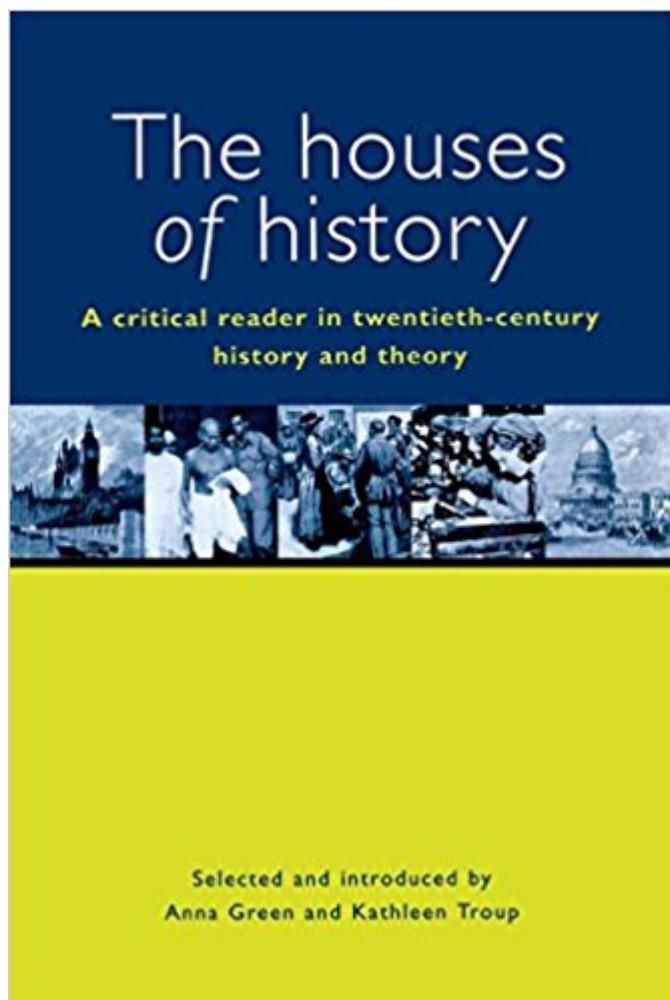


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The Houses Of History: A Critical Reader In Twentieth-Century History And Theory



Synopsis

Every piece of historical writing has a theoretical basis on which evidence is selected, filtered, and understood. This is as true of scientific empiricism as it is of poststructuralism. The Houses of History provides a comprehensive introduction to the twelve schools of thought which have had the greatest influence on the study of history in the twentieth century. Ranging from Empiricism to Postcolonialism, Marxism to the Ethnohistorians, each chapter begins with an introduction to the particular school, the main protagonists, the critics, and is followed by a useful section of further readings. From the classic, such as G. R. Elton's "England Under the Tudors" and E. P. Thompson's "The Making of the English Working Class," to the recent, such as Henrietta Whiteman's "White Buffalo Woman" and Judith Walkowitz's "City of Dreadful Delight," the diverse selections collected here bring together the leading historians and theorists of the century. Comprehensive and accessible to undergraduates, The Houses of History is ideally suited to classroom use.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I found this book very helpful in understanding the methodologies behind the different "houses" of historiography. As the first reviewer stated, it can sometimes be tedious, but if you need to know this stuff, this is a relatively painless way to go about doing it. Finally, I would just like to pose a question: why would anyone trust a review by a college student who cannot correctly spell "nonsense"?

This is not a historical book, and I think the negative reviews are the result of people trying to read it as such. It is instead an instructional book, which intends to teach the reader about the different methods (houses) of history. Anyone engaged in a serious study of history needs to understand how to read a historical work in two ways. First, you must read in order to acquire the information that the book is presenting, obviously. Second, a reader must analyze how the information is being presented. This includes the analysis of the logical arguments being used, the work being cited as evidence of that argument, and determining the author's bias. (Every author has one, even "objective" authors) Even the decision of what information to include in a historical work is evidence of the author's bias. The failure to take this into account will inevitably mean the failure to fully understand the work you are reading. The various arguments, pieces of evidence, and personal dispositions of the authors who write about a particular subject comprise different methods of historical scholarship, and they will vary from author to author. In other words, the "historiography" of a subject will contain a variety of methods, which this book calls the "houses of history." The intent of this book is to explain these methods, and then provide examples of each. Toward this purpose, the book excels. Acquiring the skill to analyze the historiography of a work is an indispensable skill for the serious student of history. Again this is not a history book. For example, the excerpt presented in the book by E.P Thompson is not necessarily intended to teach the reader about the English working class, but is instead intended to present an example of the Marxist method of history. The reader of this book will gain much more by analyzing the style, bias, and argumentation of each example work than by reading them for their historical value alone. When read in this way, "The Houses of History" will help the reader to develop a more complete understanding of historical works. This book does not teach history, it teaches how to study history; and it does it very well.

Great book. Before I read it, I had been confused by the various historiographical 'houses.' Now I know what's what. Anyone who's doing a historiography course at university should read this book because it (a) explains most things well and (b) makes it clear that there is a lot of conscious consideration behind how historians approach the past, which I think anyone who plans to study the past for a living needs to know. Jay's negative review shows he isn't willing to engage in a sophisticated analysis of the historian's influence on history.

The reason I recommend this book above any others on historiography, is that the chapters are succinct and virtually absent of pretentious academic-speak. In addition, each "house" of history comes with an example of the theory or methodology being discussed, which is useful for those of

us who need "illustrations." While this work is extremely useful while taking an oft-painful historiography course, it is also a terrific handbook for developing the historiography section of a long research paper, thesis, or dissertation.

Historiography (writings about the writing of history) is a rather arcane topic, generally of interest only to historians. Even history students roll their eyes at the thought of historiography, but the consideration of the approach to use in writing the history of an event or person is important. Knowing how others have approached their subjects is also important. This review, then, is aimed at history students. The Houses of History gives a good overview, with an example reading, for each of several main historical approaches, including Annales, social history, empiricism, psychohistory (yes, Isaac Asimov fans, we really use this term, but not quite in the way Hari Seldon did. Asimov merely extrapolated from a real school of history). When students take their required course in historiography or theory of history, they may very well find this a required text. I did. In its clarity and its approach, this is one of the better overviews of historical theory.

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