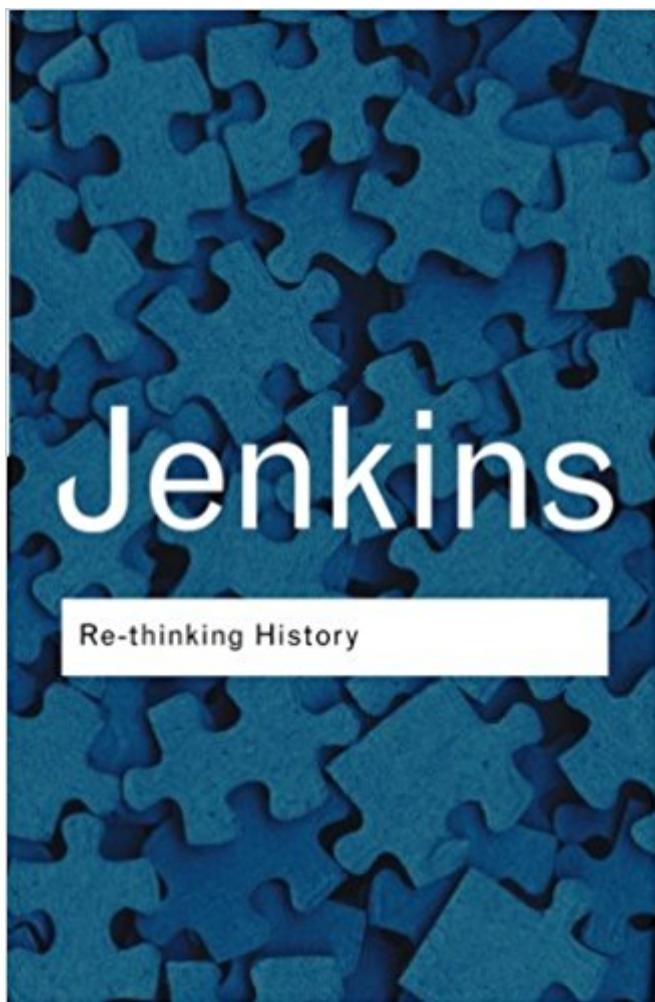


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Rethinking History (Routledge Classics) (Volume 96)



Synopsis

History means many things to many people. But finding an answer to the question 'What is history?' is a task few feel equipped to answer. If you want to explore this tantalising subject, where do you start? What are the critical skills you need to begin to make sense of the past? The perfect introduction to this thought-provoking area, Jenkins' clear and concise prose guides readers through the controversies and debates that surround historical thinking at the present time, providing them with the means to make their own discoveries.

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Customer Reviews

'Far and away the best introduction to the state of the question currently available.' - Hayden White, University of California at Santa Cruz, USA

Keith Jenkins (1943-). Professor of Historical Theory, University College Chichester, UK

Keith Jenkins illustrates how the retelling of history is problematic and how we must examine our history to find the gaps that lie within it. Jenkins draws from narrative theory to illustrate the problematizing of history through chronos and story telling. First of all it suggests that events 1 and 2 lead to event three where as they may or may not be related at all. Jenkins in his argument demonstrates the difference between the past and history and how they correlate with one another. He draws upon historical events and illustrates how our retelling may be questionable or even

downright false. The book is short and enjoyable to read. It is thought-provoking and will encourage you to dive deeper into the question of what is history. I also recommend reading Hayden White as his insights are also interesting. Enjoy!

The other reviews on give excellent presentations of the arguments contained in this short and well-written book. I will just add a few thoughts. Keith Jenkins wrote this book with the express purpose of introducing "deconstructionist" ideas into a generally conservative discipline. He is concerned with the lack of discussion of theory in history circles and, when discussed, by its limiting scope. Keith Jenkins is convinced that we live in a post-modern world, a world in which everything is ideologically positioned and morally relative; where nothing is fixed and everything is open to revision. This book basically applies these insights to historiography (the theory of how history is practiced and written). Keith Jenkins, who is basically an expositor of the ideas of Hayden White, is seen here attempting a popularization of a lot of Hayden White's work. Needless to say he is incredibly successful in this. Keith Jenkins presents these arguments in very readable and intelligible terms, and shows that history is what historians do when they want to understand the past. History and the past are two completely different things. The past is that which precedes us here in the present, and history is the way historians write about it. But because people are always ideologically motivated and positioned in the present, authoring an objectively true account of the past is impossible because facts must be selected in an infinitely rich and inexhaustible world, making those facts which come to be selected ideologically-laden. Moreover, there is no way to compare the relative merits of competing accounts of the past because the past itself is not an account, but a series of past events. Therefore, since there is no fundamentally correct "text" or account to which all other accounts can be compared, all we have are variations (interpretations) of the past, each equally groundless and ideological. Keith Jenkins does, however, offer a novel defense of relativism in this book, parting company with Hayden White. Hayden White argues that relativism is desirable because it serves as the basis for "social toleration and the positive recognition of differences" (page 68). Once we recognize that there is no such thing as a correct view of the past, we can begin to entertain seriously other interpretations that differ radically from ours both in the style of argument and in the conclusions reached. Relativism, White argues, should prevail because it promotes a respect for diversity and creativity. Keith Jenkins takes a "power struggle" view and argues that some positions are deemed more correct than others because they have managed to gain control of the power structures. Citing Foucault, Jenkins argues the "knowledge is related to power" (page 31), and that notions of truth are "dependent on somebody

having the power to make it true. ... [T]ruth and similar expressions are devices to open, regulate and shut down interpretations. Truth acts as a censor - it draws the line" (page 38-39). This is an interesting argument, and I found it persuasive. Anyway, this book is recommended not only as an introduction to historiography, but to postmodernism as well. Consider it the most reader-friendly application of postmodern ideas to historiography out right now! A very entertaining read. I would also recommend Jenkins' follow-up book, "Refiguring History", a much more mature and sustained work that contains wonderful discussions of the philosophy of Derrida.

This book was recommended to me by a musicologist at the University of California San Diego, and it is apparently in their progressive (even radical) syllabus. It is a short, succinct, well-organized explanation of what the practice of history actually is. It is NOT, Jenkins said, a window to the past, and no work by a historian will ever provide an objective recreation of the past as it was. What historians do is provide new insights into the historiographical discourse by taking an ideological stance (which is inevitable- there is no neutral/central position) and then using it to illuminate interpretations of history that can actually enhance our understanding of the present world. The book involves a lot of deconstructionist ideas but without much depth to them (since it's waaaay beyond the scope), but it has a great bibliography and encourages the reader to keep a critical eye on all of the ideas so that they can decide for themselves what to accept and adopt. I certainly won't accept all of his positions, but I'm glad I read the book.

You either love or hate what Jenkins says. He gives the low down on how history is seen by different people. Very good author, Provides an interesting view on history and could make someone change their mind about studying the discipline. The book was packaged well and looked new. Just as ordered.

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