
**Introduction:**
Great accomplishment - one of the few books by historians to grapple with the intellectual trends of the past decades (poststructuralism, new historicism, cultural studies), recent political questions (multiculturalism) and cultural changes (postmodernism) -
- p. 9 - discussion of "general debates" - show how the discipline *prevents* historians from participating but *exonerates* it at the same time - "professional historians have been so successfully socialized by demands to publish that we have little time or inclination to participate in general debates about the meaning of our work." --- what is the impact of this??

Title: "telling the truth" - a moral command of parents and teachers to children - combines "truth" with love/fear and power --

p. 3 "Our central argument is that skepticism and relativism about truth, not only in science but also in history and politics, have grown out of the insistent democratization of American society." [the inclusion of workers, women and minorities] p. 4 "...we endorse the insights and revisions made possible by democratization. [i.e.,] healthy skepticism...a multicultural approach to human history...But we reject the cynicism and nihilism that accompany contemporary relativism."

p. 7 "We are arguing here that truths about the past are possible, even if they are not absolute, and hence are worth struggling for." - moral register, not discursive critique **such as that brought to bear on nationalism in early national period of U.S. p. ??

p. 9-10 "Our aims in this book are simple and straightforward but also ambitious. We want to provide general readers, history students, and professional historians with some sense of the debates currently raging about history's relationship to scientific truth, objectivity, postmodernism, and the politics of identity."

Politics and truth -- they connect their work with "democracy"

p. 11 "A democratic practice of history, we will argue, encourages skepticism about dominant views, but at the same time trusts in the reality of the past and its knowability....the expansive quality of democracy [requires] a version of the scientific model of knowledge....In a democracy, history thrives on a passion for establishing and communicating the truth."

**Part One: Intellectual Absolutisms**

Ch. 1: *The Heroic Model of Science* (Jacob ?)

Ch. 2: *Scientific History and the Idea of Modernity* (Hunt ?)
p. 65 end of 18th century: identity linked to nationalism and "history books... stood at the forefront of struggles for national identity.... The invented community of the nation called out for historical grounding....

p. 77 history under the sign of modernization

p. 79 Marxism, Annales School and U.S. Modernization theory -- "imagined by their adherents as universally applicable and scientific in method and thus all three helped foster a Western history that aimed to homogenize the study of all other places and times into general Western models of historical development."

p. 89 "In telling history `as it really was'...historians believed themselves to be fascilitating progress toward the modern....These models were all imperialist in their aim to encompass everyone."

Ch. 3: History Makes a Nation (Appleby ?) - great title!

p. 94 political history has interpreted national integration as a question of federal vs. state authority "rather than one of creating a common identity..."

p. 103 "Detecting no conflict between their zeal for truth and their love for their own country, nineteenth-century writers provided the `imagined community' of the new nation with a history that was both patriotic and scientific." [my question: what epistemological stance is being taken here??]

p. 104 "turning this event [1776] into a destiny implicit in the original seventeenth-century settlements was a narrative invention." and this "history" became "uncontested truth" -- this discourse excluded - complex reason for European immigration, enslavement and expulsion of peoples whose cultural values questioned universality of U.S.

- [but - 1. no contest of discourses: weren't there any dissenting voices of a conservative or radical kind?? -- what was this nationalist discourse ?
  2. no materialist analysis of ideas -- how were the ideas institutionalized in education and society? what media were used?]

p. 123 historians also made the Constitution an "inviolable fundamental law"

p. 125 Appleby's critique -- "In time [American history's] imperviousness to change stifled curiosity about America's past because it could not explain the real problems of living people..." [emphasis added] [this resort to the "real" betrays the weakness of the position in failing to think through the epistemological critique of the discipline -- after all, the effort to "forge a nation" was a "real" problem; excluding blacks was a "real" problem for "living" agents of the ruling class]***

Part Two: Absolutisms Dethroned

Ch. 4: Competing Histories of America (Appleby)

p. 141 - on progressivist history -- its "elevated" history of ideas "lost contact with the actual [emphasis added] people of the past.
Ch. 5: Discovering the Clay Feet of Science (Jacob)

p. 171 "Science can be historically and socially framed and still be true."
pp. 191-2 [This critique is way off base as in] "...the new postmodern relativists...deal in absolutes: [they] cannot imagine the complexity of a human situation in which workable truths appear as the result of messy, ideologically motivated, self-absorbed interventions undertaken by myopic people whose identities may be vastly different and distant from one's own." ???? -- relativism: fails to address "the need for causal explanations and narratives" [and the warning:] "Every time people go down the relativist road, the path darkens and the light recedes from the tunnel." -- p. 193 appeals to "laws reasonably true to nature" -- p. 194 "Denying the possibility of truth" --- [does Foucault or Derrida do this??] -- p. 196 "Truths hard won by human beings....can make for consoling allies. In the darkest moments of this century they have kept many people from despair." --[so have any number of other things]

Ch. 6: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Modernity (Hunt)

Problems with this chapter:
1. "Postmodern" is inadequately presented so that it can be denied
2. Poststructuralist theory is misnamed so that the question of "postmodern culture" does not enter the debate -

p. 200 awareness of epistemological conservatism: "Social historians did not oppose the standards of objectivity or the codes of professional discipline; they used those very standards to challenge the traditional interpretations....[they] hoped to fill out the record...but one of the main effects of their work has been to reveal how limited the previous histories were....the work of social historians fostered the argument that history could never be objective."

p. 202 "Our goal is to navigate course between the traditionalist critics and the postmodernists..."

p.202 [astonishing ignorance of the debate and weak quality of argument:] postmodernist "argument against the unified self....undermine[s] the premises of
multiculturalism. Without an identifiable self, [note the slippage from unified to identifiable] there would be no need to worry about differing cultures, ethnic pride, and battered identities." [see Homi Bhabha, *Local Cultures*, Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora*, etc.]

p. 206 "postmodernists are deeply disillusioned intellectuals..." p. 207 

"postmodernism is an ironic, perhaps even despairing view of the world, one which, in its most extreme forms, offers little role for history as previously known. [analyze this sentence] On the other hand [is this a parody of Derrida?], postmodernism raises arresting questions about truth, objectivity, and history that cannot simply be dismissed." [what are these questions??]

p. 207 Derrida and Foucault provide the crucial argument: (p.208) reality cannot be represented as objectively true; the autonomy of the self is "deconstructed", they attack the "entire Enlightenment project." - this is simply wrong: Foucault's late work, Derrida's modest definition of deconstruction --- but neither is quoted -- she goes on to discuss Nietzsche

p. 213 concludes that D and F's "critiques of the subject and of language fostered a deeper skepticism about the (disappearing) self and truth." But in a footnote "We recognize that postmodernists, including Foucault and Derrida, have held a variety of (not always consistent) positions about truth."

p. 218 [yet she shows how cultural history surpasses social history and that its concept of truth is relativist:] "In the cultural perspective, a different view of rationality comes into play, one which stresses that human reason operates within a specific cultural context."

p. 219 footnote: English journals on French history 1976-90: political-diplomatic decrease by 1/2; economic/social decrease by 1/4; intellectual/cultural doubled.

p. 225 "If postmodern theories are taken seriously, there is no transhistorical or transcendent grounds for interpretation, and human beings have no unmediated access to the world of things or events." [why do we need to make such ridiculous claims in the first place?]

p. 226 [YET] "...the new cultural theories, including postmodernist ones, have helped,...to revitalize discussion about methods, goals, and even the foundations of knowledge..." [how have they done so - by advocating "relativism"? "pessimism"?]

p. 227 "Were this version of postmodernism applied to history, the search for truths about the past would be displaced by the self-reflexive analysis of historians' ways of fictively producing convincing 'truth-effects.'" [what would be bad about this?]

p. 228-9 "...we are attempting to go beyond the current negative or ironic judgments about history's role. We as historians are nonetheless making our own aesthetic choices...We are emphasizing the human need for self-understanding through a coherent narrative of the past....[why human? are we imperialists again?] we are highlighting the need for the most objective possible explanations as the only way to move forward...toward a more intellectually alive, democratic community...."
p. 229 ...the focus on culture and language undermines...[a clear hierarchy of explanation] p. 230 she agrees with this yet points out the limits of postmodernism (linguistic determinism; reduction of social and nature world to language; context to text)

p. 232 "...postmodernism attacks meta-narrative along with the narrative form itself as inherently ideological and hence obfuscating." D and F do not argue that narrative is obfuscating since that critique is possible only from an objectivist stance

p. 233 "...the postmodernist notion that history is irrelevant to identity (a position not shared, by the way, by Foucault, who attributed all identity to historical processes). [and therefore takes the opposite position from the one in question and since he is one of the two "postmodernists" and the views of the other one (Derrida) are not examined, cannot we say exactly the opposite of the Hunt's claim]**** example of poor argumentation

p. 237 "...postmodernism cannot provide models for the future when it claims to refuse the entire idea of offering models for the future. In the final analysis, then, there can be no postmodern history." but p.235 "...narrative is essential both to individual and social identity...." [and so forth, exactly "postmodern" positions]

Part Three: A New Republic of Learning

Ch. 7: Truth and Objectivity

p. 248 favors "practical realists" defines this for history on p. 250 as "The historian is someone who reconstructs a past pieced together from records left by the past, which should not be dismissed as a mere discourse on other discourses." why would that be so bad

p. 250 "...practical realism = "some words and conventions" "reach out to the world and give a reasonably true description of its contents" [rhetoric of reasonable as opposed to rational]

p. 254 "qualified objectivity" p. 255 "These traces [from the past] alas, never speak for themselves... [cf earlier claim]

p. 259 - "We have redefined historical objectivity as an interactive relationship between an inquiring subject and an external object." -- [this distance cannot be sustained in postmodern culture]

p. 259 "History is crucially distinguished from fiction by curiosity about what actually happened [wie es eigentlich gewesen] in the past." [I thought we got beyond this?]  

p. 270 "It is exactly the psychological potency of written history that makes it so important to nations." [this is cynicism if I ever saw it!]

Ch. 8: The Future of History

INCOHERENCE: p. 271 "times of deep and significant historical change such as the world is witnessing now." what then of "the future of history" when "old absolutisms have fallen" -- "A part of this new thinking will include a return to the intellectual center of the Western experience since the seventeenth century..." - non-sequitur
p. 277 "As the twentieth century closes, it becomes obvious that new definitions of truth and objectivity are needed in every field of knowledge." [WHY? The argument for this is simply not made!!]

p. 281 "The system of peer review, open refereeing, public disputation, replicated experiments, and documented research -- all aided by international communication and the extended freedom from censorship -- makes objective knowledge possible." I agree except I would say "makes possible knowledge that we like to call objective."

p. 295 "A comprehensive national history is not now an educational option for the country; it is a cultural imperative." [WHY? The last national history was a disaster so why do another one -- the nation needs to be opposed, not fostered] p. 301 "It is the nation that sustains and protects the array of particular identities in the United States." [I don't know what this means]

p. 305 "Modern Westerners cannot live without causal language and generalizations about human behavior because these organize their reality." [So we must contribute to our own mystification by causal language -- why not critique it so that "reality" can be critiqued?] [And aren't we postmodern non-Westerners or multiculturalists??]