**Historiography** is the study of how history has been written and analyzed. Historians must consider the era, perspectives, and agendas of their primary and secondary sources as they determine historical arguments. “The history of history.”

**PROVIDENTIAL (1600-1700s)**

**Characteristics:**

The development of the United States is viewed as a chronicle of God’s hand in American affairs. The founding of colonies, such as Massachusetts, and the American Revolution are a result of God’s divine providence and a victory of Protestantism over Catholicism.

John Winthrop – *The Journal of John Winthrop* (1630-1649)

Cotton Mather – *Limitation of Government* (1655)

**RATIONALIST (1700s-Early 1800s)**

**Characteristics:**

The focus of the rationalist perspective, in contrast to the providential view, is natural law as the source of progress and reason rather than God’s divine intervention. Historians emphasized the Enlightenment principles and a more secular version of America’s development.

William Byrd – *The History of the Dividing Line*

Thomas Hutchinson – *The History of the Massachusetts Bay Colony* (1764)

Thomas Jefferson – *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785)

David Ramsay – *The History of the American Revolution* (1789)

**NATIONALIST (Late 1800s-Early 1900s)**

**Characteristics:**

Historians promoted Anglo-Saxon superiority with the continuing spread of American democratic principles across the continent and, hopefully, throughout the world.

George Bancroft – *History of the United States* (1888)

Helen Hunt Jackson – *A Century of Dishonor* (1881)

Josiah Strong – *Our Country: Its Possible Future and its Present Crisis* (1885)


Source: Couvares, Francis G. *Interpretations of American History*, pgs. 4-24
APUSH AMERICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY AND SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

PROGRESSIVE HISTORY (1914-1940s)

Characteristics:

Struggle and conflict, such as between classes, regions, ideologies, shaped the nation’s history. Historians emphasized these struggles and conflicts as a means to expand liberty and democracy.

Authors:

Frederick Jackson Turner – *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (1893)

Charles Beard – *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (1913)

Arthur Schlesinger – *The Age of Jackson* (1945)

CONSENSUS HISTORY (1940s-1960s)

Characteristics:

Traditional American values and a strong sense of nationalism define the history of the United States as a chronicle of success domestically and abroad. The idea of conflict between groups is minimized as most Americans shared Lockean principles, such as individual liberty and private property. Historians tended to illustrate the Cold War as a struggle to defend liberty and democracy against Soviet encroachment.

Authors:

Richard Hofstadter – *The Age of Reform* (1955)

Louis Hartz – *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1955)

Daniel Boorstin – *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (1973)

REVISIONIST/NEW LEFT (1960s-1980s)

Characteristics:

From a bottom-up approach, the experiences of minority classes, exploited by the ruling classes, along with a focus on the history of radical dissent highlight this approach to American history. Historians tended to view the United States and Soviet Union equally guilty of pushing their respective ideologies on their spheres of influence during the Cold War.

Authors:

Michael Harrington – *The Other America* (1962)


Source: Couvares, Francis G. *Interpretations of American History*, pgs. 4-24
NEO-WHIG/REPUBLICAN (1960s-Present)

Characteristics:

Historians focus American progress based on traditional values and national unity expounded by the earlier Conservative historians. Using the American Revolution as a case study, Neo-Whig/Republican historians viewed it as a political struggle to ensure republicanism rather than the Progressive and Revisionist/New Left perspective of the Revolution as a result of class warfare.

Authors:


NEW SOCIAL HISTORY (1980s-Present)

Characteristics:

Continuing the New Left’s bottom-up approach, historians focus on the experiences and perspectives of common folk rather than primarily basing historical understanding on the experiences of those with power and influence. The idea of conflict still shapes American history, but it is a primarily cultural conflict rather than political or economic. Further understanding of American History should be done through comparative studies by viewing the United States from a global perspective.

Authors:

