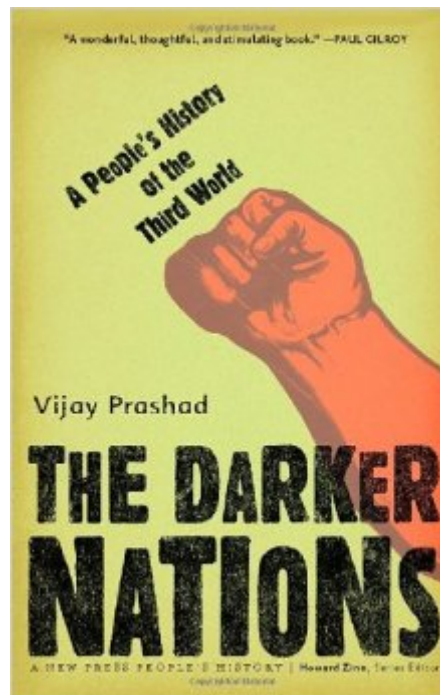


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The Darker Nations: A People's History Of The Third World (New Press People's History)



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is an ambitious effort to chart the fortunes of the political project of unifying the postcolonial world into 'the third world'. It is not, however, a 'people's' history, either in the senses of charting the demographic transformations of ordinary people (literacy, urbanization, etc) or anthropologically describing how they understood the dramatic events (revolutions, counterrevolutions, development experiments, etc) unfolding. It is almost exclusively concerned with the major leaders and some of the intellectuals and artists who shaped the consciousness of the

period. Indeed, even if it was not titled 'people's history', I think it could be faulted by being a little vague about 'the people'. In any case, the book is basically divided into three parts. The first section, 'Quest', considers some themes (economics, nationalism, gender, etc) through the optic of major conferences. The second, 'pitfalls', highlights places that epitomize themes like military coups and socialism from above. The third section, 'Assassinations' describes the demise of the third world as a subject as a result of neoliberalism, the IMF, the rise of East Asia, and religious fundamentalism. In all sections, Prashad tends to move between the focus of the chapter and historical geographical events that are far afield and occur before and after the moment in question. The effect can be a little vertiginous. Certainly he deserves credit for attempting such an expansive work, and his knowledge about the time period appears to be vast. However, I found his organization a little too tidy, and his political perspective restricted by his focus on state leaders.

This book gets high marks for its sheer wealth of information, though it's not a casual reading experience. Here Vijay Prashad has continued the spirit of Howard Zinn's classic "A People's History of the United States," and this book is a strong inaugural release in what will hopefully be a continuing series. Here Prashad constructs the "Third World" as a Cold War term for all the disadvantaged nations that were caught in the crossfire between the First and Second Worlds, and were usually abused as pawns in the era's strictly bilateral games of geopolitics and development. Specifically, most of Prashad's work concerns the Non-Aligned Movement of nations that tried to resist taking sides in the bilateral Cold War, and attempted to build a coalition of nations that could stand as a viable entity with its own ideologies and political strategies. Prashad provides a wealth of little-known information on the nations and leaders that attempted to build this movement, and the political and economic realities faced by the peoples and societies that were being used and left behind by the superpowers. Those familiar with Zinn's book will recognize the travails of the passionate historian who can't figure out how to synthesize vast quantities of historical knowledge. The first half of this book is tough to digest, consisting of an interminable laundry list of names and events with little over-arching analysis, giving the impression that Prashad is trying to describe every single thing that happened during the Cold War era outside of the US, Europe, and USSR. Occasional snippets of theory also seem forced and awkward, such as Prashad's examinations of unnatural borders or the behavior of military dictators.

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.

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