



# **History Teaches Us to Resist: How Progressive Movements Have Succeeded in Challenging Times**

*Mary Frances Berry*

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## **History Teaches Us to Resist: How Progressive Movements Have Succeeded in Challenging Times**

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**Historian and civil rights activist proves how progressive movements can flourish even in conservative times.**

Despair and mourning after the election of an antagonistic or polarizing president, such as Donald Trump, is part of the push-pull of American politics. But in this incisive book, historian Mary Frances Berry shows that resistance to presidential administrations has led to positive change and the defeat of outrageous proposals, even in challenging times. Noting that all presidents, including ones considered progressive, sometimes require massive organization to affect policy decisions, Berry cites Indigenous peoples' protests against the Dakota pipeline during Barack Obama's administration as a modern example of successful resistance built on earlier actions.

Beginning with Franklin D. Roosevelt, Berry discusses that president's refusal to prevent race discrimination in the defense industry during World War II and the subsequent March on Washington movement. She analyzes Lyndon Johnson, the war in Vietnam, and the antiwar movement and then examines Ronald Reagan's two terms, which offer stories of opposition to reactionary policies, such as ignoring the AIDS crisis and retreating on racial progress, to show how resistance can succeed.

The prochoice protests during the George H. W. Bush administration and the opposition to Bill Clinton's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, as well as his budget cuts and welfare reform, are also discussed, as are protests against the war in Iraq and the Patriot Act during George W. Bush's presidency. Throughout these varied examples, Berry underscores that even when resistance doesn't achieve all the goals of a particular movement, it often plants a seed that comes to fruition later.

Berry also shares experiences from her six decades as an activist in various movements, including protesting the Vietnam War and advocating for the Free South Africa and civil rights movements, which provides an additional layer of insight from someone who was there. And as a result of having served in five presidential administrations, Berry brings an insider's knowledge of government.

*History Teaches Us to Resist* is an essential book for our times which attests to the power of resistance. It proves to us through myriad historical examples that protest is an essential ingredient of politics, and that progressive movements can and will flourish, even in perilous times.

## **History Teaches Us to Resist: How Progressive Movements Have Succeeded in Challenging Times Details**

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# **From Reader Review History Teaches Us to Resist: How Progressive Movements Have Succeeded in Challenging Times for online ebook**

**Scott Schneider says**

Mary Frances Berry is a civil rights legend who has not gotten the attention she deserves. The book is almost an autobiography of her involvement with various civil rights struggles. I knew a lot of the history so it wasn't too surprising. Her conclusion is that we have to show up and showing up make a difference. I was disappointed though that she didn't have a chapter on Obama and one on Trump. Lots has gone on since the end of the Bush Presidency in 2008.

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**Christian Schwalbach says**

I did not end up finishing this book for a few reasons, but I did enjoy what I read of it. I thought that she did a good job of going into depth in the case studies in the beginning of the books, and I did indeed learn some facts and information that I was completely unaware of before. This is not, however, a handbook on techniques to use in the action of non violent resistance, but is, as appropriately titled, a short survey/history on a few successful resistance movements of the 20th century. I did not end up finishing this book since it started to get somewhat repetitive. and despite it being quality writing, wasnt what I was expecting when I picked up the title. May re-visit at a later time.

3/5 stars, cheers for: publicizing some lesser known figures of non violent resistance, providing a balanced survey of events jeers for: repetitive nature of narratives

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**Andre says**

A good and example-laden lesson in the power of protest. Mary Frances Berry is the right choice as author of such a book, mainly because she can offer the voice of an insider as well as that of an outsider/protester. She is the former chair of the US Commission on Civil Rights serving under Carter and then Reagan, whom she successfully sued to retain her seat. "I was a member of the US Commission on Civil Rights and was fired by President Reagan for opposing his anti-civil rights policies. He said I served at his pleasure but was not giving him very much pleasure. I gave him even less pleasure then, as I decided to sue, winning reinstatement." Apparently her commitment to justice and civil rights ran counter to the Reagan administration agenda and she refused to be a rubber stamp, hence he sought her removal. She also served in the Clinton administration.

She has done a first-rate job of clearly defining the links between mass protest that prompted government action and policy change, sometimes in a delayed fashion but eventually amendments and adjustments were made. "It's crucial to recognize that resistance works even if it does not achieve all the movement's goals, and that movements are always necessary, because major change will engender resistance, which must be addressed." She opens the book with the March on Washington Movement. No, not the Martin Luther King March of 1963 but the 1941-1946 Movement that planned a massive march on Washington that was called off in the eleventh hour. in the second chapter she displays her bona fides as a protester when she discusses

the anti Vietnam war movement and resistance. She not only was a student resister but also spent time in Vietnam as a weekly reporter for the University of Michigan Daily, beginning each article with “We’re not winning the War.” The chapter dealing with the Vietnam War is the highlight of the book, kind of showcases exactly what she was attempting to do with this text. Which is talk about the impact resistance can have on the government while going behind the scenes and shining a historical light that aids in our understanding and perhaps lead the way for contemporary mass action.

The Free South Africa Movement gets an examination here as well as various protests of policies against Bush, Clinton and other presidents. This is a good guidebook for any and all interested in resistance and how to create and sustain the energy needed to eventually affect change. She leaves would-be protesters today with a message, that although “social media and advanced technology communication“ make it easier to organize, be mindful; “But the advances in communication technology also make it easier for authorities to conduct surveillance and spread disinformation to disrupt protest. In addition, the easy use of social media makes it more difficult to sustain protest through disruption, which, along with strategic organizing and education about the issues, produces change. Some people still mistake using Twitter or Facebook as the sum and total of their protest.“

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### **Val Brown says**

I learned a lot about the history of several movements got introduced to new inspirational activists that I will add to my list of people who have made a positive difference in our society.

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### **Alisa Harris says**

I got this book after I read Mary Frances Berry’s bio and saw she is the real deal— a lifelong civil rights activist who has supported and led social progressive movements for her entire life. The book is strongest when she brings in that personal experience and it is a good thumbnail overview of protest movements from FDR through George W. Bush. It covers the March on Washington, the anti-Vietnam War movement, the anti-apartheid movement, disability rights and civil rights advocacy, LGBTQ activism during the Clinton era, and anti-war activism during the Bush presidency. It skips over the Obama era and ends with a brief postscript about resistance to Trump.

Overall, I was a little disappointed. The book largely reads like a series of Wikipedia entries with very little of the analysis I was hoping for: what makes a protest movement effective or ineffective? In fact, despite the promise of the title, progressive movements have quite often *not* succeeded in challenging time. It has been quite easy for leaders to ignore mass protests and do what they want despite visible opposition. I was left wondering if protests are all that effective, which is probably not the outcome the author intended, and with lots of questions about why some make a difference and others don’t seem to.

If you want a quick overview of a range of protest movements, this is a solid choice. If you’re looking for a blueprint for effective resistance, I think the book falls short.

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## **Robynne says**

Berry gives readers and insider's and outsider's perspective on the impact of protest in changing domestic and foreign policy in the US. As an historian, she uses evidence to provide good analysis of where and when protest movements worked effectively or not. From an insider's perspective, as a participant in protest movements as well as former chair on the United States Commission on Civil Rights, she works through protest movements chronologically focussing on one administration at a time. To that end, it is unfortunate that she didn't analyse the Obama administration. Certainly the book is timely in light of protests against President Trump (and this book was released just a week before the March for our Lives protest with its global impact), but to jump from George W. Bush to Donald Trump without any focus on Obama misses an important opportunity. Yes, Obama was the progressive and friendly president. But he, too, is a complicated man and his legacy should not be glossed over.

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## **Jill says**

While the author focused on five presidents, Franklin Roosevelt, Reagan, Clinton, George H. W., and George W Bush, there were also chapters on the Vietnam War and Free South Africa movement. Each area includes both a historical and social perspective. The most interesting section was on lessons learned. It gives the readers ideas on how grassroots movements may or may not be successful in dealing with current challenges. Notes and an index are included.

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