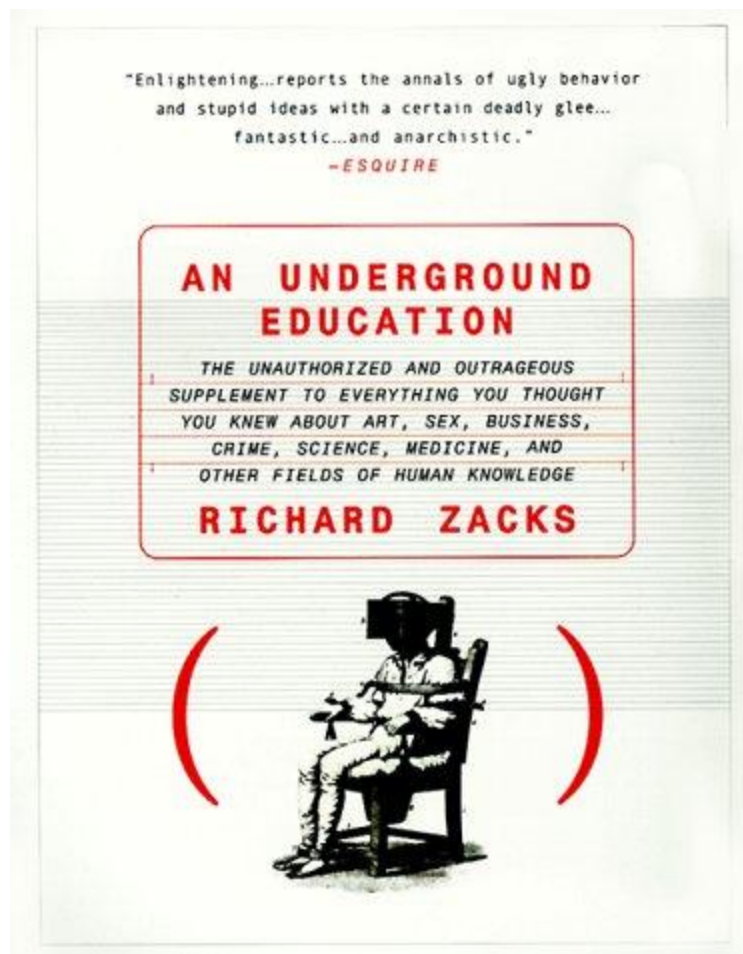


An Underground Education : The Unauthorized and Outrageous Supplement to Everything You Thought You Knew About Art, Sex, Business, Crime, Science, Medicine, and Other Fields of Human by Richard Zacks



[An Underground Education](#)

Forget the history you were taught in school; Richard Zacks's version is crueler and funnier than anything you might have learned in seventh-grade civics--and much more of a gross-out, too. Described on the book jacket as an autodidact extraordinaire, Zacks is also the author of *History Laid Bare*, making him something of an expert guide through history's back alleys and side streets. There's no fact too seamy or perverse for Zacks to drag out into the light of day, from matters scatological and sexual

to some of history's most truly bizarre episodes. Curious about ancient nose-blowing etiquette? What about the sexual proclivities of Catherine the Great? Throughout chapters such as The Evolution of Underwear and Dentistry Before Novocaine, Zacks proves a tireless debunker of popular myths as well as a muckraker par excellence.

An Underground Education

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. Sigh, just another 98 times and then I have to go home and start my history homework. I guess my teacher didn't like some of my more creative answers to the exam. What does she know? She is totally oblivious to Area 51, Tesla's death ray, or that Hitler's Brain is hooked up to a supercomputer and is the president of Brazil. I love reading, but she makes history soooo boring. She just teaches us what we are supposed to know. Nothing I'm not supposed to know, nothing quirky or surprising, or interesting. I mean, why did Napoleon really lose the battle of Waterloo? * Textbooks can be so plodding, far too logical and way too orderly. History is messy and it can be amusing and not so serious, and even a little bizarre...

I want to know the good stuff and that's why I turned to *An Underground Education: The Unauthorized And Outrageous Supplement To Everything You Thought You Knew About Art, Sex, Business, Crime, Science, Medicine, And Other Fields Of Human Knowledge* by Richard Zacks. Forget what you learned in school, and the teacher's angry red marker. Zacks debunks many popular cultural myths and gives new life to old history. Zacks has divided the book into ten different sections: Arts & Literature, Business, Crime & Punishment, Everyday Life, Medicine, Religion, Science, Sex, World History, and American History.

Zacks covers a wide variety of topics, but he keeps the writing simple and attention grabbing. His emphasis, however, is definitely on the strange and often perverse. So, if you are easily offended, and a bit conservative you should probably skip this book. I mean the title does have business and sex in the title, so that should tell you it's not for the thin-skinned. For example, you might read today's headlines and get the impression that Iraqi War profiteering is something new, but the unfortunate soldiers of the Civil War often wore shoes with no soles, slept in disintegrating tents, and fired weapons that blew up in their hands, all due to the greed of America's great capitalists.

Surely you would have paid more attention in English class if you knew the Bard was so bawdy or that Chaucer made sly jokes about sex. Sure, you knew Edison was credited for inventing the incandescent light bulb, but did you know he secretly helped develop the electric chair in a devious scheme to have the death-dealing device named after his archrival,

George Westinghouse? There are lots of interesting facts and tidbits, though its far from complete. For example, he joyfully explores the evolution of the codpiece, but skips over the symbolism of the long-toed shoes, or poulaines. European folk beliefs equated foot-size with penis-size (think also of noses...) and the tips of the poulaines were thus phallic symbols. The tops of poulaines were also often painted with images of male genitals. You just cant make this stuff up!

Yes, history is way more interesting, and vastly more complicated, than the dried-out sentences in high school history books that leave me feeling deeply unsatisfied. Perhaps great men and women should be pushed off their pedestals. They do not stand on the shoulders of giants (not an admission of humility by Sir Isaac Newton, but rather a bitter insult to a hunchbacked dwarf he was feuding with); they are human, like you and me. Made of flesh and blood and sometimes just a little strange-the famous Mari Hari was no master spy, Cleopatra was ugly as sin, and Pope Innocent III authorized a holy quest for Jesus foreskin. I guess history can be entertaining, warped and worth remembering. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it...

*Theories abound, but the brilliant strategist had a raging case of hemorrhoids, which prevented him from riding out and surveying the troops. Ahh, but for a nail...

History, condemned repeating it, or seeing if we can escape it? Email me at frommyshelf@epix.net. Miss a column? Our archives are available at www.frommyshelf.blogspot.com read the history of Hobo in Hobo Finds A Home A charming story about a barn cat who wants more out of life. Dont miss the in depth documentary about Hobo the cat, soon to be aired on the History Channel

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