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A Young People's History Of The United States: Class Struggle To The War On Terror (Volume 2)



Synopsis

A Young People's History of the United States brings to US history the viewpoints of workers, slaves, immigrants, women, Native Americans, and others whose stories, and their impact, are rarely included in books for young people. A Young People's History of the United States is also a companion volume to The People Speak, the film adapted from A People's History of the United States and Voices of a People's History of the United States. Beginning with a look at Christopher Columbus's arrival through the eyes of the Arawak Indians, then leading the reader through the struggles for workers' rights, women's rights, and civil rights during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and ending with the current protests against continued American imperialism, Zinn in the volumes of A Young People's History of the United States presents a radical new way of understanding America's history. In so doing, he reminds readers that America's true greatness is shaped by our dissident voices, not our military generals.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The visionary historical work of professor and activist HOWARD ZINN (1922–2010) is widely considered one of the most important and influential of our era. After his experience as a bombardier in World War II, Zinn became convinced that there could no longer be such a thing as a "just war," because the vast majority of victims in modern warfare are, increasingly, innocent civilians. In his books, including A People's History of the United States, its companion volume Voices of a People's History of the United States, and countless other titles, Zinn affirms the power of the people to influence the course of events. REBECCA STEFOFF is the author of

more than 100 nonfiction books for children and young adults, and she has adapted several best-selling history books for younger readers.

As this book explains at the beginning, most history books, especially textbooks, look at history from the point of view of power – kings and presidents, scientists and writers and other noteworthy names. Therefore, much of this history is about the struggle over power – wars, coups, electioneering and other means of transferring power, whether peacefully or violently. Most of these books make claims to “objectivity” without acknowledging that in fact, they are all, of necessity, biased. Writing history is a matter of what gets written and what gets left out. Who gets to tell the story and who is silenced.

Howard Zinn’s *THE PEOPLE’S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES*, on the other hand, has no pretensions about “objectivity”. Zinn states up front that he is writing the history we don’t learn in school or read in the newspapers. He is telling the history of the people who have been affected by power and the struggle for power. In the Friedman/Thatcher/Reagan vision of “trickle-down economics”, Zinn is concerned about those getting trickled on and, more importantly, what those people have done and are doing about it. The original, adult version of this book is over seven hundred pages long. Zinn, along with co-writer Rebecca Stefoff, wanted to bring a more accessible version of the book to younger audiences, hence, *THE YOUNG PEOPLE’S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES*, which is roughly two-thirds as long with significantly less writing per page. The young people’s version pretty much follows the adult version of the book, starting with debunking the myth of Columbus and continuing until about the date of publication, including information on the September 11 attacks, the war on terrorism and the invasion of Iraq. The book ends with the Democratic resurgence at the midterm elections during Bush 43’s second term. Although Zinn makes it repeatedly clear that he doesn’t have significantly more love for the Democrats than the Republicans, he did seem to view this as a positive sign that Americans had had enough of abuses of executive power, foreign wars and empire building and federal overreach at home. Sadly, he lived just long enough to probably realize his hopes may have been overly optimistic. Of necessity, the young people’s version is significantly less detailed and more simplistic than the adult version, which can be a bit of a drawback as it exacerbates accusations of bias and inaccuracy. As noted, Zinn never pretends to be un-biased, but the simplification in this book does away with a degree of nuance that seems to lead to a number of statements that have been simplified to the point of generalization, and generalizations almost always carry a degree of inaccuracy. As simplified as this book is, I don’t recommend it for high school students (most of whom can

handle the adult version). This book would be good for late elementary and middle school kids with adult guidance. I would like to see this book used in conjunction with a supposedly "objective" text book and maybe even an explicitly right-wing focused book. It would be a slow process, but a worthwhile exercise to have students comb through equivalent chapters and look for information among the texts that is outright contradictory versus information that is simply a matter of perspective. For instance, the view of Columbus as a "great explorer who discovered America" isn't necessarily incompatible with the view of him as a conqueror and slave master of the Indians – it's just a matter of whether you look at it from a European or an Indian point of view. Students should pay attention in each text to see whose voices are included and whose are not. But other sections, such as the Civil War, may present contradictory information among the texts. For instance, was the Civil War fought over slavery or not? Who was the aggressor? In these cases, students should be helped to find primary sources which may support one position or another. In this way, students will begin to understand how we know what we know about history and to understand the limits of objective "truth" in history, which really makes up a large chunk of what studying history is really all about, rather than simply memorizing names and dates. One of the biggest drawbacks to both this version and the adult version of this book is the lack of footnotes, endnotes, bibliography or other references. Some sources are mentioned in the text itself and there are many quotes from ordinary people – letters to the editor or elected officials or interviews with the media. But without adequate information to trace those sources for one's self, the book suffers a small loss of credibility, even for those who support Zinn's message and perspective. Students especially need to understand where historical information comes from and that, while it may represent an interpretation, the information underlying that interpretation comes from actual historical events as documented in many different sources. Everyone, from the most flaming radicals to the staunchest conservatives, should read Zinn's work simply for the neglected viewpoints he offers. If his information is wrong, then it should be easy enough to dispute it, debate it and determine the truth of the matter. But no one, child or adult, is going to be indoctrinated simply by hearing an alternate viewpoint or different interpretation. And, while Zinn's viewpoint is definitely quite harsh on the power structure that has frequently led America in a bad direction, the book is not itself anti-American. In fact, the book is quite optimistic in the idea that ordinary people, standing up for what they believe in, have the power to change history and thereby correct the mistakes of our imperialistic, racist, classist past to create a more equitable and just future as enshrined in our founding documents.

A must have for a growing 'Merican.

A new perspective for readers

Thought provoking, challenges what you think you know & educates!

Bought this for my 10 year old daughter who loves American history. She loved it and will frequently referred to things she learned from this book.

As a retired teacher and presently a sub, I often have to teach long term assignments. Not only did the book provide me with a comprehensive review of America's major historical events of history, I also learned many new insights and details that I never knew in our country's evolution. I recommend it highly also for students who struggle with learning disabilities since although very comprehensive, the events are presented in a more simple form than our regular texts.

This book is an excellent read for both young people and adults. Going through life, we always hear that we should be critical thinkers, but how many people take this to heart? One exceptional person that did was Howard Zinn. A veteran of WWII he later visited the very sites that he helped level to the ground in search of the truth. Like most things in life, there is usually another side to every story, and this is what this book provides. This book is for people that are life-long learners, and want to learn more about history. This book will not suit the close-minded, who choose to believe whatever "official history" the government wants them to learn in a sanitized textbook. I think this book is great. But don't take my word for it, read it and make up your own mind.

Effective pros well adapted for kids. Informative, thoughtful, and incisive. Every kid should have a copy.

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