

Chapter 1- Columbus, the Indians, and Human Progress

- A. Write down the FIVE most important things Zinn says about Columbus
 - B. Write down the TWO most important things he says about the writing of history.
1. According to Zinn, what is his main purpose for writing A People's History of the United States?
 2. What is Zinn's thesis for first 10 minutes of reading?
 3. According to Zinn, how is Columbus portrayed in traditional history books?
 4. Why does Zinn dispute Henry Kissinger's statement: "History is the memory of states?"
 5. Identify one early and one subsequent motive that drove Columbus to oppress indigenous peoples.
 6. What was the ultimate fate of the Arawak Indians?
 7. Explain Governor John Winthrop's legal and biblical justification for seizing Indian land.
 8. Explain the main tactic of warfare used by the English against the Indians.
 9. According to Roger Williams, how did the English usually justify their attacks on the Indians?
 10. What ultimately happened to the estimated 10 million Indians living in North America at the time of Columbus' arrival?
 11. How does Zinn attempt to prove that the Indians were not inferior? Provide examples.

Chapter 2 – Drawing the Color Line

1. According to Zinn, what is the root of racism in America?
2. Why were Africans considered "better" slaves than Indians in Virginia?
3. How did 16th century Africa compare to 16th century Europe politically, economically, and militarily?
4. How did slavery in Africa differ from slavery in Europe and the Americas?
5. Describe the conditions that slaves on ships coming to America ("Middle Passage").
6. What was the position of the Catholic Church in Portugal vis-à-vis slavery?
7. In terms of mortality, what was the cost of slavery?
8. What was the relationship between slavery and the plantation system.
9. What evidence exists that America's slaves did not accept their fate easily?
10. Why did slave owners fear poor whites?

Chapter 3 – Persons of Mean and Vile Condition

1. What was the economic condition of Virginia in 1676?
2. What is the evidence that Bacon's Rebellion in 1676 "had the overwhelming support of the Virginia population"?
3. Why would a European man or woman sign an indenture? Was it a "choice" or were they compelled by "historical forces"?
4. What was the greatest threat to the elite's control over the colonists – a fear that was realized in Bacon's Rebellion? What tactics did the wealthy elite/rich rulers adopt to prevent another Bacon's Rebellion?

Chapter 4 – Tyranny is Tyranny

1. What does Zinn mean by "... the advantages of combining paternalism with command"?
2. Zinn argues that, "It was not a conscious conspiracy, but an accumulation of tactical responses".. What is the difference between a "conscious conspiracy" and "tactical responses"?
3. Define (a) the "lower orders," and (b) the "local political and social elite" in terms of their:
 - percentage of community wealth controlled
 - occupations
 - political and economic interests
 - social labels/ epithets

Chapter 5 (pp 77-89)– A Kind of Revolution

1. How much colonial opposition was there to British rule in 1776?
2. What motivated the colonial poor to fight the British?
3. Zinn argues that the American Revolutionary War was making the ruling elite "more secure against internal trouble". What evidence does Zinn provide to support this assertion?
4. What were the grievances of the American troops who mutinied or rebelled during the American Revolution?
5. What were the methods of control used by the Revolutionary elite to control disobedient and rebellious colonists?

Chapter 5 (pp 90-102) – A Kind of Revolution

1. Did Shays's Rebellion have the salutary effect of "refreshing the tree of liberty"? Explain your response.
2. Did the US Constitution define a democratic government? Is a democratic government possible in an economically polarized society?
3. Many historians argue that the US Constitution creates a neutral, level playing field on which contestants prove their worth (that any inequality in wealth is not due to unfair rules but to unequal abilities). For what reasons does Zinn disagree with this interpretation?
4. Why did Congress pass the Whiskey Tax? How did small farmers who manufactured whiskey respond? What is the difference between the means by which Shays's Rebellion was defeated and the Whiskey Rebellion was defeated?

Chapter 7 (pp 125-148) – As Long as Grass Grows and Water Runs

1. What was Jefferson's policy toward the Indians?
2. How did Jackson act unconstitutionally?
3. What strategy/ies did the Cherokees adopt to fight removal?
4. What position did Sen. Frelinghuysen take regarding Indian removal? What action did Ralph Waldo Emerson take to oppose it?
5. Explain why/why not Andrew Jackson's Indian policy represented a fundamental change from the Indian policies of previous US presidents.

Chapter 8 (149-169) – We Take Nothing by Conquest, Thank God

1. What were the arguments that the news media used to support a war with Mexico?
2. What role did race play in both the promotion of and opposition to the war?
3. How can the division over the Mexican-American War (1846-48) be seen as a prelude to the Civil War (1861-65)?
4. Who were the opponents of the war? How did they manifest (in word and deed) their opposition to the war? To what degree were their tactics effective?
5. What evidence does Zinn provide to determine how widespread desertion was among American soldiers?

Chapter 9 (171-210) – Slavery Without Submission, Emancipation Without Freedom

1. On what basis did the US government support slavery?
2. "Are the conditions of slavery as important as the existence of slavery?" Why does Zinn ask this question?
3. Was resistance to slavery more, as much, or less, effective than rebellion? Explain.
4. Why was there a price on David Walker's head?
5. Why might Frederick Douglass have been "the most famous black man of his time"?
6. What was J.W. Loguen's argument against the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850? What does Sarah Logue's proposal and Loguen's response reveal about how slave owners justified slavery?
7. How did the racism of white abolitionists reveal itself? How could a white person be both an abolitionist and a racist? Why would a racist be an abolitionist? (Was the institution of slavery undermining the free labor philosophy that allowed the northern elite to justify economic inequality of the factory system?)
8. What was "The Triple Hurdle" that Sojourner Truth had to overcome?
9. Lincoln was able to speak to both sides of the slavery debate. Why did he feel compelled to speak to both sides, given his personal solution to the problem of slavery in America?
10. How was the Emancipation Proclamation a military tactic?
11. What evidence supports the thesis that the North could not have won without the help of American blacks?
12. After the South surrendered unconditionally, how did Congress dispose of the land confiscated during the war? Of what significance was the decision? For example, what did it reveal about the congressional majority's belief about the future status of blacks in the United States?)
13. Why does Zinn think that laws calling for equal treatment of blacks and whites were meaningless in practice? What other reforms would have had to accompany such laws for the laws to be meaningful in Zinn's eyes? Why? Do you agree?
14. What caused Republicans to abandon their defense of black rights? Discuss economics as well as political reasons.
15. How does Horace Mann Bond's study of Alabama Reconstruction reveal that the ultimate result of the Civil War was to reduce the South to colonial status? {To help define "colonial status," one might think the relationship between Britain and her American colonies was as defined by the Navigation Acts. These acts were passed by the English Parliament starting in 1665.}

Chapter 11 (253-295) ROBBER BARONS AND REBELS

1. Explain what Zinn means by a "skillful terracing to stabilize the pyramid of wealth."
2. Explain what Zinn means by saying that the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887 "gives away the secret of reform legislation in America."
3. In what ways does Zinn believe the Supreme Court "was doing its bit for the ruling elite"?

4. Explain how the “message” of Conwell’s famous lecture Acres of Diamonds supported the theory of Social Darwinism (refer to Pageant page 550 for definition if necessary).
5. How did the writings of Henry George and Edward Bellamy represent a “literature of dissent and protest” that arose to challenge the orthodoxy and obedience Zinn believes was designed to “control” the American working class?
6. Compare and contrast Zinn’s (270-271) and Pageant’s (558) accounts of the Haymarket Square bombing in terms of causes and effects.
7. Zinn says that revolutionary movements at this time (1880s-1890s) were stimulated by “the recognition that day-to-day combat was not enough, that fundamental change was needed.” (268) How do his accounts of the Homestead and Pullman strikes illustrate both the issues and the oppositional forces involved in such change?
8. Explain why “a Senator from Wisconsin” supported the Homestead Act in 1860, and why he was wrong.
9. Cite an example of Zinn providing evidence of mutual support and sympathy between (a) urban laborers and farmers, and (b) blacks and whites.
10. What was “the first document” of the Populist movement, and what did it call for?
11. Explain what Zinn means when he says, “on top of the serious failures to unite blacks and whites, city workers and country farmers, there was the lure of electoral politics – all of that combining to destroy the Populist movement.”

Chapter 12 (297-320) The Empire and the People

1. Why might Teddy Roosevelt have thought that the U.S. needed a war in 1897?
2. In what sense was expansion overseas “not a new idea”? If it was not new, then why did it not begin until 1898?
3. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge believed that the United States needed to control the balance of trade in the Pacific. Which island and countries did he believe were key acquisitions toward attaining such a goal?
4. U.S. business interests favored an “open door” policy over the conquest of colonies. From this point of view, what were the pros and cons of intervening in the Cuban revolt that began in 1895? Why did intervention ultimately win out?
5. How did the Cuban rebels react to McKinley’s ultimatum to Spain?
6. Why were the Cuban rebel leaders shut out of the negotiations for peace?
7. What did the American victory in the Spanish-American War allow American business to accomplish in Cuba? What role did the U.S. military occupation force play in the relationship between American investors and the Cuban workers?
8. How did the Filipinos respond to the U.S. decision to take over their country?
9. How did Beveridge justify American cruelty toward the Filipinos in 1900? Why did the U.S. government resort to such brutality? (Consider the following when answering the question: race relations in the United States; the Filipino population’s relationship to the guerrillas; and the U.S. government’s goals of the Spanish-American War).
10. What explains the heavy opposition to the passage of the Treaty of Annexation? (For example, why was it ratified by only one vote?)

Chapter 14 (359 - 368) War is the Health of the State

1. The rhetoric of the socialists, that it was an “imperialist war,” now seems moderate and hardly arguable.
2. ...on days when men by the thousands were being blown apart by machine guns and shells, the official dispatches announced “All Quiet on the Western Front.”
3. As Hofstadter says: “America became bound up with the Allies in a fateful union of war and prosperity.”
4. Written by W.E.B. Du Bois, it was titled “The African Roots of War.”
5. “...it is the nation, a new democratic nation composed of united capital and labor.”
6. That there was no spontaneous urge to fight is suggested by the strong measures taken: a draft of young men, an elaborate propaganda campaign throughout the country, and harsh punishment for those who refused to get in line.
7. “Scarcely a political observer...but what will admit that were an election to come now a mighty tide of socialism would inundate the Middle West.”
8. The Espionage Act was used to imprison Americans who spoke or wrote against the war.
9. Did citizens not have a right to object to war, a right to be a danger to dangerous policies?
10. Debs was arrested for violating the Espionage Act.

Chapter 14 (369 - 376) War is the Health of the State

1. At the same time, Theodore Roosevelt was talking to the Harvard Club about Socialists, IWWs, and others who wanted peace as “a whole raft of sexless creatures.”
2. In 1918, the Attorney General said: “it is safe to say that never in its history has this country been so thoroughly policed.”
3. He was sentenced to ten years in prison. The case was officially listed as U.S. vs. Spirit of '76.
4. In Congress, a few voices spoke out against the war.
5. The war gave the government its opportunity to destroy the IWW.
6. The IWW was shattered. Haywood jumped bail and fled to revolutionary Russia, where he remained until his death ten years later.
7. ...when the war was over, the Establishment still feared socialism.

8. The Constitution gave no right to Congress to deport aliens...
9. These were Nicola Sacco and Barolomeo Vanzetti.
10. ...the message was going out: the class war was still on in that supposedly classless society, the United States.

Chapter 16 I (407- 419) A PEOPLE'S WAR

1. By certain evidence, it was the most popular war the United States had ever fought.
2. For the United States to step forward as a defender of helpless countries matched its image in American high school textbooks, but not its record in world affairs.
3. Was this simply poor judgment, an unfortunate error? Or was it the legal policy of a government whose main interest was not stopping Fascism but advancing the imperial interests of the United States?
4. The plight of Jews in German-occupied Europe, which many people thought was at the heart of the war against the Axis, was not a chief concern of Roosevelt.
5. Beneath the noise of enthusiastic patriotism, there were many people who thought war was wrong, even in the circumstances of Fascist aggression.

Chapter 16 II (419- 431) A PEOPLE'S WAR

1. The justification for these atrocities was that this would end the war quickly, making unnecessary an invasion of Japan.
2. But what about fascism - as idea, as reality? Were its essential elements -militarism, racism, imperialism - now gone?
3. The war not only put the United States in a position to dominate much of the world; it created conditions for effective control at home.
4. World events right after the war made it easier to build up public support for the anti-Communist crusade at home.
5. In this atmosphere, senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin could go even further than Truman.

Chapter 16 III (431-442) A PEOPLE'S WAR

1. Liberal intellectuals rode the anti-Communist bandwagon.
2. Even the American Civil Liberties Union, set up specifically to defend the liberties of Communists and all other political groups, began to wilt in the cold war atmosphere.
3. The Marshal Plan also had a political motive.
4. The whole Bay of Pigs affair was accompanied by hypocrisy and lying.
5. The country was on a permanent war economy which had big pockets of poverty, but there were enough people at work, making enough money, to keep things quiet.

Chapter 17 I (443-452) "OR DOES IT EXPLODE?"

1. Why did Truman and his advisors feel a need to "act on the race question" immediately following WWII? What evidence exists to support Zinn's answer to this question?
2. In what way did the 1954 Brown decision by the Supreme Court mark a departure from its previous course? In what way did it not?
3. What was the key strategy that King contributed to the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s?
4. What was the goal of the Freedom Riders? How were they able to achieve that goal?

Chapter 17 II (453-467) "OR DOES IT EXPLODE?"

1. How did the Voting Rights law of 1965 differ from previous laws?
2. What did Malcolm X think of the 1963 march?
3. Why did the Black Panthers have guns? (Compare Zinn's answer with standard American history texts.)
4. Why did King speak out against the war in Vietnam? Why did he not speak out against the war earlier than he did? What does Zinn say was the consequence of King's speaking out against the war in Vietnam, and what does that suggest about King's death in 1968?
5. How did the government respond to King's shift in focus from civil rights to poverty? How can one explain the government's response?

Chapter 18 I (469-484) THE IMPOSSIBLE VICTORY: VIETNAM

1. What were the Vietnamese complaints against French rule as itemized in their 1945 "Declaration of Independence," and Ho Chi Minh's letters to Truman?
2. What did the 1954 Geneva Peace Accords stipulate? Why did the US agree to elections and then prevent them from occurring?

3. How did the Johnson administration persuade Congress to give the president the freedom to wage war in Vietnam?
4. What was Operation Phoenix? Why were the American people kept ignorant of its existence?
5. Was Nixon's order to invade Cambodia a tactical error in his pursuit of control over American foreign policy? Explain.

Chapter 18 II (485-501) THE IMPOSSIBLE VICTORY: VIETNAM

1. The Nixon administration tried to get the Supreme Court to stop further publication...
2. The climax of protest came in the spring of 1970 when President Nixon ordered the invasion of Cambodia.
3. All this was part of a general change in the entire population of the country.
4. Traditional history portrays the end of wars as coming from the initiatives of leaders – just as it often finds the coming of war a response to the demand of “the people.”
5. In fact, the United States had lost the war in both the Mekong Valley and the Mississippi Valley.

Chapter 20 I (541-552) THE SEVENTIES: UNDER CONTROL?

1. “The courts, the juries, and even judges were not behaving as usual.” How is Zinn defining “usual”?
2. Explain why Nixon resigned.
3. According to a Wall Street financier, if Nixon resigned the US would have, “the same play with different players.” What do you think he meant by “play”?
4. Why did ITT not care whether Democrats or Republicans won an election?
5. How did C.L. Sulzberger explain the lack of popular support for American foreign policy in the 1970s? How does Zinn explain it?

Chapter 20 II (552-562) THE SEVENTIES: UNDER CONTROL?

1. What was the significance of the Mayaguez affair? Why did the New York Times commend the “admirable efficiency” of the operation?
2. Why did Watergate prompt in-depth investigations into the CIA and FBI? What did these investigations discover in terms of the degree to which these organizations had gone beyond their mandates? Why does Zinn call into question the sincerity of these investigations?
3. What other factors besides Vietnam and Watergate could be seen as contributing to Americans' loss of confidence in their business, political, and military leaders?
4. What did William Simon mean by the “human side of capitalism”?
5. According to Samuel Huntington, how much democracy is an “excess of democracy”?

Chapter 21 I (563-581) CARTER-REAGAN-BUSH: THE BIPARTISAN CONSENSUS

1. How does Zinn characterize post-1960s activism?
2. How did Carter present himself to the voters during the presidential campaign of 1976?
3. How did the United States acquire the Panama Canal? How could Reagan argue that Carter “lost” or “gave away” the canal? Why would the American people care?
4. What were Reagan's and Bush's lasting legacies?
5. What did the Supreme Court accomplish during the Reagan-Bush years?

Chapter 21 II (582-600) CARTER-REAGAN-BUSH: THE BIPARTISAN CONSENSUS

1. What parallels can you draw between U.S. government conduct of the Vietnam War and its war against the Sandinistas?
2. Assess the validity of the following statement made by George Kennan as quoted by Zinn: “the general effect of cold war extremism was to delay rather than hasten the great change that overtook the Soviet Union by the end of the 1980s.”
3. How was the U.S. government's role preceding and during the Gulf War consistent with its diplomatic and military actions since World War II? In what ways was it a departure? (To what degree does the Gulf War represent part of the “American Political Tradition”?)
4. How did Bush gain congressional approval to attack Iraq? How did his process compare to that of Johnson getting approval and cooperation from Congress to wage the Vietnam war?
5. Why didn't the U.S. government remove Saddam Hussein from power?