

Steamboat Springs High School

AP UNITED STATES HISTORY Summer Reading Assignment

I'm assigning two books this summer. Both books should be available at Off the Beaten Path bookstore on 9th Street, or Epilogue Book Company (837 Lincoln)—please check there first so that we can support our local booksellers, and make sure to ask if they will offer you a discount. If they are out, you can order it from Amazon.

- Your responses must be typed, standard font. Some answers may be only a paragraph (5-7 sentences) while others may be several paragraphs. The goal is to answer them as completely as possible. Responses are due on the first day of class. *Seriously.*
- Be prepared to discuss the books in a roundtable discussion **ON THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL** (seriously), and throughout the year as we study the appropriate topics. *This will mean that you will want to take notes while you are reading the book*, in addition to the questions you answer.

Book 1: *Lies My Teacher Told Me; Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*, by James W. Loewen

Book Jacket:

“Americans have lost touch with their history, and in this thought-provoking book, Professor James Loewen shows why. After surveying twelve leading high school American history texts, he has concluded that *not one* does a decent job of making history interesting or memorable. Marred by an embarrassing combination of blind patriotism, mindless optimism, sheer misinformation, and outright lies, these books omit almost all of the ambiguity, passion, conflict, and drama from our past. In ten powerful chapters, Loewen reveals that:

-The United States dropped three times as many tons of explosives in Vietnam as it dropped in all theaters of WWII, including Hiroshima and Nagasaki

-Ponce de Leon went to Florida mainly to capture Native Americans as slaves for Hispaniola, not to find the mythical fountain of youth

-Woodrow Wilson, known as a progressive leader, was in fact a white supremacist who personally vetoed a clause on racial equality in the Covenant of the League of Nations

-The first colony to legalize slavery was not Virginia, but Massachusetts

From the truth about Columbus's historic voyages to an honest evaluation of our national leaders, Loewen revives our history, restoring to it the vitality and relevance it truly possesses.”

Purpose: The purpose of this summer reading assignment is to expose you to Loewen's argument, and to help you to think more critically about history throughout the course of this class, and for the rest of your life.

Assignment: Read chapters 1-4, and 8 in full. Skim chapters 11 and 12 and the afterword. Answer the following questions.

Lies My Teacher Told Me Questions:

1. What is heroification? According to Loewen, why is heroification a bad thing? Why don't textbooks address the shortcomings of historical figures?
2. What are some of your recollections of the portrayals of Native Americans in your history textbooks over the years? Do they differ or are they the same as the accounts in the books that Loewen surveyed? Why do American textbooks gloss over events between Native Americans and white Americans in the 19th and 20th centuries?
3. Do textbooks paint a realistic picture of the American federal government? Why or why not? Be sure to include specific examples.
4. What are Loewen's solutions to the problems in American history textbooks?
5. What is the “truth” in history?
6. How can so many books and historians have such different perspectives on the same event?
7. What is the role of the reader of history (that's you) when faced with so many different perspectives?
8. Please type a half-page reaction to your reading.

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Summer Reading Assignment continued

Book 2: *Confederates in the Attic, Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War*, by Tony Horwitz

Book Jacket:

“The Civil War still rages across the South in ways both quirky and compelling. “Hardcore” reenactors crash-diet to resemble starved Confederates and “spoon” in ditches to stave off frostbite. A Scarlett O’Hara impersonator lifts her skirts for Japanese tourists. And Sons, Daughters, and Children of the Confederacy gather to sing “Dixie” and salute the rebel flag.

Pulitzer-prize winning Tony Horwitz takes us on a ten-state adventure, from Gettysburg to Vicksburg, from Charleston graveyards to Tennessee taverns. Probing the history of the Civil War and its potent echo in the present, Horwitz crafts an eloquent, fast-paced, and penetrating travelogue that show us how the Lost Cause still resonates in the memory and rituals of the South.”

Purpose: This is one of my all-time favorite books. It’s fun to read, and is hilarious and disturbing, often at the same time. It digs deeply into the racial and social issues that confront us daily as Americans, and is one of the best examples I’ve come across of how much history really does impact us in the present. I hope you enjoy it.

Assignment: Read the whole book. It’s really good. Please answer the following questions. (You might want to check out the questions before reading.)

***Confederates in the Attic* Questions:**

1. While Americans cling to the Civil War, they've forgotten most of the rest of their history. There is no comparable obsession with the Mexican War, the War of 1812, or even the American Revolution. What are some of the reasons for this?
2. Horwitz meets many women who are as devoted as men to memory of the War: Sue Curtis, June Wells, Melly Meadows, Mauriel Joslyn. How does their approach to the War differ from that of men?
3. Horwitz devotes more space to Robert Lee Hodge than to any other character. Why? What drives Rob? Do you find him heroic, appealing, repellent, or just plain nuts?
4. Horwitz suggests that reenactors are motivated by an urge to escape their own time zone and experience the "period rush" of entering another era. What is it about the 1860s that seems more appealing than our own time period? Does Horwitz ever experience a period rush?
5. At one point, Horwitz, clad as a Confederate reenactor, walks into a shop full of black shoppers and feels ashamed. Is it possible to play-act the Civil War as spectacle, or does reenacting the War inevitably raise troubling questions? Horwitz often asks himself a difficult question: what is the appropriate way to remember the Confederacy and those who fought for it? Can you honor your Confederate ancestors without insulting others? What do you think?
6. Horwitz writes about the killing of Michael Westerman while flying a Confederate flag from his truck, in Todd County, Kentucky. What are the social and emotional reasons why Westerman's killing becomes such a flashpoint for Southern anger, both black and white?
7. Across the South, Horwitz implies that the dream of the Civil Rights era is embattled. In what ways does he show progress in race relations, and in what ways retreat?
8. What does the Confederate flag mean to you? How does that compare to what it meant to others in the book?
9. Should the Confederate flag be allowed to be displayed in public areas? Why or why not?
10. What scenes from the book made the biggest impression on you and why?
11. Please type a half-page response to this reading. In addition, please consider the course for next year and include your expectations, concerns, and questions. Thanks.

Have a great summer!

Mrs. Boyd