

The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past By John Lewis Gaddis The current discourses include previously neglected metrics such as the role of women.

And at the same time it impresses upon us those tendencies in human beings which have not changed and which accordingly are unlikely to at least in the immediate future. Given plenty of time and good food.

Gaddis proposes to show the nitty-gritty of history writing - the blueprints of how a historian constructs his structures and promises to use an over-abundance of crazy metaphors to do this. Who can resist that proposal? The aim of the book is to look at the process of creating and comprehending history - as an act of creation with its own processes, flaws and compromises. To illustrate this Gaddis suggests two contrasting positions for the historian - if you think of the past as a kind of landscape then the historian (standing over the historical landscape like *The Wanderer above a Sea of Fog* in Friedrich's 1818 painting) is always caught between these positions: of the simultaneous sense of significance and insignificance of detachment and engagement of mastery and humility of the personal and the general. The various chapters focus one by one on how the historian can go about achieving that state of suspension: the manipulation of time space and scale; the derivation of past processes from surviving structures; the particularization of generalization; the integration of randomness with regularity; the differentiation of causes; the obligation to get inside the mind of another person or another age but then to find your way out again. But the best part of the book is that through all of this Gaddis never disappoints on the promise he makes early on in the book - that the historian should indulge in metaphors because much of history is about comparison and metaphors are the best aids to comparison and hence comprehension that we have. Outrageous metaphors abound with time machines, fractals, never-ending coast lines, Roman roads and what not littering the pages but always used as a means of pushing the readers into looking at some familiar issues in unfamiliar ways. He also dedicates a lot of time to how history, the sciences and the rest of the social sciences have tracked their methods over time and takes pride in the dogged subjective stance adopted by history throughout - and it makes us realise that it is in fact true - historians seem to be the one bunch of scholars who have admirably resisted physics envy and stuck to their guns. Kudos to them! The biggest insight from this discussion is to observe how history tracks closer to the non-laboratory sciences like geology and cosmology in having to imagine processes to account for observed structures/results. After establishing quite nicely I must say the historical process and the limitations as well as the strengths of it Gaddis finally turns from the What and How of history to the Why of history and here the book disappoints. He only inverts the driving metaphor of the book - Caspar David Friedrich's 1818 painting *The Wanderer above a Sea of Fog* - and invites the reader to make an immediate shift in perspective - of seeing the painting not as the historian looking out across the past shrouded in fog but at the future. It might have sounded poignant and grand when writing it but after reading through a couple of hundred pages to arrive at a rhetorical conclusion I have to report it doesn't sound as grand in the reading. Carr wrote: "It does not follow that because a mountain appears to take on different shapes from different angles of vision it has objectively either no shape at all or an infinity of shapes. History - all those processes that happened in the past - does not change because of various interpretations, new metrics in terms of which it is measured and remeasured and the controversial character of some historical sources. Why should we study history? What methods do historians use? Why does history matter in the modern world? Did you know that history had some things in common with paleontology, cartography, tailoring, geology and even fractal geometry? According to the author the work of a historian in certain aspects resembles that of the above-mentioned disciplines. If we allow ourselves some simplification we may say that they process pieces of surviving information of different kinds (structures) put them through specific lenses (chosen discourse) and come up with a representation (a historical narrative). As Gaddis points out history operates by deriving processes from structures by fitting representations to realities by privileging neither induction nor deduction by remaining open — the word is consilience

— to what insights from one field can tell you about another. Like geologists and paleontologists they must allow for the fact that most sources from the past don't survive and that most daily events don't even generate a survivable record in the first place. For this reason alone it would be very difficult for history to repeat itself even if repeating patterns tend to recur with sufficient regularity to make themselves visible to scholars. Many things had to have happened Bloch pointed out in order to produce this outcome: the man had to have slipped; the path he was walking along had to have been built along the edge of a cliff; geological processes had to have uplifted the mountain from the plain; the law of gravity had to have been in effect; and Bloch might have added the Big Bang had to have occurred. His pragmatism builds on a very post-modern vision of history: the past is a foreign country we can only represent it by giving meaning to the remnants of the past in terms of what they explain. Just as there can be different maps of the same landscape there are also different descriptions (Gaddis chooses the word 'narratives') of the past possible; all of which are true as far as they lean as close to reality as possible. No relativism with Gaddis (there is truth): the past is not irremediably gone it is definitely out there open to questioning by us in the present and even sometimes actively adjusting our look on it: the history these representations represent has not changed. Precisely because there are different ways of mapping the landscape of the past we must be open to methodological tolerance that too is pragmatism: Within a single narrative we can be Rankeans or Marxists or Freudians or Weberians or even postmodernists to the extent that these modes of representation bring us closer to the realities for which we're trying to account. And finally it is the continuing debate among historians (and non-historians) on the outcome of these different approaches which may lead to a consensus about the past albeit a provisional one. He even offers a bold reversal of thought: Gaddis refers to the chaos and complexity theory to suggest that the hard sciences gradually move in the direction of what historians have long been doing: approaching reality as a complex system a web-like thing where everything is connected to everything. I'm not so pleased though with Gaddis' quite crude attack on social sciences and their supposed reductionism: The methods of historians are closer to those of certain natural scientists than to those of most social scientists- because too many social scientists in their efforts to specify independent variables have lost sight of a basic requirement of theory which is to account for reality. Perhaps that is true for certain trends in the social sciences but I think Gaddis here is generalizing too much and perhaps more expresses a personal inferiority complex as a historian. Anyway Gaddis is right that when historians adhere to their pragmatic methodology they are building a sound scientific view of reality different perhaps but as meritorious as that of other sciences. 0000195171578 For most of this book I found myself thinking This is a perfect example of the sort of discursive fluff that emeritus professors grant themselves license to write but which they would have fiercely criticized if they had read while younger. Gaddis attempts to illuminate the work of the historian with references to time machines black holes number theory fractals chaos theory quantum physics consciousness ecology and God knows what else all the while displaying that he doesn't have much clue about the subjects he refers to and thus rendering somewhat questionable the conclusions he draws from such comparisons. In the midst of this he spends a long chapter ridiculing social science in a witty but superficial way that reads more like a coffee-and-cigarettes-fueled common-room debate than a reasoned and analytical argument. Perhaps it is necessary to remind listeners of what you talked about last week or a few weeks ago but not readers who can if they feel the need simply open the book at the earlier point to refresh their memories. I almost abandoned the book at several points which would have been a pity because almost hidden underneath the blizzard of flippant comments and airy metaphors are some important topics about which Gaddis has some interesting things to say namely: what is it that historians do what does it mean to say that a work of historical scholarship has been done well and what is it good for? There's an excellent book to be written about these topics. At the same time he fiercely defends the value of that representation provided that it fits as close as possible to reality (supported by sources) and leaves room for questioning so that a final consensus can grow between professional and non-professional observers of the past. Gaddis has a very pragmatic view he constantly compares the writing of history to the making of a map (in

which the past obviously is a kind of landscape); he firmly rejects relativism because according to him there is indeed a reality of the past that continually allows querying by us (every time from a different present). Gaddis also devotes many pages to the question whether history actually is a science a question that has intrigued and divided historians and non-historians since the beginning of the 20th century. According to him social scientists are stuck in earlier (positivist) thinking patterns and in their obsessive quest for independent variables they only end up with models that barely touch reality. 0000195171578 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. 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. 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. John Lewis Gaddis took an opportunity to tell us his experience and wisdom by using various material and immaterial cultural elements focusing on the material to explain his relationship to writing history. Then he goes with Jorge Luis Borges' fable about "the Cartographers Guilds struck a map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire and which coincided point for point with it. However this relativity and inherent bias of a research doesn't not mean that postmodernist critique of in attainability of truth is valid: "It would be most unwise for sailors to conclude simply because we cannot specify the length of the British coastline that it isn't there and that they can sail self-confidently through it. So too it would be imprudent for historians to decide from the fact that we have no absolute basis for measuring time and space that they can't know anything about what happened within them. Then he follows with a question is a history a science? He argues that a more correct question should be which sciences are similar to history? - disciplines that depend upon thought experiments like astronomy geology paleontology or evolutionary biology phenomena that rarely fit within laboratories and the time required to see results can exceed the life spans of those who seek them. Like geologists and paleontologists they must allow for the fact that most sources from the past don't survive and that most daily events don't even generate a survivable record in the first place. According to him history differs from other social sciences is that while they try to distinguish independent from dependent variables (reductionism) history stresses interconnections thus has an ecological view of reality. While the ecological approach also values the specification of simple components it does not stop with that: it considers how components interact to become systems whose nature can't be defined merely by calculating the sum of their parts. They are still in Newtonian concept of clockwork universe while both physics (and history) moved ahead to chaos theory to Henri Poincaré's ideas that some things are predictable and some are not; regularities coexist with apparent randomness; both simplicity and complexity characterize the world in which we live. As he shows:It would make no sense for example to begin an account of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor with the launching of the planes from their carriers: you'd want to know how the carriers came to be within range of Hawaii which requires explaining why the government in Tokyo chose to risk war with the United States. Which of course resulted from the opportunity provided by France's defeat at the hands of Nazi Germany together with the frustrations Japan had encountered in trying to conquer China. Accounting for all of this however would require some attention to the rise of authoritarianism and militarism during the 1930s which in turn had something to do with the Great Depression as well as the perceived inequities of the post—World War I settlement and so on. You could continue this process all the way back to the moment hundreds of millions of years earlier when the first Japanese island rose up in great billowing clouds of steam and smoke from what was to become the Pacific Ocean. But no work of history has ever been written without making some kind of statement—explicitly or implicitly consciously or subconsciously—about where its subjects lie along the ubiquitous spectrum that separates the admirable from the abhorrent. Because no two historians will ever perform this task in just the same way there can be no single standard for

objectivity in biography or for that matter in all of history. In a weird way the non-lab sciences do something quite similar to historians: they look at structures and phenomena that exist in the present (the equivalent of sources) and project into the past narratives about the processes that created those phenomena. What you often end up with is conclusions that are either broad and obvious (people pursue their interests thanks rational choice!) or deterministic in the sense that individual narratives are forced into broader theoretical frameworks. Historians approach causation holistically: they find it difficult and counterproductive to tease out the condition or decision that if removed from or added to a set of cases would trigger a similar outcome. They believe that in human affairs (molecules with minds of their own as Gaddis puts it) you can't separate one causal factor from another as the switch factor that determines the event. Causation for us is about how forces ideas personalities cultures etc (variables if you will) interact and ping off each other forming often unpredictable outcomes that are highly rooted in context. Social science also creates a significant confirmation bias: if you think factor X (geography GDP type of government rational self-interest) was most important to causing a certain event you are likely to find and focus on that side of the story. As Winthrop Jordan a great historian of racism in Western culture once put it: A comprehension of the past seems to have two opposite advantages in the present: it makes us aware of how different people have been in other ages and accordingly enlarges our awareness of the possibilities of human experience he coined metaphors about the profession and freehandedly slandered the leaders of communism. Gaddis is shameless in employing cheap anti-communist myths like an extremely intolerant Stalin who even crushed his parrot's head because he felt like the parrot was humiliating him (p. But meanwhile Winston Churchill the supervisor of Bengal Famine in India which killed nearly 3 million people; Churchill the white supremacist who was involved in the construction of the concentration camps in South Africa and Churchill the instigator of 1944 Athens Massacre is cherished as the great man (s:

People draw maps of different scales and expect them to serve a variety of purposes. A world map will not help us find our way around town: A historical narrative is always an approximate description of this or that historical event, There were and still are so many voices buried under a thick layer of silence: Scholars attempt to get them to the surface and work on making them audible. This book is very useful for graduate students who want to poke their heads out of the archives for a day and think about their profession more broadly. I also recommend it for historians or social scientists who are interested in the differences and similarities between their disciplines. 0000195171578 A reactionary Cold War historian (a friend and an advisor to George W. Bush) was invited to Oxford to share his invaluable musings on historical writing: Being suspended between these polarities and being aware of it to Gaddis is what historical consciousness is all about, 5 stars rounded up Before starting my review I want to outline the one idea that is in the foreground of the book. The book is an extended essay in which John Lewis Gaddis tries to answer several questions that are well known to most history buffs, I had better quote from the book: history like cartography is necessarily a representation of reality. Like paleontologists historians attempt to reconstruct the flesh of historical events and figures on the basis of relics - surviving bones that are accessible, Unless a scholar has the privilege of traveling through time to the past in a time machine to see for sure she must rely on such structures. For a historian those relics are structures generated by historical processes: History can be thought of as processes that took place at some point in the past. The remnants of these processes that have persisted until our day are regarded as surviving structures: Those structures embrace a wide range of archival documents material objects (bones and excrement tools and weapons) and cultural products (great ideas and works of art), The main goal of a narrative is to simulate what transpired in the past, One of the metaphors with which the essay abounds concerns the idea of 'fitting': While deducing historical facts and developing their representations historians must try to reach a consensus among themselves, At the same time their representations are subject to constant standardizing based on comparing them to the surviving historical evidence: For historians too start with surviving structures whether they be archives

artifacts or even memories, As no one needs the one-to-one map no one needs a one-to-one correspondence between a representation and past reality it is intended to describe, A scholar who spends many hours and days on their research is a human being with his or her predilections, The likelihood of finding a completely unbiased researcher is no greater than of winning a large sum in the lottery, The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past it seems has been geared towards students and young researchers. Professional historians would probably find its content and main points too obvious: However the author has succeeded in bringing the complexity of history to light, The writing style despite many striking metaphors and pertinent analogies is somewhat boring. Thus I have some doubts that amateurs would enjoy this text: As a bonus I invite you to have a look at a simple example (given below in italics) that describes the complexity of almost every case in history. Most events have several antecedents or many things have to have happened in order for an event to take place, Marc Bloch speaks of a man falling to his death from a precipice. Still anyone asked the cause of the accident would probably reply: "a misstep. " The reason Bloch explained is that this particular antecedent differed from all the others in several ways: "it occurred last; it was , the most exceptional in the general order of things; [and] finally by virtue of this greater particularity it seems the antecedent which could have been most easily avoided, " 0000195171578

Two things I appreciate about this book: Gaddis' pragmatism and his attempt to put the writing of history back on the scientific map: It's like making a map of a landscape: also a selection but a quite useful one: It's back there in the past just as solidly as that still imprecisely measured coastline: It's this reality that keeps our representations from flying into fantasy(p: We're free to describe evoke quantify qualify and even reify if these techniques serve to improve the 'fit' we're trying to achieve: Second merit: history indeed is a science! Historians according to Gaddis are scientific experimentalists par excellence they constantly test their conclusions on what sources say: Thus they do exactly what the hard scientists more and more do in an ongoing revision of intuitive practical and theoretical approaches fitting things together, Obviously he doesn't focus on the scientists in their laboratory but rather on geologists paleontologists astronomers evolutionary biologists etc. They reduce complexity to simplicity in order to anticipate the future but in doing so they oversimplify the past (p: That tempts him into outright derogatory statements: Historians are in much less demand than social scientists when it comes to making recommendations for future policy: We have the consolation in contrast to them though of more often getting things right(p: I'm not defending social science here which I think often suffers from the ills Gaddis refers to but rather criticizing the unseriousness of the approach: The book was adapted from a series of lectures and it shows: In addition the sort of humor that works in a lecture probably shouldn't be directly transferred to the printed page. 0000195171578 John Lewis Gaddis builds on the work of Marc Bloch and E. Carr two renowned historians that have eloquently put into words where the writing of history actually stands for what its own epistemological criteria and methodological rules are: Fortunately Gaddis has integrated - 50 years later - the profound changes that have happened in the meantime in historiography and in the sciences in general. This is in the first place postmodernism and especially the cultural turn of Hayden White and others: Gaddis rightly points out that historiography only gives a representation of the past in the form of a story (a narrative) and not the past itself: Surprisingly Gaddis argues that history leans much more to some of the hard sciences than the social sciences do. He zooms in on elements of the chaos- and complexity theory that have pushed the hard sciences to take into account the uncertainty principle in complex systems, History did so much earlier he states because ultimately the past is an extremely complex system: That is a worthy argument with which historians finally can get rid of their frustration and minority complex, But Gaddis drives his thesis too far especially in his provocative stance on the social sciences. Interesting and to some extent correct for sure but to my feeling not quite fair for the social sciences in general, In short this is definitely an interesting book which apart from a number of provocative statements finally puts historiography back on the scientific map, 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. 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, It will be essential reading for anyone who reads writes teaches or cares about history: *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* Long ago I took a historiography seminar. Since I often read histories I wanted to sharpened my historiographical understanding. As one approaches the end date courage increases a need to share Experience and Wisdom becomes imperative: A familiarity with WWII and the Cold War--just a working one--allows access to this gem. I am glad that I read *Rise of the Machines: A Cybernetic History* by Thomas Rid in 2019 in which I was reminded of the continuing Cold War. 0000195171578 This is a philosophical essay about what history is what are its goals etc. I read it as a part of monthly reading for April 2021 at Non Fiction Book Club group. The book starts with a picture that is on its cover - Caspar David Friedrich *The Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, The author compares the man on the picture with a historian who looks on the fog of past from the present (and we watchers look at him from a future): " - just like such a map lacks any sense so a historian doesn't represent the history in its fullness but selects some items over others: Just like a road map omits things that are important for e. weather map a history should serve some goals set by a historian: Like biologists and astrophysicists they must deal with ambiguous or even contradictory evidence, And like all scientists who work outside of laboratories historians must use logic and imagination to overcome the resulting difficulties their own equivalent of thought experiments. It allows for fundamental particles but it seeks to place them within an equally fundamental universe, The ecological viewpoint is inclusive even as the reductionist perspective is exclusive: Reductionism within the social sciences actually comes from their attempts to forecast the future: Historians are as a consequence in much less demand than social scientists when it comes to making recommendations for future policy. So they err less :) More interesting is that for him the methods of historians are closer to those of certain natural scientists than to those of most social scientists. The reason is that too many social scientists in their efforts to specify independent variables have lost sight of a basic requirement of theory which is to account for reality, They reduce complexity to simplicity in order to anticipate the future but in doing so they oversimplify the past, Then he in depth looks at a problem of causation - an impossibility to get the initial cause for each has something preceding it like any person had parents back ad infinitum, First the distinction is between the immediate the intermediate and the distant, Historians tend to start with some particular phenomenon—large or small—and then trace its antecedents. Or they begin with structures and then derive the processes that produced them: But you can't do that without discussing the American oil embargo against Japan which in turn was a response to the Japanese takeover of French Indochina, Should a historian take sides? Nobody worries within the "hard" sciences about the morality of molecules, There'll never be a consensus on the reputation of Peter the Great any more than there'll be on the length of the British coastline. There certainly is a consensus though on the existence of both and indeed on the fact that the former once sailed along the latter, 0000195171578 Another excellent work from my favorite historian this time about how historians think and how they differ from social scientists and scientists: One of my favorite points in the book was his discussion of social science history and non-laboratory sciences (geology evolutionary biology some fields of physics etc): A historian does basically the same thing when she for example excavates the history of a building an institution an ideology or an event, In contrast the social sciences seem stuck with a desire to imitate lab sciences by forming hypotheses that can be tested empirically and that explain multiple disparate phenomena. While my knowledge of the hard sciences is limited I thought the idea that non-lab sciences and history both focus on narrative in contrast to social science was very compelling. The key difference that Gaddis sketches out between history and social science seems to be the existence of independent variables. This is why I caution

historians against reading too much social science or critical (race gender etc) theory, It creates a sort of a priori here's how phenomenon X works let's go see how in case Z bias in people's work, They will certainly find what they are looking for but that doesn't mean they are improving our understanding of the historical event or process, Gaddis seems keen on this risk even though he has been quite engaged with international relations theorists throughout his career (as historians should be), He's tough on social scientists but his criticisms are well-informed and measured, Lastly I liked Gaddis' point about history as a personally and socially liberating discipline: He's not talking about history as advocacy here a major problem in today's scholarship (and all other times as well). What he means is that historians are moral beings and can't totally separate what they study from judgement about the material, If history is going to have a tilt towards liberation or oppression it should tilt towards liberation, Here's how: history shows us that the sources of oppression and suffering are human in origin contextual and contingent on certain circumstances and conditions: Within reason what is made by human beings can be unmade at least in part. It's clear that rights revolutions throughout the world have deployed history in this way: Historians need not be open advocates for certain political positions to show how systems of oppression or disastrous decision came to pass: We are probably the best equipped discipline to do this and we should do so as objectively and concretely as possible, Thus we learn about horrendous examples of what Hitler did in Germany what Lenin and Stalin did in the Soviet Union and what Mao Zedong did in China (p: This book is more about a reactionary historian's way of thinking than the historical writing in general. The same principle works for historical narratives. Certain details would inevitably elude us. Today history is becoming more and more polyphonic. 0000195171578 Thoughts soon. Nevertheless a must read for students of history. 0000195171578 3. The historian E.H."The same applies to history. To replicate the past would be a manifest impossibility. Historians work with representations of the past. They then deduce the processes that produced them. Another metaphor that the author employs deals with maps. Not to say that both are no more than mere chimeras. Instead minorities discourse sexuality disease and culture. Also Gaddis touches on the question of subjectivity. Much has been written about them (cf. The Historian's Craft by Marc Bloch). On top of that the author gets repetitive at times. While reading I frequently wanted to take notes. For me this does speak in favor of the book. .125). Whatever works in short we should use.(108).71).58). And that is no small achievement. I really loved this little book. Then there is the repetition of concepts arguments and examples. but this isn't that book. H. Written in the tradition of Marc Bloch and E.H. I have selected a few quotes to include here. There are other concepts and ideas to reread and reconsider. A gem. As such it actually covers a lot of subjects.g. However we don't usually go back quite that far. Finally he raises a question of moral judgements in history. You can't escape thinking about history in moral terms. Nor according to him should you try to do so. An interesting mix of ideas. I'd love to hear from some hard scientists on this. 127). 117). 138). 0000195171578

