

## Transcription

Exploring how we can master ourselves by looking at how experts say it is possible with your host Suswati Basu.

Intro music

Welcome to season 2 episode 60 of How To Be...with me Suswati as your timid presenter, guiding you through life's tricky topics and skills by reading through the best books out there.

Before we get started on talking about real history, I wanted to introduce the excellent podcast The Comfortable Spot with Ken Sweeney.

**THE COMFORTABLE SPOT:** Hi, I'm Ken Sweeney. This is The Comfortable Spot. The Comfortable Spot is a series of conversations with interesting people from different walks of life. You may not know all of them, but you might find them intriguing, so I hope you are sitting comfortably and happy to stay with us. You can find a comfortable spot on Google, Spotify, Apple, or wherever you get your favorite podcasts

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Accurate history is important so that we can understand how our society came to be. History also gives us insight on how to react to certain events. An inaccurate understanding of the past, therefore, will present the incorrect answers as to why the world is like it is now. However, we don't always hear the different points of view in the classroom. With that in mind, here is Chief Communications Officer of WePlay Holding, Alena Dalskaya-Latosiewicz on her thoughts on the Ukraine-Russian war.

**ALENA DALSKAYA-LATOSIEWICZ:** Studying history, we can better understand why certain events occur in our lives. Casual affects relationships. That is, what should history learn to us both in theory, in practice? The Russian Ukraine war, which started in 2014 and turned into full -scale war on February 24, confirms this. For now, war in Ukraine lasts more than 30 days. The Russian government keeps using its favorite tool, propaganda. The role of history here is based on facts and proofs to combat with the fake news. For example, the hashtag Stop Russian Propaganda initiative by our company. WePlay Holding aims to dispel stereotypes about Ukraine that Russia has been imposing for years. Today we witnessed a new stage of Kremlin's propaganda, the myth of the good Russians spread throughout Europe. The goal of the message Russians are uh against war and they are the victims as well is to decrease the pressure of the world economic sanctions. Let's get back to the facts. 80% of Russians support Putin's war against Ukraine. So if some Russians indeed want to stop the war, they should put pressure on those 80% of Russians inside the Russia, but not to look for mercy at the red carpet and come. I believe that the mission of every nation is to preserve its unique history and culture. Today, the whole world knows who are the Ukrainians, and this is the tipping point of the European history. Slava Ukraina!

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Our first book is from Sabrina Mahfouz, who is a writer and performer, raised in London and Cairo and working across multiple art forms, including film, TV, opera, dance and music. She is a Royal Society of Literature fellow and a resident writer at Shakespeare's Globe theatre. Her previous theatre work includes *A History of Water in the Middle East*, *Chef and Dry Ice*. Sabrina has edited the anthologies *Smashing it: Working-class Artist of Life, Art and Making it Happen*, *Poems from a Green and Blue Planet* and *The Things I Would Tell You: British Muslim Woman Write* and she is an essay contributor to the multi award-winning *The Good Immigrant*. Her new book *These Bodies of Water: Notes on the British Empire, The Middle East, and Where We Meet* is part history, part polemic and part intimate memoir. I got to catch up with the author, so have a listen to the snippet, but find the full interview on [www.howtobe247.com](http://www.howtobe247.com) or on the YouTube channel.

**SABRINA MAHFOUZ:** The very first piece of writing that I did was a poem that was just reflecting on the time that I spent working in government and the realization of the fact that I was part Egyptian, actually playing into the possibilities of that career could or could not have for me. But in general, the idea of looking at specifically water in the Middle East region, I think that was more to do with the theater projects that I wanted to do, which was looking at different women's stories in different countries in the region and then connecting those stories to water. And then that sort of developed more and more into a show. Again, looking at my time working in the government and then connecting still some of those women's stories and stories of water altogether. The theater show as a finished product came first and then from that obviously done a lot of research, even though the theater show was 1 hour, so it had to be highly, highly condensed version of the history that I was trying to get through, as well as part of my own history as well with uh songs as well, all in less than 60 minutes. So I had all of this research that I still wanted to do something with. I still wanted to try and connect the dots a little bit more with and expand on. So it felt like when lockdown happened and there was this sense of time • changing its rhythm for uh short periods, writing it into a book form, something that I'd never felt like I had the tenacity or patience or focus actually to do felt more possible than it had before. So then it became a book. So it was kind of uh amalgamated really from the book was amalgamated from all those years previous to it and the things that had been researched and written and created for different mediums. Obviously I'd been linking trauma and colonialism and the personal impacts that colonial legacy has on families and on women in particular for a long time, just both in my general thoughts and conversation, but also in my work in one way or another. But I hadn't really gone into it in a lot of detail. And the water element, it appealed to me sort of thematically, really, in terms of looking at water as this life-giving and life sustaining natural resource. But that's also kind of used in a more implicit way for control and for domination. And that made quite a connection with how I feel women are used in society as well. And that was a bit of a discovery really, to realize how important the water aspects was to the entire Imperial project. And so I wasn't necessarily expecting to find that much connection between it. I initially thought it would have just been quite an interesting somatic sort of overlay to look at the water situation alongside women's situations. And so, yeah, it definitely went down

a broader and more complicated and heavier route than I'd ever expected it to you with true history is obviously a difficult phrase because there's always going to be so many different sides and there's always someone who's going to have to collate that and make a decision as to how that those things are presented. Even if you just say you're giving someone a list of facts, those facts are still presented instead of other facts which could also be presented in the research in this book made it even more clear than ever that no matter what you can take • one day that one particular agreement was made, and then you look around what else was happening around that date with all the different countries that were involved in that agreement, and you start seeing these never ending links as to why that agreement was actually beneficial for that person at that time to make, which had nothing to do with what was being said or that anyone's officially ever connected. So it's just so difficult to say that there's a true history, which is why it's so easy to manipulate. But ultimately I think that it's very important, particularly in Britain, for people to be taught about the exact position that Britain held in these countries in the world and why. And then people can make up their own mind if they think that that was something that had to be done or not. Obviously I would go on the side of not. But there might be some people who see it differently. I don't think it's about telling them how you have to think about it, but it's about at least saying it wasn't this greatly received mission that was happening around the world where people were like opening their arms and couldn't wait to have Shakespeare brought into their country and just all that kind of stuff, which again has been happening, but less so in an educational setting and particularly with the Middle East, I think because it is still ongoing, because Britain is still so involved and it's still so hugely important to their economy in terms of arms sales and oil as well, but particularly arm sales as direct economic money making into the country I think there is a need to keep that uh history more sidelined than it is in other regions where our uh current position doesn't feel as connected. And so it feels a little bit easier for Britain to maybe say, oh, that was an unfortunate um time, but we've moved on from that, whereas in the Middle East, they haven't actually moved on for it because they're still arming most of the conflicts that happen in there if they're not directly involved in them physically. So, yeah, I think if you don't tell people, then what happens is what we're seeing now, which is this sort of apathy towards people who are coming from other countries. You can see how welcoming people have been to Ukrainian refugees, and that's wonderful. But I think that that's not unconnected to the fact that we've never really had any representation of that region as being as a negative one. Whereas the Middle East, which has had so much negative representation, such a sort of constant conversation as, like, Britain kind of helped it. Britain gave it all this stuff, and now it just doesn't know what to do with itself. And that's sort of impacting on how people see the people who are coming from that region and needing help just as much as people coming from other places that are deemed more deserving by the British public. So, yeah, I think it's really important for a history that is more Truthful, if not the true history.

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Mahfouz once sat in a Whitehall interview room and was interrogated about everything from her political leanings to her private life. It was ostensibly a job interview, but implicit in their demands was the unspoken question: as a woman of Middle Eastern heritage, could she really be

trusted? Years later, she found herself confronting the meaning behind this interrogation, and how it was specifically informed by the British Empire's historical dominance in the Middle East, especially in terms of water.

During one of those opportunities of working whilst studying in London, she was waitressing at Stringfellows strip club in Covent Garden, where her Kosovan colleagues became great friends, and then she found informal work experience at an office in Pristina that was supporting the United Nations war crimes tribunal in Kosovo.

It was here that she realised the NGO world was in part another version of colonialism, sticking to a country's claim in another country through the morally celebrated framework of humanitarian aid.

She had been a member of Stop the War and had been in the protest against the British invasion of Iraq. But she received the role at the Ministry of Defence. She had wanted to work at the national archives because she wanted to be able to tell the untold history of British colonies, convincing ministers of the need to teach the British empire authority in schools with the archives we had at our disposal.

Mahfouz says war is in all of us, one way or another, a constant part of humanity's long story. Not least, a significant part of the story of every empire, including the British empire. Britain fought 230 wars during the 64 years of Queen Victoria's reign alone, paving the way for its Imperial peak of 1921, when it ruled, to varying degrees, 23% of the world's population and 25% of the world's landmass.

During the expansion of the British empire, and most others that came before it, the justification of a divine mandate was a standard excuse for the terrible violence required to establish and preserve it.

The European colonisation of the Middle East really began nearly 1000 years ago, with five civilian slaughtering crusade led by European Christians between 1099 and 1221. They were initially instigated by Pope Urban with the objective of expanding the world its access to Catholicism by defeating Islamic rule. This allowed the Western Church's power and wealth by capturing Jerusalem and various territories across what is now known as Palestine, Lebanon and Syria. The reasoning of initiating war on the basis of just means continues today, depending on what society is willing to accept as just.

Water surrounded every colonial decision the British had ever made. Water in all its forms is that centre of our pending environmental breakdown and ecosystem collapse. The sharing of water resources amongst nations offers the hope of collaboration and generosity before greed, but at the same time, political crises such as the dispute between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia over Ethiopia is a continued building of contested dams in the River Nile, which simmers constantly. Almost all conflicts have elements of water politics within them, even if it is not one of the primary causes.

Britain's dependency on the Middle East water for fast and easy trading route goes back almost 100 years before oil was even discovered in the region. By the time it was discovered in Persia, modern day Iran, in 1908, the British empire had already colonised to varying degrees, a quarter of the world, including water now Egypt, Sudan, Bahrain, Kuwait, Yemen and Oman. This reading is growing in importance to the British because of the Ottoman Empire, which had begun to dissolve and they wanted to be the first in line to gain control of its Middle Eastern territories.

Competition between European imperial powers was increasing, and role in this area allowed Britain unhindered access to the quickest route for imperial trade and therefore economic dominance. The region was instrumental in getting the British empire to its so-called territorial peak in 1921, when it ruled with protectorates, colonies or dominions, sometime does the east India company and sometimes is the Crown, over 30,000,000 mi.<sup>2</sup> of the world's landmass, making it to the largest empire in history.

The Middle East is a contentious term. It is a political term, as all border and regions are, not geographical facts. It is of course east only in relation to the west, seeing as it is right in the middle of a spherical landmass. The countries that have been labelled as belonging to the region have changed over the years. Afghanistan, Eritrea and Sudan are highlighted in some early 20th century British maps of the Middle East but are rarely included now.

And the history seems to be erased in the UK where for example the monument Cleopatra's Needle stands tall. One of Egypt's most celebrated archaeologists Zawi Hawass called for the monument to be returned recently, because of Britain's lack of understanding and refusal to acknowledge its origins.

Did you know the incredible plinth's first journey was 3,500 years ago? Cleopatra's Needle is one of two obelisks gifted to the UK and US by the Khedive Muhammad Ali Pasha in 1819. Its American twin is located in New York's Central Park but the London version stands in an unloved part of the Victoria Embankment. It celebrated 200 years since the presenting in 2019, given to commemorate Lord Nelson and Sir Ralph Abercrombie's victories over the French in the battles of the Nile and Alexandria during the Napoleonic Wars. It took a further 59 years to begin to transport the 224-tonne stone from Alexandria to the UK due to being almost lost at sea, and was officially erected in 1878.

Hence, it's understandable that Dr Hawass is angry. He believes we should treat the ancient monument with the reverence and respect it deserves. He said it should be in a temple or museum, not forgotten by Riverside. He said if they don't care, they should give it back.

The British, with an Anglo Indian army, first invaded Egypt in 1798 to expel the French, who were attempting to take over Egypt. This would have led the British to have increasing influence in India due to the established trade routes to Egypt from Europe.

In 1882, the British invaded this time with the French, and began to colonise the Nile region, ushering in the Nile gunboat era, when Victorian gunboats facilitated Britain's imperial control of the north eastern corner of Africa, policing and attacking from the water, seen as "floating symbols of British imperial power". This was primarily about the Suez Canal. An engineering feat like no other at the time, designed and managed by the French but built between 1859 and 1869 by the Egyptians, many as forced labour. Up to 120,000 out of the 1.5 million workers died whilst building it.

The Khedive of Egypt had gotten heavily into debt. When the British saw that the canal would be realised and provide a route to India which cut out the thousands of miles and extra weeks to sail around Africa, they bought the land bankrupt Khedive's shares in it. The French and British began to control all of Egypt's finances, railways, ports, post offices and museums – all due to Egypt's bankruptcy, brought about by the crippling European debts. The Egyptian army officers were understandably not happy about the set up and overthrew the Khedive. The British invaded, fearing been blocked from now all important Suez Canal and not trusting the French support their access, though the French had also sent troops to fight on the British side.

After the British navy bombarded Alexandria from the Mediterranean sea and attacked both ends of the Suez Canal, Colonel Urabi, who was in charge of the uprising, surrendered and Egypt was now a virtual British colony, allowing Britain to also effectively seize control of Sudan, beginning the European scramble for Africa, which saw 90% of the continent on the European colonisation by 1914.

In 1904, in British side the Entente cordiale, which formalised Britain as the dominant power in Egypt, whilst France would rule Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria. Egyptian nationalist movements and uprisings were a constant threat to British rule. It took hundreds of attempts, the decline of the post-Second World War European powers and the emergence of the exceptionally popular socialist nationalist Gamal Abdel Nasser, who had led the military overthrow of the British backed monarchy in 1952 to finally rid Egypt of British troops in 1956.

The Muslim brotherhood came into existence in 1928 and direct opposition to what many believe to be the morally corrupt British imperial rule of Egypt even though it is often associated with the west now.

General Nasser re-nationalised the Suez Canal in 1956, declaring it Egyptian owned and managed. The Suez Canal crisis ensued. The British, French and Israelis made a secret deal, the protocol of Sevres, agreeing that Israel would invade the Sinai on 29th of October 1956 and following that Britain and France who mobilised as interventionists. When they did, they began what was arguably one of the most significant episode in the post 1945 British and Egyptian history.

Through the tripartite coalition was successful in the military endeavours, with Israel occupying the Sinai until March 1957, it was a political failure, as all three were forced to withdraw from the

Suez by American and Russian pressure. It had lasted just two days, and yet it would often be credited as a crisis which insured the end of the British empire.

Egypt maintained control of the Suez Canal with the support of the United Nations and the United States. British access to fuel and oil became limited which resulted in shortages. Petrol rationing in the UK was introduced in December 1956, lasting until May 1957. Under huge domestic pressure and suffering ill-health, Anthony Eden resigned in January 1957, less than two years after becoming prime minister. The Suez crisis understandably increased Soviet influence over Egypt.

In June 2021 the UK Prime Minister's trade envoy to Egypt, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP, detailed the U.K.'s commitment to investing in the Suez Canal zone as an integral part of the U.K.'s objective to be the largest G7 investor in Africa by 2022. Hence it remains as important to Britain as they ever were.

And it is shocking that more than half of British people are completely unaware of the Yemen conflict, let alone the British role in it. In 2018, a bomb manufactured in America by Lockheed Martin, a British American arms company, that had been sold to and used by Saudi Arabia under an arms deal struck in 2015, killed 40 Yemeni boys age 6 to 11 years old who were on a bus coming home from a school trip.

Saudi Arabia is the single biggest customer for both the US and the UK arms industries, with around £6.4 billion to the UK in the last five years. By 2020, the British were still sending arms to Saudi Arabia, despite a Court of Appeal ruling that Liam Fox, Boris Johnson and Jeremy Hunt had acted unlawfully in 2015 by secretly signing off on arms sales to Saudi without properly evaluating the impact on civilians. The court ruled that it was illegal for Britain to sell any more arms to Saudi as there was a chance they would be used against civilians. British exploitation of Yemen, however, started a long time before the illicit arms deals of the 21st-century.

In 1839, British forces invaded Aden and forcibly took control of the area, as it was perfectly placed for them to launch attacks on the pirate ships in the Arabian Sea which have long been attacking the passing British cargo ships. Importing British goods to India and exporting Indian goods to Britain was at the time what made the empire viable. Pirate attacks were a real threat to the profitability and therefore the survival of the British Empire. Aden became one of the most important ports in the world to the British, and it remained so until 1965, by which point it was well known as the last post of the Empire.

The Persian gulf was the body of water that made Bahrain the first place in the Middle East the British really settled into. But 1858 official British crown rule, as opposed to East India Company control, was established in India. The Persian Gulf had long been the point at the top of the rich Indian Ocean trade triangle between West India, the gulf and East Africa. For Britain to successfully dominate and control trade from India, it needed to keep control of the area.

It re-established its Bahraini naval base in 2018 at a cost of £40 million. The Gulf shipping lanes continue to need Bahrain's largest body of water to transport 17 million barrels of oil per day.

Iraq is where the first recorded water war in history took place. Around 4500 years ago, the Sumerian city states of Lagash and Umma located in modern day Iraq, went to war over the waters of the Tigris river. Two cities eventually made what is considered to be the first boundary water agreement, the Mesilim Treaty.

In the early 1990s, after the shattering defeat of the first Gulf War, Saddam Hussein famously drained Iraq's southern marshes, but once contained the biblical garden of Eden and is now a UNESCO world heritage site. Once a diverse wetland by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, Hussein drained the wetlands in order to force out the marsh Arabs or Ma'dan people with water diversion tactics, for their supposed treachery in the Iraq and Iran war of 1980 to 1988.

Iran and Iraq war itself can be linked to a river dispute, the long running Shatt al-Arab border issue between the two countries, which in turn can be linked to British interest in the area. It was this river that was the centre of the first water-related tensions between Britain and Iran and consequently, Iran and Iraq.

The river Jordan empties into the Dead Sea and shares its banks with Syria and Israel, due to the borders drawn up by the British in 1921. Much of the water is therefore syphoned off before reaching Jordan, which is a major reason why the country has one of the lowest levels of water availability the capital in the world, with residence of the capital, Amman, having access to water for just eight hours a week and very rural communities living below the poverty line as agricultural work, reliant on water supplies, becomes scarcer. There is so much history to unpack in this incredible book that it's worth looking at yourself.

Here is another one of our voices this week. John Certalic, who was an 8th grade history teacher, host of the You Were Made for This podcast, and author of the Writer's Digest Best Inspirational Book of 2016 Them talks about the importance.

**JOHN CERTALIC:** Real history is important for a number of reasons. For one thing, history teaches us we are not alone and that others have come before us with challenges similar to the ones we face. How they dealt with their challenges can help us learn to deal with ours. History both warns us and inspires us. It is a great source of wisdom. An accurate understanding of history can teach us to avoid the mistakes made by people many years ago. And at the same time, history can inspire us to become better than we think possible when we learn what others from a bygone era accomplished. If they can do what they did in spite of their limitations, we can do the same in spite of the obstacles we face.

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The final book is by Howard Zinn, an influential historian and social activist, who taught political science at Boston University for years before passing away in 2010. A People's History of the

United States: A brilliant and moving history of American people walks you through the US' past from the perspective of the marginalised, the disenfranchised and the oppressed. Here he is speaking to Democracy Now in 2012.

**HOWARD ZINN:** Should we tell kids that Columbus, whom they've been told was a great hero, that Columbus mutilated Indians and kidnapped them and killed them in pursuit of gold? Should we tell people that Theodore Roosevelt, who was held up as one of our great presidents, was really a warmonger, who loved military exploits and who congratulated an American general who committed a massacre in the Philippines? Should we tell young people that? And I think the answer is we should be honest with young people. We should not deceive them. We should be honest about the history of our country, and we should be not only taking down the traditional heroes like Andrew Jackson, Theodore Roosevelt. But we should be giving young people an alternate set of heroes instead of Theodore Roosevelt. Tell them about Mark Twain. Well, Mark Twain, everybody learns about as the author of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. But when we go to school, we don't learn about Mark Twain. As the Vice President of the Anti Imperialist League. We aren't told that Mark Twain denounced Theo Roosevelt for approving this massacre of the Philippines. We want to give young people ideal figures like Helen Keller. And I remember learning about Helen Keller. Everybody learns about Helen Keller, a disabled person who overcame her handicaps and became famous. But people don't learn in school and young people don't learn school. What we want them to learn when we do books like Young People's History of the United States that Helen Keller was a socialist. She was a labour organiser. She refused to cross a picket line that was picketing a theatre showing a play about her. So there are these alternate heroes in American history. There's Fanny Lohemer and Bob Moses. They're the heroes of the civil rights movement. There are a lot of people who are obscure, who are not known. We have in this young People's history, we have a young hero who was sitting on the bus in Montgomery, Alabama, refused to leave the front of the bus, and it was before Rosa Parks. I mean, Rosa Parks is justifiably famous for refusing to leave her seat, and she got arrested. And that was the beginning of the Montgomery bus boycott and really the beginning of a great movement in the south. But this 15 year old girl did it first. And so we are trying to bring a lot of these obscure people back into the forefront of our attention and inspire young people to say this is the way to live.

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More often than not, history is written by victors, and the rich and powerful have consistently obscured the truth. The fact of the matter is Zinn says the United States is a land built on pillage and plunder, racism and hatred, slavery and exploitation; it is a country that has, from its inception, been set up for the rich and powerful few to exploit the many.

For decades, American schoolchildren have been taught a lie: they have been told, year after year, about the heroic tale of Christopher Columbus, a courageous Italian who “discovered” America for the Spanish, opening the door to the “New World.” The United States even named a national holiday after the explorer, honouring his arrival on North American soil on October 12, 1492. But in actual fact he had brutal intentions.

Unsurprisingly, that's precisely what Columbus and the first Europeans did: they forced the native people to lead them to gold and, on the Caribbean islands where there were few natural resources to be found, they raided the native villages, raped women and put hundreds of the strongest Arawaks on boats bound for Spain, to live out the rest of their lives in slavery.

Others who failed to produce gold or copper had their hands cut off. Over a mere three-month period, 7,000 children died, by suffocation in mines, beheading or at the hands of their own mothers to prevent their capture.

So it was that by 1515, a population of 250,000 native people had been decimated, leaving only 50,000 survivors. By 1550, that number was just 500 and, by 1650, the Arawaks were no more.

The same thing happened in the seventeenth century, when English settlers landed in Virginia and Massachusetts. They completely annihilated the Powhatan and Pequot tribes, a genocidal act that has been framed by historians as "necessary" for progress.

The Iroquois that lived in modern-day New York and Pennsylvania used to own land communally, which meant none of them were homeless. They were also agricultural experts and lived in a matrilineal society; in other words, women chose the men who would represent the tribe's interests at meetings and, if a man made poor decisions, he would be replaced which the colonists thought was absurd. They also starved in the harsh winter.

Naturally, they resented the fact that their "advanced" race must live such a miserable life, while the "savages" lived in bounty, evading all attempts at enslavement. Because of this, by the late 1700s, colonists began distributing smallpox-infected blankets to the natives to reduce their population, which destroyed the population from 3,000 to 313 between 1642 to 1764.

But despite Native American resistance, the colonists still wanted a source of slaves. To satisfy it, the Dutch and the English looked to Africa. Not long thereafter, over 100 slave ships headed from the African continent for America and, by 1800, some 10-15 million slaves had been transported in abominable conditions from Africa to the "new world." This killed one out of every three people during the passage.

The US government was built for wealthy landowners and is controlled by them to this day. Early US leaders, such as George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson and several others, were all wealthy landowners – some of them even owned immense slave plantations.

To maintain their own power and wealth, they established a formidable federal government. It's no accident that the majority of the US Constitution is about protecting landowners and never even refers to slaves, servants, women or anyone without property.

And future laws didn't change much. For example, in 1776, if you wanted to run for Governor of Maryland, you had to have property worth at least 5,000 pounds to your name. It was laws like these that kept control of government firmly in the hands of the richest 10 percent of the US population.

Of the many subjects that elementary school history books gloss over, there may be none more explicitly ignored than the topic of American Indian removal and the wars against Mexico of the mid-1800s.

During this period, a series of treaties forced Native American tribes to the west. However, once the US government decided it wanted to continue expanding, these treaties were torn up and the tribes were pushed even further west, in a mass forced migration known as the "Trail of Tears." The Cherokee people were first forced to move to Alabama in 1831, but it didn't stop there. Crossing during the Mississippi River during the winter killed 4,000 out of 17,000 Cherokees.

Not much later, in 1845, President James Polk began an insistent campaign to extend the United States' borders to the Pacific Ocean. This meant taking control of California, which was then part of Mexico. Polk's plan was to send troops to the northern bank of the Rio Grande, provoking Mexican troops into firing the first shot and launching a war that would result in the American acquisition of California.

Months of fighting ensued, during which thousands died of dysentery and heat stroke. By the end of the war, American soldiers were drunk all the time, pillaging Mexican villages. By February of 1848, Polk had accomplished his goal. In exchange for a payment of \$15 million, the Rio Grande was established as the new border between Texas and Mexico; California and New Mexico became part of the United States.

In the North at around 1860, bankers, manufacturers and elite businessmen wanted an economy that would uphold their interests; they advocated a free domestic market with high tariffs to protect against outside competition.

However, what was good for the manufacturers of the North was bad for the plantation owners of the South. The latter saw northern Republicans as unsympathetic to their needs and a threat to their way of life. When Abraham Lincoln was finally elected, it provided the spark to ignite this powder keg of animosity. The Southern states began to secede from the Union and a civil war broke out.

Zinn says Lincoln's primary interests, and those of the people who came after him, were to keep the Union, however, alongside with its financial and political establishments, alive and healthy.

By the same token, the Emancipation Proclamation that ended slavery only says that people can't have slaves if they're opposed to the Union. It was purely a strategic move to get slaves to leave plantations and force the surrender of the South.

Since former slave owners had land, and therefore could vote, they were handsomely compensated for the trouble of losing their slaves. Meanwhile, their former slaves were left to their own devices as a new form of racial oppression emerged.

In the 1800s, tenant farmers started to realize that they had another option; they could form unions and improve their lives by standing together. A united group of tenant farmers called themselves the Anti-Renters and eventually got 14 people elected to New York's state legislature, presenting a formidable challenge to establishment politicians.

Over a relatively brief period, between 1864 and 1900, unionized workers increased in number from 200,000 to 1 million. A mass showdown between capital and labor had begun.

During the Industrial Revolution, many unions were founded on socialist or communist ideals. A good example is the shoemaker's union, which published a militant newspaper called *The Awl* that quoted heavily from Marx's *Communist Manifesto* to inspire workers to organize.

WWI was a powerful tool to open up foreign markets to major US corporations that were central to the ruling elite. These massive monopolies included the likes of US Steel, run by Andrew Carnegie; Standard Oil, controlled by the Rockefeller family; and J.P. Morgan, whose "House of Morgan" oligarchy ran many of the country's railroads, as well as the First National Bank of New York.

William Jennings Bryan, Secretary of State under President Wilson, later praised the president for having "opened the doors of all the weaker countries to an invasion of American capital and American enterprise."

And if WWI was a prime example of US hypocrisy, WWII only continued this tradition. For instance, when black soldiers were sent to Europe on the *Queen Mary*, they were stowed in the bottom of the boat, right next to the engine. Was the treatment of African-Americans much different than the rampant anti-Semitism that existed in Germany at the time?

As it turns out, the president at the time, Franklin D. Roosevelt, certainly wasn't preoccupied with German racism; rather, he was concerned with how a war with Japan would affect the US supply of key resources, such as rubber and tin. In fact, just two weeks before Pearl Harbor, there was a meeting at the White House about how to justify a war with Japan to the American people.

In other words, just like WWI, the US government used WWII to open up foreign markets, especially the Saudi Arabian oil industry. This time, the US economy benefited so dramatically from the intervention that people began tinkering with the idea of permanently being at war just to benefit corporations. Fifty six major corporations were awarded military contracts including General Motors, whose president, Charles Wilson, recommended a "permanent war economy" because of the benefits.

During the early 1960s, when speaking publicly about US activity in Vietnam, President John F. Kennedy said the country was working to “assist independence” in Vietnam, helping it break free from the communist regime that had seized power in the country.

However, in private meetings, his administration described interest in “rich exportable surpluses like rice, rubber, tea, corn, tin, spices, oil and many others.”

Meanwhile, a steady stream of Vietnamese atrocities filtered into the American consciousness through the news media, laying the backdrop for the many protests of the 1960s. One of the most horrifying was a New York Times report on the horrific episode at the My Lai 4 village. In this massacre, some 450 to 500 people, many of them children, women and elderly, were executed and dumped into a mass grave. Seven million tonnes of explosives were dropped on Vietnam over the course of the war, the largest concentrated amount in human history.

And the government's response to the civil rights movement was suppression rather than justice. In the summer of 1962, Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. led a march on Washington. The demonstration drew 200,000 people, black and white, from all sectors of society. But what's less commonly known is that, before the protest, its leaders spoke directly to the Kennedy administration, who convinced them to censor the likes of John Lewis, a leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, or SNCC, which advocated more militant action.

After the largest urban riots in history, the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1968. However, there was an important exception in the law. It explicitly stated that minorities would not be given rights during situations when the government calls out law enforcement, the National Guard or the armed forces to put down a civil disturbance. Still more troubling was the fact that the government defined a “riot” as nothing more than a group of three or more people threatening violence.

And after the Vietnam War, the US continued its deceptive military actions. From Jimmy Carter to Ronald Reagan to George H. W. Bush, the United States maintained the foreign policy agendas of the Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford administrations, supporting regimes in the Philippines, Iran, Indonesia and Nicaragua – governments that utilized torture and mass murder to eliminate political dissidents.

So to sum up:

Mahfouz says in *These Bodies of Water* that we had given part of ourselves to build this country. Ancestrally and presently. Nothing we did in this country could ever be on our own terms. She adds those who arrive in the UK, fleeing drought then hoping not to be drowned during the journey, are only given choices afforded to them by the empire and its legacies.

Zinn says in *A People's History of the United States* that from the very start, the US government was built to keep the wealthy and powerful in control. It has accomplished this goal by forging

close relationships with the largest corporations, robbing native populations of their land, enslaving African peoples and their descendants, and pitting working people against one another in every way possible.

It always sounds harsh to hear facts of history, but we become all the better in understanding why we are in the situation we are in and who we share our world with. Please join in on the conversation by following @howtobe247 on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, and subscribe to the podcast, which can be found via [www.howtobe247.com](http://www.howtobe247.com).

Please do leave a review if you found this helpful! Thank you to Tom Bourlet, blogger from CBD Sloth, for your lovely comments saying "Hugely inspirational content".

I'll leave you with counsellor Vanja Beric and Global Motivational Coach Andrea Mason on their thoughts and check out another amazing podcast after the voices.

See you in two week's time!

**VANJA BERIC:** I think we need to learn about history. We learn about history to have an understanding, to have an understanding of what people went through and the struggles they had. Understanding builds compassion and it builds awareness, which helps us then to connect to those people and try and see what it is they were doing and what it is they were coming from at times. Hopefully maybe that we don't repeat the same mistakes although I don't know if that's always the truth but I think the core of it is understanding which helps us build compassion, awareness and connection.

**ANDREA MASON:** The reason why I believe that the truth about history must be taught in our schools is because to get a better understanding of who you are you must get to the root cause the underlying thread, the lineage, the culture, the diversity, the morals, ethics and values of our ancestors. It is important that we understand the truth about history rather than the skewed altered perspectives that have been influenced by our external environment. Uh in order for us to learn from our history we have the ability to repeat the positive and refrain from repeating the negative.

**HELLO I'M LISTENING:** Hello, I'm listening. This is a podcast about everything and anything with me. Danny and me Wolfie. You may know us from translating love. We did a relationship podcast uh for over 80 episodes but then thought we might open up a little bit. We wanted to kind of broaden the topics a little bit outside of just relationships. So then we thought of Hello, I'm listening, which is a podcast where we literally can talk about anything. Anything that moves us, that makes us think, talk about a topic or something that we can relate to or have experienced. One thing we're really excited about with hello and listening is having guests on the podcast to talk about their interests, Their expertise and their opinions and thoughts on different topics. Um right. So join us in our journey and follow us everywhere you get podcasts.

Hello, I'm listening.

