



A Young People's History of the United States: Columbus to the War on Terror

Howard Zinn , Rebecca Stefoff

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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.

A Young People's History of the United States: Columbus to the War on Terror Details

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From Reader Review A Young People's History of the United States: Columbus to the War on Terror for online ebook

Ami Pendley says

I am teaching US History for the first time this fall. I have been given a class set of very expensive glossy new textbooks by my district which are best described as soporifics. If I want to bore my students to death or put them all to sleep so I can answer my emails, I will assign a chapter and its uninspiring questions at the end. Howard Zinn's masterpiece is too much for my 8th graders, but this adaptation by Rebecca Stefoff is a treasure. It captures all the important themes from A People's History and simplifies them for younger readers without glossing over anything. Unlike the textbook which nearly broke my nose one night when I fell asleep after half a page, I read this in one sitting. This is the kind of history that captures the hearts and minds and imaginations of students, the kind of history that inspires them to dig deeper and think more critically. This should be the textbook.

Will Solace says

I picked this book up at Barnes and Noble because I love history and I wanted to learn more about it.

By the time I got home, I had read all about Columbus and despised the man.

This book is so far from mainstream it is out of the stream entirely and is now starting it's own city.

I have always loved the idea of MORE. MORE sides to the story. One MORE puzzle piece.

This book has made it's own puzzle.

It truly exposes everything that happens and shows how we reacted. History books leave this all out. The suffrage of the poor is never spoken of. No one knows what Bacon's Rebellion was.

We the people... We all know that. We admire the men who wrote it for speaking up against the piracy of the British, right?

NO! The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and other such documents were written by privileged white men who could afford politics.

It hasn't changed.

Ever heard of Tinker vs. Des Moines? A HIGH SCHOOL BOY and his sibling and friend went up to the Supreme Court for the right to protest the Vietnam War with armbands.

They won.

But oh! Curiosity killed the cat!

That's not the full phrase.

It's "Curiosity killed the cat, but satisfaction brought it back."

This book taught me the true meaning of protest. It spoke little of the people who get entire chapters in textbooks because we know it all! It's done! Some of them were lucky to get a page and I am proud to say I admire millions of others more than I do some of the people who are praised in the history textbook sitting under my Social Studies desk.

I now know protest. I know genocide.

It is October 25th. Columbus Day was a mere twelve days ago. I would rather go to school than celebrate that man. Genocide. We celebrate genocide.

It is not that different from praising Hitler.

This book taught me that! It has changed my life.

I have my own opinion in politics and it's a professional opinion, not just who will give us Pizza Fridays.

Howard Zinn died in 2010.

This book goes up to about 2006. It does not know Obama. It does not know Isis. It does not know Ebola.

But I don't think it needs to. It tells that while we are a far, FAR from perfect country who's flag is tainted with blood of innocent people and bombs, and we may be young, not even three hundred,

We will not be taken over.

We bomb if that happens.

We kill innocent lives, like civilians. Women. Children.

We are eager to be the world's nuclear bomb.

On that happy note,

Get out of this country.

It's terrible.

Martin V says

Zinn tells history from the point of view of the powerless. This is a very important perspective and exercise. However, his famous lack of neutrality leads to facile and perverse political conclusions.

Zinn's anti-establishment instincts frequently lead him to overshoot in a dangerously utopian direction. For example, while lamenting the conditions of the disenfranchised poor in early 20th century America, he lionizes the Russian Revolution as some kind of moral achievement - of course, "the people" fared a lot more poorly in the latter case. A historian should know better.

He shows how historical figures fall short by contemporary ethical standards, but never gives them much credit for the progress they did bring. He stops short of "exposing" Lincoln, but almost every other US

President, from Washington to Dubya, are only cynical patrician hypocrites in Zinn's estimation.

It's a bit sad that America's most famous anti-establishment historian falls into these regressive leftist traps.

Isabel says

Well, VF, since you asked for my opinion, here it is.

First of all, the audience for this book is "young people," but I would suggest that "young people" is closer to upper middle school/YA readers. Younger readers would most likely lack the background knowledge to make much sense of the more modern history and since this is a somewhat reactive history, I think it would be good for your reader to know what exactly Zinn is reacting to IYKWIM.

The Columbus chapter is a good one to consider, but bear in mind that even though it has been cleaned up considerably from its original version, it's still pretty harsh. Determining what is developmentally appropriate for your child is a very personal choice. You know her best. I would advise pre-reading, though, because I think the brutality described (though 100% TRUE and documented and supported) might be a bit hard for a sensitive, younger reader to take in.

(FWIW, I struggled for years trying to figure out when it was OK for my kids to watch the news. Images and reports of violence from local rapes and murders to civil wars and international conflict are important for all citizens to know about, but how and when do you open that door to your children? Zinn's history is a bit more intense than, say, Jr. Scholastic coverage of current events. Still, he offers a perspective that MS age kids should be able to wrestle with. I just wish it weren't quite so... brutal? I wish I'd flagged passages as I was reading it to support my vibe on this, but I didn't, so perhaps if you read it you'll come across some and see what I mean.)

And, actually, any history your child is already familiar with would be interesting for her to read about through Zinn's lens. So the colonial period is solid. As is the revolutionary period. He also adds important dimensions to the practice and legal issues of slavery that don't find their way into the standard telling of US history. So if your reader has covered US history up to the Civil War, she'd be well served to see this take on those events. But when it gets to the post Civil War part, I don't know that many kids under high school age have a fighting chance at that. (Probably most HS age kids would struggle with it, too. Even back in the 90s when we had 30 years less history to cover, I don't think we got past Kennedy. I can only imagine how they're cramming this stuff into HS classes now with all this additional time to include.)

Anyway, having just re-read the original version of this history, I was curious to see what changes made this a better fit for "young people." Pictures are included. (Yay! Older readers like those, too.) Content is shortened. (Nice, b/c the other version has a lot to take in.) Some words are defined in context (but that was inconsistent and not always all that useful, IMO).

I respect Zinn's goal with this revision of history, but I guess we are now in a "post revisionist" phase. My take on this is that in the beginning, histories were all about politicians, wars and a white, male, Euro-centric perspective. That changed in the 90s, I think largely due to writers like Howard Zinn. Zinn's objective was to include the other voices of history, but he does this to the point of completely ignoring the other side. Hence: revisionist. Why waste time telling a story we're all familiar with? Zinn sought to write the un-voiced side.

At this stage (twenty years later), though, while we are definitely *more* familiar with the "traditional" history, we are not solid enough with it that we can only rely on the revised view. Which is why we need a balance of

both perspectives. Zinn's history doesn't meet that need. Before a reader can really digest this history, she'd need to know the history of the US at least in a basic way from the exploration period to the War in Iraq. Not too many curricula cover all that ground by 5th grade.

What I *do* appreciate about this history is that it includes the *economic* perspective. He explains that there are alternatives to capitalism and that those alternatives have had brief expression even in the history of the US. He also convincingly argues that the system is rigged (to use a completely exhausted phrase) to favor big business through international free trade--trade that is made possible through active military interventions *not* for justice and liberty, but to protect economic access. That's sobering. Zinn presents this information in a straightforward, hard-to-argue manner. That economic imperialism thing is very hard to shake off. The fact that lives are lost to guarantee access to those goods/markets is something to give anyone pause. You can't help but wonder, isn't there some other way? And perhaps these are things that our Young People should think about, the sooner, the better.

I guess this history (particularly the more modern stuff) reminds me too much of the "conversations" that we are having now, in 2016 about political matters. It would be nice if we could of recognize both sides' legitimate perspectives, and build on those while acknowledging that both sides have members that abuse ideology and have selfish motives. If we could find the good stuff and fix it when it starts to go bad, I think we'd make far more progress than simply attacking the end result and going to a polar opposite solution.

Example: Waco, TX. In the Zinn telling, it looks as if the Feds simply went on a rampage and killed children, women and men indiscriminately. While it is clear that the Feds made a lot of lethal mistakes, Zinn loses the part of the story where those mistakes are acknowledged and how recognizing those fatal errors would reshape how authorities responded to this type of situation to avoid a massacre like that in the future. In the book, though, it plays out as if the system whole heartedly embraced the outcome of Waco and is designed to solve problems using excessive violence against citizens. (Also, after doing some--admittedly shallow--research, it appears that many of the children were killed by adults in the compound in an effort to prevent them from suffering in the fire and gassing of the place, so it wasn't the Feds busting in willy nilly and shooting up a bunch of little kids, though that is distinctly how it came across when I read it.)

I appreciate Zinn's intro, though. He believes that children should not be spoon-fed sanitized versions of history. He maintains that instead of worshipping the generals and politicians that make decisions for the people (or do they? Zinn thinks not-so-much.) we should pay more attention to the actual people who fight against injustice and work to make a better life for themselves through cooperation and shared values.

What Zinn fails to take into account is that while some people come together and collaborate to create communities of generosity, decency and fairness, others come together for the same purpose but generosity, decency and fairness look different when the community defines those terms differently. All I can think of is the whole Trump v. Clinton thing right now. People in both parties firmly believe that their view of the nation is fair and decent.

Also, Zinn is pretty pessimistic about the whole voting thing. His take is that the ballot box is used to distract citizens from real issues. The only way to really achieve change is through activism, protest, and even (at times) violence. That's a conclusion I'd like my kid to reach on her own after participating in the existing system and deciding how she wants to change it. I'd rather not have that be her first take on the democratic process.

But that only points out my own bias that yes, change can come through democracy as practiced in the US. It's not just a sham with surface changes. This change is *slow* and certainly has a long way to go, but in my idealistic (? who thought I'd fall into *that* category) point of view, as MLK said, "the arc of moral history is long, but it bends toward justice." I don't believe that that is a platitude to keep the masses quiet. I believe it is a goal that we must all strive toward and we simply can't expect quick fixes to problems of this magnitude,

especially if we want the fixes to last.

But then, I guess I'm more conservative than I'd thought. It took a book for Young People to drive that point home, which makes me think, again, that perhaps an older audience is a better fit for this kind of writing.

This review could probably stand some extensive revision. I have a lot of conflicting thoughts about this book. I just wanted to throw them out there for you, VF, and to some extent to try and make sense of my thoughts for myself. Not sure I accomplished that, though. :-/

Vannessa Anderson says

A Young People's History of the United States: Columbus to the War on Terror left no stone unturned when teaching actual American History.

A few things I learned

- 1) Christopher Columbus was a mass murderer, a slave trader, a slaver and a sadist
- 2) Whites believed blacks were not their equals
- 3) Children started the first mill strike in Paterson, New Jersey
- 4) Rockefeller made secret deals with railroad companies to ship his oil at lower rates
- 5) President Grover Cleveland sold out the American people to corporations
- 6) President Grover Cleveland bought back government bonds held by wealthy people at more than their face value-a gift of \$45 million to the rich

a young people's history of the united states would make a great gift for children learning about American History.

Rhiannon says

Honestly this should be required reading for every American. I wish this was part of my high school or middle school history curriculum; I had to wait until college or post-college to learn a lot of the information (or the more complete version of the information) presented in this book. It infuriates me how happily white-washed our history is taught to young people because it means that those young people will grow into full-fledged adults who have very little understanding of our true history. Those adults become voters who have the power to influence policies and they either do not take up that mantle of power because we aren't taught a lot about the history/impact/reality of resistance movements post-1776 OR those adult voters use that power with the lens of the warped sense of reality that we've been taught about America. This book is essential to being a fully-informed American citizen and voter because if we do not learn properly from our history, the good AND the bad, then we are doomed to repeat it.

Yune says

Somehow I never got around to reading Zinn's original work, and I've mentioned in another review how my

U.S. history education was lacking in some respects. So when I was browsing through the kids' section of the bookstore for books to donate and spied this, I picked it up. (I didn't donate it because they were seeking books like *The Hungry Caterpillar*. Kids that young probably aren't ready for Zinn, no matter how much they've adjusted the reading level.) I knew about Zinn's book by reputation, and was curious how it had been adapted.

I suspect some of the most graphic details may have been excised, but the book still offers descriptions of conditions aboard slave ships, and doesn't pull punches when it comes to debunking the myth that the U.S. has been covered in nothing but glory since inception. For example:

Andrew Jackson, who was elected president in 1828, said he spoke for "the humble members of society"--for workers and farmers. He certainly did not speak for the Indians being pushed off their lands or for enslaved African-Americans. But the government needed a large base of support among white people, and the myth of "Jacksonian Democracy" was designed to win that support.

That myth led ordinary people to believe that they had a voice in government and that government looked out for their interests. It was a way of speaking for the lower and middle classes to get their support when the government needed it. Giving people a choice between two political parties, and letting them choose the slightly more democratic one, was a good way to control them. The leaders of both parties understood that they could keep control of society by making reforms that gave people some of what they wanted--but not too much.

Social, racial, and gender inequalities are highlighted throughout. The brutal treatment of Native Americans and Blacks is not only mentioned, but put at the forefront, while presidents I've been taught to admire have their motives excoriated. Sprinkled through the text are hard-hitting quotes from primary sources, and perhaps due to the intended audience, the writing is simple yet direct, never bothering to beat about the bush.

Unfortunately, you'll probably need a basic grounding in U.S. history before you read this, and if you get that education in the U.S., you'll likely absorb the accompanying propaganda. (Which I have to admit is sensible. Countries do have a vested interest in promoting patriotism.) Zinn will do a pretty thorough job of scrubbing away any starry-eyed perceptions, though. My main concern in not using him as a initial reading is that because his chapters are so thematic ("The Other Civil War" and "Surprises," for example), he doesn't always present events in chronological order. (Not a prerequisite for history, but it offers the potential for confusion, I think.)

The edition I read made it all the way to *Gore v. Bush*, which might be able to bring home some of Zinn's lessons to young folks in a way they can associate with current events. Of course, I can see some people wanting to keep Zinn's liberal ideas out of impressionable minds, but I have to admire not only the content itself, but the way Zinn manages to prove so thoroughly that history can vary wildly depending upon who writes it, and it's worth picking up just for that, I think.

As a final note, I am amused by the person who hid their review of this book because of spoilers.

Jade says

I LOVED THIS BOOK!. I am read it for school and it is a bit harsh sometimes, but its true. Howard Zinn tells it from the point of view of the slaves. It goes from, Columbus and the Indians to The war in Iraq. in 422 Pages and 26 chapters. Very well written and a MUST READ BOOK!
Hope You Read This Book.

Americans in a letter: "They would make fine servants....with fifty men we could subjugate them and make them do whatever we want." It also states that Arawak Indian tribe members who didn't give gold to the Spaniards had their hands severed and often bled to death.

Other things that I consider 'glossed over' in schools now that I've read this novel include: The United States violated the UN charter and entered a war that was undeclared by Congress, Iraqi casualties in the Iraq war were much greater than US casualties, Congress approved the building of a fence that stopped Mexicans from illegally entering US territory that was *seized from Mexico*, and more. Overall, I'd say that it doesn't paint a negative portrait of the United States, but mostly just a group of people that Zinn calls 'The Establishment': business leaders, generals, and politicians. It's leftist, but not extreme-leftist. It's pro-democracy, but not pro-communism.

Liz says

Howard Zinn lived a left of center life. This is a left of center book. It's adapted from the adult version "A People's History of the United States." Let me say at the outset that this book would be best suited for kids from liberal families. This book would also be best suited for kids who have already studied the basics of American history because, I suspect as part of the adaptation, bits and pieces of events are left out so a neophyte in American history might become confused.

Zinn is interested in the power equation between conquerors and those conquered, between those with wealth in this country and those without, between the rich and powerful in this country and everyone else, between this country and the countries with which we engage in war.

Instead of celebrating Christopher Columbus as the person who discovered the New World, Zinn vilifies him for his treatment of the Indians he encountered. Zinn paints a terribly grim picture of the way the US treated Indians who were here before us. His view of those who wrote the Constitution is that they were trying to preserve the position of the wealthy and powerful.

This quote sums up the book quite well: "The greatest March of economic growth in human history took place in the United States in the late nineteenth century. The wealth it produced was like a pyramid. The supporting layers, those who built the pyramid and held it up, were the workers: blacks, whites, Chinese and European immigrants, women. At the top where the new American multimillionaires." (p171).

I was incredulous as I read about the American Revolution. According to Zinn the rich and powerful Americans redirected lower-class anger about inequality aimed at them towards the British so that they could maintain their position of power. This goes against my "We the People" view of the American Revolution. However, as I continued reading and moved into the period of time I've lived through, I found his telling of the story to be exactly right. I will re-examine my views about the American Revolution.

The book is fascinating and very readable. It has full page black and white photos and drawings throughout. There's a glossary and a thorough index at the back. I wish there had been footnotes. A bibliography of books for further reading would also have been helpful.

As a testament to the power of the book, let me say that I have been reading it for a week (I read slowly), and I'm ready to go out and work to change our society so that wealth is better distributed, and so that everyone will have access to an excellent education and excellent healthcare and nourishing food and shelter that maintains their privacy.

was newer than the one I read, so it came closer to the current time at the end than mine did) but trimmed down a bit with fewer examples and details. It mostly left out the most violent descriptions from the adult volume, although there was one segment when I stopped reading and just said "I'm not going to read you that description" and skipped on.

Still, even trimmed down it's a sizable book and covers from Columbus to George W. Bush, and Ian and I have been reading this for a long time. We took a break for a bit but then did come back to it. He found it interesting, inspiring, but also very depressing at times and expressed how hard it was to hear the bad side of people and events he admired. As we got to the section on the civil rights movement he groaned, "I hope I don't learn anything I don't know about Martin Luther King!" He didn't.

But in the end he was triumphant to finish it and said he was very glad to have read it. He talked about peace tonight and wanting to work for peaceful solutions to problems when he is president. If he takes some Zinn with him in his presidential dreams, it will certainly be a good thing.
