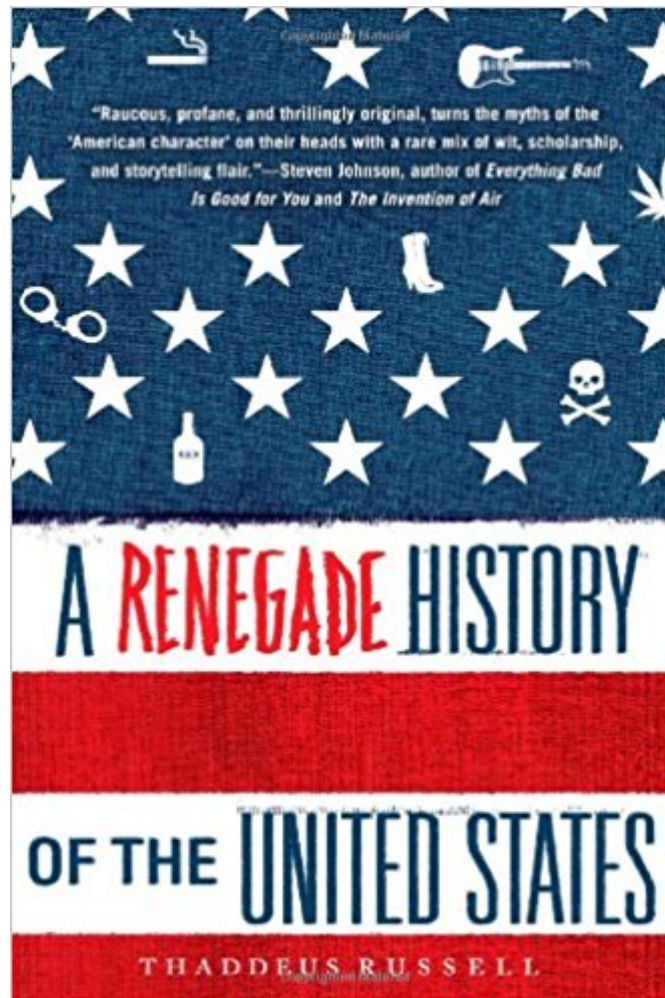




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# A Renegade History Of The United States



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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 --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"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" "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.

—Susie Bright, syndicated columnist, author of "The Sexual State of the Union", and series editor, "Best American Erotica"

"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

"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."

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I heard this author on a late night radio interview and found his ideas intriguing. I'm a student of history and had never heard a viewpoint like his expressed. His main thesis is that, while the country was founded by wealthy, educated men, who gave us a system that resulted in the standard of living we have today; there was another group of unheralded "heroes" who are responsible for shaping our society into the type of place that makes it worth living. Most of the founding fathers were pretty much a bunch of uptight, puritanistic prigs. Many of them were like today's social conservatives - hard working puritan ethic, supporting of capitalism, but don't like it if you're having the type of fun of which they don't approve. They thought the best thing a person could do was work all day, six days a week and, spend all day Sunday at church, keep alcohol to a minimum, and don't get too wild. And that went double for women. The author shows us how the "Renegades" in our society - freed slaves, poor Irish, Italian, and the lower socio-economic people - along with the "bad

women" in society - fought for and obtained the rights we all enjoy today that make life worth living. The personal freedom to do what we wish, whether it be partying hearty or women having the right to own property and vote. And time enough away from work to enjoy those things. Along the way, he gives wonderful tidbits of history that I had never read - such as the amount of alcohol consumed by people in colonial times. And the total fraternization of working class whites, free blacks and often slaves in the taverns and bordellos of the time. I'm from Flint Michigan and grew up with a lot of black people. I always enjoyed and somewhat envied the ways my black friends would allow themselves to have a good time and not worry about some of the dumb things I was raised to worry about. This book gave me a great appreciation for all the great things that black culture has given to our society but not in the way most people think. When I was a kid "soul" was a word all my black friends used - "Soul brother", "soul music", etc. But this book allowed me to see that black culture (and other non "WASPs") really did give this country its true soul of freedom to enjoy life and live it the way we want to live. Thank you Mr. Russell.

Thaddeus has created an account of American history that lights up the rebellious spirit of the reader. If you disagree, you must dislike the weekend off, great music, and people rebelling against repressive ideologues. Forget about the Framers, I want to know about drunk, homosexual pirates, homosexual poets, fun-having slaves, and the real feminists--the prostitutes.

I told an acquaintance of mine today that I spent most of this weekend reading this book, getting all riled up and outraged only to have the author calmly point out how this or that molded many of the Amendments we have on our Constitution today. I must say, his take on slavery is a bit... unorthodox and tying in minstrel was just... unbelievable, but at the end of the chapter he makes it work. You see the truth of his words when you look back or even look out your office window. More than that, you cannot deny the words of the people themselves who were recorded for posterity during the FDR Administration. As for prostitutes and women's rights, it's a stretch with a kernel of truth to it. However, it is true that pre-Revolutionary women had far more freedoms than after. Read it with an open mind and if you doubt, check his facts. I did and was flabbergasted at what I was never taught in school or through extensive reading.

Wow! This book opened my eyes to many of the stuff I was often puzzled about. As a student majoring in history. This book was not only an insight, but also a revealing of many of the freedoms we take for granted come from unexpected places. I wish the author included a chapter or two on

Latinos and Asians and how they contributed, nonetheless this is an incredible book. I recommend it to anyone who wants to get the gritty details of our past and appreciate the present. Thank you Dr. Thaddeus Russell!

If you love history you should definitely check out this book. Russell's voice is refreshing and the angle to which he zooms in on the much lesser known points of American history keep you hooked and fascinated. The book tells the other side of such events like the civil rights movement and the first gay parade. It shows a whole other side of just how gangsters and ruffians had a large hand in creating the country we know today, and how we owe them more thanks than our founding fathers! Praise the rebels!

I'm only halfway through. Thad takes a different historic perspective. There are lessons in economics behind prostitutes, self-ownership, and standing up for rights. There was consequences only after a real crime was committed. There was more of a self-defense stance by citizens. In many time frames in US history there was more freedom and less tyranny. People were prospering in entrepreneurship across the US. People voluntarily helped each other out in families and communities when needed. Thanks, Thad for a great read!

While I do think at times the author is reaching to prove his thesis, there are a number of items in this book that certainly make one think. After all, is that not the mark of a good read?

Even when I can't agree with the conclusions Russell draws, this book challenged my basic presumptions about society in so many ways. Must-read for intellectual stretching!

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