



A People's Art History of the United States: 250 Years of Activist Art and Artists Working in Social Justice Movements

Nicolas Lampert

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Most people outside of the art world view art as something that is foreign to their experiences and everyday lives. *A People's Art History of the United States* places art history squarely in the rough-and-tumble of politics, social struggles, and the fight for justice from the colonial era through the present day.

Author and radical artist Nicolas Lampert combines historical sweep with detailed examinations of individual artists and works in a politically charged narrative that spans the conquest of the Americas, the American Revolution, slavery and abolition, western expansion, the suffragette movement and feminism, civil rights movements, environmental movements, LGBT movements, antiglobalization movements, contemporary antiwar movements, and beyond.

A People's Art History of the United States introduces us to key works of American radical art alongside dramatic retellings of the histories that inspired them. Stylishly illustrated with over two hundred images, this book is nothing less than an alternative education for anyone interested in the powerful role that art plays in our society.

A People's Art History of the United States: 250 Years of Activist Art and Artists Working in Social Justice Movements Details

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From Reader Review A People's Art History of the United States: 250 Years of Activist Art and Artists Working in Social Justice Movements for online ebook

William Crosby says

The focus is on activists and political art, so if you are looking for an interpretation of U.S. art from a cultural and art techniques point of view, look elsewhere. Too many words, not enough art. And the art is primarily photographs and posters.

I also found the writing dogmatic. The historical accounts were laden with many value judgments (the word "unjust" was used often). I was hoping for more on the alternative (perhaps true) history and less on the judgmental attitude which was constant throughout.

The chapters did not seem to be related to each other so that there was no continuity. There was no cohesive narrative flow.

About 1/3 into the book I finally got tired of the tedious denunciations and returned the book to the library.

Caitlin Goldblatt says

This definitely glosses in certain places; however, Lampert generally provides a concise, earnestly-rendered history of not only objects and their usage throughout history, but of conflicting and parallel atmosphere(s) in various times and places. Excellent discussions of silencing that mostly, despite the aforementioned occasional glossing, rise to the tall order of serving completionist historical analyses.

Roberta Morris says

My wonderfully insightful son-in-law knew this was the perfect Christmas present for me. I nearly skipped out on their Christmas dinner, so caught up with this art history/American history book of incredible scope. This is both amazing social history and real appreciation for artworks and artists for all that they bring to the world, not merely messaging but astonishing beauty, humor and love.

David Melbie says

Very nice. Art as activism. Expertly done by Nicolas Lampert.

Giovanni GF says

This isn't really a history, but rather a string of case studies, and they might not all qualify as art, but rather as creative actions, but it's still fascinating and very inspiring. I learned a lot!

William Reichard says

It's difficult not to think of Howard Zinn's groundbreaking "A People's History of the United States" when opening this book. This is part of a series of alternative history texts based on Zinn's model, and released by the same publisher. What I expected from the book, at the start, was the same kind of macro view that Zinn offers, a sense of the massive scope and alternative narratives that must be included when constructing a more accurate and inclusive history of this nation. What I found, however, was a series of chapters focusing on a handful of specific examples of an alternative art history of the U.S. Each chapter, each example, was fascinating, and I learned a great deal, but in terms of how we might see an alternative art history of the U.S., a narrative that runs counter to any "official" narrative, I was disappointed. I wanted the sense of the big picture I found in Zinn's history, and instead found a series of micro narratives that change the way I see specific episodes in the cultural landscape of the U.S. The title promises more than the book delivers.

Melissa Luna says

Interesting, insightful and inspiring. This was an excellent compilation of the backstories of historical accounts and movements, focusing on the role of art in directing/impacting the course of events.

It has my mind thinking about the enduring and far-reaching effects of art to bring about positive change. For example I felt like I stepped into a contemporary chapter of this book while visiting an art gallery in Bandon, OR called Washed Ashore (<http://washedashore.org/>) which deals with the problem of plastic debris in our oceans.

Like Solnit's *Hope in the Dark*, we need to hear these stories to remind ourselves that (contrary to the dominant messaging) we can make a difference in this world.

Rachel Wexelbaum says

The history of people's art in the United States, according to Lampert, begins with wampum. Go with it and go from there. I learned a lot of things about American history that they never teach you in school--all from art. I was surprised that Facebook memes were not included in Lampert's definition of people's art in the United States, but American military performance art pieces were. Oh well. If you read up to the 1990s you will be fine.

Irina says

A great account of cooperation between artists and social movements. The book does a great job highlighting the difference between art that calls attention to a particular subject and art that provokes further action, both among lawmakers and the general public. It's the art history very much worth knowing.

Art says

Good concept. Too radical for me. Constant struggling protests. As a thirty-five dollar art history book, some of the black-and-white illustrations and photographs here need to appear in color.

Native American art introduces the first of twenty-nine discrete chapters. In 1933, President Roosevelt led government-funded public art that ran through 1943, from the depths of The Great Depression to early World War II, which provided work for many artists during that difficult period. The Works Projects Administration-Federal Art Project included writers, visual artists, sculptors, theater and music. Murals appeared everywhere in post offices and high schools. Everyone was exposed to art, artists and artmaking. And that was the most engaging ten-page chapter in the book.

I was a kid in school during the civil rights movement. Bob Dylan appears here in a 1963 photo, singing to a few people on a porch behind the Mississippi office of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Later, I became involved with Veterans Against the War. But it was Earth Day that changed me forever. The event forced me to rethink everything, including resources, energy, food, transportation and the low impact of conscious living on a small footprint. Yet, not a word or image of Earth Day or green movements made it in this book, which takes a too-narrow view of social justice movements.

Many people earned recognition in the acknowledgments, including a dozen Milwaukeeans, where the author teaches in the art and design department of UWM. So it's surprising that not one Milwaukee or Wisconsin event in 250 years appears in the book.

Art historians would know where to find artworks inspired by such Milwaukee events as these: Bay View strikes that led to the eight-hour day, the Milwaukee 14 peace activists who raided the selective service in 1968 to burn ten thousand draft files; the long string of socialist mayors early in the twentieth century. Milwaukee also played a major role developing and nourishing the underground press and comix during the late sixties, which, by definition, included plenty of activist artwork.

As a book published in 2013 by a Wisconsin artist who focuses on social issues, it missed the massive demonstrations a few years ago in Madison after the new governor eliminated collective bargaining for public workers. For example, thousands of people carried homemade posters, ranging from artful, funny, clever to caustic. And therein lies an untold story, book or gallery show of these ephemeral pieces, expressing immediate and visceral concerns.

One and a half stars. Forty pages of notes. This may serve as a good overview of the arts in social justice movements. Political and radical readers may enjoy this book more than I did.

Cm says

A People's Art History of the United States is a series of illustrated essays about artists' participation in

social movements. I am sick the past few days and am finding the book surprisingly addictive; unlike most series of essays it is hard to put down. As a college art instructor I am already thinking about ways the book could apply to my classes. It will get art students engaged in history and provide numerous paths to think about how their work can be part of movements. It seems highly teachable to high school and college students, and applicable to history, art, and cultural studies classes.

The book highlights compelling examples of art playing a complicated, multifaceted, or visionary role in activism and history. For example, one chapter looks at the Paterson Strike, and analyzes how the IWW and a bohemian NYC subculture sided with the silk workers on strike. There is a theatre performance in New York City about the Paterson, New Jersey strike, with strikers as the cast, during the actual strike. By no means a success, this idea of creating theatre or performance about a real life event while it is happening is bold, risky, and inspiring.

Stewart Tame says

Excellent book! There was quite a bit of this that was new to me. Even the bits that I knew about were covered in more depth than I'd previously encountered. I'd never even heard of Mine Okubo before. I'll have to see if I can find a copy of her book about life in the resettlement camps. The more recent events were more interesting to me, being from my time and all. I even recall reading about the flap over Gran Fury's "Kissing Doesn't Kill" ads back in the day. The final four chapters were, I think, my favorites, particularly the "Living Water" one. If you're interested in art and/or the history of social justice movements in the USA, this is definitely a book worth checking out.

Mills College Library says

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Justher says

Midway through the preface of this book, I realized that this was a book I needed in my life during my high school history classes. To talk about the United States without talking about resistance leaves out the very spirit of the American people. To talk about resistance without talking about art is a disservice to the transformative power of visual display. Lampert selects art from various time periods in a way that is not meant to be exhaustive, but instead to spark discussion and inspiration. I appreciated how he attempts to take a critical look at the artists themselves, noting the troubling racial beliefs held Jacob A. Riis and white women suffragists. This book is an excellent starting point for all those interested in the role of activist art in the United States.
