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Précis of *Thirteen Clocks*

Robert G. Parkinson, *Thirteen Clocks: How Race United the Colonies and Made the Declaration of Independence*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021)

*Thirteen Clocks* by Parkinson reviews the occurrences before the Revolutionary War and the Declaration of Independence in the lead-up to the formation of the United States. The author explores the occurrences between the fifteen-month gap between these events and the use of race and fear for the formation of the country. In particular, the book reviews the actions of the founding fathers, including John Adams, George Washington, and other patriot leaders, using disinformation to unite the 13 colonies (Parkinson 8). It presents accounts of how the events and use of prejudice and racial fears spearheaded the Patriots’ cause in fighting off the British by maximizing racial tensions to unite the 13 colonies in preparation for war. The book surmises the use of newspapers to spread false and biased information that influenced the colonists, patriots, enslaved blacks, Native Indians, and other races living in the colonial United States that influence racial relations to date.

The book’s first chapter focuses on using the newspapers as a communication medium that the founding fathers and patriots used to spread information about the impending war. It reviews the role of the newspaper in Boston, the staging ground and first target for uprisings against the British. It explains the newspaper as a method of disseminating information, attaching samples of newspaper columns, such as the *Virginia Gazette,* and the information on the dangers of racial minorities in the impending war (Parkinson 22). The chapter includes explanations on the use of the newspaper and the inclusion of information that detailed “fake news” to influence the opinions of colonies against the British. However, Parkinson identifies the disguise of the main message in the revolt against the British, which places racial minorities at the center of the controversy.

The second chapter opens with the deliberation by the British Parliament on ways to punish Boston for the series of insurrections against the colonists. The chapter highlights the challenges of the Sons of Liberty joining the thirteen colonies against the British. Such challenges included differences in religion, taxation laws, and mode of economic and political operations. In light of such circumstances and the impending punishment of Boston, the chapter highlights the ideas and deliberations of the founding fathers to orchestrate stories and narratives that would unite the thirteen colonies against the British as the common enemy (Parkinson 38). The chapter highlights the subtle influences and compromises between the thirteen states, with race as the center of the controversy. It details how colonies, especially from the south, identified racial tensions, especially from enslaved blacks and Native Americans, as a challenge to their unification during the war.

In the third chapter, Parkinson reviews the implications of the start of the American Revolutionary War that culminated with the formation of the United States. In particular, he recounts the cries that shattered across the thirteen colonies, “The regulars are out! The regulars are out!” (Parkinson 68). The chapter further highlights the realization of concerns and fears that the Sons of Liberty had been laying bear across the colonies regarding the involvement of enslaved blacks and Native Americans in the war. It recounts the fear that the Patriots had regarding the influence of slave rebellions and attacks from Native Americans to aid the British against them. The chapter further highlights the exploitation of such fears to orchestrate strong bonds between the thirteen colonies and the formation of offensives that characterized the war. Parkinson further argues the role of the outbreak of war and the capitalization of fear in solidifying the foundations of American unity under the flagship of “common cause” for the thirteen colonies.

In chapter four, Parkinson reviews the role of the Revolutionary War and the present threat by Britain as a way that the colonies united. In particular, he delves into the fears that drove the actions of the patriots across the thirteen colonies by reviewing the geography and socioeconomic differences between the colonies. For instance, Parkinson explains how the threat of the war made the northerners sympathize with patriots living in the “dangerous slave plantations” of the south. He also explains the role of race fear in informing the collaboration between the easterners and the westerners on protecting one another against the Native American tribes from the west. As a result of present threats and the need for a “common cause” approach to survival, Parkinson explores the role of racial fear in the founding of the United States (Parkinson 98). He surmises that Britain’s presence as a military and political threat underpinned the formation of the United States due to racial fears.

Chapter five reflects on the effects of the Revolutionary War on the attitudes and perceptions of enslaved blacks and American Indians in 1775. In particular, he explores the justifications across the thirteen colonies orchestrated by the Sons of Liberty to justify the discriminatory treatment of racial minorities. The chapter revolves around the expanding fallacy of the unification of the United States and the need to remain wary of blacks and American Indians as proxies of the British. The chapter explores how reservations by the patriots across the colonies evolved into laws and letters between the patriots. It explores the influence of the increasingly negative attitudes of patriots against non-whites to inform the ratification of the Declaration of Independence (Parkinson 120).

Chapter six recounts the events in 1776 before the striking of the thirteen clocks at the same time to illustrate the occurrences before the official formation of the United States. It returns to the works of the newspapers and journals across the thirteen states, which constantly and increasingly accused the loyalty of non-whites. The chapter further recounts the reservation and negative attitudes the founding fathers had collected against non-whites during the war. As a final stroke in using race fears during this period, the chapter explores how the founding fathers drafted the Declaration of Independence while excluding racial minorities (Parkinson 147). The chapter reveals the mistrust that the Sons of Liberty had created between the fifteen months that had ushered in a new and fiercer course of American history against non-whites. It draws the effects of such attitudes to form a new nation that was initially biased against certain racial populations.

In conclusion, Parkinson’s book argues that patriots exploited racial prejudices to create fear in the lead-up to and during the American Revolutionary War and the Declaration of Independence. Despite the strategy of unifying the colonies to form the United States, the effects would be far-reaching and create a negative imprint on the country’s history and racial relations.

Works Cited

Parkinson, Robert. *Thirteen Clocks: How Race United the Colonies and Made the Declaration of Independence*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021.)