

Dan Leahy's Book Outline:

A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES

By Howard Zinn

Chapter One

COLUMBUS, THE INDIANS AND HUMAN PROGRESS

Who are "the people?"

Indigenous native Americans

the Arawaks of the Bahamas, Aztecs of Mexico, Incas of Peru and the Powhatans and Pequots of VA and Mass.

The people who are not a part of "the memory of the state." (9).

What kind of America do these people want?

Curiosity

Sharing

Completely peaceful

Joint mating of partners

Natural abortion

A "natural" right to the land.

Hundreds of different tribal cultures (Zuni and Hopi)

Trading system of ornaments and weapons (Moundbuilders of Ohio)

Two thousand different languages

An agriculture of maize, tobacco, peanuts, etc.

Land owned and held in common (Iroquois)

Families in clans grouped into villages

What are they resisting?

Slavery

Work slavery

Finding "gold" for the invaders

Not to "subdue" the land. (Pohawtan)

European values a society of rich and poor controlled by priests, governors, by male heads of families.

What are their methods of resistance?

Mass suicide with cassava poison

Refusal to trade

Abandon villages

Killed the invaders

Gifts (Aztecs)

Asked invaders to go back (Montezuma)

Passive acceptance (Powhatan) and then total war.

WHY ATTACK STANDARD HISTORY?

"But the easy acceptance of atrocities as a deplorable but necessary price for progress (Hiroshima and Vietnam, to save Western Civilization; Kronstadt and Hungary, to save socialism; nuclear proliferation, to save us all) that is still with us." (89).

Genocide is not a technical necessity but an ideological choice.

Is there in fact a "United States" fundamentally a community of people with common interests? (9)

The violent beginnings of an intricate system of technology, business, politics and culture that would dominate the world for the next five centuries. (12)

If "sacrifice" is necessary for progress isn't it "fair" that those who are to suffer the sacrifice be the ones who decide upon its necessity?

"So, Columbus and his successors were not coming into an empty wilderness, but into a world which in some places was as densely populated as Europe itself, where the culture was complex, where human relations were more egalitarian than in Europe and where the relations among men, women, children and nature were more beautifully worked out than perhaps any place in the world." (21)

Chapter Two

DRAWING THE COLOR LINE

Who are "the people" Zinn is discussing?

The desperate colonialists starving and in need of labor; craftsmen and men of leisure who could not work the land.

White indentured servants

African people sold into slavery in the Americas.

What kind of America do these people want?

Assert their dignity as human beings

Maintain their family ties (runaway)

What are they resisting?

Removal from their tribal cultures

White was master, black was slave.

What are their methods of resistance?

Jumped overboard on route

Killed each other to breathe on ship

Organized insurrection (250 instances of 10 or more)

Running away

Sabotage and slowdown

Taught disobedience to the Indians (32)

Slave meetings (feasts and brawls)

Runaway villages in the frontier.

Women killed and poisoned their masters

New York revolt of 1712. (10% of NY population)

Join with white indentured servants

"NATURAL" SOLUTION TO LABOR DIFFICULTY

Because, by 1619, a million blacks had already been brought from Africa to South America and the Caribbean, to the Portuguese and Spanish colonies, to work as slaves. (25)

In 1637, the first American slave ship, the Desire, went into business.

By 1800, 10 to 15 million blacks had been transported to the Americas as slaves. 50 Million Africans to death and slavery in centuries.

Only one fear was greater than the fear of black rebellion in the new American colonies. That was the fear that discontented whites would join black slaves to overthrow the existing order. (37)

We see now a complex web of historical threads to ensnare blacks for slavery in America: the desperation of starving settlers, the special helplessness of the displaced African, the powerful incentive of profit for slave trader and planter, the temptation of superior status for poor whites, the elaborate controls against escape and rebellion, the legal and social punishment of black and white collaboration. (37)

How to eliminate the class exploitation that has made poor whites desperate for small gifts of status?? (38)

Chapter Three

PERSONS OF MEAN AND VILE CONDITION

Who are the People Zinn is discussing?

Frontiersmen of Bacon's Rebellion (1676)

Englishmen, Negroes, free men, servants, slaves. (41)

Majority of Virginia's population

Indentured servants

Half of the colonialists came as servants. (46)

Free workers

What kind of America do these people want?

Antiaristocratic and antiIndian

Military protection on the frontier

Just taxes, beaver trade, acctble govt.

Not so much English control of trade/profits.

Hopes of leveling. (equalizing wealth)

Free from bondage.

LAND

Keep from freezing (49)

Their wages (50)

What are they resisting?

Bondage

Starvation and poverty

The necessities and clothes

The rich and powerful

What are their methods of resistance?

Few servant rebellions (Isaac Friend in 1661)

Individual acts of resistance.

Escape and desertions

Servant Strike in Maryland.

Bakers refused to bake ((1741)

Desertion and strikes

Demolished the public market in Boston (1730)

Vote out of office

Surrounded the governor's house.

Poor farmers occupied land over high rents

Join the Indians and live in their culture.

As in any contract between unequal powers, the parties appeared on paper as equals, but enforcement was far easier for master than for servant. (43)

The colonies, it seems, were societies of contending classes a fact obscured by the emphasis, in traditional histories, on the external struggle against England, the unity of the colonists in the Revolution.

The country therefore was not 'born free' but born slave and free, servant and master, tenant and landlord, rich and poor. (50)

Those upper classes, to rule, needed to make concessions to the middle class, without damage to their own wealth or power, at the expense of slaves, Indians and poor whites. This brought loyalty. (58)

Chapter Four

TYRANNY IS TYRANNY