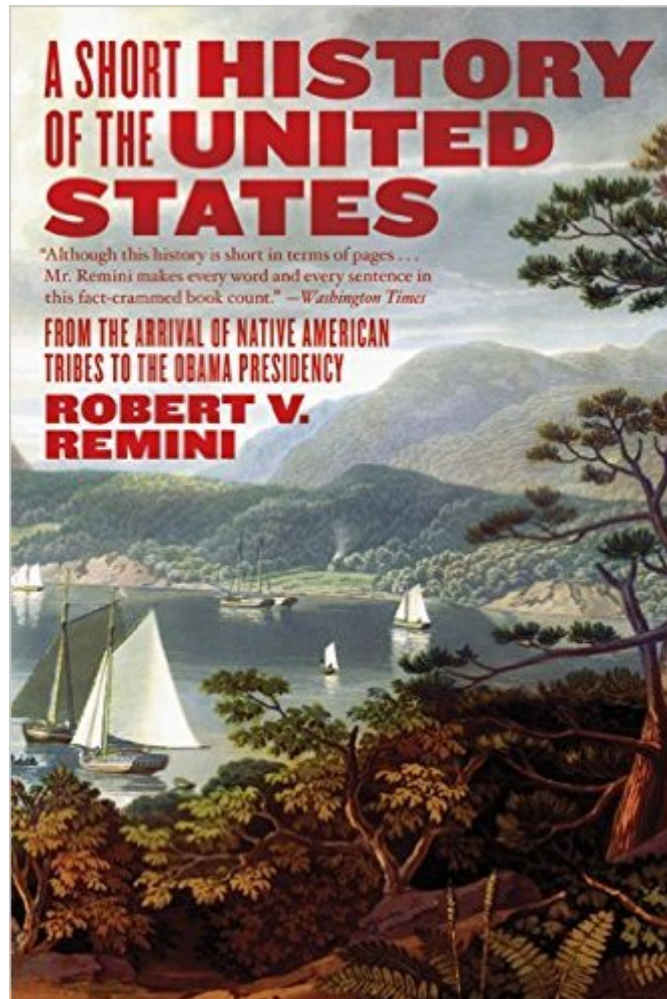


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A Short History Of The United States: From The Arrival Of Native American Tribes To The Obama Presidency



Synopsis

In *A Short History of the United States*, National Book Award winner Robert V. Remini offers a much-needed, concise history of our country. This accessible and lively volume contains the essential facts about the discovery, settlement, growth, and development of the American nation and its institutions, including the arrival and migration of Native Americans, the founding of a republic under the Constitution, the emergence of the United States as a world power, the outbreak of terrorism here and abroad, the Obama presidency, and everything in between.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Remini's *A Short History of the United States* tends to round off history in order to condense the story into 336 pages. Thus, some conclusions or inferences which the text attempts to draw are not necessarily true. For instance, Remini writes (on p.23), "When word of James Oglethorpe's overthrow reached Boston, the colonists arrested Andros and terminated the Dominion of New England." In *Seeds of Discontent*, author J. Revell Carr takes great pains to point out that news of the Glorious Revolution had not reached the colonies during the overthrow of Andros. Colonists were acting on rumors and were taking a risk in undertaking their own sort of Glorious Revolution on American soil. Worse than the rounding off of history are the errors, whether due to faulty fact-checking or to typographical errors. For instance, Louisiana became a state in 1812, not in 1810, as it is stated on page 82. Other errors that I discovered, similar in nature, are listed at the conclusion of this review. One of my reasons for

listing errors at the conclusion of the review is the possibility of the author correcting the errors in a re-release of the book. You could not use this book as a textbook for a high-school course on American History. However, you might be able to use a revised version of the book for reviewing the material on a final exam for American history. Some of the outlines by the best test-preparation books for the SAT US History exam, or the APush, are nearly as long as this book. See Kaplans or Barrons for examples. This book is easier to read than the outlines and might be useful to review the material. We may not know. That depends on whether the publisher or author have the inclination to produce an updated, corrected version of the book, attending to all of the errors noticed by all readers. The book has an extensive reading list after the conclusion of the text, which might be the most unique component of the book. Some of these books are fifty years old, written by authors who have had their obituaries cast long ago. Although most of the facts of history are not up for discussion, some conclusions are re-interpreted, and some details are re-emphasized. If you read the reviews on for *The Great Journey* by Brian Fagan, you might question Remini's recommendation. Some of the other books are outstanding, such as *A Fierce Discontent* by Michael McGerr, *The Battle Cry of Freedom* by James McPherson, and *The Impending Crisis* by David M. Potter (ably edited by Don Fehrenbacher). Separating the wheat from the chaff will take some time, but Remini does offer some interesting selections for further reading that are off the beaten trail. This book did not meet my expectations. * * Errata p11. Between the Powhatans and the settlers. P20. In 1732, Georgia was founded, when James Oglethorpe ... (James Oglethorpe) P34 Letters from an American Farmer (Letter from a Farmer in Pennsylvania). P82 Louisiana in 1810, (1812) P262 Remove the extra space in baton-wielding police P267 Virginia, Texas, Alabama, Arkansas, and Mississippi charged a poll tax. (Capitalize Arkansas).

Robert Remini is a great history writer, having written the definitive biographies of not only Andrew Jackson but Daniel Webster and Henry Clay as well. Although his expertise is with the Jacksonian era, he is well-versed in the rest of U.S. history as well, something that was demonstrated in his history of the House of Representatives. Now, he uses his broader field of knowledge again with *A Short History of the United States*. Consider all the volumes of books on the Civil War alone, with even many focusing on a single battle. It's obvious that there is a lot to say about American History, and to capture it all in less than 350 pages of text isn't easy. Of course, this means glossing over a lot of things, but Remini does a good job at capturing many of the key points. Everything you probably remember from your high school History class is here, from the original Indian settlers to Columbus, the Pilgrims, the Revolution, the Civil War, WWI, the Great Depression, WWII and the

Cold War. The book concludes at the beginning of 2008, so the McCain-Obama race isn't mentioned. For the most part, Remini keeps things objective, but there are bits of commentary here and there, particularly as he starts discussing more recent times. Certainly, the faults of recent presidents are discussed, and it's evident that Remini leans more heavily against the Republicans. Is this bias, or do the facts merit this? Each reader will make his own decision, based on his own political leanings. A Short History of the United States is well-written; Remini is too good to write a bad book, though this is not his best work. It serves its purpose well, however, giving the reader a solid overview of American History and a context in which to place more event-specific or person-specific reads.

The author is apparently the official historian of the U.S. House of Representatives - and it shows. Although wars and inventions and such are reported, this book is primarily a history of the U.S. government with an emphasis on Congress. As the book progresses, time moves slower and the final 100 pages cover just 1941-2008. Also, Remini becomes more harshly critical of presidents from LBJ on, which adds to the length of later chapters. // Maps, which are normally helpful in history books, are small-scale in this book, and some are poorly placed. A map of "1803-1807 Western Explorations" is placed before the Declaration of Independence. The 1810 map is placed three pages before the 1800 map. // A few misconceptions common to high school texts are included: The Hessians were sleeping off a Christmas celebration when attacked at Trenton, an unlikely 4,000 Cherokee died on the Trail of Tears, and giving Panama ownership and control of the Panama Canal was a "success" in foreign affairs. // The book has a fair number of typos and questionable sentences. It also has a few outright contradictions: LBJ's domino effect didn't occur although one paragraph later Cambodia fell to Communism, and "Reagan inherited an economy crippled" while one page later Reagan's policies caused the economy to be "in decline." // More blatant errors include the Confederacy adopting a Constitution on Feb. 8 (instead of Feb. 4) 1861 and the Confederacy moving its capital from Atlanta (instead of Birmingham) to Richmond after Virginia seceded. // I recommend this book to politicians who want to read a politically correct review of the history of the U.S. government.

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