

Synopsis

The Cartoon History of the Modern World is a wickedly funny take on modern history. It is essentially a complete and up-to-date course in college level Modern World History, but presented as a graphic novel. In an engaging and humorous graphic style, Larry Gonick covers the history, personalities and big topics that have shaped our universe over the past five centuries, including the Industrial Revolution, the American Revolution, the Russian Revolution, the evolution of political, social, economic, and scientific thought, Communism, Fascism, Nazism, the Cold War, Globalization and much more. Volume I of the Cartoon History of the Modern World picks up from Gonick's award winning Cartoon History of the Universe Series. That series began with the Big Bang and ended with Christopher Columbus sailing for the New World. This book starts off with peoples that Columbus "discovered" and ends with the U.S. Revolution.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I read this book through in one day and still want more. The complicated history of diplomacy between England, Spain and France continues to intrigue as most of the reversals and diplomatic snafus were probably too complicated for such an endeavor. I was a little disappointed to see Queen Elizabeth given such a small part on the world stage that Gonick draws. I also felt that there could have been more material on the pre-Columbus Indians, but I was happy to enjoy the background on the Aztecs and Mayans at least. With every book in this series I look forward to three things 1. Learning material that I never knew, 2. Reading about material that I knew already but from a completely different perspective and 3. the humor which runs the gamut from hilarious to

juvenile. And this book definitely delivers. I knew that the Netherlands played a role in the rise of modern commerce from Neal Stephenson's books and I knew about the tulip crisis but I didn't know about the ways the major powers fought over the Netherlands until they couldn't take over. I never knew anything about the origins of Sikhism, especially not as a fusion religion that tried to take the best of Islam and Hinduism. Of course, it's also delightful to go over familiar history. King Henry VIII is dismissed as an ambitious despot. Gonick comes down on the Marlowe as a royal spy against Catholic side of the conspiracy theory (of course, we all pretty much agree that he wasn't just killed in the barroom brawl) and the American Revolution is seen in perspective as an opportune rebellion against an England temporarily sick of fighting for its colonies. One hopes that the next installment is a trifle more in depth when dealing with America than Gonick's first attempt which was decidedly Howard Zinn inspired. Overall, this is an amazing book and you should buy it for all your friends and relatives.

When "Cartoon History of the Universe Part III" closed with "Next: Quetzalcoatl!" many probably didn't realize they were teetering on the edge of a 5-year cliff hanger. The next installment, namely this one, didn't appear until 2007. But this fits right in line with the monumental nature and timeline of the "Cartoon History" series itself. Those who bought the first book way back in 1990 aged almost twenty years before the series' end (which finally happened last year, but more on that another time). In any case, a few shockers awaited nail-biters clawing at book store doors for "The Cartoon History of the Universe IV." First, had they asked for that title the book store sales clerks would think them insane. No such book exists. For reasons that remain a little inexplicable, the series title changed to "The Cartoon History of the Modern World Part I." Now where's the continuity in that? Gonick, the almost insanely persistent author of this series, claimed it was the publisher's idea. Well, how can starving artists disagree with the hand that feeds? So it has a new title, many can deal with that. The biggest mandible yanker, however, was the size, or lack of it. The previous three books were giant in comparison with the almost meager new installment (which should be called book IV, nyah! Blah!). Consequently, the art doesn't leap out like before and eyestrain may occur when scouring some of the not-to-be-missed marginal details that dot almost every page. Though things seemed less than ideal, the best parts were not missing. The new installment still was a funny, sad, poignant, insightful and dang well-drawn comic with real educational value. Parents the world over (except in Japan) recoil at the very concept. But even adults who were victims of almost any of the world's educational systems will learn from these hand-inked tomes. History comes alive here in words and pictures. Learn something, already! As expected, and as promised, this book

picks up where Book III left off. It begins with the rise of the great ancient civilizations of Mexico and walks through their brutal and often heartbreaking fall to explorers and conquistadors. Columbus in particular comes off rather shoddy. Gonick calls his subsection "Visionary Bungler." He also takes some stabs at people who conveniently record that many native deaths were from disease. One memorable panel shows three smiling modern types who say in turn: "Gosh, our ancestors didn't mean to kill so many!" "Yes, they hardly shot or stabbed or starved more than a few million!" "I feel strangely relieved!" Moments like this, when Gonick injects moral viewpoints into the narrative, make the series all the more enjoyable. Potosí, the famous hill of silver, looms over the second section as do conflicts between the Portuguese and Spanish. The Mughals also show up starting with Babur, their famous founder and first emperor. Not only that, the origins of the Sikhs under the itinerant Nanak also receive apt space. Then back to the west and the events leading up to the Reformation and the ominous reach of Carlos V (depicted wearing a tower of crowns). Machiavelli also peeks in before the rise of Calvinism and the Jesuits. All of the drama around Henry VIII, Elizabeth I, Huguenots, peasant uprisings, and the forming of the United Provinces of the Netherlands. And suddenly science via Galileo, Brahe, Kepler, Newton and more, ending with suppression by the church until Charles II allowed the formation of the Royal society. Gonick also gets in a quick bash at France-bashers. Beaver-rich Canada attracted feuding protestants and Catholics which led a succession of skirmishes and treaties with the Iroquois and Huron. But then the "new world" really picks up after King James I allows more frills in church. The Puritans, extreme Calvinists, pack off to Holland (which they find too tolerant) and finally North America. But Charles I caused far more uproar by dissolving parliament. He was executed and Oliver Cromwell slowly became dictator. After Charles II's return, Gonick delineates the ups and downs of John Locke's philosophy. An entire page is devoted to debunking some of Locke's ideas. Finally, the last section begins around 1700 and ends with the signing of the American Constitution. The strange paradox of slave owners founding a free society does not go unmentioned. So ends another whirlwind and overwhelming book in this astounding cartoon series. More to come. This installment completely maintains the quality of the previous installments. The five year interval goes almost unnoticed. Here again stands another crash course in world history. Given the space and format this remains a rather cursory course, but the major points peek through the mass saliently. Though the history sticks to the major political events (wars, revolutions, etc.) the common folk get their word in now and then in typical Gonick fashion. His political stance becomes rather clear (even George W. Bush makes a rather uncomplimentary cameo), but this won't surprise readers of the previous books. Thankfully, we didn't have to wait too long for the final conclusion of this, one of cartooning's most

impressive achievements. "The Cartoon History of the Modern World Part II" (or, better, "The Cartoon History of the Universe V") appeared in late 2009. But Gonick, twenty years older like the rest of us, still keeps plenty busy. Anyway, enough snibbering, on to Part II...

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