A Review Of A People?s History Of Essay, Research Paper

A Review of A People?s History of

The United States

A People?s History of the United States concentrates on the personal experiences

and struggles of people who lived in the United States from 1492-present. It is a view of

history from the common man?s perspective, rather than the view of the leaders and

upper class of this country.

The book revolves around the views of history from the oppressed point of view.

Howard Zinn makes it clear from the beginning that he will value the views and

experiences of the oppressed over the view of the oppressor. He describes the conquest

from the point of view of the Native American population. He describes slavery in the

south from the point of view of the slave. He describes industrialization from the point of

view of the workers on the shop floor. He describes World War II from the point of view

of the soldiers on the front lines. He describes the Vietnam War from the point of

view of the Vietnamese. You have to realize that these are his views of history as he sees

them, and is only one side of the story.

There is no such thing as unbiased, balanced, truthful history. History is in the eye

of the teller. In this case, Howard Zinn?s view of the history of this great country is

extremely Marxist. He seems to pick and choose historical data that fits his agenda in an

attempt to evoke an emotional response from the reader. He does make some good points

pertaining to injustices and misconceptions regarding the idealistic view of history, but

unrealistic perceptions are made of the founding and progress of this country. You have

to ask yourself, which is more important, that Columbus made his way to America or

that he treated the Indians horribly when he got here ? Which is more important,

that the Declaration of Independence states, that ?all men are created equal? or the fact

that the author of the Declaration owned hundreds of slaves?

Zinn seems to argue that we cannot end evils like genocide, exploitation, and

abuse until we ?face? them … drag them into the light of day. To that point we are in

complete agreement. But, the very heart of Zinn’s ?history? is distorted. To use the two

most obvious examples; he condemns Columbus for genocide and America for slavery.

However, on the genocidal religious practices of Native Americans and on the African

elements of the international black slave trade, Zinn is virtually silent. That silence is a

crime of sorts. It is a crime because it distorts the truth rather than advances it and justice

cannot be had by any means other than the truth. If Zinn wants justice he needs to face

the truth and to face it he has to be willing to look for it. In my opinion he has attempted

nothing of the sort in this book.

Zinn’s interpretation of the motivations of the founders with respect to the

Constitution and the Bill of Rights are inaccurate. For example, if you knew nothing

about the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, Zinn would have you believe that they were

merely the results of a clever ploy by the rich landowners. To ?buy? enough support from

the middle class to assure continuation of the system that kept the rich, wealthy. You

would not know that these documents and the ideas they reflect have been profoundly

important not only in the United States, but also throughout the world.

In my opinion his history of the Cold War is wrong as well. In reading about the

Cold War, one would emerge from Zinn’s account believing that the U.S. government

had driven the arms race throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In his view the Soviets, it

seems, had no role in all of this. Zinn fails to mention that after the end of the Cold War,

what emerged from Soviet and then Russian sources strongly corroborated most of the

United States views on the Cold War. The Soviet missiles were real; they?re potential to

conquer Europe with their massive army was real as well. They?re military expenditures

were, in fact, much higher in terms of the burden they placed on the Soviet economy,

then we realized.

In discussing the Rosenbergs, Zinn leaves the reader with the impression that they

were framed. He conveniently fails to mention the substantial literature of the last fifteen

years, nearly all of which tends to confirm that they were guilty as charged.

His treatise on Vietnam begins with a false contention. On page 460, Zinn opens

his chapter on the Vietnam War with this paragraph:

?From 1964 to 1972, the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the

history of the world made a maximum military effort, with everything

short of atomic bombs, too defeat a nationalist revolutionary movement

in a tiny, peasant country, and failed. When the United States fought

in Vietnam, it was organized modern technology versus organized

human beings, and the human beings won.?

-Chapter 18, A People?s history of the United States

Anyone who knows anything about the Vietnam War, knows that we did not

make a ?maximum military effort? in fighting this war. He fails to mention that the senior

political and military leadership of the United States was inept and we waged this war in

a half-hearted manner. We did not buildup military forces in Vietnam or the bordering

Southeast Asian countries. Instead we sent a minimal number of our boys into the jungles

to die. We would then replace them with improperly trained men, without any additional

aid or hope of reinforcements. Our pilot?s were not allowed to bomb strategic locations in

Hanoi. The North Vietnamese military leadership knew this and stored a large supply of

military hardware there. This is just another example of Zinn’s clearly socialist-biased

writing. If he wasn’t so caught up in spreading Marxism by praising the cruel North

Vietnamese soldiers and citizens, then he might realize he has the facts wrong. The North

Vietnamese soldiers and citizens are the ones who committed numerous atrocities against

American soldiers during the war(the infamous POW camps). In my opinion Zinn is too

busy spreading anti-American propaganda, to realize these facts or is just unwilling to

acknowledge them.

To put it bluntly, please spare me the bleeding heart liberal slant on history, life

isn?t fair, period. Without this country and the principles it was founded on, life would

indeed be more miserable and similar to the millions of people who are currently

suffering in Third world countries, or under the hammer of communism. There isn?t a

country in this world that doesn?t have skeletons in their closet. For a country that had

and still has so many problems (according to Zinn), I think we turned out to be just fine.

Things in our society will never be perfect, but we keep striving to make things better and

our citizens are granted the freedoms of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That?s

what makes this the greatest country in the world today. For those people who want to

rewrite history, let history speak for itself, good or bad and don’t inflate or deflate it

according to your own personal agenda.