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History In The Making: An Absorbing Look At How American History Has Changed In The Telling Over The Last 200 Years



Synopsis

In this “thought-provoking study” (Library Journal), historian Kyle Ward – the widely acclaimed co-author of History Lessons – gives us another fascinating look at the biases inherent in the way we learn about our history. Juxtaposing passages from U.S. history textbooks from different eras, History in the Making provides us with intriguing new perspectives on familiar historical events and the ways in which they have been represented over time. The hardcover edition of History in the Making struck a chord among readers of popular history, and Ward was featured on NPR’s popular series “How the Understanding of U.S. History Changes.” “Interesting and useful,” according to Booklist, the book “convincingly illustrates how texts change as social and political attitudes evolve.” With excerpts that span two hundred years, from Columbus’s arrival to the Boston Massacre, from women’s suffrage to Japanese internment, History in the Making exposes the stark contrasts between the lessons different generations have been taught about our past. “A good starting point for anyone interested in history and subjectivity” (Kirkus), this immensely readable book is proof positive that your history is not your grandparent’s history and won’t be your children’s history.

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Customer Reviews

For this fascinating history of history, author and professor Ward (History Lessons) examined scores of textbooks published between 1794 and 1999 to see how the same American historical periods,

events or figures have been portrayed at different times throughout the nation's past, uncovering startling discrepancies in writers' versions of everything from slavery to Vietnam. Ward prefaces each chapter, broken down by event ("The Boston Massacre," "Witchcraft in the Colonies," "The Trail of Tears," "McCarthyism") with a summary of how a particular incident has been retold over the years. He then provides excerpts from a variety of texts, each with a scene-setting description that helps put the selection into context for present-day readers. In many cases, shifting biases, politics and cultural preferences (loaded with stereotypes and insensitive depictions of ethnic groups) have altered history's presentation over time, as later texts tend to prove earlier writings overly embellished or outright false. It's all enough to lead history buffs to ponder not only how history will treat, say, the Bush administration 50 years from now, but also whether they can actually believe what they read. Readers who found the similar (but far narrower) *Lies My Teacher Told Me* a sobering look at the shortcomings of American history books will come away even more disconcerted here. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Even when historians strive mightily to remain objective, their biases inevitably are reflected in their writings. Ward is an assistant professor of history and political science at Vincennes University, and he has also taught history at the high-school level. In examining excerpts from general U.S. history textbooks written over the past two centuries, he convincingly illustrates how these texts change as social and political attitudes evolve. In an early-nineteenth-century text, Native Americans are portrayed as treacherous savages. By the turn of the century, they have become the disappearing "noble savage." By the late twentieth century, the emphasis is on the victimization of Native Americans while showing respect for their diverse cultures. A few years after the Monroe Doctrine was proclaimed, texts stressed its opposition to European colonialism. But a current text views the doctrine as an example of America's emerging imperial ambitions. Jay Freeman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Ward does an excellent job of selecting pieces from history textbooks and showing how society's issues have altered the perception and importance of historical events. Women's suffrage went from being a few lines about men giving women the right to vote all the way to quite a few paragraphs and sections on the women who made the Suffrage Movement happen. A must for any history teacher or student to read.

Take a topic, let's say, American Indians, here is an excerpt from a book in 1844, and one in 1901, and one in 1944, and one in 1967 each from textbooks of the time, and see how the viewpoint changes (or doesn't?) . It is not fun to read, surprisingly. It is kind of dry. Maybe because textbooks are careful not to be too enthusiastic in opinion, so you don't start out with "raving savages" and go to a more objective "broken treaties" and then to the sympathetic today "we really screwed them". It would be much more fun to do this with newspapers, they used to be quite colorful and you might find out that Lincoln was a scoundrel and then a beloved victim, and then the greatest President ever, and so on. History does change in its viewpoints as we pass from the date and when we have the big picture without the emotion, but you won't find much of that in this book. Good book for teachers, probably, but not exciting enough for students-- unless you are doing a paper or something.

For someone looking for a comparative historiography, this is your book. The book examines in detail how U.S. History textbooks have covered a particular topic over time. Ward does an excellent job of providing a brief introduction to the topic itself followed by a quick summary of each era's excerpt. This summary provides a context of the era for the reader who may be a novice or experienced historian. The author's experience as a high school teacher and methods instructor is evident as this is a valuable tool for every secondary history teacher.

For social studies teachers who want to teach historiography, this is the book to start with. It does a great job dividing up key topics of American history and shows how the telling of those topics have changed over the years. A must have for any educator!

Helped with thesis writing

I was very excited about this book, because I thought it would be more of a presentation of the revisionism of our history that we're teaching our kids. It is, in a way, but instead, it is very boring, very uninteresting, and a very uneven collection of snippets from various texts. Even the headers for each section are uninteresting. Someone somewhere might enjoy it, but I can't even work up the enthusiasm to finish it.

I am a middle school history teacher. It is an interesting read. I like the idea of looking at the historiography of our own history. He picks some very well known events and some little known

events. There were some events I wish had more depth or had been covered. The book doesn't talk much about California history, like the mission system or the gold rush is absent for instance. Since even textbooks can't include everything an "anthology" of textbooks certainly can't.

For the readers who suffered through Sociology 101, there will be a feeling of déjà vu when they leaf through this book--but without renewed suffering. There's all you learned about how rumors spread contained in this compendium of history text-book descriptions of events. 18th Century earth-shaking matters become 20th Century trivia. Political correctness changes memories. Minor points become grossly exaggerated. The lesson? No history is written in stone. There is more than one surprise in this nicely told, well documented record of past and present history lessons as taught to students and passed along to the general public.

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