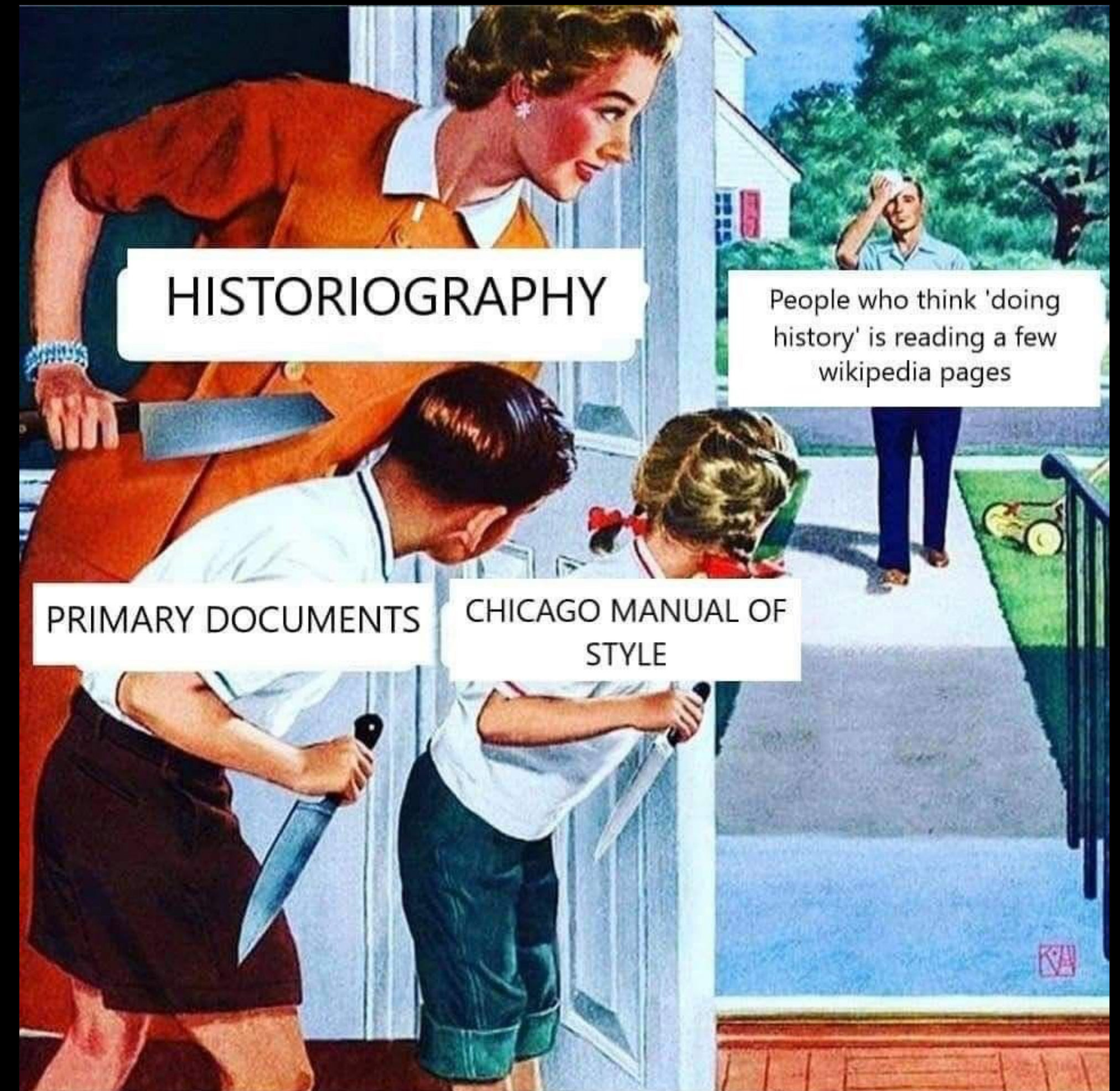


Sharing Lessons / Teaching Historiography

GECCO GEHP Workshop
June 26, 2023

Roark Atkinson



Silly Historiography Meme I Found On Google (SHMIFOG)

Things we could discuss after the presentation:

What do you think historiography is?

How do you teach it?

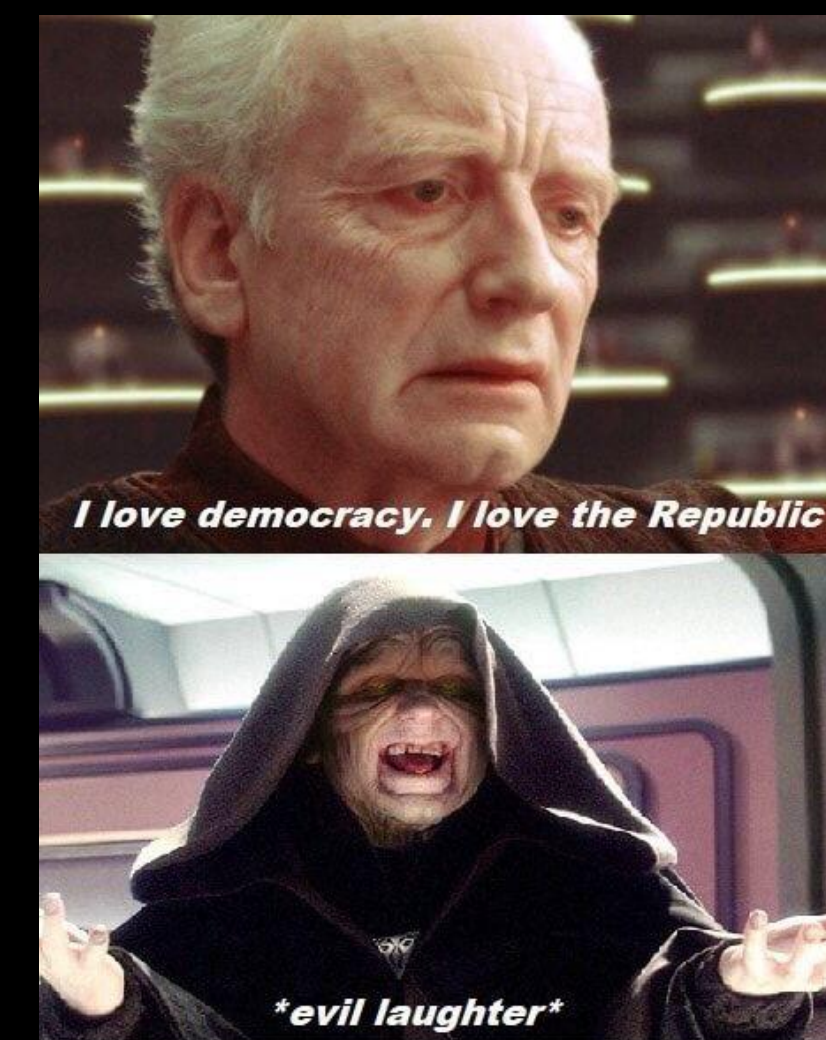
If you created a course that you submitted to GECCO, why did you decide to include historiography in your syllabus?

If you're not a historian, what is it about your discipline that most resembles historiography?

English students studying the entirety of their country's history



(SHMIFOG)



Britain in
British history
books

Britain in every
other history book

HIST-201 How to Make History

When I teach it, I help students answer the following questions, which were identified by Caroline Hoefflerle:

What kind of history do you like best?

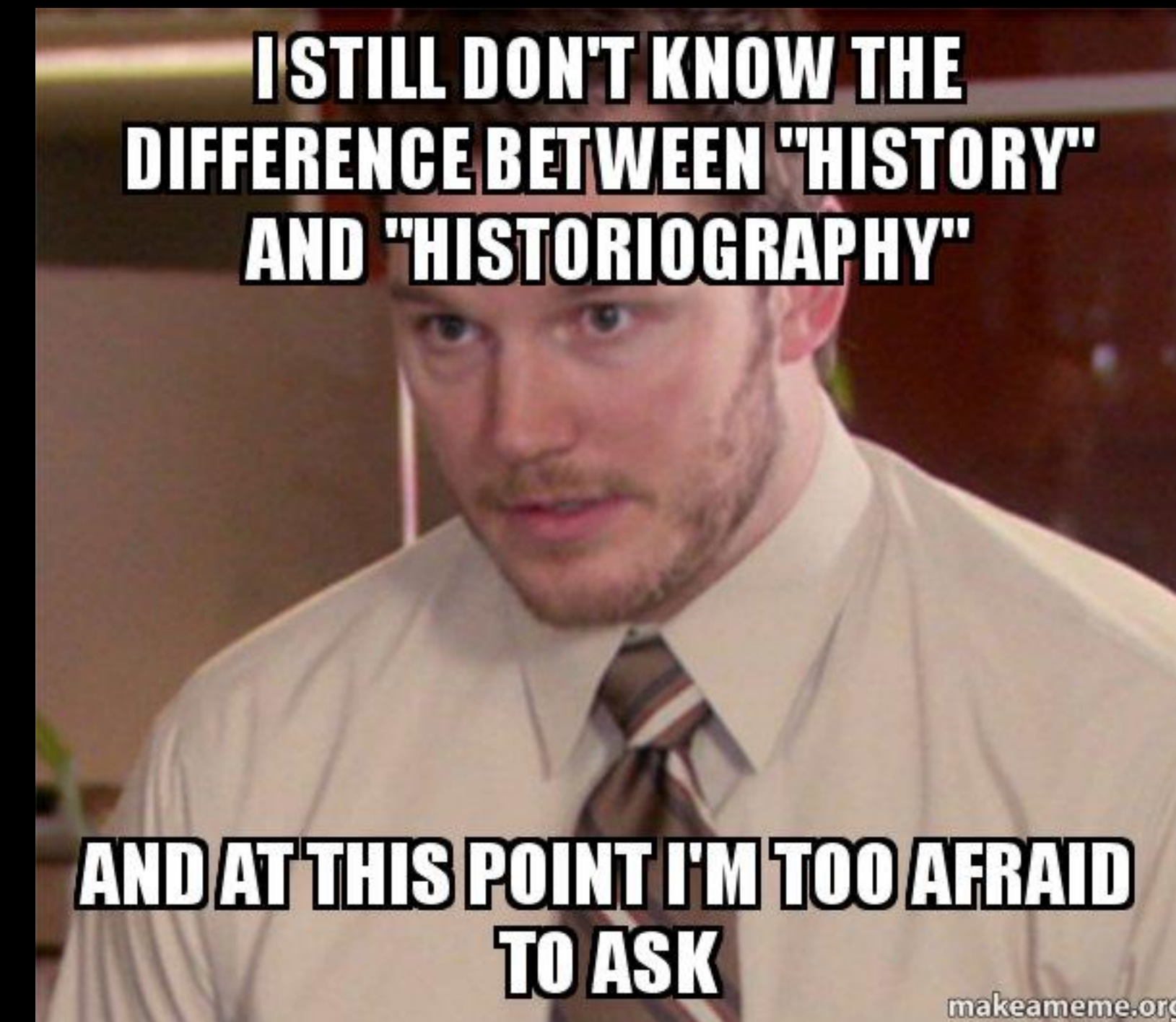
Why do you study history?

Who is your favorite historian?

What kind of historian will *you* be?

This may not be what you have in mind. But if it is, that's great, because students need help answering these questions and thereby understanding the importance of historiography.

Hoefflerle, Caroline. *The Essential Historiography Reader*. Pearson, 2011.

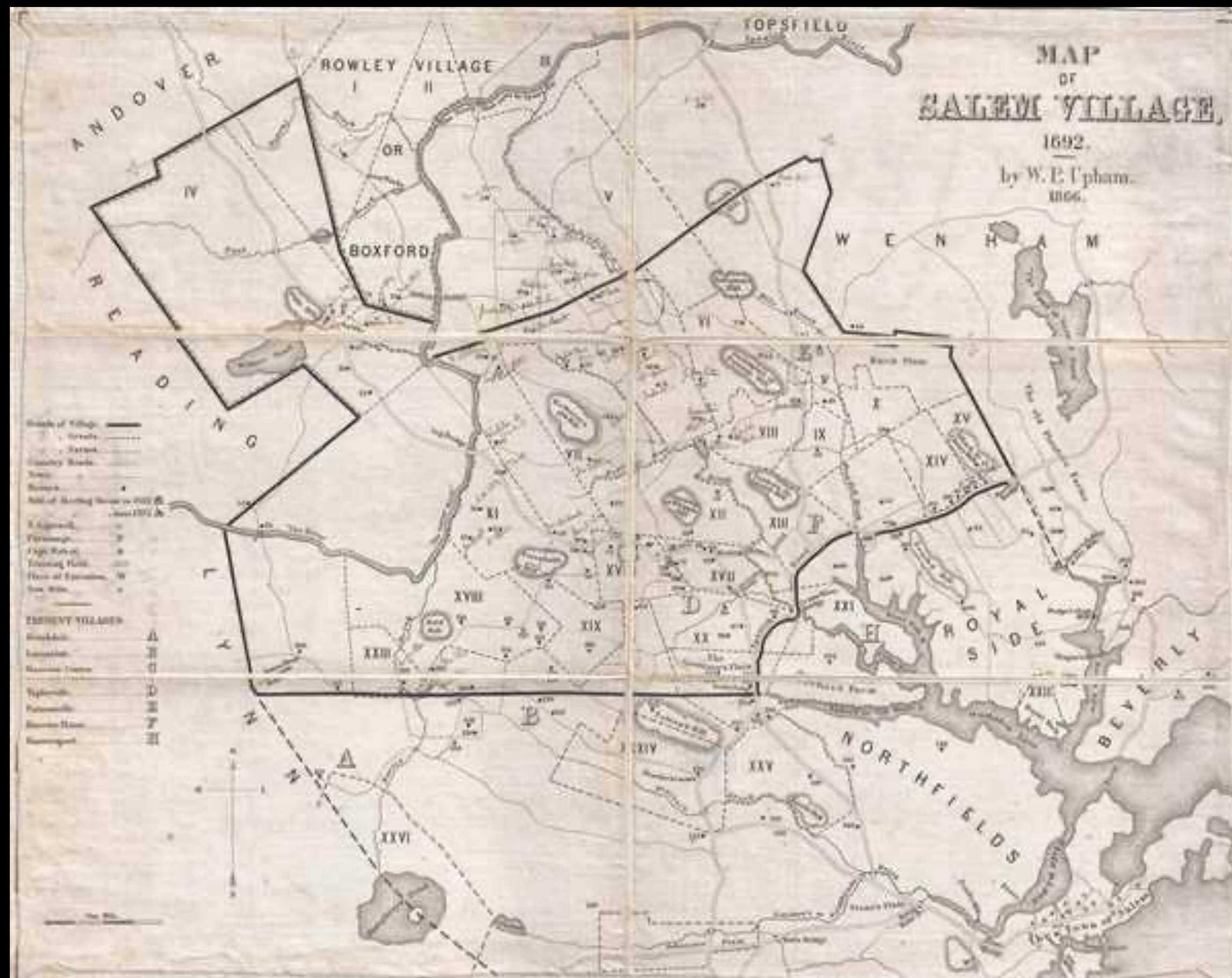


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Nuts and Bolts Example: *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (1974).

Right: "Map of Salem Village, 1692," frontispiece from Charles W. Upham, *Salem Witchcraft: With an Account of Salem Village and a History of Opinions on Witchcraft and Kindred Subjects* (Boston, 1867).

Paul Boyer and and Stephen Nissenbaum used this 19th-century map to create their own in the 1970s.



A Powerful Interpretation....

Boyer and Nissenbaum claimed to have found an explanation for the Salem witch trials.

The rural, poorer Salem Village residents (in the west) accused people living in the wealthier, commercializing Salem Town (in the east) of witchcraft.

The textbook I use puts it this way: “The Salem trials can be seen as an indirect yet anguished protest of a group of villagers whose agrarian way of life was being threatened by the rising commercialism of Salem Town.”

(Davidson, et al., *After the Fact*, 1992)

A simple and influential explanation, made all the more powerful with this famous map.

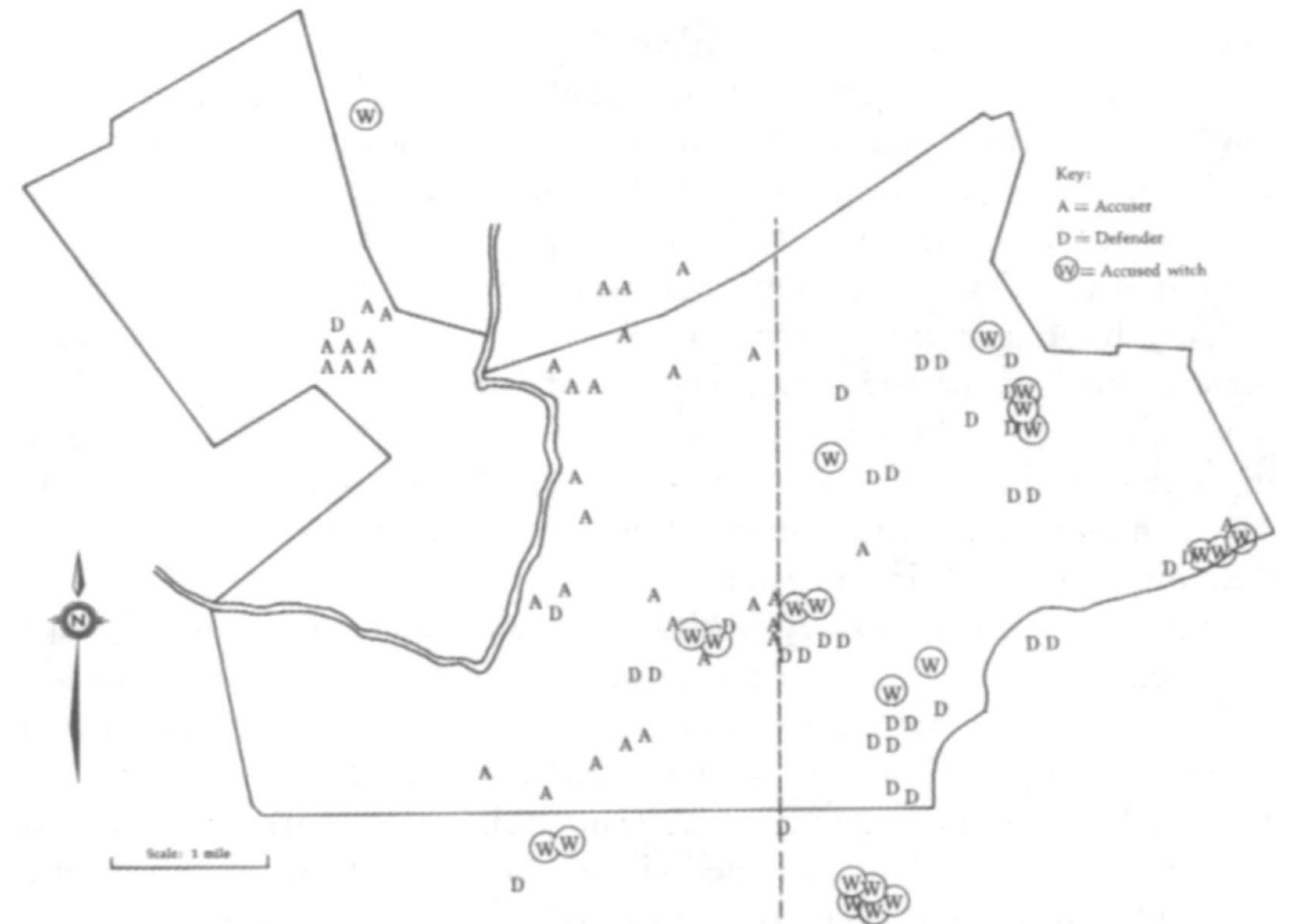


FIGURE II

“The Geography of Witchcraft: Salem Village, 1692,” in Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), 34. Courtesy, President and Fellows of Harvard College.

Not So Fast!

Benjamin C. Ray found numerous errors and omissions that basically invalidate Boyer and Nissenbaum's claims.

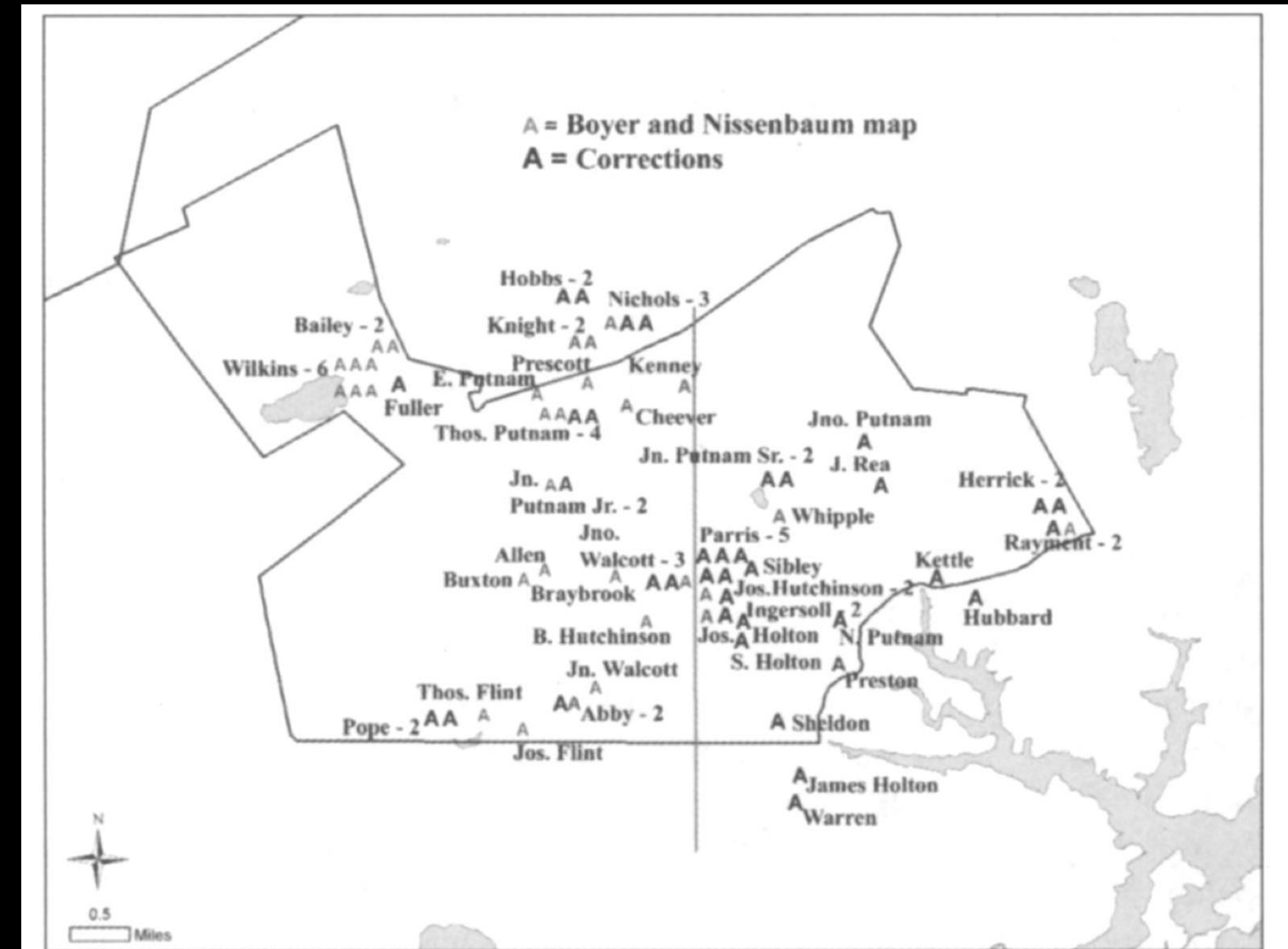


FIGURE IX

Corrections to the accusers delineated on "The Geography of Witchcraft: Salem Village, 1692." Numbers after the householders' names indicate the number of accusers in the households (if more than one).

Ray, Benjamin C. "The Geography of Witchcraft Accusations in 1692 Salem Village." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (2008): 449–78.

Some Good Reasons to Teach Historiography

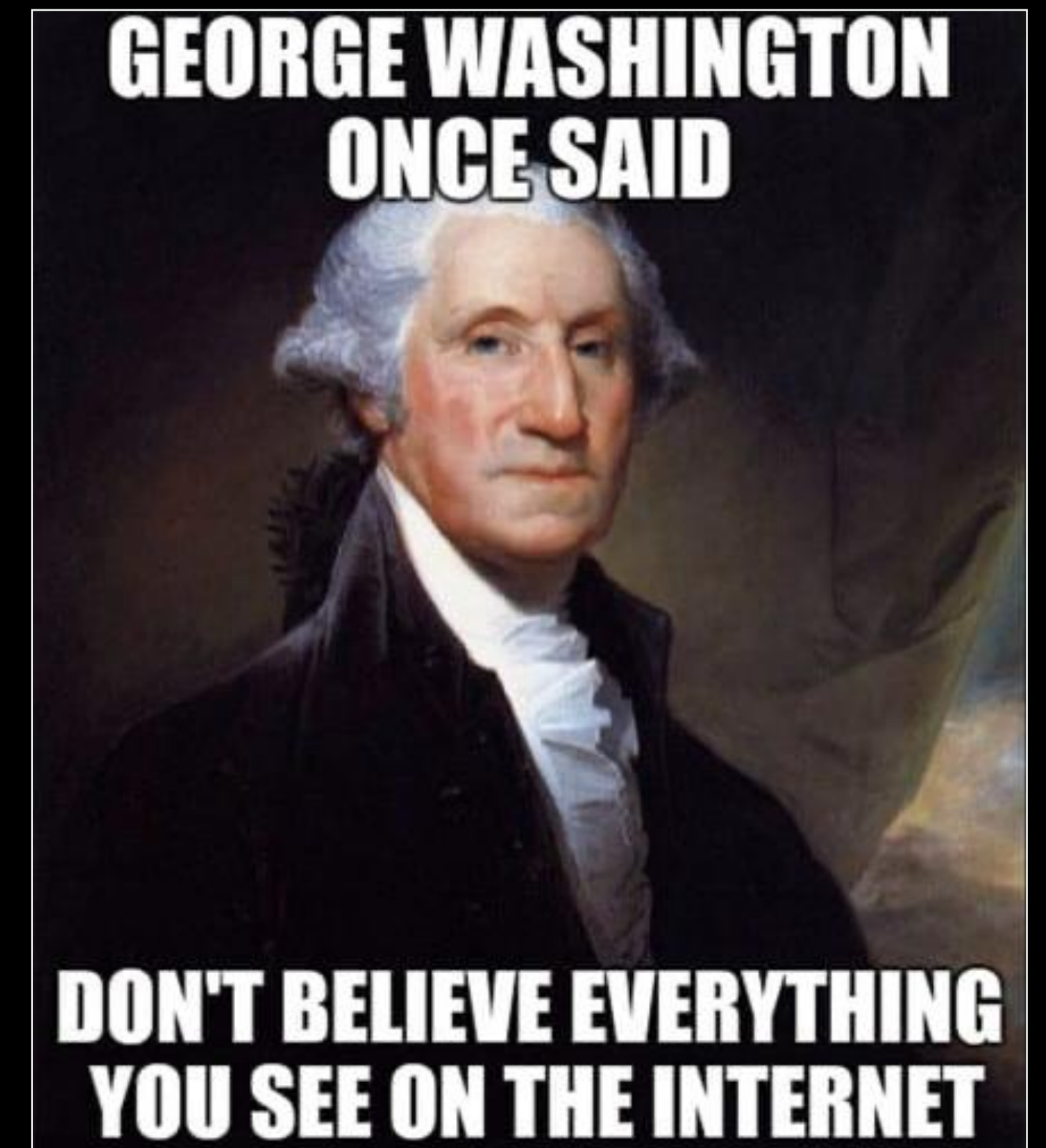
A dominant topic of historiography is the need for historical revision.

This can be because of *simple errors of fact*, as in the *Salem Possessed* example.

It's also important to learn how historians and other scholars reveal their research to a reader with the proper citation of sources (using Turabian/Chicago Style).

It's important for students to learn how to analyze truth claims 'sold' as history in all forms of media.

The thornier reason is to account for changes in societal attitudes, and therefore, changes in the *interpretation* of existing historical facts.



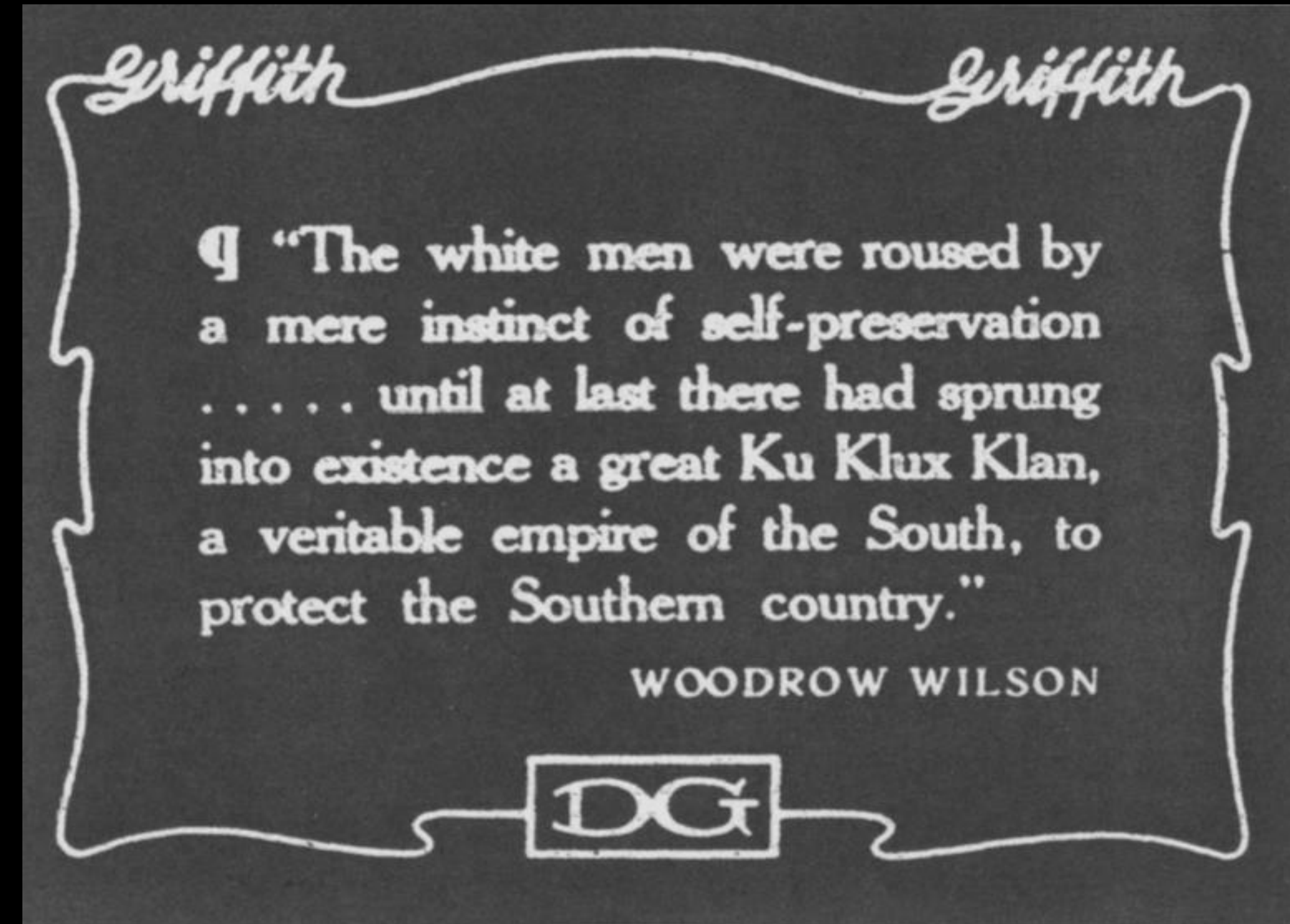
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Thornier Indeed: Creating a “Usable Past” of Reconstruction

Another way of thinking about it is to realize how unhelpful earlier interpretations would be if we applied them to present circumstances.

For example, President Wilson (Ph.D. in history), screened the film *Birth of a Nation* at the White House and supposedly said it was “like writing history with lightning.”* How helpful is this interpretation today?

Each generation has an opportunity to reevaluate history and create its own “usable past,” based on both a better understanding of the facts, and more accurate (and useful) interpretations.



One of three title cards used by director D. W. Griffith that quoted Woodrow Wilson in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915).

*Whether he actually said this is itself a subject of debate by historians. See: Mark E. Benbow, “Birth of a Quotation: Woodrow Wilson and ‘Like Writing History with Lightning,’” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 9, no. 4 (2010): 509–33. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20799409>.

What other ways can we teach historiography?

Today we'll offer two approaches for your consideration:

Assignment 1. The historiographical debates of the culture wars in news media.

Assignment 2. The changing historiographical approaches evident in textbooks from the past two centuries.



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Assignment 1: Historiography in the News

Extremely useful in helping students get familiar with the news media databases in Potter Library (Proquest, Nexis Uni, *The New York Times*, etc.).

Helpful in getting students to become discerning readers of news media generally.

Helps students learn to separate experts from charlatans.

Helps show that, as Faulkner wrote, “the past is never dead. It's not even past.”

(SHMIFOG)



“It's really cool to be alive in America at this point in history because it's like the collapse of the Roman Empire but with wi-fi”

Possible Topics for Historiography in the News:

The impeachment of Bill Clinton

The Enola Gay controversy

The changing views of Christopher Columbus over the past 30+ years

The History Standards debate

Michael Bellesiles' book *Arming America*

The Lipstadt—Irving controversy (Holocaust denial and its challengers)

The 1619 Project (and backlash)

The current Florida textbook controversy

The joint OAH-AHA Statement on the Dobbs v. Jackson Decision (abortion)

The tearing down of statues, renaming of buildings, removal of flags, etc.

Others?

History textbooks in 2050 be like:



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Assignment 2: Historiography in Textbooks

True Fact: My high school in Boston was so broke my math textbook was published in 1948.

Some might think there is no reason to revise textbooks, especially history textbooks.

Looking at the ones published over the past two centuries might give you a different impression.



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The Historiography in Textbooks Assignment I use in HIST-150 History Matters

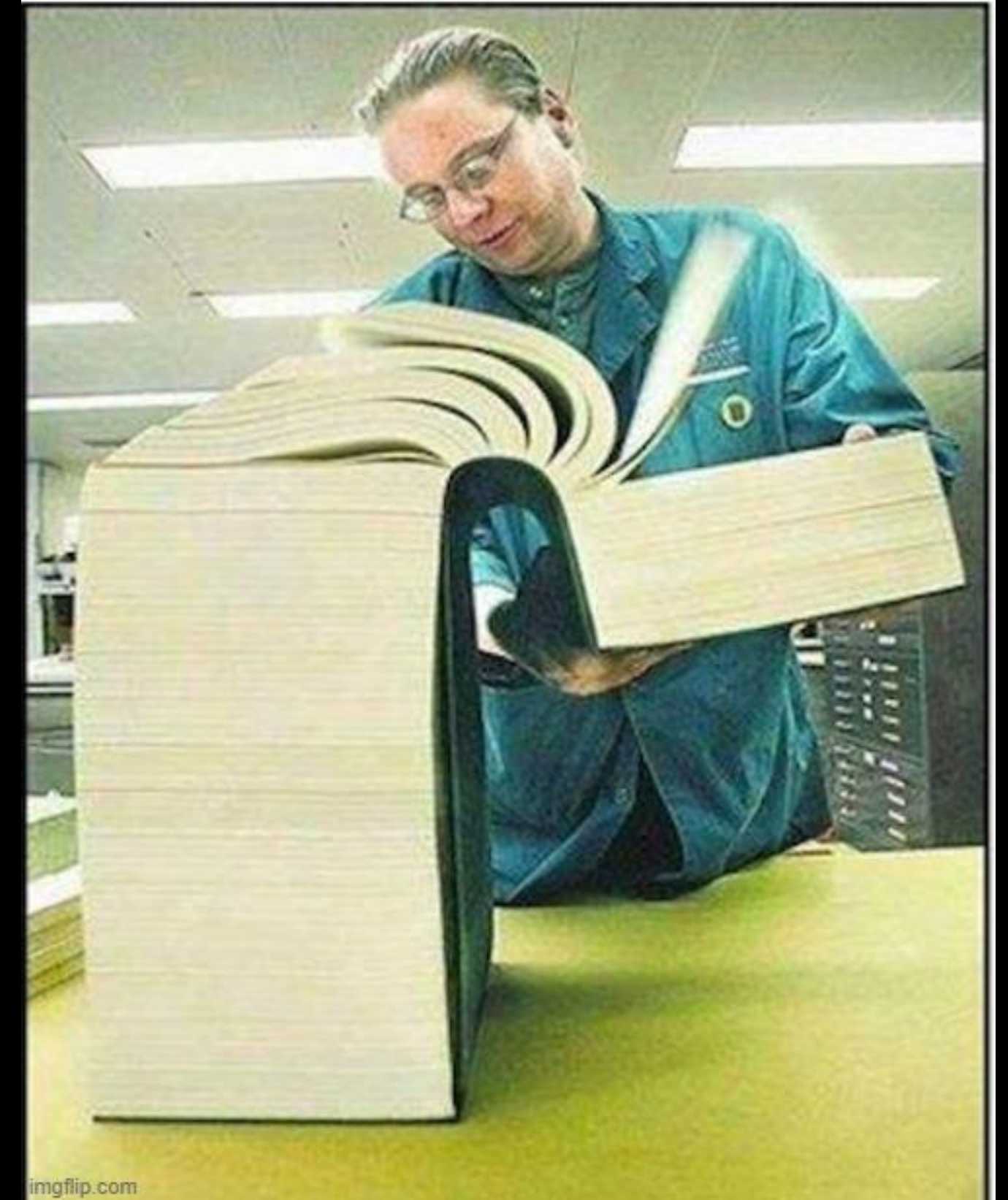
Look at 15-20 history textbook excerpts from the 19th century to the present.

Focus on how the authors describe Native American (First Nations) people.

Examples: terminology (“savages,” “red men,” etc.); population estimates (tiny versus huge); cultural achievements (none versus many); naming of actual tribes or individuals (Powhattan, Iroquois, etc.).

Write a short paper describing how these descriptions have changed over time, and suggesting reasons for the change.

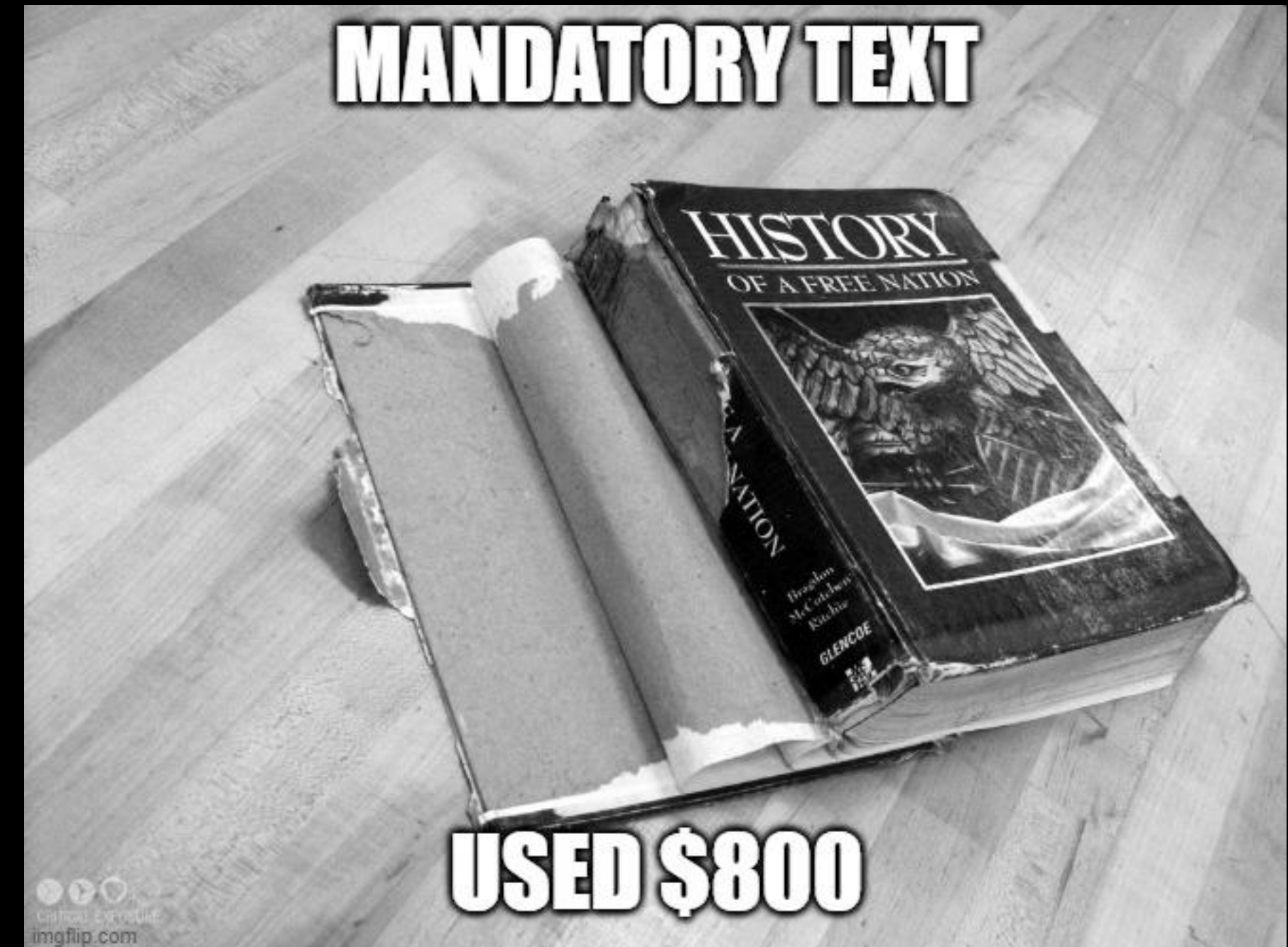
What the history books
are gonna look like after 2020



(SHMIFOG)

How about other topics?

Christina Connor can suggest even more topics using the American History Textbook Project (AHTP) collection.



(SHMIFOG)

**Questions? Further
discussion?**

**Please save them for the
end.**

Thanks!

History channel during the day:



History channel at 1am:



(SHMIFOG)