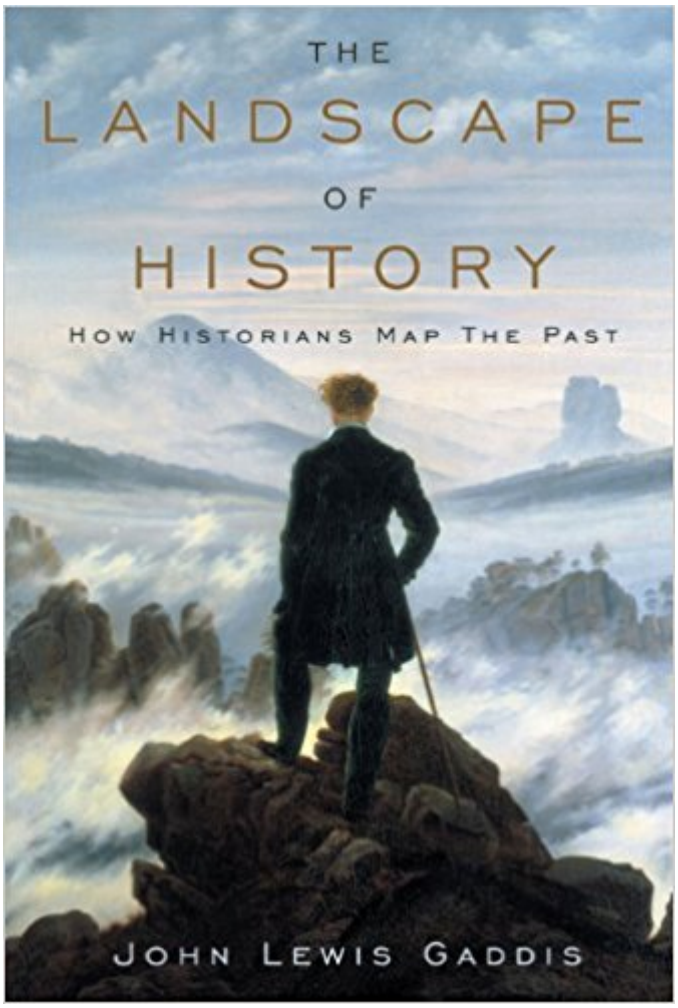
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The Landscape Of History: How Historians Map The Past (Inaugural Lectures)



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Synopsis

What is history and why should we study it? Is there such a thing as historical truth? Is history a science? One of the most accomplished historians at work today, John Lewis Gaddis, answers these and other questions in this short, witty, and humane book. The Landscape of History provides a searching look at the historian’s craft, as well as a strong argument for why a historical consciousness should matter to us today.Gaddis points out that while the historical method is more sophisticated than most historians realize, it doesn’t require unintelligible prose to explain. Like cartographers mapping landscapes, historians represent what they can never replicate. In doing so, they combine the techniques of artists, geologists, paleontologists, and evolutionary biologists. Their approaches parallel, in intriguing ways, the new sciences of chaos, complexity, and criticality. They don’t much resemble what happens in the social sciences, where the pursuit of independent variables functioning with static systems seems increasingly divorced from the world as we know it. So who’s really being scientific and who isn’t? This question too is one Gaddis explores, in ways that are certain to spark interdisciplinary controversy.Written in the tradition of Marc Bloch and E.H. Carr, The Landscape of History is at once an engaging introduction to the historical method for beginners, a powerful reaffirmation of it for practitioners, a startling challenge to social scientists, and an effective skewering of post-modernist claims that we can’t know anything at all about the past. It will be essential reading for anyone who reads, writes, teaches, or cares about history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is certainly a good introduction in history as a science. Questions regarding it's methodology, it's subject, it's aim are discussed, using metaphors and philosophical analysis. Moreover, it offers an introduction to philosophy of science in general (i.e.: more than just history), suggesting, among other proposals, that the natural sciences have become more historical in nature, rather than history having become naturalised. Lighthearted in tone, well-written (as a non-native speaker, I really enjoyed reading this book), but engaging and seriously arguing for it's thesis, I would recommend this book for everyone, in particular for those interested in the relation between the human sciences and the natural sciences.

This is a necessary part of any historian's library.

This was okay - a little interesting here and there, but as a whole, I found it boring. I had to read it for a MA world history class and it just wasn't for me. Again, there were some interesting parts, but once the class is over I'm going to sell it. If you are incredibly into history, I'm sure you`ll enjoy it far more than I did, but it was too slow moving for me to enjoy.

Gaddis is a giant in the field of history, most notably for his exhaustive studies on the Cold War. What he attempts to do here is give a detailed, scientific description of how the historian does what he does. Contary to some of the other reviewers, I did not find this an easy read. More on that in a minute, first I'll say what I did glean from the book. Gaddis starts off comparing the historian to a geographer. Much like a map-maker is incapable of mapping a large area of terrain while standing on that terrain, a historian cannot accurately describe an event if they are involved in it. You must be outside it, or above it to get all the perspectives and deliver an objective view of the overall situation. This section was good.Gaddis also tries to argue that history is more of a scientific process than many people realize. In fact, he claims that the historical method has more in common with that of a geologist, physicist, or paleontologist than a social scientist. To argue this point, he uses an array of scientific jargon, analogies, and metaphors. He writes as if he is trying to convince a scientist of the

scientific validity of the historian's craft. In fact I read that this book is essentially an expansion of some speeches he gave to science students, attempting to do just that. This is why I had some difficulty with the book. I have virtually no science background and therefore found much of the scientific jargon to be over my head. For Pete's sake, one of the reasons that I'm a history major is because I'm no good at science! Anyway, I do not dispute Gaddis' knowledge or talent in his chosen field, that is not an issue. But I would just offer the warning that if you are not reasonably well-versed in basic scientific concepts, this book will be a challenge. Needless to say, those with a basic understanding of science will no doubt get much more out of this book than I did.

Too many metaphors. On several occasions it seemed the author just wanted to fill in pages. It is almost certain that this 150 pages book could have been explained in a decent well written 20 to 30 pages summery. Overall the books is dull and lacking; more like a well written prose that lack on meaning.

An excellent read!

This book is an entertaining and easily readable book about how historians map that unusual and mysterious landscape known as the past. Examining the relationships between history and the 'hard' sciences and how their methods have become joined over the course of the 20th and early 21st centuries, and filled with well-thought and humorous barbs against both reductionism and relativism, this book gives historians the grounds to feel supremely proud and awesomely humble about their field and their approach. This book should be either required or recommended reading for any class in historiography as a brief but vital apologetic for the historical craft. Clio, that famous muse of history, would be proud to be defended so ably and so cleverly, and so should the proud student of history.

This is a brilliant book written in a very concise and easy to comprehend manner. The connections between History, Social and physical sciences are so much better than you get from most philosophy texts.

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