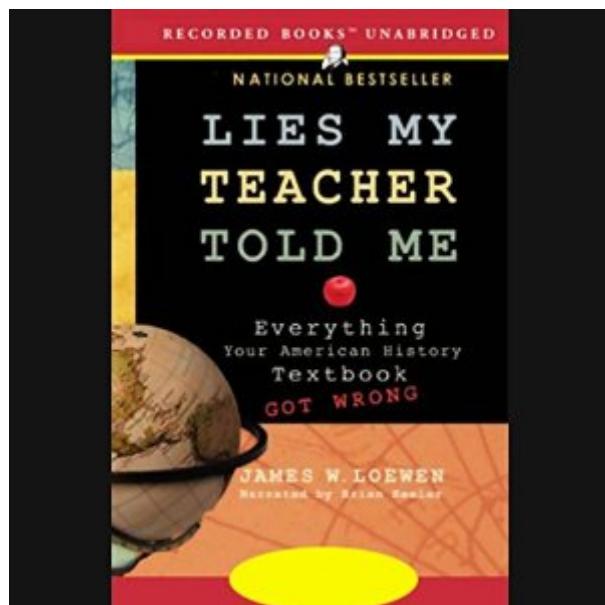


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Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong



Synopsis

This updated and revised edition of the American Book Award-winner and national bestseller revitalizes the truth of America's history, explores how myths continue to be perpetrated, and includes a new chapter on 9/11 and the Iraq War. Americans have lost touch with their history, and in *Lies My Teacher Told Me* Professor James Loewen shows why. After surveying eighteen leading high school American history texts, he has concluded that not one does a decent job of making history interesting or memorable. Marred by an embarrassing combination of blind patriotism, mindless optimism, sheer misinformation, and outright lies, these books omit almost all the ambiguity, passion, conflict, and drama from our past. In this revised edition, packed with updated material, Loewen explores how historical myths continue to be perpetuated in today's climate and adds an eye-opening chapter on the lies surrounding 9/11 and the Iraq War. From the truth about Columbus's historic voyages to an honest evaluation of our national leaders, Loewen revives our history, restoring the vitality and relevance it truly possesses. Thought provoking, nonpartisan, and often shocking, Loewen unveils the real America in this iconoclastic classic beloved by high school teachers, history buffs, and enlightened citizens across the country. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As a conservative white male who views revisionist history quite skeptically, I did not expect much from this book. As a student of American history, I understood what a woeful job our textbooks and (unfortunately) our teachers do in teaching the actual history of this country, but I never expected

both the depth and the level of scholarship Mr. Loewen presents in this book. It is well researched, well written and much needed. Having grown up near an Indian reservation, my own personal studies in original sources confirm how accurate Mr. Loewen really is. The book is hardly "political correctness" run amuck as suggested by one review. And his point is not to paint America as evil or bash Christian Europeans as two other reviews would lead us to believe. This type of simple minded attack does not tell us anything about the book, but rather betrays the reviewers' own entrenched viewpoints - viewpoints that certainly will not be changed by exposure to the truth. In fact, the criticisms make Mr. Loewen's point almost better than he can as to why history is taught in feel-good myths rather than truth. Yes, Mr. Loewen treats certain issues and not others. He tells us he is doing so several times throughout the book, and makes apologies for it. This is not intended to be a replacement for a full history of the United States. Mr. Loewen makes good and valid suggestions as to such replacements. It is not even intended to be a complete coverage of all the things our history texts get wrong. He would need several more volumes for that, and even then would get some of it wrong. For those who actually read the book (and many reviewers obviously did not), he admits all of this. Mr. Loewen's book is an important start. But it is only a start. One reviewer, in criticising the book, stated that we must learn from our past. But this is exactly the point of the book. We must and can learn from our past, but only if we have the objectivity and moral courage to accept what that past was. As a white Christian Anglo-Saxon male, I feel no need to beat myself up as a result of the deeds done by white Christian Anglo-Saxon males who are long dead. But I do feel the need to move forward with as good an understanding as I can have of the cultural and personal histories that cause people to act as they do - especially those whose backgrounds are so different from my own.

This is a real eye-opener to anyone who thinks they learned about U.S. history in high school. Loewen spent eleven years reviewing the 12 most commonly-used U.S. history textbooks and found all to be seriously wanting. Textbook publishers want to avoid controversy (so, apparently, do many school systems), so they feed students a white-washed, non-controversial, over-simplified version of this country's history and its most important historical figures. To make his point, Loewen emphasizes the "dark side" of U.S. history, because that's the part that's missing from our education system. So, for example, we never learned that Woodrow Wilson ran one of the most racist administrations in history and helped to set back progress in race relations that had begun after the Civil War. Helen Keller's socialist leanings and political views are omitted and we only learn that she overcame blindness and deafness. John Brown is portrayed as a wild-eyed nut who ran amok until

he was caught and hanged, rather than an eloquent and dedicated abolitionist who uttered many of the same words and thoughts that Lincoln later expressed. Loewen's book vividly illustrates the maxim that "those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it." Ignorance of our real history also renders us incapable of fully understanding the present and coming to grips with the issues of our time. For example, from the Civil War until around 1890, real racial progress was underway in the United States and civil rights laws were Federally enforced in the South. The military was integrated and former slaves had the right to vote, serve on juries and as witnesses in trials, own property and operate businesses. They also received mandatory public education, which was automatically extended to white children for the first time in the south. But, between 1890 and 1920, the Feds gradually disengaged and allowed southern racist governments to strip these rights from blacks and relegate them to virtual non-citizenship. Only within the last half-century has that policy been gradually reversed, again through Federal intervention. This history casts current racial attitudes and issues in a different light than most of our high school graduates are likely to see unless they are taught the complete history of their country, warts and all. Despite some of the reviews posted here, it is clear to me that Loewen is NOT out to bash the United States or offer up an equally one-dimensional, negative version of its history. He gives a balanced account of many of the figures whose weaknesses he exposes. Thus, we learn that, although Columbus was an unimaginative fortune hunter, a racist tyrant and slave trader, he (and Spain) were not much different than most people at the time. He points out that all societies, including Native Americans and Africans, kept slaves, for example (the very antithesis of "revisionist" or "post modern" approaches) and that it is unfair to single out Columbus as singularly evil. The problem is that our kids never learn both sides of these stories, so history becomes a bland repetition of non-confrontational "events" that appear to have had no or vague causes. Historical events are not related to issues that people disputed or serious conflicts that placed them at irreversible odds with one another, the very stuff that drives history. No wonder kids are bored and uninterested. They are left with the distorted impression that, down deep, the United States always means well (rather than acting in its own best interests, like any other country) and, in the end, is always "right." With that view of our history, these students become putty in the hands of politicians who appeal to that dumbed-down, distorted view. Loewen has presented fair accounts of key events in our history and indicated why our high school graduates know and care so little about it. He also suggests ways to correct this serious shortcoming and every American ought to applaud that.

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