



History Lessons: How Textbooks from Around the World Portray U.S. History

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History Lessons offers a lighthearted and fascinating challenge to the biases we bring to our understanding of American history. The subject of widespread attention when it was first published in 2004—including a full front-page review in the *Washington Post Book World* and features on NPR's *Talk of the Nation* and the History Channel—this book gives us a glimpse into classrooms across the globe, where opinions about the United States are first formed.

Heralded as “timely and important” (*History News Network*) and “shocking and fascinating” (*New York Times*), *History Lessons* includes selections from Russia, France, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Cuba, Canada, and others, covering such events as the American Revolution, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Iran hostage crisis, and the Korean War, providing an alternative history of the United States from the Viking explorers to the post–Cold War era.

By juxtaposing starkly contrasting versions of the historical events we take for granted, *History Lessons* affords us a sometimes hilarious, often sobering look at what the world learns about America's past.

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Sutherland says

I went into this book expecting more domestic U.S. history but it focuses on international events that the U.S. happened to be involved in. I was also expecting the book little bit less dry. Aside from the North Korean entry on the Korean war, which is both absurd and frightening, the book reads like a straight forward text book. It might be a decent alternative to a U.S. published text book on world history but it doesn't make for great casual reading.

mike says

I wanted to like this book better, or to learn more from it. I think I was looking for a smoking gun, some nugget of world history that we'd been taught "wrong" in the U.S.

There was none. Just a lot of dryish history-text prose, translated, from around the world. Books in translation are never as good as the originals, and history textbooks aren't the most engaging reads even in English.

Mike Banino says

Very interesting, and somewhat illuminating, but fairly repetitive. It doesn't cover as much ground as I would have liked... I think it would have benefitted from a wider range of source material. It tends to feel like they put this together from 10 [rather than, say, 50] foreign textbooks.

David says

Sometimes enlightening and sometimes ridiculous, this book definitely reinforced my opinion that every community and individual is egocentric in their historical perspectives. From reading the excerpts from multiple countries, I saw reflected each nation or culture's character...the variety of voices very fascinating. Overall, the portrayal of history (whether in the U.S. or elsewhere) proves to be very subjective, portraying its perspectives based on contemporary political or cultural movements.

Adam Gutschenritter says

I loved seeing how other cultures present our history. The increase in details that American textbooks do not find important or leave out due to cultural bias and vice versa. It does good to expand the cultural outlook of American history for an expanded context of events.

Theresa says

While this book has an interesting premise, showing the differences in the portrayal of history in academic textbooks around the world, it lacks commentary and analysis which would bring the passages together. The reader is left to interpret each excerpt for his or herself, but without more context this is nearly impossible and the book renders itself practically useless.

Kelley says

Not what I expected. I was hoping for a sort of companion book to read along with *A People's History of the U.S.* I wanted to get an understanding of what took place from the U.S. historical and personal records, then also see how the stories are presented or interpreted in other countries or what insight they had from an outside position.

History buffs or those interested in International Relations might find this book interesting. I wouldn't recommend or suggest it for the casual reader though.

Nora says

This book is a fascinating read for anyone who has an interest in understanding the world perspective on the U.S. and its history. There are so many events in our history that are omitted from our textbooks for whatever the reason, and yet they remain significantly relevant to understanding how opinion of us has shaped abroad.

And it's also great in providing bits of trivia U.S. textbooks forget to mention, such as:

1) Those menacing Hessians always mentioned in middle-school Revolutionary War fiction? Yeah, they were just poor farmers who got shipped out since they couldn't pay their bills. Hardly ruthless soldiers.

2) Canada actually fought in wars. No, really, they did. And not with Mounties.

3) All Americans are illegitimate. Every one of us is a bastard. Ask any North Korean junior high school student.

4) We liked to dick around in other countries. A lot. A lot a lot. Holy shit a lot. And we were assholes even when we barged in to "help". Like when a Filipino-American alliance captured Manila from the Spanish in 1898, American troops entered the city and had a celebration. Except, the Filipinos who fought alongside weren't invited. They sat locked outside the gates. Lovely.

J says

Pretty interesting. Would have been four stars if the author had done more analysis of the text. As it was, the copy-pasted excerpts from other nations' textbooks was still an interesting window into other worldviews.

Justin says

Some parts of it were more interesting than others. I felt like it was just barely worth it for how long it was. Only a little bit enlightning.

Tuhina says

A quirky read. Not for the non-academics, though, since this book is filled with text from history textbooks from around the world. I was entertained, since each country has their own viewpoint concerning their role in major historical events.

Sapote3 says

Does what it says on the box: contrasts articles from relevant countries (France, Canada, Cuba, Mexico) on certain issues, and recommends following along in a US high school history textbook. This is very useful and I would actually prefer to make a high schooler read it. I didn't finish it, though, because it was dry for through-reading.

Pat Carson says

Nice read - seeing events from another point of view.

Clickety says

What I found most interesting about this was the LACK of commentary. The bulk of the book is made up of excerpts from history textbooks from other countries; the author (editor?) lets the texts pretty much speak for themselves.

It's pretty full of awesome... if a bit like reading a high-school history textbook! ;D

Logophile (Heather) says

I read a review of this book in which someone complained that History Lessons was much too dry and textbook like. I was puzzled by that because pretty much the title informs you that you will be reading translated TEXTBOOKS!

It's not suspenseful, or filled with moments of high drama but I thought this book was fascinating, a way to gain insight into how various events in US history are portrayed in school around the world.
