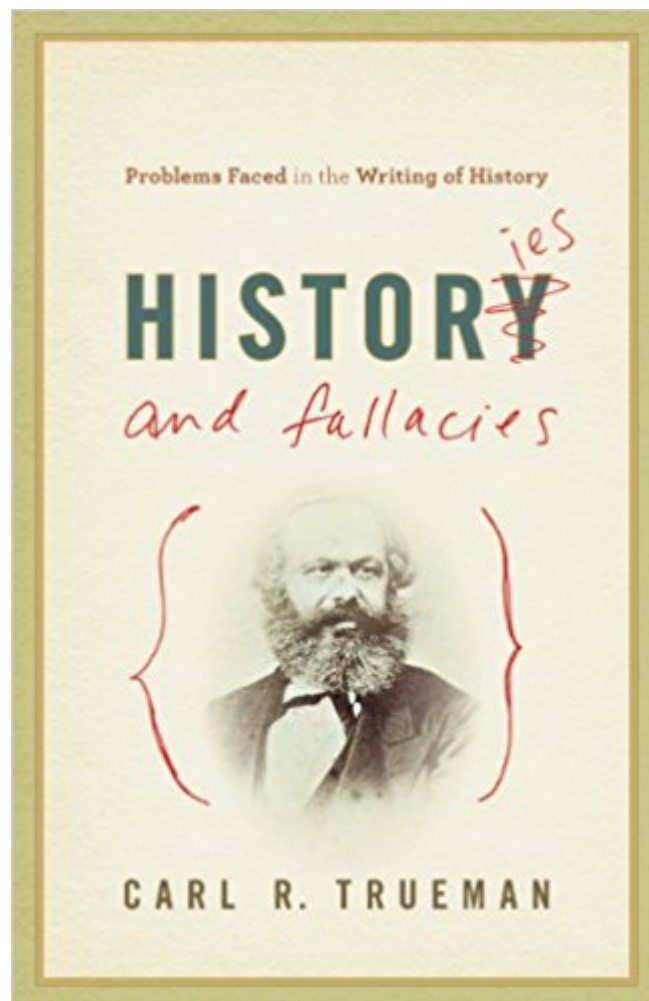




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# Histories And Fallacies: Problems Faced In The Writing Of History



## Synopsis

How do we know the stories told by historians are true? To what extent can we rely on their interpretations of the past? *Histories and Fallacies* is a primer on the conceptual and methodological problems in the discipline of history. Historian Carl Trueman presents a series of classic historical problems as a way to examine what history is, what it means, and how it can be told and understood. Each chapter in *Histories and Fallacies* gives an account of a particular problem, examines classic examples of that problem, and then suggests a solution or approach that will bear fruit for the writer or reader of history. Readers who follow Trueman's deft writing will not just be learning theory but will already be practicing fruitful approaches to history. *Histories and Fallacies* guides both readers and writers of history away from dead ends and methodological mistakes, and into a fresh confidence in the productive nature of the historical task.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This is a very good book, full of historiographical wisdom. I recommend it strongly as a sure and encouraging guide to budding historians befuddled by the so-called 'history wars,' and to anyone who is interested in the challenges attending those who represent the history of Christian thought." —Douglas A. Sweeney, a distinguished professor of church history and the history of Christian thought; director, Jonathan Edwards Center, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

"Carl Trueman's cogent and engaging approach to historiography provides significant examples of problems faced by historians and the kinds of fallacies frequently encountered in historical argumentation. Trueman steers a clear path between

problematic and overdrawn conclusions on the one hand and claims of utter objectivity on the other. His illustrations, covering several centuries of Western history, are telling. He offers a combination of careful historical analysis coupled with an understanding of the logical and argumentative pitfalls to which historians are liable that is a service to the field and should provide a useful guide to beginning researchers. A must for courses on research methodology.

•Richard A. Muller, P. J. Zondervan Professor of Historical Theology, Calvin Theological Seminary

“Because the past shapes the present, a just understanding of the past is important for any individual, society, or church. Here is wise and practical advice for those wanting to write history for others about how to do it well. Follow this guidance and avoid the pitfalls!”

•David Bebbington, Professor of History, University of Stirling

Carl R. Trueman (PhD, University of Aberdeen) is the Paul Woolley Professor of Church History at Westminster Theological Seminary and pastor of Cornerstone Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Ambler, Pennsylvania. He was editor of *Themelios* for nine years, has authored or edited more than a dozen books, and has contributed to multiple publications including the *Dictionary of Historical Theology* and *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*.

Carl Trueman does an excellent job at giving the reader a primer for proper historical analysis and investigation. Full of real examples and flowing logic with each chapter. At times I even found him answering a question that would pop in my mind at the next paragraph. Be prepared to learn proper historical evidence, post-hoc propter-hoc fallacies, oversimplification, eye witness accounts, and examining historical texts for possible causes and effects. His handling of Marxist historical thought was excellent. On a side note... From the little I know, I think he mistreated Rushdoony's view on the holocaust, but that does not negate the fact that this is a great little book. It truly changed the way I examine historical claims and study. Fair and balanced. Great for the layman or future historian. Well done Mr. Trueman.

Over the past couple of years I have become increasingly skeptical of history. It seems as though today we have everyone just re-writing history, re-interpreting events with the sole purpose of promoting their agenda. Everything is propaganda. America was founded as a Christian nation. None of the founding Fathers were Christians. What is a Christian? Can any historical account be trusted? Thankfully, Carl Trueman has written an insightful book explaining the problems we are faced with in the writing of history. *Histories and Fallacies* is a delight to read and filled with wisdom.

Trueman walks the reader through real life examples of some of the rights and wrongs that are frequently committed. I was just as fascinated by the subjects he chose as examples, as I was with the lessons he was teaching. Tackling issues such as Holocaust Denial, Marxism, and was Luther an anti-Semite are just some of the real world histories he explores. I found Trueman's work to be very enlightening. I learned much that I can now apply in my research of historical events and in rightly interpreting scripture. I highly recommend this book to everyone who could benefit (and who couldn't?) from a behind the scenes look at the work of discerning historian.

Carl Trueman is a professor of historical theology and church history at Westminster Theological Seminary. He blogs at Reformation21 and is always an interesting read. Because of my prior knowledge of Trueman and my passion for history I was excited to read his book on Histories and Fallacies. This book is actually pretty difficult to review. It's difficult because you can actually learn a good deal of diverse things such as Holocaust denial, Marxism, and the "racism" of Martin Luther. Trueman takes various areas of historical research and discusses them while teaching the reader how to do history. In the first chapter he discusses Holocaust denial and various ways that historians deny history. In the second chapter Trueman explores the grand scheme of Marxism and shows how Grand Schemes can lead to fallacious thinking and bad history. In the third chapter the reader is exposed to the pitfalls of anachronism. Various historical questions are explored such as "was Calvin and Calvinist?" and "was Martin Luther a Jew-hating racist". Trueman shows how such questions are off-the-mark historically. The final chapter is a conglomeration of some of the most typical fallacies in historical research. Obviously this book is not for everyone. That is partially why I am only giving it a quick review. Even though the writing is often hilarious and witty, if you don't give much of a care about "doing history" then you will be bored out of your gourd. But for those of us that are history nerds, and especially those of us that are charged with writing history/biographies, then this book is phenomenal. So, if you like history buy this book. If you don't like history keep the name Carl Trueman in mind and perhaps pick up some of us other offerings.

This little volume is an examination of problems faced in the writing of history (actually, that's the subtitle). Trueman refutes the idea, currently popular, that history is illusory, analyzes the failure of those who, like the Marxists, interpret history according to an overarching ideological scheme, and discusses the dangerous pull of anachronism, especially anachronism of ideas, such as calling Luther an anti-Semite racist. He finishes by discussing several historical fallacies: reification (the mistake of treating an idea such as 'Aristotelian thought' like a concrete, transferable object rather

than a fluid set of concepts that means very different things to different people at different points of history), oversimplification (the mistake of making historical artifacts, events, etc. more straightforward than they really are, such as saying that the American Civil War was started over slavery), the post hoc fallacy (including an interesting discussion of necessary and sufficient conditions), the word-concept fallacy (similar to reification, in which a word such as 'liberty' is stripped of its historical context and used as a modern thinker would use it), the genetic fallacy (the mistake of drawing too strong a connection between historical circumstances and their modern or later manifestations), and a handful of other such ideas. The book is straightforward, interesting, sometimes funny, and neatly bridges two disciplines in which I'm interested. Trueman's position as a church historian also makes his work more immediately applicable to some of the historical issues I find myself struggling through.

I found the material rather focused on one group of history deniers. Overall though it's a useful text in historiography.

Trueman's well-conceived book is a terrific tool for non-experts. And even some experts may learn a few things. At the very least, some in the latter category might take a clue from Trueman on how to write more engaging books!

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