



From The Desk Of

March 23, 1994 [REDACTED]

Mr. Brian Lamb
C-Span
400 Capital Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Brian:

My wife and I hate to miss any of your Booknote programs.

I hereby recommend an author for you to interview: Joy Hakim, author of "A History of US."

Her 10 books on American History are great reading for adults as well as for kids. She makes the usually dull history books come alive, as evidenced by the three enclosures, and by my own reading of the stories she tells about people and events

Joy is a personable character so would provide an interesting interview on your excellent program.

Ms. Joy Hakim
[REDACTED]

Virginia Beach, Va. 23451
[REDACTED]

Sincerely,
[REDACTED]



Va Beach, VA 23451-2206
[REDACTED]

Where We Stand

By Albert Shanker, President
American Federation of Teachers

A History Lesson

Children often complain that history is nothing but a bunch of boring facts, which they learn, write down on a test and then forget as soon as the test is over. "What's the point?" they ask.

Now, I can't see anything wrong with learning that Vasco Nunez de Balboa crossed the Isthmus of Panama and "discovered" the Pacific Ocean. But it's true that these facts are not especially interesting, or memorable, unless you know some of the story behind them—for instance, that Balboa and his men slogged through the steamy jungles of Panama and found another ocean where Europeans had no idea there was one. (They thought they'd already crossed the ocean separating Europe from China.)

History is an exciting story—and often not a pleasant one—about the real-life adventures of heroes, villains and people who are a little bit of both. Unfortunately, most children would never know that because the history textbooks they read are not written by story tellers, and the texts are so crammed with details that it's hard to follow what's going on—or to care about it in the least.

Joy Hakim, a former teacher and journalist, understands these problems, and she's written a new ten-volume history of the U.S., called *The History of Us*, for children ages 8 to 13. Hakim's history is wonderfully vivid and engaging, but it is more. Kids who read these books will get a grounding in U.S. history and the often difficult process by which we became a nation. They will also find out a lot about how to think about and understand the past.



History is an exciting story about the real adventures of heroes, villains and people who are a little bit of both. But most children never find that out.

Hakim's first volume, *The First Americans*, which is the only one published thus far, begins with the appearance of the original settlers—the ones who crossed the Bering Straits while woolly mammoths still roamed what would become the U.S. (We were all, Hakim remarks, once immigrants.) After talking about the peoples who inhabited this country before the Europeans appeared, she goes on to tell the grim but fascinating story of how the Europeans conquered the Americas.

Hakim is terrific at making a historical situation present to the imagination. Here's how she describes Cortez's wonder and admiration for the Aztec capital—which he was soon to destroy:

As he nears the city he rubs his eyes. He can hardly believe what he sees. Tenochtitlan is more beautiful than any city on earth, he says. It is an island, five miles square, surrounded by a glistening lake [that] . . . shines turquoise in the morning sun. Houses and public buildings are chalk-white or earth-red. Some are gilded, as if made of the gold the Spaniards covet.

Hakim does not flinch from presenting some of the most troubling things about our early history—like the brutal fact that the conquerors of the Americas enslaved the people they found living here, and, when these people died off or wouldn't work, imported African slaves to take their place. In the past, historians—especially those writing for children—would have glossed over all this. These days, some people say that this troubling record shows the rottenness of our whole civilization—from the beginning. Hakim is neither squeamish nor politically correct. She presents historical facts as something for readers to think and talk about—and learn from:

Slavery was common everywhere then, and it didn't seem wrong to many people; not to the Portuguese or the Arabs or the Dutch or the Spaniards or the Africans—who were all involved in selling human beings as slaves. . . .

In America the Aztec Indians practiced blood sacrifices; the Iroquois tortured their captives; the Mound Builders kept slaves. They didn't think that was wrong either.

How could people behave that way? Were they different from us? Not really. Slavery, torture, and religious intolerance have been around for a long time. It is always easy to do and think as everybody else does.

Many good, or partly good people, as Hakim points out, have done terrible things to others—usually in the belief that they were doing good. Does this absolve them from the results of their acts? Hakim does not say it does, but she does tell her readers that one of the uses of history is to enable the present to learn from the mistakes of the past.

The First Americans, volume 1 of *The History of Us*, is available from Oxford University Press, 20001 Evans Rd., Cary, NC 27513 for \$7.95, plus \$2 shipping and handling (credit card orders, 800-451-7556). Excerpts of two later volumes were published in the *American Educator*, Fall 1990. For a reprint, write Box A, AFT.

SPECIAL REPORT

Kids love it as author puts 'story' back in history

By Carol Innerst
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

"American history textbooks are no good." With that, Joy Hakim sat down and wrote "A History of US," a bold red, white and blue narrative history of America that begins with the first Americans crossing the Bering Strait and ends with President Clinton's inauguration.

Oxford University Press, her publisher, and D.C. Heath and Co., which is marketing the books to the schools, expect the 10-volume series to spark a love of history among hoards of schoolchildren who routinely pronounce history "boring."

"It's an anti-textbook," said Mrs. Hakim, who feels that "kids shouldn't have to read anything we wouldn't read."

Hers is a compelling and challenging story about our nation's great experiment in democracy, in all its majesty and tragedy.

"It's like reading a novel you can't put down," said George Coggan, a teacher at East Elementary School in Punta Gorda, Fla. "I used it for two years in manuscript form. We had to copy it and put it in three-ring notebooks. There were no pictures, no diagrams — and my class just loved it."

With only four of the 10 books in published form, Oxford reports bookstore sales of about 10,000 copies of each volume. D.C. Heath projects school sales of about 10,000 units per book, or a total of 100,000 books representing about \$1 million in sales.

The big months for school sales are May and June, said Kathy Shepard, D.C. Heath's marketing manager for humanities.

"Schools are evaluating and piloting the books," Mrs. Shepard said. "There's a tremendous amount of interest in the books, but they are quite different from what teachers have been using."

A former teacher and journalist from Virginia Beach, Mrs. Hakim wanted to make history "accessible" to pupils and perhaps, along the way, try to build the foundation for a new curriculum and new way of teaching that's anything but boring.

The books, reviewed by respected historians and endorsed by the American Federation of Teachers — which has had a long-standing involvement in efforts to improve history texts and teaching — are just beginning to make their way into schools. The remaining six books in the series are being published at a rate of about one a month.

Technically "trade" books rather than "textbooks," they can be purchased at bookstores for \$9.95 for paperback and \$19.95 for the hardcover version.

Charlotte Berman, one of the owners of the Cheshire Cat bookstore in the District, said the books "are selling madly."

"There's quite a need for history books for this middle school age," she said. "Adults are buying them for their children, children are coming in and reading them, schools are buying them with PTA money."

"What's happening is that school systems are supplementing textbooks with outside reading material, and that outside reading material is trade books," said Roger Williams, spokesman for the Association of American Publishers.

A trade book is one that's sold through regular book outlets and is meant for the general public, he said. A textbook is made for the school population, has a straight-out teaching purpose and is generally bought in large numbers. Mrs. Hakim's books are an unusual combination, he said.

Nine-year-old Ned Williams from Virginia Beach surprised himself when he read one of the books on his own.

"That should mean a lot to you because I don't read much," he wrote Mrs. Hakim.

"I think this is the best American history written for young people that I have ever seen," David H. Donald, emeritus professor of American history at Harvard University, said in a letter to Oxford University Press.

Why did Mrs. Hakim embark on this venture? Because of her daughter Ellen.

"Ellen took a history course, and that got me thinking," Mrs. Hakim tells readers in Volume One, "The First Americans."

"You see, the teacher taught the history backwards. When I saw the history book I understood why. The book was so dull that it didn't matter whether you read it backwards or forwards. I decided I could do better. I decided I would spend a year and write a history book for children."

Actually, it took more than seven years, and instead of one book, it required 10 to tell the story of America's ongoing experiment in democracy.

She wrote "A History of US" for fifth graders — 10-year-olds.

"But what's happened with the books... is a lot of adults are reading them and a lot of people see them as middle school books, for eighth and ninth grades. They were used in a high school in Los Angeles."

The books return to a traditional format lost in recent years by restoring the concept of "story" to history.

The tone is informal, conversational and presents American his-



Former teacher Joy Hakim wanted the history "accessible" to kids.

tory as a whale of an adventure about "explorers, farmers, cowboys, heroes, villains, inventors, presidents, poets, artists, slaves, teachers, revolutionaries, priests, musicians — the girls and boys, men and women who all became Americans."

Historians — among them Pulitzer Prize-winner James M. McPherson — have reviewed the books and affirmed their honest depiction of American history.

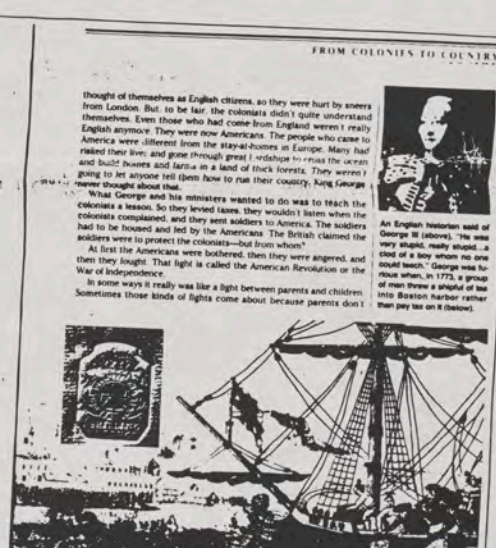
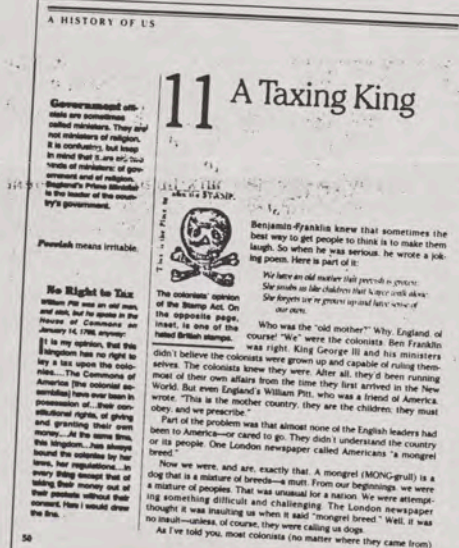
Historian Paul Gagnon, emeritus professor at the University of Massachusetts, praised the series and the author's candor.

"She is just so open and direct with issues and isn't all bound up with being politically correct," he says. "She really respects kids."

One of his favorite passages is in the third book of the series, "From Colonies to Country." The cover is a color rendering of Paul Revere's lithograph depicting the Boston Massacre. Inside Mrs. Hakim teases readers with a little bit that reads:



The 10-volume series of U.S. history for children is getting rave reviews from kids, historians, teachers and parents. Described as "anti-textbook" by its author, the books are selling well. However, not all volumes are available yet.



EXCERPTS

Thoughtful text gives the real story

Book six in the "History of US" series, "War, Terrible War," covers the Civil War. Here is a sampling.

The first big battle was fought at a place called Manassas, Virginia, not far from the city of Washington. It was fought near a muddy stream known as Bull Run. So some people call it the Battle of Bull Run, and others, the Battle of Manassas.

Manassas was a logical place to have a battle. It was a railroad junction: the place where two railroad lines met. This would be the first war where modern transportation was used. Again and again, the railroads would make a difference. They would help decide this Battle of Manassas.

The Northern generals thought they would take Manassas and then march south, to the Confederate capital at Richmond, Virginia.

"From Colonies to Country" is the third book in Joy Hakim's series. Here is an excerpt.

"All men are created equal." Just what does "equal" mean? Are we all the same? Look around you. Of course we aren't. Some of us are smarter than others, and some of us are better athletes, and some of us are better looking, and some are nicer. But none of that matters, said [Thomas] Jefferson. We are all equal in the eyes of God, and we are all entitled to equal rights: the right to live, the right to be free, the right to be able to try to find the kind of life

that will make us happy. Jefferson's Declaration of Independence said "all men are created equal." He didn't mention women. Did he mean to include women? No one knows. Perhaps not. We do know that in the 18th century the words "men" and "mankind" included men and women.

Did Thomas Jefferson mean to include black men when he said "all men"? Historians sometimes argue about that.

In 1776, when Jefferson wrote the Declaration, he included a long section in which he described slavery as

a "cruel war against human nature." Yet Jefferson owned slaves himself. He thought slavery was wrong and he said so. "Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate than that these people are to be free," wrote Jefferson. Many congressmen agreed. John Adams spoke out strongly against slavery. Benjamin Franklin and Benjamin Rush founded the first antislavery society in the New World. But South Carolina and Georgia would not sign the Declaration if it contained the antislavery section. So Jefferson's antislavery words were taken out. The

South won that battle of Bull Run. The Northern soldiers, who had planned to fight on to Richmond, now retreated back to Washington. By this time people began to realize that war is no picnic. Although, even then, no one dreamed that the war would be as long, hard, and bloody as it turned out to be.

By afternoon everyone was exhausted. Bodies littered the ground, the earth was bloody and beginning to smell, and neither side seemed to be winning. Then fresh Southern troops arrived by train. That made the difference. It gave new energy to the rebels. General Jackson — Stonewall — told them to "yell like furies." They did. They attacked with blood curdling shouts — they called it the "rebel yell." And that was too much for the Yankees. They dropped their guns and fled.

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"The picture on the cover tells a lie. Read this book and you'll learn why."

Her account of the Boston Massacre reads in part:

"Soon a noisy, jeering group of mischief makers... began pushing and shoving and throwing stones and pieces of ice at the British sentry."

"Captain Thomas Preston came to the rescue with eight British soldiers. There is some confusion about what happened next. The mob is said to have taunted the redcoats, yelling 'Fire! Fire!' Captain Preston is said to have yelled, 'Hold your fire!' Then a British soldier was hit with a big stick. He claimed he heard the word 'fire,' so he fired his gun into the crowd. The street gang moved forward, the redcoats panicked and fired at unarmed people. Five Americans died; seven were wounded."

"None of them was a hero. The victims were troublemakers who got worse than they deserved. The soldiers were professionals (the British army was supposed to be the best in the world,) who shouldn't have panicked. The whole thing shouldn't have happened. Sam Adams made the most of it."

Later in the text she explains why the book's cover is a lie:

"The picture that Paul Revere chose to etch into a piece of copper — so it could be printed over and over again — showed British soldiers firing at peaceful Boston citizens. That wasn't the way it actually happened. Adams and Revere knew that — but the drawing made good propaganda. It made people furious at the British. That drawing was soon seen all over the colonies. It helped start a war."

"It's intellectual history for kids," she said. "I really get into some very difficult concepts and I explain them in easy language. We haven't respected children's intelligence. They love the idea that I say you don't have to agree with me."

Byron S. Hollinshead, former president of both Oxford and American Heritage publishing companies, was responsible for getting Oxford to publish her manuscripts after textbook publishers pronounced her books "trade" books and the trade publishers declared them too "textbooky."

He started to skim one book and ended up reading the first five volumes word for word.

Mr. Gagnon, presently senior associate on the staff of the National Education Commission on Time and Learning, believes her treatment of history will appeal to liberals and conservatives alike.

"She's probably going to be between the zealous on either side, and as an historian for 35 years, I think it's the best place to be," he said.

For example, Mrs. Hakim makes no apologies for Christopher Columbus, who took a beating on the 500th anniversary of his "discovery" of America.

"The First Americans" says that Columbus enslaved Indians, but also that some of the Indians here when Columbus arrived owned slaves and went to war with other Indians just to capture slaves.

"The problem with a lot of people is they look at history from now, rather than taking themselves back to the time, and it looks very, very different," Mrs. Hakim said.

"In 1492, Columbus was a monumental figure. He did the best he could, I believe, within the world he was in. Columbus was a product of his time and he did something remarkable."

Her readers learn that in 1619, blacks came to America first as indentured servants, and one became a slave owner. By the time of the Civil War, she says, 12,000 slaves were owned by free blacks.

"I make a real point of that," she said. "To me, that says we're all in this together. We've got to stop saying that whites were the bad guys and the blacks were the victims."

She has a chapter on women and children in the Revolution in which she states that Abigail Adams never stopped reminding her husband, John, about the inequality of opportunity for women in America compared with men.

"But he didn't listen," she writes. The overall tone of the books is positive.

"These are red, white and blue books," Mrs. Hakim said. "It's appropriate for children. You start any subject in a positive way. Beyond that, and this is where I differ from a lot of my contemporaries, I think we have something to be proud of in our history. And I think we can say that without ignoring all the mistakes we've made."

"We have a body of remarkable founding documents, and we need to cherish them and celebrate them without for a minute forgetting some of the outrageous things that have happened in this country."

"I tell children we have perfection as our goal, liberty and justice for all. Can we achieve that? Of course not, but the journey in that direction is, as the kids say, awesome. We've come a long way."

"I feel very good about American history. It's an upbeat, positive, celebratory history with heroes, heroines and villains. That's what history is all about and that's what kids need. They need role models, and they're all there in our history."

News from

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

200 Madison Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10016

(212) 679-7300

PRAISE FOR A HISTORY OF US

"Joy Hakim seems to have accomplished a miracle -- interesting kids in history. I can find nothing to criticize, and much to praise."

--James McPherson, Author
Battle Cry of Freedom

"We owe Joy Hakim a great debt of gratitude. These books have the potential to change the way [we] experience our country's history. And who knows, maybe some day soon we may even catch a kid sneaking one of them under the covers at night."

--Elizabeth McPike, Editor
American Educator Magazine

"A HISTORY OF US really involves young people in the story"

--Bob Edwards, Host of 'Morning Edition',
National Public Radio

"I really liked your book. I liked it so much I read the rest of the book on my own! That should mean alot [sic] to you because I don't read much."

--Ned W.
5th grade student

"I had intended to scan the material...but when I started reading A HISTORY OF US I couldn't stop. [The] writing is fascinating, and I'm confident [it is] the most interesting history young people are getting these days."

--Ernest L. Boyer
President, The Carnegie Foundation
for the Advancement of Teaching

"It is a fine piece of work...It really respects children, as the best children's literature does....I am convinced that the response to these particularly warm, entertaining, yet challenging books will be large, and what is more, will have important national results."

--Bernard A. Weisberger
Author, The Impact of Our Past: A History
of the United States, From Sea to Shining
Sea and Many People, One Nation

"A HISTORY OF US sets just the right tone, sustains interest, examines what history is and what it is not, and is a book of real substance that speaks directly to children."

--Jean Fritz
Author, The Double Life of Pocahontas
and What's the Big Idea, Ben Franklin?

-- more --

What educators say about A HISTORY OF US

"I like this series a lot. It uses examples to illustrate concepts of history that really allow kids to see historical events in the present tense."

--Phyllis Clarke
4th grade teacher at
Heatherwood Elementary
in Boulder, Colorado

"These books are instant classics...highly recommended for the reading enjoyment of all Americans, young and old."

--George Coggan, 5th grade
teacher at East Elementary in
Punta Gorda, Florida

"Hakim's history is wonderfully vivid and engaging, but it is more. Kids who read these books will get a grounding in U.S. history and the often difficult process by which we became a nation. They will also find out a lot about how to think about and understand the past."

--Albert Shanker
President of the American
Federation of Teachers

"What a treat it would be for American youngsters to be able to read a fifth grade history textbook like this."

--Chester Finn
Director of the Education
Excellence Network