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Science



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Shannon Leigh Wynne Advanced Placement United States History Mr. Ed Forte 1 December 2010 To America: Personal Reflections of an Historian by Stephen Ambrose vs. Lies MyTeacherTold Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong by James W. Loewen History can be interpreted in many different ways, and has been, by many different people, who all have different views on politics and economics. Some authors try to change the audience's opinions, some try to enhance them. Authors have different purposes for writing, different biases and ideas, different research and documentation as well.

Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong by James W. Loewen and To America: Personal Reflections by an Historian by Stephen Ambrose are perfect examples of two very different books about essentially the same subject. While Loewen is a democrat, and Ambrose is a republican, not only are their philosophies and ideas different, the authors present the ideas in totally different fashions and with different audiences in mind. James W. Loewen and Stephen E. Ambrose have two distinctively different writing styles, political preferences and purposes when writing.

Loewen's Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong is democratic, liberal, and written in textbook style writing. In contrast, Stephen Ambrose's book, America: Personal Reflections by an Historian, is republican, conservative and written with personal anecdotes and a warm tone, as if a grandfather was telling you the stories. In Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got

Wrong, Loewen presented a lot of new, surprising, information on well known subjects.

These new facts were supposed to sway the reader's opinion on the subject being presented from what is popular to believe, to what is the "real" truth. Loewen presented surprising facts about Helen Keller and her political preferences, Christopher Columbus and who actually discovered America, and how some textbooks are have hidden racism and antiracism within the book. *America: Personal Reflections by an Historian* was written to comment on history and certain events, and the author's experiences learning about them. Both books focus on certain events, or narrow subjects, but each chapter is a completely new subject.

Ambrose interjects his personal experiences and opinions on subjects like Ulysses S. Grant and the Transcontinental Railroad, which the facts are supplied by the author himself, the author's mentors, and other famous texts and records. Most evidence for *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* is found in documents such as newspaper articles, from both current times and archived materials, as well as books. The information is documented in the back of the book in Notes by the author along with explanations for the use of some phrases and words.

Loewen uses many secondary sources, such as textbooks and analyses. Most evidence from *America: Personal Reflections by an Historian* is also a lot of secondary sources, but many primary sources as well. Ambrose tells many personal anecdotes about the subject and many opinions and stories his mentors and professors shared with him. *James Loewen and Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* have a

completely different purpose than *America: Personal Reflections by an Historian*, by Stephen Ambrose, but the two books have overlapping documentation and research.

Both *America: Personal Reflections by an Historian* and *Lies my Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* are presented in a somewhat logical manner, but in different ways. James W. Loewen wrote his book by focusing on one subject for an entire chapter and then moving on to the next subject and another chapter. He had the subjects go in chronological order and includes many pictures, charts and graphs to help the reader, and are very well spaced and placed throughout the book.

There was no gap in any information in *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*, but there was a plethora of repetition. Loewen almost went in circles, explaining the same thing over, and over, in slightly different ways each time he covered a subject. In contrast, Stephen Ambrose designed *America: Personal Reflections by an Historian* to flow with the way his mind flowed from thought to thought. The chapters, which also focus on one subject per each chapter, but do not go in chronological order.

For instance, one chapter is entitled “ Writing about Men in Action, 1992-2001” and a couple chapters after comes “ Women’s Rights andImmigration”. Also, each chapter is not strictly about a historical subject, some focus on his personal life and experiences that have to do with history. Yet another chapter is titled “ Writing about Nixon” which describes his time while he was researching and writing his biography about President Nixon.

Stephen Ambrose wrote as thoughts entered his head, not in a timeline or anything, like a textbook.

Ambrose does not use any visual helpers in *America: Personal Reflections by an Historian*, but his words make up for the absence of pictures because he describes things so colorfully, energetically, and with great care and emotion. These two books are both well organized, but are very different in their organization and layout in general. The points of *America: Personal Reflections by an Historian* and *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* are almost as different as history reviews can get.

Stephen Ambrose's book was meant to explain historical figures and events and expand on the way Americans already feel on the subject. His object was not to diminish or change the reader's view on the subject, like James Loewen did, only heighten it. James W. In the chapter in *America: Personal Reflections by an Historian* about President Ulysses S. Grant, he takes the good image of the war hero, and enhanced it, with unknown stories of his greatness.

Loewen's purpose when writing *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* was to change the reader's opinion on the subject that he was talking about at the time. For example, most people see Helen Keller as a hero or as very brave, because she overcame her disabilities to help others with the same disability to function in society. Loewen told the readers only a little about her accomplishments about that but spent the rest of the chapter telling all about her political views

and career as a socialist and how she publically supported Russia in its new administration as a communist nation.

Anyone who reads this book cannot help but feel cheated both by James Loewen for ruining a respectable icon and role model, and at other historians and textbooks for not telling the whole truth. He also tells the readers that Christopher Columbus was a thief and a bad person and that he doesn't deserve to be nationally celebrated. Both Helen Keller and Christopher Columbus are looked up to by many people, especially children, who are only at school to learn the alphabet and how to share, but Loewen is setting out to ruin all the little pilgrim and Christopher Columbus books for them, and he is okay with that.

He wants the public to know the truth, and that is worth everything to him. *America: Personal Reflections by an Historian* is mainly supporting America's loved ones, and *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* is shooting them down. Before his death in 2002, Stephen Ambrose was a famous biographer and historian. He was also a professor or taught at the University of New Orleans, Kansas State University, Johns Hopkins University, Rutgers University, U. C. Berkeley, and some European schools.

He was mentored by some very famous older historians as well, though he always formed his own opinion on the subject he was being mentored on, even if he did not agree with his mentor. Ambrose was definitely a republican, and interjected his republican views during many parts of *America: Personal Reflections by an Historian*, and he has also published biographies of Presidents Nixon and Eisenhower, as well as Emory Upton and

Henry Halleck. James W. Loewen is very liberal, and it shows in *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*.

James Loewen has a PHD in sociology from Harvard, co-authored a U. S. history textbook called *Mississippi: Conflict and Change*, which won the Lillian Smith Award, and has also taught at The Catholic University of America, The University of Vermont, and Tougaloo College. When writing *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*, Loewen studied and stayed at the Smithsonian Institution, where he formed his opinion that no textbook makes history interesting or even documents it correctly.

Loewen has written a total eight books, almost all of the same style writing; liberal and decisive. The intended audience for both *America: Personal Reflections by an Historian* and *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* was a person or student with a general knowledge of history in general and a mainstream idea of many components and events, who is willing to learn and accept new facts about these components and events.

The language is that of an educated adult or young adult, so that students and working people alike could understand and relate to the book and author. *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* is more of a student's book, because it focuses on how textbooks get history wrong, but adults are still attracted to the title and style of writing. *America: Personal Reflections by an Historian* probably brings in more adult readers, because of the style of the writing, more of a story and personal reflections than plain facts.

Overall, both books have tremendous value to any reader who is willing to learn, and is patient with the author. At some points in both *America: Personal Reflections by an Historian* and *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*, the storyline got a little bit slow, which made it difficult to get through. These books could be recommended to high school students, adults and seniors; they cover multiple generations of interest. There was always something new to learn, or a new way to think of or appreciate something with James W.

Loewen and Stephen Ambrose. Reading these two books change a lot of thoughts on the main subjects brought up, and the main people analyzed. *America: Personal Reflections by an Historian* and *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* makes a person wonder if any leader or idol is a good leader, or role model, or icon, or if they are all really fake. It also makes a person wonder if there really is good and bad in the world, or if everything is grey, not just black and white.