



The Whites of Their Eyes: The Tea Party's Revolution and the Battle over American History (The Public Square)

Jill Lepore

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Americans have always put the past to political ends. The Union laid claim to the Revolution--so did the Confederacy. Civil rights leaders said they were the true sons of liberty--so did Southern segregationists. This book tells the story of the centuries-long struggle over the meaning of the nation's founding, including the battle waged by the Tea Party, Glenn Beck, Sarah Palin, and evangelical Christians to "take back America."

Jill Lepore, Harvard historian and *New Yorker* staff writer, offers a careful and concerned look at American history according to the far right, from the "rant heard round the world," which launched the Tea Party, to the Texas School Board's adoption of a social-studies curriculum that teaches that the United States was established as a Christian nation. Along the way, she provides rare insight into the eighteenth-century struggle for independence--a history of the Revolution, from the archives. Lepore traces the roots of the far right's reactionary history to the bicentennial in the 1970s, when no one could agree on what story a divided nation should tell about its unruly beginnings. Behind the Tea Party's Revolution, she argues, lies a nostalgic and even heartbreaking yearning for an imagined past--a time less troubled by ambiguity, strife, and uncertainty--a yearning for an America that never was.

The Whites of Their Eyes reveals that the far right has embraced a narrative about America's founding that is not only a fable but is also, finally, a variety of fundamentalism--anti-intellectual, antihistorical, and dangerously antipluralist.

In a new afterword, Lepore addresses both the recent shift in Tea Party rhetoric from the Revolution to the Constitution and the diminished role of scholars as political commentators over the last half century of public debate.

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