

Short author commentaries precede each document, place the writings in their historical context, and provide transition.

The overall impression conveyed by the documents is that Lenin was a brutal leader, willing to use "Draconian measures" to accomplish his ends. Historians from those nations outside the Soviet Union have tended to give Lenin a "pass" for his sometimes violent tactics. Lenin's behavior is justified as an extension of his committed idealism. Most criticism is reserved for Joseph Stalin, who is portrayed as a violent pragmatist with loyalties only to himself. Historians native to the former Soviet states consistently have proffered a darker image of Lenin, and the book under consideration follows that trend. Lenin the monster is visible. Lenin the idealist is not. The authors' point of view is clear from the beginning of the text, when Lenin is mentioned alongside Hitler, and at the end when the authors refer to a Leninist cult.

Still, *Lenin and the Making of the Soviet State* is a strong work that belongs in college, and some high school, classrooms. For the student, it offers an easy-to-follow format, moving from brief history, to supporting documents with commentary, to a three-page timeline of Lenin's life. For the instructor, the book includes suggested questions. Further, the use of secret documents encourages classroom discussions on censorship, propaganda, and authoritarianism. And lastly, the authors' language choice and their document selection process could lead to consideration of research methodologies and historiography.

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**Howard Zinn, Mike Konopacki, and Paul Buhle.** *A People's History of American Empire: A Graphic Adaptation.* New York: Henry Holt and Company (Metropolitan Books), 2007. Pp. 273. Paper, \$17.00; ISBN 13: 978-0-805008744-4.

Howard Zinn's *magnum opus*, *A People's History of the United States*, was originally published in 1980 and sales are approaching two million. Surely a major part of its success has been its use by teachers. This book is a "graphic adaptation," but not of Zinn's entire work so much as those portions related to the theme of empire. Those responsible might not be comfortable with the book being called a "comic book" version of Zinn, but essentially that is what we have here. Is there potential for such a book being used by teachers, and thus having Zinn's message reach many more students? Probably so. Whether that is a good thing or a bad thing depends on one's point of view.

*A People's History of the United States*, most readers of *Teaching History* probably do not need to be told, was a direct outgrowth of the various movements for peace and justice that dominated the 1960s, including the civil rights movement, anti-Vietnam War movement, women's movement, and environmental movement. Thus, Zinn made himself, with this book and several others, including *The Politics of History*,

one of the leading members of the "radical" or "revisionist" or "New Left" or "conflict" historians of that era and since. This approach often has been called history "from the bottom up," suggesting that it focuses on common people rather than on presidents, royalty, generals, and the rich. But it is also history "from the outside in," in the sense that Zinn's heroes and heroines are those radicals who worked for change, such as those who fought to abolish the evil of human slavery, those who worked for equality for women, and those who struggled against the various wars in U.S. history.

One right-wing critic on the Internet has referred to Zinn as "the most influential historian in America." Personally, I hope so! And this book should spread his important message to even more and younger students. I had the experience, a few years ago, at the Woody Guthrie Free Folk Festival in Woody's hometown of Okemah, Oklahoma, of approaching one of the Burns Sisters, a wonderful folk-singing trio from upstate New York, to ask for her autograph on one of their albums. She complied, then asked me, interestingly and unusually, about my own work. I told her I was a retired history professor, and the conversation led to my mention of my book on the life and writings of Zinn. She responded enthusiastically: "I'll have to get that book! I'm reading his *People's History* right now, and I love it!" She knew about Zinn, she said, only because her daughter was using it in high school and recommended it to her.

This volume is an outgrowth of the work of The American Empire Project, described in the back of the book as a group that responds critically to the fact that "Empire, long considered an offense against America's democratic heritage, now threatens to define the relationship between our country and the rest of the world." Their earlier publications include works by Noam Chomsky and Anthony Arnove's *Iraq: The Logic of Withdrawal*. Surely even those who differ with Zinn and with the Project can see the value of introducing students to this important point of view and to this "graphic adaptation" of his classic "people's history" as one way of doing so that might hold their interest.

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**Walter LeFeber, Richard Polenberg, and Nancy Woloch. *The American Century: A History of the United States Since the 1890s*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2008. Pp. 624. Paper, \$42.95; ISBN 978-0-7656-2064-4.**

*The American Century: A History of the United States Since the 1890s* is a powerful book that comes from a noted press and is written by well-respected authors. This sixth edition text includes new online content and updated material on the 1990s through the present. Unlike many texts for the second half of the United States history survey that begin either at the end of the American Civil War in 1865 or at the end of Reconstruction in 1877, *The American Century* begins in the 1890s.