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Paul Swendson

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In this revised, expanded, and updated second edition, Paul Swendson - in a series of comprehensive essays - puts into written form what he has spent more than thirteen years doing as a community college history instructor: making American history “manageable, meaningful, and relevant” for everyday people. In addition to breaking down the fundamental topics of American history in a concise, easy to read fashion, this is a work of political and social commentary, relating the experiences, struggles, and decisions of past Americans to life in the United States today. As stated in the book’s introductory essay: “If history teachers – and historians for that matter – make no effort to draw lessons from the data and to bring the facts to life, then we are merely engaged in a trivia exercise.” The goal of this book, like all good history teaching and writing, is to help its readers become a little wiser, and raising the essential questions is often more important than providing the “right” answers.

This book is ideal for anyone who is looking to get an overview of the basics of American history. It can also be a very effective supplemental reader in an American history survey course, stimulating classroom discussions that go beyond just learning the "facts." The author himself is currently using this book in his history courses, and many of the essays have evolved through his personal experiences working with junior high, high school, and college students. And since many of these students have not been history enthusiasts, the author has worked as hard at making the material engaging as he has ensuring its accuracy.

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