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William Hogeland, *Inventing American History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009, £9.95). Pp. 216. ISBN 978 0 262 01288 1.

William Hogeland's *Inventing American History* is for the most part an engaging work dedicated to examining what he describes as the failings in "public history" which are encountered in American museums, tourist attractions, newspaper columns, election campaigns, public broadcasting and popular biographies – the overly simplistic and erroneous history often conveyed via such sources. This work is additionally driven by the aim to support its publisher's commendable, if somewhat overly ambitious, cause to further democracy in the USA.

This small book (running to 216 pages) attempts to pick out what the author deems to be influential political and cultural icons (leaders and monuments) who have figured large in the consciousness of many Americans during the past two centuries whose popular representation has conveyed, in the author's view, simplistic and incorrect political messages to Americans. Hogeland does so by asserting that too often public perceptions of history can be misinformed by misrepresentation, distortion and omission of key historical information. Hogeland's agenda is also to address some of the incorrect contemporary political uses to which some of the icons of America's past are put.

For the first three-quarters of the book the reader is treated to a page-turning, impressively economical and high-calibre journalese style of writing. Hogeland has in part mastered the craft of the historian by being forensic with the evidence of his chosen topics and has synthesized some important historiographical debates. In chapter 1 some debunking of the recent neocon lionization of Alexander Hamilton's contributions to national politics and economics in the USA is achieved skilfully and incisively. Hogeland revisits Hamilton's early political career and, contrary to what recent right-wing popular biographies (and an edition of PBS *American Experience*) have portrayed of him, contends that Hamilton, far from enhancing economic opportunity and competition, actually achieved the opposite by orchestrating the creation of an authoritarian government with a national debt supported by nationally enforced taxes benefiting only rich Americans during the 1780s and 1790s.

In chapter 2 Hogeland challenges the accuracy of influential sections of the American media in their portrayal of two major figures from the Left and Right of American political life during the twentieth century – Pete Seger and William F Buckley Jr. In both cases Hogeland goes deeper than popular documentaries and political magazines have done in order to convey the less-than-democratic formative influences and works of these two influential public figures. In the case of Seger the reader is forced to reevaluate the links between the musician's music and social activism: a hitherto nice liberal gloss is undermined by details concerning Seger's willingness to toe the Soviet Communist Party line in the pre-Second World War era. Hogeland rails against the lack of nuance – a repeated laudable theme of the book – in popular portrayals of Seger's work. Similar judgement is meted out to what Hogeland contends is a misrepresentation of the work of William F. Buckley Jr. by his right-wing acolytes. Hogeland targets the repeated theme of racism running through Buckley's political commentary and powerfully challenges the notion of

Buckley's supposed harmless erudite and engaging persona. The final chapter points to the failure of significant national museums such as the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia to convey fully the less-than-democratic origins and nature of America's founding political documents. This is the poorest section of the book because of its overly lengthy coverage of the audiovisual ways in which such museums operate.

This book is a welcome contribution to concerns raised about the less-than-rounded portrayal of history in American life. It suffers from lack of references and a slightly arbitrary and narrow choice of characters to convey much-needed broader points. However, it is a stimulating and provocative piece which is worthy of careful consideration.

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