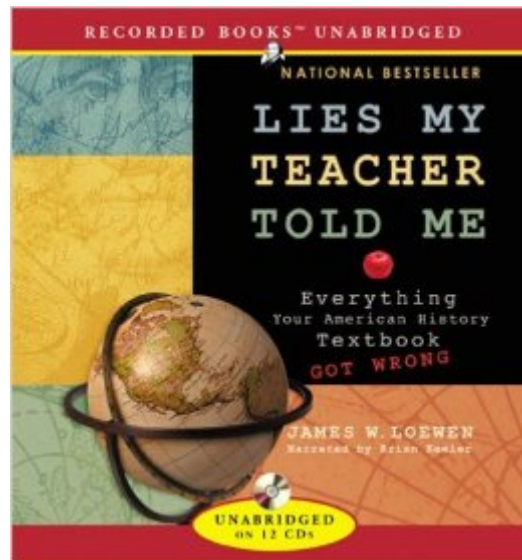


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# Lies My Teacher Told Me



## Synopsis

This national best-seller is an entertaining, informative, and sometimes shocking expose of the way history is taught to American students. *Lies My Teacher Told Me* won the American Book Award and the Oliver Cromwell Cox Award for Distinguished Anti-Racist Scholarship. James W. Loewen, a sociology professor and distinguished critic of history education, puts 12 popular textbooks under the microscope--and what he discovers will surprise you. In his opinion, every one of these texts fails to make its subject interesting or memorable. Worse still is the proliferation of blind patriotism, mindless optimism and misinformation filling the pages. From the truth about Christopher Columbus to the harsh reality of the Vietnam War, Loewen picks apart the lies we've been told. This is a book that will forever change your view of the past.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As a conservative white male who views revisionist history quite skeptically, I did not expect much from this book. As a student of American history, I understood what a woeful job our textbooks and (unfortunately) our teachers do in teaching the actual history of this country, but I never expected both the depth and the level of scholarship Mr. Loewen presents in this book. It is well researched, well written and much needed. Having grown up near an Indian reservation, my own personal studies in original sources confirm how accurate Mr. Loewen really is. The book is hardly "political correctness" run amuck as suggested by one review. And his point is not to paint America as evil or bash Christian Europeans as two other reviews would lead us to believe. This type of simple minded

attack does not tell us anything about the book, but rather betrays the reviewers' own entrenched viewpoints - viewpoints that certainly will not be changed by exposure to the truth. In fact, the criticisms make Mr. Loewen's point almost better than he can as to why history is taught in feel-good myths rather than truth. Yes, Mr. Loewen treats certain issues and not others. He tells us he is doing so several times throughout the book, and makes apologies for it. This is not intended to be a replacement for a full history of the United States. Mr. Loewen makes good and valid suggestions as to such replacements. It is not even intended to be a complete coverage of all the things our history texts get wrong. He would need several more volumes for that, and even then would get some of it wrong. For those who actually read the book (and many reviewers obviously did not), he admits all of this. Mr. Loewen's book is an important start. But it is only a start.

This is a real eye-opener to anyone who thinks they learned about U.S. history in high school. Loewen spent eleven years reviewing the 12 most commonly-used U.S. history textbooks and found all to be seriously wanting. Textbook publishers want to avoid controversy (so, apparently, do many school systems), so they feed students a white-washed, non-controversial, over-simplified version of this country's history and its most important historical figures. To make his point, Loewen emphasizes the "dark side" of U.S. history, because that's the part that's missing from our education system. So, for example, we never learned that Woodrow Wilson ran one of the most racist administrations in history and helped to set back progress in race relations that had begun after the Civil War. Helen Keller's socialist leanings and political views are omitted and we only learn that she overcame blindness and deafness. John Brown is portrayed as a wild-eyed nut who ran amok until he was caught and hanged, rather than an eloquent and dedicated abolitionist who uttered many of the same words and thoughts that Lincoln later expressed. Loewen's book vividly illustrates the maxim that "those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it." Ignorance of our real history also renders us incapable of fully understanding the present and coming to grips with the issues of our time. For example, from the Civil War until around 1890, real racial progress was underway in the United States and civil rights laws were Federally enforced in the South. The military was integrated and former slaves had the right to vote, serve on juries and as witnesses in trials, own property and operate businesses.

In this superb book, James Loewen argues what most Americans have understood since childhood, namely that our American History textbooks, are, boring, theme-driven, inaccurate and largely ineffective at imparting the richness of their subject. While the book's title and argument may

seem like a leftist gerrymander, they are not. Loewen, a professor of Sociology at the University of Vermont (who spent several years analyzing ten high school American History textbooks totaling more than 8,000 pages), is not out to reverse the traditional cast of heroes and villains in American history. Instead, Loewen advocates an honest and inclusive history that simply reveals events as they actually happened. While this may expose some dark truths about heroic people and events in American history, and may cast historical villains in a new light, Loewen does not believe it will cause students to despise their country. On the contrary, he argues that revealing conflicts and problems that our text books ignore or conceal will make American history come alive and will almost certainly enhance students' appreciation for their country. Ironically, while many textbook editors and teachers fear that altering their inaccurate and theme-driven content will cause students to despise their country, they miss the fact that this is precisely what the specious, vapid nature of the textbooks already accomplishes. Some of Loewen's interesting observations are contained below:

**COLUMBUS** Columbus was almost certainly not the first European to discover or colonize North America. He tortured and mutilated the native population of Haiti and eventually exterminated it by working the inhabitants to death searching for gold. All of these facts are available in the journals of Columbus and his colleagues.

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