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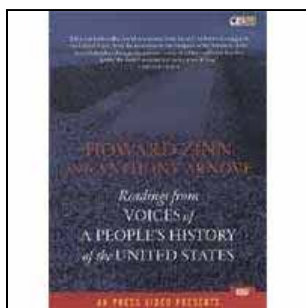
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Howard Zinn

Voices of a People's History of the USA

Seven Stories Press

Committed activist, writer and academic transfers his million selling book onto DVD and proves that America is not all fat, idiotic war mongers

America has got a bad press recently. I'm as guilty as the next man for America bashing and it's certainly not without foundation. Under the roller coaster stewardship of George W and with the twisted remit that is the September 11th inspired war on terror, the United States has been on a one nation mission to batter the rest of the world. Wiping out civil rights, invading sovereign nations and witch hunting those who oppose them are just a few examples of the causes of ill feeling towards America. However, what's more galling is the fact that all the while, the burger guzzling, trailer trash that is much of the American populous are right behind their Texan terror trailblazer. So, most people have forgotten that American's have been at the forefront of the fight for rights ever since their young nation was born. Therefore, it's apt that the popular academic and activist Howard Zinn, has chosen to transfer his best selling book A Peoples History of America to the more generally palatable format of DVD.

This essentially takes the updated version of the book in which Zinn and his fellow academic Anthony Arnove have taken nuggets of speeches and commentaries from the oppressed in America's history who chose to speak out against their oppressors. This 2 hour DVD is basically a film of an October 2004 lecture with actor readings. Actors include John Sayles (wide stance, bad trainers, too much chest hair), Sarah Jones (glamorous yet strangely manly), Lili Taylor (Someone's attractive Mum), Brian Jones (the most enigmatic performer), Wallace Shawn (Rex the gay dinosaur from Toy Story amongst other things) and Paul Robeson Jnr (political writer and son of the legendary actor). Each take turns to read out pieces written by authors ranging from

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Bartolme De La Cassas in the time of the Spanish occupation of the Indies through Anti slavery campaigner Frederick Douglas right up to an open letter from a relative of a September 11th victim pleading for the government not to seek revenge.

The content of the speeches is a timely reminder of the heat and power of the historical fight against oppression in America. Whether this be about racism, war, AID's or civil rights, there have been ardent critics of government policies and cultural trends that are a world away from the fat, apathetic 'patriots' who rattle the imperial sabre n fries today. The issues are still pertinent today, especially in this so called war on terror. However, there are a few reasons why I feel this DVD will slip past many Americans and other possible viewers. Firstly, the film definitely lacks energy and dynamism in parts. Proceedings drag often and much of the material and actor's deliveries do come across as a touch stale. Without dumbing things down, a bit more could have been done with the production. This is likely to appeal to only a few people which is a shame because the material is very important in terms of message. Moreover, I can think of someone in the White House who should definitely get a copy...

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