

# A People's History Of The United States Summary

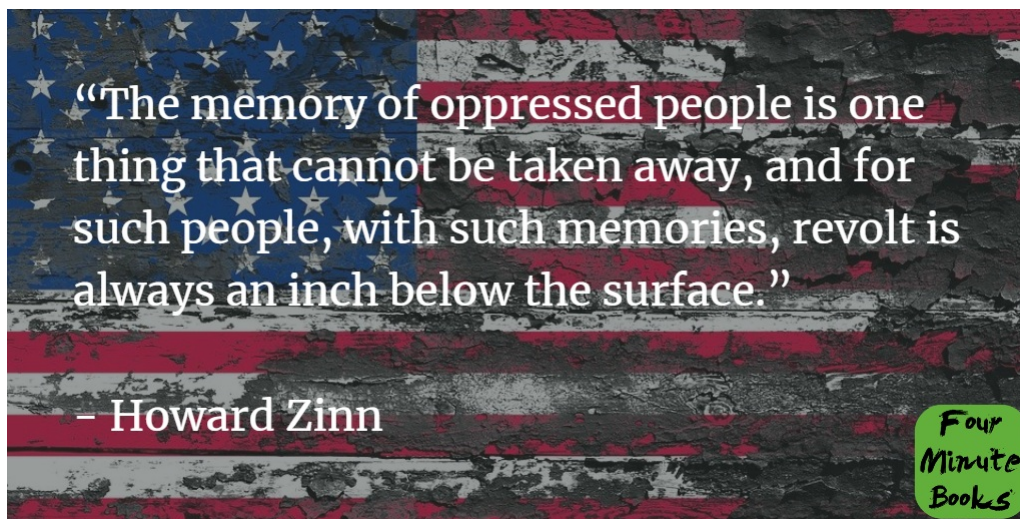
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**1-Sentence-Summary:** *A People's History Of The United States* will help you see ways to improve the world by giving you a better understanding of the true, sometimes shameful, story of this country's rise to power.

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



I was recently talking with my Colombian brother-in-law who told me some interesting facts about Fidel Castro. It was surprising that in all my time at school I'd never heard what he told me that day about the US involvement in Cuba. I came to realize that maybe this country that I live in isn't as flawless as our education system teaches.

While I am still grateful for where I live, I was excited to get a new perspective that day. I see now that this country has a problem with hiding its imperfections, which has serious consequences.

This is why I enjoyed Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, a book about the uprising of the United States from the perspective of the oppressed. You definitely didn't hear these facts in history class. It comes off a bit one-sided at times, but I think you'll appreciate the eye-opening new view you'll get.

Here are the 3 most eye-opening lessons I've learned from this book:

1. The founding fathers set up the US government to benefit wealthy landowners, who still have power today.

2. The Civil War wasn't as much about ending slavery as it was about advancing political interests.
3. The US has repeatedly used war as a way to improve their economic situation.

Are you ready to have your mind opened about history as you thought you knew it? Let's begin!

## Lesson 1: Wealthy landowners set up the US government to benefit their interests, and they continue to rule today.

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In the past, historians have falsely claimed that African people who were brought to America were naturally submissive. But the real truth is that they did try to revolt, and many died for this. Slave owners knew that they had to crush their spirits if they could successfully keep slaves.

However, the biggest fear these early settlers had was that the slaves and lower-class whites would join together and attempt to overthrow the rich property owners. At the time, about half of the people who were coming to America were white servants, so the groups posed a significant threat. This was the real reason a law was passed making it illegal for white and black people from speaking.

By the year 1770, the top 1 percent was in control of 44 percent of the nation's wealth. This unfair distribution of wealth still exists today, thanks to the founding fathers.

Did you know that early American leaders like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Alexander Hamilton were all very wealthy landowners? Some of them actually owned large slave plantations. Naturally, the government they established was in favor of maintaining their own wealth. **This is why most of the US Constitution focuses on protecting those who own land but mentions nothing of women, slaves, servants, or those without property.**

Laws like needing to own property with at least a value of 5,000 pounds ensured that the power stayed with the wealthier Americans.

## Lesson 2: Political leaders were more concerned about their own interests than ending slavery at the start of the Civil War.

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We'd like to think of the Civil War as the heroic plight of the altruistic North freeing the slaves. But in reality, things might be a little less valiant. Tensions brewed between the North and South because the North was elite businessmen and manufacturers who wanted a free

market and high tariffs that would protect against competition. This plan was not in the interest of the Southern plantation owners, and the South was angry they were unsympathetic to their needs. So they seceded from the Union.

Yes, Lincoln waged the war that ended slavery, but it wasn't for the sake of humanitarianism or justice. He just wanted to do everything he could to keep the Union financially healthy and please his political supporters. Remember the Emancipation Proclamation? Though it's often hailed as a wonderful act of humanitarianism, this isn't really the whole picture. What it really said is that those who are opposed to the Union could not have slaves. **This was only to strategically get slaves to leave their plantations, forcing the South to surrender.**

After the war, the Union gave the plantation owners compensation for losing their slaves. The freed slaves, however, were left on their own as new forms of racial oppression emerged, mostly without protection.

### Lesson 3: Economic gains were a primary reason for the United States entering World War II, and have been for many military actions of the country.

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If you're American, when you picture our involvement in World War II, it's probably a picture of our heroic country coming in and stopping the war just in the nick of time. The reason for our involvement is a bit different, though.

Franklin D. Roosevelt wasn't focusing on dictators and racism as much as we think. His primary concern was how war would affect resources the US depended on, particularly from Japan. After trade was becoming affected by the War, the US began to place heavy sanctions on them. Just two weeks before Pearl Harbor, the White House held a meeting trying to justify starting a war with Japan.

They knew the US economy would benefit from the the War and open up foreign markets. Oil in the Middle East is just one example. But a small group of businessmen benefited most. Of the 2,000 companies who submitted bids for military contracts, only 56 large corporations got them, and they saw their profits skyrocket.

General Motors president Charles Wilson suggested we have a "permanent war economy" and that's exactly what happened. **After the War, military budgets remained at those high levels, and were justified by threats of everything from communism to Vietnam.**

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## **A People's History Of The United States Review**

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I have a lot of thoughts about *A People's History of the United States*. I think it's important to be honest with ourselves about our past, which is something that the U.S. hasn't historically been very good at. Eye-opening stories like this from the side of the oppressed should be taught in school. I also believe, however, that just being angry about historical atrocities doesn't do much good and we should use this information to live and be better people than our forefathers.

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## **Who would I recommend the A People's History Of The United States summary to?**

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The 22-year-old political science major who is fascinated by the real history of the United States, the 52-year-old activist who'd like to help end oppression, and anyone who'd like a more accurate perspective on the history of the US.