

**A Clear and Present Concern:
The Radical “New History” of Howard Zinn**

by

Ron Hughes

B.A., University of the Fraser Valley, 2008

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

in the

Department of History

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

© Ron Hughes 2014

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Fall 2014

All rights reserved.

However, in accordance with the *Copyright Act of Canada*, this work may be reproduced, without authorization, under the conditions for “Fair Dealing.” Therefore, limited reproduction of this work for the purposes of private study, research, criticism, review and news reporting is likely to be in accordance with the law, particularly if cited appropriately.

Approval

Name: Ron Hughes
Degree: Master of Arts
Title: *A Clear and Present Concern: The Radical “New History” of Howard Zinn*

Examining Committee: **Chair: Roxanne Panchasi**
Associate Professor, History

Mark Leier
Senior Supervisor
Professor

Allen Seager
Supervisor
Associate Professor

Stephen Collis
External Examiner
Professor
Department of English
Simon Fraser University

Date Defended/Approved: December 1, 2014

Partial Copyright Licence



The author, whose copyright is declared on the title page of this work, has granted to Simon Fraser University the non-exclusive, royalty-free right to include a digital copy of this thesis, project or extended essay[s] and associated supplemental files ("Work") (title[s] below) in Summit, the Institutional Research Repository at SFU. SFU may also make copies of the Work for purposes of a scholarly or research nature; for users of the SFU Library; or in response to a request from another library, or educational institution, on SFU's own behalf or for one of its users. Distribution may be in any form.

The author has further agreed that SFU may keep more than one copy of the Work for purposes of back-up and security; and that SFU may, without changing the content, translate, if technically possible, the Work to any medium or format for the purpose of preserving the Work and facilitating the exercise of SFU's rights under this licence.

It is understood that copying, publication, or public performance of the Work for commercial purposes shall not be allowed without the author's written permission.

While granting the above uses to SFU, the author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in the Work, and may deal with the copyright in the Work in any way consistent with the terms of this licence, including the right to change the Work for subsequent purposes, including editing and publishing the Work in whole or in part, and licensing the content to other parties as the author may desire.

The author represents and warrants that he/she has the right to grant the rights contained in this licence and that the Work does not, to the best of the author's knowledge, infringe upon anyone's copyright. The author has obtained written copyright permission, where required, for the use of any third-party copyrighted material contained in the Work. The author represents and warrants that the Work is his/her own original work and that he/she has not previously assigned or relinquished the rights conferred in this licence.

Simon Fraser University Library
Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada

revised Fall 2013

Abstract

Howard Zinn, an academic, popular, and radical historian, political commentator, and author of the bestselling *A People's History of the United States*, has been heavily criticized by those who claim that his history is distorted by his political agenda and thus lacks “objectivity” and “balance.” This study reveals that there is considerable justification for such claims, but also that the same criticisms can be applied with equal justice to the work of some of Zinn’s harshest critics. Zinn argued that genuine historical objectivity is neither possible nor desirable, and wrote history with an unabashedly partisan and “present-minded” approach. On the “objectivity question,” which has long been debated among academic historians, Zinn emulated the “new historians” of the early twentieth century. As a radical historian, he owed much to Karl Marx, but his thought is “Marxian” rather than “Marxist.” As a popular historian, he used literary sources and unapologetic moral and emotional appeals to further his radical agenda.

Keywords: Howard Zinn; popular history; radical history; historical objectivity; presentism in history; new history, progressive history

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Cornelius and Christa Hughes and Diana and Carl Berg, to two very special ladies, Cathy Hughes and Doreen Anderson, and to my sons, Jason, Michael, David, and Lincoln Hughes. Their kindness, love, and support has been crucial and precious to me during my journey through the halls of higher education, and essential to the completion of this project.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the superb SFU professors whose wisdom, support, and encouragement has been invaluable to me, starting with my supervisors for this project, Mark Leier and Allen Seager. Their patience, good humour, and friendship have been particularly appreciated. Other professors who have helped to make my experience at SFU enjoyable and rewarding include Paul Garfinkel and Emily O'Brien, Luke Clossey, Roxanne Panchasi, Hilmar Pabel, Carla MacDougall, Ilya Vinkovetsky, and John-Henry Harter.

Among the school's superlative support staff, I would particularly like to thank Ruth Anderson, Judi Fraser, Anne Klein, and Tessa Wright, all of whom have been models of patience, courtesy, and helpfulness throughout my years at SFU.

I would also like to thank the excellent professors under whom I was fortunate enough to study during my undergraduate years at the University of the Fraser Valley, including Sylvie Murray, who gave me the idea for my thesis topic, as well as Bob Murray, Barbara Messamore, Stephen Schroeder, Larissa Horne, Ron Dart, Susan Fisher, Nadeane Trowse, and Michelle Rhodes.

I am also pleased to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to the family members whose support and encouragement has been so helpful, Lew and Sally Tusken, Marguerite Lawson, Gina Denoni, Lisa Young, Rick Denoni, Randy Denoni, Russell Crockett, Robin Crockett, Andrew Berg, Marc Scheuer, Lori Willard, and Roy Crockett.

Finally, I would like to gratefully acknowledge the financial support provided by SFU, UFV, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

Table of Contents

Approval.....	ii
Partial Copyright Licence	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Dedication.....	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Table of Contents.....	vii
Introduction: The History of Howard Zinn.....	1
Howard and the Historians: On “Objectivity,” “Neutrality,” and “Present-mindedness”.....	9
Howard and the Historians, Part Two: On “Balance”	40
A Very Popular Historian: Doing Some Work in the World	55
“People’s History” versus “Patriot’s History”	66
An “Anti-American Marxist”?.....	79
Conclusion	88
Bibliography	91

Introduction: The History of Howard Zinn

“Is it not time that we scholars began to earn our keep in this world?”¹ With this blunt challenge, Howard Zinn opened the first chapter of *The Politics of History* in 1970. It was just one of many such challenges issued by the self-confessed “radical historian,” whose political views blended elements of anarchism and socialism, over the course of his long, productive, and often controversial career as an historian, political scientist, and prolific author. In *The Politics* and elsewhere Zinn urged scholars, particularly his fellow historians, to energetically apply their talents to a quest for a more just, humane, and rationally ordered world, and until he passed away at the age of 87 in early 2010 he practised what he preached. Zinn kept, it might be said, one foot in the scholarly world and the other in the street. An academic historian who reached out to the general public with works such as *A People’s History of the United States*, Zinn was also a professor of political science who for roughly half a century delivered a steady stream of political and social commentary in various popular publications and speaking engagements at numerous public venues. Mere words, moreover, were not enough for Zinn. “In a world hungry for solutions,” he wrote in 1966, “we ought to welcome the emergence of the historian...as an activist-scholar, who thrusts himself and his works into the crazy mechanism of history, on behalf of values in which he deeply believes.”² By this time Zinn himself had already emerged as an energetic activist-scholar. Deeply involved in the American Civil Rights Movement, he served as an adult advisor to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), one of the most dynamic and aggressive of all civil rights organizations in the 1960s, and wrote two books about the movement, *The Southern Mystique* and *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*, both published in 1964. Later he campaigned with equal vigor for an end to the Vietnam War, becoming one of the first

¹ Howard Zinn, *The Politics of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 5.

² Howard Zinn, *The Zinn Reader: Writings on Disobedience and Democracy*, 2nd edition (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2009), 543.

American intellectuals to call publicly for a complete and unconditional withdrawal of American forces from the Asian conflict in his 1967 book *Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal*. His anti-war activities also included a controversial trip to Hanoi in 1968, where he represented the American peace movement as part of a “mission” instigated by the government of North Vietnam, and the role he played a few years later as a key supporter of Daniel Ellsberg’s efforts to publicize the contents of a secret Department of Defense study which became known as the Pentagon Papers.³ Because these contained embarrassing revelations about American involvement in Vietnam, the government of Richard Nixon went to great lengths to thwart Ellsberg’s efforts. Zinn helped him to hide the documents, edited and prepared some of them for publication, and also served as a key witness for the defence when Ellsberg was indicted on a variety of criminal charges including violation of the Espionage Act.⁴ Over the ensuing decades, into his old age, Zinn continued to campaign energetically against various American military engagements and for such causes as nuclear disarmament and the abolition of the death penalty. “When still a mere eighty-one,” biographer Martin Duberman reports, Zinn “continued to speak widely against the Iraq War; in the single month of November 2003, he conducted no fewer than seven teach-ins,” in places as far from his home in New England as Miami and California.⁵

Somehow, despite his hectic schedule as an activist and a full-time professor until his retirement from teaching in 1988, Zinn found time along the way to author, co-author, or edit roughly thirty books and numerous essays for such magazines as *The Progressive*, in which he consistently expressed the uncompromising radicalism that earned him both a legion of admirers and, especially among politically conservative Americans, a multitude of critics.⁶ By far the most controversial of these works is the book for which Zinn is most famous—or, his critics might say, most infamous—A

³ Martin Duberman, *Howard Zinn: A Life on the Left* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 132-8.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 175-9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁶ Forty-two titles are listed under “Also by Howard Zinn” in the opening pages of *The Indispensable Zinn*, but these include compilations put together after he passed away. Aside from his books and essays, Zinn also wrote book reviews and numerous introductions for other radical writers.

People's History of the United States. Zinn's thick volume, which has to date sold over two million copies—making it, as Timothy Patrick McCarthy observes, “the bestselling work of American history *in* American history”—is a classic example of “history from the bottom up.”⁷ Zinn makes this clear in the opening chapter: “I prefer to try to tell the story of...the Constitution from the standpoint of the slaves, of Andrew Jackson as seen by the Cherokees...of the postwar American empire as seen by peons in Latin America,” and so forth.⁸ It might also be described as “revisionist” history—with a vengeance. The consternation that Zinn's book has caused among those who prefer a more celebratory version of American history, and a kinder treatment of traditional American heroes, is understated in historian Eric Foner's observation, shortly after its initial publication in 1980, that “those accustomed to the texts of an earlier generation...may be startled by Professor Zinn's narrative.” This is especially so because of what Foner described as Zinn's “reshuffling of heroes and villains.”⁹ Historian Sean Wilentz later put it somewhat more colorfully: “What he did was take all of the guys in white hats and put them in black hats, and vice versa.”¹⁰ Thus, for instance, the seafaring Italian whose exploits are celebrated annually on Columbus Day is portrayed in *A People's History* not as the heroic adventurer who in 1492 “sailed the ocean blue” and “discovered America” but, rather, as an avaricious, genocidal conqueror who played a leading role in “the European invasion of the Indian settlements in the Americas.”¹¹ America the nation is depicted in a similarly un-heroic light. Dominated by powerful, manipulative and rapacious elite groups, plagued by economic exploitation, injustice, class conflict, and persistent racism, the America of *A People's History* is not the “beacon of liberty” often portrayed in more traditional histories; rather, it is a country with a long history of slavery, violent expansionism, and imperialistic aggression against other nations. Encountering Zinn's quotation of an American soldier who reported that atrocities committed by his countrymen during the Mexican-American War “made me for the first time ashamed of

⁷ Timothy Patrick McCarthy, introduction to *The Indispensable Zinn*, by Howard Zinn (New York: New Press, 2012), xxi.

⁸ Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 10.

⁹ Eric Foner, “Majority Report,” *New York Times Book Review* (March 2 Mar., 1980), BR3-4.

¹⁰ Marjorie Miller, interviewer, “An experts' history of Howard Zinn,” *Los Angeles Times* (01 February, 2010), <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/feb/01/opinion/la-oe-miller1-2010feb01> .

¹¹ Zinn, *A People's History*, 7-9.

my country,” few readers of *A People’s History* can doubt that its author often felt the same way.¹² More than a few reviewers have suggested that Zinn hoped to inspire similar feelings in his readers, including fellow academic historians such as Ron Radosh, who mockingly described his work as a history of “America the Awful,” and Michael Kammen, who evidently felt that Zinn’s book gave his fellow Americans so many reasons to be ashamed of their country’s history, and so few to be proud of it, that it was necessary to point out indignantly that “the people are entitled to have their history *whole*: not just those parts that will anger or embarrass them.”¹³

Zinn’s signature work has attracted many such critiques from other historians, many of whom have challenged not only his treatment of specific historical events or persons, but also the general purposes and methods with which he approached the practice of history. In effect, such critics are revisiting the debate into which Zinn entered so aggressively in *The Politics of History*, and it is this debate which shall command much of our attention in this study. Zinn’s work raises a number of important questions about the uses and abuses of history, questions that have long concerned professional historians but which are, perhaps, in an era of shrinking academic history departments, especially pressing today. What is—and what should be—the purpose of studying, teaching, and writing history? Should historians study “the past for its own sake,” as a longstanding professional maxim suggests, or should they, as did Howard Zinn, take a “present-minded” approach to their historical studies and “attempt to scour the past,” as Michael Kazin puts it, in order to address the problems of the present and thereby help to create a more desirable future?¹⁴ Should they focus on the “facts” of history, or should they, like Zinn, write “value-laden” history?¹⁵ Should historians study and write about the past as “neutral,” “objective,” even “scientific” scholars, eschewing “emotionalism,”

¹² Zinn, *A People’s History*, 168.

¹³ Ron Radosh, “America the Awful—Howard Zinn’s History,” *Minding the Campus*, A project of the Manhattan Institute’s Center for the American University (28 Jan. 2010), http://www.mindingthecampus.com/2010/01/america_the_awfulhoward_zinns/; Michael Kammen, “How the Other Half Lived,” review of *A People’s History of the United States* by Howard Zinn, *The Washington Post* (23 March 1980), p. BW7.

¹⁴ Michael Kazin, review of *Declarations of Independence: Cross-Examining American Ideology* by Howard Zinn, *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 78, No. 3 (Dec., 1991), 1034.

¹⁵ Zinn, *The Politics*, 36.

describing but never prescribing, and writing “judicious” history that passes no judgments, especially those of an ethical or political nature? Or should they, as did Zinn, allow passionate political and ethical convictions, “moral and personal outrage” even, to guide them in their research and their writing?¹⁶ For those who accept Zinn’s counsel to act “in deliberate un-neutral pursuit of a more livable world,” what methods might they employ to fulfill such purposes more effectively?¹⁷ Are historians who eschew such purposes and claim to objectively present the past “as it actually was” actually, as Zinn claimed, deluding their readers and, perhaps, themselves as well? Was he correct to claim that “there is no such thing as impartial history,” that historical writing “inevitably takes sides,” and that those who claim otherwise and criticize radical historians for their alleged lack of objectivity are often, themselves, exemplars of a powerful professional tendency to write history with a “conservative bias”?¹⁸ A further set of questions pertains to the audience to which historians bring the results of their studies. May they be content to remain within the bounds of scholarly discourse and debate, presenting their work at academic conferences or in journals and books addressed primarily to other scholars? Or do professional historians have a duty to bring historical knowledge to the general public? Should they, as Zinn insisted, accept a responsibility to the larger society that supports their work and write history as a means of promoting worthwhile social aims or inspiring people to struggle for a better world? Should it be the purpose of historical study and education to inform or to inspire, and are these aims even compatible?

¹⁶ According to Zinn biographer Martin Duberman, *New York Times* critic Herbert Mitgang “felt that Howard, in place of [historical and political] analysis, too often settled for ‘simply moral and personal outrage.’” Duberman, *Howard Zinn*, 266. Whether or not there is any validity to suggestions that Zinn’s work was somehow deficient in regard to “analysis,” it cannot be denied that “outrage” of one kind or another frequently provided a potent motivation for it.

¹⁷ Zinn, *The Politics*, 13.

¹⁸ Howard Zinn, *Declarations of Independence: Cross-examining American Ideology* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 51, 59. Zinn explained that “there is a conservative bias to history” because historians often “report on something because everyone else who has written before has reported on it.... [or] omit something because it has always been omitted.... The motive... is safety, because the historian who breaks the pattern causes stares and suspicions.” Even radicals were susceptible to this “tendency to emphasize what previous generations have emphasized,” wrote Zinn, quoting Marx’s famous statement from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: “The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.... [even] when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something entirely new.”

Such are the questions that Howard Zinn brought, either verbally or by the example he set, to the attention of his fellow historians. Though at times my own opinions and sentiments will perhaps be obvious, I will not attempt to answer such questions here. Rather, I will examine the way that Zinn answered them, assess the impact that these answers had upon his practice of history, and attempt to place him in the context of the larger debate about these issues which has sometimes raged and sometimes merely simmered within the historical profession for over a century now. The questions at issue here were not new when Zinn raised them and neither were his answers particularly new, but he did address them in an unusually clear and forceful way. This often created a considerable amount of what Daniel Opler has called “the friction between Zinn’s views of history and his colleagues’ views.”¹⁹ Reviewing Davis D. Joyce’s *Howard Zinn: A Radical American Vision*, Opler complained that this admiring biography represents a “missed opportunity” to explore that friction. Here I would like to avail myself of that opportunity and explore the tension between Zinn’s views and those of other historians, among whose number I will include academic historians, popular historians, and those whose work, like Zinn’s, often blurs the boundary between the two genres. Since Zinn was not only an historian but also a journalist who commented on contemporary political and social issues for a general audience, I will also consider some of the critiques of his work advanced by other writers of this kind. As the foregoing statement may suggest, throughout this paper I will attempt to assess Zinn and his work in light of the many professional “hats” he wore: as an academic, a popular, and a radical historian, and as a teacher and political commentator.

The paper is divided into five sections. In the first of these, I will provide historical background on the “objectivity question,” arguing that in respect to Zinn’s views on historical “objectivity,” “neutrality,” and “present-mindedness,” he followed in the tradition of, and was clearly influenced by, the “new historians” of the early twentieth century, especially James Harvey Robinson, Charles Beard, and Carl Becker, who were dismissed as “relativists” when they challenged the prevailing orthodoxy of the American

¹⁹ Daniel Opler, review of *Howard Zinn: A Radical American Vision* by Davis D. Joyce, *Cercles: Revue pluridisciplinaire du monde Anglophone* (2004), <http://www.cercles.com/review/r18/joyce.htm> .

historical profession on these questions. In this connection I will discuss the debates surrounding such questions which resurfaced with particular intensity in the late 1960s, when Zinn and other radical “New Left” historians such as Jesse Lemisch found themselves under attack by mainstream historians who alleged that “present-mindedness” and political partisanship had compromised their objectivity and distorted their history, and I will draw further parallels between the original “new historians” and those of Howard Zinn’s time. In the second section I will use Zinn’s treatment of Abraham Lincoln as a “test case” to assess the frequent claims that Zinn’s history lacked “balance.” Comparing Zinn’s portrayal of Lincoln with that of his fellow leftist historian Eric Foner, I will argue that there is considerable justification for such claims, and also that Zinn’s overwhelmingly negative depiction of American political leaders in general can be explained, in part at least, by his radical political agenda. I will follow this with a consideration of the specific methods that Zinn employed as he sought to further this agenda through his work as a teacher and a popular historian, paying special attention to his writing and teaching styles, his use of literary sources, and his unapologetic use of moral and emotional appeals. I will then move to consider Zinn’s conservative counterparts in the fields of popular history and political commentary, especially Larry Schweikart, the author of *A Patriot’s History of the United States*, written as a kind of “antidote” to the radical history of Zinn and others like him. Schweikart and other popular writers of a similar political persuasion have attacked Zinn on familiar grounds, claiming that his history is hopelessly distorted by his political biases and accusing him of disregarding historical facts inconvenient to his political agenda. I will argue, however, that in Schweikart’s own writings he employs the very tactics that he finds so reprehensible in Zinn’s work, for political purposes of his own, and thus, unwittingly it seems, provides evidence to support Zinn’s claim that genuine historical objectivity can never be achieved. Finally, I will consider the claims of conservative writers such as Schweikart and Daniel Flynn that Zinn’s history is “Marxist” and “anti-American.” In this section I will argue that Zinn was deeply influenced and inspired by Marx, who represented for him a kind of prototype of the activist-scholar and radical historian that he himself sought to be. Zinn also incorporated a number of Marx’s ideas into his own view of history. Nevertheless, he was not an uncritical admirer of Marx or his ideas, and in the end it is probably more reasonable to describe Zinn’s thought as “Marxian” rather than “Marxist.” As for charges that he was “anti-American,” I will let Zinn speak for

himself, showing that his thoughts on this matter were inspired not only by Marx but also by what is considered by many to be the founding document of America, the Declaration of Independence.

Howard and the Historians: On “Objectivity,” “Neutrality,” and “Present-mindedness”

It is fitting that Howard Zinn began his academic career as a professor of history and ended it as a professor of, in his words, “what is grandiosely called political science.”¹ He was at home in both worlds and moved seamlessly between them in much the same way that in his writing over the course of his career he was no less likely to be found acting as a journalist commenting on current events, almost always events with significant political implications, than as an historian relating those events to past developments or vice-versa. For Zinn, knowledge of history was essential to understanding the political affairs of the present. “If you don’t know important things about history, then it’s as if you were born yesterday,” Zinn told Harvard students in 1999. “And if you were born yesterday, then you will believe anything that is told to you by somebody in authority and you will have no way of checking up on it.”² For instance, he pointed out in a 2006 essay published in *The Progressive*, a president might “declare that we must go to war,” saying that “the nation is in danger, that democracy and liberty are at stake...and we will have no reason to disbelieve him.” However, “if we know some history, if we know how many times presidents have made similar declarations to the country, and how they turned out to be lies,” Zinn continued, “we will not be fooled.” Instead, we “might accept as our civic duty the responsibility to buttress our fellow citizens against the mendacity of our high officials.”³ A knowledge of history could thus serve not only as a “safeguard against being deceived,” but also as inspiration for political action in the present, and Zinn was clearly pleased to employ it as such, for it fulfilled the desire he expressed in a 1998 interview for *Revolutionary Worker*. “I wanted

¹ Zinn, *A People’s History*, 683.

² Howard Zinn with Donaldo Macedo, *Howard Zinn on Democratic Education* (Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm, 2005), 69.

³ Zinn, *Zinn Reader*, 637.

my writing of history...to be part of social struggle.... So that kind of attitude toward history, history itself as a political act, has always informed my writing and my teaching.”⁴

As natural and proper as this blending of historical writing and political action seemed to Zinn, however, it has brought forth harsh criticisms from many of his detractors, both inside and outside of academia. Daniel Flynn, for example, a popular conservative writer, was sufficiently disturbed by the explicitly political motivation of what he considered Zinn’s one-sided view of American history that for a 2004 book, *Intellectual Morons*, he used a phrase from the Zinn interview quoted above as the title of a chapter which covers not only Zinn but Noam Chomsky and Gore Vidal as well: “History Itself as a Political Act.” Flynn was unimpressed with the insight that Zinn offered into his method of writing history as a “political act” in *A People’s History*. In what Flynn described as “the most honest words” of the entire book, Zinn cheerfully admitted that his rendition of American history was “a biased account, one that leans in a certain direction.”⁵ However, “because the mountain of history books under which we all stand leans so heavily in the other direction—so tremblingly respectful of states and statesmen and so disrespectful, by inattention, to people’s movements—that we need some counterforce to avoid being crushed into submission,” Zinn explained, he was “not troubled by that.”⁶ Flynn, on the other hand, found Zinn’s explanation troubling indeed: “Two wrongs, he [Zinn] seems to be saying, make a right.”⁷

Flynn is only one of a number of critics who have expressed disapproval of Zinn’s method of, as it were, balancing the historiographical scales. Journalist Jamelle Boui, for instance, commenting on a 2014 controversy over standards for American high-school history education, declares that a history course “dedicated to the slave-owning hypocrisy of the Founders, the extermination of Native Americans,” and so forth—one that took “the Howard Zinn route,” in other words—would be “as blinkered and

⁴ Zinn, *Zinn Reader*, 638; Zinn, *Revolutionary Worker*, no. 987 (20 Dec. 1998), quoted in Daniel J. Flynn, *Intellectual Morons: How Ideology Makes Smart People Fall for Stupid Ideas* (New York: Crown Forum, 2004), 106.

⁵ Flynn, *Intellectual Morons*, 106.

⁶ Zinn, *A People’s History*, 631.

⁷ Flynn, *Intellectual Morons*, 106.

unsatisfying as a course devoted to a morality tale of American goodness and American freedom.”⁸ Academic historians have been similarly critical of Zinn in this regard. In a review of *A People’s History* written shortly after its initial release in 1980, for example, Michael Kammen decries Zinn’s “sins of omission,” including his tendency to focus on radicals, rebels, and protestors of one kind or another while the traditional heroes of American history—founding fathers, presidents, generals, captains of industry, religious leaders, and so forth—are either neglected or depicted in a negative light. The American people, says Kammen, “do deserve a people’s history,” but a more “*balanced* history” than that produced by Zinn is needed. American history “has encompassed grandeur as well as tragedy, magnanimity as well as muddle, honor as well as shame,” but Zinn, Kammen laments, offers a unidimensional portrayal of America as “a land of relentless exploitation and hypocrisy,” and in his “singleminded, simpleminded history, too often of fools, knaves, and Robin Hoods,” we get, for instance, “Black Panthers galore, but not Hugo Black, one of the greatest civil libertarians to have graced the Supreme Court.”⁹

Many of Zinn’s harshest critics are conservative thinkers for whom his socialistic, anarchistic leanings and his radical criticisms of past and present American foreign policy are intolerable. Yet even among colleagues of Zinn who largely share his political philosophy there are critics to whom what Daniel Opler describes as “the limits of Zinn’s historical work” seem all too obvious.¹⁰ Running through nearly all of these critiques, from various points on the American political spectrum, implicitly if not explicitly, are questions of historical “objectivity” and “balance,” along with differences—or, at least, avowed differences—between Zinn and his critics in the matters of historical philosophy and methodology, that is, contrary opinions on how and why professional historians should go about their business. It seems logical then to begin with a look at the way Howard Zinn answered such questions, at the outset of which some historical background on what Peter Novick calls “the objectivity question” will be useful.

⁸ Janelle Boui, “Don’t Know Much Revisionist History,” *Slate* (4 Sept., 2014), http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2014/09/ap_u_s_history_exam_revisions_have_conservatives_furious_the_changes_are.single.html .

⁹ Kammen, “How the Other Half Lived,” BW7.

¹⁰ Opler, review.

This question has commanded the attention of historical thinkers, and sparked controversy among them, since ancient times. According to G. R. Elton, “at the very beginning of our science stands the prototype of all these arguments: history had barely begun when Thucydides attacked the methods and purposes of Herodotus.”¹¹ “For who does not know history’s first law,” the Roman statesman Cicero asked, “to be that an author must not dare to tell anything but the truth? And its second that he must make bold to tell the whole truth? That there must be no suggestion of partiality anywhere in his writings?”¹² By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when what is often described as the “professionalization” of history took place, “the idea and ideal of ‘objectivity,’” Novick observes, had come to occupy a place at “the very center of the professional historical venture,” and it remains “the quality which the profession has prized and praised above all others.”¹³

Few have played so large a role in this development as the nineteenth-century German historian Leopold von Ranke. “Indeed,” as George Iggers asserted in 1962, “almost every major debate in German or American historical thought on the nature and methods of historical research has centered around, or at least involved, the question of the acceptance or rejection of Ranke’s methodology and philosophy of history.”¹⁴ Because of his efforts to elevate history to the status of a science, Ranke is widely regarded as “the father of modern historical scholarship,” or, as he was described by American historians who elected him in 1885 as the first honorary member of the American Historical Association (AHA), “the father of modern scientific history.”¹⁵ Modern historians not enamoured with the long hours of tedious archival research that

¹¹ G. R. Elton, *The Practice of History* (Fontana, 1969), in John Tosh, *Historians on History*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2013), 26-7.

¹² Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Oratore* (2:15:62), quoted in Lester L. Grabbe, ed. *Did Moses Speak Attic? Jewish Historiography and Scripture in the Hellenistic Period* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 170.

¹³ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1.

¹⁴ Georg G. Iggers, “The Image of Ranke in American and German Historical Thought,” *History and Theory*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1962), 17.

¹⁵ Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 26; Daniel R. Woolf, Andrew Feldherr, and Grant Hardy, eds., *The Oxford History of Historical Writing: Volume 4: 1800-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 42.

their craft often demands—and Howard Zinn can be counted among these—have, one might say, Ranke to thank for their troubles.¹⁶ By using the most advanced scientific methods of the age, including rigorous critical analysis of primary documents, historians could and should, Ranke taught, recreate history “as it actually was.” This, at least, was the way that his famous phrase, “*wie es eigentlich gewesen*,” was understood by most English-speaking historians. But, as Peter Novick and others have pointed out, a more correct translation might be “as it essentially was,” a phrase that more accurately conveys the influence of German idealist philosophy upon Ranke’s view of history, and the consequent metaphysical, religious character of his approach to its practice.¹⁷ The “extraction of the pure facts,” through the “strictest method” of historical research, including “criticism of the authors, the banning of all fables,” Ranke advised his German colleagues, was the first duty of every historian. However, to “recognize what really [or essentially] happened in the series of facts which comprise German history,” a further task was required “after the labor of criticism.” Every fact has “a spiritual content” which “we have to discover,” Ranke wrote, and this could only be achieved through the practice of “intuitive contemplation” (*Anschauung*).¹⁸ His somewhat mystical approach to historical understanding was largely unknown to, or misunderstood by, those American historians who considered Ranke, as AHA president George B. Adams put it in 1908, “our first leader.”¹⁹ In some respects, therefore, his exalted status among American historians was based on a misunderstanding. In any case, to these historians, as explained in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, “the Rankean approach to history meant a historiography based on a strict reconstruction of the past, on the ‘facts’ as they appeared in a critical examination of the sources, avoiding any moral judgments or

¹⁶ “The solitary scholar working alone year after year in manuscript archives was far from Howard’s idea of the good life,” biographer Martin Duberman reports. Though Zinn did many hours of archival research for his prize-winning doctoral dissertation, published in 1959 as *LaGuardia in Congress*, “thereafter he relied in his writing primarily on a combination of secondary sources and personal experience.” Duberman, *Howard Zinn*, 217.

¹⁷ Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 28.

¹⁸ Leopold Von Ranke, *The Secret of World History: Selected Writings on the Art and Science of History* (New York, 1981), 21, quoted in Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 28.

¹⁹ George B. Adams, “History and the Philosophy of History,” *American Historical Review*, XIV (1908-09), 236, quoted in Iggers, “The Image of Ranke,” 22.

recourse to theory,” and writing “with a commitment to strict objectivity.”²⁰ As the American historian H. B. Adams wrote in 1896, Ranke “determined...to preach no sermon, to point no moral, to adorn no tale, but to tell the simple historic truth. His sole ambition was to narrate things as they really were.”²¹ These were the principles by which his followers in America and elsewhere hoped to satisfy what Ranke, described in 1913 by English historian G. P. Gooch as “the first [historian] to divorce the study of the past from the passions of the present,” called the “first demand” of their profession, “the pure love of truth,” and no moral, political, or philosophical purposes or considerations could be allowed to taint their objectivity or otherwise hinder this quest.²²

In an age of unparalleled faith in the possibilities of science, this prescription accorded well with the dominant intellectual currents, and over time such was the impact of these influences on the historical profession that in 1900 Henri Houssaye, the opening speaker at the First International Congress of Historians in Paris, proudly announced: “If the nineteenth century began...with imagination and poetry...it ended...with science and history.”²³ By that time most professional historians had come to regard themselves not primarily as storytellers but as scientists, searching impartially for the truths or “facts” of history, ruled by the same standards of scholarly detachment and scientific objectivity as would be expected of a chemist in a laboratory.²⁴

As Novick observes, it was a particular “model of scientific method which, in principle, the historians embraced” at this time, an embrace that would have a significant

²⁰ Daniel R. Woolf et al., *Oxford History of Historical Writing*, 42.

²¹ H. B. Adams, “Leopold von Ranke,” III (1888), 104-105, quoted in Iggers, “The Image of Ranke,” 21.

²² G. P. Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century* (London, New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1913), 101; Ranke, quoted in Beverley Southgate, *What is History For?* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 14.

²³ *Annales Internationales d'Histoire, Congrès de Paris 1900, Première Section, Histoire Générale et Diplomatique* (Paris, 1901), 5-6, quoted in Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 37.

²⁴ History is more commonly described as a branch of the humanities today but it was once more widely regarded by its practitioners and other scholars as a science. In 1939, for instance, Robert S. Lynd described history as “the most venerable of the social sciences.” Robert S. Lynd, *Knowledge for What? The Place of Social Science in American Culture* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 129.

impact on the kind of history they produced and the readership they attracted.²⁵ This method, unlike so much of the academic history of our own time, was not based on deductive reasoning, that is, one did not start out with a general hypothesis and test it with historical particularities. As American historian Edward Cheyney pointed out in 1901, “beginning the examination of historical facts...with any theory of interpretation,” was not an acceptable method; scientific historians were expected to apply inductive reasoning, which proceeds from the particular to the general, and “the simple but arduous task of the historian” was, therefore, “to collect facts, view them objectively, and arrange them as the facts themselves demanded.”²⁶ “Historical construction,” according to the most influential manual of historical methods available to turn-of-the-century historians, had to “be performed with an incoherent mass of minute facts, with detailed knowledge reduced as it were to a powder.”²⁷ Historians wanted “nothing more to do with the approximations of hypotheses, useless systems, theories as brilliant as they are deceptive,” Houssaye asserted at the historical Congress in Paris. “Facts, facts, facts—which carry within themselves their lesson and their philosophy. The truth, all the truth, nothing but the truth.”²⁸

Three decades later, the newly elected president of the AHA, Carl Becker, would describe this mindset as follows: “With no other preconception than the will to know, the [scientific] historian would reflect in his surface and film the ‘order of events throughout past times in all places,’ so that, in the fullness of time, when innumerable patient expert scholars, by ‘exhausting the sources,’ should have reflected without refracting the truth of all the facts, the definitive and impregnable meaning of human experience would emerge of its own accord to enlighten and emancipate mankind.” However, “to suppose that the facts, once established in all their fullness, will speak for themselves,” Becker

²⁵ Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 37.

²⁶ Edward Cheyney, quoted in Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 38-9.

²⁷ Charles Victor Langlois and Charles Seignobos, *Introduction aux études historiques* (Paris, 1898; English trans., London, 1898), quoted in Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 37-8.

²⁸ *Annales Internationales*, 5-6, quoted in Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 37-8.

declared, “is an illusion.”²⁹ His 1931 presentation outraged his traditionalist colleagues and delighted supporters such as W. Stull Holt, who wrote to Becker: “It was sacrilege against the deity, Scientific History, who has been enthroned for so long.... It was glorious. It was grand. But I marvel that you were not tied to a stake and pelted with heavy tomes full of actual, self-expressing facts.”³⁰ As this comment and Becker’s ascension to the presidency of the AHA suggest, his views were shared by a significant group within the American historical profession in 1931. Had he so argued at the turn of the century, however, his would have been a lonely voice indeed, for the contrary view expressed in Henri Houssaye’s prescription reflected a professional ethos that was embraced with virtual unanimity at that time.³¹

A classic explanation of this ethos was offered by one of Becker’s predecessors as president of the AHA, Albert Bushnell Hart, in 1909. Only when sufficient historical facts had been painstakingly gathered, verified and evaluated, Hart suggested, might the historian presume to construct a theory based upon them. Praising the “inductive method” essential to “a genuinely scientific school of history,” he asked his colleagues to consider “the fortunate analogy of the physical sciences; did not Darwin spend twenty years in accumulating data, and in selecting typical phenomena before he so much as ventured a generalization?”³² Although Hart’s prescription was largely based on a widespread misconception of the scientific method that Darwin actually employed—more deductive than inductive—it nevertheless reveals the view that prevailed among professional historians at the time, and it explains, certainly, what Hart’s colleague Cheyney meant when he referred to the “arduous task of the historian.”

One consequence of such a view was that many historians began to see themselves as participants in a collective effort, in which individual historians might devote themselves to methodically “laying up stores of well-sifted materials” which, when

²⁹ Carl Becker, “Everyman His Own Historian,” annual address of the president of the American Historical Association, delivered at Minneapolis, Dec. 29, 1931, *American Historical Review*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Jan., 1932), 232-3.

³⁰ Letter of 13 January 1932, Becker Papers, quoted in Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 268.

³¹ Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 38.

³² Albert Bushnell Hart, “Imagination in History,” Annual address of the president of the American Historical Association (1909), *American Historical Review* 15, no. 2 (January 1910), 232-3.

the task of compilation was complete, could be synthesized and interpreted, either by those more gifted at such tasks or, perhaps, by future generations of historians. J. Franklin Jameson, the founder and editor of the *American Historical Review*, expressed this conception of his own role in a 1910 letter to fellow historian Henry Adams: “I struggle on, making bricks without much idea of how the architects will use them, but believing that the best architect that ever was cannot get along without bricks, and therefore trying to make good ones.”³³

Such was the general approach to the practice of history that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century became especially dominant in the American historical profession. The basic elements of this approach are summarized by Novick: historical science “must be rigidly factual and empirical, shunning hypothesis...scrupulously neutral...and, if systematically pursued, it might ultimately produce a comprehensive, ‘definitive’ history.”³⁴ But the winds of change blow through the field of history as fiercely and as frequently as they do through other academic disciplines, and it was not long before the “scientistic cult of the ‘objective facts,’” as Novick puts it, began to provoke what would in time become, in Zinn’s words, “devilishly persistent sparks” of scepticism and discontent.³⁵ Even Albert B. Hart, in the same speech that he expressed such approval of scientific history, expressed doubt about the objectivity of the very man widely credited with establishing that science. “It was all very well for Ranke to begin his lectures: ‘I will simply tell you how it was,’” said Hart. However, he asked, “Did not his students really get ‘how it was’ as seen through the mind of Ranke?”³⁶ Moreover, at a time when, as Novick observes, most professional historians, pursuing “the authority of science,” had “consistently distanced themselves from, and disparaged, ‘history as literature,’ ‘history as art,’” Hart gave voice to a growing weariness with the bland, dispassionate style of writing that “history as science” seemed to demand.³⁷ He also regretfully noted the increasing tendency of its practitioners to

³³ J. Franklin Jameson, letter of 31 October 1910, quoted in Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 56.

³⁴ Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 37.

³⁵ Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 42; Zinn, *Politics*, 17.

³⁶ Hart, “Imagination,” 245.

³⁷ Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 40.

write not for readers of history in general as their pre-professional forebears had done, but for their colleagues, among them “critical historians” who, he suggested humorously, were “more or less cannibals: they live by destroying each other’s conclusions.”³⁸ Evidently, the tendency of academic historians to write primarily for their professional colleagues while largely neglecting lay readers—who find the complex academic debates they indulge in incomprehensible or, perhaps, just uninteresting—has been an enduring phenomenon, as have been the consequences thereof. “We write too much for each other,” historian David Greenberg complained to his colleagues in 2005, “and, as we do, a public hungry for good history” buys, instead, “vapid mythmaking” recommended by “uninformed critics.”³⁹ Similarly, Hart addressed his fellow historians in the AHA at a time when the history-buying general public—many of whom who had once eagerly consumed the works of the literary historians—were revealing a clear preference for the art, rather than the science, of history, and a distinct lack of interest in the dull, fact-laden, colorless monographs that professional historians were increasingly producing.

“There is perhaps no logical reason that scientific history should be dull,” Hart opined, but it was, in fact, “in the position of the teacher who can instruct but cannot make her pupils love her.”⁴⁰ To explain the failure of scientific history to win the affection of a wide readership, he referred to a 1903 book by Samuel McChord Crothers, *The Gentle Reader*. Having been informed that the “true historian...is a prodigy of impartiality, who has divested himself of all human passions, in order that he may set down in exact sequence the course of events,” Crothers’s *Gentle Reader* “turns to these highly praised volumes,” only to find himself “adrift, without human companionship, on a bottomless sea of erudition—writings, writings everywhere and not a page to read!” After struggling through these highly detailed compilations of historical facts painstakingly supported by “references to bulky volumes” in notes which “at the foot of every page...rim along, like little angry dogs barking at the text,” the *Gentle Reader* at last

³⁸ Hart, “Imagination,” 235.

³⁹ David Greenberg, “That Barnes & Noble Dream: Academic Historians vs. Popularizers,” *Slate.com* (17 May 2005), <http://www.slate.com/id/2118854/entry/2118924> .

⁴⁰ Hart, “Imagination,” 236.

returns from his “perilous excursion,” and “ever after adheres to his original predilection for histories that are readable.”⁴¹ Given his familiarity with the activities of the American Historical Association during this era, it is likely that Howard Zinn was acquainted with the thoughts of both Hart and Crothers on this topic; be that as it may, both the content thereof and the humorous, irreverent manner in which these thoughts were delivered clearly call to mind Zinn’s own distaste for what he called the “trivial or esoteric” nature of much academic historiography, including its tendency to degenerate into “empty arguments” and “spurious ‘theorizing’ which races around the academic stratosphere with no particular destination.”⁴² The portrait Crothers draws of the lay reader, bedeviled by intrusive footnotes and references to intimidating scholarly tomes, also calls to mind the pleasure Zinn often took in poking fun at the conventions and preoccupations of academic history, as he did, for instance, for a university audience in one of the last public addresses he ever delivered: “You find very often that what you learn in graduate school is what you learned in elementary school, only with footnotes.”⁴³

Hart’s relatively mild critique of the excesses of scientific history roughly coincided with the emergence of a community of scholars who would soon mount a more serious challenge to the claims of objectivist historians in America. This group of “New Historians” included James Harvey Robinson and his students Charles Beard and Carl Becker, all of whom also came to be called “Progressive Historians” because of their commitment to political and social reform in accordance with the general movement known as Progressivism, and all of whom Howard Zinn clearly held in high regard, as evidenced by his frequent use of their thoughts to support his own arguments about various historical and political issues. It was this group whom Zinn credited with striking those “devilishly persistent sparks” of opposition to the objectivist, morally and politically neutral, “the past for its own sake” school of thought which was for so long dominant in the American historical profession and against which Zinn himself struggled for most of

⁴¹ Samuel McChord Crothers, *The Gentle Reader* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1903), The Project Gutenberg EBook of *The Gentle Reader*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/38873/38873-h/38873-h.htm> .

⁴² Zinn, *The Politics*, 8, 300.

⁴³ Howard Zinn, *Howard Zinn Speaks: Collected Speeches 1963-2009*, ed. Anthony Arnove (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 287.

his professional career. Indeed, Zinn's approach to the practice of history paralleled that of these New Historians so closely that it seems reasonable to presume that to a large extent he considered himself, and we may consider him, as part of a new generation carrying on the tradition of the New Historians.

At its inception the central figure of this tradition was James Harvey Robinson, a Columbia University professor and author of *The New History*, a collection of essays published in 1912. Like Zinn, though less prolific, Robinson was a successful author who took a special interest in historical education for young people and held very strong views about how it should be conducted. Two of his high-school history textbooks, C. Gregg Jorgensen reports, sold over a million copies each, "quite an astonishing number for those times."⁴⁴ A staunch advocate of "the practical value of history," Robinson argued that this value had been obscured by the work of professional historians, whose books were "like very bad memories which insist upon recalling facts that have no assignable relation to our needs."⁴⁵ Young students, he believed, needed historical narratives which, having been brought "into relation...with modern needs and demands," focused on "those things that are best worth telling," but the historical profession had, instead, given them "manuals...crowded with facts that are not worth while bringing to the attention of our boys and girls."⁴⁶

Many years later in *The Politics of History* Howard Zinn would similarly complain about the "thousands of volumes of 'objective' trivia" which had become "the trademark of academic history," and lament that historians and other scholars had been "honoured, flattered, even paid, for producing the largest number of inconsequential studies in the history of civilization."⁴⁷ All too often, Zinn complained, an academic historian first spent years producing a doctoral dissertation which, due to "the primary requirement of finding an untouched decade or person or topic," would almost certainly be "some monstrous

⁴⁴ C. Gregg Jorgensen, *John Dewey and the Dawn of Social Studies: Unraveling Conflicting Interpretations of the 1916 Report* (Charlotte, North Carolina: Information Age Publishing, 2012), 21.

⁴⁵ James Harvey Robinson, *The New History: Essays Illustrating the Modern Historical Outlook* (New York: Macmillan, 1912), 22.

⁴⁶ Robinson, *The New History*, 137. See also Jorgensen, *John Dewey*, 23.

⁴⁷ Zinn, *The Politics*, 17, 5.

irrelevancy,” and then went on to a professional career devoted to historical questions that could only be of interest or value to antiquarians.⁴⁸ As an example of such questions, Zinn referred to sociologist Robert S. Lynd’s doubts about “the relevance of a detailed analysis of ‘The Signal Shield at Marathon’ which [had] appeared in the *American Historical Review* in 1937,” doubts that Zinn obviously shared. In *The Politics* he asked the same question that Lynd had raised some thirty years earlier in a work which Zinn credited as an important influence in his thinking about “the social role of the historian,” and from which he now quoted with approval: *Knowledge for What?*⁴⁹ Echoing Lynd’s complaint that history had become “a vast, wandering enterprise.... a gigantic industry of recording and annotating things assumed to be *worth knowing for themselves* because they are part of the hitherto unknown,” Zinn made it clear that he shared Lynd’s conviction that “[w]ithout disparaging ‘the lessons to be learned from the past,’ one may still urge that our problems, however much conditioned by the past, *are in the present.*”⁵⁰

The orientation that such statements reflect has come to be known among historians, more often than not disparagingly, as “presentism,” defined by Carl Becker in 1912 as “the imperative command that knowledge shall serve purpose, and learning be applied to the solution of the problems of human life.”⁵¹ At that time it was not a particularly controversial concept within the historical profession. “Virtually all turn-of-the-century historians believed,” as Novick observes, “in the manifest contemporary utility of what they were doing,” and the phrase that was later to become a kind of mantra for objectivist historians, “the past for its own sake,” was rarely heard.⁵² By the time that Zinn quoted Becker’s definition in *The Politics of History*, however, presentism had become “a fighting word within the historical profession,” as Howard Schonberger colorfully put it in a 1971 essay which cited Zinn’s book and correctly identified him as one of the “New Left,” “revisionist” historians who emerged during the political and

⁴⁸ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁹ Zinn, *Zinn Reader*, 741.

⁵⁰ Robert S. Lynd, *Knowledge for What?*, 132, 130.

⁵¹ Carl Becker, quoted in Zinn, *The Politics*, 17.

⁵² Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 100.

academic turmoil of the 1960s and often “attempted to demonstrate that their own view of the purposes and ends of history” could be “traced back to leading Progressive Historians.”⁵³

For over fifty years a battle has raged between the presentists who argue for a “usable, value-laden history” and those historians who defend a “disinterested, neutral, scientific, and objective” scholarship. Each side has its own officer corps, training schools, and grand strategies for annihilating the enemy. To wear the uniform of the presentists, in some periods, was as foolhardy as having a red coat at Bunker Hill.⁵⁴

Presentist historians occupied a definite minority position in the historical profession when *The Politics of History* appeared, but in this 1970 book Zinn left no doubt that he was proud to wear that uniform, not least by his citation of a 1912 statement by James Harvey Robinson that remains to this day, surely, one of the most eloquent expressions of the presentist position ever written: “The present has hitherto been the willing victim of the past; the time has now come when it should turn on the past and exploit it in the interest of advance.”⁵⁵

An essay in *The New History* titled “The Spirit of Conservatism in the Light of History” reveals another important way in which Robinson’s views on the uses of history anticipated—and, it seems safe to say, inspired—those of Zinn. Addressing “thoughtful persons” interested in “social betterment,” Robinson asked, “does not the supreme value of history lie for us today in the suggestions that it may give us of what may be called the technique of progress, and ought not those phases of the past especially to engross our attention which bear on this essential point?” In harmony with Robinson’s prescription, Zinn often focused on “historical examples of social change,” hoping thereby to awaken his readers to “the possibilities glimpsed in a reading of history,” the history of massive popular protests during the American civil rights movement, for instance, which showed that “people, against enormous odds, have come together to struggle for liberty and

⁵³ Howard Schonberger, “Purposes and Ends in History: Presentism and the New Left,” *The History Teacher*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (May, 1974), 449.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 448.

⁵⁵ Robinson, *The New History*, 24.

justice, and have *won*—not often enough, of course, but often enough to suggest how much more is possible.”⁵⁶

More Zinn-like still is another striking passage from Robinson’s “Spirit of Conservatism”:

History has been regularly invoked, to substantiate the claims of the conservative, but has hitherto usually been neglected by the radical, or impatiently repudiated as the chosen weapon of his enemy. The radical has not yet perceived the overwhelming value to him of a real understanding of the past. It is his weapon by right, and he should wrest it from the hand of the conservative. It has received a far keener edge during the last century, and it is the chief end of this essay to indicate how it can be used with the most decisive effect on the conservative.

Like most other Progressives in 1912, Robinson wanted to reform capitalism, not replace it with socialism or any other “plan of social amelioration” conceived, as he put it, by the “Marxian socialist” who used “his version of the past in support of his plan.”⁵⁷ Thus, by the standards of Zinn and other New Left historians his political aims were hardly “radical.” Nevertheless, conservatives in the early twentieth century certainly considered them so, and in this regard as in others, therefore, we can count Robinson, along with fellow Progressive historians Beard and Becker, among the intellectual forebears of New Left historians such as Zinn and Jesse Lemisch. All shared a commitment to strive for significant political change, and all, in their own ways, used history as a “weapon” against the conservatives of their own time who resisted such change and accused them of allowing presentist political purposes to distort their history. Moreover, both New Left and Progressive historians strove to turn the tables on their accusers by exposing their claims to objectivity as false and showing that conservative historians had, in fact, used history as their own “chosen weapon” for purposes other than the simple Rankean retelling of the past “as it actually was.” Indeed, Charles Beard argued, even Ranke himself could not be exonerated of this charge.

⁵⁶ Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train: A Personal History of Our Times* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994, 2002), 4; Zinn, *The Historic Unfulfilled Promise* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2012), 47.

⁵⁷ Robinson, *The New History*, 252.

Becker and Beard pointed out that the supposedly objective, purely factual, politically neutral history advocated by their conservative colleagues almost inevitably supported a conservative political position. A 1921 comment by Becker suggested that this was not purely coincidental: "The mere 'fact,' if you allow the wretched creature to open its mouth, will say only one thing: 'I am, therefore I am right.'"⁵⁸ In 1933, by which time differing opinions on the question of historical objectivity had led to deep divisions within the AHA, in a presidential address titled "Written History as an Act of Faith," the newly elected Charles Beard made the connection more explicit with these words about the man to whose authority proponents of the "facts, facts, facts" approach to history had so often appealed:

Ranke, a German conservative, writing after the storm and stress of the French Revolution, was weary of history written for, or permeated by, the purposes of revolutionary propaganda. He wanted peace. The ruling classes in Germany, with which he was affiliated...wanted peace to consolidate their position. Written history that was cold, factual, and apparently undisturbed by the passions of the time served best the cause of those who did not want to be disturbed.⁵⁹

Beard's speech, however, was disturbing indeed to those who saw themselves as following in the tradition of Ranke. Adherents of "so-called neutral or scientific history," those who still "believed that it is possible to describe the past as it actually was," unfiltered by their own prejudices, preconceptions, or present political, social and ethical concerns and values, were clinging to a conception that, Beard asserted, "itself was a passing phase of thought about the past."⁶⁰ Beard claimed to speak "in accordance with the most profound contemporary thought about history," and with the longstanding, "obvious and commonplace" recognition that "each historian...is a product of his age, and that his work reflects the spirit of the times, of a nation, race, group, class, or section," when he observed that "historians are...disturbed, like their fellow citizens, by crises and revolutions occurring in the world about them," and for this reason among others, "the assumption that any historian can be a disembodied spirit...coldly

⁵⁸ Carl Becker, in *The New Republic* 25 (1921), quoted in Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 254.

⁵⁹ Charles A. Beard, "Written History as an Act of Faith," 1933 Presidential Address to the American Historical Association, *American Historical Review*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Jan., 1934), 221.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 221.

neutral to human affairs” was a fallacy.⁶¹ It was therefore entirely appropriate, Beard suggested, that “the Ranke formula of history” had been “discarded and laid away in the museum of antiquities.”⁶²

Beard’s apparent declaration of victory for those AHA colleagues who had come to be known as historical “relativists” was, however, rather premature. The following year, Theodore Clarke Smith responded to Beard’s speech by letting it be known that he, for one, was prepared to resist all such “far-reaching assaults upon the ideal of historic ‘impartiality.’” Citing Beard’s *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* as an example of the “doctrinaire...type of historical writing which discards impartiality as incompatible with a specific theory of human activity,” he contrasted such writing with the “impressive output of sound, creditable, and in many cases masterly, works on American history” that had been produced by historians striving to fulfill “one clear-cut ideal—that presented to the world first in Germany and later accepted everywhere, the ideal of the effort for objective truth,” and ended his address with an emotional appeal:

It may be that another fifty years will see the end of an era in historiography, the final extinction of a noble dream, and history, save as an instrument of entertainment, or of social control will not be permitted to exist. In that case, it will be time for the American Historical Association to disband, for the intellectual assumptions on which it is founded will have been taken away from beneath it. My hope is, none the less, that those of us who date from what may then seem an age of quaint beliefs and forgotten loyalties, may go down with our flags flying.⁶³

Beard responded at the next meeting of the AHA in an address titled, as is the Peter Novick work from which we have so often drawn here, “That Noble Dream.” To what Beard clearly saw as a thinly veiled attack on his own work and that of Robinson and other “menaces to the old and true faith, mentioned by Mr. Smith,” this speech was, in part, an indignant rejoinder:

⁶¹ Ibid., 220.

⁶² Ibid., 221.

⁶³ Theodore Clarke Smith, “The Writing of American History in America, from 1884 to 1934,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Apr., 1935), 448, 447, 445, 449.

Mr. Smith makes a division between scholars affiliated with the Association.... One group, with which he ranges himself, had 'a noble dream,' and produced sound, creditable, and in many cases masterly works on American history. Although he does not say that the opposition is ignoble, unsound, discreditable, and weak, that implication lurks in the dichotomy which he makes.⁶⁴

It was also the most severe critique of Ranke and his methods that Beard had yet voiced, a direct challenge to “Scholars of the Old Guard” and “disciple[s] of Ranke” that came with a mocking edge: “I make no pretensions to knowing Ranke as he actually was or his motives in writing the kind of history he chose to write. But records are available to establish the fact that he did not abstain entirely from those hot political controversies which are supposed to warp the pure thought of the empirical historian.” After listing a number of examples “showing that he [Ranke] could not completely separate his political from his historical conceptions”—for instance, that Ranke had “rejoiced in the events of 1870-1871 ‘as the victory of conservative Europe over the Revolution’”—Beard came to a conclusion that startled and offended many of his conservative colleagues: “Persistently neglecting social and economic interests in history, successfully avoiding any historical writing that offended the most conservative interests in the Europe of his own time, Ranke may be correctly characterized as one of the most ‘partial’ historians produced by the nineteenth century.”⁶⁵ Here Beard used the word “partial” in the same way it would later be used by Zinn: “All written history is partial in two senses.... in that it is only a tiny part of what really happened.... [and] in that it inevitably takes sides, by what it includes or omits.”⁶⁶

In this as in so many other ways, Beard and the New Historians prefigured the New Left radicals whose revisionist history would cause the long-running battle over the question of historical objectivity to flare up again with particular intensity in the 1960s and 70s. Interestingly, it was the wartime conduct of professional historians which provided devastating intellectual ammunition for the “new historians” of both eras. During

⁶⁴ Charles A. Beard, “That Noble Dream,” *American Historical Review*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Oct., 1935), 75, 74.

⁶⁵ Beard, “That Noble Dream,” 75, 85, 77-8.

⁶⁶ Howard Zinn, *Declarations of Independence: Cross-examining American Ideology* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 51.

the First World War, the National Board for Historical Service was established after a 1917 meeting at which a group of prominent historians discussed “what History men can do for their country now,” and many American historians enthusiastically accepted its call. This led to, in Novick’s words, the “wholesale abandonment of prewar norms of objectivity” by the vast majority of American historians, who essentially became wartime propagandists. Despite Albert Heckel’s insistence in 1918 that “the historian cannot sacrifice truth—even to patriotism,” the assessment of Andrew C. McLaughlin, expressed shortly after America entered the war, proved to be prophetic: “Perhaps few of us are able entirely to disentangle our scientific historical fibres from our swelling patriotic muscles, but most of us can try.”⁶⁷ Try as they might, this task, it seems, was too difficult for most American historians, and the resultant “pseudo-scholarship produced by the leaders of the profession during the war” was later “gleefully recalled” by Beard, Becker, and other relativists as evidence that the “the ideal of the effort for objective truth” had been exposed as an elusive dream.⁶⁸

Years later, the conduct of historians during another war, the Cold War, would be similarly cited by Howard Zinn, Jesse Lemisch, and others who were also called “new historians” and who used essentially the same stratagems to defend their position, and attack their opponents, as had their namesakes in the early part of the century. Both Zinn and Lemisch argued, in effect, that the mainstream historians who accused their radical colleagues of allowing presentist political agendas to distort their history were themselves secret presentists with their own political agendas. In 1970, for instance, Zinn derided the attempt of Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. to explain America’s involvement in the Vietnam War as a “tragic misapplication” of an “entirely honorable” strand in American thought, “the concept that the United States has a saving mission in the world.”⁶⁹ Given America’s less than honorable history of expansionism, Zinn argued, readers should be “properly suspicious” of an account which presented its latest invasion

⁶⁷ Albert Heckel, “The War Aims Course in the Colleges,” *Association of History Teachers of the Middle States and Maryland: Proceedings* 16 (1918), 40-41; Andrew C. McLaughlin, “Historians and the War,” *The Dial* 62 (1917), 428; both quoted in Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 119.

⁶⁸ Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 116.

⁶⁹ Arthur Schlesinger Jr., in Richard Pfeffer, ed., *No More Vietnams* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 7-8, quoted in Zinn, *The Politics*, 46.

of a “protesting foreign people” as a regrettable but well-intentioned “wandering from a rather benign historical tradition.”⁷⁰ Zinn’s comments extended the criticism of Schlesinger’s history that his radical colleague Lemisch had voiced a year earlier: “Schlesinger does indeed write as he votes and vote as he writes, and it is hard to find a line of demarcation between his politics and his scholarship.”⁷¹ These acerbic comments came in a paper presented at the 1969 AHA convention entitled “Present-Mindedness Revisited: Anti-Radicalism as a Goal of American Historical Writing Since World War II,” which Zinn would later describe as “a biting critique of the historical profession.”⁷² A few months after the event, a fellow radical historian in attendance, Ronald Radosh, described the proceedings in an article titled “The Bare-Knuckled Historians.” By the time that *A People’s History* was published, Radosh’s political views had shifted considerably to the right and he had become a harsh critic of the revisionist history he had once embraced, but in 1970 he described Lemisch’s presentation with admiration. Lemisch “argued persuasively,” wrote Radosh, that such highly regarded mainstream historians as Schlesinger, Oscar Handlin, Allan Nevins, Samuel Eliot Morison, and Daniel Boorstin, “the supposedly un-political stars of the profession,” were in fact “implicit cold warriors who sought to use history as a vehicle in the fight against communism.”⁷³

Lemisch went on to suggest that the ideological bias of his more conservative counterparts was evident not only to radicals such as himself but also to the university students of the time who were increasingly turning away from the mainstream history which they regarded as unconvincing and irrelevant in favor of the alternative history offered by New Left historians:

Leuchtenberg’s students just don’t believe him anymore. Nor do they believe Professors [Henry Steele] Commager, Nevins, Boorstin, Schlesinger, Handlin, or Morison. It is the Left which has spoken to them of real issues, of pain and suffering, and of a better world which has *not* been seen before.... [W]e will simply not allow you the luxury of

⁷⁰ Zinn, *The Politics*, 46.

⁷¹ Jesse Lemisch, *On Active Service in War and Peace: Politics and Ideology in the American Historical Profession* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1975), 111.

⁷² Zinn, *Zinn Reader*, 741.

⁷³ Ronald Radosh, “The Bare-Knuckled Historians,” *The Nation* (02 Feb. 1970), quoted in Thomas Schofield, introduction to *On Active Service in War and Peace*, by Jesse Lemisch, 3.

continuing to call yourselves politically neutral while you exclude all this from your history.⁷⁴

Lemisch's "bare-knuckled" address was delivered at the end of a volatile decade during which American society had been convulsed by massive anti-war and civil rights protests, student demonstrations, rioting in the inner cities, and the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and his brother Robert, along with civil rights leaders such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. As both activists and scholars, radical historians such as Zinn, Lemisch, and Staughton Lynd had often been active participants in the struggles of their time, and all had suffered indignities of one kind or another for their commitment to such causes. Both Zinn and Lemisch had been arrested, and years later Lemisch would write that his "capacity to understand the terror and flight involved in eighteenth-century crowd behavior was enhanced by the experience of being in a crowd that was tear-gassed and nearly blinded by Chicago Mayor Daley's police...in August 1968."⁷⁵ All three had also paid a professional price for their political beliefs and actions. Zinn had been expelled from his first professorship in Atlanta, and, as Lemisch pointed out at the AHA convention, he himself "had been dropped by the University of Chicago...because, as the chairman of the history department explained, 'Your convictions interfered with your scholarship,'" while Lynd, unable to secure a professorship because of his "public activities," meaning his high-profile opposition to the Vietnam War which included a trip to Hanoi in 1966, was, "in plain English...being blacklisted."⁷⁶ In this context, the emotional quality of Lemisch's concluding comments is easily understood. "Fire us, expel us, jail us, we will not go away," he declared defiantly. Mainstream historians who extolled the "apologetics" of their likeminded colleagues while dismissing the work of radical historians as ideologically driven and therefore lacking in objectivity, Lemisch warned, should expect "the most rigorous and aggressive of scholarly replies," in other words, the kind of reply he was about to finish delivering. He ended by suggesting that he and his radical colleagues were, in fact, more objective than their conservative counterparts, slyly using a Rankean turn of phrase to make his

⁷⁴ Lemisch, *On Active Service*, 117.

⁷⁵ Jesse Lemisch, "2.5 Cheers for Bridging the Gap between Activism and the Academy; Or, Stay and Fight," *Radical History Review* 85 (Winter 2003), 241.

⁷⁶ Lemisch, *On Active Service*, 44-5.

point: “we are in the libraries, writing history, trying to cure it of your partisan and self-congratulatory fictions, trying to come a little closer to finding out how things actually were.”⁷⁷ A large part of the standing-room-only crowd rose to give Lemisch a standing ovation, and it can hardly be doubted that Howard Zinn, who had also played a somewhat contentious part at the convention, was among them.⁷⁸ The following year he wrote *The Politics of History*, which was in large part a reasoned defence of the radical history practised by himself, Lemisch, and Lynd, among others. In this work, which Zinn himself ranked among the most important of his books, he addressed many of the questions at issue during the 1969 AHA convention, and it is his answers to those questions that we shall now consider here in some depth.

Howard Zinn’s views on the general question of historical objectivity were settled for the most part, by his own account, well before he became a professor of history. “I had grown up in the dirt and dankness of New York tenements, had been knocked unconscious by a policeman while holding a banner in a demonstration, had worked for three years in a shipyard, and had participated in the violence of war,” and such experiences, he reported in *Declarations of Independence*, “made me lose all desire for ‘objectivity,’ whether in living my life, or writing history.”⁷⁹ Thus, said Zinn in a 1994 interview, “I started studying history with one view in mind: to look for answers to the issues and problems I saw in the world around me.”⁸⁰ At the outset of his studies, he told Harvard students in 1999, “I knew immediately that I was not going to be what is called an ‘objective’ historian.”⁸¹

This certainty was inspired in part by his conviction that, as he put in *Declarations*, “devoting a life to the study of history was worthwhile only” if it upheld

⁷⁷ Ibid., 117.

⁷⁸ For more on Lemisch, Lynd, and the 1969 AHA convention, see Jim O’Brien, “‘Be Realistic, Demand the Impossible’: Staughton Lynd, Jesse Lemisch, and a Committed History,” *Radical History Review* 82 (Winter 2002), pp. 65-90.

⁷⁹ Zinn, *Declarations of Independence*, 48.

⁸⁰ “Why Students Should Study History,” Interview with Barbara Miner, *Rethinking Our Classroom: Teaching for Equity and Justice*, Vol. 1, eds. Bill Bigelow, Linda Christensen, Stan Karp, Barbara Miner, and Bob Peterson (Rethinking Schools: Milwaukee, 1994), pp. 150-53, in Zinn and Macedo, *Democratic Education*, 187.

⁸¹ Zinn and Macedo, *Democratic Education*, 71.

“certain fundamental values: the equal right of all human beings...to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, Jefferson’s ideals.”⁸² Feeling this way, he had little patience with calls for “disinterested,” “neutral” scholarship, which reflected, Zinn wrote in *The Politics*, “a cluster of beliefs which are so stuck, fungus-like, to the scholar, that even the most activist of us cannot cleanly extricate ourselves.”⁸³ The historian, he declared, “cannot afford to be neutral; he writes on a moving train.”⁸⁴ Zinn, who later used this metaphor in the title of his personal memoir, explained it to interviewer David Barsamian: “*You Can’t Be Neutral on a Moving Train* means that the world is already moving in certain directions.... Wars are taking place. Children are going hungry.... [T]o be neutral...is to collaborate with what is happening.”⁸⁵

In any case, as Zinn explained to his Harvard audience, his historical studies had barely begun when “it became clear to me that there was no such thing as objectivity, that there’s an enormous amount of hypocrisy in the history profession and elsewhere about objectivity.”⁸⁶ Echoing Becker and Beard, Zinn continued: “I saw that the very people who called for just...telling the facts as they are and reproducing the past as it was, did history from their [own] point of view.”⁸⁷ Frequently questioned and criticized regarding his frank and unapologetic admissions of bias in his own writing, Zinn reiterated these sentiments on numerous occasions, in *Declarations*, for instance, where he wrote of “another kind of dishonesty that often goes unnoticed,” that is, “when historians fail to acknowledge their own values and pretend to ‘objectivity,’ deceiving themselves and their readers.”⁸⁸

To be so deceived was, Zinn believed, a matter of some consequence, and readers of history “should understand from the start,” therefore, “that there is no such thing as impartial history.” As noted earlier, he argued that all historical writing “inevitably

⁸² Zinn, *Declarations*, 49.

⁸³ Zinn, *The Politics*, 8.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 35

⁸⁵ “Outside the Classroom: Interview with David Barsamian,” in Zinn, *Unfulfilled Promise*, 40.

⁸⁶ Zinn and Macedo, *Democratic Education*, 71.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁸⁸ Zinn, *Declarations*, 50.

takes sides, by what it includes or omits, what it emphasizes or deemphasizes.”⁸⁹ By emphasizing certain historical actors and events while ignoring others, historians can reinforce the political passivity of their readers and thus help to perpetuate the status quo. On the other hand, by stressing the historical achievements of popular movements for social justice for instance, historians may inspire those readers to struggle for a better world. In either case, a political or moral position is taken, and a political or moral end is served. This may be done consciously and deliberately, as was the case for Zinn and generally has been for radical historians, or, as is apt to be the case for those whose political and moral views reflect the dominant ideology of the day and which therefore are often seen as self-evident truths, it may be done more or less unconsciously, but it is nevertheless, thought Zinn, inevitable.

Similar arguments have long been advanced by scholars in various disciplines. In 1931, for instance, at around the same time that Beard, Becker, and others were challenging the underlying motivations and assumptions of the ostensibly scientific, objective history of Ranke and his followers in America, Morris Cohen wrote: “Those who boast that they are not, as social scientists, interested in what ought to be, generally assume (tacitly) that the hitherto prevailing order is the proper ideal of what ought to be.” It was not realistic, Cohen suggested, to believe that human actions could be studied with “the same ethical neutrality with which we view geometric figures,” a sentiment that was echoed by the Canadian historian and educator Hilda Neatby, who wrote in 1953 that the historian “can never achieve the natural detachment of the man who surveys a colony of ants and whose observations on them may be sublimely free from the influences of time and space.”⁹⁰ Cohen concluded that “the questions of human value are inescapable, and those who banish them at the front door admit them unavowedly and therefore uncritically at the back door.”⁹¹

⁸⁹ Ibid., 51.

⁹⁰ Hilda Neatby, *So Little for the Mind*, quoted in Donald Wright, *The Professionalization of History in English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 164.

⁹¹ Morris Cohen, *Reason and Nature* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1931), quoted in Robert S. Lynd, *Knowledge for What?*, 184.

In Zinn's view such questions began to intrude upon the work of an historian as soon as he or she began to write:

As soon as a fact is presented, it represents a judgment.... that this fact is important to present and other facts are not. That's a very important judgment. And that's what the whole realm of historiography is about—deciding which facts are important and which facts are not important.⁹²

Here, again, Zinn was treading on ground plowed earlier by the New Historians. Becker and Beard, especially, were the first to forcefully bring the challenge that the selection of historical facts poses for historians' claims to objectivity to the attention of their colleagues in the American historical profession. Their arguments were as hard to ignore then as they are now. This passage from Beard's "That Noble Dream" is a case in point:

The documentation...with which the historian must work covers only a part of the events and personalities that make up the actuality of history. In other words multitudinous events and personalities escape the recording of documentation.... In very few cases can the historian be reasonably sure that he has assembled all the documents of a given period, region, or segment. In most cases he makes a partial selection or a partial reading of the partial record of the multitudinous events and personalities involved in the actuality with which he is dealing.⁹³

Some three decades after Beard thus challenged the Rankean certitude of his objectivist colleagues, not long after Howard Zinn began his career as a professor of history (1956), anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, writing of historical "facts," similarly observed that historians

choose, sever and carve them up, for a truly total history would confront them with chaos.... In so far as history aspires to meaning, it is doomed to select regions, periods, groups of men and individuals in these groups and to make them stand out.... History is therefore never history, but *history-for*. It is partial in the sense of being biased even when it claims

⁹² Zinn and Macedo, *Democratic Education*, 72.

⁹³ Beard, "That Noble Dream," 83.

not to be, for it inevitably remains partial—that is, incomplete—and this is itself a form of partiality.⁹⁴

At around the same time, in the early 1960s, historian E.H. Carr gave a series of lectures that were eventually published as *What is History?* He, too, emphasized the selective and subjective nature of the historian's endeavour to recreate the past:

It used to be said that facts speak for themselves. This, of course, is untrue. The facts speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context.⁹⁵

Howard Zinn had such arguments in mind when he asserted in a 1992 interview with David Barsamian that “it's not possible to be objective.” And, in any case, Zinn continued, in the explicitly and unabashedly moralistic tone that was often a characteristic of his arguments,

it's not desirable if it were possible. We should have history that does reflect points of view and values.... We should have history that enhances human values, humane values, values of brotherhood, sisterhood, peace, justice, and equality.... Those are values that historians should actively promulgate in writing history.... [I]f they have those values in mind... they will emphasize those things in history which will bring up a new generation of people who read history books... who will care about treating other people equally, about doing away with war, about justice in every form.⁹⁶

These words offer some insight into the appeal that Zinn and his work have held for public intellectuals such as Noam Chomsky and many others. No scholar who is concerned about social, political, and economic justice could fail to be powerfully attracted by this approach to the practice of history, nor could one who believes that scholars should serve the societies that sustain them and that the work conducted in the academy should be of some practical value to the world outside of the academy. Nevertheless, such an approach inevitably raises questions as to whether the purpose of

⁹⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Codes of History,” *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966), in Robert Burns and Hugh Rayment-Pickard, eds., *Philosophies of History From Enlightenment to Postmodernity* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2000), 286.

⁹⁵ E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1961), 11.

⁹⁶ Zinn, *Failure to Quit*, 11.

historical education is to inform or to inspire, and whether the two are even compatible. Zinn's reply to such questions was, in effect, that historians could—and should—inspire *by* informing, and that historical accuracy need not be sacrificed in the process. Although, as has been noted, he saw the practice of history as a means of “helping to change what was wrong in the world,” Zinn insisted:

That did not mean looking only for historical facts to reinforce the beliefs I already held. It did not mean ignoring data that would change or complicate my understanding of society. It meant asking questions that were important to social change... but being open to whatever answers were suggested by looking at history.⁹⁷

In effect, he looked at this problem in much the same way that Robert Lynd had sixty years earlier:

Values may be and are properly and necessarily applied in the preliminary selection of “significant,” “important” problems for research. They may be but should not be applied thereafter to bias one's analysis or the interpretations inherent in one's data.⁹⁸

Zinn laid out some of the practical consequences that he believed should follow from this outlook in a 1966 *New York Times* essay titled “Historian as Citizen.” Here he called for “a radically different approach to history,” the practitioners of which would “see our responsibility to present and future,” and thereby rise above “the traditional concern of academic history, [which] from the start of the investigation to the finish, is with the past, with only a few words muttered from time to time to indicate that all this digging in the archives ‘will help us to understand the present.’”⁹⁹ Undoubtedly Zinn had in mind such traditional historians as his contemporary G. R. Elton, who argued with equal conviction in a 1969 book, *The Practice of History*, that historians should embrace “the deliberate abandonment of the present.”

[W]e must accept the despised tenet that the past must be studied for its own sake.... and then [and only then] enquire whether this study has any contribution to make to the present.... The historian studying the past is

⁹⁷ Zinn, *Failure to Quit*, 30.

⁹⁸ Lynd, *Knowledge for What?* 183.

⁹⁹ Zinn, *Zinn Reader*, 546.

concerned with the later event only in so far as it throws light on the part of the past that he is studying. It is the cardinal error to reverse this process and study the past for the light it throws on the present.”¹⁰⁰

As we have seen, Zinn, however, believed that his duty as an historian and a citizen was not merely to inform his readers about the past, but also to inspire them to struggle for social, political, and economic justice in the present and the future. To this end he advocated “value-laden” historical writing, oriented towards present concerns and “consciously activist on behalf of the kind of world which history has not yet disclosed, but perhaps hinted at.”¹⁰¹ Here he shared much common ground with Marxist and other radical historians. For instance, in *The Politics of History*, in a striking passage reminiscent of Karl Marx’s famous assertion in his *Theses on Feuerbach* that “philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it,”¹⁰² Zinn argued with some passion for “activist” history:

The historian is, by habit, a passive reporter, studying the combatants of yesterday, while those of today clash outside his window.... [H]e rarely sees himself as helpful in changing the pattern [of history].... [He is] bound—by professional commitment—to tally but not to vote, to touch but not to feel. Or to feel, but not to act. At most, to act after hours, but not through his writing, in his job as a historian.... [I]n a world where children are still not safe from starvation or bombs, should not the historian thrust himself and his writing into history, on behalf of goals in which he deeply believes? Are we historians not humans first, and scholars because of that?¹⁰³

A long line of Zinn’s professional colleagues, however, have insisted that presentist agendas are bound to result in inaccurate or otherwise flawed history, and Zinn himself acknowledged that a preference for practising history as “humans first” could easily produce distorted history, as Richard J. Evans warns:

Ultimately, if political or moral aims become paramount in the writing of history, then scholarship suffers. Facts are mined to prove a case;

¹⁰⁰ G. R. Elton, *The Practice*, in Tosh, *Historians on History*, 29.

¹⁰¹ Howard Zinn, *The Politics*, 36, 3.

¹⁰² Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845), in David McLellan, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 173.

¹⁰³ Zinn, *The Politics*, 1.

evidence is twisted to suit a political purpose; inconvenient documents are ignored; sources deliberately misconstrued or misinterpreted.¹⁰⁴

Zinn did not accept, however, that this must inevitably be the case, and countered the claims to the contrary by advocates of “neutral” or “objective” history with three of his own: first, that it was simply “not possible” to be objective; second, that it was not desirable in any case; and finally, that scholars who were not impartial could nevertheless be honest.¹⁰⁵

“Everyone is biased,” Zinn insisted, and it is clear that in his view the “noble dream” of Theodore Clarke Smith—of a historical profession guided by an “ideal of impersonality and impartiality”—was, in fact, an impossible dream if not, indeed, an ignoble one.¹⁰⁶ In this respect, Zinn again echoed Charles Beard, who argued in his response to Smith’s address that

The historian...does not bring to the partial documentation with which he works a perfect and polished neutral mind in which the past streaming through the medium of documentation is mirrored as it actually was. Whatever acts of purification the historian may perform he yet remains human, a creature of time, place, circumstance, interests, predilections, culture.... Into the selection of topics, the choice and arrangement of materials, the specific historian’s “me” will enter. It may enter with a conscious clarification of philosophy and purpose or...surreptitiously, without confession or acknowledgment.¹⁰⁷

This point of view has in recent decades become considerably more popular among historical scholars of all political stripes than it was when Zinn advanced it in *The Politics of History*. The historical profession has not been impervious to the onslaught of postmodernist philosophy, much of which casts “doubt [upon] the very possibility of historical knowledge,” as Matt Perry observes, and thereby challenges the objectivist position in a far more radical way than the likes of Beard, Becker, or Zinn ever did.¹⁰⁸ Relatively few professional historians today embrace the most extreme versions of

¹⁰⁴ Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta, 1997), 219.

¹⁰⁵ Zinn, *Failure to Quit*, 11.

¹⁰⁶ Zinn, *Declarations*, 51; Smith, *The Writing*, 446.

¹⁰⁷ Beard, “That Noble Dream,” 83-4.

¹⁰⁸ Matt Perry, *Marxism and History* (London: Palgrave, St. Martin’s Press, 2002), 145.

postmodernist thought exemplified by such thinkers as historiographer Hayden White, who argued that all historical narratives “are verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented as found*.”¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, it is also true that few historians today “[burn] incense before ‘the One True God of Objectivity,’” as J. H. Hexter amusingly puts it, and even those who criticize radical historians for their alleged politically-inspired departures from historical truth are inclined to acknowledge that, as Beard put it, the “historian’s powers are limited.”¹¹⁰ In 1987, for instance, the conservative American historian Gertrude Himmelfarb lamented that Marxist historians “cannot abandon, or even hold in abeyance, their political agenda of changing the world while engaged in the historical task of interpreting it,” but she conceded, nevertheless, that Marxists would “quite rightly” say that “all historians reflect in their work a political bias of some sort...that precludes objectivity.”¹¹¹

Indeed they would. A case in point is an historian with whom Zinn had much in common and whose signature work, *The Making of the English Working Class*, he admired as exemplifying “the ideal joining of impeccable research and social conscience,” E. P. Thompson.¹¹² In *The Making of E.P. Thompson*, Bryan D. Palmer, discussing professional historians who are “contemptuous of radicalism and intolerant of new questions and approaches smacking of the ‘ideological,’ which is always portrayed as the particular monopoly of the left,” writes that Thompson once “described such men and women well.”¹¹³ On this occasion, sounding rather Zinn-like, Thompson had tartly observed that while “the world of politics chunters on from one unprecedented danger to the next,” his conservative colleagues remained blissfully unaware and uninvolved:

¹⁰⁹ Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), quoted in Georg Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 119.

¹¹⁰ J. H. Hexter, “Carl Becker, Professor Novick, and Me; or, Cheer Up, Professor N.!” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 96, No. 3 (Jun., 1991), 675; Beard, “That Noble Dream,” 84.

¹¹¹ Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The New History and the Old: Critical Essays and Reappraisals*, revised edition (Cambridge: Belknap, 1987, 2004), 106-7.

¹¹² Zinn, *Zinn Reader*, 741.

¹¹³ Bryan D. Palmer, *The Making of E.P. Thompson: Marxism, Humanism, and History* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1981), 2.

The globe spins, but as they cross the campus to the next committee they don't notice any movement. The conventions of their ideologies hem them in but they have lived inside there so long that they don't know it.¹¹⁴

In a similar vein, John Tosh points out in a recent book, *The Pursuit of History*, that because even "historians who have no particular axes to grind... can all too easily be the unconscious vector of values taken for granted by people of their own background.... self-knowledge is a desirable trait among historians." However, Tosh argues, those who lack this crucial quality will surely be corrected by their colleagues:

Historians are members of a profession, one of whose principal functions is to enforce standards of scholarship and to restrain waywardness of interpretation. Peer-group scrutiny operates as a powerful mechanism for ensuring that within the area of inquiry they find significant, historians are as true as they can be to the surviving evidence of the past.¹¹⁵

In the case of Howard Zinn, there has been no shortage of professional colleagues attempting to restrain what they see as his wayward historical interpretations. It is these critics to whom we shall now turn in our effort to further explore the friction between Zinn's history and that of his fellow academic historians.

¹¹⁴ E. P. Thompson, "C. Wright Mills: The Responsible Craftsman," *Radical America* 13 (July-August 1979), 70-1, quoted in Palmer, *The Making*, 2.

¹¹⁵ John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 5th edition (Harlow, England: Longman, 1984, 2010), 206-7.

Howard and the Historians, Part Two: On “Balance”

More than a few professional historians have accused Zinn of producing shoddy history precisely because of what his work, to use his own phrase, “includes or omits, what it emphasizes or deemphasizes.”¹ In this respect, a particularly vociferous critic of Zinn was the politically conservative Oscar Handlin of Harvard. Shortly after its original publication in 1980, Handlin wrote a scathing review of *A People’s History* for *The American Scholar*, in which he described the book as “deranged,” a “fairy tale... patched together from secondary sources, many used uncritically... others ravaged for material torn out of context,” and its author as “a stranger to evidence” who used “a complex array of devices” to “pervert his pages,” including the omission of any historical information that did not support his book’s “overriding thesis.”²

Historian Michael Kazin shares enough common ground with Zinn politically to acknowledge that although his “big book” is “bad history,” it is “gilded with virtuous intentions.” These intentions notwithstanding, in a 2004 article, “Howard Zinn’s History Lessons,” he describes *A People’s History*, “grounded in a premise better suited to a conspiracy-monger’s Web site than to a work of scholarship,” as a “painful narrative” about “ordinary folks who keep struggling to achieve equality, democracy, and a tolerant society, yet somehow are always defeated by a tiny band of rulers whose wiles match their greed.” As one example of his propensity to reduce the American past to “a Manichaeian fable,” says Kazin, Zinn “depicts John Brown as an unblemished martyr but sees [Abraham] Lincoln as nothing more than a cautious politician who left slavery alone as long as possible.”³

¹ Zinn, *Declarations*, 51.

² Oscar Handlin, review of *A People’s History of the United States* by Howard Zinn, *American Scholar* 49 (Autumn 1980), 546-50, quoted in Joyce, *Howard Zinn*, 154.

³ Michael Kazin, “Howard Zinn’s History Lessons,” *Dissent* (Spring 2004), 81, 83, <http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/howard-zinns-history-lessons> .

Eric Foner, another of Zinn's colleagues whose political views lean heavily leftward, tempers some high praise for *A People's History* with this acknowledgement: "Sometimes, to be sure, his [Zinn's] account tended toward the Manichaeian, an oversimplified narrative of the battle between the forces of light and darkness." Nevertheless, Foner declares, that account "taught an inspiring and salutary lesson—that despite all too frequent repression, if America has a history to celebrate it lies in the social movements that have made this a better country." Foner then puts his finger firmly on an important thesis that appears throughout *A People's History* and is characteristic of Zinn's work in general: "As for past heroes, Zinn insisted, one should look not to presidents or captains of industry but to radicals such as Frederick Douglass, Susan B. Anthony and Eugene V. Debs."⁴ As Zinn himself puts it in a chapter titled "The Coming Revolt of the Guards," his most famous work is "a history disrespectful of governments and respectful of people's movements of resistance."⁵

We have already noted Zinn's purpose for writing such a history, namely, to provide a "counterforce" opposing traditional histories dominated by "states and statesmen" and emphasizing instead the power of popular movements for social and economic justice. This is a constant theme in Zinn's work as an historian. American history, he declares in a 2007 book, *A Power Governments Cannot Suppress*, "runs deep with the stories of people who stand up, speak out, dig in, organize, connect, form networks of resistance, and alter the course of history."⁶ Among these stories and people are those connected with the American civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1960s and 1970s, to name a few that Zinn cites to make his case. All too many historians, however, asserts Zinn in his 1990 book *Declarations of Independence*, have given short shrift to such stories and focused instead on presidents, generals, Supreme Court justices and the like, and sometimes, indeed, on the most trivial details concerning such people. In the process, Zinn argues, they undermine "a fundamental principle of democracy" and ignore a fundamental truth of American history: "that it is the citizenry, rather than the government, that is the ultimate source of power and the locomotive that

⁴ Eric Foner, "Zinn's Critical History," *Nation* 290, no. 7 (22 February 2010), 6.

⁵ Zinn, *A People's History*, 631.

⁶ Zinn, *A Power Governments Cannot Suppress* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2007), 11.

pulls the government in the direction of equality and justice.” Such histories, in Zinn’s view, tend to create “a passive and subordinate citizenry” because, as he puts it in *A People’s History*, they “suggest that in times of crisis we must look to someone to save us: in the Revolutionary crisis, the Founding Fathers; in the slavery crisis, Lincoln; in the Depression, Roosevelt,” and so forth.⁷

Zinn’s treatment of such “saviours” has, perhaps more than any other aspect of his most famous book, prompted indignation from a number of his fellow academic historians, and these range from the likes of Oscar Handlin, whose political views were far to the right of Zinn’s, to leftists like Michael Kazin. Despite the harsh criticism of Zinn’s work cited above, Kazin described *Declarations of Independence* as “a work that should be taught,” because of its “passionate moral arguments” and its “debunking [of] certain pillars of the common [American] wisdom,” the belief, for instance, “that capitalism rewards hard work.”⁸ Zinn’s efforts to debunk a pillar of American history, Abraham Lincoln—whom polls of both the American public and academic historians routinely rank among the greatest of all American presidents—were another matter entirely. Is it fair to say, however, as Kazin does, that the Lincoln presented in *A People’s History* is “nothing more than a cautious politician who left slavery alone as long as possible”?

Arguably, it is indeed. A close analysis of the chapter that deals with Lincoln and slavery in Zinn’s book, “Slavery Without Submission, Emancipation Without Freedom,” suggests that Kazin’s assessment is only mildly hyperbolic. Consider Zinn’s opening comments on the matter. After explaining that, notwithstanding Lincoln’s personal antipathy toward slavery, the national government of which he became the president in 1861 “would end slavery only under conditions controlled by whites, and only when required by the political and economic needs of the business elite of the North,” Zinn continues:

It was Abraham Lincoln who combined perfectly the needs of business, the political ambition of the new Republican party, and the rhetoric of

⁷ Zinn, *Declarations*, 62; Zinn, *A People’s History*, 631.

⁸ Kazin, review of *Declarations*, 1034-35.

humanitarianism. He would keep the abolition of slavery not at the top of his list of priorities, but close enough to the top so it could be pushed there temporarily by abolitionists and by practical political advantage.⁹

Needless to say, this passage hardly presents Lincoln—portrayed as an exemplar of “the rhetoric [but, this language seems to imply, not the reality] of humanitarianism,” representing, first and foremost, a “business elite,” and motivated above all by “political ambition” and “practical political advantage”—in a flattering light.

Zinn’s subsequent comments on this topic are in the same vein. “It was only,” he explains, “as the [Civil] war grew more bitter, the casualties mounted, desperation to win heightened, and the criticism of the abolitionists threatened to unravel the tattered [political] coalition behind Lincoln that he began to act against slavery.” In support of this claim, Zinn cites the assertion of historian Richard Hofstadter that, like “a delicate barometer,” Lincoln “recorded the trend of pressures, and as the Radical pressure increased he moved toward the left,” and follows this by quoting Lincoln’s contemporary, abolitionist Wendell Phillips, who “said that if Lincoln was able to grow ‘it is because we have watered him.’” Abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison’s description of Lincoln’s policy in the early stages of the war—“stumbling, halting, prevaricating, irresolute, weak, besotted”—is also cited.¹⁰

Zinn goes on to discuss a wartime exchange of letters between Lincoln and New York Times editor Horace Greeley, an ardent anti-slavery campaigner, during which the former famously declared that his “paramount object in this struggle” was “to save the Union, and... not either to save or destroy Slavery.” This purpose, wrote Lincoln, was in accordance with his own view of his “official duty,” which he intended to pursue in spite of his “oft-expressed personal wish that all men, everywhere, could be free.” After citing this statement, Zinn stops short of calling the American president a hypocrite, but the implication—and the indignation—seem clear in his laconic concluding comment on the Lincoln-Greeley exchange: “So Lincoln distinguished between his ‘personal wish’ and his

⁹ Zinn, *A People’s History*, 187.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 189,190.

‘official duty.’”¹¹ In short, it is easy to understand the chagrin of Michael Kazin and others who, rightly or wrongly, are accustomed to seeing Lincoln in a considerably more heroic light, and it seems fair to say that the Lincoln who appears in *A People’s History* is indeed much more the “cautious politician” than the “Great Emancipator,” much more the pragmatist concerned primarily with his own political fortunes than the idealistic, inspirational leader, martyred for a noble cause, that generations of Americans have been taught to revere.

A comparison of Zinn’s depiction of Lincoln with that of his fellow leftist historian Eric Foner is revealing, particularly in regard to the way that each uses quotes from Lincoln’s contemporaries to portray the American Civil War president. In *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*, Foner reproduces many of the same statements made by abolitionists such as Phillips, Garrison, and Frederick Douglass, expressing deep dissatisfaction with Lincoln’s cautious movement toward black emancipation, that are cited in *A People’s History*. His account, moreover, like Zinn’s, leaves us with no doubt about the considerable impact that the abolitionists, and the slaves themselves, had upon the evolution of Lincoln’s thinking and the actions that he eventually took to end American slavery. The matter of Lincoln’s “growth” in this respect, however, is addressed by Foner in a decidedly different manner than that of Zinn, and consequently the Lincoln who appears in *The Fiery Trial* is no saint but a considerably more admirable figure than the one we read about in *A People’s History*. “In approaching the subject of Lincoln’s views and policies regarding slavery and race, we should first bear in mind,” writes Foner, “that the hallmark of Lincoln’s greatness was his capacity for growth.... Not every individual possesses the capacity for growth; some, like Lincoln’s successor as president, Andrew Johnson, seem to shrink, not grow, in the face of crisis.”¹² Lincoln’s ability “to rise to the occasion,” and to thus complete a political career that was “a process of moral and political education and deepening antislavery conviction,” writes Foner, can be attributed to his “willingness to listen to criticism, to

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹² Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), *xix-xx*.

seek out new ideas.”¹³ Foner supports this view by pointing out that it was held by many of Lincoln’s contemporaries, an emancipated slave, for instance, who wrote after the war that “our race would yet have remained” in bondage had Lincoln “considered it too humiliating to learn in advanced years.”¹⁴ Moreover, abolitionist Lydia Marie Child, Foner reports, wrote one week before the president’s assassination that “we have reason to thank God for Abraham Lincoln.” Despite “all his deficiencies,” Child continued, in a passage cited among the concluding words of *The Fiery Trial*, “it must be admitted that he has grown continuously; and considering how slavery had weakened and perverted the moral sense of the whole country, it was great good luck to have the people elect a man who was *willing* to grow.”¹⁵

No quotations of this nature appear in *A People’s History* as a counterbalance to the harsh criticisms of Lincoln that Zinn cites freely therein. It is perhaps revealing, also, that one of the most infamous assassinations in American history, an event that, in Foner’s words, “inspired an unprecedented outpouring of grief, and the first national funeral in the country’s history,” is mentioned by Zinn only in passing, by way of introducing Andrew Johnson, “who became President when Lincoln was assassinated at the close of the war.”¹⁶ Also included in Foner’s account but conspicuously absent from Zinn’s are the comments of Frederick Douglass about that assassination, which the black abolitionist, who had frequently been a severe critic of Lincoln’s policies, described as “an unspeakable calamity” for black Americans.¹⁷ Statements such as this, of course, lend an importance to Lincoln the individual, in respect to both his contribution to the freeing of the slaves and to their fortunes after emancipation, with which Zinn seems unwilling to credit him. Might their exclusion from *A People’s History* be the kind of thing that Oscar Handlin had in mind when he accused Zinn of omitting historical information that did not support his book’s “overriding thesis”?

¹³ Ibid., xx.

¹⁴ Ibid., 334.

¹⁵ Ibid., 336.

¹⁶ Zinn, *A People’s History*, 199.

¹⁷ Frederick Douglass, “Abraham Lincoln: A Speech,” (ca. December 1865), *Frederick Douglass Papers*, LC, quoted in Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 335.

Biographer Martin Duberman, a personal acquaintance of Zinn and fellow activist historian who acknowledges that he and his subject “held common convictions on a wide range of public issues,” is somewhat more willing than the conservative Handlin to excuse Zinn for such omissions, given his approval of Zinn’s “hope for *A People’s History*...that it would act as a guide to radical action in the present,” and the fact that “Howard had been clear that his intent was to write an alternate not a comprehensive history.” He, too, however, feels that Zinn’s “version of our past has been justly criticized as leaving out too much, of presenting a partial and thereby distorted account—just like other historians.” To support his contention that the “middle ground disappears in *A People’s History*,” he cites Zinn’s “one-dimensional view of a complex, cautious man,” Abraham Lincoln, contrasting this with the “balanced account” given by Foner, which “properly places Lincoln in the context of his times.”¹⁸

In other words, Foner’s assessment of Lincoln took into account such things as the prevalent opinions of the time, the various political and military pressures which constrained his actions, and his “complex relationship with abolitionists.” Such considerations allowed Foner to present both Lincoln’s “strengths and weaknesses, his insights and misjudgments,” and led him to acknowledge, though not without reservations: “I admire Lincoln very much.”¹⁹ Notably for our purposes here, a similarly measured analysis led to a similar outcome for one of Lincoln’s contemporaries, Frederick Douglass, as revealed in an 1876 speech given at the unveiling of the Freedman’s Monument in Washington, D.C. In this eloquent, moving oration Douglass showed considerable understanding of the difficulties Lincoln faced from the very outset of his presidency to the end of the Civil War:

He was assailed by Abolitionists...by slaveholders...by the men who were for peace at any price...by those who were for a more vigorous prosecution of the war...for not making the war an abolition war; and...for making the war an abolition war.

Given a decade after Lincoln’s assassination, Douglass’s address made it clear that he concurred with “the judgment of the present hour...that taking him for all in all...infinite

¹⁸ Duberman, *Howard Zinn*, xi, 234, 229, 228, 232.

¹⁹ Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, xvii, xx-xxi.

wisdom has seldom sent any man into the world better fitted for his mission than Abraham Lincoln.”²⁰

There was no evidence of this aspect of Douglass’s speech, however, in the lengthy passage excerpted from it by Howard Zinn for a 1965 essay titled “Abolitionists, Freedom Riders and the Tactics of Agitation,” in which only critical comments about Lincoln appeared. The omission, in effect, transforms what was for the most part, in fact, an extremely laudatory tribute to Lincoln into a scathing indictment of the Civil War president; certainly, a reader unfamiliar with the speech would be hard pressed to avoid drawing such a conclusion, especially given Zinn’s introduction to the selected passage, which prepares the reader for the “most shocking statement about Lincoln...all the more shocking when we realize its essential truth.”²¹ Zinn’s selection begins with several sentences along these lines:

To protect, defend, and perpetuate slavery in the United States where it existed Abraham Lincoln was not less ready than any other President to draw the sword of the nation. He was ready to execute all the supposed constitutional guarantees...in favor of the slave system anywhere inside the slave states.

It ends with Douglass’s poignant assertion:

The race to which we [black Americans] belong were not the special objects of his consideration.... [Y]ou, my white fellow-citizens.... were the objects of his deepest affection and his most earnest solicitude. You are the children of Abraham Lincoln. We are at best only his step-children; children by adoption, children by force of circumstances and necessity.

Just a few sentences later, Douglas exhorted Lincoln’s “children” to “build high his monuments; let them be of the most costly material...symmetrical, beautiful, and perfect...and let them endure forever!” Elsewhere in the speech he spoke of the “vast, high, and preeminent services rendered...to our race, to our country, and to the whole

²⁰ Frederick Douglass, “Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln,” speech delivered at the unveiling of the Freedmen’s Monument in Memory of Abraham Lincoln, in Lincoln Park, Washington, D.C., April 14, 1876, *University of Rochester Frederick Douglass Project*, <https://www.lib.rochester.edu/index.cfm?PAGE=4402> .

²¹ Zinn, *Zinn Reader*, 133.

world by Abraham Lincoln” and of “the exalted character and great works of Abraham Lincoln,” whose memory, to black Americans especially, would be “precious forever.” Though black Americans “were at times grieved, stunned, and greatly bewildered” by Lincoln’s actions, or lack thereof, “we were able to take a comprehensive view of Abraham Lincoln,” Douglass asserted, “and to make reasonable allowance for the circumstances of his position.” His assessment of those circumstances, and of Lincoln’s response to them, does indeed place the man whom he called the “great liberator” in the context of his time, and it is worth quoting at some length:

His great mission was to accomplish two things: first, to save his country from dismemberment and ruin; and, second, to free his country from the great crime of slavery. To do one or the other, or both, he must have the earnest sympathy and the powerful cooperation of his loyal fellow-countrymen.... Had he put the abolition of slavery before the salvation of the Union, he would have inevitably driven from him a powerful class of the American people and rendered resistance to rebellion impossible. Viewed from the genuine abolition ground, Mr. Lincoln seemed tardy, cold, dull, and indifferent; but measuring him by the sentiment of his country, a sentiment he was bound as a statesman to consult, he was swift, zealous, radical, and determined.²²

Zinn’s essay supplies no quotations of this nature from Douglass’s address, although these might have afforded his readers a more complete, and more accurate, understanding of Lincoln’s character and conduct, as seen through the eyes of a contemporary whom he so often quoted to cast America’s sixteenth president in a decidedly negative light. As noted earlier, similar omissions characterize the treatment of Lincoln in *A People’s History*, and it is largely due to such omissions that Martin Duberman, the present writer, and others have compared it with that of Foner’s *The Fiery Trial*, much to the disadvantage of Zinn.

One may reasonably object that Zinn cannot be expected to provide, in a book covering over four centuries of American history, the kind of nuanced portrayal of Lincoln that Foner does in a monograph devoted entirely to him. It would hardly be persuasive to argue, however, that in a book of nearly seven-hundred pages, or even in the roughly thirty pages of the essay cited above, a writer as skilled as Zinn could not have come

²² Douglass, “Oration.”

closer to that ideal by making room for a few paragraphs, or sentences, to more accurately portray a man who has long been widely regarded as one of the most important, influential, and beneficent figures in all of American history. It seems more reasonable to conclude that it did not suit his purposes to do so.

Zinn's "disparagement of Lincoln," writes Duberman, "is part of a general problem with the way he assigns motivation to individuals. With few exceptions, only members of the working class or minorities (or their champions) are allowed to represent human nobility or selflessness."²³ Thus, for instance, in Zinn's coverage of the New Deal era in *A People's History*, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his advisors "aren't allowed to rise above any concern other than the determination to save capitalism by instituting a number of reforms—most of which were soon corrupted."²⁴ As we have seen, complaints of this nature have frequently been expressed by Zinn's critics, and even those who largely share his political convictions and laud the ends he sought to achieve have essentially agreed with the contention of a group whose purposes and politics neither they nor Zinn would by any means applaud, the conservative watchdog lobby, Accuracy in Academia, that *A People's History* portrays traditional "American heroes as villains, if it mentions them at all."²⁵

Among those that Zinn depicted as "villains," American presidents seem to have held a special place. According to Sean Wilentz, Zinn had a "very simplified view that everyone who was president was always a stinker and every left-winger was always great."²⁶ This itself is a simplified view, Duberman suggests, but Zinn's books, "taken together, do lean strongly in that direction."²⁷ It is, indeed, difficult to find a positive reference to an American president in Zinn's works, especially in the pages of *A People's History*, where the occupiers of the Oval Office are portrayed, in general, as a

²³ Duberman, *Howard Zinn*, 233.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 233.

²⁵ Accuracy in Academia, quoted in Duberman, *Howard Zinn*, 247.

²⁶ Miller, "An experts' history."

²⁷ Duberman, *Howard Zinn*, 316. Duberman quoted the statement made by Wilentz during a 2010 interview with Marjorie Miller, but did not name him, he explained in a footnote, "on the selfish grounds of wanting to avoid a series of contentious dustups" with Zinn's detractors within the historical profession (n23, 344).

rather sorry lot. A few examples are sufficient to illustrate the point. Andrew Jackson he dismissed as “a land speculator, merchant, slave trader, and the most aggressive enemy of the Indians in early American history.”²⁸ The Theodore Roosevelt depicted in *A People’s History* is the same one Zinn described in 2007 as “another presidential hero...always near the top of the tiresome lists of Our Greatest Presidents,” whose face on Mount Rushmore served as “a permanent reminder of our historical amnesia,” and in a 1999 lecture at Harvard, explaining why “my heroes are not other people’s heroes,” as “a racist, a lover of war, and an imperialist.”²⁹ Franklin D. Roosevelt had earned some qualified praise from Zinn in the introduction to a 1966 volume he edited, *New Deal Thought*, wherein he wrote that the “experimentalism of the New Deal...had its limits: up to [though not beyond] these limits, Roosevelt’s social concern was genuinely warm, his political courage huge, his humanitarian spirit unflinching.”³⁰ No such kind words about the longest serving American president in history appear, however, in *A People’s History*, where a more typical comment is Zinn’s assertion that during the Second World War Roosevelt “was as much concerned to end the oppression of Jews as Lincoln was to end slavery during the Civil War,” and the priority of both, “whatever their personal compassion for victims of persecution,” was “not minority rights, but national power.”³¹ However much truth there may be in such characterizations, what is notable for our purposes here is the relentlessly negative quality of his coverage of America’s chief executives in *A People’s History* and the almost complete absence therein of any reference to worthwhile achievements or nobler motivations on their part.

Zinn’s disdain for the powerful extended beyond presidents and beyond his native land, as suggested by a talk he gave at the University of Wisconsin in 1991 which was published as “Just and Unjust Wars” in Zinn’s 1993 book *Failure to Quit*. Speaking about American military actions in the first Persian Gulf War, Zinn said: “Granted, [Iraqi dictator] Saddam Hussein is an evil guy..... No question about it. Most heads of

²⁸ Zinn, *A People’s History*, 127.

²⁹ Zinn, *A Power*, 58; Zinn and Macedo, *Democratic Education*, 76.

³⁰ Howard Zinn, *New Deal Thought* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), xxii.

³¹ Zinn, *A People’s History*, 410.

government are.”³² In response to this rather sweeping assertion, one may play the “generous reader” whom Zinn in his introduction to the published speech hoped would “perhaps forgive the loose and easy style of an extemporaneous talk,” just as one might regarding his comments as the keynote speaker at the annual convention of the Campaign to End the Death Penalty in 1996: “I don’t trust the government. I don’t trust the judicial system. I don’t trust judges.”³³ The comments are revealing nonetheless.

Zinn, who had an evidently deep-rooted and longstanding distrust of authority and authority figures, seemed to revel in his status as an inveterate iconoclast, forever challenging the established order, in government, in the historical profession, and in the universities where he taught. According to journalist Gary Sargent, an appreciative reviewer of his personal memoir *You Can’t Be Neutral*, his longstanding conflict with the president of Boston University, John Silber—about issues such as Zinn’s involvement in campus labor disputes and anti-war protests—showed that, his personal amiability notwithstanding, he “thrived in an environment of frequent verbal slugfests.”³⁴ As debatable as this claim may be, to whatever extent that Zinn did indulge in such “slugfests,” we can be reasonably certain that many if not most of them were with those whose authority he was challenging in one way or another.

Another reviewer of Zinn’s memoir, historian Paul Buhle, imagined him taking part in the “radical movements of the 1840s-50s,” campaigning for abolition, women’s rights, and other causes, during which he would have “commanded the platform with figures like Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass, held his own against hostile audiences and broadcast the prospects for universal freedom,” all with a “style and bearing” suggesting “the prophetic profile so common to radicals in those days.”³⁵ Buhle’s invocation of Anthony and Douglass must surely have pleased Zinn, for they were among the personal heroes that he covered with such admiration in *A People’s*

³² Zinn, *Failure to Quit*, 109.

³³ Ibid., 99; Duberman, *Howard Zinn*, 302.

³⁴ Gary Sargent, “Never in Neutral: The Life of a True Believer,” *New York Newsday* (20 October 1994), quoted in Joyce, *Howard Zinn*, 202.

³⁵ Paul Buhle, review of *You Can’t Be Neutral on a Moving Train* by Howard Zinn, *Nation* 259 (21 November 1994), 623-25, quoted in Joyce, *Howard Zinn*, 199.

History, and whose struggles for justice were dramatized in *The People Speak*, a 2009 documentary film based on Zinn's book. A host of celebrities such as Morgan Freeman, Marisa Tomei, Bruce Springsteen, and Bob Dylan contributed their talents to the production, often eliciting during rehearsals and recordings, according to director Anthony Arnone, "grunts of pleasure" from Zinn.³⁶

Zinn's heroes "are instructive," Michael Kammen observed in a review of Duberman's biography, "because they too were insubordinate, like him."³⁷ The novelist Alice Walker, who was one of Zinn's students during his years at Spelman College, and according to whom he was "magical as a teacher," tells a story that speaks to this aspect of his character:

Under the direction of SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), many students at Spelman joined the effort to desegregate Atlanta. Naturally, I joined this movement. Because...[my] scholarship would be revoked if I were jailed, my participation caused me a good bit of anxiety. Still, knowing Howard and other professors of ours [Staughton Lynd, for instance]...supported the students in our struggle, made it possible to carry on. But then...Howard was fired.... for "insubordination."

Yes, he would later say, with a classic Howie shrug, *I was guilty*.³⁸

The insubordination to which Zinn so cheerfully pled guilty came as a direct result of his involvement, as a supporter, instigator, and co-participant, in his students' civil rights activities. This led, as noted, to his summary dismissal and the end of his career as a history professor in 1963, though he continued, of course, to write history and to

³⁶ Duberman, *Howard Zinn*, 309-10.

³⁷ Michael Kammen, "The Insubordinate Historian: The Life and Legacy of Howard Zinn," review of *Howard Zinn: A Life on the Left* by Martin Duberman, *Los Angeles Review of Books* (29 Nov. 2012), <http://lareviewofbooks.org/review/the-insubordinate-historian-the-life-and-legacy-of-howard-zinn#>

³⁸ Howard Zinn, *The Indispensable Zinn*, Ed. Timothy Patrick McCarthy (New York: The New Press, 2012), 372-3.

play an active and, true to form, a sometimes contentious role in the proceedings of organizations such as the AHA.³⁹

The one-sided nature of Zinn's coverage of American political leaders can thus be explained, to some extent at least, by his natural inclination to, as the saying goes, "speak truth to power." To this we can add his stated aim to downgrade the role played by statesmen in history in order to elevate that of those he called "unsung heroes." Along these lines, decrying the "hero worship, so universal in our history textbooks" of various American presidents, he once asked: "Should we not replace the portraits of our presidents, which too often take up all the space on our classroom walls, with the likenesses of grassroots heroes like [civil rights activist] Fanny Lou Hamer, the Mississippi sharecropper?" Instead of venerating "slaveholders, Indian killers, and militarists," Zinn asked, should Americans not "bring forward as a national hero" the likes of Emma Goldman, sent to prison for speaking out against American involvement in the First World War I, or her contemporary Mark Twain, who denounced American imperialism during the Philippine war?⁴⁰

Some comments that Zinn made in a 1994 interview may offer further insight into his tendency to show only the least attractive attributes of American political leaders. "People ask me why in my book *A People's History*...I did not simply add the things that I put in to the orthodox approaches so, as they put it, the book would be better balanced," he told interviewer Barbara Miner. "But there's a way in which this so-called

³⁹ In 1969, for instance, Zinn was part of the Radical Historians Caucus which, in David Donald's words, staged an "attempted revolution" at the organization's annual convention, the same one we have described earlier here. One of the issues which led to a highly unusual "conjunction of well-mannered historians and pandemonium," as Duberman puts it, was the radicals' resolution proposing that the AHA call for "an immediate withdrawal of all the United States troops and material aid" from Vietnam. At the annual business meeting, normally attended by a few dozen people, a crowd of roughly eighteen-hundred were on hand to hear Zinn, the author two years earlier of *Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal*, read the resolution aloud. His comments, however, were cut short by John K. Fairbank, who had earlier argued strenuously against any such attempt to "politicize" the AHA. In a letter written later to Fairbank, Zinn described the encounter with characteristic wit: "you wandered up the aisle, came up to me at the mike, put your hand on my shoulder...whispered a few professional nothings in my ear and then pulled the mike out of my hand with the genial ferocity of Teddy Roosevelt...If I had done that to you, it would have been ascribed by some to typical radical hooliganism." Duberman, *Howard Zinn*, 163-4.

⁴⁰ Zinn, *A Power*, 58-60.

balance leaves people nowhere, with no moral sensibility, no firm convictions, no outrage, no indignation, no energy to go anywhere.”⁴¹ Unlikely as such an explanation is to placate the many critics who deplore Zinn’s treatment of Lincoln and other traditional American heroes, considered along with the comments which immediately followed it, about the importance of presenting history “in a way that highlights not only the facts but also the emotional intensity” of the events covered, it does offer some insight into the methods by which Zinn hoped to achieve his goal of practising “history itself as a political act.” It is to such methods that we shall now turn our attention, and this will lead us, as it were, out of the academy and into the realm where Howard Zinn did the work for which he is best known and which he himself considered his most important: popular history.

⁴¹ Zinn and Macedo, *Democratic Education*, 198.

A Very Popular Historian: Doing Some Work in the World

During a discussion of “Academic vs. Popular History” held at Notre Dame University in 2008, Thomas Noble, chairman of the History department, wryly observed: “There’s popular history, and then there’s unpopular history.”¹ Given the impressive sales of *A People’s History*, it is hardly necessary to state on which side of that great divide Howard Zinn stood. Popular in both senses of the word, aimed at a popular audience and successful in attracting a very large one, his major work was both a history of the American people and a history very deliberately written for the people, the people, that is, whom Zinn hoped to inspire to work for a radically more just and humane society. Given Zinn’s conviction that all such progress comes “from the bottom up,” that is, from the pressure exerted upon political leaders by popular movements, his preference for popular history was a natural corollary of his presentist philosophy.

In this respect as in so many others, Zinn’s views paralleled those of the New Historians of the Progressive Era. When Zinn challenged his fellow scholars to “earn our keep in this world” in *The Politics of History*, he echoed the “insistence on the historian’s responsibility to descend from the ivory tower and contribute to social needs” that, as Peter Novick observes, was a theme “hammered home constantly” by Charles Beard and James Harvey Robinson.² This theme is exemplified by the title of an essay by Robinson, “History for the Common Man.” Similarly, Carl Becker advised his colleagues in 1931:

Berate him as we will for not reading our books, Mr. Everyman is stronger than we are, and sooner or later we must adapt our knowledge to his

¹ Catherine Miller, “Panel discusses popular history,” *The Observer* (03 Dec. 2008), <http://media.www.ndsmcobserver.com/media/storage/paper660/news/2008/12/03/News/Panel.Discusses.Popular.History-3567351.shtml> .

² Zinn, *The Politics*, 5; Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 272.

necessities.... The history that lies inert in unread books does no work in the world.³

Howard Zinn clearly wanted his history to do some work in the world, and few historians have reached out to “Mr. Everyman,” nor adapted their knowledge to his needs, as successfully as Zinn did. Staughton Lynd, his long-time friend and fellow radical historian, has suggested that Zinn’s importance lies primarily in his work as a popular historian and a scholar who “steadily directed what he had to say to an audience off campus,” thus providing a “model...of a radical intellectual who is only incidentally an academic...an ‘organic intellectual’...who lives out a professional life in the midst of social struggle.”⁴ Lynd counseled his fellow radical historians to “grapple with the fact that...[*A People’s History*] has probably done more good, and influenced more people (especially young people), than everything the rest of us have written put together.” Key to this influence, he suggested, was “his indifference to the usual rewards and punishments of academia.”⁵ This was a trait that Lynd observed soon after being recruited by Zinn to join him on the faculty of Spelman College. The head of the Spelman history department, Lynd told interviewer Andrei Grubacic, “looked at me as if I were speaking a foreign language” when asked what papers he was planning to present at academic conferences.⁶ Zinn had chosen to focus not on academic debates and discussions but, rather, on the civil rights activities in which he and his students were deeply involved at the time.

A pair of essays written during this era, in which Zinn drew parallels between the nineteenth-century abolitionists and the students who participated in “the freedom movement of the Sixties,” offer insight into Zinn’s choice. Here Zinn wrote with disdain of “scholarly detachment from the profound ethical conflicts of society, and from that human concern without which scholarship becomes a pretentious game,” and with approval of the “wise and humane” ideas expressed in Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach*:

³ Carl Becker, “Everyman,” 234.

⁴ Staughton Lynd, “Reflections on Radical History,” *Radical History Review* 79 (Winter 2001), 106, 107.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 105-6.

⁶ Staughton Lynd and Andrei Grubacic, *Wobblies and Zapatistas: Conversations on Anarchism, Marxism and Radical History* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2008), 66.

“We learn there that the world has real problems.... We also learn that these problems are operable, if we will only stop interpreting, and start acting.”⁷ These comments—and, more important, the activism through which he applied the principles expressed therein—are emblematic of both the humanitarian concern and the intensely practical philosophy with which Zinn approached his scholarship, his teaching, and his writing.

As a scholar, Zinn had little patience for “[a]cademic controversies” about questions “in which those beleaguered by the real problems of society could have no interest,” and he lamented the intellectual energy wasted by scholars on the gathering of useless knowledge, quoting Becker to make his point: “What influence has all this expert research had upon the social life of our time?... Very little, surely, if anything.”⁸

As a teacher, he ignored the “drumbeat of scolding” he heard from conservatives alarmed by the offerings of radical teachers such as himself “about the need for students to learn facts,” likening advocates of such approaches to “the character in [novelist Charles] Dickens’ *Hard Times*, the pedant Gradgrind, who admonished a younger teacher: ‘Teach nothing but facts, facts, facts.’”⁹ “It’s not the facts [students] retain—that’s not important,” Zinn once said, explaining his teaching methods. “It’s the atmosphere, the mood they come away with. And that’s what stays with them.”¹⁰ A typical assignment aimed at developing such a “mood” might involve a student working with a community organization such as the American Civil Liberties Union and then writing a paper on his or her experiences. Innovative pedagogical methods such as these, first employed at Spelman, were practical applications of Zinn’s belief, set forth in his memoir, that “a good education was a synthesis of book learning and involvement in social action.” His further comment should come as no surprise to readers of the present study: “I wanted my students to know that the accumulation of knowledge, while fascinating in itself, is not sufficient as long as so many people in the world have no

⁷ Zinn, *Zinn Reader*, 115, 127; Zinn, *The Politics*, 153, 166.

⁸ Zinn, *The Politics*, 322; Carl Becker, “What Are the Historical Facts?” *The Western Political Quarterly* (Sept. 1955), quoted in Zinn, *Zinn Reader*, 151.

⁹ Zinn, *A People’s History*, 683.

¹⁰ Joyce, *Howard Zinn*, 84.

opportunity to experience that fascination.”¹¹ Zinn had long since retired from teaching when Stanley Fish wrote derisively of “the save-the-world theory of academic performance” in a 2006 *New York Times* article, “Tip to Professors: Just Do Your Job,” but he had heard, and rejected, other “tips” similar to Fish’s prescription: “You don’t have to ignore or ban moral or political questions [in the classroom]. What you have to do is regard them as objects of study rather than as alternatives you and your students might take a stand on.”¹² Fish proposed, in effect, that teachers should restrict themselves to helping their students, like the philosophers of Marx’s *Theses*, to “interpret the world.” Unsurprisingly, Zinn viewed this question from the opposite pole:

[Y]ou must raise the controversial questions and ask students, “Was it *right* for us to take Mexican territory? Should we be proud of that, should we celebrate that?... Questions of right and wrong and justice are exactly the questions that should be raised [and debated] all the time.”¹³

In his emphasis on moral questions, a regular theme in his writings, Zinn broke another of what Richard White describes as “the rules of academic history,” the “sense of the past being a foreign country where people follow rules different than our own.”¹⁴ This principle, said Zinn, was “quite often” invoked by people who objected to his treatment of Christopher Columbus: “What these people say is, ‘You are taking Columbus out of context, looking at him with the eyes of the twentieth century. You must not superimpose the values of our time on events that took place five hundred years ago.’” Zinn found this argument “strange.”

Does it mean that cruelty, exploitation, greed, enslavement, and violence against helpless people are values peculiar to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and that we in the twentieth century are beyond them? Are there not certain human values that are common to the age of Columbus and to our own?... [I]n both his time and ours there were enslavers and

¹¹ Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral*, 203.

¹² Stanley Fish, “Tip to Professors: Just Do Your Job,” *The New York Times* (22 Oct. 2006). Fish argued in greater depth for this viewpoint in Stanley Fish, *Save The World on Your Own Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹³ Zinn and Macedo, *Democratic Education*, 191.

¹⁴ Richard White, “History, the Rugrats, and World Championship Wrestling,” *Perspectives on American History*, American Historical Association (April, 1999), <http://historians.org/Perspectives/Issues/1999/9904/9904FIL8.CFM> .

exploiters; and...there were those who protested against slavery and exploitation and in favor of human rights.¹⁵

As usual, Zinn had the present in mind when he judged the past. His point was “not to grieve for the victims and denounce the executioners.” If he told a story that caused his readers to “become emotionally wrought up over something that happened in the past,” he told interviewer David Barsamian, it was so that it could become “a starting point for moral indignation for things that are happening today.”¹⁶ Long before Zinn thus explained his methods, a reviewer of his 1966 essay, “Limits of the New Deal,” a critical assessment of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s achievements during that era, had perceptively noted that Zinn “seems to be berating Roosevelt for not doing in the 1930s what needs to be done today.”¹⁷ Of course, Zinn was doing just that. Similarly, when he invited his students to consider the cruelties of Columbus and “think twice” about his place among “our traditional heroes,” it was to provoke discussion “about how easily we accept conquest and murder because it furthers ‘progress,’” and about “what is done to human beings” today with similar justifications.¹⁸

Discussions of this nature, in which moral questions were raised and emotions were engaged, made history interesting to students, said Zinn, and during such discussions,

I take a stand.... I don’t simply lay history out on a platter and say, “I don’t care what you choose, they’re both valid.” I let them know, “No, I care what you choose; I don’t think they’re both valid. But you don’t have to agree with me.” I want them to know that if people don’t take a stand, the world will remain unchanged, and who wants that?¹⁹

Whether he was in the classroom, at a convention or a demonstration of some kind, or writing a book, Howard Zinn, it seems, rarely stopped trying to change the world.

¹⁵ Zinn and Macedo, *Democratic Education*, 116.

¹⁶ Zinn, *Zinn Reader*, 271-2.

¹⁷ Anonymous, review of *New Deal Thought*, ed. Howard Zinn, *Choice* 4 (June 1967), 474, quoted in Joyce, *Howard Zinn*, 77.

¹⁸ Zinn, *Declarations*, 57-8.

¹⁹ Zinn and Macedo, *Democratic Education*, 192-3.

To this end, as we have seen, the writings of Karl Marx, particularly the famous passage from his *Theses on Feuerbach* that Zinn often cited, were a major source of inspiration, and we can learn much about the motivations and methods of Zinn's work as a popular historian from *Marx in Soho*, one of the three theatrical plays that Zinn wrote. The play appeared roughly a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union, an event which was seen by many as a final repudiation of Marx and his ideas. "What we may be witnessing," Francis Fukuyama wrote triumphantly in 1989, "is not just the end of the Cold War...[but] the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy [and capitalism] as the final form of human government."²⁰ This was not a view shared by Zinn nor by committed Marxists such as Ellen Meiksins Wood, who wrote in 1997 that because Marx, "more effectively than any other human being then or now, devoted his life to explaining the systemic logic of capitalism," "this historical moment, the one we're living in now, is the best not the worst...moment to bring back Marx."²¹ Whether or not he read Wood's article, in 1999 Zinn did just that, figuratively speaking. In *Marx in Soho*, with characteristic wit, Zinn imagined the German philosopher returning to address an audience in late twentieth-century America. Zinn's purposes for writing the play were multiple, as he explained in a 2010 preface: to show Marx "defending his ideas against attack," as not only a thinker but also a "passionate, engaged revolutionary," and as "a family man, struggling to support his wife and children" while he was so engaged. Zinn also hoped to "show that Marx's critique of capitalism...remains fundamentally true in our time."²²

The play is a one-man show, but Zinn has the fictional Marx recalling conversations with such people as his wife Jenny, his daughter Eleanor, and the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, each of whom offers "blunt criticism" of Marx's ideas.²³ Imagined conversations as these are, it is often clear that they reflect the thoughts of the man who imagined them, Howard Zinn. It can hardly be doubted, for instance, that

²⁰ Frances Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *The National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989), 4.

²¹ Ellen Meiksins Wood, "Back to Marx," *Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine* 49, no. 2 (June 1997), 1.

²² Howard Zinn, *Three Plays: The Political Theater of Howard Zinn* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), 107-9.

²³ Zinn, *Three Plays*, 109.

Marx's wife Jenny is speaking for her literary creator when, her concession that his *Das Kapital* is a "profound analysis" of capitalism notwithstanding, she likens reading her husband's tome to "wading through the mud."²⁴ Zinn had felt a similar sensation struggling through this and others among Marx's works on political economy; in these "impossibly abstract" writings, he wrote in *Failure to Quit*, "my poor head at the age of nineteen swam, or rather drowned."²⁵

Jenny goes on to describe Marx's tome as "too long, too detailed," "boring," and "ponderous," and is unmoved by his protest that it is "an analysis" of complex matters, not intended for the general public as was *The Communist Manifesto*. "Let it be an analysis, but let it cry out like the *Manifesto*," she says. "A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism! Yes...that excites the reader." *Kapital* is another matter entirely: "Do you know why the censors have allowed it to be published? Because they cannot understand it and assume no one else will." Unimpressed with "the pretensions of high level scholarship," Jenny accuses her husband of being "a scholar first and a revolutionary second," and asks, "Are we reaching the people we want to reach?" Finally, after showing Marx how to explain his theory of surplus value in plain language that ordinary workers can understand, Jenny bluntly tells her increasingly defensive husband: "Forget your intellectual readers. Address the workers."²⁶ Zinn expressed similar thoughts in a 1969 essay, "Marxism and the New Left," where he speculated that Marx might have "succumbed to the temptations of the intellectual," carried away by "his research...his passion for scheme-building and for scientific constructions." Like Jenny, Zinn wondered how useful the "long expositions" in Marx's "dense volume" were to his revolutionary cause: "Even so brilliant a theory as that of surplus value—how relevant is to social action? Has the militancy of workingmen in history required such an analysis to sustain it?"²⁷ We can see, then, that Jenny's efforts to simplify Marx's complex ideas for a working-class audience reflect Zinn's recognition that "you can only organize large

²⁴ Ibid., 126.

²⁵ Zinn, *Failure to Quit*, 147.

²⁶ Zinn, *Three Plays*, 126-9.

²⁷ Zinn, *Zinn Reader*, 682.

numbers of people around issues that are obvious or that can easily be made obvious.”²⁸

Zinn rarely forgot the audience that he needed to reach to help bring about the transformation of society he so desired, especially after 1970, when *The Politics of History* became the last book he would ever write primarily for an academic audience. In this respect, he again followed the pattern of the New Historians whom he so admired. By 1920, both Robinson and Beard had left academia and thereafter wrote largely, in Robinson’s case exclusively, for a lay audience, while Becker remained within the academy but never wrote a scholarly monograph again.²⁹ Like Beard especially, Zinn wrote plainly and passionately, and like Beard, Becker and Karl Marx above all, often with a biting wit. Like Jenny of *Marx in Soho*, Zinn understood the importance of “exciting” or otherwise emotionally engaging his readers, in this respect resembling a fellow popular historian whose works have also attracted a massive American audience, filmmaker Ken Burns. A self-described “emotional archaeologist,” Burns has stated that history is best absorbed by an audience when it comes with “certain emotional associations,” and it is these that he seeks “to excavate along with the facts of the past” in his films.³⁰ Zinn made only one major incursion into the world of historical filmmaking, but *A People Speak*, often profoundly moving, is a powerful example of this principle in action. In his written works also, Zinn sought to provoke strong emotional responses in his readers, as suggested by the quotation from a letter written by French encyclopaedist Denis Diderot to Voltaire with which he prefaced *The Politics*: “Other historians relate facts to inform us of facts. You relate them to excite in our hearts an intense hatred of lying, ignorance, hypocrisy, superstition, tyranny; and the anger remains even after the memory of the facts has disappeared.”³¹ Along these lines, Zinn argued that it is “not enough” to give students of history just “the facts of slavery...of

²⁸ Ibid., 682. Zinn credited James Bevel with this idea.

²⁹ Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 271.

³⁰ Gary Edgerton, “Ken Burns—A Conversation with Public Television’s Resident Historian,” *Journal of American Culture*, vol. 18 (Spring 1995), 6; Thomas Cripps, “Historical Truth: An Interview with Ken Burns,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 100, No. 3 (Jun., 1995), 746-7.

³¹ Zinn, *The Politics*.

racial segregation...of government complicity in racial segregation...of the fight for equality.”

I think students need to be aroused emotionally on the issue of equality. They have to try to feel what it was like to be a slave.... Novels, poems, autobiographies, memoirs, the reminiscences of ex-slaves...have to be introduced as much as possible.... [so that students can] feel their anger, their indignation.

Zinn, who opined in a 1998 interview that “fiction can often represent history more accurately than nonfiction,” found the novels and poems of such black Americans as Richard Wright, Alice Walker, and Langston Hughes particularly useful for this purpose: “These writings have an emotional impact that can’t be found in an ordinary recitation of history.”³²

Here Zinn spoke from personal experience. During his childhood, “growing up in the slums of Brooklyn” in the 1930s, the novels of Charles Dickens had filled him with “anger at arbitrary power puffed up with wealth and kept in place by law,” along with “a profound compassion for the poor.”³³ As a teenager, he was filled with indignation by “the epitome of capitalist exploitation” presented in Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, and thrilled by the socialist “vision of a new society” he found in its final pages.³⁴ The “tumultuous emotions” aroused by such works evidently remained with Zinn for his whole life, inspiring and energizing the tireless activism that he carried on through his teaching, writing, and speaking. And in an author such as Sinclair or John Steinbeck, whose novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, said Zinn, “gave my students a better feel for the [Great Depression]...than any non-fiction account of the Thirties,” he found both a model and material for his efforts to similarly inspire his readers and students.³⁵ Timothy Patrick McCarthy’s observation that “he was fond of quoting literature” is an understatement; so ubiquitous are such references in Zinn’s writings that one has the impression that, as

³² “Interlude: Resistance and the Role of Artists,” interview with David Barsamian (2004), in Zinn, *The Indispensable Zinn*, 281; Zinn and Macedo, *Democratic Education*, 193.

³³ Zinn, *You Can’t Be Neutral*, 164, 169.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

³⁵ Zinn, *Zinn Reader*, 738.

has been said of Carl Becker, he “read more fiction than most scholars feel that they have time for.”³⁶

Zinn’s use of literary sources is consistent with his belief that “artists play a very special role in...social change,” which, of course, was always his aim.³⁷ Impressed by the many “great artists and writers... [who] have been outspoken in their criticism of existing society and in their longing for a different kind of society,” he saw such artists as indispensable voices of resistance. Social movements throughout history, said Zinn, have needed the “special power” of art—literature, poetry, music, visual art, and theater—to “inspire people...give them a vision...bring them together, [and] make them feel they are part of a vibrant movement.”³⁸ Naturally enough, Zinn frequently sought to avail himself of this power in his own work.

Contemporary artists have contributed to Zinn’s cause in another important way: helping him to popularize his own work. According to publisher HarperCollins, relates Duberman, sales of *A People’s History* “increased considerably” after the book was mentioned in a 1997 film, *Good Will Hunting*, and several years later in an episode of the long-running television series *The Sopranos*. Actor Matt Damon, who had grown up next door to Zinn and knew him and his work well, co-wrote and played the title role in *Good Will Hunting*. In this Oscar-winning movie, Damon’s character recommends *A People’s History* as a “real history book” that will “knock you on your ass.”³⁹ *The Sopranos* episode features a student informing his outraged father that Columbus, traditionally a hero among Italian-Americans, was in fact a genocidal slave-trader. “It’s in my history book,” he says, holding a copy of *A People’s History*, the title of which is clearly visible to television viewers. Coverage such as this helped to make Zinn’s book, as Sam Wineburg puts it, a “cultural icon,” while he in his later years had achieved a kind

³⁶ McCarthy, introduction, *The Indispensable Zinn*, xxix; Charlotte Watkins Smith, *Carl Becker: On History and the Climate of Opinion* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1956), 143.

³⁷ “Interlude,” *The Indispensable Zinn*, 330.

³⁸ Zinn, interview with *Grey Matters* magazine (December 1998), in Zinn and Macedo, *Democratic Education*, 127; Zinn, “Interlude,” *The Indispensable Zinn*, 331.

³⁹ Duberman, *Howard Zinn*, 236, 287.

of celebrity status, a level of public renown that few historians ever attain.⁴⁰ As biographer Davis D. Joyce asks, “What other historian has been profiled in *Rolling Stone*?”⁴¹ Fame generally comes with a price, however, and it is not surprising that Zinn’s public profile has made him a highly visible target for conservative journalists and popular authors with opposing political views. It is these to whom we shall now turn.

⁴⁰ Sam Wineburg, “Undue Certainty: Where Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History* Falls Short,” *American Educator* (Winter 2012-2013), 27.

⁴¹ Joyce, *Howard Zinn*, 240. Joyce referred here to a 1996 article by Charles M. Young, “Howard Zinn’s Rage Against the Machine,” in the popular magazine *Rolling Stone*.

“People’s History” versus “Patriot’s History”

The depth of the hostility that Zinn’s portrayal of American history has aroused among conservatives is suggested by a chilling comment in a 2010 email sent shortly after his death to top state education officials in Indiana by then-governor Mitch Daniels: “This terrible anti-American academic has finally passed away.”¹ In this letter we see one of the two principal charges that conservative commentators have most frequently hurled at Zinn and his history: “anti-Americanism.” The other is “Marxism.” In many ways *A People’s History of the United States*, portraying as it does an America with a long record of oppression, exploitation, class struggle, and imperialism, presents an easy target for such critics, for whom Zinn’s signature work, like *The Communist Manifesto*, is anathema.

These critics see *A People’s History* as just another disturbingly influential example of, to paraphrase Marx, a spectre haunting their land: radical ideas promulgated by leftist intellectuals from comfortable positions in the halls of higher education throughout America. Among such “tenured radicals”—so described in a 1990 book of the same title by Roger Kimball—whom conservative writers claim have been “indoctrinating” impressionable students in America for several decades now, Zinn seems to pose a special threat.² The popularity of his perennial best-seller among the general public, and the fact that it—along with derivative works such as *A Young People’s History of the United States*—has been enthusiastically embraced by teachers throughout the American educational system, prompted David Horowitz not only to include Zinn among *The Professors: the 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America*,

¹ Robert Cohen and Sonia Murrow, “Who’s Afraid of Radical History?” *The Nation* (05 Aug. 2013), <http://www.thenation.com/article/175592/whos-afraid-radical-history> .

² Roger Kimball, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (Ivan R. Dee, 2008).

but to devote more space to him than to any of the other one-hundred “dangerous academics” listed in this call-to-arms for conservatives.³

In *The Professors* Horowitz heaps scorn upon Zinn’s most famous work. *A People’s History*, he opines indignantly, is “really not a ‘history’ of the American people” at all but, rather, a “Marxist fantasy” in which Zinn strives to fulfill the “overtly political agenda” of his book by “sympathizing with America’s enemies and relentlessly denigrating the achievements of the American people.” From beginning to end, Horowitz complains, the “nearly seven hundred pages” of Zinn’s book are informed by “a pedestrian Marxism.” Most derisively of all perhaps—given the connotations of crude, simplistic propaganda inherent in such a description—he dismisses *A People’s History* as, its tome-like quality notwithstanding, “a Marxist tract.”⁴

Horowitz credits another popular conservative writer, Daniel J. Flynn, for his research on Zinn, and the title of a 2002 book by Flynn therefore comes as no surprise: *Why the Left Hates America: Exposing the Lies That Have Obscured Our Nation’s Greatness*. For Flynn, *A People’s History* is a “Marxist take on America” and its author part of “an elite that hopes for its [own] country’s demise,” who is therefore intent on “twisting any event to make America look bad.”⁵ These themes resurface in *Intellectual Morons: How Ideology Makes Smart People Fall for Stupid Ideas*, a 2004 work in which Flynn describes Zinn, along with Noam Chomsky and Gore Vidal, as one of the “three stooges of anti-Americanism” and flatly declares: “If you’ve read Marx, there’s no reason to read Howard Zinn.” Lamentably, given Zinn’s status as arguably “the most influential historian among young people” in America today, Flynn complains, readers of *A People’s History* can expect not “a detached chronicling of the past” but, rather, a litany

³ Zinn dedicated *A Young People’s History* to “all the parents and teachers...who have asked for a people’s history for young people, and to the younger generation, who we hope will use their talents to make a better world.” Howard Zinn and Rebecca Stefoff, *A Young People’s History of the United States* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2007, 2009), vii.

⁴ David Horowitz, *The Professors: the 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2006), 359, 363, 358, 364, 359, 358.

⁵ Daniel J. Flynn, *Why the Left Hates America: Exposing the Lies That Have Obscured Our Nation’s Greatness* (Roseville, California: Forum, 2002), 95, 35, 95.

of “politically motivated inaccuracies, long-winded rants, convenient omissions, the substitution of partisanship for objectivity.”⁶

Unlike Horowitz and Flynn, the equally conservative Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen are both professors of history, but their objections to Zinn’s history are of the same nature. The pair collaborated on *A Patriot’s History of the United States*, which first appeared in 2004, purportedly as “an honest evaluation of the history of the United States” inspired by, and meant to inspire in others, “the recognition that, compared to any other nation, America’s past is a bright and shining light.”⁷ *A Patriot’s History* is thicker still than *A People’s History*, and it is obviously meant to be a direct and powerful response to Zinn’s volume. “Even its subtitle, From Columbus’s Great Discovery to the War on Terror,” as David J. Bobb observes in a review that covers both books, “takes aim at Zinn, who would use the terms ‘great discovery’ and ‘war on terror’ only in scare quotes.”⁸ *A Patriot’s History* provides a useful contrast to Zinn’s most famous work because it is in many ways similar in style and intent to *A People’s History*. Written by academic historians but clearly aimed at a popular audience, it is equally polemical, partisan, and passionate, but in respect to its underlying ideology it is so much a polar opposite of Zinn’s volume that a radical thinker might be excused for seeing it as a kind of “evil twin” thereof.

A Patriot’s History is not mentioned by name in Sam Wineburg’s 2012 essay on Zinn, “Undue Certainty,” but it was, one suspects, among the works he had in mind when he wrote that it “was only a matter of time before *A People’s History* spawned no-qualification narratives from the other side of the political aisle,” for there are, as we shall see, ample grounds to include it among such “feisty, one-sided blockbusters.”⁹ Though

⁶ Flynn, *Intellectual Morons*, 101, 125, 99, 101.

⁷ Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen, *A Patriot’s History of the United States* (USA: Sentinel, 2007), xxi.

⁸ David J. Bobb, “The Future of Patriotism,” review of *A People’s History of the United States* by Howard Zinn, *Founding Myths: Stories That Hide Our Patriotic Past* by Ray Raphael, and *A Patriot’s History of the United States: From Columbus’s Great Discovery to the War on Terror* by Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen, The Claremont Institute, <http://www.patriotshistoryusa.com/reviews-interviews/the-claremont-institute/> .

⁹ Wineburg, “Undue Certainty,” 33.

they object strenuously to the “Marxist biases” of *A People’s History*, throughout their lengthy response to Zinn’s work Schweikart and Allen inadvertently support the oft-reiterated thesis of their radical counterpart that no historian can accurately claim to be truly objective.¹⁰

As to the kind of biases that one might expect to find in *A Patriot’s History*, readers of the 2007 edition who are not forewarned by the title should know the answer to that question before they get to the authors’ introductory comments, which in this edition are preceded by the transcript of an interview that Schweikart gave in March 2005 to radio talk-show host Rush Limbaugh. In this interview, originally published in *The Limbaugh Letter*, the often controversial Limbaugh, whose program is aired nationwide and caters to a massive audience on the far right wing of the American political spectrum, said of Schweikart’s book, “We will do what we can here, Larry, to get as many people to buy it as possible.” Schweikart returned the compliment: “[T]he great thing, Rush, is that... thanks to shows like yours, we are no longer dependent on a bunch of stupid reviews in the *American Historical Review*.... So what if some leftist professor at Pinkston U gives us a negative review? Who is going to read that compared to *The Limbaugh Letter*?”¹¹

Though Zinn obviously never taught at the fictitious “Pinkston U,” he was undoubtedly just the kind of professor that Schweikart had in mind, both when he made this comment and in 2009 when he again took on Zinn and other “leftist” teachers of history in *48 Liberal Lies About American History (That You Probably Learned in School)*. Therein Schweikart claims that, by correcting the distortions, omissions, and errors of the likes of Zinn, his previous work had “filled a Grand Canyon-size hole in American history education.” Be that as it may, if *A Patriot’s History* left any doubts about Schweikart’s own ideological biases or political loyalties, *48 Liberal Lies* should dispel them once and for all. Complaining about the failings of the American history textbooks currently used in schools and colleges across America, for instance, he laments that one

¹⁰ Schweikart, *A Patriot’s History*, xxi.

¹¹ “Interview with Larry Schweikart as seen in *The Limbaugh Letter*,” in Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot’s History*, xix, xi.

of them, *Enduring Vision* by Paul Boyer et al., “gives the [Ku Klux] Klan the better part of two pages—about the same as it gives to the Clinton impeachment, despite the fact that [former American president Bill] Clinton’s was only the second impeachment of a president in U.S. history.” In Schweikart’s view, this “‘over-the-top’ coverage [of the Klan], meant to characterize the 1920s as an age of backwardness and bigotry” in America, coupled with what he considers the inadequate coverage of a presidential impeachment, is a prime example of the “leftward slant” of these textbooks.¹² Schweikart does not explain why the impeachment of a president should be considered more important, or deserving of greater coverage, than the activities of a terrorist group like the Ku Klux Klan. This is an especially pertinent question in light of the fact that the practical political effect of the impeachment process begun by the House of Representatives was negligible given that, as Zinn observes in the three short paragraphs he devotes to the matter in *A People’s History*, “the impeachment did not lead to the end of Clinton’s presidency because the Senate did not vote for removal.”¹³ Schweikart’s complaint does not seem consistent with his own dictum that, contrary to writers of “history from the bottom up” like Zinn, “history must always deal with [and emphasize] those events and people who affected the greatest number over time.”¹⁴ This prescription naturally prompts a question that, one suspects, Howard Zinn might have asked if challenged by Schweikart on this issue: how many men were lynched, how many houses were set ablaze, and how many families were forced to live in terror as a result of the Clinton impeachment? Schweikart makes no attempt to answer such questions, but the reason that he assigns such importance to Clinton’s fall from grace seems clear: Clinton was a Democratic president, and Schweikart makes it transparently obvious throughout his 2009 book that Democrats have suited his political tastes only on

¹² Larry Schweikart, *48 Liberal Lies About American History (That You Probably Learned in School)* (USA: Sentinel, 2009), 11, 2, 2, 3.

¹³ Zinn, *A People’s History*, 659-60. Though not mentioned specifically by Schweikart, the relative space afforded to these two issues in *A People’s History* would surely be even less satisfactory to him than was the case for Paul Boyer’s textbook. In Zinn’s index six entries are listed under “Ku Klux Klan.” By contrast, the Clinton impeachment is not specifically mentioned therein at all, and in the text of Zinn’s book, as noted, the entire matter is disposed of in three short paragraphs.

¹⁴ Schweikart, *48 Liberal Lies*, 7.

the rarest of occasions. According to Schweikart, Grover Cleveland, who left the Oval Office in 1897, was “arguably the last good Democratic president.”¹⁵

Here and in many other instances, Schweikart shows not only a general ideological bias but also a partisan political bias. Whereas Zinn disapproved of both of America’s major political parties in almost equal measure, Schweikart clearly favors one of them, and thus his history often reads as if it were written to supply historical background or support for the speeches of Republican congressmen in the twenty-first century.¹⁶ Virtually all of the favorite causes and policy prescriptions of modern Republicans—“small government,” the “free market,” deregulation, privatization, lower taxes for the “job-creators,” restriction of the “welfare state,” reduction or elimination of “entitlement” programs, etc.—appear repeatedly in Schweikart’s history. In *A Patriot’s History*, for example—after reminding readers of “the numerous provisions in [the biblical Book of] Proverbs against sloth”—sounding much like Republican congressman and 2012 vice-presidential candidate Paul Ryan, who recently complained that “nearly 100 [anti-poverty] programs at the federal level...have actually created a poverty trap,”¹⁷ Schweikart laments that the Freedman’s Bureau, established to aid former slaves after the Civil War, “inevitably fostered dependence on government.”¹⁸ Moreover, reminiscent of the frequent Republican warnings in our own time about the evils of “big government,” the Bureau, says Schweikart, “like all government institutions, was bound to be

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁶ During election campaigns Zinn occasionally expressed a preference for one of the major parties, and on the rare occasions when this happened it was the Democratic party he favored, in 2008, for instance, when he wrote that, primarily because of his somewhat less militaristic approach to foreign policy, there was “just enough [of a difference between the two presidential candidates] for me to vote for [Barack] Obama and to hope he defeats [John] McCain.” Far more typical of his general attitude toward the Democratic party, however, is this statement, made during that same campaign: “The Democratic Party has broken with its historic conservatism, its pandering to the rich, its predilection for war, only when it has encountered rebellion from below, as in the 1930s and the 1960s.” Zinn, *Unfulfilled Promise*, 212, 207.

¹⁷ “House GOP poverty report focuses on reforming welfare, overhauling social programs,” *Washington Post* (March 2, 2014). Republican Senator Marco Rubio asks: “After 50 years, isn’t it time to declare big government’s war on poverty a failure?” Peter Beinart, “The Republicans’ Inside-Out Approach to Poverty,” *The Atlantic* (Jan. 9, 2014), <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/01/the-republicans-inside-out-approach-to-poverty/282943/>.

¹⁸ Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot’s History*, 370.

corrupted.”¹⁹ He goes on to suggest that the failures of the Bureau and similar institutions associated with the Reconstruction era can largely be blamed on “a view of government” that favored a “large, central behemoth” to oversee the affairs of Americans.²⁰

Governmental “behemoths” of one sort or another are a frequent target of *A Patriot’s History*, especially when these are deemed to have interfered with the “free market” because, as thinkers of the Republican persuasion are wont to do, Schweikart often ascribes truly remarkable powers to this market. He claims, for instance, that “the *only* hope many Southern blacks had once the Yankee armies had left [the South] for good in 1877 was the free market, where the color of money could overcome and subdue black/white racism,” adding that the market, “freed from interference from racist Southern state regulations, would have desegregated the South decades before Martin Luther King Jr., the freedom riders, Harry Truman, Earl Warren, and the Civil Rights Acts.”²¹

Given his faith in the power of the free market, denunciations of government regulations that restrict the operations of that market appear as predictably in Schweikart’s history as they do in Republican campaign rhetoric. Presented as a particularly obnoxious characteristic of “big government,” a variety of government regulations and the agencies charged with instituting and enforcing them are held responsible for intolerable infringements upon both economic and personal freedoms, vastly increased government spending, and calamitous effects on the American economy.²² During the presidency of Richard Nixon, for instance, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)—still a frequent target of Republican attacks today—was established with a “\$2.5 billion budget,” Schweikart explains, and “with its tendency to acquire vast and unchecked power over private property in the name of the

¹⁹ Ibid., 370.

²⁰ Ibid., 388.

²¹ Ibid., 351.

²² Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot’s History*, 709.

environment,”²³ it was not long before the EPA and other environmental agencies began to indulge in numerous “excessive and outrageous practices.”²⁴ Schweikart cites a number of examples to support this claim, reporting, for instance, that the “government claimed *private* land as small as 20 feet by 20 feet as a sanctuary for passing birds.”²⁵

Given the size and scope of the operations conducted by such agencies, however, that some abuses and excesses may have occurred is rather unremarkable. What is notable for our purposes here is the apparent lack of balance in Schweikart’s coverage of these agencies and their operations. In *48 Liberal Lies* he denounces the many ways that college history textbooks have been “slanted” by liberal or leftist historians, but in *A Patriot’s History* his own treatment of the EPA and other regulatory agencies provides, one might say, a textbook example of such practices. Consider his complaint about the practice of “labeling,” “using loaded terms,” for instance, “to describe those positions liberal favor as ‘progressive,’ forward-thinking,’ ‘liberating,’ while characterizing conservative or religious views as ‘fundamentalist,’ ‘backward,’ ‘nativist,’ or ‘prejudiced.’”²⁶ Schweikart himself seems to employ precisely this tactic when he describes the EPA’s efforts during the Nixon era to reduce automobile exhaust emissions and thereby deal with the smog which, he concedes, “had become an obvious problem in many cities.”²⁷ These efforts are characterized as an “attack on the automobile,” and the EPA—because it “quickly drifted into determining which technologies cars ‘should’ use” (rather than using tax incentives or “market-oriented methods” and thereby “allowing Detroit to meet [emission standards]...by whatever means it found most effective or profitable”)—is accused of using “brute force” to achieve its goals.²⁸ “Labeling,” notes Schweikart, apparently oblivious to his own use of it, “is a fairly easy tactic to identify and illuminate.”²⁹

²³ Ibid., 708.

²⁴ Ibid., 709.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Schweikart, *48 Liberal Lies*, 4.

²⁷ Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot’s History*, 709.

²⁸ Ibid., 709.

²⁹ Schweikart, *48 Liberal Lies*, 4.

“Omitting good news,” however, is among the “forms of bias involving interpretation or coverage” that are not so easy to detect, Schweikart explains, but are commonly used by liberal and leftist historians who, in his opinion—and to his obvious chagrin—clearly favor the Democratic party over the Republicans, as suggested by his complaint about their efforts “to demonize [Republican president] George W. Bush, or fawn over [Democratic president] Barack Obama.”³⁰ As evidence of the “sins of omission” committed by such historians, Schweikart points to an account of the New Deal era in which liberal historian Arthur Schlesinger “praised Social Security, the tax laws of the 1930s” and similar legislation passed under Democratic President Franklin D. Roosevelt “without bothering to mention a single negative impact of any of those pieces of legislation (and there were many).”³¹

Worse still, in Schweikart’s view, is the “story of Ronald Reagan” told in the books of liberal and leftist historians. Given Schweikart’s clear preference for the Republican party under whose banner Reagan served as American president for most of the 1980s, it is unsurprising that he is particularly indignant about the negative treatments of Reagan which he described as among “the most egregious errors” to be found in such books.³² Since leaving office in early 1989, Reagan has achieved an iconic status among Republicans, to the point that even so staunch a Republican supporter and Reagan admirer as Ford O’Connell, a long-time Republican strategist and the author of *Hail Mary: The 10-Step Playbook for Republican Recovery*, has described as a “disturbing trend” what he calls “O.R.D.—‘Obsessive Reagan Disorder’.... the insistence that any [Republican] presidential candidate verify that he is Reagan’s stylistic and ideological twin.”³³ “In 2008,” according to O’Connell, prospective Republican presidential candidates “John McCain and Mitt Romney fought for the title of ‘true heir to Ronald Reagan,’”³⁴ and if the Republican platform statement issued before the 2012

³⁰ Ibid., 12.

³¹ Ibid., 6.

³² Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot’s History*, xii.

³³ Ford O’Connell, “Ronald Reagan is not coming back, Republicans. Accept it,” *Foxnews.com* (29 Nov. 2013), <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2013/11/29/ronald-reagan-is-not-coming-back-republicans-accept-it/>.

³⁴ Ibid.

presidential election is any indication, debates of this nature are still a strong factor in Republican politics. In this document, which features many admiring references to the programs, policies and achievements of America's fortieth president, Reagan's name appears no less than nine times; by contrast, the names of the most recent Republican president, George W. Bush, and the first Republican president, Abraham Lincoln, each appear just twice, while none of the other fifteen Republican presidents, and very few Democratic presidents, are mentioned by name at all. In light of such reverence for Reagan among today's Republicans, Schweikart appears once again to be falling in line with his political party of choice when, to demonstrate the biased, selective presentations of liberal and leftist historians, he reports that when covering the 1980s, these historians "routinely leave out the incredible turnaround in unemployment and inflation" during the Reagan presidency, while "focusing obsessively on [federal budget] deficits" incurred under Reagan. Moreover, such deficits, he complains, again revealing his resentment of what he perceives to be an anti-Republican, pro-Democrat bias, "are never treated as problems in Democratic administrations."³⁵ Similarly, Daniel Flynn laments that Reagan "continues to be smeared" by "Marxists like Zinn," citing as evidence a laconic assertion in *A People's History*: "Unemployment grew during the Reagan years."³⁶ As Flynn points out—correctly, it must be said—unemployment did grow during the Reagan years, but only during the first two of those years. During the next six years that Reagan occupied the Oval Office, the jobless rate declined steadily, and when he left office it was lower than it had been for almost twenty years.³⁷ There was indeed a significant "turnaround in unemployment" under Reagan, but it is not mentioned by Zinn, and as a result his depiction of economic conditions during Reagan's presidency is misleading, to say the least. Here Zinn can justly be accused of, as Schweikart puts it, "omitting good news" about his subject. The present reader will hardly be surprised that in this respect Reagan fared no better than Abraham Lincoln: he too, after all, was an American president.

³⁵ Schweikart, *48 Liberal Lies*, 4.

³⁶ Flynn, *Intellectual Morons*, 105; Zinn, *A People's History*, 578.

³⁷ See U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Division of Labor Force Statistics, <http://data.bls.gov/pdq/SurveyOutputServlet> .

As accurate as his characterization of Zinn's practices may be in this case, it cannot be denied that Schweikart's own coverage of the EPA and other regulatory agencies established in the same era is of a strikingly similar nature. In the three pages that he devotes to these agencies in *A Patriot's History*, amidst an extensive account of the "bad news" for which they are held responsible, there is but a single, brief acknowledgment of any positive impact of their operations: as a result of the EPA's aforementioned "attack on the automobile," Schweikart concedes, "the air was cleaned up within twenty years." The impact of this evidently rather grudging admission, however, is blunted by the caveat that immediately follows it: "but other aspects of American life suffered dramatically as Americans saw taxes for the growing bureaucracy increase while their choices shrank."³⁸ Thus Schweikart quickly resumes his critique of government regulation in general, lamenting the high cost of legislation passed by the 1968-74 congresses, including the Coal Mine Health and Safety Act, the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the Toxic Substances Control Act, and what he calls "a series of clean air and pure food and drug acts." No further reference is made to the real or potential benefits of such measures—presumably, cleaner air and water, purer food and drugs, safer workplaces, and so forth. Instead, Schweikart keeps the focus on the negative, informing us that "[b]y 1976, businesses estimated that it cost \$63 billion per year to comply with this legislation," while "productivity fell" and "unemployment soared in states where federal pollution mandates forced vast new expenditures" upon such businesses.³⁹ Here, again, Schweikart echoes the complaints of Republican politicians, who frequently characterize the EPA and other regulatory agencies as "job-killers." The 2012 Republican platform statement is a case in point: under the heading "Protecting Our Environment," the authors of this document claim that "in caring for the land and water, private ownership has been our best guarantee of conscientious stewardship, while the worst instances of environmental degradation have occurred under government control," and call for "a dramatic change in the attitude of officials in Washington, a shift from a job-killing punitive mentality."⁴⁰ "Reining in the EPA" is the

³⁸ Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History*, 709.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 710.

⁴⁰ *Republican Platform 2012*, 18, <http://www.gop.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/2012GOPPlatform.pdf> .

title of the following section, in which readers are told that the “expansive regulations” of the environmental agency are “preventing new projects from going forward, discouraging new investment, and stifling job creation.”⁴¹ Needless to say perhaps, such sentiments, as *New York Times* reporter John M. Broder notes, “are encouraged by industries that are reliable financial supporters of Republican candidates—the petroleum industry, utilities, coal companies, heavy manufacturers and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.”⁴²

Even in regard to concerns about global warming, Schweikart’s history faithfully propagates what have become, in Broder’s words, “tenets of Republican orthodoxy,” that is, “[o]pposition to regulation [in general] and skepticism about climate change.”⁴³ In the process of disparaging the presentist orientation of the contemporary historians whom he holds responsible for “agenda-driven [college history] textbooks” that perpetuate such concerns, he ridicules calls for action to combat global warming. “Virtually all of the global warming nonsense has come in the most recent revisions” of standard college textbooks such as *The American Pageant*, Schweikart explains, because it is when these books are revised to keep them current that “most of the leftist ideology seeps in,” thanks to historians who “slip in” new material that furthers their present-day political or ideological agendas. Such historians, he suggests, should “put more effort into recording history rather than current events” because, after all, “How many readers think that in fifty years, global warming will have been a serious issue?”⁴⁴ If there is any merit to the opinions of the vast majority of climate scientists in the early twenty-first century, readers fifty years from now may well think global warming a very serious historical issue indeed. Be that as it may, however, for our purposes here it is sufficient to note that at many

⁴¹ Ibid., 19.

⁴² John M. Broder, “Bashing E.P.A. Is New Theme in G.O.P. Race,” *New York Times* (August 18, 2011), http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/18/us/politics/18epa.html?_r=0 .

⁴³ Ibid. It should be noted that not all Republicans subscribe to this “orthodoxy.” In 1996 an organization called Republicans for Environmental Protection was established, which pointed out that conservatives could also be conservationists and sought to restore the “great conservation tradition” of the Republican party. In 2011, reporter Tom Zeller Jr. suggested that this tradition had largely been abandoned by most contemporary Republican politicians: “Rob Sisson, the president of the group...walks something of a lonely road these days.” Tom Zeller Jr., “Republican Environmental Group Seeks To Put Conservation Back On The Conservative Agenda,” *Huffington Post* (20 Dec. 2011).

⁴⁴ Schweikart, *48 Liberal Lies*, 12-13.

Republican gatherings in our own time, Schweikart's "attacks on the E.P.A., climate-change science and environmental regulation more broadly" would undoubtedly be, as Broder puts it, "surefire applause lines."⁴⁵ It seems no less certain that such audiences are in large part responsible for the bestselling status of *A Patriot's History*, for on issue after issue covered therein the historical interpretations and the lessons that Schweikart and his co-author draw from these are faithful to current Republican orthodoxy.

Nevertheless, though it seems clear that their own renderings of the American past are, like Zinn's, heavily influenced by present-day political beliefs and considerations, Schweikart and the other "anti-Zinn" popular historians we have considered here are firm in their conviction that readers of their own books will be, unlike Zinn's readers, "grounded in truth."⁴⁶ In contrast to Zinn and others who "have told the story of America's past dishonestly," Schweikart assured Rush Limbaugh, he and his co-author "tell the accurate story" in *A Patriot's History*.⁴⁷ Accordingly, they make little attempt to practise what John Tosh has described as "the confessional mode of historical writing," that is, to acknowledge their own biases. Zinn clearly did, and Tosh's observation about E. P. Thompson, that "he made no secret of his sympathies," describes Zinn equally well.⁴⁸ So explicitly and directly did Zinn acknowledge the "agenda" behind his writing and teaching of history that even Schweikart and Allen saw fit to exclaim in their introduction to *A Patriot's History*: "At least Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* honestly represents its Marxist biases in the title!"⁴⁹ The logic of this claim is not entirely clear given that "people's history" is not the exclusive domain of Marxist historians, but Schweikart perhaps conflates the two, as suggested by his evident disdain for "such leftist-dominated fields as 'social' history" (of which "people's history" is a particular form).⁵⁰ In any case, I would now like to consider the question of Zinn's "anti-American," "Marxist biases."

⁴⁵ Broder, "Bashing E.P.A."

⁴⁶ Schweikart, *48 Liberal Lies*, 13.

⁴⁷ Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History*, xiv.

⁴⁸ John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 207.

⁴⁹ Schweikart, *A Patriot's History*, xxi.

⁵⁰ Schweikart, *48 Liberal Lies*, 7.

An “Anti-American Marxist”?

It is no simple task to determine whether Zinn was, in fact, a Marxist. It is difficult, indeed, even to simply define the term. There are few thinkers in history whose ideas have been analyzed, interpreted, and debated as much as have those of Karl Marx, and since his death in 1883, as Paul Blackledge observes, a variety of “diametrically opposed Marxisms” have been constructed from the legacy of “a multiplicity of Marxes” conceived by students of his life and work.¹ S. H. Rigby similarly asserts that “it is possible to construct a number of textually-authorized Marxes, some of which can be refuted by others,” but adds a point that is particularly pertinent to our purposes here: “It is...futile to ask which of these is the ‘real’ Marx. The key task is to ask which is the most *useful* Marx.”² Zinn’s approach was strikingly similar. He took little interest in what he called the “endless arguments that go on in academic circles about what Plato or Machiavelli or Rousseau or Marx *really* meant. Although I taught political theory for twenty years,” he explained in *Declarations of Independence*, “I don’t really care about that. I am interested in these thinkers when it seems to me their ideas are still alive in our time and can be used to illuminate a problem.”³ Taking a cue from Rigby, we shall ask which Marx Howard Zinn found most “useful,” starting with a look at his thoughts on one of the many scholarly debates that have long surrounded the “real Marx.”

This debate focuses on the differences, or lack thereof, between the “young Marx” and the “mature Marx.” In recent years scholars such as Joseph Ferraro have argued that there is no essential contradiction between the young, “ethical or humanist

¹ Paul Blackledge, *Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 20.

² S. H. Rigby, *Marxism and History: A critical introduction*, 2nd edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 299.

³ Zinn, *Declarations*, 5.

Marx” and the mature, “scientific Marx.”⁴ The dominant view among Marxist scholars for much of the twentieth century, however, was closer to that of the French philosopher Louis Althusser, who was among the most prominent of Marxist thinkers in the 1960s and 1970s and who, as J. E. Elliot puts it, “clearly regard[ed] the early Marx as an aberration from the real Marx.”⁵ Undoubtedly Zinn had such thinkers in mind when he complained in a 1988 article that the works of the early Marx are “often dismissed by hard-line fundamentalists as ‘immature,’” even though these “contain some of his most profound ideas.”⁶

Zinn found some of these “profound ideas” in such works as *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Among these ideas, Zinn listed Marx’s critique of capitalism and the industrial system that “not only robbed them of the product of their own work, it estranged working people from their own creative possibilities, from one another as human beings, from the beauties of nature, from their own true selves,” and his insight that “this alienation from all that was human” could only be overcome by “a fundamental, revolutionary change in society, to create the conditions—a short workday, a rational use of the earth’s natural wealth and people’s natural talents, a just distribution of the fruits of human labor, a new social consciousness—for the flowering of human potential, for a leap into freedom as it had never been experienced in history.”⁷ Here Zinn displayed a powerful attraction to the “humanist Marx,” the one that he depicted in *Marx in Soho* “defending his ideas against attack” in order to “show that Marx’s critique of capitalism...remains fundamentally true in our time.”⁸

As a young man, Zinn was deeply inspired by his first reading of *The Communist Manifesto*, written by Marx and Engels, as he relates in his memoir, “when they too were young radicals.” He found the *Manifesto*’s famous assertion that the “history of all

⁴ Joseph Ferraro, *Freedom and Determination in History According to Marx and Engels* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1992), 190.

⁵ J. E. Elliot, “Continuity and Change in the Evolution of Marx’s Theory of Alienation: From the *Manuscripts* to *Grundrisse* to *Capital*,” in *Karl Marx’s Social and Political Thought, Volume 8*, eds. Bob Jessop, Russell Wheatley (US: Taylor & Francis, 1999), 485.

⁶ Zinn, *Zinn Reader*, 616.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Howard Zinn, *Three Plays*, 107, 109.

hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle” to be “undeniably true, verifiable in any reading of history.”⁹ “Even knowing only a little history of the United States, who could deny the truth of that?” he asked.

Wasn't money, yes, *class*, behind all the political conflicts in the country.... Didn't we have a long history of strikes, struggles between capital and labor, and even if workers didn't see this as 'class struggle,' ...might they not one day understand it and try to defeat not just one employer, but the entire capitalist class?¹⁰

Zinn, who did not forget the lessons he had absorbed from the *Manifesto* as he aged, devoted many pages of *A People's History* to this “long history” of class struggle in America. In a chapter titled “The Unreported Resistance,” for instance, he attempted to demonstrate the truth, in America as everywhere else, of Marx's assertion that “an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight” is forever being waged between the contending classes.¹¹ Also from the *Manifesto* is another idea that Zinn often incorporated into his own history and political commentary: “The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class.”¹² “If those in charge of our society...can dominate our ideas,” Zinn wrote in *Declarations*, “they will be secure in their power.”¹³ In America, he suggested, a “sophisticated system of control” operates to maintain “the quiet dominance of certain ideas”—the idea that “if you are poor you have only yourself to blame,” for instance—and thus ensures an “obedient, acquiescent, passive citizenry.”¹⁴ And although Zinn sometimes pointed out that the “dominance of these ideas is not the product of a conspiratorial group,” he often made statements that strongly suggest otherwise, as in *A People's History* where he wrote of an America

⁹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Signet Classics, 2011), 62; Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral*, 175.

¹⁰ Zinn, *Declarations*, 268-9.

¹¹ Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 63.

¹² Zinn, *Declarations*, 269; Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 90.

¹³ Zinn, *Declarations*, 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

managed for the benefit of a wealthy elite by “the most ingenious system of control in world history.”¹⁵

If we are to avoid becoming embroiled in the “endless arguments about what Marx *really* meant” for which Zinn had so little taste, the safest course is, perhaps, to describe his thinking as “Marxian” rather than “Marxist.” Given the heavy, undeniable influence of Marx’s thought upon Zinn’s work and his own admission that “some of Marx’s ideas I embrace heartily,” it seems unlikely he would have had any serious objection to David Horowitz’s assertion that he viewed “the American narrative through a Marx-tinted lens,” and nor should we.¹⁶ Daniel Flynn’s attempt to cast him as a Marxist ideologue, intellectually impaired by “a captive mind long closed by ideology,” however, is another matter entirely.¹⁷ “I don’t want to be labelled as a Marxist,” Zinn said in a 1997 interview, and he responded to the attempts of Flynn and others to so label him in a 1998 essay: “Je Ne Suis Pas un Marxiste.”¹⁸ This “famous statement” was “a high point in Marx’s life,” wrote Zinn, suggesting that one could take his ideas seriously “without becoming...a born-again Marxist who argues that every word [in *Das Kapital*]...is unquestionably true.” In this essay, while praising the “acute insights” and “inspiring visions” he found in Marx’s works, Zinn acknowledged that “Marx was often wrong, often dogmatic,” and, his protest to the contrary notwithstanding, “often a ‘Marxist.’”¹⁹ It was not the first time that Zinn had approached Marx’s ideas with a critical eye. Decades earlier, in “Marxism and the New Left,” he argued that the New Left should update Marxist theory in accordance with “the advantage [it had] over Marx of having an extra century of history to study.” Later, Zinn did so himself in *Marx in Soho*, which represents, one could argue, his attempt to vindicate but also to revise Marx’s ideas. “Surely we don’t have much confidence in inevitabilities these days,” Zinn wrote in 1969, referring to

¹⁵ Zinn, *Declarations*, 3; Zinn, *A People’s History*, 632.

¹⁶ Zinn, interview (14 Mar. 1997), quoted in Joyce, *Howard Zinn*, 34; Horowitz, *The Professors*, 358.

¹⁷ Flynn, *Intellectual Morons*, 101.

¹⁸ Zinn, interview, in Joyce, *Howard Zinn*, 34.

¹⁹ Zinn, *Failure to Quit*, 145-9.

Marx's famous prediction in the *Manifesto* of the "inevitable" demise of capitalism.²⁰ In 1999, his resurrected Marx confessed:

I was wrong in 1848, thinking capitalism was on its way out. My timing was a bit off. Perhaps by two hundred years.... But it will be transformed.... Yes, capitalism has accomplished wonders unsurpassed in history—miracles of technology and science. But it is preparing its own death. Its voracious appetite for profit—more, more, more!—creates a world of turmoil.... But it does not have to be. There is still a possibility of choice. Only a possibility, I grant. Nothing is certain. That is now clear. I was too damned certain. Now I know—anything can happen. But people must get off their asses!²¹

In this final admonition we can hear the voice of Howard Zinn clearly, for *Marx in Soho* represents another in a long line of his efforts to so motivate people. This brings us to perhaps the most important lesson that Zinn evidently drew from Marx: the concept of praxis, the unity of theory and practice. A classic expression of this principle is found in the passage from Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* cited earlier here, which Zinn described as "one of the most quoted, and most ignored, in practice, of Marx's statements."²² In Zinn's case, it was often quoted but, it seems, rarely ignored. Zinn wrote history not to interpret the world but to change it, as had Marx in what Zinn described as "the *Manifesto*'s sweeping treatment of history."²³

A case could be made for Marx as a pioneer, perhaps even "the father," of radical history, and for Zinn, obviously, as an inheritor and modern exemplar of that tradition. Many parallels can be drawn in respect to both the purposes and the methods with which Zinn and Marx wrote history. Both, for instance, were presentists, though in Marx's case long before such a term had ever been heard. Both Zinn and Marx, who declared that the "task of history" was "to establish the truth of here and now," wrote about the past with the present and the future in mind above all.²⁴ As Robert Lynd observed, Marx "mined the past for its specific implications for the operation of the

²⁰ Zinn, *Zinn Reader*, 679, 681.

²¹ Zinn, *Three Plays*, 140-1.

²² Zinn, *Zinn Reader*, 674.

²³ Zinn, *Declarations*, 269.

²⁴ Marx, "Towards a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*," quoted in McLellan, *Karl Marx*, 72.

capitalism of his day,” and thereby gave to future generations “an historically-edged instrument for confronting their contemporary problems.”²⁵ A century later Zinn was still using that instrument. Like Zinn, too, Marx wrote “on a moving train” and made no effort to write “neutral” history. “Integral to his [historical] method was,” as Matt Perry puts it, “the combination of research and tigerish partisanship.”²⁶ Moreover, intensely involved in the social and political struggles of his era, Marx was not only a scholar but also, as Zinn pointed out, “a tireless activist all his life.”²⁷ In this regard as in others, Marx provided a model that Zinn obviously admired and in many ways emulated. It was this Marx that Zinn sought to bring to life in *Marx in Soho*, a powerful thinker and critic of capitalism, to be sure, but also a “passionate, engaged revolutionary.”²⁸

One further example of the inspiration that Zinn found in the *Manifesto* and other writings of Marx is worthy of brief consideration here, and it is as far as we shall go to address the accusations of Zinn’s critics that he was “anti-American.” “Perhaps the most precious heritage of Marx’s thought,” wrote Zinn, “is his internationalism, his hostility to the national state, his insistence that ordinary people have no nation they must obey and give their lives for in war, that we are all linked to one another across the globe as human beings.”²⁹ “Wipe out these ridiculous national boundaries!” exclaims Zinn’s imaginary Marx.³⁰ In this light, however much validity there may be in claims that Zinn’s coverage of America’s foreign ventures is as “unbalanced” as his treatment of traditional American heroes, it is arguable that he was not so much “anti-American” as “anti-national-state” in general, particularly when one also considers statements such as the following, from Zinn’s *Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal*. His study of American military involvements and his own experiences as a bombardier during World War II led him to conclude, Zinn wrote in 1967, “not that the United States was more evil than other

²⁵ Lynd, *Knowledge for What?*, 133.

²⁶ Perry, *Marxism and History*, 59.

²⁷ Zinn, *Failure to Quit*, 146.

²⁸ Zinn, *Three Plays*, 108.

²⁹ Zinn, *Failure to Quit*, 149.

³⁰ Zinn, *Three Plays*, 139.

nations, only that she was *just* as evil.... It does not take too much study of modern history to conclude that nations as a lot tend to be vicious.”³¹

Needless to say, such conclusions did not lead Zinn to look kindly on the concept of American exceptionalism or the nationalistic “patriotism” with which it is often associated, typified by the assertion of *A Patriot’s History* that America, “a fountain of hope, and a beacon of liberty,” has “uniquely had...a standard to uphold, and a mission to fulfill. In the end, the rest of the world will probably...grudgingly admit that, to paraphrase the song, God has ‘shed his grace on thee.’”³² Rather, Zinn derided “the arrogant idea that this country is the center of the universe, exceptionally virtuous, admirable, superior,” and lamented the tragic consequences to which in his view such ideas so often led, quoting the subject of his first play, the anarchist Emma Goldman:

Indeed, conceit, arrogance, and egotism are the essentials of patriotism.... Those who have had the fortune of being born on some particular spot consider themselves better, nobler, grander, more intelligent than the living beings inhabiting any other spot. It is, therefore, the duty of everyone living on that chosen spot to fight, kill, and die in the attempt to impose his superiority upon all the others.³³

Zinn went so far as to suggest that his fellow Americans should “begin to redefine patriotism” and “expand it beyond that narrow nationalism which has caused so much death and suffering.”

Should we not begin to consider all children, everywhere, as our own? In that case, war, which in our time is always an assault on children, would be unacceptable as a solution to the problems of the world.

³¹ Zinn, *Zinn Reader*, 298.

³² Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot’s History*, 828-9.

³³ Zinn, *Zinn Reader*, 637; Emma Goldman, quoted in Zinn, *A Power*, 114. Paraphrased expressions of these sentiments appeared in Zinn’s play *Emma*. Zinn, *Three Plays*, 69-70, 99-100.

To support this proposal he appealed to “the tradition of Thomas Paine,” an influential writer during the American Revolution who, Zinn declared, had “enlarged the idea of patriotism when he said: ‘My country is the world. My countrymen are mankind.’”³⁴

Zinn found historical support in the American revolutionary era for not only his global “patriotism,” but also for his radical politics. As Staughton Lynd put it in a 1968 work that Zinn admired, *Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism*, he was one among “all kinds of American radicals,” who have since 1776 “traced their intellectual origins to the Declaration of Independence and to the Revolution it justified.”³⁵ Zinn saw the Declaration as “a remarkable statement of left values,” especially “the idea that everybody has an equal right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”³⁶ If the people have the right proclaimed in the Declaration, to “alter or abolish” any government that “becomes destructive of these ends,” Zinn argued, then the people surely have “the right to criticize, even severely,” the policies of such governments. “This principle suggests that a true patriotism lies in supporting the values the country is supposed to cherish,” he continued. “When our government compromises, undermines, or attacks those values [by, for instance, jailing anti-war protestors such as Emma Goldman], it is being unpatriotic.”³⁷ True patriotism, Zinn insisted in a speech given at an anti-war rally a month after the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, is a care and concern for the people, not the government, of a country, and certainly does not entail “dying for your government” or “for the greed of the oil cartels, for the expansion of the American empire, for the political ambitions of the president.”³⁸

If it is unpatriotic to severely criticize one’s government, then Howard Zinn was clearly no patriot. One wonders, however, where that leaves the so-called Tea Party Patriots, who have rarely ceased to do so since the election of Barack Obama. Similarly, if it is unpatriotic to call one’s country to address the “historic unfulfilled promise” of its

³⁴ *Zinn Reader*, 718.

³⁵ Staughton Lynd, *Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968, 1982), 7.

³⁶ Zinn, *Unfulfilled Promise*, 48.

³⁷ Zinn, *A Power*, 112.

³⁸ Zinn, *Zinn Reader*, 717.

own founding document, then Howard Zinn was no patriot. Neither, perhaps, are those conservative Americans who frequently invoke the “Founding Fathers” to support their criticisms of the current government. One could go on, but in the end, judgements about Zinn’s patriotism, or lack thereof, will remain in the eye of the beholder.

Conclusion

I have drawn freely here from Peter Novick's *That Noble Dream* because, as described by its author, it is "an inquiry into what professional historians have thought they were doing, or ought to be doing, when they wrote history." His aim, said Novick, was "to provoke my fellow historians to greater self-consciousness about the nature of our activity, to stimulate alternative ways of thinking about works of history and the claims made on their behalf."¹ Perhaps it is unsurprising that Howard Zinn considered Novick's book "superb," for much of his career was spent challenging such claims, raising and answering such questions, often provocatively, always clearly and directly, and presenting to his fellow historians, and fellow scholars more generally, alternative ways of thinking and acting, both through his words and by force of example.² He was not the first to present such alternative ways of thinking nor did he do so in a particularly original way. On the matter of historical objectivity, for instance, he followed very much in the footsteps of the New Historians James Harvey Robinson, Carl Becker, and Charles Beard, often citing their arguments to support his own efforts to puncture what he saw as the pretensions to objectivity of his conservative colleagues, pretensions to what he believed was both an unattainable and an undesirable state of mind, and which often masked an agenda that was no less partisan, presentist, and biased, albeit in a different direction, than his own. I have attempted to show here, hopefully with some success, that the authors of *A Patriot's History of the United States* exemplify this tendency and do much to confirm Zinn's doubts about the very possibility of historical objectivity. Unfortunately, some would say, so did Zinn himself. I confess to being among the readers who would like to see a more "balanced" portrayal of various historical events and persons than Howard Zinn often provides, in spite of my sympathy for the humane ends he sought to achieve thereby.

¹ Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 628-9.

² Zinn, *Zinn Reader*, 741.

As a “present-minded” historian and an activist-scholar working for a more just and egalitarian society, Zinn, who essentially remained a New Left historian to the end, carried on and helped to reinvigorate traditions which can be traced back to the Progressive, New Historians of the early twentieth century, especially Charles Beard, and still further back to the nineteenth century and Karl Marx, who also served as a model for Zinn’s practice of radical history, and whose concept of praxis Zinn exemplified above all. Among his contemporaries, in this regard Zinn was also inspired by, and had much in common with, E. P. Thompson and Staughton Lynd, among others.

Yet for all these influences Howard Zinn was his own man, as fiercely independent in thought and action as the rebels and radicals he so often portrayed with, as Eric Foner observed, “an enthusiasm rarely encountered in the leaden prose of academic history.”³ In his own intensely practical way, he adopted those ideas and practices of the thinkers he admired which seemed appropriate to his purposes and discarded those which did not. As we have seen, for instance, despite Zinn’s great respect for Marx and his ideas, he did not admire or emulate his tendency, as portrayed in *Marx in Soho*, to get lost in his scholarly research and forget the audience he needed to reach to fulfill his revolutionary dreams. As Staughton Lynd suggested, radical scholars who aspire to “move the masses,” as the saying goes, could learn much from Howard Zinn. Like Ronald Reagan, the president whose policies he so despised, Howard Zinn, too, was the “Great Communicator.”⁴ Taking a lesson from Carl Becker, perhaps, he rarely forgot “Mr. Everyman,” and like his imaginary Jenny, Zinn understood the need to “simplify complex ideas” and to write in a way that “excites the reader” in order to reach, and influence, a larger audience. In Dickensian fashion, and often using the literature of Dickens and others in the process, he disregarded scholarly injunctions to avoid “emotionalism” and was utterly “unashamed” of arousing “tumultuous emotions” in his audiences in order to inspire them, anger them, or otherwise move them toward “the kind of world which history has not yet disclosed, but perhaps hinted at.”⁵ Similarly, he did not hesitate to confront, indeed he often hastened to confront, his readers, his

³ Foner, “Majority Report,” BR3-4.

⁴ For this analogy I am indebted to historian Allen Seager of Simon Fraser University.

⁵ Zinn, *The Politics*, 12, 3.

students, and his colleagues with the controversial moral questions to which historical and political studies often give rise. This, too, was part of his popular appeal, for although many scholars prefer to avoid such questions, or to deal with them strictly as academic exercises, as the popularity of movements such as the Moral Majority suggests, Mr. Everyman and Ms. Everywoman are often extremely interested in engaging with such issues in a much deeper way, a way much more likely to lead to action, which was always what Zinn hoped to provoke. Hence, he deplored what he saw among those who were, like him, the guardians of the “knowledge industry,” but who followed the scholarly “rules which sustain the wasting of knowledge”—“Be objective,” for instance—leading to endless, sterile academic discussions and “the proliferation of debates which go nowhere into the real world, only round and round in ever smaller circles of scholarly discourse.”⁶

This brings us full circle to the question with which Zinn opened *The Politics of History* and, figuratively speaking, this paper. It was, of course, a rhetorical question. Zinn clearly felt that it was indeed time that “scholars began to earn...[their] keep in this world.” What he proposed as a necessary prerequisite, however, was nothing less than “a revolution in the uses of knowledge,” the end result of which would be that most if not all scholars would at last begin to act in accordance with the presentist “imperative” set forth by Carl Becker, “that learning be applied to the solution of the problems of human life.”⁷ Unfortunately for Zinn, and perhaps for the world, such a revolution does not appear to be any closer at hand today than it did when he first called for it in 1970. Perhaps it will never come, and all too many scholars will continue to be content with interpreting the world, rather than trying to change it. Those who choose otherwise, however, can take both inspiration and instruction from the life and work of Howard Zinn.

⁶ Ibid., 6, 9, 8.

⁷ Zinn, *The Politics*, 5, 9, 17.

Bibliography

- Beard, Charles. "Written History as an Act of Faith." 1933 Presidential Address to the American Historical Association. *American Historical Review*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Jan. 1934), pp. 219-231.
- Beard, Charles. "That Noble Dream." *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Oct. 1935), pp. 74-87. University of Chicago Press on behalf of the American Historical Association.
- Becker, Carl. "Everyman His Own Historian." Annual address of the president of the American Historical Association, delivered at Minneapolis, Dec. 29, 1931. *American Historical Review*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Jan. 1932), pp. 221-236.
- Blackledge, Paul. *Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006.
- Bobb, David J. "The Future of Patriotism." Review of *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn, *Founding Myths: Stories That Hide Our Patriotic Past* by Ray Raphael, and *A Patriot's History of the United States: From Columbus's Great Discovery to the War on Terror* by Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen. The Claremont Institute. <http://www.patriotshistoryusa.com/reviews-interviews/the-claremont-institute/>
- Boui, Jamelle. "Don't Know Much Revisionist History." *Slate* (04 Sept. 2014).
- Broder, John M. "Bashing E.P.A. Is New Theme in G.O.P. Race." *New York Times* (18 August 2011), http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/18/us/politics/18epa.html?_r=0 .
- Burns, Robert and Hugh Rayment-Pickard, eds. *Philosophies of History From Enlightenment to Postmodernity*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2000.
- Carr, E. H. *What is History?* Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1961.
- Cohen, Robert and Sonia Murrow. "Who's Afraid of Radical History?" *The Nation* (05 Aug. 2013). <http://www.thenation.com/article/175592/whos-afraid-radical-history>.
- Cripps, Thomas. "Historical Truth: An Interview with Ken Burns." *American Historical Review*, Vol. 100, No. 3 (June 1995), pp. 741-764.

- Crothers, Samuel McChord. *The Gentle Reader*. Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1903. *The Project Gutenberg EBook of The Gentle Reader*. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/38873/38873-h/38873-h.htm> .
- Douglass, Frederick. "Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln." Speech delivered at the unveiling of the Freedmen's Monument in Memory of Abraham Lincoln, in Lincoln Park, Washington, D.C. (14 April 1876). *University of Rochester Frederick Douglass Project*. <https://www.lib.rochester.edu/index.cfm?PAGE=4402> .
- Duberman, Martin. *Howard Zinn: A Life on the Left*. New York: The New Press, 2012.
- Edgerton, Gary. "Ken Burns—A Conversation with Public Television's Resident Historian." *Journal of American Culture*, vol. 18 (Spring 1995), pp. 1-12.
- Evans, Richard J. *In Defence of History*. London: Granta, 1997.
- Elliot, J. E. "Continuity and Change in the Evolution of Marx's Theory of Alienation: From the Manuscripts to Grundrisse to Capital." In *Karl Marx's Social and Political Thought, Volume 8*. Edited by Bob Jessop and Russell Wheatley. US: Taylor & Francis, 1999.
- Ferraro, Joseph. *Freedom and Determination in History According to Marx and Engels*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1992.
- Fish, Stanley. *Save the World on Your Own Time*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Fish, Stanley. "Tip to Professors: Just Do Your Job." *New York Times* (22 October 2006).
- Flynn, Daniel J. *Why the Left Hates America: Exposing the Lies That Have Obscured Our Nation's Greatness*. Roseville, California: Forum, 2002.
- Flynn, Daniel J. *Intellectual Morons: How Ideology Makes Smart People Fall for Stupid Ideas*. New York: Crown Forum, 2004.
- Foner, Eric. "Majority Report," *New York Times Book Review* (02 Mar. 1980), pp. BR3-4.
- Foner, Eric. *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2010.
- Foner, Eric. "Zinn's Critical History," *Nation* 290, no. 7 (22 Feb. 2010).
- Fukuyama, Frances. "The End of History?" *The National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989), pp. 3-18.

- Gooch, G. P. *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century*. London, New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1913.
- Greenberg, David. "That Barnes & Noble Dream: Academic Historians vs. Popularizers." *Slate* (17 May 2005). <http://www.slate.com> .
- Hart, Albert Bushnell. "Imagination in History." Annual address of the president of the American Historical Association (1909). *American Historical Review* 15, no. 2 (January 1910), pp. 227–51.
- Hexter, J. H. "Carl Becker, Professor Novick, and Me; or, Cheer Up, Professor N.!" *American Historical Review*, Vol. 96, No. 3 (June 1991), pp. 675-682. University of Chicago Press on behalf of the American Historical Association.
- Himmelfarb, Gertrude. *The New History and the Old: Critical Essays and Reappraisals*. Revised edition. Cambridge: Belknap, 1987, 2004.
- Horowitz, David. *The Professors: the 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America*. Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2006.
- Iggers, Georg. *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1997.
- Iggers, Georg G. "The Image of Ranke in American and German Historical Thought." *History and Theory*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1962), pp. 17-40.
- Jorgensen, C. Gregg. *John Dewey and the Dawn of Social Studies: Unraveling Conflicting Interpretations of the 1916 Report*. Charlotte, North Carolina: Information Age Publishing, 2012.
- Joyce, Davis D. *Howard Zinn: A Radical American Vision*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2003.
- Kammen, Michael. "How the Other Half Lived." Review of *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn. *Washington Post* (23 March 1980), p. BW7.
- Kammen, Michael. "The Insubordinate Historian: The Life and Legacy of Howard Zinn." Review of *Howard Zinn: A Life on the Left* by Martin Duberman, *Los Angeles Review of Books* (29 Nov. 2012). <http://lareviewofbooks.org/review/the-insubordinate-historian-the-life-and-legacy-of-howard-zinn#> .
- Kazin, Michael. "Howard Zinn's History Lessons." *Dissent* (Spring 2004), pp. 81-5. <http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/howard-zinns-history-lessons> .
- Kazin, Michael. Review of *Declarations of Independence: Cross-Examining American Ideology* by Howard Zinn. *Journal of American History*, Vol. 78, No. 3 (Dec. 1991), pp. 1034-35.

- Lemisch, Jesse. "2.5 Cheers for Bridging the Gap between Activism and the Academy; Or, Stay and Fight." *Radical History Review* 85 (Winter 2003), pp. 239–48.
- Lemisch, Jesse. *On Active Service in War and Peace: Politics and Ideology in the American Historical Profession*. Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1975.
- Lynd, Robert S. *Knowledge for What? The Place of Social Science in American Culture*. New York: Grove Press, 1964.
- Lynd, Staughton. *Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968, 1982.
- Lynd, Staughton. "Reflections on Radical History." *Radical History Review* 79 (Winter 2001), pp. 104-7.
- Lynd, Staughton and Andrej Grubacic. *Wobblies and Zapatistas: Conversations on Anarchism, Marxism and Radical History*. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2008.
- McLellan, David, ed. *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.
- Miller, Catherine. "Panel discusses popular history." *The Observer* (03 Dec. 2008).
- Neuchterlein, James. "Radical Historians." *The History Teacher*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Nov. 1981), pp. 25-42. Society for History Education.
- Novick, Peter. *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- O'Brien, Jim. "'Be Realistic, Demand the Impossible': Staughton Lynd, Jesse Lemisch, and a Committed History." *Radical History Review* 82 (Winter 2002), pp. 65-90.
- Opler, Daniel. Review of *Howard Zinn: A Radical American Vision* by Davis D. Joyce. *Cercles: Revue pluridisciplinaire du monde Anglophone* (2004). <http://www.cercles.com/review/r18/joyce.htm> .
- Palmer, Bryan D. *The Making of E.P. Thompson: Marxism, Humanism, and History*. Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1981.
- Perry, Matt. *Marxism and History*. London: Palgrave, St. Martin's Press, 2002.
- Radosh, Ron. "America the Awful—Howard Zinn's History." *Minding the Campus: Reforming Our Universities* (28 January 2010), Center for the American University at the Manhattan Institute. http://www.mindingthecampus.com/2010/01/america_the_awfulhoward_zinns/

- Rigby, S. H. *Marxism and History: A critical introduction*, 2nd edition. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998.
- Robinson, James Harvey. *The New History*. New York: Macmillan, 1912.
- Schonberger, Howard. "Purposes and Ends in History: Presentism and the New Left." *The History Teacher*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (May 1974), pp. 448-458.
- Schweikart, Larry. *48 Liberal Lies About American History (That You Probably Learned in School)*. USA: Sentinel, 2009.
- Schweikart, Larry and Michael Allen. *A Patriot's History of the United States*. USA: Sentinel, 2007.
- Smith, Charlotte Watkins. *Carl Becker: On History and the Climate of Opinion*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1956.
- Smith, Theodore Clarke. "The Writing of American History in America, from 1884 to 1934." *American Historical Review*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Apr., 1935), pp. 439-449. Oxford University Press.
- Southgate, Beverley. *What is History For?* New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Tosh, John. *Historians on History*, 2nd edition. New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Tosh, John. *The Pursuit of History*, 5th edition. Harlow, England: Longman, 1984.
- Wood, Ellen Meiksins. "Back to Marx." *Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine* 49, no. 2 (June 1997), pp. 1-9.
- Woolf, Daniel R. and Andrew Feldherr, Grant Hardy, Eds. *The Oxford History of Historical Writing: Volume 4: 1800-1945*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Wright, Donald. "Howard Zinn, The People's Historian." *Labour/Le Travail* 73 (Spring 2014), 265-277.
- Wright, Donald. *The Professionalization of History in English Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005.
- Zinn, Howard. *A People's History of the United States: 1492 - Present*. New York: Perennial Classics, HarperCollins, 2003.
- Zinn, Howard. *A Power Governments Cannot Suppress*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2007.

- Zinn, Howard. *Declarations of Independence: Cross-examining American Ideology*. New York: HarperCollins, 1990.
- Zinn, Howard. *Failure to Quit: Reflections of an Optimistic Historian*. Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1993.
- Zinn, Howard. *Howard Zinn Speaks: Collected Speeches 1963-2009*. Edited by Anthony Arnove. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012.
- Zinn, Howard, ed. *New Deal Thought*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966.
- Zinn, Howard. *The Historic Unfulfilled Promise*. San Francisco: City Lights, 2012.
- Zinn, Howard. *The Indispensable Zinn*. Ed. Timothy Patrick McCarthy. New York: New Press, 2012.
- Zinn, Howard. *The Politics of History*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1970.
- Zinn, Howard. *The Zinn Reader: Writings on Disobedience and Democracy*, 2nd edition. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2009.
- Zinn, Howard. *Three Plays: The Political Theater of Howard Zinn*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2010.
- Zinn, Howard. *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train: A Personal History of Our Times*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.
- Zinn, Howard and Donaldo Macedo. *Howard Zinn on Democratic Education*. Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2005.
- Zinn, Howard. *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*, 2nd edition. Boston: Beacon Press, 1965.
- Zinn, Howard. *The Future of History: Interviews with David Barsamian*. Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1999.
- Zinn, Howard. *The Southern Mystique*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964.