

A Renegade History of the United States

By Thaddeus Russell



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This provocative perspective on America’s history claims that the country’s personality was defined not by the ideals of the elites and intellectuals, but by those who throughout have lived on the fringes of society history—slaves, immigrants, gangsters, and others who challenged the conventions of their day.


“Raucous, profane, and thrillingly original, Thaddeus Russell’s *A Renegade History of the United States* turns the myths of the ‘American character’ on their heads with a rare mix of wit, scholarship, and storytelling flair” (Steven Johnson, author of *Everything Bad Is Good for You* and *The Invention of Air*).

An all-new, stunning, and controversial story of the United States: It was not “good” citizens who established American liberty, declares Thaddeus Russell, but “immoral” and “degraded” people on the fringes of society whose subversive lifestyles legitimized the taboo and made America the land of the free.

In vivid portraits of renegades and their “respectable” adversaries, Russell shows that the nation’s history has been driven by clashes between those interested in preserving social order and those more interested in pursuing their own desires. The more these accidental revolutionaries—drunkards, prostitutes, gangsters, unassimilated immigrants, “bad” blacks—persevered, the more American society changed for the better.

This is not the history taught in textbooks or classrooms—this renegade book will upend everything you believe about the American past.

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Editorial Review

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This ultrarevisionist work is provocative, often interesting, and often preposterous. It appears to be a case of bottom-up history gone wild. The trend to view history from the standpoint of mass society is well established. Russell, a historian and journalist, has taken this approach much further. He asserts that the driving force behind many historical developments in history was provided by so-called marginalized groups outside the bounds of "respectable" society. So Russell provides a rapid run through some episodes and social movements in U.S. history, beginning with the meeting of the Second Continental Congress. His champions of liberty are not "respectable" men like Adams, Jefferson, and their ilk. Instead, he finds the real thirst for freedom among the drunkards, prostitutes, and slaves who mix socially and have "fun" in Philadelphia taverns. And so on through the abolitionist, feminist, and civil-rights struggles. Russell is hardly the first historian to notice the influence of the bottom of the social strata on culture, but his constant idealization of the lives of these "free" and "fun-loving" groups means readers should take everything with a heavy dose of skepticism. --Jay Freeman

Review

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"Thaddeus Russell's "A Renegade History of The United States" is a work of history like no other—a bold, controversial, original view of American history that will amuse, inspire, outrage, and most of all instruct readers. Russell strips away conventional wisdom and explodes many myths. In the process, he sheds new light on ideas, institutions, and people."

- Alan Brinkley, Allan Nevins Professor of History, Columbia University, and author of "The Publisher: Henry Luce and His American Century" and "American History: A Survey"

"Thaddeus Russell is a trouble-maker for sure. Whether you call his book courageous or outrageous, his helter-skelter tour through the American past will make you gasp and make you question—as he does—the writing of 'history as usual.'"

- Nancy Cott, Jonathan Trumbull Professor of American History, Harvard University, and author of "Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation" and "The Grounding of Modern Feminism"

"A Renegade History of the United States" takes us on a tour of backstreet America, introducing us to the rebels and prostitutes, the hipsters and hippies. The book tells good stories, all in the cause of illuminating larger historical struggles between social control and freedom, repression and letting go. Author Thaddeus Russell gives us a new pantheon of American heroes, and argues that those who expanded the realm of desire—for sex, for drugs, for illicit experiences—were the very ones who created our liberties. This is a controversial book, but certainly not a dull one."

-Elliott Gorn, Professor of American Civilization and History, Brown University, and author of "Dillinger's Wild Ride: The Year That Made America's Public Enemy Number One"

"Howard Zinn wrote the "'People's History' of the United States". But Thaddeus Russell has written the

history of the American People Whom Historians Would Rather Forget: the whores, delinquents, roustabouts—the so-called bums and immoral minority who did more for our civil rights and personal freedoms than anyone could count—until now. There is no understanding of American feminism, sexual liberation, civil rights, or dancing in the streets without this careful analysis that Russell has put before us.”

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“Thaddeus Russell has broken free of the ideological prisons of Left and Right to give us a real, flesh-and-blood history of America, filled with untold stories and unlikely heroes. No waving incense before the sacred personages of Washington, D.C. here. This wonderful book follows the best American traditions of iconoclasm and—what is the same thing—truth-telling.”

- Thomas E. Woods, Jr., author of "The Politically Incorrect Guide to American History"

"It's always fascinating spending time with a devil's advocate, and Russell is one of the best. You'll shout at this book endlessly, but you won't be able to put it down, for it's chock full of startling, upsetting, and entertaining anecdotes" --The Scotsman

This is a fun read that makes a serious point. Even drunkards, whores, black pleasure-seekers, gangsters, and drag queens have contributed to American culture, and sometimes in surprising ways. --W. J. Rorabaugh, professor of history, University of Washington and author of "The Alcoholic Republic"

"[A] rollicking and sure-to-be-controversial history of our great nation..." --"Metro-Boston"

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About the Author

Thaddeus Russell teaches history and cultural studies at Occidental College and has taught at Columbia University, Barnard College, Eugene Lang College, and the New School for Social Research. Born and raised in Berkeley, California, Russell graduated from Antioch College and received a Ph.D. in history from Columbia University. Russell's first book, *Out of the Jungle: Jimmy Hoffa and the Re-Making of the American Working Class*, was published by Alfred A. Knopf in 2001. He has published opinion articles in the *Los Angeles Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Salon*, and *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, as well as scholarly essays in *American Quarterly* and *The Columbia History of Post-World War II America*. Russell has also appeared on the History Channel and *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Micheal McDonough:

The book A Renegade History of the United States give you a sense of feeling enjoy for your spare time. You can utilize to make your capable much more increase. Book can being your best friend when you getting tension or having big problem along with your subject. If you can make reading a book A Renegade History of the United States to become your habit, you can get more advantages, like add your capable, increase your knowledge about many or all subjects. You can know everything if you like available and read a reserve A Renegade History of the United States. Kinds of book are several. It means that, science e-book or encyclopedia or other folks. So , how do you think about this e-book?

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