The Untold History of the United States. Oliver Stone and Peter Kuznick. New York and London: Simon and Schuster, 2012. p/bk 750 pp. ISBN 978-009-194-930-3. Price £14.99.

Oliver Stone and Peter Kuznick's *The Untold History of the United States* will hold very few surprises for readers already engaged with the history of the US, which begs the question of who the supposed readership of such a history ought to be. Stone and Kuznick state that the book challenges "the basic narrative of US history that most Americans have been taught," and herein lies the heart of their approach that renders much of the criticism aimed at the book misplaced and unduly critical. *The Untold History of the United States* is a popular history aimed at high-school students that addresses the "basic narrative" of American history. In popular culture, or on the Fox News Network, it is a narrative that has often been framed around notions of exceptionalism and the myth of a manifest destiny that became a euphemism for American imperialism after being coined in John O'Sullivan's article "Annexation" in 1845. Responding to the perceived "ignorance" of high school students, Stone and Kuznick construct a fluent, cohesive narrative that necessarily excludes minor details so as to maintain the momentum of a history text designed to enthrall readers otherwise disinterested in the foundational myth of the world's most powerful nation. Ultimately, the book is preoccupied with debunking the myth that the United States has never acted as an imperial nation; a myth which few outside of the United States would still believe. To this end, the book is a resounding success. Perhaps the most important lesson for history students is that any historical narrative might be taken with a grain of salt, which certainly applies to this book.

Stone and Kuznick are unapologetic about their approach to their history of the United States. They seek to critique the nation's master narrative of benevolence by including the unsavory details of US imperialism omitted in the narratives favored by American Presidents And, like most master narratives, this is largely a history dominated by men who act as totemic embodiments of policies more about personalities than political ideologies. President Truman's decision to allow the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki becomes as much about his masculine insecurities as the complicated geopolitical uncertainties regarding the Soviet Union's

role in post-war Japan. The chapter involving the momentous decision to drop the bombs is even subtitled "The Tragedy of a Small Man." It makes for interesting reading, but the identification between an emasculated person finding vicarious empowerment in an atomic bomb might seem a rather convenient narrative device.

Stone and Kuznick's history often reads like an assorted tale of horrors as they focus on the numerous injustices performed at the behest of American leaders to sustain the country's global status. While it is certainly appropriate to hold the United States accountable for various atrocities, the context in which they are discussed often proves problematic. By drawing attention to the technique of waterboarding prisoners during the Filipino-American war, Stone and Kuznick craft a convenient circular narrative in which history repeats itself: the imperialistic desires of the United States in the 1900s are continued into the twenty-first century. President George W. Bush is equated with President William McKinley, and the war in Iraq is conflated with the annexation of the Philippines so as to emphasize the importance of sustaining American business interests.

The revelations that the United States terrorized South America in the nineteenth century and enforced fascist policies during World War II might inspire further inquest into the history of an imperial nation that is as imperfect and aggressive as any other empire. However, Stone and Kuznick's history is a flawed account of the imperial machinations of the United States that weaves an intriguing tale at the expense of historical objectivity.

Works Cited

O'Sullivan, John. "Annexation." *Democratic Review*, Jul-Aug. 1845. *Web. grinnell.edu*, 2009. Web. 19 Mar. 2014.

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