



Rethinking Our Past: Recognizing Facts, Fictions, And Lies In American History

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"This course is designed to enlighten and encourage you to consider the factual basis of many of our most-cherished yet glossed-over stories and the real-life characters who populate them. From archaeological misinformation to investigations into the nature of modern public policy, Professor Loewen challenges you to consider the history of what "was" rather than what has been told by standard teaching methods and textbooks"--Container.

Rethinking Our Past: Recognizing Facts, Fictions, And Lies In American History Details

Date : Published 2004 by Recorded Books

ISBN : 9781402581939

Author : James W. Loewen

Format : Audio CD 7 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction



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Jim says

A very enjoyable audiobook lecture series on events and eras of American history that have been whitewashed, glossed over, hijacked by interest groups, or just plain forgotten about with the passage of time. Dr. Loewen is a fine narrator who makes the topics he chooses to cover both entertaining and memorable, although some areas are clearly stronger than others - his two lectures on the "nadir period" of race relations between 1890 and 1940 were probably the highlight of the whole course.

Kym Robinson says

This is another excellent book by Loewen as he attempts to leave no historical rock un turned. Like much of his work, Loewen seeks to add colour and depth to the realities of North American history, repairing much of the damage which has been done by the simplistic and politically correct muck taught in most schools.

The audio book is very easy to listen to as Lowen's content is that interesting and in depth that it only inspires you to want to know more. This is the most valuable trait of any one sharing knowledge and I think that Lowen does this all too well.

A definite must read...listen for any one interested in history.

85 %

Rodney Harvill says

When I spotted this lecture set in the audiobook section of the local library branch, I was simultaneously intrigued and skeptical, wondering if I was about to get a dose of left-wing revisionism. Professor Loewen did not strike me as an ideologue and gained credibility with me by what appeared to be a balanced approach. For example, when he discussed capitalism, he discussed its strengths and weaknesses.

When Professor Loewen claimed a "historical fact" to be incorrect, he attributed it to past revisionism and backed up his assertions with evidence. For example, he attributes the cause of the Civil War to slavery. I have traditionally viewed the cause as states rights. Yet, he quoted Confederate leaders and secession documents (Declarations of Causes) that made it clear that secession was about slavery and that the slave states weren't exactly for states rights. For example, these secession documents, which Professor Loewen quoted, took umbrage with the effective nullification by free states of the Fugitive Slave Act and the requirements by Article IV, Section 2, of the Constitution that they deliver up escaped slaves. If these slave states were for states rights, they were for their own states rights when it benefited themselves. When and why the revisionism? Once it became apparent that slavery was a lost cause, history was revised to credit states rights, a revision that proved credible at a time when racism was on the rise throughout the nation.

Presently, I have noticed two extremes in dealing with our history. The first is American Exceptionalism,

which tends to deny or gloss over our past wrong-doing. The other extreme, for which I don't have a name, takes the polar opposite position, that America is an irredeemable blight on this earth. Both extremes are intellectually bankrupt. I have also noticed that the Exceptionalists tend to be Republican, and the other extreme tend to be Democrat. Imagine the discourse twenty years or more into the future. The Exceptionalists, who despise our current president, Barak Obama, will have to defend him because, as an American President, he can do no wrong. On the other hand, the other extreme, who currently idolize him, will have to despise him because, as an American President, he can do no right.

Professor Loewen did not appear to take either side in that absurd contest of American history and appeared to go after "historical facts" that have become sacred cows. Management consultant Tom Peters once wrote that "Sacred cows make great steaks." As I listened to his lectures, I could not help noticing the savory smell of barbequed sacred cow briskets.

Darrin Tisdale says

Do not buy into the hype of the distorted histories we all are taught. They represent in attempt at indoctrination, at marketing a lie. Rather, the author claims, discover the real history behind much of what we believe to be true in American history. For example, the argument put forth by the South after the Civil War, that the war was a conflict over state's rights, is an outright lie. How so? Look at the historic facts. Read the Articles of Secession, and in them, you find the real reason for the Civil War, to paraphrase, slavery now, slavery tomorrow, slavery forever. The author clearly demonstrates that what we tell ourselves in our schools today represents a fundamental disservice to all Americans.

Robyn says

Loved this, but it turned me into a bit of a Cliff Claven...boring everyone with facts they just had to know!

Joyce says

I "read" the audio book version from Recorded Books during a recent long car trip. Professor Loewen presents his material in a clear and entertaining fashion that left both my husband and I thinking we'd enjoy being in his class.

There's much to think about here. It's been years since I was in high school, and I don't remember my American history classes. If the texts were as bad then, and I have no reason to believe they weren't, there's good reason to forget them! According to Loewen, they were probably sanitized propaganda - although he does not use those words. That's my extrapolation, after listening to his 14 lectures.

I think I'd enjoy reading Loewen's other books, "Lies my Teacher Told Me" is the one that springs to mind. No wonder every high school kid I've asked has said they "hate" history. My response has always been that there's so much to learn and it's so interesting... but I haven't seen their textbooks, have I? Loewen has, and he believes there's reason for outrage.

Highly recommended. Note - this book is about U.S. history only. Others may find it instructive and useful,

but U.S. readers should find it sadly on target.

Jan Rice says

These fourteen lectures by James W. Loewen are based on his prior writings, most notably, *Lies My Teacher Told Me : Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*. In fact, *Lies* is the recommended reading for this eight hours' worth of lectures. I've acquired the book and used it as a resource, although I haven't read the whole thing.

Prof. Loewen is an adroit lecturer, and listening to this series brought his ideas front and center. I bought this some time ago for around \$5.00 when Audible put it on sale--saw they were on American history and made the purchase not really knowing what they were--but now they're back up to more than \$40. Unlike some *Modern Scholar* lecture series, these aren't in my local libraries. If you're interested, I did find the CDs in the Amazon Marketplace under a different name: *Everything You've Been Taught is Wrong*. I'm guessing after Recorded Books went belly up, the author or someone published under that title.

James Loewen is a sociologist, but his specialty is **historiography**.

Commenters on Loewen's work often thank him for turning history upside down for them. I agree; he's good at that, and at pointing out "B.S.--Bad Sociology" when he finds it. His comments on racism constitute a good example of how he turns things upside down. These particular comments sank in immediately, changing how I can think. Many people nowadays, it seems, think racism against people of color goes all the way back through history. No, says Loewen. Western racism, the idea that Africans are inferior to Europeans, emerged in the 16th and 17th centuries to justify the African slave trade. It's true, he says, that slavery existed in the Roman Empire, but in Rome a Nubian slave could be a bookkeeper, whereas slaves from the British Isles were considered too dumb even for manual labor. You just did not want one of *those* slaves. (People from the British Isles were from parts relatively further away and, in those days, less well known.)

We tend to generate "reasons" spontaneously for our bad treatment of others.

He says slavery picked up in Africa after the discovery of the Americas and the influx of gold and silver from there into Europe. The Gold Coast of Africa was no longer the gold coast, so that's how slaves became the remaining valuable--so that connecting the continent to the world economy fell to the slave trade.

He does touch on the importance of connecting to the economy. I appreciate that.

He tells the narrative of how Native Americans were made into savages in the minds of the European immigrants. (view spoiler)

Some Native Americans have received respect again, subsequent to setting up viable gaming and gambling enterprises in the 20th century, another illustration of Loewen's emphasis on the importance of being integrated into the world economy.

According to Loewen, *The War of the Worlds* was based on the events concerning Hispaniola (later, Haiti). I

was struck by that since *White Trash* had reminded me of *The Handmaid's Tale*--the part about dumping waste people in nonviable territory.

For the most part, *Rethinking Our Past* does not seem dated, even though it came out in 2004. (The second edition of *Lies* is from 2007.) One exception, I think, is on the Confederacy and the Civil War. Writing in 2007, Loewen looked on the Civil Rights era as the point at which the false history about the "War Between the States," reconstruction, etc. had been overthrown. Yet even afterward, confederate monuments around the south for the most part still stood. True, it was before Civil Rights that Eisenhower had to condemn racist violence in the south by saying it was giving the confederacy a bad name. In 1958, the great editorialist Ralph McGill, writing the morning after The Temple bombing, had to imply the violent extremists were hijacking the revered symbols of the Confederacy; no one could say, or think, that the Confederacy itself was the problem. Now they can. I think the tipping point was the 2014 Charleston church shooting. It's not that nobody thinks wrong thoughts anymore, but that now the whole idea of the Confederacy can be condemned, without having to deny that it stood for slavery. And the monuments are coming down.

As per the title of his best seller, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, Loewen asserts he himself can use objective methods to write truth rather than lies, here in the present, but I think the comments from his grateful readers about "turning history upside down" are more to the point. Standing in the present (or at least the present as of 2004 and 2007), he can see things differently, more nearly truthfully, and turn things around in what he writes.

Sometimes.

But sometimes he can't. For example he names three factors that influence foreign policy: internal politics, ideology, and realpolitik. He thinks we should act on the latter. Yet he says that's how we ended up supporting too many dictators. So, then he says our realpolitik is too short-term

Also, in the book he has a section on why terrorism happens that includes a sizeable paragraph on cracking down on illegal immigrants. From the perspective of today's politics, that scenario just doesn't sound right.

And what would he say about the situation on some college campuses (or in other spheres), where yesterday's targets may now be having too much power to silence or even target others? Has there been an over-correction? Or should people's behaving in the ways they themselves find reprehensible when they're on the receiving end be considered a form of justice? Sometimes it's very hard to know what's correct.

What's correct: does he mean what's true or what's morally right? There seems to me to be some confusion there, but I'll save until I get into the book proper. I just wish he'd be a little more humble about truth and seeing correctly, and, like Nassim Nicholas Taleb, perhaps acknowledge needing a story to fight a story.

All told, though, I'm glad he's showing us how to use the lens of the present to correct our understanding of the past, and he does show us some humdingers.

Ending on a positive note, here's a correction with which most would agree. James Loewen advocates for the correction of old historical monuments and markers and the placement of new, correct ones. In Salem, Massachusetts, there is now a new monument apologizing for the execution of twenty people for witchcraft in 1692 and acknowledging the wrong that was done in that loss of life. One of the victims, Susannah Martin, was my husband's ancestor ten generations back. <http://www.indexjournal.com/news/nati...>

Ellis says

This was fantastic. Man, there is nothing like getting the straight story on history. It's amazing (well, it shouldn't be) how much more history makes sense and fits together when we have the facts.

Cat. says

Excellent (till near the end when he mis-attributed a quote, but anyway...). I loved the challenge he issues in the final "class" when he calls on all of us to get involved in our community and find out the real truth behind some of the events in our past, good or bad. That's what history is for!

Michael Miller says

Not as good as his other work, but filled with many thought-provoking facts and insights. If nothing else, he spurs us to check his facts to see if he is shooting straight with us. He usually is. Hiding the problems of our national past is pointless and counterproductive. We've got to own up to them if we are going to fix them. Name the wrong, repent of it, change the behavior.

Terence says

The lectures on this CD were recorded in 2004, before the Texas school textbook circus and before the recent upsurge in whitewashing Civil War history to make the South the oh-so-innocent victim of evil Northern aggression, and I wonder what Loewen makes of such recent developments. He ends his lectures on a hopeful note, urging his listeners to "write history on the land to represent the past accurately." (p. 75 of the accompanying "Course Guide") I can only imagine he must be feeling a certain amount of despair with the publication of such books as *The Real Lincoln A New Look at Abraham Lincoln His Agenda* and *An Unnecessary War*. But as he argues in his "Civil War" and "Race Relations" lectures, it's merely further evidence that the South may have lost the war on the battlefield but it won the war of ideas.

As usual with my Audio CD books, I listened to this in the car and didn't take notes so this review will be short and sweet (short, anyway).

Loewen is at his devastating best when he's analyzing the subjects that he's particularly interested in - namely the Civil War era and after and race relations, to which he devotes nearly a third of the 14 lectures. Their power comes from his reliance on primary sources. He quotes letters, newspapers and speeches that put the lie to the simplified, pasteurized gruel that passes for popular history (and not just in our schools).

For example, to the contention that the Civil War was not about slavery, he quotes Jefferson Davis in 1861: "(the Lincoln administration's policies would) make property in slaves so insecure as to be comparatively worthless, thereby annihilating, in effect, property worth thousands of millions of dollars." (p. 38, "Course Guide")

Loewen is not as strong in other areas. He overgeneralizes in his discussions of prehistoric America and in

regards to Socialism (a term which, for him, appears to cover everything from Stalin's Russia to British Labour). And his discussion of US foreign policy in Lecture 12 lacks the "umph" of earlier lectures because it is based on secondary sources. He's back in form in Lecture 13, "Capitalism and Social Class," when he returns to quoting the primary sources.

All is not a tale of woe, however. Loewen takes pains to highlight positive aspects of American history: What the Founders got right in the Constitution, the real progress made among the races between 1865 and 1890, the Civil Rights movement, John Logan's progress from racist to equal rights advocate, and a list of examples in the last lecture of people making the effort to learn the truth - good and bad - about their history. And it's the latter that is Loewen's point. People need to make the effort to understand their history:

1. Don't trust what you learned in school or read in books. Check it out.
2. History is a process of forgetting.
3. Modern perspectives are projected onto past subjects.
4. America's current status in the world invites a dangerous ethnocentrism.
5. Resist the process of "heroification."

Definitely worth listening to.

Al Menaster says

Quite good. Loewen is an entertaining speaker and does a fun and job of exploring myths about American history, focused on Black and Native American history.

Sherry Schwabacher says

This is actually a collection of Professor Loewen's lectures on American history. It is an absolute must for anyone who wants to understand how we got so confused about our own history.

Tchipakkan says

This is a great deal of fun. Since I had just listened to the first set of America Before 1776, much about the Columbian Exchange wasn't new, but it still is great to hear a version of history that makes more sense than the usual mythology. It's easy to tell that Loewen's interest is the Nadir of race relations, but I would have loved him to have turned his attention to many of the other aspects of American history- medicine, and science, and other periods than he was able to cover. I think it was a 14 lecture course and could easily have been twice as long.

Marsha says

Wow! I have never been much of a history buff, which may be why I really appreciate this book; I think I learned more about history here that I learned all the way through grade school and high school (in college

there was no particular reason that I should have learned anything about history)(although I have learned more about history since then...). The standard things about Native Americans and the way our history is skewed when it comes to "American Indians" was pretty much expected, but there were a lot of details. And it was interesting to learn how many things with "learned about" that really never were. And in the end, learning then thought "historical sites" nationwide for the most part are a farce! Unfortunately, to verify most of it, I need to read a lot more – which I will admit I am not inclined to do :-), but it is really interesting what one person can determine about our texts and curriculum through high school! If nothing else, it opens up a lot of questions!

Dena says

I've read Lies my teacher told me and thought my mind had been blown with that - this too just opens your eyes to some of the deep lies that are perpetually told in American History. Once again, mind blown

Lee says

This was an excellent course. I will definitely be reading the books he's written. He does a good job at not blaming one group of people throughout history, though he does tend to be rather liberal minded. That being said, I still think his views are pretty well supported.

I think everyone should either take this course or read his book (Lies My Teacher Told Me), not because everything in it is the absolute truth but it really makes you think about what you have learned and helps plant a desire to know what the truth is, and not just take it at face value.

Bettie? says

Home audio H drive

How many white men have to die before it's termed a massacre?

Conversely...

How many Native Indians?

The answer seems to be that it's termed a 'battle' when the Native Indians lost.

Hmmmmmmmm

Blurbifications - "You will get the most from this course by reading or listening to Professor Loewen's book, Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong. Within that book are many facts about American (and world) history to which most people have simply never been exposed. Nationalist history by textbook authors and the descendants or biographers of the famous and infamous have given history students a very skewed vision of our true history—indeed, the true history of mankind.

This course is designed to enlighten and encourage you to consider the factual basis of many of our most-cherished yet glossed-over stories and the real-life characters who populate them. From archaeological misinformation to investigations into the nature of modern public policy, Professor Loewen challenges you to consider the history of what “was” rather than what has been told by standard teaching methods and textbooks.

This is history revealed. This is history as it was made, not as it is usually taught by well-meaning, but misdirected, teachers. Go back in time and recover what has been “lost.” The historical truth helps to make sense of our present circumstances as Americans and for our future as world citizens.

Tadas Talaikis says

Was very interesting, even as for non-American (though I had done some U.S. high school). It challenged my own few misconceptions induced through popular American culture. I need even downrate some books with biased information.

Shows how it is important to question everything instead of believing in what you're getting in schools.

Aimee says

Worthwhile to read or listen to. Interesting and insightful. I don't claim all of his conclusions and deductions are absolute fact, but somewhere in between what most of us were taught in high school/college and what he teaches in this course. I will be adding "Lies my Teacher Told Me" to my "to read" list!
