

Scandalous! 50 Shocking Events You Should Know About: So You Can Impress Your Friends

Hallie Fryd

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Highlighting fifty events spanning the twentieth century, Hallie Fryd identifies issues that helped shape American culture over that time, making insightful connections between significant contemporary and historical events. These events typically involve behavior that went against the social norms of the era, and public outrage or support, sometimes in the form of a protest, played a part in the outcome.

In making connections between older and more recent events, Fryd illustrates that many current cultural and political issues are actually long-standing ones. For example, the release of Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle* in 1906 exposed unsafe worker conditions in meatpacking plants. It led to the formation of unions, as well as governmental oversight of workplace practices and food safety, an issue highlighted recently in the 2008 documentary *Food Inc.* The debate about whether gay soldiers should be able to serve openly in the military is often associated with political discourse in the 1990s, but Fryd traces it back to 1919, when FDR, then assistant secretary of the Navy, approved a sting operation to expose gay soldiers. She cites other events that led to commonly used phrases, the origins of which may not be familiar, including the term "Ponzi scheme," which refers to the plan used by Charles Ponzi in 1920 to defraud investors. He kept the money and used it to pay dividends to older investors—a strategy, Fryd notes, that will be familiar to readers who followed the Bernie Madoff case in 2008.

The casual, conversational tone of the text, presented in small chunks, and the colorful graphics that accompany the information, highlight key facts and recreate the look of websites and blogs, which will appeal to a younger audience, enticing them to learn about cultural history. However, no sources are cited for the factual information, and a few of the descriptions presented in this abridged format are incomplete or misleading. For example, the woman at the center of the *Roe v. Wade* case is referred to as Jane Roe, but there is no mention that it was a pseudonym, a play on "Jane Doe," to conceal Norma McCorvey's identity during the legal proceedings. Also, televangelists are described as unpopular following fallout from the Jim Bakker sex and money scandal in 1987, even though Billy Graham has remained popular and new, widely followed televangelists such as Joel Osteen have emerged in the years since.

Overall, by connecting events during the past century in a fun format, Fryd provides an entertaining read while reinforcing that history matters.

MARIA SIANO (May 2, 2012)

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