

Zinn Summer Reading Guide

ZINN CHAPTER 1

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 pages 1-11?
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. What is Zinn's basic criticism of historian Samuel Eliot Morison's book, Christopher Columbus, Mariner?
6. What major issues does Bartolome de las Casas bring up regarding Spanish expeditions in the Caribbean?
7. Identify one early and one subsequent motive that drove Columbus to oppress indigenous peoples.
8. What was the ultimate fate of the Arawak Indians?
9. What was the significance of Quetzalcoatl?
10. Compare the strategies and motives underlying the conquest of the Aztecs by Cortez and the conquest of the Incas by Pizarro.
11. What were the major causes of war between the Powhatans and the English settlers?
12. Discuss the significance of Powhatan's statement, "Why will you take by force what you may have quietly by love?"
13. Explain Governor John Winthrop's legal and biblical justification for seizing Indian land.
14. Explain the main tactic of warfare used by the English against the Indians.
15. According to Roger Williams, how did the English usually justify their attacks on the Indians?
16. What ultimately happened to the estimated 10 million Indians living in North America at the time of Columbus' arrival?
17. Evaluate the statement: "If there are sacrifices to be made for human progress, is it not essential to hold to the principle that those to be sacrificed must make the decision themselves?"
18. How does Zinn attempt to prove that the Indians were not inferior? Provide examples.

ZINN CHAPTER 2

1. According to Zinn, what is the root of racism in America?

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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 20: The Seventies: Under Control?

1. What was the result of the University of Michigan's survey?
2. What were the various factors that led Americans to this?
3. How do these events (and the public's reaction) contribute to the wealthy attempting to subdue the masses?
4. Why did Agnew resign?
5. What other factors besides Vietnam and Watergate could be seen as contributing to Americans' loss of confidence in their business, political, military leaders?
6. According to Samuel Huntington, how much democracy is an "excess of democracy?"

Chapter 21: The Coming Revolt of the Guards

1. How does Zinn characterize post-1960s activism?
2. What were Reagan's and Bush's lasting legacies?
3. What was the significance of Reagan's ability to end the air traffic controller strike?
4. How did the economic position of blacks in the 1980s testify to the enduring nature of racism?
5. What reasons did the US actually have for invading Caribbean countries?

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6. How did Bush's process of gaining congressional approval to attack Iraq compare to that of Johnson getting approval and cooperation from Congress to wage the Vietnam war?
7. Why did the media virtually ignore the number of Iraqi war casualties while focusing on how few Americans died?