



The Smart Aleck's Guide to American History

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Do you know America? No, I mean, do you REALLY know America? Would you recognize John Adams in a lineup? Can you identify any presidents between Lincoln and Roosevelt?

Hmmm. I thought so.

Well, you *really* need this book.

Not only will it improve your sorry historical knowledge, it will crack you up, and give you material to throw your teachers off-balance for entire class periods. Identify their lies! Point out their half-truths! And possibly, just possibly, gain some extra credit for yourself.

The Smart Aleck's Guide to American History Details

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Bridget says

It took me a while to get through this, but that's mostly because it's very easy to pick up and put down without losing your place or getting confused when you come back to it. It's almost a history textbook, but filled with snark and silly asides and funny quotes. It reminds me a bit of The Daily Show with Jon Stewart Presents America, only with more history and fewer gags.

I know some folks don't like all the public domain images, but I kind of loved that the pictures were what you'd find in any history text book. Besides, the captions were usually funny enough to make the pictures entertaining.

I'd definitely recommend this as a resource for teens doing research or for anyone who wants to brush up on their US history without falling asleep.

Dave says

Being a history teacher and a sucker for autographed books, I found it ironic to meet this author at a Language Arts conference. He was sarcastically witty and instantly, I found his approach to American history refreshing. It was primarily tongue-in-cheek as is this book, sacrificing many unnecessary details for the essence of well-chronicled events. In other words, perfect for an average or uninterested middle schooler, or even one smart enough but only interested in being a class clown. It is clean and often dry humor for the most part, refraining apologetically from foul language. It covers the essentials, from George to George (Washington to Bush), and even takes a pop culture turn in the last chapter, chalking up history as it parallels rock 'n' roll. Entertaining for a history nerd such as myself, and affirming as I check off all the things I cover in my 8th grade class.

Dj says

From the title, I was expecting to be somewhat annoyed with this book. Fortunately enough they only got Smart Alecky on occasion and generally in ways that didn't detract from the information that was being presented. Neither did the book go out of its way to try and say that they were giving you information that the Schools didn't because they Schools are lying to you. In most cases, they did point to a valid reason why things that were mentioned in some cases weren't brought up in history classes. Like Cannibalism. Not a topic that most people, no matter who they are really want to delve too deeply into. Another reason the pointed out for some of the things they were going over not coming up in class was the fact that due to time constraints and focusing on tests there was little ability to go down side paths like these.

While not as in your face as I expected from the title, it still has some funny moments and even though it is mostly a general overview it is a good read. Like most overviews, there are going to be some points where disagreements with the material do come up but the same could be said of any work of history on that point.

I recommend it for anyone brushing up or for students looking for a way to make their history class discussions a little more lively.

Lyg says

Although there was a plethora of pickle and smelly people jokes, this book stood out for high readability and details on aspects not typically covered or memorable in the standard history book. I learnt quite a bit more than I expected and even the information I already knew was made an enjoyable re-convention due to the writing style. The "forgettable presidents" and "some other stuff we missed" sections informed me on some things that I really did not know; I thought I could recognize the name of any U.S. president and recount a few facts about each one, but I was found in error when I read the name Millard Fillmore, which I did not recognize at all. All in all, it was a pleasurable and informative experience.

I recommend this book to anyone who wants to touch up on their American history in an entertaining fashion.

Jessica says

An excellent guide to American History! Though listed as a kids book, I find that this is a great reference book for all ages. It contains information that any average American should know about the history of his own country. This book will enlighten its readers about both the little known facts and over-looked people of history and the lies and half-truths we have been passing off to school children for generations as "the whole truth and nothing but the truth". Required reading for all those who seek knowledge and for all those who SHOULD BE seeking it. Fun and education, a history book doesn't get much better than this!

Rebecca Radnor says

American history told in a way that is snarky, funny, entertaining, and focused on dispelling historical myths. Sometimes it gets so caught up in the humor of the details that it misses the big picture, so sort of the inverse of The Daily Show's focus, but in that same vein. The history is shallow... and broad, covering James town to Obama in 400 pages that include big photos, and fake silly exams at the end of each chapter. Definitely useful as a teaching text for folks who aren't all that into history to start with.

Emma says

I really like how he presented the information.

Leslie says

History was boring in jr. high and high school, but it doesn't need to be that way. Back then it was the fault of the textbooks. Now, a young person has written a history textbook aimed at jr. high and high school

students. Problem solved, assuming school districts adopt this book for classroom instruction.

Allison Greene says

This is an amusing read that will keep you laughing the whole way through. You won't even realize you are learning! The Smart Alecks Guide to American History follows its name to the letter. The book starts off at the beginning of American History, with the first American settlers. Fun facts are sprinkled all throughout the book, and give content needed facts and even the silly ones. Adding silly facts (like Thomas Paine had terribly hygiene and only a few people attended his funeral) make these early Americans more real and relatable. There is a smart aleck tone throughout the entire book (thus the title), which keeps you hooked into all the knowledge and facts.

Even the chapter names are funny. "A Nation Declined to Bathe" and "World War II (Out of...?)" are some of the silly chapter names. Though the funny undertone, you really are learning as you read. I couldn't help but have those 'ah-ha' moments as things I learned years ago came back to the surface. I think many high school history classes could get a use out of this book. So much is covered that it can be used no matter what you are covering.

Chris says

Best. Textbook. Ever.

Some may cringe at me labeling this a textbook because it is most definitely a parody chock full of laugh-out-loud humor, but it is structured as an American History text and the humor is all based on well-researched information. Even as I was delightfully entertained, the history buff in me was thrilled by all the factual review I was getting--along with some new things I learned. Honestly, I don't know why real textbooks don't work in humor like this to make the subject more approachable, the people more human, and the events more real. Anyone interested in reading about the history of the U.S. while being highly entertained would do well to give this a look, and anyone actually studying the subject should most definitely find the time to read this alongside your assigned text to make the whole enterprise much more fun.

The smart aleck tone runs consistently through the book, from chapter titles* to section headings** to each paragraph of text,*** including the frequent footnotes.**** There are fun end-of-chapter questions,***** assignments,***** and more. And I think the picture captions***** are my favorite part of all.

*Chapter 2: "The Colonists Are Revolting"; Chapter 3: "A Nation Declines to Bathe"

**(Lead in text: *Today, we generally remember the Roaring Twenties as one big party. But it had its dark side as well. For instance, the 1920s ushered in an era of . . .*) " . . . Even More Forgettable Presidents!"

****Garfield might have survived if his doctors had been better, but the treatment he got was lousy even by the standards of the day. Doctors stuck their bare fingers into the wound to get the bullet, and one of them accidentally poked him in the liver. This doctor is probably the only person ever to touch a sitting president's liver. If he's not, it's still probably a pretty exclusive club.*

*****Freedonia was the name of the country Groucho Marx ran in the movie Duck Soup. In 1992, Spy magazine asked several members of Congress about the situation in Freedonia, and they all talked about it as though it were a real place. They didn't want to admit that they'd never heard of it. If the government can be fooled, the people who read your paper can, too. Give it a shot!*

******Flappers had all sorts of hats, few of which were really all that stupid. What did they call the ones with enormous peacock feathers stuck in them? a) Caps. b) Bobtops. c) Turbans. d) Macaroni. (Answer: None of the above; we just wanted to throw in one more "stuck a feather in his hat" crack--because that's the way we roll, son.)*

******Be like William Randolph Hearst! Write an editorial that could push the nation into war against Freedonia. Send it to your local paper and see if you get any reaction! Use of facts is optional.*

******Rutherford B. Hayes. Researchers on staff have been unable to determine whether he was actually cross-eyed or just had a real talent for looking confused.*

or

Johnson became president without ever spending a day in school. Before you point this out to your teacher, keep in mind that he sucked as a president.

or

Neville Chamberlain: Not a fascist, but also not the guy you want to hear on the other end of the phone when you call the Psychic Hotline.

or

Cheapskate historians like us can't find free pictures of Marilyn Monroe to use, so here's one of James Monroe, our fifth president, whom we didn't show anywhere else in the book. His administration is best remembered for the Monroe Doctrine, the Missouri Compromise, and the Era of Good Feelings. He was not related to Marilyn, whose real name was Norma Jean Baker. Heck, in this shot, you don't even get to drool over his dynamite gams!

Mark Flowers says

There are much funnier books of satirical American history out there--The Daily Show's in particular (even Dave Barry Slept Here is pretty hilarious, if I remember)--but what sets this book apart is that Selzer actually attempts (and succeeds for the most part) to be accurate as well as funny. In other words, you can actually use this book to learn American history, not just make fun of it. And he does an excellent job of exploding various myths about America along the way. Pretty funny too - teens might not get it, but I thought using Dr. Billy Joel as the primary source for the "We Didn't Start the Fire" era was genius.

Pumpkinpi says

Oh my word. My sides are still aching from this great history book. Adam Seltzer somehow manages to teach you everything about American history, from Columbus on, without stooping to “fact-spouting” (blech!). I found that I knew, as a 5th grader, more about American history than most adults I know do! This is probably my ninth or tenth reading of the Smart Aleck’s Guide, and yet every time I still find a new hilarious joke, or weird fact. Even if you think you hate history, I recommend you try this side-splitting book.

Susan says

Uneven, too silly, too cheap--I mean seriously, pony up for modern picture rights or don't use any at all and tell people to Google it, too much Billy Joel in the late 20th-century chapter.

It got pretty annoying to have them refusing to curse because of parents while still trying to stick it to the man by writing so-hip history. That's not really a line you can walk successfully.

Try Larry Gonick's *Cartoon History of the United States* instead.

Lola says

There aren't many interesting or fun things to do in Michigan, but one of the things I enjoy doing the most is visiting Greenfield Village. It's similar to Colonial Williamsburg only on a smaller scale with more variety. In addition to buildings such as Thomas Edison's workshop, it also had an awesome gift shop. Being the history nerd I am, I love the awesome selection of books. This is just one of the many books on American history I've picked up from there.

The Smart Aleck's Guide is not only informative but surprisingly witty for something about American history. This is probably due to the fact that it's written by a young man who's also a bit of a smart aleck. Trust me, American history has never been funnier or more self-deprecating than this. Though it may border on ridiculous sometimes with certain pictures and comments, it is always enjoyable. One of my teachers was shocked when I cracked up laughing during class while reading this because they didn't know what could possibly be funny about American history. If you like American history combined with a good dose of humor and wit, pick this up.

Colin McCarthy says

The Smart Aleck’s Guide to American History was a fantastic book. The book had great humor and sarcasm that made me chuckle a lot. This book was very funny. Also, I learned a lot while I read this. I filled my brain with plenty of knowledge of the wars and conflicts between the citizens and foreign people in the world. Lastly this is a great book because there were some words that challenged me that I had to look up. This helped my vocabulary. This book was one of my favorites. The Smart Aleck’s Guide to American History was fantastic.

