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The Radical Reader: A Documentary History Of The American Radical Tradition



Synopsis

Radicalism is as American as apple pie. One can scarcely imagine what American society would look like without the abolitionists, feminists, union organizers, civil rights workers, gay and lesbian activists, and environmentalists who have fought to breathe life into the promises of freedom and equality, the lifeblood of American democracy.

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Customer Reviews

It's bracing to be reminded that the American experiment was radical at its inception—that in their own day the founding fathers (and mothers) were not hallowed figures but revolutionaries charting a new political path. Thus, among the 155 entries selected by two Harvard academics, are the 1765 Resolutions of the Stamp Act Congress and the Bill of Rights. Also here are crucial documents from the abolitionist movement (such as Frederick Douglass's "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?"); feminist texts, from Sarah Grimke's Letters on the Equality of the Sexes to the 19th Amendment giving women the vote; texts of the 60s counterculture, from Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" to a Weathermen brochure; and the volume ends in the immediate past with a 2002 open letter by academics opposing the invasion of Iraq. Each entry is preceded by a brief introduction providing historical and biographical context. "By definition, radicals are a minority," writes historian Eric Foner in his foreword. Members of the newest left, whether antiwar or anti-globalization, will find a sense of roots and tradition in this comprehensive anthology. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Progressive radicalism, the array of traditions that "seeks to expand existing definitions of freedom, equality, justice, and opportunity," is intrinsic to American society and essential to democracy. From the revolution that gave birth to our nation to abolitionism, the labor movement, suffrage and feminism, civil rights, gay liberation, and environmentalism, radicalism has been responsible for maintaining the freedoms guaranteed in the Constitution, and for ensuring that quality of life and justice aren't forfeited in the pursuit of wealth and power. Two Harvard-based historians explicate and encapsulate the rich and vital spectrum of American radicalism by presenting more than 200 declarations, appeals, editorials, and essays by such radical thinkers (each introduced in a brief bio) as Frederick Douglass, Sarah Grimke, Henry David Thoreau, Upton Sinclair, Emma Goldman, Angela Davis, Betty Friedan, Mario Savio, Cesar Chavez, Rachel Carson, Tony Kushner, and Ralph Nader. The result is proof-positive that the U.S. has always been "a protest nation," a society of necessary sacrifice and tremendous achievement, and every citizen should hope that it remains so.

Donna Seaman
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A great compilation of social movements, their struggles, and triumphs throughout time. If you are into social justice, community organizing, community activism, marginalized groups, sociology, or simply people who have the courage to fight back, then this is a book for you. From the abolition of slavery to feminist thought to queer liberation or environmentalism.

A fascinating history of the thoughts and acts of radicals in America.

Good.

Read for a class.

The ordinary American's personal experience of history is often organized around a pantheon of readings and tomes that view our democratic experience as a pristine and elevated philosophical exercise by icons of verity and probity. Recent treatments such as Howard Zinn's "A People's History of The United States" and the wonderful "Founding Brothers" by Joseph J. Ellis have helped us to recognize the fact that while brilliant they were, the founders of this country were both mortal and fallible, and were hardly disinterested and objective idealists. This superb work by Timothy

McCarthy and John McMillan (both history professors at Harvard) offers us over 150 short but spellbinding works by a wide variety of authors that help to widen the reader's understanding of the radical American experience, and to demystify the highly emotional and politically explosive issues and concerns that have faced us in terms of home-grown radical perspectives regarding social and political issues ranging from the original Articles of Confederation to those surrounding slavery, from corporate sponsored police brutality against union organizing to the war in Vietnam, from strident environmentalism to the current protests against the war in Iraq. All of it is here, and wonderfully so. In essence, the authors have culled a treasure-trove of radical statements and observations that breathe life into our rather checkered history. Far from the sanitized and revisionist efforts one finds in most public school treatments of American history, herein one discovers a masterfully articulated series of articles written in colorful prose by those intimately involved in the radical protest, and most usually written from the radical perspective. The reader finds himself on an incredible journey into the various issues and concerns that have animated our long and often fractious progress toward a more perfect civil union. The book is organized into eleven principal chapters, each of which offers an absorbing selection of articles pertaining to cross-cutting issues such as the American revolution; the utopian visions relating to the very idea of a constitutional republic itself; abolitionism; suffrage and feminism; labor, anarchism, and socialism; civil rights; the new left and the counterculture; radical environmentalism; gay rights; and an epilogue with articles directed to some recent transcending issues and the radical writings relating to them. The list of notable authors included ranges from Samuel Adams to Ralph Nader, from Thoreau to Frederick Douglas, from Susan B. Anthony to Huey Long, and from Barry Commoner to Malcolm X. The list of worthwhile notables just goes on and on. Without a doubt, this is the most readable, provocative, and useful collection of American critical writings by radical thinkers I have personally had the joy and benefit of reading. What I truly love about it is that it is the perfect way to read short articles and thought-pieces without spending hours plowing through individual chapters. The length of the individual articles ranges from two to seven pages, so the book is a great way to spend some break time or lunch time reading material along and to be able to finish the particular piece in a single short sitting. It is also provides an extremely eclectic and electrifying range of views and opinions for one to have the chance to experience, and adds immeasurably to the reading experience as a companion teaching device one could use admirably as an adjunct to a text such as Zinn's for use with the average undergraduate student. This is a book I would heartily recommend for anyone interested in a fascinating exploration of radical American thought and critiques of the mainstream culture, and one that is certainly a terrific way to give a meaningful educational gift to a loved one this holiday season! Enjoy!

This was required reading for a class I was taking in College. Most books that I have to buy for classes I never touch again after the end of the semester, except this book. Not only are the documents in the book interesting, but the chronological and categorical layout is brilliant. Great range of material set up in a book one can read for academic purposes or use as a casual "bathroom" read.

A chunk of the book in the gay civil rights section is misprinted... It repeats pages from a previous section. I didn't realize this until after I had lost my receipt. Good book, but bummed about the misprint.

This book is real treasure of various ideas and the people behind them. A great resource for scholars or teachers. The curious person who enjoys US history will find something in here that they will enjoy.

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