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Untold History of the United States (Blu-ray)

[Warner Bros.](#) // Unrated // October 15, 2013 // Region A

List Price: **\$49.99** [Buy now and save at]

J'aime 469 personnes aiment ça. Soyez le premier parmi vos amis.

Review by [Randy Miller III](#) | posted October 17, 2013 | [E-mail the Author](#)



If Oliver Stone's *The Untold History of the United States* has one clear message, it's that history repeats itself. This scathing, focused series explores the dark underbelly of American history, turning its lens on events that went largely unreported or, in some cases, have simply been forgotten during the last several decades. Stone wrote, directed and narrated each of the ten one-hour episodes (dubbed "chapters") with the goal of sharing information that audiences of all ages probably never learned from school or mainstream media. Though Stone's detractors will rightfully approach this series with caution (or ignore it entirely), the acclaimed filmmaker has obviously done his research here and presents each installment in a measured, effective manner that's easy to follow and understand. Still, the series can largely be categorized as an editorial piece, as many quotes and ideologies are paired with similar or contrasting film clips ranging from [Zero Dark Thirty](#) to [Mr. Smith Goes to Washington](#). Either way, *The Untold History of the United States* remains a captivating and accessible production that aims to enlighten and inform...or, at the very least, provoke discussion.

Complete Episode Listing

Paraphrased packaging summaries provided. Additional comments are italicized.

Disc One

CHAPTER 1: "WORLD WAR II" explores the birth of the American Empire by focusing on Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin. Through examination of key decisions during World War II, this chapter celebrates unsung heroes such as American Henry Wallace and explores the demonization of the Soviets. *Not surprisingly, this provides more of an overview regarding certain events to come during the next two episodes, as its condensed format allows little room for more than the most basic details. With that said, "WWII" still offers a good preview of what's ahead.*

CHAPTER 2: "ROOSEVELT, TRUMAN, & WALLACE" includes highlights from the historical upset of Harry Truman replacing Henry Wallace as Roosevelt's Vice President during his fourth term, leading to a dramatic shift in leadership that propelled the US towards empire building. It also explores the relationship between the US and the Soviet Union, as well as the beginnings of the Cold War. Relationships between Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill are shown to be an integral part of post-war Europe's division at the Yalta conference. *Wallace is championed for his progressive beliefs, and it's later hinted that his startling loss would later be mirrored somewhat during the 2000 Presidential election.*

CHAPTER 3: "THE BOMB" explores the strategies behind the atomic bombings of Japan, as well as a new mythology that emerged from World War II. The bombing haunted the Soviets and mistrust towards the Allies grew quickly. The consequences of beginning a process that could end life on the planet are examined. *Undoubtedly one of the finest chapters in this first season, "The Bomb" is perfectly executed. The horror of General Curtis LeMay's "Terror Bombing" of non-militarized cities is shown in detail, as well as miscommunication that prevented an earlier end to the war.*

Popular Reviews

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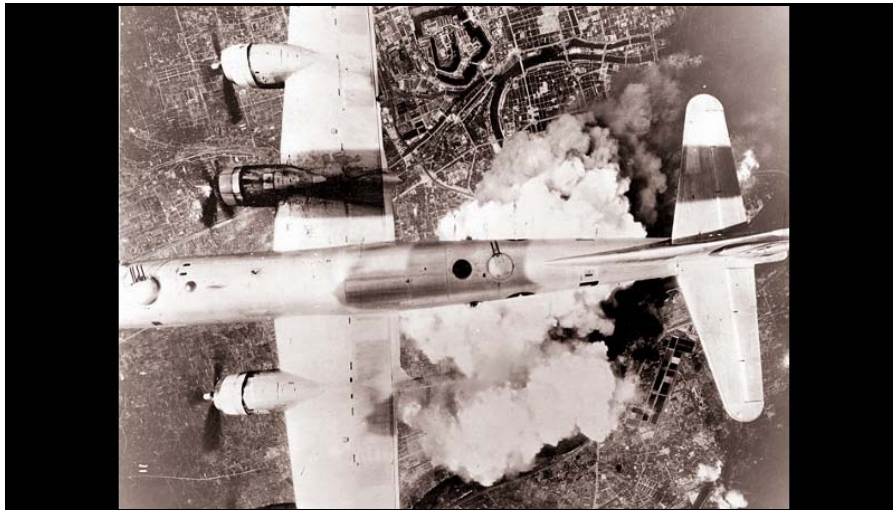
Disc Two

CHAPTER 4: "THE COLD WAR: 1945-1950" changes the equation: specific month-by-month causes of the Cold War emerge, as well as the mystery of its beginnings. Highlights include Churchill's historic "Iron Curtain" speech, Greece's civil war and the Red Scare that prompts Joseph McCarthy's rise, the House Committee on Un-American Activities and the FBI. *A particularly compelling chapter, specifically the mystery of blame in regards to the Cold War's beginning.*

CHAPTER 5: "THE '50S: EISENHOWER, THE BOMB & THE THIRD WORLD" continues as Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles replace Truman. Stalin dies but relations with the Soviet Union turn colder. The H-bomb and the doctrine of nuclear annihilation are explored, as are the Korean War and U.S. rearmament. McCarthyism grows and so does the ruthlessness of U.S. policy towards a Third World. Eisenhower emerges as a game changer. *A spiritual sequel to Chapter 3, portions of this installment explore the accelerating nuclear arms race and the concept of fear as a prologue to unjustified wars. Though it feels rushed at times, it's an excellent summary of just under a decade's worth of events.*

CHAPTER 6: "JFK: TO THE BRINK" includes summaries of JFK and the Bay of Pigs, the brink of total war during the Cuban Missile Crisis, early conflicts in Vietnam, JFK's attempts at peace with Khrushchev and the President's tragic 1963 assassination. *Undoubtedly one of the most infamous periods during 20th century America's development, this chapter does an admirable job of lining up well-researched facts and personal convictions in a detailed, mature manner.*

CHAPTER 7: "JOHNSON, NIXON & VIETNAM: REVERSAL OF FORTUNE" shows us cataclysm in Vietnam as the war reaches a turning point and an exit strategy seems almost out of reach. Watergate and the betrayal by Richard Nixon are also covered. *Like the previous chapter, "Johnson, Nixon & Vietnam" is familiar territory for the director, but the more measured approach taken here certainly helps his case as a whole. Among other topics, post-Vietnam America is compared and contrasted with the social climate of the country soon after World War II came to a close.*



Disc Three

CHAPTER 8: "REAGAN, GORBACHEV & THE THIRD WORLD - RISE OF THE RIGHT" follows Carter's dreams of change and Ronald Reagan's presidency, including secret wars in Afghanistan and Central America. Gorbachev redeems Reagan and fresh opportunities for peace arise, while the debate over Reagan's legacy continues after he leaves office. *Among other topics, the senseless and long-running "War on Drugs" (which included George H.W. Bush's later invasion of Panama) is suggested to mirror later attempts of controlling uncontrollable things, much like the "War on Terror".*

CHAPTER 9: "BUSH & CLINTON: SQUANDERED PEACE - NEW WORLD ORDER" shows us George W. Bush's doctrine of endless war in Iraq and Afghanistan and the continued cannibalization of the U.S. economy. Squandered chances given by the end of the Cold War and Russia is introduced to American capitalism. A new USA, the National Security Fortress, emerges as the U.S. goes to war in the Middle East and a New World Order is shaped. *Though this chapter only spends 60% of its running time covering the Bush and Clinton years before shifting to the controversial 2000 election, George W.'s reign and 9/11's aftermath, the reinforcement of Clinton's overblown sex scandal can't be repeated enough.*

CHAPTER 10: "BUSH & OBAMA - AGE OF TERROR" follows the meaning of events up to current times, including George W. Bush's doctrine of an "endless war" against terrorism, the birth of the Department of Homeland Security, developments in Iraq and Afghanistan, the election of Barack Obama, and the destiny of the American Empire. *Though portions of this chapter unsurprisingly sound like the New Testament's "Revelations", this first season thankfully ends on a hopeful note and suggests how we can reverse course and avoid the mistakes repeated in decades past.*

Warner Bros. presents Oliver Stone's *The Untold History of the United States* in a handsome four-disc Blu-ray package; oddly enough, no DVD version looks to be available. Either way, this edition serves up a solid A/V presentation, a bonus disc of special features and a practical, sleek packaging job. Fairly priced for nearly fifteen hours of total content, this engaging new series even plays well during multiple viewings, which isn't necessarily the case for most documentaries.



Quality Control Department

Video & Audio Quality

No better or worse than your average newly-produced historical documentary. *The Untold History of the United States* is presented in its original 1.78:1 television aspect ratio and the 1080p transfer is, more often than not, a clean and stable representation of difficult source material. Archival footage is often filled with nicks, dirt and scratches, portions are cropped to fill the widescreen frame and vintage photographs are occasionally dissected to simulate a pseudo-layered appearance. Though the latter two issues are certainly pet peeves of mine, they don't distract from the viewing experience too much and, if nothing else, occasionally break up the static nature of this presentation. No glaring digital imperfections were spotted along the way, including excessive noise reduction, interlacing and compression artifacts. Overall, it's a solid presentation of material that history fans should enjoy, especially most of the lesser-seen footage.

DISCLAIMER: The screen captures featured in this review are strictly decorative and do not represent Blu-ray's native 1080p image resolution.

The audio presentation is slightly more ambitious and, for the most part, succeeds admirably. This DTS-HD 5.1 Master Audio track is largely anchored up front, while Craig Armstrong's original score gets plenty of opportunities to open up the rear channels. Occasional sound effects have been inserted during portions of the combat footage, including a few well-placed surround effects that took me by surprise at several occasions. Stone's narration is clean and crisp, rarely fighting for attention with anything else. Optional English SDH, French and Spanish subtitles have also been included.

Menu Design, Presentation & Packaging

Presented with Warner Bros.' typical no-frills menu interface, this ten-part program is split across three Blu-rays with a fourth dedicated to bonus features. Each chapter is presented with roughly half a dozen breaks and, sadly, no "resume" function is included. This four-disc release is housed in a multi-hinged keepcase, which is tucked inside a sturdy outer slipcase. Also included is a separate booklet / episode guide and a promotional insert for [the book](#) of the same name.



Bonus Features

Nearly four hours' worth, all presented in 1080p on **Disc Four**. The main attraction is actually a pair of **Bonus Episodes** that double as a two-part prologue to the "official" episodes. Dubbed "World War I, The Russian Revolution, & Woodrow Wilson: Roots of Empire" and "1920-1940: Roosevelt, Hitler, and Stalin: The Battle of Ideas", these like-minded chapters are presented in the same familiar format, narrated by Stone and chock full of lesser-seen historical clips and photographs. These are well worth watching and will play just as well if you view them chronologically before the first episode. Topics discussed include the Spanish-American War, the value of imported oil, the Russian Revolution, FDR's landmark run as a four-term President, the Great Depression, Hitler's rise in Germany, Stalin's rule and much more.

Also of interest is "A Conversation with History: Tariq Ali And Oliver Stone" (102:12), advertised as a companion film to the series itself. Very few topics are left uncovered as Stone and Ali (who previously collaborated on 2009's [South of the Border](#)) discuss the politics of history, the military-industrial complex, topics covered during *The Untold History* and more. Historical film clips and photographs are also peppered throughout, typically providing more support for the subject at hand. It's an appropriate partner to the series itself...and a nice little incentive, since it's exclusive to this Blu-ray release in home video form. All bonus features include optional English (SDH), French and Spanish subtitles.

Final Thoughts

Oliver Stone is undoubtedly a polarizing writer and filmmaker, but *The Untold History of the United States* is a well-researched, entertaining and highly informative take on the dark underbelly of America's last 100 years. Split into three main parts with a total of ten chapters (along with a two-part prologue on the bonus disc), this documentary series covers a wide range of topics, aiming to incite discussion and interest in most everything that mainstream media frequently glosses over. Untouchables are shown in a new light, unsung heroes are praised and, most importantly, we're reminded that history has a strange but avoidable way of repeating itself. Warner Bros' Blu-ray package is a keeper, serving up an excellent A/V presentation and nearly four hours' worth of terrific extras. Whether you've lived through most of it or not, even the most casual fans of American history shouldn't pass this one up. **Highly Recommended.**



Randy Miller III is an affable office monkey by day and film reviewer by night. He also does freelance design work, teaches art classes and runs a website or two. In his limited free time, Randy also enjoys slacking off, juggling HD DVDs and writing in third person.

What Do You Think?

4 Comments

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Barry Lane · Owner at 4 Directions Entertainment Ltd.

I detest Oliver Stone's work and the personality he brings to it but your review appears to cover all the bases.

Like · Reply · Oct 17, 2013 8:17pm



Brian Johnson

I admire Oliver Stone. His movie contributions, "JFK" and "The Untold History of the United States" are important contributions to the historical record.

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Gary David Vander Zwaag

Oliver's take on history

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Alexander Chatzipantelis · Τεχνολογικό Εκπαιδευτικό Ίδρυμα (TEI) Καβάλας (Official)

This is an awesome set, and I really want to own it. But sadly, its not available on region B. Anyone know if it is or when and if it will be?

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