



History in the Making: An Absorbing Look at How American History Has Changed in the Telling over the Last 200 Years

By Kyle Ward

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In this “thought-provoking study” (*Library Journal*), historian Kyle Ward—the widely acclaimed co-author of *History Lessons*—gives us another fascinating look at the biases inherent in the way we learn about our history. Juxtaposing passages from U.S. history textbooks from different eras, *History in the Making* provides us with intriguing new perspectives on familiar historical events and the ways in which they have been represented over time.

The hardcover edition of *History in the Making* struck a chord among readers of popular history, and Ward was featured on NPR’s popular series “How the Understanding of U.S. History Changes.” “Interesting and useful,” according to *Booklist*, the book “convincingly illustrates how texts change as social and political attitudes evolve.”

With excerpts that span two hundred years, from Columbus’s arrival to the Boston Massacre, from women’s suffrage to Japanese internment, *History in the Making* exposes the stark contrasts between the lessons different generations have been taught about our past. “A good starting point for anyone interested in history and subjectivity” (*Kirkus*), this immensely readable book is proof positive that your history is not your grandparent’s history and won’t be your children’s history.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

For this fascinating history of history, author and professor Ward (*History Lessons*) examined scores of textbooks published between 1794 and 1999 to see how the same American historical periods, events or figures have been portrayed at different times throughout the nation's past, uncovering startling discrepancies in writers' versions of everything from slavery to Vietnam. Ward prefaces each chapter, broken down by event ("The Boston Massacre," "Witchcraft in the Colonies," "The Trail of Tears," "McCarthyism") with a summary of how a particular incident has been retold over the years. He then provides excerpts from a variety of texts, each with a scene-setting description that helps put the selection into context for present-day readers. In many cases, shifting biases, politics and cultural preferences (loaded with stereotypes and insensitive depictions of ethnic groups) have altered history's presentation over time, as later texts tend to prove earlier writings overly embellished or outright false. It's all enough to lead history buffs to ponder not only how history will treat, say, the Bush administration 50 years from now, but also whether they can actually believe what they read. Readers who found the similar (but far narrower) *Lies My Teacher Told Me* a sobering look at the shortcomings of American history books will come away even more disconcerted here.

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From [Booklist](#)

Even when historians strive mightily to remain objective, their biases inevitably are reflected in their writings. Ward is an assistant professor of history and political science at Vincennes University, and he has also taught history at the high-school level. In examining excerpts from general U.S. history textbooks written over the past two centuries, he convincingly illustrates how these texts change as social and political attitudes evolve. In an early-nineteenth-century text, Native Americans are portrayed as treacherous savages. By the turn of the century, they have become the disappearing "noble savage." By the late twentieth century, the emphasis is on the victimization of Native Americans while showing respect for their diverse cultures. A few years after the Monroe Doctrine was proclaimed, texts stressed its opposition to European colonialism. But a current text views the doctrine as an example of America's emerging imperial ambitions.

Jay Freeman

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Review

"This thought-provoking study is ideal for history buffs and the general public; for public libraries and teachers' college collections." —*Library Journal*

"A nation's guiding assumptions must be continually re-examined . . . [Ward] shows that looking back and reconsidering history is a prerequisite of the very possibility of moving forward." —*History News Network*

Users Review

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Byron Sierra:

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