Chapter 5, "'Gone with the Wind': The Invisibility of Racism in American History Textbooks", focuses on the untold story of racial slavery, while Chapter 6, "John Brown and Abraham Lincoln: The Invisibility of Antiracism in American History Textbooks", flips the coin to show how the movement to free slaves falls victim to the need not to discuss taboos or offend the majority white readership.

Chapters 7-10 look at how textbooks handle other taboo subjects. Chapter 7, "The Land of Opportunity", takes on the effects of social stratification; Chapter 8, "Watch Big Brother: What Textbooks Teach about the Federal Government", looks at foreign policy and desegregation snafus; Chapter 9, "Down the Memory Hole: The Disappearance of the Recent Past", shows how Vietnam and other near-current events receive short shrift; and Chapter 10, "Progress Is Our Most Important Product", looks at how the myth of continual progress leaves history as a subject irrelevant.

The final two chapters and Afterword shift from evidence of how history is misrepresented to an attempt at explaining *why* it is handled this way: Chapter 11, "Why is History Taught Like This?", the pedagogical outcome: Chapter 12, "What is the Result of Teaching History Like This?"; and how some improvements can perhaps be effected: "The Future Lies Ahead - and What to Do about Them".



Quotes

"Why don't textbooks mention arms as a facilitator of exploration and domination? Why don't they treat *any* of the foregoing factors? If crude factors such as military power or religiously sanctioned greed are perceived as reflecting badly on us, who exactly is 'us'? Who are the textbooks written for (and by)? Plainly, descendants of Europeans." Chapter 2, p. 44

"Acknowledging how aboriginal we are culturally - how the United States and Europe, too, have been influenced by Native American as well as European ideas - would require significant textbook rewriting. If we recognized American Indians as important intellectual antecedents of our political structure, we would have to acknowledge that acculturation has been a *two-way* street, and we might have to reassess the assumption of primitive Indian culture that legitimates the entire conquest." Chapter 4, p. 113

"Way is trying to show respect for Native American religion, but it doesn't work. Stated flatly like this, the beliefs seem like make-believe, not the sophisticated theology of a higher civilization. Let us try a similarly succinct summary of the beliefs of many Christians today. " 'These Americans believed that one great male god ruled the world. Sometimes they divided him into three parts, which they called father, son, and holy ghost. They ate crackers and wine or grape juice, believing that they were eating the son's body and drinking his blood. If they believed strongly enough, they would live on forever after they died.'" Chapter 4, p. 115

"The very essence of what we have inherited from slavery is the idea that it is appropriate, even 'natural,' for whites to be on top, blacks on the bottom. In its core our culture tells us - tells all of us, including African Americans - that Europe's domination of the world came about because Europeans were smarter. In their core, many whites and some people of color believe this." Chapter 5, p. 144

"For our first seventy years as a nation, then, slavery made our foreign policy more sympathetic with imperialism than with self-determinism. Textbooks cannot show the influence of slavery on our foreign policy if they are unwilling to talk about ideas like racism that might make whites look bad. When textbooks authors turn their attention to domestic policy, racism remains similarly invisible." Chapter 5, p. 152

"Textbooks authors have an additional reason to avoid Brown's ideas: they are tinged with Christianity. Religion has been one of the great inspirations and explanations of human enterprise in this country. Yet textbooks, while they may mention religious organizations such as the Shakers or Christian Science, never treat religious ideas in any period seriously." Chapter 6, pp. 178-179

"Textbooks attribute selfish motives only to characters with whom they have little sympathy, such as the idealists in Reconstruction. The negatives then stick in the mind, cemented by the catching pejoratives *carpetbaggers* and *scalawags*, while the



qualifying phrases - 'some sincerely wanted ...' - are likely to be forgotten." Chapter 6, p. 197

"In short, textbook authors portray a heroic state, and, like their other heroes, this one is pretty much without blemishes. Such an approach converts textbooks into anticitizenship manuals - handbooks for acquiescence." Chapter 8, p. 216

"E. J. Mishan has suggested that feeding students rosy tales of automatic progress helps keep them passive, for it presents the future as a process over which they have no control. I don't believe this is why textbooks end as they do, however. Their upbeat endings may best be understood as ploys by publishers who hope that nationalist optimism will get their boos adopted. Such endings really amount to concessions of defeat, however. By implying that no real questions about our future need be asked and no real thinking about trends in our history has no serious bearing on our future. We can hardly fault students for concluding that the study of history is irrelevant." Chapter 10, p. 270

"Indeed, attempts by parents to preserve some nonexistent childhood innocence through avoidance are likely to heighten rather than reduce anxiety. Lying and omission are not the right ways. There is a way to teach truth to a child at any age level." Chapter 11, p. 294

"Education as socialization tells people what to think and how to act and requires them to conform. Education as socialization influences students simply to accept the rightness of our society. American history textbooks overtly tell us to be proud of America. The more schooling, the more socialization, and the more likely the individual will conclude that America is good." Chapter 12, p. 307

"To succeed, schools must help us learn how to ask questions about our society and its history and how to figure out answers for ourselves. At this crucial task most American history textbooks and courses fail miserably." Afterword, p. 313



Topics for Discussion

Can what Loewen calls "heroification" be justified in the telling of history? Use any character from *Lies My Teacher Told Me* to illustrate your answer.

What is the method of "cognitive dissonance"? Describe it in terms of any character from *Lies My Teacher Told Me* and from your own life if you find you have used it.

How would you portray Abraham Lincoln if you were writing a textbook?

How would you handle slavery in Colonial American days if you were writing a textbook? Show how this differs from the standard treatment described in *Lies My Teacher Told Me*.

How would you handle Native American culture if you were writing a textbook? Show how this differs from the standard treatment described in *Lies My Teacher Told Me*.

Would you have filled in the percentages in Loewen's "Vietnam exercise" correctly? How does the ability to interconnect discrete facts contribute to getting it right?

How would you describe the truths about Thanksgiving and the Plymouth Colony to children at the third, sixth, and twelfth grades, and at adult levels? Must they be protected from the truth? If so, what elements and why?