

or another? Does not the kind of history that they prefer represent simply a different political agenda? And even if history textbooks are slanted to the left, how many students genuinely read them? Do the texts engage student interest? How much information do young people retain over the long haul? A decade of teaching American history surveys at the university level leads me to believe that most college students remember almost nothing from their high school textbooks, which they nearly always characterize as boring, and what little they do recall is largely superficial.

Which leads us to James Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me*. Loewen wants to understand why so many high school students hate history, and he contends that textbooks bear much of the blame. He claims convincingly that, for one thing, textbooks whitewash American history. Scrutinizing twelve texts widely in use today, Loewen examines their treatment of a series of historical topics, from Columbus to recent history. He demonstrates, contrary to the assertions found in *Molding the Good Citizen*, that textbooks avoid anything that might be controversial. Granted, unlike textbooks in the days of old, the modern ones point out problems and evils that existed in the past but quickly dismiss them by insisting that national progress has rectified all wrongs.

This is part of a larger problem that Loewen identifies, and it is his most important insight because it gets to the ultimate crisis of history in our schools today. The textbooks flatten history—employing an omniscient tone rendered in passive voice, they are crammed with dry facts and lack context, drama, and personality. Differences in historical interpretation are glossed over if mentioned at all. Simply put, texts do not suggest the genuine excitement that is possible when doing history, so they fail to engage student interest. Whatever interpretive bias they may carry really does not matter very much, since students pay little attention to textbooks anyway.

Who is responsible for this state of affairs? Loewen blames American society as a whole—publishers afraid of controversy, flag-wavers who sit on textbook adoption boards, teachers who lack adequate training and fear the kind of open-ended teaching that would invite debate and inquiry, parents who do not trust that their children can handle historical unpleasantness. Pointedly Loewen questions whether American society is honest enough to deal with its history directly. With delicious irony, he points out that Russia recently has begun to confront its history with candor; surely the United States could do as well.

Loewen thus helps us move the issues of history curriculum beyond simplistic arguments about Harriet Tubman receiving two more sentences than Paul Revere, or whether or not Thomas Jefferson should be identified as a slaveowner. Until we convince high school and college students that history matters, until we help them to connect to history in a way that makes the subject come alive to them, quantitative content analysis is extraneous.

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David Pace & Sharon Pugh. *Studying for History*. New York: HarperCollins, 1996. Pp. ix, 208. Paper, \$10.50. ISBN 0-06-500649-6.

David Pace and Sharon Pugh have produced a work for the student taking his or her first college history course. The first three chapters give the student sound advice on getting oriented in this first course, discuss the "new" kinds of history now being taught in colleges and universities (in which the authors assume, not altogether correctly, that the student is unlikely to have

encountered any of these "new" varieties in secondary school), suggest the best ways to manage energy, time, and mind, and stress the necessity of thinking like an historian. The last four chapters deal with the nuts and bolts of course work: reading, listening, and study strategies, preparing for and taking examinations, and writing papers. All this is done in a plain and simple style illustrated with homey examples.

From the student's point of view, the advice seems to break down at only one point. The authors contend that by efficient management, the student will be able to handle each week's work in a reasonable amount of time. But their suggestions as to what he should do each week—read the textbook analytically, making careful notes in the margins of the textbook; write brief summaries of paragraphs; make key concept cards; draw up a variety of exceedingly lengthy charts, the complexity of which daunted even me; study and rewrite lecture notes; outline for class discussions; and participate in a student study group (two hours a week for this last alone)—are as overwhelming as this sentence, and may well leave the student wondering when there will be time for the other three or four classes in a typical student schedule.

The book has other shortcomings. Specifically, the section on analytical reading (87-89) asks the student to analyze a quotation from a current text on Jackson's war on the Second Bank of the United States. The quotation is obviously misquoted and makes no sense; it does not even mention two persons whom the authors in their commentary claim are included in the passage. On a more general level, the authors appear to argue that organization is the key to the study of history. Organization is certainly an important element, but it alone will not guarantee a student's success. Finally and perhaps most importantly, Pace and Pugh, in stressing the need for analytical reading and listening to determine the validity of historical interpretations, imply that such analysis is a matter of objective logic, of methodology; there is no hint that historical interpretations can be (and frequently are) based on subjective value judgments. Such an approach, it seems to me, will leave the student with no real understanding of present-day historical controversy. Worse, it will deny the student the opportunity to test his or her own value system by comparing it with those of the historians encountered.

So is this a work that beginning history students can use profitably? If the student's problem is how to organize his study, the answer is yes. But the book's discussion of the organizational aspects of history is probably too complex for the marginal student, and its failure to consider the philosophical sells the better student short. Indeed, the work may be of most value to the beginning college instructor, who can easily mine and boil it down for all manner of how-to-study advice in the form of class handouts

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Michael Field. *Inside the Arab World*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994. Pp. 439. Cloth, \$27.50. ISBN 0-674-45520-7.

Michael Field, long-time economic correspondent in the Middle East, offers another volume to an interesting body of literature that attempts to explain the failures of the contemporary Arab world. Among the more prominent works in this area are David Pryce-Jones's *The Closed Circle: An Interpretation of the Arabs* (1989), Halim Barakat's *The Arab World: Society, Culture, and State* (1993), Milton Viorst's *Sandcastles: The Arabs in Search of the Modern World* (1994), Paul Salem's *Bitter Legacy: Ideology and Politics in the Arab World* (1994), and Nazith N. Ayubui's