



The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World

Vijay Prashad, Howard Zinn (Editor)

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A landmark study that offers an alternative history of the Cold War from the point of view of the world's poor.

*"Europe" is morally, spiritually indefensible. And today the indictment is brought against it...by tens and tens of thousands of millions of men who, from the depths of slavery, set themselves up as judges.'--Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism**

Here, from a brilliant young writer, is a paradigm-shifting history of both a utopian concept and global movement--the idea of the Third World. *The Darker Nations* traces the intellectual origins and the political history of the twentieth century attempt to knit together the world's impoverished countries in opposition to the United States and Soviet spheres of influence in the decades following World War II.

Spanning every continent of the global South, Vijay Prashad's fascinating narrative takes us from the birth of postcolonial nations after World War II to the downfall and corruption of nationalist regimes. A breakthrough book of cutting-edge scholarship, it includes vivid portraits of Third World giants like India's Nehru, Egypt's Nasser, and Indonesia's Sukarno--as well as scores of extraordinary but now-forgotten intellectuals, artists, and freedom fighters. *The Darker Nations* restores to memory the vibrant though flawed idea of the Third World, whose demise, Prashad ultimately argues, has produced a much impoverished international political arena. 12 b/w photographs.

The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World Details

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From Reader Review The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World for online ebook

Aidan Walker says

Ok...so this is a really good book. It gives a great account of the Third World as a utopian concept. ("The Third World was not a place. It was a project." Prasad writes.) It gives the reader an excellent, encyclopedic knowledge of people, places, groups and events that are important to the Third World's history. And it gives a decent analysis of the reasons the utopian project that was the Third World failed. I had several major complaints with this book, though. One, despite its title ("A People's History of the Third World"), the history it tells is very much a top-down history. It is told overwhelmingly through the eyes of the leaders of the Third World (Nehru, Nasser, Nkrumah, Sukarno, Tito, Castro, Nyerere, Michael Manley, Indira Gandhi, Amilcar Cabral, Ho Chi Minh, Chou Enlai, et al.) And while all these leaders should be celebrated and remembered, the fact that it is told through them means it's not really a "people's history". Two, the author places too much of the blame for the failure of the Third World on its own shortcomings. He blames most of the failure of the Third World on its own leaders, even though at least a great deal of the blame should lie with the former colonizers. For instance, in his chapter focusing on Jamaica, he places almost all the blame for the collapse of Michael Manley's experiment in democratic socialism on Manley himself, and his failure to break with the IMF, even though Manley with the target of a CIA-led destabilization campaign that ultimately cost him his office. Three, and this is tied into the second complaint, he fails to give enough credit to the successes of the Third World. His chapter on Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, and ujamaa paints it entirely as a stupendous failure even though there were major advances in health care and education under this system of "benign village socialism," to quote Howard Zinn. His dismissal of the achievements of Mexico under Lazaro Cardenas and Bolivia Paz Estenssoro fails to give them their due as well. Four, in the first chapter he flat out denies overpopulation is a problem, and dismisses birth control and family planning as Western neocolonial inventions, despite the fact that lower fertility rates almost always lead to a higher standard of living and are indicative of more women's rights-to say nothing of the environmental impact of too many humans. Five, the book is incomplete, though to Prasad's credit, he anticipates and admits my beef that "This story of the production of the Third World is not going to take us to antiquity or the devastation of the regions that become central to the concept." I happen to feel that a discussion of those things is essential to telling the history of the Third World as Vijay Prasad does. Lastly (and these two reasons are largely intertwined), Prasad dismisses the traditional classes of the Third World completely and insists that Communism/Marxism are the only way forward for the Third World. First of all, he fails to acknowledge the role religion and royalty/nobility, among other traditional groups, played in fighting Western imperialism, both violently and nonviolently. The examples of this that come to my mind (and this is only a microscopic fragment of 1%) include the Rani of Jhansi in India, Emperor Menelik II and Empress Tayta Beytul in Ethiopia, Cetewayo of the Zulus, Yaa Ansaantewa of the Ashanti, Agaja Trudo of Dahomey, Pope of the Pueblo Indians, Queen Lilioukalani of Hawaii and Queen Nzinga in Angola, just to name a few. Also, Prasad's insistence that orthodox Marxism and Marxist dogma are the only way for the Third World dream to be achieved are deeply problematic, to say the absolute least. What about such examples as the democratic Christian socialism of Costa Rica, where abolishing the military led to massive advances in health care, education, and the environment, that would put the first world to shame? What about Botswana? What about Bhutan, shrugging off globalization to embrace Buddhism and "Gross National Happiness"? What about Mongolia, embracing its rich nomadic culture and the history of its hordes, celebrating the legendary conqueror Genghis Khan while preserving the health and educational progress of the Communist era? What about the Jamahiyira system of Libya-while Gaddafi was brutal, who would not want to preserve the gains in material standards of living under him? I am not saying that Marxism is not viable-look at Cuba and Kerala-but Prasad is wrong to insist on it being the only way forward. This leads him to take deeply questionable

positions. For one example, he praises the seizure of power in Ethiopia by the brutal Dergue and its psychotic leader Mengistu (he of the "wasted bullet tax") as a great good. For another, he describes Iran's brilliant, enlightened, progressive leader Mohammed Mossedegh as revealing "the shallowness of his class" by undermining the Communist Tudeh Party. It's not a bad book-it's a good book, but it suffers from flawed logic and an incomplete story. You're a very fine historian Vijay Prasad! Better luck next time!

Nidhi Jakhar says

The book presents an erudite narrative on the Third World, which was created as a result of the cold war between the first two worlds. Post World War II, the world changed completely; not only politically but also economically. From the rubble of the war arose two worlds - First World comprising of USA and Western Europe and the Second World comprising of Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The colonized nations across Asia, Europe and Latin America fought for independence and amassed as the Darker Nations or the Third World.

Thrown between the compulsions of being loyal to either of the two blocs, the Third World countries led by Nehru, Naseer, Marshal Tito, Nkrumah and Sukarno formed the Non-Aligned Movement at Belgrade in 1961. The book sheds light on how USA driven IMF's structural adjustment policies completely destroyed the development agenda of the Third World countries as they became pawns in the hands of transnational companies which assassinated their economies, social welfare agenda, and communism ultimately falling into the deep quagmire of debt trap, as a result of neo-liberal policies.

Its astounding to know how selfish economics on part of USA and Europe (to lesser degree post WWII) have sought to alter geo-political situations in other parts of the world; turning one against the other for their own selfish interest. The new unipolar world led by hegemony of USA led to the demise of the Third World; which has resulted in a much impoverished international political scenario as all nations made to toe the line drawn by the United States of America.

Avani says

Well written, but surprisingly dry for a book by Vijay Prashad. I was a bit disappointed, honestly.

Emmanuel-francis says

A riveting read brought low by the constraints of ideology. Cherry picked facts abound and while he is sharp-eyed in identifying the failures of competing ideologies, he quibbles around his. Outpaced by the events of history. It, however, does an excellent job portraying an oft-ignored viewpoint and some of its critiques hit home. Warily recommended, a text which despite its flaws will leave your shibboleths challenged.

A bellwether quote: "What the elites who were produced by this project saw as constraints, their parents' generation would have seen as the necessary architecture for the production of freedom . The new generation of structural adjustment wanted the accoutrement of advanced industrial capitalism without a sense of the historical process that makes this possible."

Kevin says

An absolute favorite for understanding current global affairs and how we got here:

*The Good:

--As in his lectures (many online), Vijay Prashad has such mastery of articulating overarching social issues, drilling down to give detailed examples before resurfacing to tie the ideas together. So well-read, articulate, and with so much humanity...

--Prashad brings to life the side of history that is censored, the anti-colonial movements that shook 20th century power structures against all odds, their triumphs and their failures. A critical framework for understanding global power, poverty, conflicts, sociopolitical ideology, and (most importantly) change...

--Main concept: class analysis of not just colonialism, but also the independence movements (where certain development strategies re-enforced class inequities)

*The Bad (actually, suggestions to readers):

--Fair warning: this is an **in-depth analysis** unearthing the roots of global poverty; so, for complete beginners who have never been critical (or are "on the fence") about empire's "kicking away the ladder" and military atrocities, I'm impressed you found this book, but first consider these "gentle" introductions:

-Bad Samaritans: The Myth of Free Trade and the Secret History of Capitalism

-Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq

Then, this introduction further dispels illusions:

-Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky

--Vijay Prashad's lectures are also excellent overviews:

1) On US empire, wars, and capital accumulation: <https://youtu.be/hTb2uVIWG5Q>

2) With more details on global south examples: <https://youtu.be/DiHtfeof15s>

--for those ready to dive in, I find it helpful to take hierarchical notes, keeping in mind to highlight the general ideas and use the historical details as case studies; so much information to organize

*The Brilliant:

Quoting the beginning of "The Darker Nations":

Among the darker nations, Paris is famous for two betrayals.

The first came in 1801, when Napoleon Bonaparte sent General Victor Leclerc to crush the Haitian Revolution, itself inspired by the French Revolution. The French regime could not allow its lucrative Santo Domingo to go free, and would not allow the Haitian people to live within the realm of the Enlightenment's "Rights of Man." The Haitians nonetheless triumphed, and Haiti became the first modern colony to win its independence.

The second betrayal came shortly after 1945, when a battered France, newly liberated by the Allies, sent its forces to suppress the Vietnamese, West Indians, and Africans who had once been its colonial subjects. Many of these regions had sent troops to fight for the liberation of France and indeed Europe, but they returned home empty-handed. As a sleight of hand, the French government tried to maintain sovereignty over its colonies by repackaging them as

"overseas territories." A people hungry for liberation did not want such measly hors d'oeuvres.

Wendy Liu says

a radical history of the third world. similar in spirit to howard zinn's people's history of the us. very thorough and packed full of names, events, facts and figures.

Katherine says

This is an amazing book that tracks the history of the Third World Movement and its foundation of the Nonaligned Movement and how the efforts existed and the story of how it failed.

It's such a great read and it would be a great text book for International Relations degrees to get a much more Global South perspective than what you get in the mainstream academia.

Anyone in the field should read this book at some point!

Scott says

Prashad's book is important, though I wouldn't call it a "people's history" as it focuses largely on the actions of the leaders of the U.S., U.S.S.R., and "Third World." He does a good job of accessibly covering the general themes that played out during decolonization, independence and neoliberalism, as well as conceptualizing the Third World as an intentional project. But no book can really get at the dynamics at play over the course of 80 years and three continents. And of course, as anyone in 2009 can tell (except Thomas Friedman), it's not going to be an uplifting story. I'll just throw in part of my response paper for class:

It got me thinking about the ideas of transition and power and how those played out in the Third World. Two consistent themes seemed to be the transition of ideas into action and the transition from armed resistance to national leadership. Prashad lays out example after example of how, sadly, these transitions almost always failed. In particular, I appreciated his analysis of how the FLN in Algeria worked to demobilize the population, failed to take advantage of its knowledge and desire to participate in the development of a new state, alienated them, then tried to appease them, and then Ben Bella was overthrown. Being of a certain political persuasion, I enjoyed his emphasis on the potential (and occasionally tangible) successes of participation and autogestion. It strikes me as both misguided and tragic that the party or forces that inherited the reigns after decolonization believed that a state could be built without popular participation and popular investment. One of my favorite quotes from Battle of Algiers sums this up: "Starting a revolution is hard, and it's even harder to continue it. Winning is hardest of all. But only afterward, when we have won, will the real hardships begin." If you can't win liberation without the people, how in the world can you run a state (in a nominally socially just form) without the people?

All tangled up in this is of course power - based in the state, the gun, the idea, the masses, the economy, the international scene. Can popular power ever be successfully transferred to state power (and remain popular,

just, etc.)? Can the power of an idea ever be transferred into the power of actions that even come close to resembling that original idea? And even if the answer is yes to both - how do you do it after being colonized for one hundred plus years with two superpowers breathing down your neck?

Signe says

I'm not really sure what audience Prashad had in mind. As a novice to many of the histories, I was very confused. It doesn't really work as a textbook. The author offers so many case studies with little-to-no background I imagine even scholars would have trouble reading this without a reference guide.

ka?yap says

A brilliant dialectical analysis of the political phenomenon of third world and the global political economy. This is an analysis and not a narrative and assumes some rudimentary knowledge of the world history of the 20th century on part of the reader.

The main thesis of Parishad is that the third world is a project among the formerly colonised states of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, for political, economic and cultural sovereignty and mainly for dignity. It thoroughly examines the major leaders of the third world, their ideologies and the institutions they formed and their struggles for economic and cultural sovereignty.

I liked the way the book is structured. The first part titled quest deals with the beginnings of the third world, from the League against imperialism conceived in the Brussels conference and the Bandung conference that happened after many of the third world nations have become politically independent. The second part titled pitfalls deals with the failures of the third world nations through authoritarianism, failures in land reforms, corrupt bureaucracy, failures in socialising production, local opposition from the dominant classes of the old and trying to implement policies without any proper analysis and mass mobilisation. The third part deals with the death of the third world through IMF-led liberalisation of economies and the rise of cultural nationalism in the form of chauvinism, religious intolerance and racism. In each chapter, he also provides a historical analysis of race, class and gender in the specific case.

One flaw however is that Vijay Parishad didn't provide much attention to the people's struggles apart from just a small mention, especially as this is titled "people's history". But I guess this can still be called a people's history as it offers a view from the global south instead of being Eurocentric.

Highly recommended for anyone interested in the history of international relations, neoliberalism and the global capital.

Jon Morgan says

An excellent overview of the Third World as a conscious project, one that started giddily in the newly liberated states but deflated in the face of neoliberalism. Although the book has a broad outlook, it avoids

cliche and jargon. The use of chapters that focus on subthemes of how the Third World created itself (e.g. cultural projects, development strategies) allows the book to move quickly while packing in detail and comparative analysis of national and regional situations. A great introduction to the history of decolonization and a dramatic narrative to boot.

James says

"The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World"

By Vijay Prashad

Review by James Generic

The Third World is a Cold War term, meaning mostly former nations that were ruled by Europeans and won their political independence in the decades after the second world war. That's how most people understand it anyway. It started off as a term of empowerment and hope by the leaders of the newly independent countries in the 1950s, after years of trying to bind the colonized into a single cause. These leaders saw that the First capitalist world and the Second Soviet-bloc world needed the Third world for its resources, people, and support in the global cold war, and they did not want to be pawns anymore.

The Third World Project started in the 1955 at the Bandung Asian-African Conference, when the Nonaligned Movement was founded (NAM) in opposition to the 1st and 2nd Worlds. From here, the Third World was split by internal divisions, attacks by the West and Eastern blocs, and finally outright destruction of the "Third World" by economic policies pushed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United States, as well as political and military attacks by the USA and its allies. In "The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World" by Vijay Prashad, the history of this push for unity, the contradictions of the class of leaders in trying to build this better Third world, the splits within the movement, and the final assassination of the Third World Project.

The book switches between different locations and different situations. Prashad points out that there was a strange contradiction in the work of building a Third World. The ruling class of the decolonized countries supported the new rulers, in many places, who wanted to stand up for themselves. But at the same time, as time went on, they also supported all-powerful dictators and neo-liberal economics that lead to the resources of the country being drained out like vampires (leading to continuation of places which have some of the richest resources of the world and some of the poorest people, like in Congo.) Projects like OPEC started as the "darker nations" tried to control their own politics, though it soon disintegrated into just rulers enriching themselves. In the end, they worked better with ruling classes of the 1st world than the people of their own countries.

Prashad goes to each place, from Singapore, to Indonesia and Suharto, to Baghdad, and explores the rise and fall of the Third World. Today, he ends, the Third World is dead. However, an international movement, free of imposed movements from above or directly by the elites of the government, has arisen and the world is changing to oppose the US. The book is an interesting look at an attempt by the leaders of former colonized

places to fight back, though it can be a little disorienting traveling across so many places so fast (which is probably what trying to organize all those places to act together would have been like.) How the First World was able to destroy this movement is a pretty good lesson of history for any person to know.

Sidne says

Not really a peoples history...more of a history of those in power/ those who had the ability to make any sort of difference (good or bad). People aren't mentioned (as in the masses) which seems to marginalize them more.

Interesting concept of the Third world as a project rather than a place, explains why these places are still behind today.

Explains how capitalism was able to grow (ie. how the US came to dominate everyone/everything). Of course it's impossible for these countries to become mini-Americas...there is NO ONE that they can exploit/ they don't have the ability to exploit anyone or siphon their goods.

helps to also destroy this idea too that stupid American students need to be enforcing American neoliberal social justice on these people as well (this, among many other books, will show you why)

Malcolm says

The title unsettled me a bit – but this had received good reviews and the series it is in (The New Press's People's History series edited by Howard Zinn) is really quite good. I am so pleased I read this: it is a cogent, politically charged and engaged analysis of the 'Third World' as a political project. Prashad sees the Third World as a potentially a powerful challenge to but also product of the two worlds of the Cold War, and a movement and concept with enormous promise. He argues that the concept was weakened by the Third World's oppositionalism – it was defined by what it wasn't – and a fundamental problem of a focus on 'the people' as a largely undifferentiated anti-colonial mass at the expense of class. His concluding case, then, that the Third World as a political project was destroyed by resurgent class and imperialist power using three weapons – IMF related structural adjustment policies, an abandoned social transformation agenda leading to neo-liberal policies at home, and atavistic forms of cultural nationalism and religious anti-nationalism – is powerful and hard to refute. It adds together then to be a major contribution to contemporary history and to analyses of the current global political economy, as well as pointing to many of the weaknesses in the current wave of people's movements. The case that neo-liberal globalisation and cultural nationalism are bedfellows is essential to understanding the current shape of global politics, and one that needs more extensive analysis and exploration. Extremely good, highly recommended (one of my must-reads for the year), the kind of history we need more of.

Craig Werner says

A classic case of where even smart Marxist history can go off the tracks. Prashad's one of the best writers about Asian American experience and he can be a fiery speaker whose anger about the state of the world, especially white supremacy and economic injustice, is usually on target. I was hoping that *The Darker Nations* would be the kind of overview that could serve as a foundation for readers wanting to orient themselves to the dizzying range of experiences subsumed under the "Third World" terminology.

Unfortunately, Prashad assumes that his readers are a. familiar with the frequently turgid vocabulary of Marxist class analysis; and b. in agreement with how he's worked through all the issues. All too often he winds up sounding like a delegate to a hallucinatory contemporary version of the Bandung Conference which he correctly identifies as a key moment in the development of "pan-Third-World" thinking. Problem is that a lot's happened in the interim (much of which Prashad touches on), so anyone who wants to make an impact on the way people outside the very small choirboy think about these issues had better come up with a new approach. In addition to passages that descend into not-particularly-engaging political theory, Prashad has a tendency to elide the differences between various Third World countries in the support of generalizations that simply don't hold up if you know the local histories in any detail at all. It's too bad because he sprinkles in enough real insight, especially into the decay and collapse of the promising post-colonial states into dictatorship and corruption. He makes particularly good use of Fanon.

Ultimately, though, the only people who I recommend this book to are those with a solid background in Third World histories and an interest in finding a rhetoric to communicate issues of injustice for whom Prashad will mostly be a cautionary tale of how not to craft a voice.
