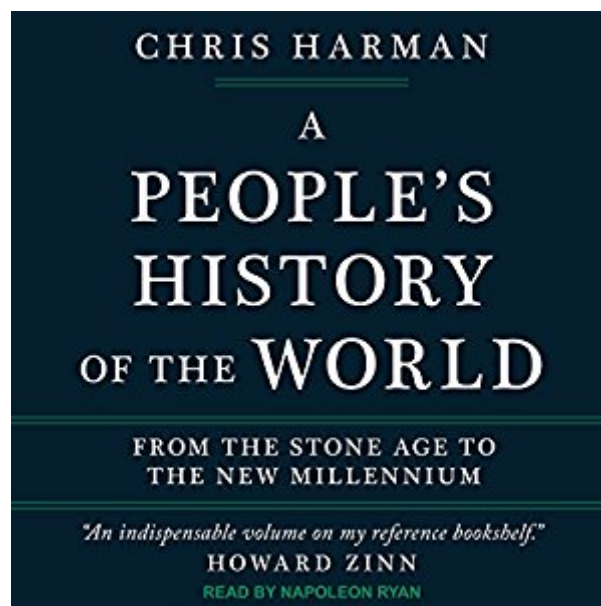




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A People's History Of The World: From The Stone Age To The New Millennium



Synopsis

Chris Harman describes the shape and course of human history as a narrative of ordinary people forming and re-forming complex societies in pursuit of common human goals. Interacting with the forces of technological change as well as the impact of powerful individuals and revolutionary ideas, these societies have engendered events familiar to every schoolchild - from the empires of antiquity to the world wars of the 20th century. In a bravura conclusion, Chris Harman exposes the reductive complacency of contemporary capitalism, and asks, in a world riven as never before by suffering and inequality, why we imagine that it can - or should - survive much longer. Ambitious, provocative and invigorating, *A People's History of the World* delivers a vital corrective to traditional history, as well as a powerful sense of the deep currents of humanity which surge beneath the froth of government.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Great work. Interesting perspectives on the development of slavery/racism versus racism/slavery. Not fully cognizant of the historical development of fascism in Europe. (I see some parallels to the modern American political situation.) As to be expected, the early history of the world was a little abstract. There were several instances when it loses focus and me as a reader. These are regained, however, with further reading.

Harman covers a lot of historical ground, from a point of view too often forgotten : class struggle. He demonstrates the marxist idea that humans are locked into a war between the rich and the poor, the

nobility and the bourgeoisie, with the proletariat in the end, through a final revolution, liberating all societies. This focus explains a lot, but leaves a lot of events in the shadow. The value of individual freedom, the distortions of communist ideology by so many dictators, transforming a dreamed classless world into a real hell for millions, And when so many religious extremists use their political power to destroy basic freedom, would it not be urgent to defend a new Enlightenment?

Harman describes how the Agricultural Revolution enhanced people's adaptive capabilities but at a price. It introduced bureaucracy, a necessary innovation to deal with complexities introduced by the division of labor in society. Tribal connectivity gave way to management and ultimately to elitism. The history of empires, of feudalism in Europe, and finally the development of modern global society reflect the poisonous effects of pragmatism at the expense of community solidarity. Harman shows us how a thin thread, however, growing gradually more substantial since the Middle Ages, and significantly so during the French Revolution, testifies to humans' stumbling drive to reverse this anomaly. He provides, therefore, a useful focus for activism in our age. Less upon accomplishing specific political goals than upon learning how to build complex community, including needed bureaucracy, without sacrificing the core survival attribute of our species: our drive to connect. Elites inevitably seek to disrupt this drive, but so do our own individual tendencies to sacrifice happiness for short term gains. In the Marxist tradition, Harman calls upon his readers consciously to come to terms with our own irrationality, and consciously to reject elitism in order to promote our own survival. What makes us happy is indeed most adaptive.

Loved this book. It's a doorstop -- I had to rip it into three parts to be able to read it easily, but it's a page turner, and I read it all.

I reacquired this because I enjoyed it in paper format. I am eliminating my hard copies of most books because I tire of packing, toting, and unpacking thousand of books whenever I relocate. This alternative narrative of historical events invited thinking about the biased historical facts that I learned as a child. This book places history within a psychosocial context, which seems a more accurate portrayal of the unfolding of the American developmental process, albeit it from an equally important psychosocial context.

For someone with little formal exposure to various political perspectives on history, this provides an illuminating perspective on the evolution of human social interaction and organization. The themes

in the book continue to enlighten and inform me as I watch current events. Quite readable, although it does bog down a bit in the 20th century. I wish, though, there was just a bit more "meta" in the book. Chris Harman takes his perspective on class as generated from and competing over production surplus as given and obvious, and never explicitly introduces, compares and contrasts, or justifies that assumption

Incredibly important read. I recommend it to anyone not aware of the "other side" of history, that of events and great men. Harman approaches the topic not only from the standpoint of the common classes, but discusses the forces that shaped events and the motivations of the participant groups and individuals. There's much to think about here.

I would recommend this book to any worker interested in learning about the history of their class ancestors. The time scale necessitated a glossing over of many historical events, but it's a good start. The reader should be critical of Harman's conclusions, of course, and should not be afraid to check and follow his sources. We're living in a time of emerging class struggle. It behooves all workers (and people) who are interested in a truly egalitarian, democratic future to intellectually arm themselves for the coming struggle.

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