

# Historical Revisionism - Changing the Past through Perception

## Intro

We live in an info saturated world, where every scroll and click indulges us with knowledge. Hence, identifying the truth from distortion is becoming harder than ever.

But how much of what we process is actually true to the content within it? Let's put that to the test! I will read out 3 news headlines, and I want you to think about which ones real:

- A) Winner Didn't Even Know It was a Pie - Eating Competition
- B) Archaeological Dig Uncovers Ancient Race of Skeleton People
- C) In this centuries - old English pancake race, "you just have to go flat out"

Now if you guessed A or B, you're wrong, those are in fact articles from The Onion. C the correct option, an article from AP news from February 4, 2024. And whether deciphering reality from fantasy - it is evident that a lot of the time, it is not an easy job, as truth is both complex and nuanced.

From the beginning people have argued and debated over the same historical event, showing that history is built on perspective, and that perspective is what historical revisionism is. Today, let's look at what exactly historical revisionism is by examining its foundation, Examples of it, and the concept's wider implications. Because, If we do not understand how our history is defined, we cannot make history moving forward.

The United State's National Endowment for the Humanities states **"history is created by the application of human thought and imagination to what's left behind."** So, when we speak on what Historical Revisionism really is, it is crucial to understand how the concept is defined, and its history of development. Initially, through the use of different methodologies, revisionists reinterpret our past in a way that diverges from its already established viewpoint - And that is why \_\_\_\_ describes Historical revisionism as the "....." But to the extent to which this practice is beneficial, harmful, or somewhere in the middle is debatable. The interpretations of history which are chosen with a are often derived from the prevailing thoughts or biases of the time, both in popular culture and in academia. Hence, why many find this detrimental as this count easily leads to important historical factions from being distorted.

Now, to better understand the nuances of historical revisionism, let's examine its History. Historical revisionism has a wide range of interpretations. We can isolate two historical themes of how historical revisionism is applied in reaction to wide running changes and in order to challenge existing structures of thought. To delve into these themes, let's start by looking at Karl Marx's historical materialism, a foundational concept in understanding how economic forces shape historical development. Karl Marx, The Stanford Encyclopedia of History, first published on August 26th 2003 states that, **"historical materialism - centered around the idea that forms of society rise and fall as they further and then impede the development of human**

**productive power.”** Here Marx challenges the traditional view of history how history is created. Typically seen as a series of events driven solely by the actions of those in power and abstract ideas. Instead, he

Despite this, can historical revisionism actually be useful? The answer depends on the intentions and methodologies behind the efforts of revisionists, either to empower or take away from history. Legitimate historical revisionism, conducted with scholarly rigor and a commitment to uncover truth, can be incredibly beneficial. Furthermore, it can lead to a more nuanced and accurate understanding of the past, challenging outdated interpretation and shedding light on overlooked perspectives.

A prime example of this can be seen through the revaluation of Christopher Columbus. Traditionally celebrated as a hero who “discovered” America, even gaining a national day after him is now a subject of much controversy. Scholars have challenged the myth of Columbus as a benevolent explorer and instead highlighted the devastating impact of his voyages on the people of the Americas. They have documented the violence, genocide, exploitation, and cultural destruction inflicted upon indigenous communities. By critically reassessing Columbus’s legacy, legitimate historical revisionism has contributed to a more nuanced and accurate understanding of the past. This revelation has prompted important conversations of historical figures and the need to confront the uncomfortable truths about their legacies and colonialism.

On the flip side of this, historical revisionism can be detrimental when it is driven by ideological agendas or political motivations rather than a genuine pursuit of truth. When revisionist efforts prioritize promoting a particular narrative or agenda over objective analysis of historical evidence, they risk distorting the past and perpetuating misinformation, as well as to deny or minimize the impact of historical atrocities, such as genocide or systemic oppression, thereby erasing the experiences of victims and hindering efforts towards reconciliation and justice.

This is perhaps best exemplified through America’s treatment towards the Indigenous. Revisionist narratives regarding America’s treatment of Indigenous peoples often involve minimizing or denying the extent of colonial violence, land theft, forced assimilation, and cultural genocide perpetrated against Indigenous communities, has affected the perception of people greatly. Howard Schuman, a research scientist and professor emeritus at the Institute for Social Research (ISR), in his “Elite Revisionist on Popular Beliefs: Christopher Columbus, Hero or Villain?” published in Spring of 2005, states that **“the inertia of collective memory has sustained Columbus’s reputation in the face of criticism.”**

Furthermore, we can see how revisionist narratives seek to distort aspects of American history when we look at proponents of the manifest destiny ideology, **“it was the divinely ordained right of the United States to expand its borders to the Pacific Ocean and beyond.”** This was used to justify westward expansion of the United States by portraying Indigenous people as obstacles to progress or as primitive beings destined to be supplanted by European settlers. Furthermore, this self-serving concept has been used as the prime rationale in the removal and

degradation of the Indigenous and their native homelands, the effects of which are still being reckoned with to this day.

Historical revisionism also forces a reexamination of how identities are portrayed in historical narratives as society grows increasingly aware of the nuances of identity. This entails raising concerns about how national identities are created, dispelling myths and stereotypes, and elevating the voices of those whose experiences have been misrepresented or ignored. Historical revisionism enhances our comprehension of identity formation and representation across time by integrating intersectional viewpoints.

In this digital age, social media has expanded from being a site showcasing lifestyles and personalities, linking and building connections between people, and a form of social entertainment to a version where people turn to for the latest news updates, research on historical events, and even for all kinds of information. Especially misinformation, The rapid spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories on social media poses significant challenges to legitimate historical revisionism. False or distorted narratives can gain traction quickly, blurring the line between fact and fiction and undermining scholarly efforts to uncover the truth about the past.

Our perception of history is shaped by the lenses through which we view it. In our information-rich world, distinguishing fact from fiction is increasingly challenging. Historical revisionism, the reinterpretation of the past, plays a pivotal role in shaping our understanding of history.

We explored this ground-shaping concept by first looking into its conceptual framework and history, by looking at applications of revisionism and finally drawing critical implications. By critically evaluating sources and interrogating underlying motivations, we can strive for a more accurate understanding of the past. Without nuance, we risk distorting history and hindering our ability to comprehend and address the complexities of our present reality.

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