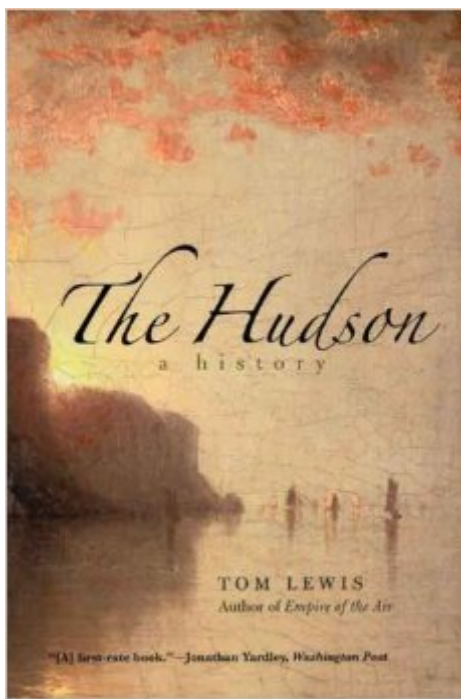


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The Hudson: A History



Synopsis

Flowing through a valley of sublime scenery, the Hudson River uniquely connects America's past with its present and future. This book traces the course of the river through four centuries, recounting the stories of explorers and traders, artists and writers, entrepreneurs and industrialists, ecologists and preservationists—those who have been shaped by the river as well as those who have helped shape it. Their compelling narratives attest to the Hudson River's distinctive place in American history and the American imagination. Among those who have figured in the history of the Hudson are Benedict Arnold, Alexander Hamilton, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, the Astors and the Vanderbilts, and Thomas Cole of the Hudson River school. Their stories appear here, alongside those of such less famous individuals as the surveyor who found the source of the Hudson and the engineer who tried to build a hydroelectric plant at Storm King Mountain. Inviting us to view the river from a wider perspective than ever before, this entertaining and enlightening book is worthy of its grand subject.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is the perfect book to take along for a car trip on Route 9 or a train trip on the Metro North Hudson Line or any fall vacation along the Hudson River Valley. It is a miracle that suburban sprawl has not destroyed the beauty that the American artists of the Hudson River School painted in the mid-1800's. Mr. Lewis tells the tales of how the Hudson River avoided that fate through the centuries. "The Hudson : A History" is a collection of historical vignettes collected and written in a storytelling style by Mr. Lewis. This book is not the definitive account of the Hudson River -- only the

events that Mr. Lewis found most interesting to him. Fortunately, the reader will find them to be interesting and well-told as well. As a follow-up, the reader is referred to "Hudson River Journey" (2003), a beautiful collection of 100+ photographs with a brief background of and driving directions to each photo.

This is a charming book - well written and engaging, and wonderful in how it pulls together so many diverse threads, from geology to military history to environmental policy to art history to economics. And although my eyes glazed over a little when the book discusses intricacies of the Dutch poltroon families upstate (my main interest as a New Yorker is recognizing them as Manhattan street names) I think the work is broad in its appeal. Lewis's argument that the Hudson river has been central to shaping American history and culture is compelling and evocatively set forth. My main criticism is the lack of visual accompaniment. This river has inspired extraordinary maps, documents, photographs, and paintings - a whole "school" of art for goodness sake - giving us just handful of postage stamp black and white reproductions in the book is a missed opportunity. The paucity of imagery is really a demerit.

Lewis has written a metaphor for the growth of america from an untamed wilderness, to a economic (water) highway, to an industrial giant, to an environmental success story. Lewis takes us through a series of vignettes that tell the history of the changes to the river. It was first to be the way in which trappers and traders were able to get into the interior of the continent for furs. Later it became the source of bringing lumber down to the mills. It was a major battlefield during the Revolution and by protecting it we were able to keep the British from splitting the colonies in two. With the building of the Erie Canal it became the conduit to and from the Great Lakes region for raw materials and finished products. The steamboat and railway made the whole area of the hudson river valley available for settlement and the burgeoning of industry along it's shore. Unlike most east coast rivers, it was navigable for hundreds of miles; with great natural resources of streams for mills, wood for charcoal, deposits of clay it became a major industrial area in the nineteenth century (and a major source of pollution). By the early twentieth century, the river was a polluted nightmare, with large areas unusable and without fish. The river had been polluted with PCB's and the discharge of raw sewage from many of the surrounding towns and cities. In the 1960's when the electric supplier wanted to build a retaining pond for eight billion gallons of water and destroy half of Storm King mountain, people finally began to take notice. The Hudson was the first big victory for the forces of environmental protection that would lead to the creation of the "Superfund". Today the water is

cleaner than its' been in a century and can be looked at as an example of how man and nature can live in harmony again.

Every student remembers the famous sale of Manhattan Island by the Indians to the Dutch for a few dollars worth of trinkets, but what you may not recall is the native Indians lived in an expanse of territory that stretched throughout the Northeast and to them, it was amazing that anyone would pay for one small island. They may have gotten the better deal at the time. The book is filled with fascinating pieces of history and you will soon learn that the Hudson River is linked to the very foundations of our country. You will also learn that all those street names and highway names in New York stem from the state's very rich history with the Dutch and the English. Some parts of the story are a bit dry, no doubt, but the book is worth reading for the highlights.

Errata on the map prior to Introduction. There are not 2 Bear Mountain bridges. The bridge near Poughkeepsie is the Mid-Hudson Bridge. Should there be a reprint, hopefully this can be fixed. Otherwise, looking forward to reading the book...but I looked at the photos and map first. :) The Hudson is a most beautiful river valley and I am blessed to live so near and recently discovered its history and geography in more detail. Will try to add more later after reading the text.

Leaves one wishing the book were longer. Very readable and contains good overall views as well as some surprises. A good compliment to other books I own on New York. Anyone new to the subject will not be overwhelmed. My only negative comment, as with most books, could have more maps..

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