

VOLUME II: Since 1865

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 II: Since 1865

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Thinking Through the Past

Preface

This book was 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 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 provides 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.

INSTRUCTOR'S RESOURCE MANUAL

The format of *Thinking Through the Past* is designed to be effective in various classroom situations. Students in large classes can work through this book with minimal instructor assistance. Yet the format also provides students in seminars, small classes, and discussion sections the opportunity to share with one another the excitement of thinking about the past. The Instructor's Resource Manual is designed to enhance the effectiveness of *Thinking Through the Past* in all these classroom settings. The manual contains discussion of the sources in each chapter and explanations of how they relate to the chapter's main problem and pedagogical goals. It also contains questions to stimulate classroom discussion and suggestions for evaluating students' learning.

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Many people contributed to this book. I want to thank my students, without whom it never would have been created. I owe thanks to many others as well. Richard Cooper and Brad Nystrom at California State University, Sacramento listened patiently to unformed ideas and offered helpful suggestions at the initial stages of this project. Alan Balboni, DeAnna Beachley, Gary Elliott, Michael Green, and Charles Okeke, colleagues at the Community College of Southern Nevada, offered sources, ideas, and encouragement. Marion Martin, Inter-Library Loan librarian at CCSN, provided unfailingly cheerful and efficient assistance. D. C. Heath editors James Miller and Pat Wakeley made many helpful suggestions. Susan Zorn of Houghton Mifflin copyedited the manuscript with extraordinary skill, while Jeffrey Greene and Carol Newman performed their editorial tasks with professionalism and good humor. Numerous colleagues around the country reviewed chapter drafts and offered insightful suggestions.

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J.H.

Contents

| | |
|---------|------|
| Preface | xiii |
|---------|------|

| | |
|---------------------|----------|
| Introduction | 3 |
|---------------------|----------|

1

| | |
|--|----------|
| Historians and Textbooks: The “Story” of Reconstruction | 8 |
|--|----------|

| | |
|---------|---|
| Setting | 9 |
|---------|---|

| | |
|---------------|----|
| Investigation | 10 |
|---------------|----|

| | |
|---------|----|
| Sources | 11 |
|---------|----|

Reconstruction (1906)

The Negro in Reconstruction (1922)

The Ordeal of Reconstruction (1966)

Radical Reconstruction in the South (1991)

| | |
|------------|----|
| Conclusion | 19 |
|------------|----|

| | |
|-----------------|----|
| Further Reading | 20 |
|-----------------|----|

| | |
|-------|----|
| Notes | 21 |
|-------|----|

2

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Using Primary Sources: Industrialization and the Condition of Labor | 22 |
|--|-----------|

| | |
|---------|----|
| Setting | 23 |
|---------|----|

| | |
|---------------|----|
| Investigation | 24 |
|---------------|----|

| | |
|---------|----|
| Sources | 25 |
|---------|----|

Testimony of Workingmen (1879)

Earnings, Expenses and Conditions of Workingmen and Their Families (1884)

Wages in the Iron and Steel Industry, 1858–1900

Price Indexes, 1866–1890

Why We Struck at Pullman (1895)

Colored Workmen and a Strike (1887)

| | |
|--|----|
| Women Make Demands (1869) | |
| Summary of Conditions Among Women Workers Found by the Massachusetts Bureau of Labor (1887) | |
| Work in a Garment Factory (1902) | |
| Gainful Workers by Age, 1870–1920 | |
| Breaker Boys (1906) | |
| Night Shift in a Glass Factory (1906) | |
| Conclusion | 49 |
| Further Reading | 50 |
| Notes | 50 |



| | |
|---|-----------|
| Evaluating Primary Sources: The Populist Image in the 1890s | 51 |
| Setting | 52 |
| Investigation | 53 |
| Sources | 54 |
| Platform of the People's Party (1892) | |
| The Negro Question in the South (1892) | |
| Financial Conspiracies (1888) | |
| The Farmer's Troubles and Their Remedy (1891) | |
| Cross of Gold Speech (1896) | |
| The English Octopus (1894) | |
| Wall Street Milks the West and South (1894) | |
| An Account of Mary Lease (1892) | |
| James A. Troutman on the Populist Party (1894) | |
| Description of the 1896 Populist Convention (1896) | |
| What's the Matter with Kansas? (1896) | |
| William McKinley on the Bryan Democrats (1896) | |
| Kansas Populists William Peffer and "Sockless Jerry" Simpson Take Their Seats in Congress (1891) | |
| Bryan Blows Himself Around the Country (1896) | |
| Urban and Rural Population, 1850–1900 | |
| Prices of Commodities, 1866–1890 | |
| Gross National Product, 1869–1901 | |
| Total Currency in the United States, 1866–1900 | |
| Conclusion | 72 |
| Further Reading | 73 |
| Notes | 73 |



| | |
|--|-----------|
| Evaluating a Historical Argument: The “Yellow Press” and the Spanish-American War | 74 |
| Setting | 76 |
| Investigation | 77 |
| Sources | 78 |
| McKinley, the Press, and the Decision for War (1990) | |
| Chicago <i>Tribune</i> Editorial on Public Opinion and Cuba (1895) | |
| The Case of Evangelina Cisneros (1897) | |
| Our Country (1885) | |
| The Expansion of the United States (1895) | |
| William McKinley on Overseas Trade (1898) | |
| Some Time in the Future (1895) | |
| The White Man’s Burden (ca. 1900) | |
| A Policy of Murder and Starvation (February 1898) | |
| Conditions Are Unmentionable (March 1898) | |
| McKinley’s War Message (1898) | |
| The <i>New York Times</i> Reports on Preparations for War (May 4, 1898) | |
| Value of Manufactured Exports, 1866–1900 | |
| Conclusion | 97 |
| Further Reading | 97 |
| Notes | 98 |



| | |
|---|-----------|
| The Problem of Historical Motivation: The Bungalow as the “Progressive” House | 99 |
| Setting | 100 |
| Investigation | 102 |
| Sources | 103 |
| The Progressive Housewife and the Bungalow (1981) | |
| A Craftsman Cottage (1909) | |
| <i>The Craftsman</i> Contrasts Complexity and Confusion with Cohesion and Harmony (1907) | |
| Gustav Stickley on the Craftsman Home (1909) | |
| Edward Bok on Simplicity (1900) | |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Conspicuous Consumption and the Craftsman Style (1899) | |
| Cover from <i>The Bungalow Magazine</i> (1909) | |
| Putting the American Woman and Her Home on a Business Basis (1914) | |
| The Efficient and Inefficient Kitchen (1920) | |
| Domestic Economy (1904) | |
| Double Bungalow Plan, Bowen Court | |
| Average Daily Servants' Wage Rates, Chicago, 1890–1910 | |
| Female Servants by Regions, per 1,000 Families, 1880–1920 | |
| Clerical Workers in the United States, by Sex, 1870–1920 | |
| Conclusion | 123 |
| Further Reading | 124 |
| Notes | 124 |

6

| | |
|--|------------|
| Ideology and History: Closing the “Golden Door” | 126 |
| Setting | 127 |
| Investigation | 128 |
| Sources | 129 |
| Racism and Immigration Restriction (1984) | |
| The Passing of the Great Race (1916) | |
| Whose Country Is This? (1921) | |
| The Klan's Fight for Americanism (1926) | |
| Because You're a Jew (1908) | |
| Her Father's Daughter (1921) | |
| A Congressman Calls for Restriction (1921) | |
| The Bootleggers (1925) | |
| Immigrant Occupation Groups, 1899–1924 | |
| Unemployment Rates, 1900–1924 | |
| Conclusion | 149 |
| Further Reading | 149 |
| Note | 149 |

7

| | |
|--|------------|
| The Problem of Historical Causation: The Election of 1928 | 150 |
| Setting | 151 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Investigation | 152 |
| Sources | 153 |
| Prejudice and the Election of 1928 (1979) | |
| Al Smith—Catholic, Tammany, Wet (1928) | |
| Speech to the Ohio Methodist Conference (1928) | |
| An Open Letter to Governor Smith (1927) | |
| Al Smith's Tammany Hall (1928) | |
| The Women's Vote (1928) | |
| Is Al Smith Afraid of the South? (1928) | |
| Acceptance Speech (1928) | |
| A Heavy Load for Al (1928) | |
| The Wet "Hope" (1928) | |
| Conclusion | 174 |
| Further Reading | 175 |
| Note | 175 |



| | |
|--|------------|
| History "From the Top Down": Eleanor Roosevelt, Reformer | 176 |
| Setting | 178 |
| Investigation | 179 |
| Sources | 180 |
| Eleanor Roosevelt and the Great Depression (1987) | |
| This I Remember (1949) | |
| Transcripts of Eleanor Roosevelt's Press Conferences (1933–1938) | |
| Letter to Her Daughter (1937) | |
| My Parents: A Differing View (1976) | |
| Excerpts from Letters to Franklin Roosevelt (1935) | |
| Letter from Barry Bingham to Marvin McIntyre (1934) | |
| News Item, "Definition of Feminism" (1935) | |
| News Item, "Opposes Amendment" (1938) | |
| It's Up to the Women (1933) | |
| Conclusion | 200 |
| Further Reading | 200 |
| Notes | 201 |

9

| | |
|--|------------|
| History “From the Bottom Up”: The Detroit Race Riot of 1943 | 202 |
| Setting | 204 |
| Investigation | 205 |
| Sources | 206 |
| The Detroit Rioters of 1943 (1991) | |
| A Handbill for White Resistance (1942) | |
| Black Employment in Selected Detroit Companies, 1941 | |
| An Explanation for Strikes (1943) | |
| Black Workers Protest Against Chrysler (1943) | |
| A Complaint About the Police (1939) | |
| Changes in White and Black Death Rates, 1910–1940 | |
| A Profile of the Detroit Rioters | |
| Conclusion | 225 |
| Further Reading | 225 |
| Notes | 225 |

10

| | |
|--|------------|
| History as Synthesis: The Cold War and Popular Culture in the 1950s | 227 |
| Setting | 229 |
| Investigation | 230 |
| Sources | 231 |
| The Culture of the Cold War (1991) | |
| Advertisement for <i>Runaway Daughter</i> (1953) | |
| Promotional Material for <i>Walk East on Beacon</i> (1952) | |
| A Game Show Producer Remembers the Red Scare (1995) | |
| A Playwright Recalls the Red Scare (1995) | |
| The Hammer Song (1949) | |
| A Folk Singer Remembers the Early 'Fifties (1995) | |
| Sixty Minute Man (1951) | |
| Sweet Little Sixteen (1958) | |
| Pogo (1952) | |
| Conclusion | 252 |
| Further Reading | 252 |
| Notes | 252 |

11

| | |
|---|------------|
| Causation and the Lessons of History: Explaining America's Longest War | 254 |
| Setting | 255 |
| Investigation | 257 |
| Sources | 257 |
| Fighting in "Cold Blood": LBJ's Conduct of Limited War in Vietnam (1994) | |
| God's Country and American Know-How (1986) | |
| Lyndon Johnson Defends the American Commitment to Vietnam (April 1965) | |
| LBJ Expresses Doubts about Vietnam (June 1965) | |
| LBJ Recalls His Decision to Escalate (1971) | |
| The Central Intelligence Agency Reports on the War (1967) | |
| McNamara Recalls the Decision to Escalate (1995) | |
| A Medical Corpsman Recalls the Vietnamese People (1981) | |
| Fighting a Technological War of Attrition (1977) | |
| Conclusion | 278 |
| Further Reading | 278 |
| Notes | 278 |

12

| | |
|---|------------|
| Gender, Ideology, and Historical Change: Explaining the Women's Movement | 280 |
| Setting | 281 |
| Investigation | 283 |
| Sources | 284 |
| Feminism and Family Change: 1960–1980 (1983) | |
| Cold War Ideology and the Rise of Feminism (1988) | |
| The Problem That Has No Name (1963) | |
| Civil Rights and the Rise of Feminism (1987) | |
| NOW's Statement of Purpose (1966) | |
| Redstockings Manifesto (1969) | |
| On Women and Sex (1972) | |
| Our Bodies, Ourselves (1973) | |
| The Politics of Housework (ca. 1970) | |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Sex Ratios of High School and College Graduates in the United States, 1940–1980 | |
| Women’s Labor Force Participation, by Marital Status, 1940–1987 | |
| Median Earnings of Year-round, Full-time Workers, by Sex, 1955–1985 | |
| Conclusion | 311 |
| Further Reading | 311 |
| Notes | 312 |

13

| | |
|---|------------|
| Why Historical Interpretation Matters: Assessing the “Reagan Revolution” | 313 |
| Setting | 315 |
| Investigation | 317 |
| Sources | 318 |
| Roosevelt Revolution, Reagan Counterrevolution (1988) | |
| Summing Up the Reagan Era (1990) | |
| Five-Year Economic Program for the U.S. (1980) | |
| The Budget: Guns Up, People Down (1982) | |
| The Triumph of Politics (1986) | |
| The Unfinished Agenda (1987) | |
| The Contract with America (1994) | |
| Real Average Weekly Earnings, 1947–1986 (in 1986 dollars) | |
| Pay of Workers and Corporate Chief Executives, 1965–1988 | |
| Federal Budget Priorities, 1980–1987 | |
| Total Government Expenditures, 1929–1990 | |
| Federal Budget Deficits, 1980–1990 | |
| Conclusion | 342 |
| Further Reading | 343 |
| Notes | 344 |

Thinking Through the Past

