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RETHINKING OUR PAST: RECOGNIZING FACTS, FICTIONS, AND LIES IN AMERICAN HISTORY

COURSE GUIDE



Professor Emeritus
James W. Loewen
UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT

Rethinking Our Past: Recognizing Facts, Fictions, and Lies in American History

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University of Vermont



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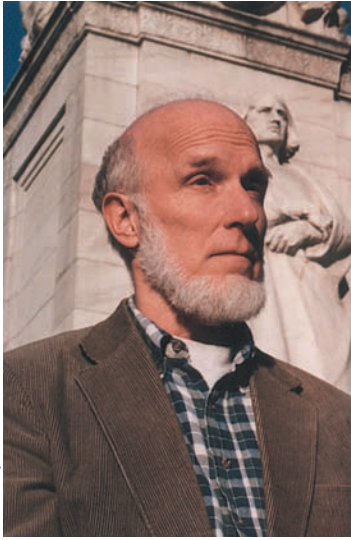
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About Your Professor

James W. Loewen

James W. Loewen taught race relations for twenty years at the University of Vermont. Previously, he taught at predominantly black Tougaloo College in Mississippi. He now lives in Washington, D.C., continuing his research on how Americans remember their past. *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong* came out in 1999. His other books include *Mississippi: Conflict and Change* (co-authored), which won the Lillian Smith Award for Best Southern Nonfiction. The book, however, was rejected for public-school text use by the State of Mississippi, leading to a path-breaking First Amendment lawsuit, *Loewen et al. v. Turnipseed, et al.* He also wrote *The Mississippi Chinese: Between Black and White*, *Social Science in the Courtroom* and *The Truth About Columbus*. He attended Carleton College and holds a Ph.D. in sociology from Harvard University.

James Loewen spent two years at the Smithsonian Institution surveying twelve leading high school textbooks of American history. He found an embarrassing blend of bland optimism, blind nationalism, and plain misinformation weighing in at an average of 888 pages and almost five pounds.

In response, he wrote *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your High School History Textbook Got Wrong*, in part a telling critique of existing textbooks, but also a gripping retelling of American history as it should, and could, be taught. The book won the 1996 American Book Award, the 1996 AESA Critics' Choice Award, and the Oliver Cromwell Cox Award for Distinguished Anti-Racist Scholarship. It has sold more than 700,000 copies.

From 1999 to 2004, Loewen studied all-white towns that were (some still are) all white on purpose; the results led to his newest book, *Sundown Towns*.



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Introduction

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.

Lecture 1: Why Study the Past?

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is James Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, introduction and chapter 1.

Why Study the Past?

Studies show that history is the least-liked subject in high school. This is partly because much of what we are taught there is wrong and *most* of it is boring. Ironically, the truth of real history is much more interesting. Much of what we have been taught can be referred to as

B.S. = Bad Sociology ✓

There are at least three erroneous answers for why we study history:

1. We study history because "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it," as George Santyana famously said. But to the contrary, the philosopher Hegel maintained that people and governments have never learned anything from history, and there is endless proof to support this idea.
2. We study history to become good and proud citizens. This kind of thinking, however, leads to bad history. Sometimes known as "heritage," this thinking renders us ethnocentric and makes us blind to our national faults, which in effect may make us "proud" citizens but not necessarily "good" citizens.
3. We study history because we indulge in "bad presentism." This involves reading history in terms of current issues and debates and looking at the past through eyes that can only see issues of the present.

Consider this . . .

If white people as a category were responsible for the egregious institution of slavery, is there not an agenda for white people of today to distance themselves from identifying with slavery, thus sugarcoating the realities of slavery? Thinking like this is an example of what can be called "Racial National Character," which can greatly skew our impressions of the past.

*“The paradox of education is precisely this—
that as one begins to become conscious one begins
to examine the society in which he is being educated.”*

—James Baldwin,
“A Talk to Teachers,” *Saturday Review*

Patriotism vs. Nationalism

It is important when thinking about history to make a clear distinction between patriotism and nationalism. Nationalism is the kind of thinking that leads to feelings of “my country, right or wrong.” Patriotism in its true form should allow a citizen to rebuke a country for its sins and not excuse it for those sins. Nationalistic history asks for history textbooks that describe a country with no real faults or inner conflict and thus requires us to lie to students in order to instill a love of country.

In a democracy, a historian’s responsibility is to tell the truth. Students need to develop informed reactions to what goes on and thus have the ability to criticize our country as well as to take pride in it.

History as Self-Defense

History should be concerned with causation. History can be a weapon used against us to misinform and incorrectly sculpt our views. If you don’t know your own history, you will be ignorant and helpless before someone who does claim to know it. You need to know how to think of causation in the past to maintain your place in the great debate called democracy in the present. This is what could be considered “good presentism.” History in the true sense must be relevant to the present. Facing history more accurately is imperative, especially with the new diversity of the United States. Surely our country is ready to hear what all voices have to say about its history.

Recurring Themes Throughout These Lectures

1. Don’t trust what you learned in school or from historical sites, markers, or monuments. Check it out.
2. History is a process of deliberate forgetting. Over time, history becomes simpler and less accurate.
3. Needs and patterns of thought from the present get projected backwards onto the past, influencing what we see and how we see it.
4. America’s position as the world’s dominant superpower invites us to be ethnocentric. In addition, we have a deeply ingrained Eurocentrism.
5. There is a “heroification” process that turns real people into perfect, unblemished characters.
6. Terminology problems: Should we say “Native Americans”? “Native American Indians”? “American Indians”? What exactly does the term “discover” mean in relation to our history?

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

Visit a historic house, fort, ship, or other site. Before you go, learn what happened there. At the end of the tour, especially if it has been inadequate, ask your guide when this interpretation got “set.” What does he or she think is the most important topic left out? How does he or she think the interpretation will change years from now?

Suggested Reading

Brear, Holly Beachley. *Inherit the Alamo: Myth and Ritual at an American Shrine*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995.

Loewen, James W. *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000, 15-50.

Other Books of Interest

Breisach, Ernst. *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

FitzGerald, Frances. *America Revised*. New York: Vintage, 1980.

Ravitch, Diane, and Chester E. Finn, Jr. *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?* New York: HarperCollins, 1988.

“One is astonished in the study of history at the recurrence of the idea that evil must be forgotten, distorted, skimmed over. We must not remember that Daniel Webster got drunk but only remember that he was a splendid constitutional lawyer. We must forget that George Washington was a slave owner ... and simply remember the things we regard as creditable and inspiring. The difficulty, of course, with this philosophy is that history loses its value as an incentive and example; it paints perfect men and noble nations, but it does not tell the truth.”

—W.E.B. Du Bois (*Black Reconstruction*)

Lecture 2: Archaeology and Prehistory

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is James Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, chapters 2 and 4.

Prehistory or Archaeology

Historians are consumers of archaeology and anthropology and not producers of it. Because of this, they can often make assumptions that are wrong.

When did people first get to the Americas? The traditional answer that historians give to this question is 11,000 years ago. Actually, we don't know. Numbers now range from 11,000 to 35,000 to 70,000 years ago. There is evidence for each of these hypotheses.

How did people get to the Americas? The traditional answer is that people walked across the Bering Strait during the last ice age. There is practically no evidence for this.

Absence of evidence, however, is not the same as evidence of absence. The point is that we just do not know the answers, and our proclivity to profess certainty about something we don't know is very dangerous.

We do know that people got to Australia between 40,000 and 60,000 years ago. This means that people must have had boats this far back. There is evidence, too, of *Homo erectus* on other islands as far back as 600,000 years ago. Why couldn't Native Americans have come by boat? The notion that they had to have walked across the Bering Strait is the problem of assumptions projected onto the past.

All Native Americans can be divided into three groups.

- a. The Dineh, or Cree/Navajo/Apache, is the most recent group, coming about 1,000 years ago.
- b. The Inuits came next—2,000, 3,000, and 4,000 years ago—most probably by boat.
- c. All other Indians are from one group, but we are not sure how or when they got here.

Historians discourage the possibility that other people could have come to North America from places other than Siberia. Throughout history, people have speculated that Native Americans or other adventurers might have come from many places (e.g., Israel, Egypt, China, outer space). While some of these theories are fanciful, the resulting skepticism has led to a total denial of all evidence of other cultures arriving in the Americas before the Indians. For instance, there is now proof that the Norse were most certainly in North America a thousand years ago. It is quite possible that other people may have arrived on America's shores along with the people we traditionally consider "Native Americans."

The general assumption that Native Americans were “primitive” and didn’t domesticate animals or use wheels because of their lack of cultural development is unproven. There may well have been good reasons for why Native Americans did (or did not) do what they did. “The Affluent Primitive Theory” of anthropology has persuaded most scientists that hunters and gatherers lived quite comfortably and were not on the brink of starvation. The notion of primitive people being “primitive” implies an evolutionary stereotype.

Consider this . . .

Who is to say that “higher” civilization is in fact “higher”? Is the standard explanation of division of labor as being a requisite for higher civilization justified? As a society with a highly developed division of labor, maybe we are intelligent, but as individuals in this society we may well be less intelligent than people from a society without such divisions of labor.

The Savage to Barbaric to Civilized Myth

After the invention of agriculture, societies actually became much more war-like and developed more hierarchy and much shorter lifespans. What do we mean then by “civilized”? Would we say that the Third Reich was civilized? It certainly had a highly developed division of labor, but could it really be considered a happier or more civil society?

Historiography

Historiography is the study of history as a social product. There are myriad influences from our present projected backward as much as 50,000 years, as seen in the preceding examples. Imagine then what happens when one arrives closer to our present era, after the European arrivals to the Americas.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

Read a journalist's account of an "archaeological cutting-edge" story about the peopling of the Americas, such as Joseph B. Verrengia's AP story, sometimes titled "Settlers May Have Crossed Atlantic," filed from Santa Fe, New Mexico, 11/1/1999, on the Web at several sites, or a more recent story. Should authors of a U.S. history textbook incorporate such a story as they prepare a new edition? On what basis might they judge its claims? What should they do with it?

Suggested Reading

Deloria, Vine, Jr. *Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1997.

Loewen, James. *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000. Essays 21, 87.

Other Books of Interest

Shao, Paul. *The Origin of Ancient American Cultures*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1983.

"It would be better not to know so many things than to know so many things that are not so."

—Felix Okoye

Lecture 3: The Politics and History of Columbus

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is James Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, chapter 2.

Even today, Columbus frequently makes news. Native Americans, however, see little to celebrate with regard to Columbus. Recently, there has been extensive questioning about Columbus's role in "discovering" America. Columbus is relevant today and how we think of him frequently makes headlines.

Consider this . . .

How is the unrest and political turmoil in Chiapas, Mexico, related to Columbus and our standard view of his actions?

Four Key Questions About Columbus

1. What made Columbus's voyages different and why is it so important? Why do we "heroify" him?

Answer: Thorfinn Karlsefni was the leader of the Norse who arrived in North America around 1003. In 1492, Columbus had done nothing that Thorfinn Karlsefni hadn't already done almost 500 years earlier. What makes Columbus different isn't his journey in 1492, but his journey in 1493. Columbus's return to Haiti at this time is arguably the most important event in the history of the human species. In 1493, Columbus proceeded to take over the island of Haiti and renamed it Hispaniola (Little Spain). This was new—never before in the history of the world had one nation taken over another nation across an ocean.

2. Why did the West "win"? How did it win?

Answer: By 1892, almost every country was dominated by Europeans. Why? The first reason is superior military technology, of which Columbus had much on his second voyage. Social technology, including the nation-state, bureaucracy, and proselytizing religion added to Europe's increasing dominance. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—all born in the Middle East—were easily transportable. These religions were all very different than the kind of native religions that existed in the Americas, which were place-based and local to each individual culture. When you can take your religion with you, it allows for a rationalization for conquest.

3. What was the impact on the world of Columbus's enterprise and of Europe taking control of such vast amounts of land?

Answer: Europeans to this day dominate the Americas as well as Australia, New Zealand, and Hawaii. Why? Columbus started what has become known as the "Columbian Exchange." Native people of the Americas contributed almost half of the foods grown around the world. They contributed two hundred medicines that are in use today. The introduction of the potato to Europe is probably the most important single factor that caused Europe to have a population explosion, especially for Germany, France, the British Isles, and Russia, and it is these nations that became dominant. Gold and silver from the Americas had such a revolutionary effect on the world that it led to 400 percent inflation and caused Europe to dominate the world and especially the Muslim nations, who up until Columbus's time had been Europe's main competitors.

4. Where does our stereotypical view of Columbus come from?

Answer: We don't talk about the Columbian Exchange, which revolutionized the world in 1493. Instead, our history textbooks focus on trivial details of the 1492 expedition. What most of us have been told about Columbus is pure fiction. For instance, the idea that sailors of Columbus's time thought the Earth was flat and it was Columbus who convinced them otherwise is B.S. (Bad Sociology). Sailors have long known that the Earth is round. So why teach this? One could argue that people feel it is good for us not to think about why Europe won.

Syncretism

Syncretism means putting things together from two or more cultures to come up with something new. Europe put together ideas about navigation from the Arab cultures, numerals and ships from India, and gunpowder from China. Europe was able to use these and many other things together to conquer the world. If we don't address the questions of why Europe won and why it resettled the Americas, we're left with a vacuum, and into that vacuum rushes racism or the idea that white people are better. The politics of history thus begins with Columbus.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

The “Columbian Exchange” initiated syncretism all over the world. Tell how each of the following exemplifies syncretism deriving from the Columbian Exchange: Szechuan, Italian, West African, and Louisiana Cajun cuisine; American democracy; Plains Indian culture; the Ghost Dance Religion of the Plains Indians; Dvorak’s *New World Symphony*. Then come up with your own additional example(s) of syncretism.

Suggested Reading

Sale, Kirkpatrick. *The Conquest of Paradise: Christopher Columbus and the Columbian Legacy*. Reprint ed. New York: Plume (Penguin, USA), 1991.

Other Books of Interest

Bigelow, Bill, and Bob Peterson, eds. *Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years*. Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools, Ltd., 1998.

Crosby, Alfred. *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*. 30th anniversary ed. Oxford: Greenwood Publishing Group (Praeger Publishers), 2003.

Viola, Herman. *Seeds of Change: A Quincentennial Commemoration*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999.

“What we committed in the Indies stands out among the most unpardonable offenses ever committed against God and mankind and this trade [in Indian slaves] as one of the most unjust, evil, and cruel among them.”

—Bartolomé de las Casas

Lecture 4: Pilgrims

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is James Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, chapter 3.

This lecture will try to answer five questions:

1. What were the Pilgrims really thankful for?
2. In Thanksgiving, what role was played by the Native Americans of New England?
3. How did the Pilgrims end up in Massachusetts if they were originally going to Virginia?
4. When did European Americans really begin to exterminate native peoples? Why?
5. Why do some events in the past get emphasized more than they should while others that should be emphasized get glossed over?

First, one must note that it really doesn't make any sense to begin any discussion of U.S. history with the Pilgrims.

Consider this . . .

When was the country that we now know as the United States first settled?

If our answer to this question is that this country was settled in 1620 by the Pilgrims, we are off to a very bad start. This answer omits not only 11,000 to 70,000 years of Indian settlement, but also the Spanish settlements of the sixteenth century, the Dutch in New York, and even the Virginians. However, the mythic origin of the country we now know of as the United States is at Plymouth Rock in 1620. The history we learned in school amounts to a sort of civil religion with the Pilgrims as our origin myth. In this civil religion, Plymouth Rock becomes a shrine and the Mayflower Compact becomes a sacred text. Our high school history textbooks, then, play the function of books of prayer that tell us the meaning behind the civil rite of Thanksgiving.

The Origins of Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving, as a national holiday, dates back only to the Civil War. Abraham Lincoln proclaimed it first in 1863 and it then became a continuing holiday known as Thanksgiving. In 1863, it made sense that Lincoln would emphasize the Pilgrims of New England over the settlers of southern Virginia. The Pilgrims actually got called "Pilgrims" only in the 1880s because we wanted to emphasize that they were seeking religious freedom. In fact, this is

also untrue. The Pilgrims already had gained religious freedom in Holland. What they were in fact seeking were better economic opportunities and the ability to remain British as opposed to Dutch.

Plymouth Rock

We have been celebrating the location of Plymouth Rock only since about 1880. There is no good evidence that anyone ever actually landed there. Why not celebrate the alleged first white footsteps at Jamestown, Virginia; St. Augustine, Florida; or Albany, New York? We emphasize Plymouth Rock because of events in our history that happened centuries after the Pilgrims landed. Today, Thanksgiving ends up as the ritual that affirms that God is on our side and we are an exceptionally good people who deserve God's providence.

The First Thanksgiving: Fact vs. Fiction

What most people don't know is that two-thirds of the *Mayflower* voyagers were not even Pilgrims, and all were originally heading for Virginia. Nor do people know that Squanto learned English as a British slave and was more of a world traveler than all the Pilgrims. In addition, British settlers in New England were especially thankful for something that is rarely mentioned—the plagues that decimated almost 95 percent of Indians in New England around 1617. This event made the British settlement process much safer and easier.

Earlier Settlers

Most Native American Indians were true settlers who farmed the land and remained stationary. It wasn't until much later, because of European conquest, that Indians were forced into adopting a more "roaming" lifestyle.

One-third of the United States from San Francisco to Arkansas to Natchez, Mississippi, and into Florida has been Spanish longer than it has been English or American. Spanish culture introduced horses, cattle, sheep, and pigs.

Consider this . . .

Where do words like "mustang," "bronco," "rodeo," and "lariat" come from?

The first "Pilgrims" were in fact Spanish Jews who fled the Inquisition in the late 1500s, first from Europe and then from Mexico. Even when speaking of the first British settlements, one must realize that in 1607 the London Company sent settlers to Jamestown, Virginia. These first British settlers were unprepared for life in Virginia and did not fare well at all. Some ended up starving to death; others disinterred and ate recently deceased Indians—another reason why we do not emphasize these arrivals as the "first" British settlers.

The Pilgrims

There has been considerable debate about why the Pilgrims settled in Massachusetts rather than in Virginia. One hypothesis is that they never actually intended to go to Virginia in the first place. Squanto, a Native American who had earlier been sold into slavery (see sidebar below), may have provided the Pilgrims with extensive knowledge of the New England region prior to their departure from England. It is also known that the Pilgrims had maps of the area in their possession on their arrival.

Other issues may have influenced the Pilgrims to favor a northern rather than a southern location in which to settle. One was the knowledge that a plague in 1617 had decimated the native populations in New England. Another was that the English Anglican church was already well-established in Virginia. The Pilgrims interested in avoiding further persecution from the Anglicans would certainly not have wished to live under their domination again.

Cause and Effects of the Plague

The absence of livestock meant that Native Americans did not experience the many diseases that in Afro/Eurasia got passed back and forth from humans to livestock. Therefore, they possessed no immunity to smallpox, swine flu, tuberculosis, cholera, and many other diseases brought by the newcomers. This led to disaster for the Indians. The plague was of overwhelming importance to the Pilgrims as well, because it meant that they would not face any major Indian resistance for at least fifty years. Also, it confirmed to the Pilgrims the idea of God's providence. There was no knowledge of germ theory, and while the Indians had no recourse to combat smallpox and other diseases, white settlers had for the most part already built immunity to many of these diseases. This led many white people to regard the plagues as miraculous and the natives to believe them a sign that their own religion was wrong. For the Europeans, the fact that the Indians did not believe in the

Squanto

Squanto is one of the most famous and well-traveled of the Colonial-era Indian interpreters and guides. Born into the Pawtuxet tribe in the area now occupied by Massachusetts and Rhode Island, Squanto would journey across the Atlantic, be sold into slavery, and serve as an emissary for the Plymouth Colony's governor before his death in 1622.

Thomas Hunt, a member of John Smith's exploration party, captured Squanto from his tribe, took him across the Atlantic, and sold him into slavery in Spain. Squanto subsequently escaped to England, joined the Newfoundland Company, and returned home in 1619—only to learn that his tribe had been obliterated by disease. Governor William Bradford of the Plymouth Colony then made Squanto, who was fluent in English, his Indian emissary. Squanto was also an interpreter for the Pilgrims during negotiations with the Wampanoag chief.

("Squanto." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2004. Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service.)

“one true God” and Jesus Christ his son was considered reason enough for their contraction of any and all diseases. The plague is certainly of more importance to the history of New England than all of the details of which we are more likely to have heard.

The Pilgrims’ Reliance

The Pilgrims relied on the Indians not only to teach them the skills needed for basic survival in Massachusetts, but also as an economic resource to help the Pilgrims repay the debts that had been incurred in preparing for and making the transatlantic voyages.

Early on, Native Americans were captured as slaves or were used to procure other Natives as slaves. Later, trade between the Pilgrims and Indians in sassafras, deer hides and meat, and, most importantly to the Pilgrims, furs (a very lucrative trade item) gave the European immigrants the necessary economic tools to discharge their substantial debt.

Consider this . . .

Why do we call a dollar a “buck”?

Much of the interaction between Europeans and Indians was peaceful throughout our history. Indians were much more likely to be helpful to Europeans, as it was in their best economic interest.

History as Amnesia

What we’ve ended up with in our history textbooks is a fallacious argument for “nice” Pilgrims and “savage” Indians. This is inaccurate and makes us both stupid and insensitive about Native American culture. In the end, the fact remains that the land was the Indians’ first and we took it.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. More American Indians survive today in formerly Spanish colonies—a majority of the populations in Bolivia and Guatemala—than in formerly British colonies. Why?
2. More American Indians survive today in the high Andes of Bolivia and Peru and the far north of Canada and Alaska than in places like Maryland or Argentina. Why?

Retrieve from the Web the 2002 Presidential proclamation of Thanksgiving (whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/11/20021126-4.html). Use it as “pretext” for considering the following questions:

3. What impact might the proclamation have on American ethnocentrism? Does it exemplify ethnocentrism itself?
4. Does it provide accurate information about Natives and Europeans in Massachusetts?
5. What does it imply about our social class system? (*Skip ahead to Lecture 13 for assistance.*)

Suggested Reading

Willison, George F. *Saints and Strangers*. East Orleans, MA: Parnassus Imprints, 1985.

Other Books of Interest

Glasrud, Bruce A., and Alan M. Smith, eds. *Race Relations in British North America, 1607-1783*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, Inc., 1982.

Jennings, Francis. *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1976.

Ziner, Feenie. *Squanto*. Hamden, CT: Linnet Books, 1988.

“European explorers and invaders discovered an inhabited land. Had it been pristine wilderness then, it would possibly be so still, for neither the technology nor the social organization of Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had the capacity to maintain, of its own resources, outpost colonies thousands of miles from home.”

—Francis Jennings

Lecture 5: Native American Societies and Cultures

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is James Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, chapter 4.

Much of what we learn about Native Americans is B.S. (Bad Sociology). In order to rationalize how and why we completely subjugated Indians, we continue to put Native American people down.

Consider this . . .

What is considered the most important purchase in the history of the United States for the exact sum of \$24?

The Purchase of Manhattan Myth

As we have learned it, the Dutch in 1626 bought the island of Manhattan from the Canarsies. In New York City, there is a statue to commemorate this purchase of "New Amsterdam." It is located at South Ferry at the precise spot where the sale did not in fact take place. This story has been propagated forever with the sum of \$24 as the selling price. This never accounts for inflation. If you projected inflation on this price, it would easily be one hundred times more. This would mean that the island was bought for \$2,400 worth of beads. However, as far as can be ascertained, beads were not, in fact, involved at all. What the Indians wanted were five things:

1. Metal kettles
2. Steel knives
3. Steel axes
4. Guns
5. Woven woolen blankets

The Dutch, in effect, bought the rights to Manhattan from the Canarsies for roughly \$2,400 worth of these items. The Canarsies, however, lived in what is now known as East Brooklyn. The Canarsies, then, sold something for which they had no claim. The Weckuaesgeeks who actually lived in Manhattan were not pleased at all with this agreement and warred sporadically with the Dutch for years until about 1644 when, probably with the help of the Canarsies, the Dutch exterminated the Weckuaesgeeks. Does it make any sense that Indians would sell their homes and all of their land's hunting, farming, and grazing rights for \$2,400—much less \$24?

Why Do We Learn This Story?

We don't put the Dutch down for buying from the wrong tribe. Instead, we make fun of the Indians for selling so cheaply. This story is Eurocentric and more about power than anything else. The Dutch may have known what they were doing and been perfectly happy doing it because they realized that they weren't really "buying" Manhattan but were purchasing the rights to Manhattan in the eyes of other Europeans. They were buying respectability and buying an ally in the Canarsies who could help them with the inherent problem of the Weckuaesgeeks in Manhattan. Learning this story does two things:

1. It makes the Indians look stupid. It perpetuates the social archetype of the hapless, primitive Indian.
2. It makes Europeans look good. It perpetuates the fallacy that Europeans did the right thing and purchased the land instead of stealing it.

Both of these points direct us to one conclusion: white supremacy. We subconsciously have become used to these stories and we accept them without questioning them.

Louisiana

Almost all history textbooks tell that Thomas Jefferson doubled the size of the United States by buying Louisiana from the French in 1803. However, Louisiana was not France's to sell. It was Indian land, and they were never consulted, or, for that matter, even aware of the "sale." The French did not even know the boundaries of the land they were ostensibly selling to the Americans. What France sold was its "claim" to the land. The United States bought from the French the right to respectability in the eyes of other European countries. The United States subsequently fought more than fifty Indian wars in this area and paid the Indians large amounts of money for the land as the years went on.

Consider this . . .

What are we really seeing when we see a near-naked Indian alongside a heavily clothed European? What are the implications of this type of representation?

The Indian Wars

During the Indian wars, the Dutch, French, and British waged total war on Indian peoples. They destroyed their homes, attacked their livestock, burned their fields, and made no distinction between civilians and combatants. We hear very little about this in our history textbooks. Consider the Pequot war started by the colonists in 1636. The colonists attacked the Pequot village at dawn, surrounding it, setting it on fire, and burning alive all the predominantly women, elders, and children there. Even the Narragansett who were allied

with the colonists because of their rivalry with the Pequots were shocked by the colonists' approach and methods, and they deeply condemned what they saw as pointless slaughter. Warfare in Native American society was more for pastime than to conquer and subdue enemies, and it was rarely used for fulfilling the task of exterminating another race.

One of the most violent Indian wars began in 1676 and became known as King Philip's War. It cost more American and Native American lives than the French and Indian War, the War of 1812, the Revolutionary War, and the Spanish American War. Proportionally, it was the worst war this country has ever fought. In addition to this war, there were at least five world wars that Indians were forced to fight on behalf of various European allies:

1. King William's War (1689-1697)
2. Queen Anne's War or the War of Spanish Secession (1702-1713)
3. King George's War or the War of Austrian Secession (1744)
4. The French and Indian War or the Seven Years War (1754-1763)
5. The War of 1812 or The Napoleonic War (1811-1815)

In each of these wars, Native American peoples took up arms to protect their lands and allied themselves with whatever power they thought would help them. In 1811, most Indians allied themselves with Great Britain because they saw the Americans as more of a direct threat to their land.

The War of 1812

Americans from the West declared this war because they wanted Indian land. Five of the seven major land battles of the War of 1812 were fought mainly against Native Americans. In 1815, at the end of the war, it was neither the British nor the Americans who lost, but the Native Americans. After 1815, all subsequent Indian wars, including the ones we are more likely to know of in the plains, left the Indians on their own with no European allies.

Tribal Names

Most names that we give to Indian tribes are derogatory and came originally from neighboring enemy tribes:

1. **Navajo** means "people who steal from the fields" (the people we call Navajos call themselves the "Dineh," meaning "we the people").
2. **Apache** means "enemy" and is the term used to refer to them by their Pueblo enemies.
3. **Pueblo** means "town," and these Indians don't call themselves this but prefer to be called after the actual village that they come from.
4. **Eskimo** should be called "Inuit."

5. **Sioux** should be called “Lakota” or “Dakota.”

Consider this . . .

When the Spanish asked the Pima Indians who they were, the Indians, not understanding what the Spanish were asking, replied, “I don’t know.” In their language, that sounds like “Pima,” and so they are now referred to as the “Pima” or “I don’t knows.”

Other Terminology Problems

1. **Discover:** How could the Americas be discovered if there were up to a hundred million people already living there?
2. **Squaw:** Most likely a derogatory word for female genitalia or a negative term for Native American women.
3. **Devil:** Every time the word “devil” appears on the landscape it is a sacred site for Native American people. Europeans viewed these sacred spots as part of “the devil’s religion” and thus branded them with these misnomers.
4. **Massacre:** How many dead whites does it take to have a massacre? How many dead Indians? Americans exterminating Indians is referred to as a “battle.” Indians killing white people, no matter how few, is invariably a massacre.
5. **Frontier:** This word implies a border on the land when in fact there was truly only a band of interculturalism that slowly moved across the United States.

In thinking about our 258 years of war against Native American peoples, we should be honest with ourselves and call this a time of conquest. We must recognize that many Indian groups have special rights today as a result of their relationship to the United States and as a result of purchases and treaties that America signed with them. It is our responsibility to stop demeaning Indians in the present. If Native American cultures are to remain alive and vibrant, we must begin by righting the wrongs of our perceived history.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

Look over the place names in your state (see U.S. Geological Survey State and Topical Gazetteer Download Page: geonames.usgs.gov/stategaz/index.html). Do any demean Indians or Indian culture? (Search for terms like “squaw,” “devil,” “dead Indian,” etc.) If so, touch base with Native American groups and the human relations council in your state and propose a change to your legislature and the U.S. Geological Survey.

Suggested Reading

Loewen, James W. *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000. Essays 1, 7, 14, 17, 19, 23, 24, 26, 35, 81, 93, 94.

Weatherford, Jack. *Indian Givers*. New York: Fawcett, 1988.

Other Books of Interest

Martin, Calvin, ed. *The American Indian and the Problem of History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Stannard, David E. *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World*. Reproduction ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Wright, J. Leitch, Jr. *The Only Land They Knew: The Tragic Story of the American Indians in the Old South*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985.

“There is not one Indian in the whole of this country who does not cringe in anguish and frustration because of these textbooks. There is not one Indian child who has not come home in shame and tears.”

—Rupert Costo

Lecture 6: The Making and Use of the Constitution

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is James Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, chapter 8.

Why Did America Fight for Separation from Great Britain?

A primary answer to this question involves the issue of Indian land. The French and Indian War between the British (and Americans) and the French and Indians ended with the French defeat and the Proclamation Line of 1763. This proclamation by King George established that the Continental Divide would mark a line beyond which the British (and colonists) would not settle. This proclamation offended many colonists, including George Washington, who felt that they had the right to take these lands. In addition to these reasons, it also became evident that a small country such as England, thousands of miles away, was never going to control such a large "new" land permanently.

The Revolution

The Revolutionary War can be viewed more accurately as a civil war. Not everyone felt the same about being removed from Britain's power. Fully a third wished to remain subjects and another third were undecided, so the war was as much about establishing an identity as it was about rebelling against England. The war itself could also be considered an almost civilized war.

Consider this . . .

The troops under Washington at Valley Forge did not fight a single battle between December 1777 and June 1778.

It was in America's interest not to fight. All America had to do in order to win the war was to hang together and not be conquered. Britain, on the other hand, had to win decisively and "take" America back.

The Confederation Era

The war itself had helped to solidify the thirteen colonies into one nation. Without the war, there never would have been such a confederation. However, operating under the Articles of Confederation posed some difficulties. To change policies required unanimity among all thirteen colonies. This proved impractical. Early America also didn't have a strong enough government to coordinate issues related to trade and tariff policies. Britain excluded America via protectionist tariffs and America found itself unable to retaliate. Neither could the government organize itself well enough to collect taxes properly. Along with Shays's Rebellion and worry in Southern colonies over

possible slave revolts, the Articles of Confederation became unworkable and led eventually to the creation of the Constitution.

Influences on the Constitution

Scottish philosophers David Hume and Adam Smith, English thinkers such as Thomas More, and French philosophers such as Montaigne and Montesquieu had profound influence on the Founding Fathers, including Madison, Hamilton, and Jefferson. These European philosophers, it must be noted, were influenced themselves by Indians. The impact of American Indians on Western thought began in 1516 with Thomas More's *Utopia*, which was an idealized account of Incan culture. It challenged the notion that societies had to be stratified and governed by monarchies. Other social philosophers seized upon the Indians as still-living examples of the primordial past of Europe.

Consider this . . .

"In the beginning all of the world was America."—John Locke

Some Europeans glorified Indian societies while others maligned them for being underdeveloped. In either case, these European philosophers altered their concepts of the good society. Concepts of government in ancient Greece, Holland, and Great Britain also had much influence on shaping the Constitution.

In the 1740s, the Iroquois wearied of the complications that ensued when dealing with the separate colonies and their laws and regulations. They suggested that the colonies adopt a confederation similar to theirs. Benjamin Franklin proposed just such a thing—the Albany Plan of Union. Though the colonies rejected the proposal in 1754, it was an important forerunner of the Constitution. In 1775, John Hancock signed a speech from Congress to the Iroquois that read, in part, "the six nations are a wise people, let us harken to their counsel and teach our children to follow it."

The Constitution

Critics often point to several serious flaws in the Constitution:

The Constitution did nothing or made worse the plight of three groups:

1. Indians
2. Slaves
3. Women

The Constitution can be seen as an instrument of class control. It offers no economic rights and was written by a plutocracy of rich white men.

The Constitution was pro-slavery in many specific ways and protected the international slave trade for twenty years.

However, the entire Revolutionary process did lead to greater Democracy in the long run. For example, most states abolished primogeniture, several states reduced or abolished the requirement of property ownership for voting,

and several state governments even abolished slavery. The American Revolution transformed the North, at least, from a slave society to a free society. This freedom process had reverberations overseas in other revolutions in France, Haiti, and the Spanish colonies in the Americas.

Consider this . . .

Ho Chi Minh copied the preamble of the Declaration of Independence in Vietnam's declaration of independence against the Japanese and the French in 1945.

Federalism

George Washington in May of 1787 commended the Federalists by saying, ". . . in it [the Federalist Papers] are candidly and ably discussed the principles of freedom and the topics of government which will always be interesting to mankind so long as they shall be connected in civil society."

The first great principle that finds its way into the Constitution is the separation of public and private powers.

Consider this . . .

How does this principle of separation play into a general critique of socialism?

The Founders also had a separation of state versus federal powers. The Constitutional Convention was very generous in providing for new states with fully equal powers. The Tenth Amendment reads in part as follows: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution . . . are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people." This sort of Federalism allows for governmental experimentation. The Federalists largely solved the key problems of social structure, which was figuring out how one can have a strong central government that does not become autocratic.

Consider this . . .

Has Federalism been weakened? How? If the federal government must remain supreme in one area, what should that be?

The Founders deliberately complexified how we select our leaders so that no one faction could dominate them all. As the Constitutional Convention wound down, a woman asked Benjamin Franklin, "What kind of government have you given us?" Franklin replied, "A Republic if you can keep it." Can we keep our Republic today when we the people seem to have such diminished power compared to the power and influence of our government and the military industrial complex?

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

Read Howard Zinn's treatment of the Constitution in "A Kind of Revolution" in his *A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present*. Contrast the treatment in this lecture. Compare a "right wing" source, such as Paul Johnson's *A History of the American People*. Which view convinces you? Why? What evidence did you use?

Suggested Reading

Loewen, James W. *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000, Essay 74.

Other Books of Interest

Raphael, Ray. *A People's History of the American Revolution: How Common People Shaped the Fight for Independence*. New York: Perennial, 2002.

"The historian must have no country."

—John Quincy Adams

Lecture 7: Slavery

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is James Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, chapter 5.

Why Was the Direct Issue of Slavery Left Out of the Constitution?

If the Founders from the Northern states who were against slavery had tried to make the United States a free society, they would never have brought along South Carolina and Georgia (and probably not North Carolina, Virginia, or even Maryland and Delaware). In this sense, it was a pragmatic decision not to make slavery an issue with regard to the Constitution. In addition, many of these Founders thought that slavery was on its way out and that indirect limitations imposed on it would allow it to eventually die on its own. After 1787, this seemed to happen in the North, but then the cotton gin was invented. The cotton gin led to a quadrupling of the profit margin of slavery and an increase in slave holdings. Furthermore, the war with Mexico opened up a whole new area that lent itself to enslavement—Texas.

Slavery's Importance

Slavery is extremely important to the development and history of the United States. From its colonial founding until the present, the United States has been around for 400 years. For 257 of those years, it was a slave society.

Consider this . . .

It will take until the year 2099 for the United States to be a free society as long as it was a slave society.

Slavery is still relevant today. Two hundred years later, the controversy over Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemmings's relationship is still making headlines. What is deeply ingrained in our culture is the easy assumption that white people get more respect and higher positions and blacks get less. This is the most important legacy of slavery to the present.

What We Get Wrong About Slavery

Slavery wasn't limited to the South. It was widespread throughout the North. We have a tendency to make slavery "nice." We always hear of Southern plantations with masters who were "above average" and nice. We almost always omit the fact of the slave trade. Very few museums or historical markers address the slave trade. When you go to most slave plantations (which we euphemistically call antebellum homes), they leave out slavery altogether.

Slaves built, cooked, cleaned, and maintained everything that you see in antebellum homes. Saying that Jefferson built Monticello is simply a lie; his slaves built it.

The Logical (or Psychological) Connection of Slavery and Racism

Slavery was built on racism, and racism was used as a rationale for slavery. Racially based slavery arose in Western culture in about 1450 when the Portuguese enslaved tribes along the West African coast.

Slavery was not usually based on race before 1450. Under the Romans and Greeks, who enslaved people regardless of race, children of slaves were not made slaves. This wasn't true for racially tinged slavery. The institution of racial slavery often extended across generations of slave families.

Slave owners told themselves that this new form of slavery was ethical because the people being enslaved (in the Western Hemisphere, first Native Americans and then Africans) weren't really equally human. Racism thus arose to rationalize this new form of slavery.

By the 1850s, many white Americans had persuaded themselves that blacks were so inferior that slavery was proper for them, even good for them.

Consider this . . .

“It is impossible for us to suppose these creatures to be men, because allowing them to be men, a suspicion would follow that we ourselves are not Christian.”—Montesquieu, 1748

Slaves' Lack of Independence

Slaves could not decide whether to work, where to work, how to work, what to eat, when to eat, or simply what to do from moment to moment. This is the underlying inhumanity of slavery.

Many slaves were motherless children. Most were fatherless. There was a hunger for family life and a denial of it.

“In the eleventh year of my age my master sent me to another farm several miles from my parents, brothers and sisters which was a great trouble to me. At last I grew so lonely and sad I thought I should die if I did not see my mother. I asked my overseer if I might go, but being positively denied I concluded to go without his knowledge. When I reached home my mother was away, I set off and walked twenty miles before I found her. I stayed with her for several days and we returned together. Next day I was sent back to my new place which renewed my sorrow. On reaching the farm I found that the overseer was displeased at me for going without his liberty. He tied me with a rope and gave me some stripes for which I carried the mark for weeks.”

—Ex-slave narrative

Violence

Most ex-slaves remember most acutely their being whipped.

“I just about half-died. I lay in the bunk two days getting over that whipping—getting over it in the body but not in the heart, no sir, I have that in the heart until this day.”

—Ex-slave narrative

Slave Revolts

Why weren't there more slave revolts? There were, in fact, some serious slave revolts, but the repercussions of these revolts and the consequences paid by not only the instigators but by all slaves were so severe that subsequent revolts were greatly reduced. Louisiana, for example, was almost half white and the sheer number of white militia was enough to deny most opportunity for revolt.

Consider this . . .

The Citadel and Virginia Military Institute were founded in part to maintain white supremacy and put down slave revolts.

During slave days, an armed patrol system existed in the rural areas. White males had to volunteer a certain number of days a month to make sure that blacks were not out without proper passes. Our modern history has ignored much about slaves, including the revolts themselves. If you were to visit the places where these revolts occurred, you would find scant evidence that they ever even took place.

How Do We Think About Slavery Today?

How do we think about slavery today without guilt and shame, but also without omitting it? White people often react with guilt or sometimes anger at the institution of slavery, as if it was something in the past that they did. Of course, they didn't do anything, and thinking this way is another form of presentism. This thinking amounts to something like a “white national character” that erroneously implicates a contemporary white person for something white people did in 1850. The converse is evident also if African Americans react with shame to slavery.

*“And their deeds shall find record
in the registry of Fame;
For their blood has cleansed completely
Every blot of Slavery's shame.”*

—Paul Laurence Dunbar from
The Colored Soldiers

Slavery affects us today in many ways.

Consider this . . .

If not for slavery, blacks and whites would have equal SAT scores today. Is there evidence for this?

If not for slavery, wouldn't blacks and whites have had equal life chances? They also would have had equal expectations laid on them by society. Sometimes the issue of genetics will be proposed in this argument. That very hypothesis, that blacks may be less intelligent than whites, is a part of the legacy of slavery.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

Read an accurate account of a slave revolt in the United States, including what happened to the enslaved persons afterward. If you were a slave before 1860, would you revolt? If not—and most enslaved persons never revolted—does that show that you were content with your lot?

Suggested Reading

Loewen, James W. *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000, Essays 43, 57, 72.

Other Books of Interest

Berlin, Ira. *Generations of Captivity: A History of African American Slaves*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003.

Escott, Paul D. *Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979.

Rawick, George P. *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community*. Vol. 1. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1971.

“The black-white rift stands at the very center of American history. It is the great challenge to which all our deepest aspirations to freedom must rise. If we forget that—if we forget the great stain of slavery that stands at the heart of our country, our history, our experiment—we forget who we are, and we make the great rift deeper and wider.”

—Ken Burns

Lecture 8: The Civil War

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is James Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, chapter 6.

The most important single event in the history of the United States as a nation was the Civil War, and slavery had an enormous influence on its path. The Civil War cost the United States almost as many lives as all the other wars combined since the War for Independence. From about 1890 to 1970, it was also the most lied about single event in U.S. history, and the lies start with the issue of slavery. The Civil War was, in fact, about slavery.

What Caused the Civil War?

When we ask what caused the Civil War, what we really mean to be asking is what caused secession. South Carolina started the Civil War by firing on Fort Sumter in April 1861, but also by seceding from the United States the previous December. The following are typical answers as to why the Southern states seceded (in order of commonly perceived importance):

1. States' rights
2. Slavery
3. Lincoln's election
4. Tariffs and taxes

These answers are largely wrong. In fact, slavery was the overwhelming primary cause of the Civil War. Since about 1890, the United States has been lying about what caused secession.

Consider this . . .

The following is inscribed on a memorial to South Carolina's soldiers at the Battle of Gettysburg:

"That men of honor might forever know the responsibilities of freedom, dedicated South Carolinians stood and were counted for their heritage and convictions. Abiding faith in the sacredness of states' rights provided their creed here. Many earned eternal glory."

What Can Be Inferred from This Statement?

When South Carolina seceded from the Union, a declaration of independence was written called the "Declaration of the Immediate causes which induce and justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union." In part, this document said that "fourteen of the States have deliberately

refused for years past their Constitutional obligations.” Specifically, the document was referring to the obligation to the Fugitive Slave Clause in the Constitution. The Fugitive Slave Clause reads as follows:

“No person held to service or labor in one State, under the laws thereof, escaping into another shall in consequence of any law or regulation therein, be discharged from such service or labor, but shall be delivered up.”

South Carolina approved of this stipulation, but became very upset with other states’ disregard for it. In effect, South Carolina became outraged with states’ rights to amend this law. In this sense, South Carolina seceded because they were *against* states’ rights. They were against all states that denounced the institution of slavery. They were upset that the Union allowed abolitionist societies to exist and that other states were assisting slaves in escaping South Carolina.

In 1965, white South Carolinians who put up the memorial in Gettysburg knew perfectly well that slavery was the reason behind the war and not states’ rights in the traditional sense. This obfuscation was due to the period in which this memorial was erected. In 1965, white supremacists still controlled South Carolina, and they were striving to keep African Americans in separate and unequal schools. They were spending 50 percent more per white pupil than black pupil. “States’ rights” was a subterfuge for wanting to be left alone by the federal government and for taking away individual rights. It is the phrase by which South Carolinians opposed school segregation in 1965. South Carolina was for states’ rights in 1965, but not in 1863.

The Fugitive Slave Act and Its Consequences

In 1850, the Democratic Party gradually went more and more pro-slavery. A draconian fugitive slave clause was passed. Under the fugitive slave clause, any white person could claim any black person as their slave. They could then take them to court to testify to this, and law forbade the black person to testify in their own defense. The judge got paid more money if he found for the white person than if he found for the black person. A substantial traffic in black people, slaves or not, began from North to South under the Fugitive Slave Act. Northern states became upset with these actions and began utilizing their states’ rights to hamper the implementation of the Fugitive Slave Act by passing Individual Liberty Laws. This sort of lawmaking by the states outraged South Carolina.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act

In 1854, Stephen A. Douglas passed through Congress the Kansas-Nebraska Act. This undermined completely the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which determined the farthest northern line for slavery. Douglas proposed the notion of popular sovereignty that said that if Kansas wanted slavery, then it could have it. He said it was a matter for the territory to decide on its own.

Dred Scott

In 1857, the Supreme Court declared in the Dred Scott decision that Congress had no right to declare slavery illegal in the territories. This meant that even if a territory was pro-freedom, there was nothing it could do about it. This decision meant that one had the right to take one's property (slaves included) wherever one liked. This moved the country toward the notion that the national government is pro-slavery and the only places that can be free are certain individual states.

Further Toward Secession

The progression of these acts triggered the birth of the Republican Party. The Republicans, however, did not themselves consider challenging the Union, but instead pledged to undo the Dred Scott decision. It was the "Southern fire-eaters" who pushed further for a break from the Union. In 1859-60, the Southern Democrats, even though they championed it earlier, rejected Douglas's popular sovereignty initiatives for not going far enough. Because the Supreme Court said in 1857 that Congress could not forbid slavery in the territories, slave owners demanded an end to the local option that other states had given themselves. Douglas, however, refused to reverse his previous stance, knowing full well that his capitulation to the Southern Democrats would spoil his respectability with Northerners. At this point, Southern Democrats took it upon themselves to split the Democratic Party, destroying Douglas's chance to become President. Lincoln's win would pave the way for Southern fire-eaters to secede.

The Neo-Confederate Historiography of the Civil War

After 1890, the white neo-Confederate South came to "win" the war. Though the war ended in 1865, the South won it in three ways in 1890:

1. The South renamed the war. Between about 1890 and 1970, the Civil War was mostly called "The War Between the States." It was never called this during the actual conflict.
2. The neo-Confederates were able to redefine what secession had been for, asserting it had been caused by states' rights:
 - a. Shortly before the war, in 1861, Jefferson Davis defended secession as an act of self-defense against the incoming Lincoln administration, whose policies of excluding slavery from the territories would ". . . *make property in slaves so insecure as to be comparatively worthless, thereby annihilating, in effect, property worth thousands of millions of dollars.*"
 - b. Well after the war, in 1881, Davis changes tack and says, "*The South fought solely for the inalienable right of a people to change their government, to withdraw from a Union into which they had entered and into which they had as sovereign communities voluntarily entered. The existence of African servitude was in no ways the cause of the conflict but only an incident.*"

3. The Confederates won it on the ground. In county after county, even in the North, Confederate monuments sprang up. For example, in Rockville, Maryland (which did not secede), there stands a Confederate monument, put up in 1913, that reads as follows:

“To our heroes of Montgomery County, Maryland. That we through life may not forget to love the thin gray line.”

Kentucky did not secede, but today has seventy-four Civil War monuments. Of these, according to historian Thomas Clark, seventy-two honor the Confederacy! The effect of a Confederate landscape makes it easier to have a Confederate mind and heart.

Race is still tied up with the Confederate cause even today.

Consider this . . .

What implications were there in the Ku Klux Klan’s use of the Confederate flag during their anti-civil rights demonstrations of the 1960s?

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

Find a friend or relative who believes that the South seceded “because of states’ rights.” Ask what evidence would support his or her view. Be careful to separate argumentation or assertion from actual evidence. See if you can get him or her to agree that statements by Confederate leaders telling why they left the United States would be evidence. Then find those statements on the Web, such as “Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina” at users.adelphia.net/~jmscopy/USDocuments/SecessionOrdinance.htm or Alexander H. Stephens, “Cornerstone Address,” (3/21/1861) at able2know.com/forums/about2757.html. Write an essay analyzing the ensuing discussion.

Suggested Reading

McPherson, James M. *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Other Books of Interest

Loewen, James W. *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000, Essays 36, 63-67, 71, 77.

“You may dispose of me very easily. I am nearly disposed of now. But this question is still to be settled—this Negro question, I mean; the end of that is not yet.”

—John Brown, 1859

Lecture 9: The Civil War (Continued) and Reconstruction

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is James Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, chapter 6.

Although slavery does explain why the South seceded, it is not why the United States went to war in the Civil War. There were abolitionists, but the Civil War began on the U.S. side as a way to hold the country together. However, the ideology of freedom in the North developed during the war itself, because intrinsic to the war aim was the need to deny the South the benefits of slavery. Therefore, it became in the interest of U.S. field commanders to liberate slaves and have them work not for the South but for the United States. Furthermore, as the war progressed, U.S. armies came to depend upon the "black infrastructure." During this dependence, they met all kinds of slaves and learned firsthand about the slaves' humanity.

Grant's Campaign on Vicksburg

The United States controlled most of the Mississippi River except for Vicksburg. Grant finally marched his troops and sent the navy south of Vicksburg. From there, Grant began a campaign that was made possible by the people of southwest Mississippi. This area was overwhelmingly black. These residents supplied Grant's men with food and water and showed him the best roads and where the Confederates were. Their contribution to his campaign was crucial to Grant's success. Grant was able to send his cavalry north as a decoy to lead the Confederate cavalry away from the area, depriving both sides of their most important intelligence force, but he did this with confidence knowing that the black infrastructure of the area could be used to supplant the intelligence work his cavalry would normally supply. Grant's men were able to take Jackson because a black man informed them that the shelling they were receiving was not from the full Confederate force but from a much smaller artillery force, which he then led them to. After a siege, Grant took Vicksburg. Sherman did much the same as Grant in utilizing the black infrastructure in his ensuing victories in the South. Blacks who helped in these campaigns were fed and paid and became free during this process. Finally, after January 1, 1863, approximately 200,000 blacks enlisted in the army and navy. The effect of all this on U.S. armed forces was that they rapidly became abolitionist.

Consider this . . .

In the Maryland election of 1864, a new Constitution was voted upon. In the Constitution was a new clause outlawing slavery. When absentee ballots from soldiers were counted, they were 9-1 for freedom. Maryland became one of the few places in the history of the world to vote slavery out.

Abolitionist Sentiment

The army's newfound abolitionist sentiments spread throughout the country and increased the anti-racism of the Republican Party. During Reconstruction, this idealism helped to pass the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. The ideology and anti-racism of the Northern Army helped to bring into being what can be called the "springtime" of race relations that was Reconstruction.

Reconstruction

How we now understand Reconstruction depends on when we went to high school. Some of us learned a set of myths about Reconstruction before about 1970. Others learned an entirely different and more accurate set after 1970. When the history of Reconstruction was written influences what exactly was said.

Consider this . . .

Remember that throughout the nineteenth century and into the 1920s the Democrats were the party of overt white supremacy.

Confederate Reconstruction

Right after the Civil War, the Confederates were still in charge in most parts of the South. While some parts of the South had been damaged by war, many parts were left untouched. Social structure, however, was in chaos because white planters knew of no other way to organize their society other than around the conventions of slavery. Across the South, officials agreed that slavery was over, but they attempted to mitigate this by passing "black codes" whose effect was to reinstate slavery conditions:

"Under the pressure of Federal bayonets, urged on by the misdirected sympathies of the world, the people of Mississippi have abolished the institution of slavery. The Negro is free whether we like it or not, we must realize that fact now and forever. To be free however does not make him a citizen or entitle him to social or political equality with the white man."

—Governor Benjamin Humphries of Mississippi

The Mississippi Black Code came from these sentiments and stated that black people could neither own nor rent property; they had to show proof that they had a job or home or they would be fined and jailed; and they could not hold guns.

"We must keep the ex-slave in a position of inferiority. We must pass such laws as will make him feel his inferiority."

—The Jackson Daily News

White Unionists, too, were in a very tenuous situation in the "new" South.

They were attacked as a means of revenge throughout the South. All of these acts outraged Northern Republicans, who now were losing their white allies in the South and had no means of fostering relationships with blacks in the South because of the institutional repression forced upon them there. The number-one Republican newspaper in the Midwest, the *Chicago Tribune*, responded to Mississippi's Black Code in the following way:

"We tell the white men of Mississippi that the men of the North will convert the State of Mississippi into a frog pond before they will allow any such laws to disgrace one foot of soil in which the bones of our soldiers sleep and over which the flag of freedom waves."

As soon as they could, the Republicans instituted Congressional Reconstruction; this is what we usually mean when we talk of Reconstruction.

Congressional Reconstruction

After the War, most Northerners and especially Republicans came to define the problem of the war as slavery and not black people. They believed that the cure for this problem was fuller civil rights for African Americans. The Thirteenth through Fifteenth Amendments were passed with this in mind. For a time right after the war, anti-racist idealism played the dominant role in American political life. Northern Republicans re-interpreted the Declaration of Independence to include African Americans. Congress passed civil rights acts to protect black rights, and during Grant's first term as President the government even tried to enforce these measures. Consequently, African Americans lived under better conditions between 1865 and 1890 than they would in the many decades that followed. It was in the Republican and national interest to pass laws that allowed blacks to vote so that important elections could be won in the South.

Consider this . . .

Iowa with a negligible African American population, and before the Fifteenth Amendment went into effect, eventually passed a law to allow blacks to vote there.

The Fourteenth Amendment

The Fourteenth Amendment, or Equal Rights Amendment, conferred citizenship on African Americans and guaranteed "due process" and the "equal protection of the laws." Several decades ago, this amendment could not pass on behalf of women, who made up 51 percent of the voting population, yet the country was able to pass it in 1868 on behalf of a despised group that made up 0 percent of the voters.

What Reconstruction Meant

Reconstruction legally applied only to the South. It was about the political reconstruction of state governments, and only states that seceded needed to be politically reconstructed in the first place. However, Reconstruction was an ideological movement that was of immense importance in the North as well as the South. The ideological currents of Reconstruction, while focused on the South, emanated from the North and thus affected life there as well. Reconstruction was a period of possibility for African Americans throughout the country.

In 1866 and 1868, white voters returned Republicans to Congress in landslide victories throughout the North, signaling their satisfaction with anti-racism as a national policy. Many towns and countries in the North welcomed African American immigrants during and after the Civil War. Northern communities throughout the country enjoyed a springtime of race relations between 1865 and 1890.

In the South, however, in the 1870s, Reconstruction ground to a halt. With increasing tenacity and violence, Democrats fought the interracial Republican coalitions for control of each Southern state. Their methods were bloody—in Louisiana in the summer and fall of 1868, white Democrats killed more than a thousand African Americans and white Republicans. For eight more years, the Democrats continued in this vein until they had won over most of the South.

Waving the Bloody Shirt

Republicans were outraged by what Democrats were doing to white and black Republicans in the South. One of the things they did was to “wave the bloody shirt.” Over time, the meaning of this phrase has become distorted. The “bloody shirt” was a real nightshirt worn by Colonel A.P. Huggins in Aberdeen, Mississippi. Huggins was a Republican who stayed in Mississippi after the war and became superintendent of public schools in Monroe County. The Ku Klux Klan warned Huggins to leave. When he didn’t, they gave him seventy-five lashes. His bloody nightshirt was sent to Washington as proof of Klan terrorism in the South and was waved on the floor of Congress. Years later, after 1890, Democrats managed to convince historians that the Republicans were merely trying to win elections by harping on their sacrifices during the Civil War. “Waving the bloody shirt” became synonymous with irrelevant demagoguery, but actually the shirt had nothing to do with the Civil War and it was neither irrelevant nor demagogic.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

1. Read Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, pp. 642-48 (New York, Avon Books, 1973) and Margaret Walker's *Jubilee*, pp. 286-302 (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1999). Which is a more accurate account of the behavior of African Americans in Reconstruction?
2. Learn about Margaret Mitchell and Margaret Walker. Does historiography help to answer Question 1?

Suggested Reading

Loewen, James W. *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000, Essays 44, 45, 48.

Other Books of Interest

Bennett, Lerone. *Black Power U.S.A.: The Human Side of Reconstruction, 1867-1877*. Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, Inc., 1967.

Foner, Eric. *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*. New York: Perennial, 2002.

"More Americans have learned the story of the South during the years of the Civil War and Reconstruction from Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* than from all of the learned volumes on this period."

—Warren Beck and Myles Clowers

Lecture 10: The Nadir of Race Relations

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is James Loewen's *Lies Across America*, essays 37, 46–48, 52, 55, 56, and 84.

What happens between 1890 and 1940 turns out to be the very opposite of what was happening with regard to race relations up until this time. While much of the Reconstruction period has been lied about in our history textbooks, the Nadir period of race relations was entirely ignored. Instead, our history tends to refer to this period of 1890 to 1940 with various vacuous terms.

“The Gay Nineties”

“The Gilded Age”

“The Roaring Twenties”

Unfortunately, in about 1892, Republicans gave up on race relations. After 1890, well after the high point of Reconstruction, race relations were systematically getting worse. During this period, white Southerners decided that blacks would not have political rights and would be excluded from citizenship. There are three reasons why we date the beginning of the Nadir in race relations with 1890:

1. In 1890, the Massacre at Wounded Knee occurred in South Dakota. This ends the last shred of independent Indian nations.
2. In 1890, the Mississippi Constitution “legally” disenfranchised African Americans. In part, the Constitution required blacks to interpret the state constitution to the satisfaction of local white registrars. Uneducated whites were exempt from this rule with the “Grandfather” clause. This denied black people their rights without overtly saying so. Because the Supreme Court did not overrule this law, other Southern states began to copy Mississippi’s new constitution. By 1907, states as far away as Oklahoma had adopted this new rule.
3. In 1890, the Federal Elections Bill failed by one vote in the Senate.

Consider this . . .

From 1860 until the end of the century, not one Democrat in Congress ever voted for a civil rights bill.

The failure of the Federal Elections Bill had larger implications. After its failure, Democrats taunted Republicans as “nigger lovers.” Until about 1892, Republicans had ignored this taunt or defended it. What happened after 1890, though, was that Republicans began to deny the charges brought against them. In effect, after 1890, the Republicans gave up on civil and voting rights for African Americans.

What Caused the Nadir in Race Relations?

The anti-racist idealism of the Civil War and Reconstruction was fading as memories of the war dimmed. By 1890, only one American in three was old enough to have been alive when the Civil War ended. Millions more Americans came into the United States from Europe long after the war’s end, and because they had played no role in the Civil War, they did not have its legacy of anti-racism.

In addition to all of this are the “Three I’s”:

1. Indian Wars
2. Imperialism
3. Immigrants

Indian Wars: as soon as the Civil War ended, wars resumed against the Plains Indians. In these wars, the United States proceeded to take Indian lands. For example, much of South Dakota was “given” to the Lakota in the form of reservations, but then gold was discovered. This led to a total disregard of Indian rights over these lands and the ensuing Plains Wars. It’s very difficult to justify denying rights to one group of non-whites (Indians) while arguing that another group of non-whites (African Americans) should have all civil rights known to mankind.

Imperialism: an ideology that swept into America from western Europe and was in the air in the last half of the nineteenth century. America first took over Hawaii and then fought the Spanish-American War. While this war ostensibly started with the Americans on the side of the Cubans and Filipinos, this completely changed by the end of the war. With the victory of America, the McKinley administration decided to proceed as it did in Hawaii and take control of these countries by starting a war with the Filipinos. This war resulted in America claiming dominance over the entire island archipelago.

Immigrants from Europe and China remained a problem. The Europeans persisted in voting Democratic, partly because of the Republicans’ pushing of alcohol prohibition. The Republicans gradually became anti-immigrant. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, who had supported the Federal Elections Act, several years later helped to found the Immigration Restriction League that was based around ideas of eugenics.

Consider this . . .

How could the United States justify taking over the Filipino people and at the same time fight for the rights of African Americans? How could they denounce the rights of recent immigrants and simultaneously further the cause for black rights?

Social Stratification

The 1880s and 1890s saw an increasing social stratification. Republicans in particular are on top of this hierarchy, becoming the super rich of the society. In order to justify their good fortune, they begin to lose their belief in the idea that all men are created equal. A substitute ideology arose in the form of social Darwinism. This provided a potent rationale for both class privilege and racial superiority.

Some Events of the Nadir

1. In the West, Chinese were expelled from hundreds of towns. Until about 1884, Chinese lived in almost every town in the West. They were farmers, miners, and fishermen. Chinese worked extensively on construction projects like the railroad. Capitalists benefited from this, but white workers did not, which led to the expulsion of Chinese all over the West. On September 2, 1885, in Rock Springs, Wyoming, at least 150 white miners attacked Chinese there and gave them an hour to leave town. The rioters burned all of Chinatown and expelled or killed up to 900 Chinese.

Consider this . . .

It's been said that this expulsion was what led to the phrase, "He doesn't have a Chinaman's chance."

This started copycat rioting against the Chinese throughout the West. In 1870, Chinese made up one fourth of the population in Idaho. By 1900, two thirds of the Chinese had left, many by force. The result of these expulsions is that we have come to stereotype Chinese as settlers in large urban areas.

2. The federal government stood by idly while white Southerners used terror and fraud to eliminate African American voters across the South. In 1898, an interracial Republican coalition still governed in Wilmington, North Carolina. The Democrats finally rioted and drove out all the office holders, killing at least twelve African Americans, and the McKinley administration did nothing. Congress became re-segregated because the last black Congressman was from North Carolina and failed to win re-election due to the events in his state. No African American served in Congress again until 1929, and no Southern African American served there until 1973.
3. In 1894, the Democratic majority in Congress repealed the remaining Federal Election Statutes. At this point, there were no laws in place to maintain the Fifteenth Amendment.

4. Lynchings go to all time highs.

Consider this . . .

A lynching is a public murder and doesn't have to be by hanging.

5. There was a dramatic rise in anti-Semitism. The Union League Club in New York was founded during the Civil War to provide ideological support for the Republican Party and had Jews amongst its founders. In 1893, the son of the Jewish vice president came up for membership in the club but was denied entry because of his background. The father resigned and from this point, the Union League Club became totally gentile. This pattern was repeated throughout the country.
6. The Nadir led to the worst history. It affected how all Americans thought about the past. During the 400th anniversary of Columbus, in 1892, Columbus becomes completely glorified because he represents white triumph over the Western Hemisphere. The flat Earth myth becomes set around this time. A monument in California goes up showing Columbus holding a globe up to the Queen of Spain. In this period, all across the United States, Italian Americans put up statues and plaques to Columbus. At the state capital in Indianapolis, a bust of Christopher Columbus was erected in 1920 with the following words:

“Christopher Columbus, born in Genoa, Italy, 1451. Discovered America October 12, 1492. This land of opportunity and freedom was thus preserved for humanity by the perennial genius abiding in the Italian race.”

Consider this . . .

What are the different perceptions surrounding the idea of race in 1892 and in the present? When do white people become a white race?

7. Another example of this historiography is that during the time of the Nadir, textbooks began to infer the insanity of John Brown, the white American who led the raid on Harpers Ferry, Virginia. The insanity with which historians charged John Brown was not psychological, but ideological. Between 1890 and 1940, America had gone so racist as a nation that it was inconceivable to most historians that any sane person would give his life on behalf of equal rights for blacks. In addition, it is obviously not a black history perspective to paint a man who gave his life for black rights as insane.

Consider this . . .

What has history as influenced by the Nadir period done to the reputation of Ulysses S. Grant?

The entire history of Reconstruction got turned upside down during the Nadir period. This has had an effect not only on history, but also on present day society.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

What do you remember about the parade of (mostly) bearded presidents between Andrew Johnson (1865-69) and the end of the century? If you're like most Americans, nothing! Consider that race relations was the most important issue facing the country in that period (or most important *two* issues, including Indian Policy). Rank those presidents according to how well they handled these two issues. (George Sinkler's *The Racial Attitudes of American Presidents* offers a beginning, but you need to dig deeper.)

Suggested Reading

Logan, Rayford W. *The Betrayal of the Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson*. New York: MacMillan, 1965 [1954].

Other Books of Interest

Richardson, Heather Cox. *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

"We shall need all the anti-slavery feeling in the country, and more; you can go home and try to bring the people to your views, and you may say anything you like about me, if that will help. . . . When the hour comes for dealing with slavery, I trust I will be willing to do my duty though it cost my life."

—Abraham Lincoln, 1862
(to abolitionist Unitarian ministers)

Lecture 11: The Nadir of Race Relations (Continued)

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is James Loewen's *Sundown Towns*.

Abraham Lincoln Misremembered

The majority of modern history textbooks have grossly misrepresented the history of Abraham Lincoln. To begin, most textbooks rarely present the Gettysburg Address in their sections on Abraham Lincoln. On the contrary, the majority of textbooks quote the following:

"If I could save the Union without saving any slaves I would do it. If I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery and the colored race I do because I believe it helps to save this Union and what I forebear, I forebear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union."

What are the majority of textbooks trying to tell us about Lincoln by focusing on this passage? Surely, they are trying to say that Lincoln didn't care about the rights of the "colored race" and that he was only in the war to save the Union. This is simply outrageous. In order to perpetuate this lie, vast amounts of context have been left out of the textbooks. For example, the books leave out the very next sentence of the above address:

"I have here stated my purpose according to my view of official duty and I intend no modification of my oft expressed personal wish that all men everywhere could be free."

To understand the political context within which Lincoln made these statements is to understand that what he was doing was for pragmatic reasons, in order to further a cause he believed strongly in as best he could amongst the rivalry and competition of his contemporaries. The same week that he sent the above letter, he wrote the Emancipation Proclamation, and while this is included in the textbooks, it's never laid forth in their discussion of what Lincoln's war aims were. The textbooks, in order to perpetuate their agenda, are forced to leave many other facts about Lincoln from their texts, facts that unequivocally show Lincoln's personal and professional commitment to the issue of civil rights for African Americans.

The main reason that our modern textbooks follow this path with regard to Lincoln is that they are copying older textbooks. The misinterpretation of Abraham Lincoln came about during the Nadir period. The country became so incredibly racist during this period that it became an embarrassment to the country to realize that Lincoln did care about the rights of blacks.

The Nadir's Misinterpretation of Reconstruction

The biggest single misinterpretation of the past during the Nadir period was the complete reversal of opinion on what happened during Reconstruction. This revisionist view of Reconstruction was not based on facts but on eugenics theory. This theory, which came to be known as the “Dunning School” around 1900, states the following:

“The newly freed blacks proved incapable of self-government and thus made segregation necessary.”

By 1935, these “theories” had become so virulent that the African American historian W.E.B. Dubois despaired of history and wrote the following:

“We have got to the place where we cannot use our experiences during and after the Civil War for the uplift and enlightenment of mankind.”

During the Nadir, the misrepresentation of Reconstruction found its way into popular culture. Two of the most popular movies in the history of the United States deal with Reconstruction and are appalling works of history. *Birth of a Nation*, which depicts the Ku Klux Klan heroically, was simply false. *Gone with the Wind*—the highest grossing movie in the history of the world—lamented slavery’s passing and is blatantly anti-historical fiction. To base in any way the history of Reconstruction on this movie is to falsify and malign our understanding of what really happened in America during Reconstruction. Both movies are products of the Nadir period and falsely depict Reconstruction.

The Nadir also struck the sporting world. African Americans were thrown out of the Major Leagues in 1889. Textbooks that call Jackie Robinson the first African American to play in the Major Leagues are incorrect. African Americans were thrown out of the Kentucky Derby in 1911 after they won more than half of the first thirty derbies. Blacks were also stopped from being mail carriers, carpenters, and secretaries.

The administration of Woodrow Wilson is widely acknowledged as the most racist administration since the end of slavery. Wilson segregated the federal government and the Navy. He was part of the Progressive Movement, which was whites only. The Progressive Movement eliminated city councils, changing them to the commission form of government, which had the effect of eliminating blacks from elected positions in city governments.

The original Reconstruction-era incarnation of the Ku Klux Klan as a Southern phenomenon was replaced in the twentieth century by a nationwide organization. The KKK “craze” of the 1920s led to Klan rallies and meetings in small towns across the country that were larger than any meeting held since.

The rise of organized labor further imperiled the jobs and lives of African Americans, because unions forced blacks out of jobs. Prior to the rise of unions there were, for example, black firemen and black trainmen.

Consider this . . .

In 1920 and 1921, some white unions were paying \$300 for each black fireman or trainman who was shot to death.

Between 1920 and 1930, the number of different occupations held by African Americans in Nashville dropped by almost 50 percent. During the Great Depression, African Americans were even driven out of jobs that had been considered black jobs, like barbers, trash collectors, and elevator operators.

Now we can understand why the Confederacy started putting up monuments after 1890. In 1890, they won the Civil War, in part by putting African Americans back into a state of near slavery throughout the United States.

Sundown Towns

Sundown Towns were towns that kept out African Americans on purpose. Many of them had signs at their city limits or train stations saying:

“Nigger don’t let the sun go down on you in (town name).”

Most of these towns are creations of the Nadir period. After 1890, most whites no longer viewed slavery and racism as a problem, for they considered slavery long gone and racism outlawed by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. The fact that black people were still struggling with poverty and discrimination was looked upon by whites as being a problem inherent to black people. Increasingly, to solve this problem of what to do with black people, whites across the North created sundown towns. During the Nadir period, ethnic cleansing took place in every part of the United States. Mob actions forced African Americans to flee for their lives from town after town and county after county. In other towns, ordinances were passed to make it illegal for blacks to own property or businesses. Almost the entire Ozarks and Cumberlands were denuded of African Americans. Ironically, in the Deep South, this did not happen, for white Southerners there were not willing to give up their hired help.

In Illinois alone, there were without doubt at least 400 sundown towns (169 confirmed); in Indiana, another seventy towns have been confirmed. These are representative of the rest of the country. There were between 3,000 and 20,000 sundown towns throughout the United States at one time.

As of 1890, African Americans were everywhere in the United States. They lived in every county of Indiana, for example, except one. But by 1930, blacks had pulled back from many places in the face of implacable white hostility. In that year, Indiana had six counties with no blacks at all and twenty-seven others with just a handful.

Beginning around 1900 and continuing until 1968, sundown suburbs were formed and existing suburbs got rid of their black residents. By 1968, at least three-fourths of all suburbs excluded black Americans.

The Ideology of the Nadir Period

The ideology of the Nadir period began as one of social Darwinism and then morphed into the more racist ideology of eugenics. This led to widespread sterilization in the United States. In the 1920s and 1930s, state legislatures from California to Virginia passed sterilization laws for people of “dubious stock,” including the poor, isolated rural people, and those with low IQ scores.

Consider this . . .

IQ testing and standardized testing in general is a product of the Nadir period and the eugenics movement.

In 1924, immigration was restricted from eastern and southern Europe, Africa, and China. The American eugenics movement that promoted these laws and restrictions went on to become a model for Hitler and the Third Reich. The founder of the birth control movement, Margaret Sanger, was a stalwart believer in eugenics.

What Ended the Nadir?

Three factors helped to end the Nadir period.

1. The beginning of the end of imperialism. Once people of color began to run their own societies (India, Ghana, Indonesia), it became imperative that the United States learn how to get along with them.
2. African Americans from the South started the Great Migration to the large cities of the North, where they started electing people to Congress and state legislatures.
3. Hitler. As America uncovered the death camps of World War II, Americans were able to see the logical end product of eugenics.

The Nadir Period in Summary

America is still dealing with the bad history of the Nadir period in the form of incorrect historical markers and monuments and in distorted history textbooks. In addition, there are remnants of the eugenics movement seen in the form of standardized testing and the unconscious claim deep in many minds that people of other color may be inferior. In addition, to this day, all over the landscape there still exist sundown towns and suburbs that keep out African Americans.

Consider this . . .

What is the difference between a sundown town and a modern gated community?

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

Watch D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) (shown at the correct speed, so it doesn't look jerky). [Be wary: even some VHS tapes were made with the movie shown at 24 frames instead of 16 frames/second.] Then write an essay explaining what *Birth of a Nation* gets wrong and suggesting how it could have led to the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan.

Suggested Reading

Loewen, James. *Sundown Towns*. New York: New Press, 2005.

“History, despite its wrenching pain,
Cannot be unlived, and if faced
With courage, need not be lived again.”

—Maya Angelou

Lecture 12: United States Foreign Policy

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is James Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, chapters 8 and 9.

High school history textbooks present the United States as the “good guy” in relation to foreign policy. In reality, there are three main motivations that have driven America’s foreign policy:

1. Domestic politics
2. Ideological distortions
3. Realpolitik

When discussing foreign policy, we reach an area of the past where Americans are the least informed. Textbooks paint the United States as pursuing neither domestic politics or realpolitik. Instead, our efforts abroad are motivated by our efforts to promote democracy and assist other countries. This is simply inadequate history.

One of the first fallacies about America’s foreign policy is the assertion that the United States gives an immense amount of foreign aid, larger than aid given by other countries. Actually, the proportion of gross national product that the U.S. government sends abroad as foreign aid is smaller than that of any other industrial nation. In addition, more than half of all the aid goes to just two nations—Israel and Egypt. Most countries’ foreign policies are not motivated by a desire to promote democracy or provide humanitarian aid, and neither are America’s. However, if we have been miseducated to think that these are the reasons upon which our foreign policies are founded, then citizens will be less able to understand our policies, less able to critique them, and less able to appreciate them when they do work.

Domestic Politics as Motivation for Foreign Policies

After the American Revolution, many people thought that America’s example would spark revolution throughout the world, and it did. France was the first example. In the 1790s, Haiti, inspired by the American and French examples, revolted against France. This gave America its first chance to help another nation in its quest for Independence.

Haiti

Whether the President of the United States at the time owned slaves or didn’t determined his policy toward Haiti. Washington did own slaves, and his administration loaned hundreds of thousands of dollars to the French planters in Haiti to help them suppress their slave revolt. John Adams did

not own slaves, so his administration gave considerable support to the Haitians in their anticolonial revolution against the French. Jefferson succeeded Adams and, like other slave owners of the time, preferred to see a Napoleonic-like colony rather than a self-governed Republic in the Caribbean. Therefore, in 1801, he reversed U.S. policy and secretly gave France the go-ahead to reconquer the island. By doing this, the United States not only betrayed its own revolutionary heritage, but even acted against its own realpolitik, or self-interest, by fostering France's position and power in the Western Hemisphere. Jefferson took this stance because the Haitian revolution scared planters in the United States. They were afraid that the revolution might inspire slave revolts in the States. America's internal politics in this case determined its foreign policy. When Haiti eventually won its revolution over the French, the United States did not even extend the country diplomatic recognition. It took sixty years for the United States to recognize Haiti, and during much of this time, the United States placed an embargo on the country. Throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, America never encouraged independence movements wholeheartedly.

Vietnam

A more recent example of domestic politics taking precedent over realpolitik is the case of Vietnam. Why did America fight this war?

Some left-wing analysts claim that the United States fought in Vietnam to secure access to its valuable natural resources. But the United States was not even fully aware of Vietnam's relatively small oil holdings until after troops were being sent into the country.

Another popular interpretation for why America fought in Vietnam was the "domino theory." This theory suggested that if Vietnam were to "fall" to Communists, as had China, other countries in Southeast Asia might also "fall." The fear that Vietnamese Communists were under the direct control of China's Communist government was unfounded. Although China provided material support to North Vietnam during the war with the United States, China and Vietnam have a much longer history as adversaries than as friends.

Some conspiracy theorists claim that the war was organized by big business in order to help the economy. "Big Business," however, was much more tied to the Republican Party, and the escalation of the war in Vietnam was presided over by two Democratic leaders. In addition, the economy was strong at the start of the war.

The claim that America fought the war to bring democracy to Vietnam also has its problems. The Eisenhower administration refused to allow elections in South Vietnam as had been agreed to in the Geneva Accord in 1954, because President Eisenhower knew that Ho Chi Minh would win the vast majority of the vote. In actuality, the United States fought in Vietnam to stop the election of the most popular Vietnamese figure of the twentieth century, not on behalf of democracy.

A more useful view of why America fought the war is that the country had no real cause or purpose. It seems more accurate to see that no later

administration had the courage to undo the mistake of opposing Ho Chi Minh's Popular Independence Movement in 1946. The most plausible single reason for the war in Vietnam can be discovered by examining America's internal politics of the period. Democratic Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, having witnessed the manner in which Republicans castigated Truman for "losing" China, did not want to give Republicans the same opportunity over Vietnam.

"I'm not going to lose Vietnam. I'm not going to be the President who saw Southeast Asia go the way China did."

—Lyndon Johnson

The Influence of Realpolitik on Foreign Policy

Realpolitik = Looking out for the best interests of the nation.

"We have about 50% of the world's wealth but only 6.3% of its population. In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real test in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships that will permit us to maintain this position of disparity. We need not deceive ourselves that we can afford today the luxury of altruism and world benefaction, unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of living standards and democratization."

—George Kennan, 1948

The realpolitik explanation for the Vietnam War is that each president in turn—Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, and Ford—feared the loss of Vietnam would be a profound blow to American—and his own—prestige. Rather than yield to international pressure for serious diplomatic negotiations to end the war, Johnson pressed a military win lest "Pax-Americana" be threatened in other regions around the world.

American leaders have taken military action and formulated foreign policy citing our "national interest" many times. I don't find the claim convincing regarding Vietnam. More convincing is the Kennedy administration's response to the threat of nuclear confrontation over the placement of Soviet missiles only ninety miles from U.S. shores. By imposing a naval blockade of Cuba, the Cubans and their Soviet sponsors were forced to either capitulate to American demands to remove the weapons, face the possibility of invasion, or, worse, become involved in a nuclear war. In American accounts, the fact that American ballistic missiles had previously been deployed in Turkey, a relatively short distance from the USSR's borders, was seldom mentioned as a factor in the original Soviet decision to place missiles in Cuba.

Ideological Distortions on Foreign Policy

From time to time, various "isms" have distorted our foreign policy away from realpolitik and far from humanitarian principles. An early example was imperialism, which led to our war on the Philippines. There was no justification in

realpolitik or humanitarian principles for this attack, but the country couldn't think straight about the Philippines owing to the ideology of imperialism tinged with white supremacy. If great white nations "were supposed to" control lesser nonwhite colonies, wasn't the United States such a nation? Shouldn't it have colonies just like all the other European countries?

"When I realized that the Philippines had dropped into our laps, I confess that I did not know what to do with them. I walked the floor of the White House night after night, until midnight, and I'm not ashamed to tell you gentlemen that I went down on my knees and prayed to almighty God for light and guidance more than one night and one night it came to me this way; there was nothing left for us to do but take them all and to educate the Filipinos and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God's grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow men for whom Christ also died. And then I went to bed and went to sleep and slept soundly and the next morning I sent for the Chief Engineer of the War Department, our mapmaker, and I told him to put the Philippines on the map of the United States."*

—President William McKinley

(*Note: Most Filipinos had been Christians for centuries.)

The war on the Philippines was arguably the longest war in American history, though to judge by the many monuments to the much shorter and less destructive Spanish American War and the practical nonexistence of all reference to the Philippine war, one would have to infer a general desire to forget it.

Consider this . . .

President Woodrow Wilson sent American troops into all but one of the following countries:

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------|
| Cuba | Nicaragua |
| Dominican Republic | Panama |
| Haiti | Soviet Union |
| Mexico | Venezuela |

Which country did America *not* invade?

Ideology was the key reason that Wilson invaded so many countries. Textbook authors use the passive voice to disguise America's imperialism. Regarding Wilson's Mexican campaign, books always specify Wilson as ordering American forces to withdraw, but nobody is specified as ordering them in. This sort of language insulates American figures from any deeds that may be perceived as unheroic or unethical.

American Exceptionalism

American exceptionalism is the notion that America is different from all other countries. This ideology claims that Americans are more humane, moral, democratic, and fairer. American exceptionalism always leads to ethnocentrism, and ethnocentrism always makes one stupider. Textbooks push this ethnocentrism on everyone, which makes people want to believe that their government always does right, or at least tries to.

Summary

It would be better if all high school graduates understood the concept of realpolitik and were able to use the concept to critique U.S. foreign policy. American citizens ought always to demand that the government act along realpolitik lines rather than according to the demands of internal politics or such ideological distortions as imperialism and American exceptionalism.

The United States has not been exceptionally truthful about its foreign policy. Lying about what the country does abroad has been a vertically integrated history. It's been indulged in by the President, by agencies of the federal government, by our textbooks, and by us. Lying first became a big problem when Woodrow Wilson conducted the secret war against the Soviet Union in 1918, which involved the government on the side of the Whites against the Bolsheviks. Ever since, there has been a bipartisan record of lying:

“The American people are entitled to know whether we are intervening in Cuba or intend to do so in the future. The answer to that question is no.”

—Dean Rusk, Secretary of State

This statement was made on the very day that troops were landing covertly at the Bay of Pigs.

If “We the People” have been lied to about other nations and our own actions abroad, then we can't critique our foreign policy. Psychologically, it may be easier for a people to believe the lies and look upon their country as one that bestows beneficence upon all. If so, then we are complicit in our country's actions.

When we do conduct our foreign policy along the lines of promoting self government, liberty, and justice, then we will have less reason to lie to our own citizens about the nature of our foreign interests. It might work better for us in the sense of our longterm realpolitik, as well.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

Develop a realpolitik explanation for America's war on Iraq that began in 2003. Develop an ideological explanation for that war. Develop an explanation based on internal politics (including the impact on the November 2002 Congressional elections of steps taken by the G.W. Bush administration that fall). Which explanation(s) seems most convincing?

Suggested Reading

Kwitny, Jonathan. *Endless Enemies: America's Worldwide War Against Its Own Best Interests*. New York: Congdon and Weed, 1984.

Other Books of Interest

James, C.L.R. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. New York: Vintage, 1989.

Karnow, Stanley. *Vietnam: A History*. 2nd ed. New York: Penguin Books, 1997.

Lafeber, Walter. *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-2002*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002.

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"I helped make Mexico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenue in. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers. . . . I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras 'right' for American fruit companies in 1903. Looking back on it, I might have given Al Capone a few hints."

—Marine Corps Gen. Smedley D. Butler, 1931

Lecture 13: Capitalism and Social Class

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is James Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, chapter 7.

There are three topics that are taboo in U.S. textbooks: sex, religion, and social class. Social class is considered a blemish on American democracy. Like all blemishes, it is rarely spoken of in history books. In order to understand social class in American society, it is first important to take a closer look at the benefits and faults of capitalism.

The Case for Capitalism

Freedom of choice. A consumer has the right to buy whatever he or she wants. This allows for competition. The marketplace has its rationality. As a resource becomes scarce, for example, it goes up in price, so only those uses for it that are very important and only those people who feel they absolutely require it will be able to afford it.

Private enterprise. Industries, labor unions, and other large formal organizations offer countervailing power to that of government.

Meritocracy. Capitalism at its best is a type of meritocracy. Meritocracy is antiracist and antisexist.

The Case Against Capitalism

Unequal sharing of power negates the strengths of capitalism and leads to excessive social class stratification. Social class is one of the most important single variables in a capitalist society. From womb to tomb, a person's social class standing can be weighted against almost all other measurable social characteristics.

Social Class Starting in the Womb

Affluent expectant mothers are much more likely to get good prenatal care and are much more likely to receive current medical advice and more likely to enjoy better general health, fitness, and nutrition. Many poor and working class expectant mothers first contact the medical profession in the last month of their pregnancy, and sometimes not until they deliver. It follows that rich babies come out healthier and heavier and go on to lead different lives. Poor babies are more likely to have high lead levels in their environments and their bodies. Rich babies get more time with their parents and better day care. When children become school age, most rich children benefit from suburban schools that spend two to three times as much money per student as schools in inner cities or impoverished rural areas. Poor children get much less attention in school, as their classes are often 50 percent larger than those of more

affluent children. Differences like this help account for the higher school drop-out rate among poorer children.

Teacher Expectations and Social Structure

Even when poor children are fortunate enough to attend the same school as rich children, they find that their teachers expect the children of the affluent to know the right answers. Teachers are often surprised and sometimes distressed when poor children excel. Teachers and counselors believe they can predict who is college material. Teachers have different expectations for different children depending on the signals those children give off.

“If you are the child of low income parents, the chances are good that you will receive limited and often careless attention from adults in your high school. If you are the child of upper middle income parents, the chances are good that you will receive substantial and careful attention.”

—T. R. Sizer, from *Horace’s Compromise*

America’s schools have put into practice a recommendation that comes from Woodrow Wilson:

“We want one class of persons to have a liberal education and we want another class of person, a very much larger class of necessity in every society, to forgo the privilege of a liberal education and fit themselves to perform specific, difficult, manual tasks.”

Affluent children can receive coaching and tutoring for standardized testing, which is one reason why social class corresponds very closely with SAT scores. Social class can then predict who goes to college (and to what colleges) better than any other single variable, including intellectual ability.

Consider this . . .

Do you know what SAT stands for? What are the problems with this acronym?

As adults, children of affluent parents are much more likely to hold white-collar jobs, to have hired an attorney, and to be members of civic organizations that increase their power in society. Because affluent families can save money while poor people must spend what they make, the difference in wealth is about ten times higher than the difference in income. Therefore, most poor people and working class families find it very hard to accumulate the money needed for downpayments on homes. Not being homeowners shuts them off from the biggest single tax shelter of all: the deduction for interest on home mortgages and real estate taxes on the family home. Renters pay this interest and these taxes—they are included in the rent—but the landlord gets the deduction.

Social security taxes also favor the rich, the white, and in this case the female. The longer you live, the more you collect, and working-class black males do not live long enough, on average, to collect a dime from Social Security. Yet not only did they pay in, they paid a higher proportion of their income as Social Security and Medicare taxes than did individuals making \$100,000 or more.

Consider this . . .

Who has longer life expectancy, a poor person or a rich person? Why? What is the average life expectancy of an African American male? What is the average life expectancy of a white female?

Life itself, and health and medical care, are strongly influenced by social class. A large proportion of the “working poor”—people doing important but underpaid jobs like nursing assistant, childcare, garbage collection (in nonunionized cities and towns), and fast food clerk—have no health insurance. Usually they get no medical care except in emergencies, which occur more often than they should because they get no medical care except in emergencies!

American history books do not teach these facts. They instead strive to proclaim the exact opposite, holding that while there is an enormous middle class, there is no social class structure in the United States.

Are We All Middle Class?

American society is becoming less middle class. The proportion of households considered middle class (those who earn between 75 percent and 125 percent of the median family income) has been falling steadily for decades. American society is actually more unequal than any other industrialized nation. The richest fifth of Americans earn eleven times the family income of the poorest fifth.

Consider this . . .

Ten years ago, the Japanese CEO of a car company made roughly twenty times more than a line worker in that company. In the United States, the CEO of a car company made 194 times more than a typical line worker. Why? Is it because American auto executives do a much better job than those in Japan? If not, why the inequality?

All this inequality leads to an inefficient talent search. People of all social classes give deference to people they believe are rich.

“In the bright glow and warm presence of the American Dream all men are born free and equal. Everyone in the American Dream has the right and even the duty to try to succeed and to do his best to reach the top. These two fundamental themes and propositions, all of us are equal and that each of us has the right to the chance of reaching the top, are mutually contradictory, for if all men are equal there could be no top level to aim for, no bottom one to get away from.”

—W. Lloyd Warner, from *Social Class in America*

The more stratified a society is, the more it feels the need to lie about its past and the more it *does* lie about that past. In order to maintain a stratified system, it is terribly important to control how people think of that system. Karl Marx gave us the term “false consciousness” to describe how people think about the past. If the elite come to believe that their privilege is justified—that they earned it—that helps to persuade them that they have no reason to yield opportunity to others. Conversely, if the people on the bottom of the scale come to think that the reason they are not higher up is their own fault, then there is no need to use force or violence to keep them in their place.

Thanksgiving as a Social Class Holiday

“Each year on Thanksgiving we gather with family and friends to thank God for the many blessings He has given us and we ask God to continue to guide and watch over our country.”

—George W. Bush’s Thanksgiving Proclamation 2003

America’s Thanksgiving ideology says some vulgar things about social class. Implicitly, it blames the poor for being poor, for if God is responsible for the many blessings he has given us, then whose fault is it if a family is not so blessed? Either it’s God’s fault, or else it is one’s own fault. This ideology makes Thanksgiving a difficult time for poor people.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

Without doing research, make a budget for a single parent with two small children (ages two and four). List all the usual categories, such as food, transportation, medical, recreation, etc., and insert ballpark figures for a month. (You might calculate cost of items like clothing or furniture for a year and divide by twelve.) For two items—apartment rent and childcare—do a little research. (Look in the classified ads; phone a couple of daycare centers.) Then look up the job listings at a nearby university or hospital for janitor or entry-level secretary and calculate monthly take-home pay. Can your imaginary single parent hold such a job and make ends meet? If not, why not? What should he or she do?

Suggested Reading

Hacker, Andrew. *Money: Who Has How Much and Why*. New York: Scribner Book Company, 1998.

Warner, W. Lloyd. *Social Class in America: A Manual of Procedure for the Measurement of Social Status*. New York: HarperCollins, 1960.

Other Books of Interest

Agee, James, and Walker Evans. *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: Three Tenant Families*. Boston: Mariner Books, 2001.

Rose, Stephen J. *Social Stratification in the United States: The New American Profile*. New York: New Press, 2002.

“Ten men in our country could buy the whole world and ten million can’t buy enough to eat.”

—Will Rogers, 1931

Lecture 14: Doing History Yourself

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is James Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, afterward.

“Doing” History

I thought long and hard about what I wanted to do in this lecture. For example:

- I could have treated the ways we get women's history wrong
- Or how we get gay history wrong
- Or the way we get the history of our relationship to Mexico wrong

But regardless, no matter what I did, I'd be leaving out the most important thing—namely, that I want to challenge you to do something with these lectures and with historiography. I want you to see through history, figure out why it's written as it is and why it's inaccurate.

And I don't just want you to listen to history. I want you to go out and do history right.

Tip O'Neill famously said all politics is local. That may or may not be true, but certainly all history is local. History happened in your town. The women's movement happened there; race relations happened there; and you can write the history of your town or area.

For instance, you could do research on the Second Presbyterian Church. The Church is run by two boards, the Board of Elders and the slightly lower Board of Deacons. Beneath the deacons are various ministers and other such positions. Up until the late 1940s, all of these positions would be filled with men, except for the minister in charge of education, who was almost always a woman. But after the '40s, things started to change. By the '60s, you had women ministers and elders and deacons. Today, you might have boards of deacons made up primarily of women.

Correcting Historic Sites

You can also visit historical sites. Read up on the real history of the place before you go and then go incognito as a tourist. At the end of the tour, ask questions.

I once visited “Wheatlands,” President James Buchanan's mansion in Lancaster Pennsylvania. I found that the history wasn't accurate. The staff barely mentioned that he was a Democrat and said nothing of his politics. Indeed, our tour guide said that we wouldn't talk much about politics because we were there to see the house. But politics was the most important part of Buchanan's life.

At the end of the tour, I asked two questions:

Was Buchanan gay?

Buchanan was gay. He lived for years in Washington with another man, Democratic Senator William Rufus King. They were inseparable. Aaron Brown, writing Mrs. James Polk, referred to King as “Buchanan’s better half,” his “wife,” and also as “Aunt Fancy rigged out in her best clothes.” In 1844, when King was appointed Minister of France, Buchanan wrote to a friend, “I am now solitary and alone, having no companion in the house with me. I have gone a-wooing to several gentlemen, but have not succeeded with any of them.”

The tour guide, however, told me Buchanan most definitely was not gay!

My second question was:

What was Buchanan’s position on slavery?

Buchanan was actually barred from the local Presbyterian church because he was a part of the most farout pro-slavery wing of the Democratic party.

The tour guide said that Buchanan was opposed to slavery!

The visitor to “Wheatlands,” therefore, leaves the place stupider than when he or she arrived.

Real History

We are now at a point in our country where people want to learn real history. As a result, more groups are getting their stories told. Some examples:

Marcus Phillips was the person behind a movement in West Virginia that raised a historical marker telling the story of how the Union Carbide Company disregarded its workers’ health while building the Hawk’s Nest tunnel. The excavation of this tunnel resulted in our nation’s worst occupational disaster. The miners dug through silicate, causing 764 men to die of silicosis from breathing the silicate particles. The marker understates the number of dead, but calls the incident the worst industrial disaster in U.S. history, which it was. There are still very few environmental disaster markers in the United States.

Pennsylvania has sixty-six new African American markers, including one in Philadelphia that tells of the slave trade. This is all due to the work of one man, Charles Blockson, who received a grant and started this marker program.

A new Minnesota law eliminates the word “squaw” from any place name. This is thanks to the efforts of two high school students.

Counter Markers

Wyoming has a marker to a woman named Esther Morris that reads:

“Home and office site of Esther Hobart Morris 1st Woman Justice of

Peace in the world. Feb. 14, 1870. Author with W.H. Bright of the 1st equal suffrage law, Dec. 10, 1869. Her reconstructed cabin stands nearby.”

But Esther Morris actually had nothing to do with writing that law and so, recently, Wyoming put up a new plaque right next to the old one that reads:

“Esther Morris. Controversy exists concerning Esther Morris and women’s suffrage. In 1869, the legislature passed and Governor Campbell signed a women’s suffrage bill authored by William Bright, a South Pass City resident. As a result, Wyoming became the first territory or state to allow women the right to vote. For 8 months in 1870, Esther Morris served as South Pass City’s Justice of the Peace. After her death in 1901, some historians claimed that Mrs. Morris had helped write the suffrage bill. However, recent studies indicate that Bright was the only author of the suffrage bill.”

So, Wyoming did the right thing. It left the original marker and raised a corrective marker.

There are many other markers out there that need to be corrected.

In Idaho, there’s a marker carved out of slate into the shape of the state of Idaho that says:

“Almo, Idaho. Dedicated to those who lost their lives in a horrible Indian massacre. In 1861, of 300 immigrants westbound only 5 escaped. Erected by the S and D of Idaho pioneers, 1938.”

But this massacre never happened. Brigham Madsten, a historian, proved that no such event ever took place. That marker should actually be removed to a museum, where it can be identified as a “relic of 1938.”

In 1988, University of Oklahoma students pointed out that their chemistry building commemorated Edwin Debarr, who had once been the statewide leader of the Ku Klux Klan. The administration agreed to change the name of the building and put up a plaque explaining why they had done so.

Adding Women

Women need to be added to the marker landscape.

In Zionsville, Indiana, a marker says that one Patrick H. Sullivan was the first white settler in Boone County in 1823. It goes on to indicate that he built the first log cabin in the county—seemingly single-handed. But his wife and young son came with him to Boone. They’re not commemorated. And believe me, Patrick didn’t build that log cabin alone. His wife helped build it.

Race Relations

You can investigate your town’s history of race relations.

- Research the census for your town from 1890 to the present.

- See how the numbers of minorities change.
- Then pursue oral history. Go to nursing homes. Find out what the oldest residents of your community know.

There are many useful written sources as well. I tried to write the history of Chinese Americans in the Mississippi Delta when I was in graduate school and found that high school yearbooks were particularly helpful, as they can aid in tracing the growth of a community as more and more students of a certain group start showing up in the class photos.

Bring Them Back to Memory

You can bring back to public memory the stories of people and events that have become obscured by time, often because they fought for justice, yet injustice triumphed in the interim. In Copiah County, Mississippi, “Print” Matthews, a white man who helped to unite blacks and whites politically, was killed while casting his ballot in November 1883. You can invent a public ceremony to help remember people like Print Matthews, whose memory we need as we seek to act with justice in the future.

Another example is John A. Logan. There’s a Logan Circle in Washington, D.C., a Logan statue in Philadelphia, and a Logan statue in Chicago. But who was John A. Logan?

John Logan started out as a serious Democratic racist in Illinois in the 1850s who helped to pass laws that denied blacks their rights. During the Civil War, however, he remained loyal to the Union and joined the army. While in the army, he met blacks who convinced him that his racist views were wrong. He changed his mind and decided blacks were the equals of whites. For the rest of his life, he fought for equal rights.

A Real Example

In conclusion, we can take back the landscape. We can write history on the land to represent the past more accurately. We can build a landscape of trust, and you can play a role in the process.

Here is an example of how this has been done in the recent past:

In 1908, a race riot broke out in Springfield, Illinois. Local whites tried to drive out the black population. The incident received worldwide notoriety because it happened in Lincoln’s hometown and seemed to indicate how far the United States had fallen since the emancipation of slaves in 1863. In 1990, two white girls in the sixth grade at a local school started a petition to put up a memorial. The final result was the erection of eight historical markers—a race riot walking tour—as well as a video that is now included in the sixth-grade curriculum to honor the contribution these girls made to their community.

Perhaps you and I can do as much.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



Questions

If you are a college student, why not try to change the name of a building on your campus?

Suggested Reading

Loewen, James W. *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000, Essays 26-36 and 443-67.

Other Books of Interest

Foster, Gaines M. *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause and the Emergence of the New South, 1865-1913*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

“Those who don’t remember the past are condemned to repeat the eleventh grade.”

—James W. Loewen

A SHORT U.S. HISTORY QUIZ

1. Ponce de Leon went to Florida to seek the mythical fountain of youth.
True
False
2. George Wallace was considered racist for saying, "I have no purpose to introduce political and social equality between the white and black races. There is a physical difference between the two which . . . will probably forever forbid their living together . . . and I am in favor of the race to which I belong having the superior position."
True
False
3. Who said the following: "Labor is prior to, and independent of, capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor and could never have existed if labor had not first existed. Labor is the superior of capital, and deserves much the higher consideration."
Abraham Lincoln
Karl Marx
Richard Nixon
4. Who said the following: "It is above all to be remembered that the war did not originate with the North, but with the South. The North finds itself on the defensive."
Abraham Lincoln
Karl Marx
Richard Nixon
5. Who said the following: "Let us begin by committing ourselves to the truth, to see it like it is and to tell it like it is, to find the truth, to speak the truth and live with the truth."
Abraham Lincoln
Karl Marx
Richard Nixon
6. Which of these wars cost the most American lives in combat, as a proportion of the total population?
King Phillip's War
French and Indian War
American Revolution
War of 1812
Mexican War
Spanish-American War
7. Which war gets the least coverage in American history textbooks?
King Phillip's War
French and Indian War
American Revolution
War of 1812
Mexican War
Spanish-American War
8. What western hemisphere people were quick to aid George Washington's forces in the American Revolution?
Haitians
Native Americans
Canadians
Mexicans
9. Who segregated the federal government?
No one - it had always been segregated
Abraham Lincoln in 1861
Ulysses S. Grant in 1871
Woodrow Wilson in 1913
Harry S. Truman in 1947
10. Which of these Americans could be considered a communist?
Helen Keller
Groucho Marx
John Brown
Henry David Thoreau
Rush Limbaugh

For answers to these and other American history questions, visit Professor Loewen's Web site at summitassociatesinc.com/cgi-bin/quiz.pl/ask/quest.html.

COURSE MATERIALS

You'll get the most out of this course if you have the following books:

- Loewen, James W. *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.
- . *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*. New York: New Press, 1995.
- . *Sundown Towns*. New York: New Press, 2005.

Suggested Readings:

- Brear, Holly Beachley. *Inherit the Alamo: Myth and Ritual at an American Shrine*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995.
- Deloria, Vine, Jr. *Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1997.
- Hacker, Andrew. *Money: Who Has How Much and Why*. New York: Scribner Book Company, 1998.
- Kwitny, Jonathan. *Endless Enemies: America's Worldwide War Against Its Own Best Interests*. New York: Congdon and Weed, 1984.
- Logan, Rayford W. *The Betrayal of the Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson*. New York: macMillan, 1965 [1954].
- McPherson, James M. *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Sale, Kirkpatrick. *The Conquest of Paradise: Christopher Columbus and the Columbian Legacy*. Reprint ed. New York: Plume (Penguin, USA), 1991.
- Warner, W. Lloyd. *Social Class in America: A Manual of Procedure for the Measurement of Social Status*. New York: HarperCollins, 1960.
- Weatherford, Jack. *Indian Givers*. New York: Fawcett, 1988.
- Willison, George F. *Saints and Strangers*. East Orleans, MA: Parnassus Imprints, 1985.

Other Books of Interest:

- Agee, James, and Walker Evans. *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: Three Tenant Families*. Boston: Mariner Books, 2001.
- Bennett, Lerone. *Black Power U.S.A.: The Human Side of Reconstruction, 1867-1877*. Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, Inc., 1967.
- Berlin, Ira. *Generations of Captivity: A History of African American Slaves*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003.
- Bigelow, Bill, and Bob Peterson, eds. *Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years*. Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools, Ltd., 1998.
- Breisach, Ernst. *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

COURSE MATERIALS

Other Books of Interest (continued):

- Crosby, Alfred. *The Columbian Exchange : Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*. 30th anniversary ed. Oxford: Greenwood Publishing Group (Praeger Publishers), 2003.
- Escott, Paul D. *Slavery Remembered: A Record of Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979.
- FitzGerald, Frances. *America Revised*. New York: Vintage, 1980.
- Foner, Eric. *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*. New York: Perennial, 2002.
- Foster, Gaines M. *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865-1913*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
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- James, C.L.R. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. New York: Vintage, 1989.
- Jennings, Francis. *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1976.
- Karnow, Stanley. *Vietnam: A History*. 2nd ed. New York: Penguin Books, 1997.
- Lafeber, Walter. *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-2002*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002.
- . *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993.
- Martin, Calvin, ed. *The American Indian and the Problem of History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Raphael, Ray. *A People's History of the American Revolution: How Common People Shaped the Fight for Independence*. New York: Perennial, 2002.
- Ravitch, Diane, and Chester E. Finn, Jr. *What Do Our 17-Year Olds Know?* New York: HarperCollins, 1988.
- Rawick, George P. *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community*. Vol. 1. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1971.
- Richardson, Heather Cox. *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Rose, Stephen J. *Social Stratification in the United States: The New American Profile*. New York: New Press, 2000.
- Shao, Paul. *The Origin of Ancient American Cultures*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1983.

COURSE MATERIALS

Other Books of Interest (continued):

Stannard, David E. *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World*.
Reproduction ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Viola, Herman. *Seeds of Change: A Quincentennial Commemoration*.
Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999.

Wright, J. Leitch, Jr. *The Only Land They Knew: The Tragic Story of the
American Indians in the Old South*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985.

Ziner, Feenie. *Squanto*. Hamden, CT: Linnet Books, 1988.