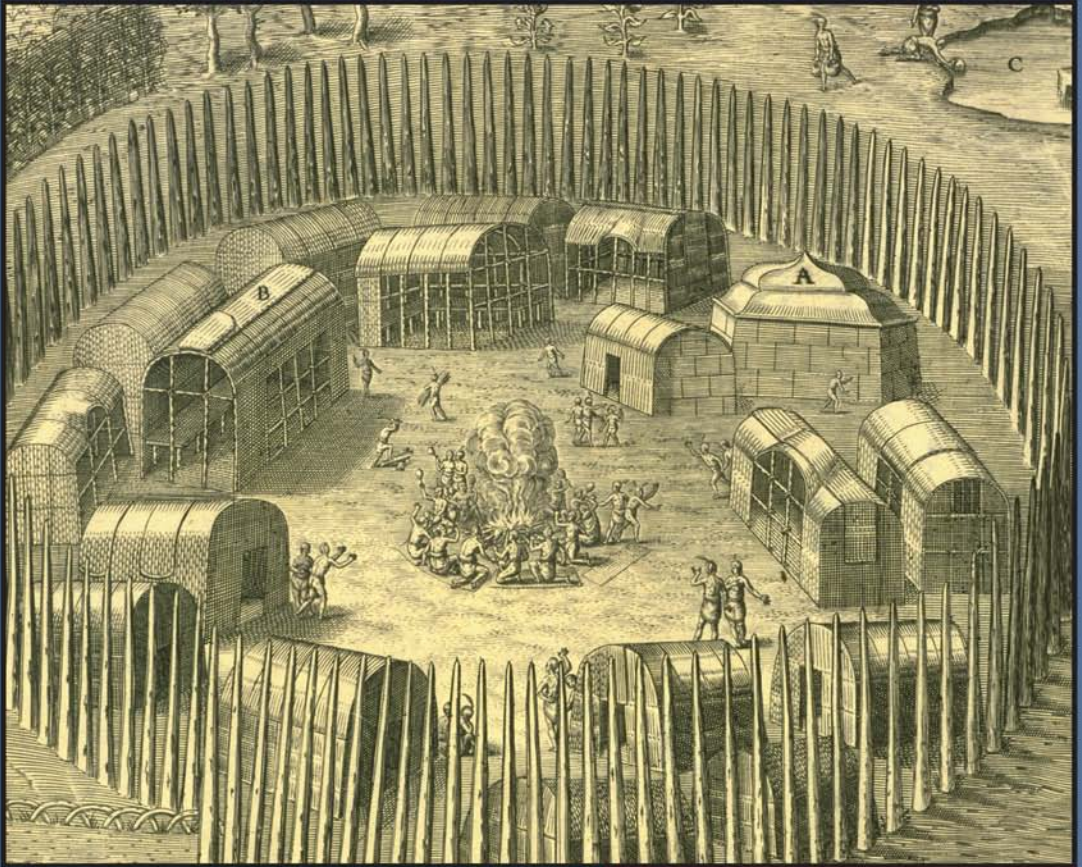


Fifth Edition



Volume I: To 1877

Thinking Through the Past

A CRITICAL THINKING APPROACH TO U.S. HISTORY

John Hollitz

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A Critical Thinking Approach to U.S. History

Volume I: To 1877

FIFTH EDITION

John Hollitz

College of Southern Nevada



Australia • Brazil • Japan • Korea • Mexico • Singapore • Spain • United Kingdom • United States

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A Critical Thinking Approach
to U.S. History, Volume I
Fifth Edition**
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Preface

The encouraging response to the fourth edition from students and instructors has prompted me to create a fifth edition of *Thinking Through the Past*. As before, this book is inspired by the idea that interpretation is at the heart of history. That is why learning about the past involves more than mastering facts and dates, and why historians often disagree. As teachers, we know the limitations of the deadly dates-and-facts approach to the past. We also know that encouraging students to think critically about historical sources and historians' arguments is a good way to create excitement about history and to impart understanding of what historians do. The purpose of *Thinking Through the Past*, therefore, is to introduce students to the examination and analysis of historical sources.

FORMAT

To encourage students to think critically about American history, *Thinking Through the Past* brings together primary and secondary sources. It gives students the opportunity to analyze primary sources *and* historians' arguments, and to use one to understand and evaluate the other. By evaluating and drawing conclusions from the sources, students will use the methods and develop some of the skills of critical thinking as they apply to history. Students will also learn about a variety of historical topics that parallel those in U.S. history courses. Unlike most anthologies or collections of primary sources, this book advances not only chronologically, but also pedagogically through different skill levels. It provides students the opportunity to work with primary sources in the early chapters before they evaluate secondary sources in later chapters or compare historians' arguments in the final chapters. Students are also able to build on the skills acquired in previous chapters by considering such questions as motivation, causation, and the role of ideas and economic interests in history.

At the same time, this book introduces a variety of approaches to the past. Topics in *Thinking Through the Past* include social, political, cultural, intellectual, economic, diplomatic, and military history. The chapters look at

history “from the top down” and “from the bottom up.” Thus students have the opportunity to evaluate history drawn from slave quarters as well as from state houses. In the process, they are exposed to the enormous range of sources that historians use to construct arguments. The primary sources in these volumes include portraits, photographs, maps, letters, fiction, music lyrics, laws, oral histories, speeches, movie posters, magazine and newspaper articles, cartoons, and architectural plans.

The chapters present the primary and secondary sources so students can pursue their own investigations of the material. Each chapter is divided into five parts: a brief introduction, which sets forth the problem in the chapter; the Setting, which provides background information pertaining to the topic; the Investigation, which asks students to answer a short set of questions revolving around the problem discussed in the introduction; the Sources, which in most chapters provide a secondary source and a set of primary sources related to the chapter’s main problem; and, finally, a brief Conclusion, which offers a reminder of the chapter’s main pedagogical goal and looks forward to the next chapter’s problem.

CHANGES TO THE FIFTH EDITION

In the fifth edition, there are significantly revised chapters in both volumes on provocative topics that have been on the cutting edge of recent historical scholarship. These topics are intended to stimulate student interest in American history. In Volume I, chapters on the Constitution, the American West, and Andrew Jackson have been revised with the addition of new source material. As before, changes reflect more recent historical scholarship and have been designed with accessibility in mind. New primary source material in Chapter 8 reflects contemporary historical scholarship on the nineteenth-century American frontier, while Chapter 9 presents a new biographical assessment of young Andrew Jackson that introduces students to a “gambler” and “carouser” who matures into a “formidable leader of men.” In Volume II, a significantly revised chapter on racial and ethnic unrest on the home front during World War II is intended to provide students with a broader historical context and to excite a broader mix of contemporary students. Overall, the volumes have been revised with an eye toward making the book a more engaging learning tool. To this end, many other chapters contain new sources that provide additional insights for students as they conduct their historical investigations.

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Many people contributed to this book, starting with my own students. Without them, of course, it never would have been created.

I owe many thanks to the people who assisted in various ways with the revisions for this edition. At the College of Southern Nevada, Inter-Library Loan librarian Marion Martin, as always, provided cheerful and invaluable assistance. Numerous colleagues around the country offered useful suggestions regarding revisions and chapter drafts. I am honored by their commitment to *Thinking Through the Past* and thank them for helping to make it a better book.

In particular, I'd like to thank the following individuals who reviewed the fifth edition: Guy Aronoff, Humboldt State University; Terrell Goddard, Northwest Vista College; Li Hongshan, Kent State University at Tuscarawas; Abigail Markwyn, Carroll University; Linda Mollno, Cal Poly Pomona; Craig Perrier, Fairfax County Public Schools; Emily Rader, El Camino College; Alicia Rodriguez, California State University, Bakersfield; Megan Seaholm, University of Texas at Austin; Rebecca Shrum, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis; Garth Swanson, Genesee Community College; and Wendy Wall, Binghamton University. The reviewers of the fourth edition were: Andy Ginette, University of Southern Indiana; Terrell Goddard, Northwest Vista College; Charlotte Haller, Worcester State College; Jeffrey Johnson, Augustana College; Jennifer Mata, University of Texas Pan American; Sean O'Neill, Grand Valley State University; Phillip Payne, St. Bonaventure University; and Timothy Thurber, Virginia Commonwealth University. The reviewers of the third edition were Michael D. Wilson, Vanguard University; David A. Canton, Georgia Southern University; Paivi Hoikkala, California State Polytechnic University at Pomona; Kathleen Kennedy, Western Washington University; Monroe H. Little, Jr., Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis; Cathleen Schultz, University of St. Francis; Paul C. Rosier, Villanova University; Marsha L. Weisiger, New Mexico State University; and Katherine A. S. Sibley, St. Joseph's University.

I owe thanks to many others as well for their contribution to the previous editions. Alan Balboni, DeAnna Beachley, Michael Green, Charles Okeke, the late Gary Elliott, colleagues at the Community College of Southern Nevada, offered sources, reviewed portions of the manuscript, shared insights, or simply offered encouragement. Richard Cooper and Brad Nystrom at California State University, Sacramento, listened patiently and offered helpful suggestions at the initial stages of this project. As usual, however, my biggest debt is to Patty. For her enduring support and abiding love, this book is once again dedicated to her.

J. H.

Thinking Through the Past

Introduction

“History,” said Henry Ford, “is more or less bunk.” That view is still shared by many people. Protests about the subject are familiar. Studying history won’t help you land a job. And, besides, what matters is not the past but the present.

Such protests are not necessarily wrong. Learning about ancient Greece, the French Revolution, or the Vietnam War will hardly guarantee employment, even though many employers evaluate job candidates on critical thinking skills that the study of history requires. Likewise, who can deny the importance of the present compared to the past? In many ways, the present and future are more important than the past. Pericles, Robespierre, and Lyndon Johnson are dead; presumably, anyone reading this is not:

Still, the logic behind the history-as-bunk view is flawed because all of us rely upon the past to understand the present, as did even Henry Ford. Besides building the Model T, he also built Greenfield Village outside Detroit because he wanted to re-create a nineteenth-century town. It was the kind of place the automotive genius grew up in and the kind of place he believed represented the ideal American society: small-town, white, native-born, and Protestant. Greenfield Village was Ford’s answer to changes in the early twentieth century that were profoundly disturbing to him and to many other Americans of his generation: growing cities, the influx of non-Protestant immigrants, changing sexual morality, new roles and new fashions for women, and greater freedom for young people.

Ford’s interest in the past, symbolized by Greenfield Village, reflects a double irony. It was the automobile that helped to make possible many of the changes, like those in sexual morality, that Ford detested. The other irony is that Ford used history—what he himself called “bunk”—to try to better the world. Without realizing it, he became a historian by turning to the past to explain to himself and others what he disliked about the present. Never mind that Ford blamed immigrants, especially Jews, for the changes he decried in crude, hate-filled tirades. The point is that Ford’s view of America was rooted in a vision of the past, and his explanation for America’s ills was based on historical analysis, however unprofessional and unsophisticated.

All of us use historical analysis all the time, even if, like Ford, we think we don’t. In fact, we all share a fundamental assumption about learning from the past: One of the best ways to learn about something, to learn how it came to be, is to study its past. That assumption is so much a part of us that we are rarely conscious of it.

2 Introduction

Think about the most recent time you met someone for the first time. As a way to get to know this new acquaintance you began to ask questions about his or her past. When you asked, “Where did you grow up?” or “How long have you lived in Chicago?” you were relying on information about the past to learn about the present. You were, in other words, thinking as a historian. You assumed that a cause-and-effect relationship existed between this person’s past and his or her present personality, interests, and beliefs. Like a historian, you began to frame questions and to look for answers that would help to establish causal links.

Because we all use history to make sense of our world, it follows that we should become more skilled in the art of making sense of the past. Ford did it crudely, and ended up promoting the very things he despised. But how exactly do you begin to think more like a historian? For too many students, this challenge summons up images of studying for history exams: cramming names, dates, and facts, and hoping to retain some portion of this information long enough to get a passing grade. History seems like a confusing grab bag of facts and events. The historian’s job, in this view, is to memorize as much “stuff” as possible. In this “flash-card” approach, history is reduced to an exercise in the pursuit of trivia, and thinking like a historian is nothing but an exercise in mnemonics—a system of improving the memory.

There is no question that the dates, events, and facts of history are important. Without basic factual knowledge historians could no more practice their craft than biologists, chemists, or astrophysicists could practice theirs. But history is not a static recollection of facts. Events in the past happened only once, but the historians who study those events are always changing their minds about them. Like all humans, historians have prejudices, biases, and beliefs. They are also influenced by events in their own times. In other words, they look at the past through lenses that filter and even distort. Events in the past may have happened only once, but what historians think about them, the meaning they give to those events, is constantly changing. Moreover, because their lenses perceive events differently, historians often disagree about the past. The supposedly “static” discipline of history is actually dynamic and charged with tension.

That brings us to the question of what historians really do. Briefly, historians ask questions about past events or developments and try to explain them just as much as biology, chemistry, or astrophysics, therefore, history is a problem-solving discipline. Historians, like scientists, sift evidence to answer questions. Like scientists, whose explanations for things often conflict, historians can ask the same questions, look at the same facts, and come up with different explanations because they look at the past in different ways. Or they may have entirely different questions in mind and so come away with very different “pasts.” Thus history is a process of constant revision. As historians like to put it, every generation writes its own history.

But why bother to study and interpret the past in our own way if someone else will only revise it again in the future? The answer is sobering: If we don’t

write our own history, someone else will write it for us. Who today would accept as historical truth the notion that the Indians were cruel savages whose extermination was necessary to fulfill an Anglo-Saxon destiny to conquer the continent for democracy and civilization? Who today would accept the “truth” that slaves were racially inferior and happy with their lot on Southern plantations? If we accept these views of Indians and black slaves, we are allowing nineteenth-century historians to determine our view of the past.

Instead, by reconstructing the past as best we can, we can better understand our own times. Like the amnesia victim, without memory we face a bewildering world. As we recapture our collective past, the present becomes more intelligible. Subject to new experiences, a later generation will view the past differently. Realizing that future generations will revise history does not give us a license to play fast and loose with the facts of history. Rather, each generation faces the choice of giving meaning to those facts or experiencing the confusion of historical amnesia.

Finding meaning in the facts of the past, then, is the central challenge of history. It requires us to ask questions and construct explanations—mental activities far different and far more exciting than merely memorizing names, dates, and facts. More important, it enables us to approach history as critical thinkers. The more skilled we become at historical reasoning, the better we will understand our world and ourselves. Helping you to develop skill in historical analysis is the purpose of this volume.

The method of this book reflects its purpose. The first chapter discusses textbooks. History texts have a very practical purpose. By bringing order to the past, they give many students a useful and reassuring “handle” on history. But they are not the Ten Commandments, because, like all works of history, they also contain interpretations. To most readers these interpretations are hard to spot. Chapter 1 examines what a number of college textbooks in American history say and don’t say about the Indians at the time of English settlement of the New World. By reading selections from several texts and asking how and why they differ, we can see that texts are not as objective as readers often believe.

If textbooks are not the absolute truth, how can we ever know anything? To answer those questions, we turn next to the raw material of history. Chapter 2, on childhood in Puritan New England, examines the primary sources on which historians rely to reconstruct and interpret the past. What are these sources? What do historians do with them? What can historians determine from them?

With a basic understanding of the nature and usefulness of primary sources, we proceed to Chapter 3 for a closer evaluation. This chapter on the haves and have-nots of colonial Pennsylvania shows how careful historians must be in using primary sources. Does a source speak with one voice or with many? How can historians disagree about the meaning of the same historical facts? By carefully evaluating primary sources in this chapter, you can draw your own conclusions about society in colonial Pennsylvania. You can also better understand how historians often derive different conclusions from the same body of material.

4 Introduction

Chapter 3 is good preparation for the evaluation in Chapter 4 of one historian's argument about the unsettling effects of the Revolution on American society. By exploring various attempts to achieve greater equality during the Revolutionary-era, the essay and primary sources in the chapter focus on an often-neglected aspect of the struggle for independence. They also reinforce the lesson that our understanding of the past is influenced by the historical voices that we choose to hear.

One of the most important sources of disagreement among historians is the question of motivation. What drove people to do what they did in the past? The good historian, like the detective in a murder mystery, eventually asks that question. And few topics in American history better illustrate the importance of motivation than that in Chapter 5, the Founding Fathers and their purposes in framing the Constitution. As that topic also shows, questions of motive perhaps cause the most arguments among historians.

Motives in history are related to ideas, the subject of Chapter 6. What power do ideas exert in history? What is their relationship, for example, to the economic motives examined in the previous chapter? In Chapter 6 we try to answer these questions by examining the role of ideology in shaping Jeffersonian policies regarding blacks and Native Americans.

The problem of motivation is also closely linked to the study of historical causation. Different historical interpretations usually involve different views about the causes of things. In considering the questions of motivation and ideology, Chapters 5 and 6 move beyond the question of what happened to the question of why it happened. Chapter 7, on the early-nineteenth-century religious revivals known as the Second Great Awakening, moves even deeper into the realm of why. It considers the extent to which many different factors may interact to produce historical change.

Once we have considered the questions of motivation and causation in history, Chapter 8 examines what historians call a "grand theory" of history, a sweeping or all-encompassing explanation of historical causation. The topic of this chapter is the causal relationship between America's long frontier experience and the development of democratic political institutions. This chapter also considers the problems historians face in trying to fit historical evidence into sweeping hypotheses.

Chapter 9 turns from the influence of grand forces to the influence of "great" individuals. Few individuals were considered greater, by many Americans in the first half of the nineteenth century, than Andrew Jackson. What influence does a "great" individual like Jackson have on history? Are there extraordinary people who shape an entire era? How much can students of history learn about the past by looking at it from the "top down"? How much do they miss by doing so? Such questions are, of course, related to the topics of previous chapters: historical evidence, motivation, causation, and even grand historical theories.

The next chapter examines history from the opposite perspective—from the “bottom up.” What can historians learn by looking at the people at the bottom of a society? What challenges face historians who try? In early American history, the best place for using this approach is the issue of slavery. Chapter 10 examines what slavery was like for slaves and why their lives are important to historians.

Many of the chapters just discussed use a single historical essay and an accompanying set of primary sources. Chapter 11 offers an opportunity to pull together the lessons of previous chapters. It compares what two historians have written about a single topic: the position of women in the North and the South before the Civil War. Because the sources in this chapter deal with the impact of ideal images on actual behavior, they enable us to consider, in a single topic, the questions of motivation and causation as well as the influence of ideology in society.

The goal of Chapter 12 is similar to that of Chapter 11: to synthesize, or pull together, the lessons learned in preceding chapters. Here, however, the emphasis is on the problems of historical evidence, causation, and the use of grand theory. Chapter 12 contains two essays on the outcome of the Civil War as well as a small collection of primary sources. It asks you to compare and analyze conflicting arguments by using not only primary sources but also insights drawn from previous chapters.

All of the chapters in this volume encourage you to think more like a historian and to sharpen your critical thinking skills. Chapter 13 returns to a point emphasized throughout this volume: The pursuit of the past cannot occur apart from a consideration of historical interpretation, and differences in historical interpretation matter not just to historians but to everyone. This final chapter examines various interpretations of the political experience of African Americans during Reconstruction. It contains two accounts of black political involvement in Reconstruction and primary documents that illuminate both interpretations. In addition, it underscores the way our view of the past can be used to justify policies and practices in a later time.

By the end of this volume, you will have sharpened your ability to think about the past. You will think more critically about the use of historical evidence and about such historical problems as motivation, causation, and interpretation. Moreover, by exploring several styles of historical writing and various approaches to the past—from those that emphasize politics or economics to those that highlight social developments or military strategy—you will also learn to understand the importance of the past. In short, you will think more like a historian.

Chapter

1

The Truth About Textbooks: Indians and the Settlement of America

The textbook selections in this chapter illustrate different assumptions textbook writers have had about American Indians and white–Indian relations during the settlement period.

Sources

1. *History of the American People* (1927), DAVID S. MUZZEY
2. *The American Pageant* (1966), THOMAS A. BAILEY
3. *A People and a Nation* (2008), MARY BETH NORTON ET AL.

One of the best aids to learning history is also one of the biggest hindrances to understanding the past. It is the textbook, the traditional authority on American history. Textbooks impose a welcome order on the past by organizing events chronologically and explaining historical relationships. How, then, do these helpful companions sometimes obscure our understanding of the past?

Readers of textbooks often start with the false assumption that these books simply report facts predetermined by the “dead hand” of the past. That misconception is encouraged by a certain tone: Textbooks seem to speak with authority. “To us as children,” historian Frances FitzGerald writes,

texts were the truth of things: they were American history. It was not just that we read them before we understood that not everything that is printed is the truth, or the whole truth. It was that they, much more than other books, had the demeanor and trappings of authority. They were weighty volumes. They spoke in measured cadences: imperturbable, humorless, and as distant as Chinese emperors.¹

Many college students make the same mistake, even if their textbooks speak in more familiar tones. They too assume that their history textbooks “contain only the truth of things.”

Of course, the case is more complicated. Textbook authors select facts and shape history in ways that reflect their own times. Thus, like all works of history, textbooks contain interpretations. Readers who see only the cold, immovable facts of history have difficulty spotting them, yet the interpretations are there, like graveyard ghosts lurking amid the headstones. Comparing the way textbooks present the same topic is one good way to detect these elusive spirits. In this chapter we examine what several textbooks say about the Indians when Europe discovered America and when England settled Virginia.

SETTING

Ravaged by strange diseases, attacked by land-hungry settlers, and dispossessed from their land, Indians were among the biggest losers in the American past. Because history is mostly written by winners, Native Americans have been big losers in history books too. For a long time, historians treated them as little more than “an exotic, if melancholy, footnote to American history.”² Worse, their accounts were based on questionable ideas about the Indians’ lack of “civilization.”

Discussions about population show how historians’ assumptions about Indian culture influenced their conclusions. In the early twentieth century, historians believed that 1 million Indians lived north of Mexico in 1492 and that

fewer than 10 million lived in the entire Western Hemisphere. In fact, at least 2 million people lived in the United States and Canada, with another 15 million in central Mexico. Some researchers now think the total population of the New World in 1492 was around 60 million. One reason for this difference is that earlier population estimates failed to take into account the devastating effects of Old World germs on Indians. They were also based on an assumption that “uncivilized” Indians were incapable of supporting large numbers of people on their land. Following the lead of anthropologists and ethnographers, historians now understand the sophistication of Native American culture and so have dramatically raised their estimates of the Indian population.

Today’s historians also have a much greater understanding of the varied ways that whites and Indians interacted. The Indians’ role in American history began with their impact on the environment. English settlers encountered a land already cleared and cultivated, a condition that made English settlement much easier. Cultural exchange began immediately, aided by a rough technological equality between the Europeans and Indians. With the exception of the Europeans’ ability to navigate the oceans and make iron into tools and weapons, the technological differences between the English settlers and their indigenous neighbors were not great. While the English learned to cultivate tobacco, corn, squash, and other crops, the Indians quickly learned to use kettles, knives, needles, and guns.

In fact, Native Americans and the European invaders often developed a symbiotic, or mutually dependent, relationship. Initially, Europeans frequently relied on Indian food and skills to survive in a foreign environment. Some New England Puritans, for instance, likely survived their first winter in bark huts that the local Native Americans taught them to construct. Later European settlers depended on Indians to guide them through seemingly trackless forests and to extract a rich harvest of furs from the land. Likewise, Native Americans quickly came to depend on European trade goods.

An understanding of Native American culture makes clear that English settlers were influenced by Indians in ways they did not understand. It also puts some familiar events in Virginia’s early history in a new light. When the Jamestown settlers fell ill in 1607, the powerful Indian Chief Powhatan provided food to keep the starving colony alive. Captain John Smith could only explain this gift as an act of God, who had “changed the heart of the savages.”³ Later Smith was captured by Indians and saved from death, so he believed, by Powhatan’s daughter Pocahontas. Just before Smith’s executioners were supposed to strike their fatal blows, the Indian “princess” threw herself at the Englishman’s feet and pleaded for his life. Once again, Smith saw only the hand of God. He did not see that his remarkable “rescue” was a ceremony designed to demonstrate Powhatan’s power and desire to have friendly relations with the English. Nor did he understand that Powhatan, who wanted to extend his authority over dozens of unruly tribes around the Chesapeake, viewed the English as a useful ally. Within a year, the suspicious Smith had begun to burn