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Know Your Zinn: Howard Zinn as a People's Public Intellectual

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INTRODUCTION

In October 2011, I visited Zuccotti Park in New York City determined to find a clearer understanding of the Occupy Wall Street Movement (OWS) and to directly experience its many diverse voices. The park felt overwhelming in its striking display of defiance with people crowded around tents and tables, chanting. Beginning on September 17th, 2011, in the hopes of replicating the Arab Spring protests, the Occupy Movement descended on Zuccotti Park to raise awareness and gain momentum against social inequality, "corporate greed," and the corrupt banks and powerful organizations.[1] Their slogan, "We are the 99%", calls for solidarity among those outside of the 1% of privilege, empowering individuals to fight for social change.[2] The Occupy Movement has a presence in 100 cities in the United States and even more around the globe. On the "Principles of Solidarity" page published on the New York General Assembly website, supporters of OWS seek to "[empower] one another against all forms of oppression," "[recognize] individuals' inherent privilege and the influence it has on all interactions," and assert the "belief that education is a human right," among other fundamental tenets.[3] In assembling nonviolently to

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[1] "Occupy Movement (Occupy Wall Street)," *The New York Times: Times Topics*, April 2, 2012, http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/o/occupy_wall_street/index.html?s=newest&.
[2] "Occupy Wall Street," *Occupy Wall Street*, n.d., http://occupywallst.org/.
[3] "Principles of Solidarity," *Occupy Wall Street: New York City General Assembly*, n.d., http://www.nycga.net/resources/principles-of-solidarity/.

exercise the "spirit of direct democracy," OWS spreads awareness of political and social injustice, invigorating people to demand the enforcement of true democratic values. This relatively small individual act has generated radical change by unveiling the world's unjust economic reality.

At Zuccotti Park, I saw a sign that implored: "Read Your Zinn," and I froze for a moment, caught off guard by seeing Zinn's name in a context outside of my recent research for this project. [4] On the opposite side of the park, next to the meditation circle and amidst the drum tableau, a girl with red hair shrouded in a grey hood stood with a sign and a worn paperback book. On the cover it read, *A People's History of the United States,* by Howard Zinn. The girl held it high in her right hand for all to see. I remembered being introduced to the text in my junior year of high school, the title staying in my memory ever since. Around her, observers stopped to snap a photo of the unconventional tableau as if viewing an impressive monument or piece of art. Her stillness caught my eye: She did not wave, yell, or hold a poster bearing the "99%" slogan. Both individuals used Zinn to represent the voice and message of the movement, silently urging others to read his words and to use his history to comprehend the current moment.

Eager to understand these connections, I sought out the red-headed girl as she broke from the tableau and wandered through the crowded park. I asked

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[4] Go to this link to see a photo of the man with the sign: http://richnacin.tumblr.com/post/11851808799/read-your-zinn-on-flickr-day-36-oct-22nd-2011

her why she identified with Zinn's book, and how she believed it was relevant to the protests in Zuccotti Park. Fey explained that she had stumbled upon *A People's History* first in high school and then earlier that day in the OWS communal library. Inspired by his progressive analysis of history, she chose to hold the text up as a symbol of protest. She believed the text uncovered a legacy of activism in our nation's history and gave voice to the traditionally underrepresented in the dominant U.S. history narrative. Fey held Zinn's book because she felt that it represented the historic struggle of the 99% who do not hold the majority of our nation's wealth and suffer under unfair policies. She called for transparency and an acknowledgement from those in power about the economic, political and social inequality in America. Fey believed Zinn's narrative empowered those who suffered as a result of economic inequality and demonstrated that uprisings like Occupy Wall Street represented another attempt in America's history to advocate for justice, equality, and democracy.

My experience at OWS elucidated the value and relevancy of Howard Zinn's writings as a public intellectual to social movements of today. Zinn's emphasis on the historical moments when people transformed their ideas into nonviolent, purposeful, and impassioned action lives on. I saw how OWS as an act of rebellion and civil disobedience replicated much of what Zinn practiced and described during the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the American War in Vietnam. His texts argued for the upholding of individuals' freedoms, the critical observation of government action, and history's role in interpreting

current events. In many ways, Zinn wrote to defend events like OWS where the public asserted agency in defiance of large corporations or government. To encourage such movements, Zinn called out against notions of "objectivity" and "disinterested scholarship" in favor of writing to motivate the public to engage in activism and to organize a unified social movement. Zinn wanted to reach beyond a strictly academic career and intellectually engage with the "urgent problems of our time."[5] His life and writings as a public intellectual have empowered movements such as OWS to question hegemonic ideas of power and to fight for social change and democracy.

Public intellectuals in America must, like Howard Zinn, harness their own voices to question hegemonic discourses and ameliorate the nation's democratic practices. Their authority is accompanied by a responsibility to influence how the public understands important political and social issues. Deep critical thought should precede the intellectual defense or criticism of an idea. The efficacy of an intellectual relies on his or her ability to impact the public through courageous analytical discourse. Remaining unbiased and objective stifles the possibility of change against the status quo. The position of the public intellectual wavers between instability and permanence because of his or her responsibility to speak against those institutions that might ordinarily provide him or her with job security. Public intellectuals stand by this sacrifice and aim above all to articulate an idea, message, or opinion with

[5] Howard Zinn, "The Uses of Scholarship," in *Howard Zinn on History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2011), 69–80.

those who do not have the ability to speak out publicly in mind. By giving a voice to the voiceless and forcing the powerful to take notice, public intellectuals speak according to universal human values of freedom and justice for all individuals. In circumstances where the U.S. fails to meet this commitment, public intellectuals speak widely to change the conversation and fight the opposing force with a methodology of justice. Unmoved by the popular rhetoric of the powerful, public intellectuals speak not to gain popularity, but to contribute to the endless fight to lessen the disparity between the powerful and the powerless.

Howard Zinn not only upholds these values of a progressive public intellectual in his writings and teachings, but also goes beyond academia and scholarship to implement them through social activism. Two years after his death, evidence of Zinn's importance and relevance to current social and political issues such as OWS reaffirms my belief in Zinn's impact as a public intellectual. Zinn's most famous text, *A People's History of the United States,* displays his unique intention as a public historian to give voice to the voiceless in American history and to encourage his readers to follow their lead in challenging the status quo. The book's presence at OWS shows the continuing relevance of his ideology to groups, organizations, and individuals unwilling to accept economic and social injustices and eager to fight for change. Zinn strongly believed in public activism and accepted his role as a public intellectual who acted as an advocate for the people:

> Note how often in this century we have been *surprised*. By the sudden emergence of a people's movement, the sudden overthrow of tyranny, the sudden coming to life of a flame we thought extinguished. We are surprised because we have not taken notice of the quiet simmerings of indignation, of the first faint sounds of protest, of the scattered signs of resistance that, in the midst of our despair, portend the excitement of change. The isolated acts begin to join, the individual thrusts blend into organized actions, and one day, often when the situation seems most hopeless, there bursts onto the scene a movement.[6]

Two years after his death, the "simmerings" of our current frustrations and hope amidst utter hopelessness for change have truly burst into a movement. This flame of challenging power persists and continues to spread as people become increasingly aware of the unequal distribution of wealth and political power in the United States. In such times, the public seeks guidance from intellectuals like Zinn, who expose injustices and contradictions from seemingly opaque institutions, but also imbue readers and fellow activists with optimism and hope. All of Zinn's work strives to challenge ultimate power against the many silent voices in the history and current political climate of

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[6] Howard Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train: A Personal History of Our Times* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 9.

America. Through his advocacy of history told through the eyes of the misrepresented millions, Zinn provides a voice for those who have been silenced despite their audible growl.

Zinn 's work contributes to a long legacy of public intellectuals who have written and acted on behalf of the public during times of political and social unrest. However, the appropriate role of the public intellectual in current society generates debate between scholars about their prevalence, effectiveness, and ultimate purpose. Scholars struggle to agree on a standardized definition of the role of the public intellectual and lament their waning influence on the American public. Many scholars assert that the university isolated public intellectuals from society and encouraged the formation of small academic niches dependent on a complex specialized language. Some see the popularizing of public intellectuals' academic work as a way to revive their existence while others view activism in the public community as the most effective method of outreach. Still others look to the classroom as the paramount arena for public intellectual work and see the need to shape the political attitudes and views of students as a way of ensuring future activism. Zinn's life and work influenced his activist approach to the role of the public intellectual beyond the university. His legacy lives on through his writing and particular approach which continues to shape concerned and informed citizens.

Background: Critiques of the Public Intellectual

Prior to analyzing Howard Zinn's influence as a public intellectual, it is important to investigate critiques of the university's role in limiting the public intellectual voice. The racism, classism and sexism embedded in the fabric of American ideology, along with a lack of effective education for low-income and under privileged students, demand a critical analysis of political and cultural institutions. The United States needs the courage, judgment, and problem solving capabilities of public intellectuals to look broadly at patterns of discrimination and historical solutions. Scholars disagree about the decline of the public intellectual and intellectuals' current ability to remain critically outspoken in the face of political and social inequalities in the United States. In his 1987 book, *The Last Intellectuals,* Russell Jacoby suggests that the university is responsible for the decreasing numbers of public intellectuals today. This decrease, he believes, has led to a less intellectually courageous and more academically cautious generation which seeks security and avoids activities that might bring disapproval or prove unpopular. Scholars believe that this move to the comforts of the university conditions public intellectuals to invest in specialized fields rather than prioritize general knowledge on matters of public concern.

Todd Gitlin, in his article "The Necessity of Public Intellectuals" (2006) describes the decline of "broad-gauged social thought and clear, generally

accessible writing" on the part of the public intellectual.[7] First suggested by Jacoby and supported and expounded on by other scholars such as Richard Posner, Edward Said, Amitai Etzioni, Alan Wolfe and Gitlin, the notion of the retreating public intellectual endures. These scholars idealize a glorified past when intellectuals possessed broad knowledge of literary, social and political issues and theorized extensively about ideas that applied to the general public. Many studied outside of one particular specialization and looked critically at mass society, offering solutions to the breaches of democracy and freedom. Jacoby claims that in the 1930s and '40s, public intellectuals sought the benefits of an academic lifestyle within the ivory tower and fled their independent posts for security. They neglected to leave a lasting legacy and as a result, the new public intellectuals disregard a large public audience outside of their own personal academic niche. Public intellectuals are almost all professors and Jacoby writes that, "Campuses are their homes; colleagues their audience" resulting in an isolation from the needs of the troubled society. "Their jobs, advancement, and salaries depend on the evaluation of specialists," which rewards narrow academic focuses and technical language.[8] Jacoby argues that intellectuals have become preoccupied with the demands of the university, working to impress colleagues and fit in with the academic status quo. Public intellectuals' resulting specialization of knowledge in modern universities

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[7] Todd Gitlin, "The Necessity of Public Intellectuals," *Raritan* 26, no. 1 (Summer 2006): 123.
[8] Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 6.

today has destroyed a larger concern for issues of social and public concern. Gitlin's assertion that public intellectuals support "standing paradigms as long as possible until new ones erupt and old ones…collapse," suggests that they are failing to contentiously and actively question the agendas of those in power.[9] It implies that they wilt from the role of insurgent since it might risk upsetting the authority that houses them.

Scholars argue that public intellectuals should critique subjects of social and political relevance and speak in language discernible by more than a coterie of fellow academics and the highly educated individual citizens. American jurist and economist, Richard Posner argues in his book, *Public Intellectuals: A Study in Decline,* that because of increased specialization, public intellectuals lack the capability to fulfill their original purpose. He cites the decline of "a common intellectual culture" replaced by inaccessible scholarship and irrelevant political and social discourse.[10] Dubbing intellectuals' "unworldly" and "not tuned to political reality," Posner laments public intellectuals' lack of relevancy.[11] Jacoby has written extensively about the effects of academic "insular societies" enriched by conferences and universities, which negate the public intellectuals' need to write in "a public prose." These societies are formed and reinforced throughout university life: "Gathering in annual conferences to compare notes, [public intellectuals] constitute their own

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[9] Gitlin, "The Necessity of Public Intellectuals," 123.
[10] Richard A. Posner, *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 55.
[11] Ibid., 73.

universe."[12] Interacting exclusively with colleagues who value technical language has rendered universal prose obsolete within public intellectuals' "universes." Scholars find these "insular" "universes" problematic for the public intellectual who no longer prioritizes communicating for broad audiences. As Gitlin adds, "clarity perished when academics published" due to the use of academic jargon that carefully stays in line with uncontroversial positions.[13]

This conceptualization of the university as the main downfall of the current public intellectual offers a limited justification of a complex phenomenon. While the university may be the primary home for public intellectuals of today, we must also acknowledge those who continue to prioritize society's needs over academic specialization from their posts in the ivory tower. Several public intellectual professors who teach in the University also frequently speak out and critically address controversial topics and debates. Speaking and writing through venues outside of their academic community, academic public intellectuals such as Cornel West, Michael Eric Dyson, Noam Chomsky, and Edward Said engage outside of their specializations and critique issues of larger social significance. For example, West spoke publicly about Occupy Wall Street in Boston, Los Angeles, Washington D.C., and New York. Chomsky wrote a letter in support of the insurgent anti-wall street movement. Dyson, professor of sociology at Georgetown University, spoke recently on CNN about the HB 2281 ban on

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[12] Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals*, 7.
[13] Gitlin, "The Necessity of Public Intellectuals," 123.

ethnic studies in Arizona and engaged in a debate with Tom Horne, Arizona's superintendent of public instruction, about the importance of this curriculum to increase understanding about America's complicated racial past.

Aware of the isolating effect of purely academic writing, some public intellectuals have begun to popularize their work in order to reach a wider audience. Michael Bérubé, scholar and professor at Pennsylvania State University, describes the importance of popularizing the work of intellectuals: "[T]he future of our ability to produce new knowledges for and about ordinary people—and the availability of education *to* ordinary people—may well depend on how effective we can…make our work intelligible to nonacademics."[14] If a public intellectual's work aims to address the inequality with the underrepresented in mind, the material must be accessible to that population. By increasing the scope of the intellectuals' universe, relevant social and political critique will expand beyond the walls of the university and potentially create greater social change. Only then, it seems, will effective change spark at the source where injustice thrives. Jacoby and Posner call for public intellectuals to translate their writing from the language of their specialized academic community to that of the general public. Posner calls the academic community, their "in-group" and argues that public intellectuals could at one point write, "accessibl[y] to a general audience, [but] not strike the author's

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[14] Michael Bérubé, *Public Access : Literary Theory and American Cultural Politics* (London; New York: Verso, 1994), 179.

peers as lacking in rigor."[15] Jacoby also laments current intellectuals' inability to "master a public prose" which produces no large public impact.[16] Posner believes that a change has occurred between past and present intellectuals such that current public intellectuals are not necessarily expected to address those outside of their "in-group." Posner adds that in order to reach a larger audience, "they must make an extra effort to do so." The extra effort to invite non-academics into their audience involves rewriting their work into unspecialized terms instead of merely communicating on general topics of public concern.

Scholars such as Ellen Cushman, associate professor of writing, rhetoric and American culture at Michigan State University, believe that this act of popularizing literature aids public involvement, but limits exposure to the well-educated public. In her essay, "The Public Intellectual, Service Learning, and Activist Research" (1999) Cushman calls on public intellectuals to reach outside of their group and employ methods that go beyond popularizing and, instead, actively engage groups outside of the intellectual elite. She argues that while popularizing may broaden the audience of highly educated readers of the *New Yorker* or *Academe*, "publishing to a greater number of elite audiences works more to bolster our own positions in academe than it does to widen the scope of our civic duties as intellectuals."[17] Cushman reveals the unfortunate effect of many popularizing efforts within academia. By slightly widening the scope of

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[15] Posner, *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline*, 53.
[16] Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals*, 17.
[17] Ellen Cushman, "The Public Intellectual, Service Learning, and Activist Research," *College English* 61, no. 3 (1999): 330.

their public voice, public intellectuals gain prestige amongst the educationally privileged. At the same time, their ideas remain distant from the portion of the public that lacks access to these venues. People disadvantaged by social inequality and without access to higher education likely remain outside of the communities where students learn from public intellectuals. Yet, the civic duty of intellectuals rests largely on voicing issues of inequality, which many non-college graduates and minority populations experience everyday. This disconnection between the intention behind public intellectual work and the effect with regards to unjustly treated peoples must be reconciled. In order for their work to remain relevant and pertinent to the discussion of political and social issues, public intellectuals must speak to issues that concern the public like educational inequality, racism, poverty and other forms of oppression.

Cushman wants public intellectuals to use a methodology of service learning and activism dedicated to voicing issues of inequality and producing tangible social change. She suggests that this methodology enables the public intellectual to effectively influence those outside of the university. She states, "When public intellectuals not only reach outside the university, but actually *interact* with the public beyond its walls, they overcome the ivory tower isolation that marks so much current intellectual work. They create knowledge with those whom knowledge serves."[18] She explains that this interaction combined with research and teaching cultivates increased access to and

[18] Ibid.

understanding of challenging issues and possible solutions. By learning from the outside and engaging in issues of social justice intellectuals improve the efficacy of knowledge they attempt to impart. After intellectuals reflect on these experiences and think critically about the issues at hand, they must courageously take a stand and engage with the public. Renowned critic, author and founding voice of postcolonial theory Edward Said articulated the unique and challenging role of the public intellectual in his 1993 Reith Lectures, *Representations of the Intellectual*. Said suggests that the public intellectual must be willing to challenge socially and politically powerful institutions with the aim of supporting the underserved and under-represented. The role asks public intellectuals to "raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them)." Said's belief in the questioning, rather than producing of orthodoxy and dogma by the public intellectual is key to encouraging transparency within opaque institutions and identifying problems. Any allegiances to corporations based on an unwillingness to provoke confrontation will hinder the public intellectual. By staying committed to these goals, the public intellectual remains free to confront all ideas important to the public, rather than living in isolation and influenced by problematic power. The public intellectual's content should "represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug."[19] Public

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[19] Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 11.

intellectuals should prioritize their awareness of these particular types of issues and suggest constructive and accessible methods for improving them.

While these individuals primarily view their published work as the venue for making a public impact, students within the classroom need to be seen as future citizens. Public intellectuals must not view their own classrooms as inhospitable to their social and political activism. While simultaneously addressing the larger public, intellectuals in the university should expose their own students to citizen building discourses to prepare them for future political engagement. Without broad critical analysis of social problems and historical solutions, students lack the inspiration and the tools to uphold democratic values. Students will not hold governments accountable for injustices or have the tools to uphold democratic values. Public intellectuals must uphold the learning of a general and interdisciplinary education where history, politics, and culture intertwine to complicate specialized areas of thought. If public intellectuals fail to promote critical pedagogical practices, future generations of public intellectuals, activists, and leaders will not emerge.

The potential to shape the political views of students inspires other scholars to embrace teaching as a form of activism. Henry A. Giroux, professor and leading proponent of the integration of Cultural Studies in education, argues for the public intellectual's voice in defense of higher education and its place in a vibrant democracy. Far from deeming universities the unavoidable graveyard of intellectual endeavor and radical thought, Giroux argues that

public intellectuals and the universities they inhabit should more effectively incorporate matters of public concern to harness students' critical thinking. In his article, "Higher Education Under Siege: Implications for Public Intellectuals," (2006) Giroux believes that the public intellectual should engage students in the "democratic public sphere," and "provide students with modes of individual and social agency that enable them to be both engaged citizens and active participants in the struggle for global democracy."[20] Public intellectual knowledge gained by experience and critical thought should incorporate pedagogical practices where students consider the implications of governmental and social institutions and events.

Giroux's text suggests that helping students to develop their own voices regarding issues of broad public concern prepares them to critically examine reality and to take action to improve it. His social justice approach asks public intellectuals to incorporate their civic duty fully into the fabric of their pedagogy: "Pedagogy…shift[s] how students think about the issues affecting their lives and the world at large, potentially energizing them to seize such moments as possibilities for acting on the world and for engaging it as a matter of politics, power, and social justice."[21] Without the opportunity for reflection, dialogue, and debate on matters of public concern, students' opportunities for activism will go unaddressed. By providing students with an awareness of

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[20] Henry A. Giroux, "Higher Education Under Siege: Implications for Public Intellectuals," *Thought & Action* (2006): 63.
[21] Ibid.

historical injustices and current manifestations of these events, the possibility of empowerment and social change arises.

Howard Zinn's Construction of the Public Intellectual

These critiques offer valuable solutions for improving the public intellectual's social and political discourse. Whether they critique the university or see it as a place for activism, scholars' engagement with the role of the public intellectual remains rooted in the institutions of higher education. Most scholars do not emphasize the importance of a politically active life outside of the university or the significance of critical pedagogical practice by public intellectuals below the collegiate level. Howard Zinn on the other hand, identified the need to influence the next generation of activists by crafting a historical narrative that spoke to the many young, underserved, and disenfranchised students attending countless history classes in high schools across the country. Zinn's life redefined the public intellectuals' role by constructing an effective and accessible socially and politically conscious pedagogical model and by demonstrating intellectual activism's significant role outside of the classroom.

A trained historian, Zinn helped popularize a bottom up approach to history by drawing attention to the agency and voices of minority peoples' in American history. His outspoken activism in support of the voiceless exemplifies his construction of the public intellectual role. Using his knowledge

of American history in particular, Zinn evaluated and analyzed current social and political events, such as racial segregation and the war in Vietnam through this lens. Author and editor of more than 50 publications, including *A People's History of the United States* (1980), and a professor at Spelman College and Boston University, Howard Zinn spoke and wrote to encourage the public to think critically about systems of power and the public's ability to challenge existing injustices. Regarded as a public intellectual by scholars such as Richard Posner, Henry A. Giroux, Cornel West and more, Zinn engaged in critical thinking within his lectures and on the streets, where his speeches and activism reinforced his teaching.

While beginning his career as an academic at Spelman College in 1956, Zinn inspired his students to question America's upholding of democratic values in courses on American History and Constitutional Law. Zinn's students looked critically at systems of power and assessed the juxtaposition of democratic freedoms with the reality of racial injustice. At Spelman, a traditionally black college for women, Zinn supported his students by encouraging them to challenge the authority of the law and administration through acts of protest. They organized sit-ins and demonstrated against segregation and unequal treatment. Zinn continued to support his students through teachings and organization despite growing criticism from the college administration. His creative effort organizing sit-ins and speaking at dynamic protests was matched by his unfailing commitment to social justice and his

students. He continued to lead with creativity and commitment through 1963 when he was fired by Spelman College because of the democratic upheaval caused by his teachings.

Zinn's political activism expanded as he continued his teaching of civil liberties at Boston University beginning from 1964 until his retirement in 1988. During this time, Zinn participated in and continued to write about the civil rights movement, protests against the American War in Vietnam and injustices within his own university. Heralded as an intellectual because of his books, *The Southern Mystique* (1964) and *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (1964) and articles written for *The Nation* and *Harper* magazines, Zinn's name became increasingly familiar in the public realm. He writes, "it seemed to me that people were grateful when someone voiced openly what they were thinking and feeling but had no way of expressing."[22] Zinn did not seek the approval of his colleagues or academia, but spoke and acted to expose issues of public injustice. John Silber, president of Boston University while Zinn was a professor, placed him on a "top-ten list of blacklisted academics at BU" because of his outspoken participation in demonstrations against the war and unfair treatment of him and his colleagues.[23] Zinn spoke to uplift, inspire and question. He discovered that young peoples' reception of his speeches, "confirmed what[he] learned

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[22] Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*, 120.
[23] Henry A Giroux, "Howard Zinn: A Public Intellectual Who Mattered," *Fast Capitalism*, no. 7.1 (2010).

from [his] Spelman years, that education becomes most rich and alive when it confronts the reality of moral conflict in the world."[24]

Zinn's historical knowledge of the horrors, unnecessary death and futility of war urged him to combine his intellectual work and public activism by participating in anti-war protests during the 1960s. After calling for removal of U.S. military forces in *Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal* (1967) Zinn's popularity grew as a result of his many speeches and debates at schools across the country. To precipitate social change in the face of government opposition, Zinn testified in court trials in defense of anti-war protestors. The majority of these cases dealt with acts of civil disobedience, which Zinn defined as "moving protest from words to action" by, for example, "violating laws of trespassing, destroying government property, breaking and entering into offices" all in protest to the war in Vietnam. His role as an "expert witness" enabled him to expound upon the value of civil disobedience to hold governments responsible for their claims of freedom and democracy. Importantly, Zinn served as an "expert witness" for the case of the Pentagon Papers in which he related the history of the U.S. in Vietnam from WWII to 1963.[25] He also demonstrated commitment to civil disobedience by spending time in jail for peaceful protest and frequently speaking and acting out against public injustice.

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[24] Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*, 120.
[25] Ibid., 160.

Outline of Part I and II

I begin the thesis by exploring the events of Zinn's early life, teaching career, and ongoing activism that influenced his conception of a public intellectual in American society. I seek to understand how Zinn's experiences growing up in poverty, serving as a soldier in the second World War, and training as a historian led him to publish and speak out against the racial climate of the South, the unnecessary violence of the American War in Vietnam, and to protest against a hostile administration at Boston University. I investigate Zinn's own critique of scholars whose work he believed lack social relevancy and his call for knowledge production focused on changing the status quo. Ultimately, Part I demonstrates Zinn's purpose in writing *A People's History of the United States.* Zinn's activism outside of the classroom, his scholarly engagement with issues of general social and political concern, and the accessibility of his language and ideas encouraged his students and the public to question society's upholding of democratic values.

In Part II, I uncover Zinn's text, *A People's History of the United States* as an ongoing legacy of his impact as a public intellectual. I link his opinions of historical writing to his emphasis on people's agency in the face of inequality. In writing a revisionist version of U.S. History, Zinn not only changed the conversation surrounding the nation's glorified past, but also provided a valuable and accessible resource for students. While many critiques of public

intellectual professors focus on needed improvements within higher education, the notion of impacting younger students fails to be discussed. Taught across the country for students at the high school and college level, *A People's History* instills the notion of a complicated history from the perspective of those who are not fully represented in most "master narratives" of American history.

In his writing, public speaking and teaching, Zinn asked his audience to question the practices of social institutions in power and approach issues of democracy, war, and education with a critical lens. In his many texts and during his influential career as a professor, Zinn upheld the responsibility of engaging future generations as active citizens invested in true democracy. By testing the boundaries of civic life in acts of civil disobedience and protest against issues such as segregation and the American war in Vietnam, Zinn taught his students by example. His creative drive and commitment to speaking to the general public led him to experiment with plays, a graphic novel, and texts for teachers on how to approach issues of American history and democracy. Giroux, also a former colleague of Zinn at Boston University, describes his charismatic demeanor: "His lack of rigidity coupled with his warmness and humor often threw people off…Howard provided a model of what it meant to be an engaged scholar who was deeply committed to sustaining public values and a civil life in ways that linked theory, history, and politics to the everyday needs and language that informed everyday life."[26] This

[26] Giroux, "Howard Zinn."

thesis will discuss the life and work of Howard Zinn as a model of the public intellectual role that transcends the limits of the university. Zinn applied scholarly knowledge of history to the development of social reform based activism. In doing so, Zinn's legacy continues to engage public citizens invested in a democratic society.

PART I: ACTIVIST AND SCHOLAR

Howard Zinn's experiences growing up in poverty and as a child of immigrant parents profoundly shaped his activism and career as a public intellectual. Born August 24, 1922, Zinn witnessed New York City's Harlem Renaissance, its burgeoning immigrant culture, and the Great Depression. The disparity of wealth and inherited cultural capital that shaped Zinn's early life especially influenced his analysis of America's social, political, and economic issues. Part II will focus on an examination of Zinn's early life, his teaching and activism in the South, the movement against the American War in Vietnam, and his career at Boston University and publishing of *A People's History of the United States*. Zinn emerges as an alternative image of a public intellectual who strove to inspire as well as educate Americans inside and outside of the university. Zinn's activism and his own reflections of the time transcends the academic realm of public intellectual discourse and engenders future activist responses to issues of wide social and political concern.

Early Life, War, and Education (1922-1956)

> "The events of my life, growing up poor, working in a shipyard, being in a war, had nurtured an indignation against the bullies of the world, those who used wealth or military might or social status to keep others down."[27]

Growing up in Brooklyn's tenement housing, Zinn observed that despite his parents' struggle and hard work, the American Dream of wealth and justice for all, remained elusive. The reality of social inequality resonated with Zinn and inspired him to analyze the role class conflict has played in American history. As a Jewish immigrant, Zinn's father Eddie came to New York prior to World War I and worked in several factories. Eddie struggled to support his family and only earned meager wages despite all his efforts. Eager to leave the factories, Eddie transitioned to waiting tables and other odd jobs, often struggling to pay the bills for his family of six. Zinn remembers moving frequently from one tenement to another claiming, "we moved often, a step ahead of eviction" and at times living without electricity and central heating.[28] Despite the lack of many household amenities growing up, Zinn credits the consistent supply of food to his mother, Jenny, as well as to his father. Jenny, a Russian immigrant, was born to a Jewish family and completed school through seventh grade (compared with Eddie's fourth grade education). Zinn explains,

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[27] Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*, 21.
[28] Ibid., 167.

"She was the brains of the family. And the strength of the family."[29] While Eddie steadfastly worked at his various jobs, Jenny helped her family by finding and cooking food, caring for her sons and organizing the family finances. Any amount of money came as a direct result of hard work. Zinn learned never to take household amenities, like electricity or objects such as books for granted.

Despite growing up poverty, Zinn did not believe in the Horatio Alger story which promised riches in return for hard work. His early jobs as a golf caddy, dry cleaning delivery employee, and part-time waiter with his father made him very aware of the enormous social disparities in the United States. This dramatic contrast in wealth and social status that he experienced made him doubt the simplistic fantasies of the Horatio Alger story. He watched his father and others work tirelessly only to struggle against poverty and the privilege of others.

Around the age of seventeen, Zinn began to question the connections between socioeconomic inequality and he developed an interest in world politics. The power of fascist governments in Italy and Spain and totalitarianism in Germany to maintain oppressive hierarchies of race and class struck him as unjust. Zinn remembers debating with other young male athletes, some of who were Communists, about the justification of political attacks during the beginning of WWII. Zinn sympathized with these men's antifascist attitudes, their frustration with unfair distribution of wealth, and

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[29] Ibid., 166.

their hunger to learn more about current politics and economics across the globe. These conversations and debates formed a major part of Zinn's democratic and activist ideology. Zinn admired the young Communists' courage in standing up against local police. He respected their resistance against state efforts to criminalize the distribution of Communist literature and to suppress their political discussions. Zinn saw value in nonviolent defiance and he actively engaged their risk taking mentality.

Zinn's first demonstration in 1939, at the age of seventeen left him knocked unconscious by the police, yet awakened a political impulse within him that fueled his future activist fervor. The demonstration focused on what Zinn remembers as "peace and justice and a dozen other causes of the day."[30] Zinn accompanied the young Communists he had befriended to Times Square and before receiving a blow to the head witnessed a multitude of people peacefully protesting and holding hands with signs and banners. When he awoke, the experience had left more than a bruise on his skull. Reflecting on the violent reaction of the police to the peaceful protestors' exercise of free speech, Zinn concluded that "the state and its police were not neutral referees in a society of contending interests."[31] Their abuse of power to defeat a public who questioned the state's laws and motives needed to be exposed. Zinn believed in the power of people to bring attention to the injustices of

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[30] Davis D. Joyce, *Howard Zinn: A Radical American Vision* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2003), 32.
[31] Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*, 172.

government intervention. By questioning the policies and structure of America's powerful institutions through "significant though small event[s]," such as a demonstration or rally, Zinn believed that people could erode old thinking and generate questions of political and social justice among other people.[32] Stimulated by this experience, Zinn turned to Communist literature eager to educate himself about the potential for a more equal and just society.

The success of Communists to organize workers, paired with their intellectual analysis of capitalist exploitation and the ideas of a free society resonated with Zinn. Literature like, *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair and *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck made Zinn think critically about questions of freedom, democracy, poverty and wealth. Seeing communist ideals in fiction allowed Zinn to envision a more effective and just social, political and economic system.

In 1940, Zinn learned first-hand about American industry and labor when he passed a highly competitive civil service exam and began a position in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. For three years, Zinn worked as an apprentice shipfitter building ships using heavy machinery. Despite the difficult conditions, the job gave Zinn a steady paycheck and he enjoyed the camaraderie of working with other shipbuilders dedicated to the war effort. Here, Zinn also formed a strong cohort of fellow young radicals with whom he organized a union in order to help reform unsatisfactory working conditions.

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[32] Ibid., 173.

As his first experience actively engaging in labor movement politics, Zinn and the other leaders sought to "improve working conditions, raise [their] pay, and create a camaraderie during and after working hours."[33] As an officer of the "Apprentice Association," Zinn began his work spearheading small movements for social and political change.

When he left the shipyard, Zinn enlisted in the Air Force, imbued with a sense of justice and pride for the anti-fascist momentum of WWII. Although he was initially rejected, Zinn spoke passionately to the officer who had made the decision and "gave him a speech on how much the war meant to [him]…why [he] wanted to be in the Air Force."[34] So compelling was his declaration that the officer negated his initial decision and inducted Zinn into the Air Force as a bombardier. Zinn's employment with the Air Force lasted from May 1943 to December 1945 and by the time he had arrived in Europe, the bulk of the war had passed. Still, he was zealous in his pursuit of bombing missions and when he was ordered to raid the vacation town of Royan, France in April of 1945, he did not question the necessity or method of destruction. Zinn's fervent belief in the war did not dramatically shift until much later when he began to study the horrendous effects of past wars and questioned the necessity of military action. Zinn later questioned his own bombings in WWII after visiting and reflecting on the lives of Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors and angered by America's involvement in Vietnam. In 1966, he decided to visit Royan to learn more about

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[33] Ibid., 177.
[34] Joyce, *Howard Zinn*, 36.

the consequences of his actions. There, he grasped the magnitude of damage produced by napalm bombs which had never been used before his mission and the needlessness of lost lives, especially a mere three weeks before the war's end. Zinn's realization that "factors of pride, military ambition, glory, honor were powerful motives in producing an unnecessary military operation" later fueled his opposition to war and active support of nonviolence, particularly in the case of the American War in Vietnam.[35]

Under the G.I. Bill of Rights, Zinn attended New York University beginning in 1949 and continued his graduate education at Columbia University, attending N.Y.U. and working as a warehouse loader to support his young family. Zinn organized union actions to improve labor conditions in his job. Understanding the reality and complexity of "the world of unemployment and bad employment" for thirty-three years directly influenced Zinn's class-consciousness as he began to study class conflict in American history. At N.Y.U, Zinn began to take an interest in history and its potential ability to provide meaningful answers to contemporary social, political, and economic quandaries. In an interview with Zinn entitled, "Why Students Should Study History," (1994) he explains that historical research enabled him to, "look for answers to the issues and problems [he] saw in the world about [him]."[36] His world growing up in the New York tenements and his work in the shipyard and

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[35] Howard Zinn, "The Bombing of Royan," in *Howard Zinn on War*, 2nd ed. (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2011), 25.
[36] Barbara Miner, "Why Students Should Study History: An Interview with Howard Zinn," *Rethinking Our Classrooms* 1 (1994): 179–182.

as a bombardier left him with questions about "war and peace, about wealth and poverty, about racial division."

In his graduate studies at Columbia, Zinn analyzed the way the state responded to social protest. He enrolled in the masters program at Columbia and began teaching part-time on other campuses after suffering work related injuries that forced him to abandon factory jobs. While at Columbia, Zinn began to focus his historical research on the influence of powerful institutions on the public. Zinn's M.A. thesis, focused on the Colorado coal strike of 1913-14 known as the Ludlow Massacre and revealed his deepening interest on governments' relationships with social protest. In his essay, "The Ludlow Massacre" which he later published in his 1970 book, *The Politics of History,* Zinn identifies a recurring conflict between government and corporate power and "movements of social protest" in which "progress and the basic retention of power and wealth" are prioritized over human lives.[37] Zinn points to the contemporary use of "subtler methods," than those identified in The Ludlow Massacre, but he underlines the perpetuation of governments' and businesses' destructive motivation to maintain the status quo. Zinn reiterates this notion in his later anti-war work and his texts emphasize the significant motivations of wealth and power used to justify social and political issues.

Zinn went on to earn a doctorate in history at Columbia and through the publishing of his first book *LaGuardia in Congress*, secured his identity as

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[37] Howard Zinn, "The Ludlow Massacre," in *The Politics of History*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 100.

an intellectual within academia. He then obtained teaching positions at Spelman College and later, Boston University. Amidst a new teaching load at Spelman College, two summers on a Ford Foundation grant studying the presentation of history through television documentary, and a family to support, Zinn finished his dissertation in 1958. During the process, Zinn's advisor, William E. Leuchtenburg remembers differing in his political outlook from Zinn, but thought highly enough of Zinn's work to nominate it for the American Historical Association's Beveridge Award competition. The dissertation won Honorable Mention, meaning that the AHA "judges voted it the second best dissertation written in the U.S. that year," said Leuchtenburg.[38] Zinn's Ph.D. dissertation not only fostered his later intellectual framework of radical history and political activism, but was also published by Cornell University Press in 1959. The dissertation centered on Fiorello LaGuardia and tracked the New York politician's congressional career and prominent voice which "bellowed for real action" by bringing to view the "suffering beneath the smugness" of his time.[39] Zinn's intellectual emphasis on the power of political activism by and for underrepresented groups took root in his analysis of LaGuardia's career and continued to grow in scope and rigor as he analyzed other aspects of American history. Published in 1959 under the title, *LaGuardia In Congress,* Zinn's first book and the way in which he chose to present

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[38] Joyce, *Howard Zinn*, 48.
[39] Howard Zinn, "LaGuardia in the Jazz Age," in *The Politics of History*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 103, 117.

LaGuardia's career revealed how he would later center his telling of history on those involved with social and political reform. The *Saturday Review* and the *American Political Science Review* complimented Zinn's meticulous analysis, and described his text as "exceedingly well written," "highly readable" and "well documented."[40] An article written on the American Historical Association's website in honor of Zinn's death wrote that his dissertation had already revealed, "Zinn's intellectual concern for the people without a presence in the traditional history books," a concern that would be mirrored throughout his teaching and scholarship.[41] Zinn's early life and formative educational experiences played an influential role in his emergence as a unique public intellectual that spoke out about class conflict, war, the power of politics, and the many sides of history.

Leaving his formal educational studies behind in New York, Zinn then traveled down to America's South, where an explosion of activism in the beginning of the civil rights movement opened his political and social perspective to questions of race and the role of defiance in social movements.

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[40] Joyce, *Howard Zinn*, 54.
[41] Pillarisetti Sudhir, "AHA Today: Howard Zinn, Paradigmatic People's Historian, Dies at 87," *American Historical Association*, January 28, 2010, http://blog.historians.org/news/973/howard-zinn-paradigmatic-peoples-historian-dies-at-87.

Spelman College and "The Movement" (1956-1963)

> "In Georgia, as all over the South, in the 'quiet' years before the eruption of the sit-ins there were individual acts—obscure, unrecorded, sometimes seemingly futile—which kept the spirit of defiance alive. They were often bitter experiences, but they nurtured the anger that would one day become a great force and change the South forever."[42]

Zinn's seven years teaching at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia not only provided the intellectual foundation for his next two historical books and united his identities as historian, educator, and emerging public intellectual. Zinn, already a "historian by profession," became an "activist by choice" and grew both in intellectual expertise and public recognition as a result of his experience teaching and leading Spelman girls during the American civil rights movement, or "The Movement" as he and many others refer to it.[43] Zinn wrote and spoke publicly about his pride in the transformation of the reputation of the mild-mannered and sweet Spelman girl who traditionally stayed "in her place" into a fearless, active and indignant women, fighting to change the status quo in the Deep South. Leading and guiding such fights, Zinn saw no reason to remain behind the walls of the ivory tower and isolate his students or himself from the explosive reality of the late 1950s and '60s. Instead, Zinn's experiences in the South inspired him to write about and participate in the

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[42] Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*, 25.
[43] Howard Zinn, "Introduction," in *The Zinn Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1997), 15.

social and political issues of his present moment, beginning with "The Movement." With courage and conviction, Zinn encouraged his students to question America's promises of liberty in their own communities.

When Zinn accepted his first official teaching job in 1956 at Spelman College, a school for African American young women, he did not initially intend to inspire radical social change in the community. Reading Sinclair and Steinbeck in his youth and witnessing unfair actions against black people in labor unions and in the Air Force prepared Zinn to view class oppression as inherently intertwined with racial oppression.[44] Upon arriving in Atlanta, Zinn witnessed the effects of the racist and segregated environment surrounding Spelman, something he would soon urge his students to fight against through sit-ins and active protests. In an article entitled "Finishing School for Pickets," which appeared in *The Nation* in August 1960, Zinn described the newfound spirit of activism on the Spelman campus. The "Spelman Girl," who had once been known to embody "all the attributes of the product of a fine finishing school," now wielded picket signs, "took a seat up front" on downtown busses, and sometimes went to jail for her defiant activism.[45] Encouraged by Zinn in and out of the classroom, the Spelman student transformed and expressed their bitter disapproval of segregation.

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[44] Joyce, *Howard Zinn*, 43.
[45] Howard Zinn, "Finishing School for Pickets (1960)," in *Howard Zinn on Race*, 2nd ed. (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2010), 35.

Before the roar of "The Movement," Zinn's early teachings at Spelman College inspired his students to voice their disapproval of Georgia's racial segregation in public acts of protest. Gradually, the careful, conforming and largely silent persona of the girls gave way with each small victory. One event in particular proved to Zinn and all the students within The Atlanta University Center (conglomeration of six independent black colleges) that active resistance could be productive, not futile. In 1959, the Spelman Social Science Club under the advising of Zinn, orchestrated a nonviolent assault on the segregationist policies of the Atlanta library system. Black students challenged the white only policy of Carnegie Library by requesting texts like *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* by John Locke, *On Liberty* by John Stuart Mill, and Tom Paine's *Common Sense.*[46] The librarians turned the students away each time with vague excuses, but the students continued to ask for these texts and others that they hoped would cause a stir around ideas of racial liberty in America. Students from both Spelman and Morehouse College visited Carnegie Library more frequently as days passed to emphasize the importance of their requests. After the increased pressure on libraries within the system and Zinn's publicized efforts to assemble plaintiffs for a lawsuit, the Library Board relented and opted to do away with racial segregation within the entire Atlanta library system. Zinn recounts in his article, "Reflections of a White Professor at Spelman College in the 1950s" (1995), the moment a few days later

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[46] Howard Zinn, "A Quiet Case of Social Change (1959)," in *Howard Zinn on Race*, 2nd ed. (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2010), 25.

when Dr. Irene Jackson, a black professor of French at Spelman was handed a membership card at the Carnegie Library. The librarian's hand "trembled slightly" as she passed over the card and Zinn saw that, "She understood that a bit of history was being made."[47] In Zinn's eyes, this small yet instrumental act of resistance opened the door for a series of protests against laws of racial injustice in the South.

Zinn viewed this small act of resistance and the multitude of others prior to the larger victories of "the Movement" as fundamental to its foundation. Zinn's emphasis on individuals' small actions to take a stand against governmental powers began from these experiences that revealed possibility of actual success. At times, these acts resulted in painful experiences and failed to produce victories like the desegregation of Atlanta's libraries. However, through the connection of each individual act there remained, Zinn believed, a "spirit of defiance" which "nurtured the anger that would one day become a great force and change the South forever."[48]

At Spelman College, Zinn pushed students to question their own reality through the study of history in their classroom as well as in society and in their school community. Zinn's former student, Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund wrote about her experience at Spelman and Zinn's impact on the growth of her independence and agency as a

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[47] Howard Zinn, "Reflections of a White Professor at Spelman College in the 1950s," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 7 (April 1, 1995): 99.
[48] Ibid.

student looking to rebel against the strict limitations of the administration. In her article, "Spelman College: A Safe Haven for a Young Black Woman," (2000) Edelman highlights the teachers and events within her undergraduate career that enabled her to lead a life of activism and leadership. Edelman writes that "Howie" taught the students in a way that inspired them to relate their education to their current political and social reality and to find courage to challenge the authority around them. "Howie…lived what he taught in history class..stressed analysis and not memorization; questioning, discussions, and essays rather than multiple choice."[49] Zinn encouraged students to unpack the messages in what they read in order to "examine and apply the lessons of history in the context of daily political, social, and moral challenges like race discrimination and income inequality."[50] He influenced student protest throughout the larger civil rights movement as well as against the Spelman administration which looked unfavorably upon the rupturing of the status quo. Outside of the classroom, Edelman writes, Zinn "was there when 200 students conducted sit-ins and 77 of us got arrested" and through his support of this experiential learning, "taught us to be neither victims nor passive observers of unjust treatment but active and proud claimants of our American birthright."[51]

As students implemented this type of thinking regarding the policies on their own campus, Zinn continued to support them in the face of growing

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[49] Marian Wright Edelman, "Spelman College: A Safe Haven for a Young Black Woman," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 27 (April 1, 2000): 118.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.

disapproval from the college's President, Albert Manley. Instigated by students who felt that Spelman's overly strict policies were stifling their independence, Zinn's promotion of student voices to the President throughout his seven years, proved threatening to the school's legacy. Even at the beginning of his Spelman career, Zinn wrote several outspoken letters of defense for students who were speaking out for change in Spelman's community in order to foster, "intellectual curiosity and the pursuit of excellence" by reforming the curriculum and system of rules.[52] Zinn's actions to increase faculty and administrative exposure to these student opinions resulted in heavy disagreements. Zinn believed Manley saw him as, "an instigator rather than simply a supporter of the protests."[53] Tension came to a head in 1963 when the Social Science group Zinn advised held a meeting to discuss the topic: "On Liberty at Spelman." More than two hundred students, faculty and a few administrators attended the meeting, in which students spoke openly in protest of the administration's actions of "surveillance, paternalism, [and] authoritarianism."[54] President Manley had not been present at the event and when Zinn suggested during a faculty meeting that they play the recording to understand the students' concerns, Manley refused. In an effort to express to Manley why he believed this recording to be important and to "ease the tension between [them]," Zinn met privately with Manley, but they were unable to

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[52] Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*, 39.
[53] Ibid., 40.
[54] Ibid., 39.

arrive at any kind of agreement.[55] Manley questioned Zinn's priorities as an educator, suggesting that he should be concerned with "other things, students cheating on exams, students stealing in dormitories," but Zinn saw the other student concerns as more important.[56] At the end of the conversation, Zinn noted, "You put your finger on the heart of it when you said you aren't a crusader. Perhaps I am somewhat. But whatever we are, shouldn't we want to turn out students who have something of the crusader in them?"[57] In all of his classes on Western civilization and American history, Zinn strove to uphold the values that he believed defined a liberal arts school. He prioritized "independent thought," "courage in the face of repression," and scrutiny of the administration's practices in upholding these values. Zinn risked his job security because these values were essential to his teaching methods.

Encouraging acts of civil disobedience in response to dissatisfaction outside of the classroom and provoking seemingly oppositional sentiments towards the administration created a risky career and one that distinguished Zinn from the other public intellectuals and academics. Manley did not have a response to Zinn's final question, but in a sense, answered it with a letter sent in June later that year: "The College does not intend to renew your employment at the end of your present term…you are relieved of all duties with the College

[55] Ibid., 40.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., 41.

after June 30, 1963."[58] The decision to fire Zinn, a tenured professor drew outrage from colleagues and students, who wrote to Manley with their complaints. Alice Walker, famous novelist, activist and poet and former student of Zinn's, wrote to Zinn saying, "I've tried to imagine Spelman without you—and I can't at all…Last night I was far too upset to finish my letter."[59] Zinn's experiences at Spelman sparked a debate about the role defiant ideas and actions should play in an academic setting. Zinn's opinion in favor of activism, or "insubordination" resulted in the termination of his career at Spelman College by an administration that could not tolerate the impending threat of reform on campus. In standing up for his students in their pursuit of intellectual rigor and independence, Zinn refined his political voice on issues of civil rights and the value of education and helped to shape his students' voices.

In many ways, Zinn's later success as a public intellectual began during his time at Spelman. Here, Zinn saw the potential for history to help us understand the present and encouraged his students to question the status quo of racial contention through critical analysis and activism outside of the classroom. Instead of ignoring the reality of racial conflict, Zinn taught his students to confront what they experienced in their lives through the lessons he provided in the classroom. Instead of sitting silently while his students protested and petitioned against the Spelman administration, Zinn

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[58] Ibid., 42.
[59] Ibid., 44.

courageously and thoughtfully, saw the possibilities for change and acted on his belief.

The Southern Mystique and SNCC (1964)

> "Missing from such histories are the countless small actions of unknown people that led up to those great moments. When we understand this, we can see that the tiniest acts of protest in which we engage may become the invisible roots of social change."[60]

Zinn produced careful documentation and analysis of his time teaching in Georgia, and working and living in Alabama and Mississippi in reaction to his view of the American South and defiance of the white hegemonic racial order. During his career at Spelman and in between his new teaching position at Boston University, Zinn traveled extensively around the South, fiercely participating in "The Movement" and documenting the experiences of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). By leading, teaching, and writing about these small acts as "invisible roots of social change," Zinn not only directly affected the Spelman girls and the surrounding Atlanta community, but a wider national public as well. His two books, *The Southern Mystique* (1964) and *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (1964) helped to transform Zinn's identity from academic intellectual to public intellectual due to the

[60] Ibid., 24.

reception of these texts and his own involvement in "The Movement" at the time.

Zinn's first published article, "A Fate Worse Than Integration" which appeared in *Harper's Magazine* in 1959 and eventually became *The Southern Mystique*, emerged from experiences interacting with and analyzing the enigma of the South.[61] The distinct "mystique" identified in the demeanor, attitude, and actions of the white Southerner revolved around a "trait of race prejudice," Zinn believed. Zinn noted that at one point this distinction may have been a mystery, but further investigation to uncover this trait has dissolved its enigmatic nature. He suggested conclusively that there are certain factors which are more important to the white Southerner than racial segregation. These factors included: "monetary profit, political power, staying out of jail, the approval of one's immediate peers, conforming to the dominant decision of the community."[62] By interjecting these priorities in the protest of anti-segregationists, Zinn believed, the trait of racial prejudice will fold and give way to racial cohesion and crumbling of our nation's faults as exhibited in America's South.[63]

The Southern Mystique offers a controversial theory of racial discourse which openly discusses the problems of segregation and criticizes the undemocratic sociocultural context of the South. Published in the same year,

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[61] Zinn, "Introduction," 15.
[62] Howard Zinn, *The Southern Mystique* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 5–10.
[63] Ibid., 262–263.

Zinn's *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* responded to the racial inequalities apparent in the South with a detailed account of the emergence of SNCC and his own involvement with the organization in the year between 1963-64. Both texts offered to the public an easily accessible, pertinent, and timely documentation of the social and political issues affecting the American South, especially with regards to racist policies of segregation. Zinn documented the formation of the SNCC in 1960 which was inspired in part by the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycotts and in particular the first sit-ins at a downtown lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1960. Zinn traces the explosive effects of Greensboro and the members of SNCC who led these sit-ins and other acts of civil disobedience in cities such as McComb, Greenwood, and Hattiesburg, Mississippi; Albany, Georgia; and Selma, Alabama. Dubbing them "the new abolitionists," Zinn emphasized their tremendous courage in upsetting the status quo of American society and sitting in peaceful protest of the infringement of their rights. These young radicals of the 1960s, like the abolitionists fighting against slavery pre-Civil War, started a movement to protest the racist rhetoric of "commercialism…profit-seeking…[and the] setting of religious or national barriers against human contact."[64]

Zinn described all these values as unacceptable to the ideals of their Movement, but focused on their acts of public protest in defiance of racial segregation. The stories of SNCC's radical activism color Zinn's text, which

[64] Joyce, *Howard Zinn*, 67–68.

documents their organized acts of "civil disobedience, demonstrations, nonviolent confrontation and 'direct action.'"[65] Some leaders and organizers were Zinn's former students and he reiterated the youths' presence on the forefront of this battle. Zinn accounts of specific individuals' stories explain how they were expelled from college, arrested, beaten, and even killed. Combining historical research with field study, Zinn writes about his own experiences with SNCC, such as teaching during the Mississippi Freedom Summer of '64, "where two thousand black youngsters, meeting in church basements all over Mississippi, had a taste of an extraordinary experiment in democratic education."[66] Far from objectively crafting the story of SNCC, Zinn emphasized the urgency and importance of their courageous actions in protest of the unjust issues he witnessed going unenforced by the government. This book, like many of Zinn's later books would also do, purposefully highlights the work of a social minority and the individuals within these groups that stood up to fight the systems of oppression around them. Zinn intended to write about "The Movement," the South, and SNCC not only to provide context for those outside of the American South, but also to publicly argue for freedom and justice for all individuals, however disputed or unfavorable it may have been.

With the writing of *The Southern Mystique* and *SNCC: The New Abolitionists,* Zinn's role as public intellectual began to fully take shape. Beyond increasing exposure to readers outside of academia, the combination of

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[65] Ibid., 68.
[66] Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*, 81.

these texts clearly defined his political voice and his dedication to social and political controversies. Zinn's discourse regarding social movements throughout American history gains particular strength from his work with SNCC. In fact, much of Zinn's awareness of the instrumental effects of SNCC comes out of his work as an adult advisor for the organization in addition to his extensive research. His close relationship with the group enabled Zinn to write passionately about their cause and advocate for the continuation of their actions. In his conclusion, Zinn defends the organization against perceived notions of "a kind of socialism" that "worries traditional liberalism" and explains clearly and persuasively why the "mood" of SNCC as a social movement goes beyond any of these clear cut definitions.[67] By elucidating both the effectiveness and importance of SNCC, Zinn makes explicitly clear his own ideals of political activism and identifies the steps necessary to achieve them.

Zinn states that these qualities which render SNCC threatening to the structure inherent to "traditional liberalism" also made it threatening to "*all* Establishments," including socialist and communist governments.[68] Zinn identifies these qualities as: "its rejection to authority; its fearlessness in the face of overwhelming power; its indifference to respectability."[69] Zinn believes these qualities are essential to a citizen dedicated to upholding the promises made by its government's Constitution. Citizens will fail themselves if they are

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[67] Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 274.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.

fearful of the power or "respectability" of governments and unwilling to ask questions and criticize the hegemonic power. SNCC's dedication to these principles in accordance with their constant creation of "a new force, nonviolent but aggressive and honest and therefore unmanageable," keeps society constantly in line with promises made to its citizens.[70] And when promises are broken or injustices begin to rear their head, this "new force" of people will be upfront and outspoken in its critique. By remaining "unmanageable," activist organizations stop governments from usurping their power. Zinn believes that the value of SNCC (and all radical social movements) lies in its objective to demonstrate "not what kind of 'system' people should believe in, but how people should live their lives."[71] Thus, Zinn argues, by existing outside the boundaries of a clearly defined "system," "radicalism is not an ideology but a mood." This limitless, amorphous, and dynamic state of being maintains power by inciting social and political change. "Moods are harder to define," writes Zinn. "They are also harder to imprison."[72]

Unlike many who believe the work of the public intellectual should remain unbiased, Zinn's writing directly states his perspective and holds no false pretenses of an objective narrative. His language steers clear of academic jargon and his efficacy as a public intellectual comes from the succinctness, simplicity, and directedness of his speech. In addition, Zinn's documentation of

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[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

his own activism suggests the large extent to which he is willing to act in defense of his views. In an effort to draw attention to the potential power of people to change the status quo and define it for themselves, Zinn fearlessly suggests a solution to thinking outside the boundaries of political establishments. Zinn's general commentary on social movements demonstrates his belief in the ability and responsibility of the public to create change. In describing the power of social movements, Zinn simultaneously articulates the very way he inhabited the role of public intellectual throughout his writings and public presentations. He notes that although social movements may not constantly achieve success of every individual goal, the work performed generates a different kind of reform: "in the course of the struggle, the strength of the old order begins to erode, the minds of the people begin to change" and the possibility of a new representation of freedom and justice will appear.[73] "The protesters are momentarily defeated, but not crushed, and have been lifted, heartened, by their ability to fight back."[74] In many ways, Zinn celebrates the relentlessness of social movements to persist in their goals of transforming the ideals of a democratic society into reality. Social movements depend not on governments or those in power, but instead on the willingness of the people to hold those in power accountable for their actions. Even in "defeat," the strength of determination and persistence of people will "lift" and "hearten" the individuals to start again towards their goal. This technique characterizes

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[73] Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*, 54.
[74] Ibid.

much of Zinn's own writings and teachings when one examines the end goal articulated in each of his essays, articles, books, speeches, and acts of protest. Even in this relatively early point in Zinn's career as a public intellectual, he embodies in his language, choice of topic, and involvement outside of the classroom the qualities of a persistent driver of social change. By advocating for SNCC and the work of others in "The Movement," Zinn purposefully complicates the narrative of American exceptionalism and seeks to educate and inspire the public by outspokenly arguing for the persistent and critical "mood" of radical activism while bringing the greater public beyond intellectual awakening to the terrain of real transformation.

Anti-Vietnam War Activism (1965-1975)

> We are no longer at war in Vietnam…It is a decision based on a fundamental American belief that human life is sacred, that peace is precious, and that true power does not consist in the brute force of guns and bombs, but in the economic well-being of a free people…We are about to embark on a venture far more glorious, far more bold, requiring far more courage—than war.[75]

Zinn's involvement in and dedication to the Civil Rights Movement taught him that the importance for resiliency when faced with seemingly unchangeable conflicts. Zinn turned his attention to a similar issue of injustice by the U.S. Government. The intensity of the American War in Vietnam disturbed Zinn and others and pushed them to call for larger and bolder techniques to jumpstart an anti-war movement. Zinn's experience working with the Spelman women and the successes of the Civil Rights Movement encouraged him to boldly take a stand against the War in Vietnam. A sharp escalation of anti-war protests, rallies, and general speaking engagements launched Zinn further onto the public stage. Specifically, Zinn's book *Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal* (1967) pivotally influenced Zinn's identity as public intellectual and radical activist in American politics. Joining Boston University in 1964, Zinn frequently left the walls of the ivory tower to protest America's

[75] Howard Zinn, *Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 124-125.

intervention in a war he viewed as fundamentally unjust. Zinn's growing reputation, co-constructed by intellectual achievements and public defiance, contributed to his increasingly distinct embodiment of a public intellectual and historian actively seeking to engage the public at the grassroots level.

Zinn's experience as a bombardier in WWII and trained historian informed his intellectual and emotional stance against war. During his involvement in the Air Force, Zinn did not question the morality of fighting in the war. Regarded as a "good war'" and an act of moral justice, WWII identified the "fascist enemy" as "so totally evil as to forbid any questioning."[76] The dichotomization of purely good and evil forces morally opposed to one another fostered America's sense of righteousness. The common war stigmatization of "bad guys" and the glorification of "good guys" nullified the questioning of huge acts of atrocities against foreign people. Only years later did Zinn "become aware, both from the rethinking of [his] war experiences and [his] reading of history, of how the environment of war begins to make one side indistinguishable from the other."[77] Zinn's realization enabled him to take a stand against another example of an unjustified and utterly tragic act of war wrongly pursued by the U.S. government in Vietnam.

Zinn's studies and experiences analyzing the costs and consequences of U.S. action in World War II fundamentally influenced his condemnation of war and specifically, his activism against the American War in Vietnam. After

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[76] Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train,* 97.
[77] Ibid.

reading *Hiroshima,* a postwar report by John Hersey, Zinn's attitudes towards the necessity of war dramatically changed. Hersey's analysis of the nightmarish consequences of the atomic bomb propelled Zinn's discovery of the unnecessary consequences of war and the legacy of America's abuse of power.[78] In 1960, Zinn earned an East Asian Studies fellowship at Harvard University where he continued to develop a critique of modern war and its adverse consequences on society. Studying the atomic bomb, Zinn published "A Mess of Death and Documents," in which he questioned the proposed U.S. justification for dropping the atomic bomb despite Japan's imminent surrender. Bringing to light the illicit and dishonest justifications for U.S. involvement in past foreign wars and conflicts, Zinn's article stressed the contradictions of U.S. political rhetoric. Uncovering purely selfish political motives to "beat the Russians to…defeating Japan and to demonstrate to them our strength," Zinn identified the disingenuousness of U.S. political action. His knowledge of the hidden motives behind napalm bombs in Royan (April 1945) further supported his critique of U.S. Foreign Policy. As a result of the "powerful momentum of a military machine," the "disinclination to 'waste'" the investment made in developing the atomic bomb, and the unfortunate "cold disregard for human life which develops in the course of war," combined to wrongly justify the unprecedented action taken against Japan. Together, these considerations resulted in an "acceptance of any means…in the total nobility of your cause,"

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[78] John Hersey, *Hiroshima* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1989).

which the U.S. abused and would continue to abuse in the case of Vietnam. The pattern of such obscenely immoral excuses radically transformed Zinn's outlook to a fierce disapproval of war.[79]

U.S. chauvinism and its competitive fight for political influence manifested itself in the construction of the good versus bad dichotomy essential to drumming up support for U.S. military intervention. Zinn's historical research found examples of the "good guy" who, through extreme destruction, eventually resembled the "bad guy," rendering the two sides indistinguishable from each other. Zinn's research cites the warfare that took place in Ancient Athens. A nation state considered, the "good guy" in comparison with Sparta, enacted "indiscriminate massacre" and the "enslavement of women and children."[80] Similarly, Zinn argued that in WWII, the U.S. and the rest of the "civilized world" hypocritically expressed shock and disapproval of Japanese, Italian and German "modern aerial warfare," only to mirror these tactics with increased enormity later in the war.[81] The evidence convinced Zinn of the absolute horrors of war where the "original moral factor" always becomes "buried at the bottom of the heap of atrocities committed by all sides."[82] Zinn's old belief in the "justness of even 'the best of wars'" crumbled and in the spring of 1965, a year after beginning to teach at Boston University,

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[79] Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*, 97.
[80] Ibid., 98.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.

Zinn's protests against the Vietnam War took root, launching him further onto the public stage.[83]

Zinn rejected claims made by the United States that the South Vietnamese need to be protected from the influence of Soviet Communism. Zinn harbored doubts about the Gulf of Tonkin incident in the summer of 1964 and he remained skeptical about past claims by the United States to defend freedom and democracy through warfare. Zinn voiced his opposition to American intervention in Vietnam from the beginning. America's past support of French control in Vietnam negated claims made by the American government that defined military intervention as a way of aiding Vietnamese self-determination. In regards to the United States' enforcement of freedom and democracy, their tolerance and support of global dictatorships such as "Duvalier in Haiti [and the] Marcos in the Philippines" exposed the fallacy of these promises.[84] Communist governments were an exception to the tolerance of the U.S., but in the widespread conquering of Vietnamese civilians and villages, Zinn sensed the injustice of such actions. In 1965, Zinn spoke to a small crowd at the first antiwar rally on the Boston Common and began writing in protest soon thereafter. His articles in the *Nation* entitled, "Vietnam: Means and Ends," published in January 1966, and in *Commonwealth* called, "Negroes and Vietnam," a month later, announced Zinn's staunch opposition to the

[83] Ibid., 102.
[84] Ibid., 106.

conflict in Vietnam.[85] In the spring of 1967, Zinn detailed his critiques and feelings about the war in a direct, brief, yet thoroughly critical book defiantly titled, *Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal*. Amidst growing activist protests around the country and the tremendous escalation of President Johnson's military action in Vietnam, the book courageously took a stand and generated much debate amongst students and the greater public.[86] Incorporating research from his experiences in WWII, his East Asian Studies Fellowship, and the Civil Rights movement, Zinn argues for the immediate removal of U.S. troops. Zinn cites the necessity of considering perspective in one's analysis of any issue and states his arguments as "angles of vision," a viewpoint he would later become well known for through his narrative of American history.[87]

Zinn embraced the activist responsibilities of the public intellectual role that many scholars have seen as being in a perpetual state of decline. Zinn asserted that scholars and citizens must uphold their responsibility to question authority regarding important ethical and moral issues in American politics. In Zinn's introduction to *Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal* entitled "A Matter of Perspective," he openly critiques the "realistic" work of scholars who he believes have failed to advocate solutions to social and political issues outside of those "the most powerful in society put forth."[88] The solution of complete withdrawal may lie outside of the government's probable course of action and

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[85] Joyce, *Howard Zinn*, 92.
[86] Howard Zinn, *Howard Zinn on War* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2011), 30.
[87] Zinn, *Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal*, 7.
[88] Ibid.

be labeled as "too extreme" a position to be taken seriously as "national policy."[89] Nevertheless, the introduction asserts that scholars should not limit their expression, especially in situations of great significance to the public. He condemns their irresponsible observance of the "limits beyond which respectable people are not supposed to think or speak," suggesting his rejection of careful and conservative criticism by scholars and public intellectuals alike. Zinn's text also discusses the responsibility of the citizen related to Henry Giroux's critiques of public intellectuals in the classroom. Public intellectuals in academia, Giroux believes, should prepare their students as future citizens by debating political and social issues with regards to democracy. Zinn implicitly upholds this responsibility by connecting the citizen's responsibility with his critique of the cowardly scholar. "The citizen's job, I believe is to declare firmly what he thinks is right. To compromise with politicians…weakens the moral force of…citizenry."[90] Zinn sees the outspoken voice of the scholar as the inherent responsibility of the citizen. His explicit analysis and rejection of the American War in Vietnam represents Zinn's commitment to his responsibility as a public intellectual which critics such as Giroux and Said believe are not often upheld.

Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal courageously engages with the highly controversial and relevant political issue of the late 1960s, calling on both citizens and leaders to act immediately and defiantly against injustice.

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[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.

Throughout the book, Zinn suggests radical ideas about America's position in Vietnam, heightened by the historical and political context of intense conflict when it was published. In line with all of Zinn's writings, this book addresses the general public, rather than an elite coterie of fellow academic scholars, and utilizes accessible, direct language. Specifically, Zinn's writing clearly expresses the urgency and significance of the war in American society and explicitly suggests actions President Johnson should take to bring an end to the war. In the final chapter of the book entitled, "Speech for LBJ," Zinn wrote a speech for President Johnson in which he announces the "halt [of] offensive operations" and "orderly withdrawal of [America's] armed forces" from Vietnam.[91] Radically suggesting the realistic content of such a speech, Zinn writes thoughtfully of this decision, "We are about to embark on a venture far more glorious, far more bold, requiring far more courage—than war" ending with, "My fellow Americans, good night and sleep well. We are no longer at war in Vietnam."[92] Zinn's speech not only aims to provoke citizen support and government action to end the war, but also suggests that such a decision would demonstrate "glory" and "courage" rather than failure and weakness. In so doing, Zinn's text not only insinuates a redefinition of society's values, but does so with the enactment of a vision. Zinn's text proposes to the President and the larger public a concrete action that could fundamentally change the pattern of U.S. involvement with war. In so doing, Zinn transcended the limits of

[91] Ibid., 123.
[92] Ibid., 124–125.

mainstream historical writing and challenged perceived boundaries of the public intellectual domain.

Garnering overwhelming responses in support and in opposition, Zinn's reputation as a radical historian and intellectual ascended to unprecedented heights. Zinn received strong responses from newspapers, journals, T.V. commentary, and a large number of personal letters including a response from Edward M. Kennedy.[93] Attesting to the book's influence on the general public and its potential as a tool for generating concrete political change, it quickly went through eight printings and six hundred copies were purchased and given to every member of Congress.[94] Zinn's identity as a public intellectual flourished as a result of this text and his continued participation and leadership in anti-war protests demonstrated his constant dedication to activism outside of teaching and writing.

Zinn's public speaking engagements further represented his drive to spread powerful knowledge beyond the classroom. Leading up to the end of the war in 1975, Zinn received hundreds of invitations to "teach-ins, rallies, debates" around the country, provoking overwhelming support as well as fierce criticism from the public. Attending graduation ceremonies for college and high school students, Zinn spoke to crowds numbering in the thousands, communicating his controversial message to diverse public audiences. At times, Zinn brought "some of the parents to their feet with shouts of anger,"

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[93] Joyce, *Howard Zinn*, 97.
[94] Zinn, *Howard Zinn on War*, 49.

provoking them to walk out in protest, but students also responded with standing ovations and at Newton North High School in 1970, the students won the right to invite Zinn as the speaker for their commencement.[95] Wesleyan and Columbia University both invited Zinn to speak at their "counter-commencements" demonstrating the pervasive effects of the war on young people and Zinn's particular influence on their lives.[96] Finally, in 1975, after countless protest events, Zinn participated in a teach-in at Brandeis University to "ask for the cessation of U.S. military aid to Saigon" when a student announced the surrender of Saigon and the end of the war.[97] Although Zinn's action in direct protest to the American War in Vietnam was finished, concluding "a period of intense speaking, writing, demonstrating" as Zinn described, his frequent passionate protests on issues of the day continued throughout the rest of his career and life.[98] Zinn's impact on society would take a new form as he undertook the act of rewriting a narrative of America's past, highlighting the legacy of activism from the perspective of the voiceless.

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[95] Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*, 119.
[96] Ibid., 121.
[97] Ibid., 124–125.
[98] Joyce, *Howard Zinn*, 151.

Boston University (1964-1988)

> The University should unashamedly declare that its interest is in eliminating war, poverty, race and national hatred, governmental restrictions on individual freedom, and in fostering a spirit of cooperation and concern in the generation growing up. It should *not* serve the interests of particular nations or parties or religions or political dogmas.[99]

Throughout Zinn's employment in academia, his dedication to questioning the environment inside and outside of the school community remained strong. As Zinn increasingly protested against the American War in Vietnam, Zinn began teaching at Boston University in the fall of 1965. Zinn succeeded in gaining tenure after two years of teaching and his classes steadily increased in popularity as a result of his dynamic and thought-provoking lectures. The arrival of B.U.'s new president, John Silber, in 1971, ushered in a feud between Zinn and the conservative administrator that only increased Zinn's reputation as an outspoken public activist and scholar. Famously clashing with Silber over issues of U.S. Marine recruiters on campus, censoring of student newspapers, and protesting of employee rights, Zinn remained steadfast in his support of outside student activism in issues like the war in Vietnam as well as directly against the school's administration.[100] While Zinn also became known for his teachings which involved among other topics, the importance of civil disobedience, Silber actively fought to suppress waves of

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[99] Zinn, "The Uses of Scholarship," 75.
[100] Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*, 185, 188, 190.

student demonstrations against the war and constantly rejected criticism of his restrictive policies mean to control student activism from the campus the community. Fundamental disagreements over political views were aggravated by Silber's persistent denial of salary raises for Zinn and other faculty members and the false accusations of arson made against Zinn.[101] Despite the constant ideological battles between both individuals, Zinn continued to teach classes with almost four hundred students enrolled.[102] Even with his demanding teaching responsibilities compounded by Silber's refusal to allow Zinn the help of a teacher's assistant, Zinn upheld his commitment to engage students as active citizens.

Not intimidated by the public or academic community's disapproval, Zinn stood by his beliefs in both his teachings and public activism at Boston University. He consistently challenged the status quo of his university as he had done during his time at Spelman. A colleague of Zinn's named Murray Levin speaks to his uniqueness both as a professor and public intellectual: "The thing I admire most about Howard is that he is the only faculty member I have ever met with substantial political convictions and who lives by them."[103] Zinn seamlessly connected the two realms of his teaching with the vibrancy of his consistent activism. Despite his formal studies as a historian, Zinn was appointed to B.U.'s political science department. Ultimately, Zinn's formal

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[101] Joyce, *Howard Zinn*, 87.
[102] Ibid., 83.
[103] Ibid., 89–90.

department and the official title of his courses bore no impact on the actual content of his lectures. Preferring instead to teach what he believed to be of crucial importance to his students, Zinn notes, "I always believed in playing a kind of guerilla warfare with the administration. No matter what the title of the course was…I would just teach what I wanted to teach."[104] Inspiring students to action with a variety of materials, Zinn's courses intertwined novels, plays, and theory to teach issues of democratic significance. Whether discussing issues of race with Richard Wright's *Black Boy,* war through Dalton Trumbo's *Johnny Got His Gun*, or political activism in the anarchist autobiography of Emma Goldman (a figure Zinn later wrote a play about), Zinn engaged his students with strong voices of individuals who questioned the status quo.[105]

His chosen materials emphasized the perspective of individuals to critically examine the legacy of thought regarding pivotal issues of the day. Abandoning textbooks, which neglected in-depth and opinionated analysis, Zinn taught classes in "Law and Justice in America" and "Introduction to Political Theory" that propelled students to consider the reality of ongoing debate outside their classroom walls. Again, Zinn's teachings prioritized Giroux's adamant belief that public intellectuals should incite students' questioning of relevant issues to prepare them as good citizens. In addition to the radically provocative content of Zinn's classes, his pedagogical methodologies fostered this questioning. During his lectures, Zinn encouraged

[104] Ibid., 82.
[105] Ibid., 83.

an atmosphere of constant debate amongst him and his students. "I let students interrupt me to ask questions, I let them know they should," Zinn states. He valued student voices at all times in his courses: "My argument and my principle was if you can't speak when you want to speak, then you've really lost some of your freedom of speech…I never ended the class with my talk."[106] Zinn's dedication to student engagement, his involvement with civil rights activism while teaching at Spelman and leading protest in the anti-war movement during a large portion of his career at B.U., demonstrate his powerful contributions to the university and outside issues of political and social concern.

[106] Ibid.

A People's History (1980)

> I don't want to invent victories for people's movements. But to think that history- writing must simply recapitulate the failures that dominate the past is to make historians collaborators in an endless cycle of defeat. If history is to be creative, to anticipate a possible future without denying a past, it should, I believe, emphasize new possibilities by disclosing those hidden episodes of the past when, even if in brief flashes, people showed their ability to resist, to join together, occasionally to win. I am supposing, or perhaps only hoping, that our future may be found in the past's fugitive moments of compassion rather in than in the solid centuries of warfare.[107]

The combination of Zinn's work as public intellectual, historian and activist resulted most famously in his magnum opus, *A People's History of the United States: 1492 to the Present*, which he wrote and published in 1980 while teaching at Boston University. Written over thirty years ago, Zinn's counter narrative of American history opened the door to a critical analysis of historiography and of America's past, told from the perspective of "its participants as opposed to that of the 'leaders'" who typically write the narrative.[108] Zinn's activism throughout his teaching career influenced his uniquely constructed narrative of America's past by emboldening his readers with a sense of optimism and propensity for change. The text's intellectual approach, accessible writing style, and relevance to the future despite its focus on the past demonstrates one of the ways Zinn has redefined the role of the

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[107] Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010), 11.
[108] Sandra Morra, "A People's History of the United States by Howard," *TESOL Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (April 1, 1991): 169.

public intellectual. Zinn's history of activism prepared him to envision and produce an expansive narrative of America's past that could honor the successes of current and past individuals to encourage the continuation of radical history making. Zinn noted the context and motivation for his text, saying, "It came out just at the time we had just gone through all these movements. And all those generations of people who had been affected by the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements were looking for a new history."[109] Zinn purposefully wrote this text intending to aid the public in understanding a history of past events to better make sense of the present. He did not write to interest those within academia, but directly cited the "generations of people" who deserved a history that they could use, remember, gain inspiration and motivation from and ultimately teach to future generations in need of such a tool.

The relevancy of Zinn's text rests in the uniqueness of his perspective from the common storytelling of American history at the time. It was precisely the differences of his approach, writing, and emphasis from those of traditional narratives of the time which provoked and continues to generate interest amongst the public. In particular, Zinn's text notably differed from other texts because of the relevancy of his analysis, which allowed readers to unpack current issues of political and social concern. In a 1980 review of *A People's History,* notable historian Eric Foner praises Zinn's text for its groundbreaking

[109] Joyce, *Howard Zinn*, 173.

and anti-traditional approach to America's history. Commenting on Zinn's outspoken critique of American nationalism, Foner writes, "Those accustomed to the texts of an earlier generation, in which the rise of American democracy and the growth of national power were the embodiment of Progress, may be started by Professor Zinn's narrative."[110] Foner's response to Zinn's counter narrative suggests the enactment of Edward Said's assertion that it is public intellectual's responsibility to challenge powerful entities in order to support the underserved and under-represented. In writing the uncomfortable and anti-celebratory legacy of America's policies and politics, Zinn's text inherently questions the powerful entity of American nationalism. It does this by openly critiquing the unjust and undemocratic actions of the American government and its powerful institutions, which often perform such actions under the guise of nationalism and the rhetoric of American exceptionalism. Specifically, *A People's History* connects these actions with the oppression and conquest of "those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug," as Said suggests, and writes intentionally from their perspective.[111]

While illustrating the long legacy of injustices which rightfully define America's history, Zinn's narrative also highlights with optimism the defiant actions and voices of individuals who achieve victories. Foner comments on the "enthusiasm" of Zinn's writing which is "rarely encountered in the leaden prose

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[110] Eric Foner, "Majority Report: Majority Authors' Queries" (New York, N.Y., March 2, 1980), sec. The New York Times Book Review.
[111] Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 11.

of academic history" and suggests the ability of Zinn's narrative to engage readers outside of the academic community.[112] By detailing the experiences of people in opposition to power, Zinn honors the bravery and courage of those individuals to constructively generate solutions in the face of tremendous obstacles. In a 1991 review of the text in the *Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)* journal, Sandra Morra refers to the larger impact of Zinn's text as an asset to the public: "Zinn's text is engaging as an understanding of the many crucial and forceful popular struggles that have shaped the economic and therefore social fabric of the United States. It is empowering because it better equips the reader to make sense out of current world events."[113] Jean Anyon's 1980 review of *A People's History* in the *Journal of Education* also alludes to the strong impact of Zinn's narrative and distinct perspective as a tool for deciphering current issues. Zinn's contribution in writing this text, Anyon believes, has brought society, "one step closer…to being prepared to use *all* voices from the past in our efforts to confront the issues that face us."[114] Both Anyon and Morra emphasize the text's impact on readers as it not only provides them with knowledge of an important past, but distributes knowledge that empowers and generates the public's greater awareness of the present.

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[112] Foner, "Majority Report."
[113] Morra, "A People's History of the United States by Howard."
[114] Jean Anyon, "Review of *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn," *Journal of Education* (summer 1980): 67–71.

Ultimately, Zinn's life and work provokes more than an understanding of past conflict and possibilities for the future. The urgency and optimism of Zinn's approach to life and work generates the power to incite the public's critical analysis and participation in society. Knowledge of Zinn's experiences growing up in a working class family, participating in war and protesting, writing and teaching at Spelman College and Boston University not only enables a greater understanding of his unique perspective as a public intellectual, but redefines the role in a way that spoke to the concerns of everyday people and inspired activism at the grassroots level.

PART II: INVESTIGATION OF THE ZINN APPROACH

After retiring from Boston University in 1988, Zinn continued to make public appearances in "high schools, public libraries, radio stations, church meetings, conferences, sit-ins, strikes, and rallies nationwide" to raise awareness about progressive causes and political and social inequality.[115] His standing as a public intellectual increased through these events, where he captivated audiences with his genuine warmth, sense of humor, and defiant commitment to civil disobedience. Zinn inspired students at Spelman and Boston University intellectually and politically while also engaging a public audience. His dedicated and outspoken activism fundamentally altered the American public's understanding of civil disobedience and justice. *A People's History of the United States,* published in 1980, with its accessible writing style and its provocative "bottom-up" analysis of history, garnered Zinn a national audience. His writing countered historical narratives typically written by the victorious that rendered others voiceless. Zinn's analysis of this perspective and focus on influential historical moments of resistance inspires high school educators to use Zinn's text to encourage students to act. The teachers value Zinn's accessible language and ability to clearly explain his counter narrative to students at the high school level. Zinn's critical assessment of past events that enables students to contextualize their life experiences and comprehend

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[115] James Green, "Howard Zinn's History," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 23, 2003, Volume 49, Issue 37 edition, sec. The Chronicle Review.

current issues in society. The prominence of Zinn's ideological framework of *A People's History* in high school classrooms illustrates Zinn's redefinition of the public intellectual role outside the boundaries of higher education.

Zinn wrote a counter narrative to America's primarily celebratory history and in the process, broadened the influence of the public intellectual beyond the campuses of higher education. His teachings reached students nationwide during his lifetime and have continued to do so after his death. Zinn's activism put his ideals, values and beliefs in action, and his *A People's History* introduced a complex narrative that attempted to change the way Americans thought about the past. When Zinn passed away in January 2010, the public lost a consistent and valuable voice in the fight to uphold America's ideals. But two years later, Zinn's voice is still present in classrooms across the country and world. Zinn's success in reaching high school students challenged the assumption that public intellectuals speak only to well-educated audiences. This section will focus on the use of Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* in high school classrooms and how his critical approach to history and society captured the attention of a diverse student audience.

High school teachers and educators continue to rely on Zinn's writings to inspire students and to demonstrate that knowledge can challenge authority through informed and conscientious decision-making. At Marin Academy High School in the Bay Area, my teacher Bill Meyer introduced me to some of the inspiring ideas and that make *A People's History* so compelling to young adults.

To better understand how *A People's History* serves as a powerful educational tool, I interviewed nine high school teachers and two additional teachers who run organizations dedicated to increasing student academic achievement in the Bay Area. In one interview, my U.S. History teacher, Bill Meyer, referred specifically to the Zinn Approach:

> The Zinn approach to me, I think, is the bit summed up in his first chapter that you can't look at a linear collection of facts. [Ronald] Takaki would call it the "master narrative." That's what textbooks are full of. [Zinn told] it from the point of view of the powerless in an attempt to correct the narrative. It opens up this whole dialogue that is rather revolutionary of sorts. How do you incorporate the perspectives of the powerless?...Whose voices are we hearing? Whose voices are we not hearing? How do we incorporate the voices that we're not hearing?[116]

Teachers use Zinn's work to push students to think for themselves through self-reflection and an engagement with complex and multi-layered historical perspectives. My interviews reveal how teachers think of Zinn as a unique resource that both remained accessible to many different learning styles and introduces complex ideas and subject material. These interviews show

[116] Bill Meyer, interview by the author, January 13, 2012.

Zinn's continuing relevancy in the high school classroom and the significant way he expanded the role of the public intellectual beyond the university campus. The way Zinn approached not only in his scholarly achievements, but also his political activism, has influenced teachers' pedagogical approaches. Ultimately, it changes the way students navigate history and how they live their lives. In looking at the way educators incorporate *A People's History* in the classroom, several tenets of the Zinn Approach emerge. His work encourages a critical comprehension of historiography and demands a democratic and politically conscious point of view. Combined, these overarching themes serve as effective and powerful tools that enable students to understand their personal life experiences and engage with a larger historical narrative on their own terms.

Critical Historiography and Perspective

The Zinn Approach asks students to critically examine the construction of history and helps them to recognize the analytic devices used to craft particular narratives. To draw attention to historiography and the role that selection and emphasis of information and bias play in writing history, Zinn makes his own motivations and intentions as an author and historian clear to his readers. I will unpack Zinn's perspective on historiography and how his approach informed his unique activist and socially conscious conception of the public intellectual.

In *A People's History,* Zinn introduces the idea of perspective and its role in constructing a historical narrative that perpetuates the contestable and questionable qualities of all history writing. He addresses these concepts in the first chapter of *A People's History* after providing a short analysis of Columbus' violent conquest of the Arawak Indians in which he draws on documents written by Bartolomé de las Casas. Las Casas outlined the reality of enslavement and death orchestrated by Columbus, who, as Zinn points out, has been primarily reframed as a "heroic adventurer" void of "bloodshed" and masked by "celebration."[117] After citing historian Samuel Eliot Morison's overwhelmingly positive narration of Columbus' identity, Zinn explains the way historians constructed a particular narrative by choosing to ignore Columbus' atrocities and instead focus on the importance of his "superb faith," "stubborn persistence," and "seamanship."[118] Zinn demonstrates how "selection, simplification, [and] emphasis" create a radically opposing narrative of Columbus from the one presented by Morison.[119] Zinn notes how Morison's text does not necessarily lie about the effects of Columbus' mass murdering of innocent people, but through these tools produces a particular narrative which distorts the weight of unjust acts. This distortion of reality does not necessarily omit violent material, but through selective emphasis devalued and undermined the notion of accountability for unjust actions. Moreover, this

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[117] Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, 7.
[118] Ibid., 8.
[119] Ibid.

emphasis does not suggest to the public and students of American history that unjust acts should not be committed. Overall, Zinn's text exposes how the personal perspective of the historian, or bias "serves—unwittingly—to justify what was done."[120]

In Zinn's first chapter, he critiques scholars who present their biases as objective truths because they distort the reality and ignore conflicting perspectives in order to advance their own intellectual or political goals. He regards historians' decisions to select, simplify, and emphasize certain facets of the truth as an "ideological" rather than a "technical" "distortion."[121] In so doing, Zinn identifies the pervasiveness and power of these decisions. He objects to historians who failed to explicitly identify their ideological interests and the way that this created a powerful guise of objectivity. Yet, historical writing requires that the historian choose what facts to select, which complexities to simplify, and which figures and events to emphasize. The goal of objectivity proves difficult if not impossible to achieve. In the afterword of *A People's History,* Zinn identified this essential tenet to help students understand why they need to critically examine a text for its ideological point of view and to question what was deemphasized or left out of the narrative. He wrote, "I had no illusions about "objectivity"...there is no such thing as pure fact, innocent of interpretation. Behind every fact presented to the world—by a teacher, a

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[120] Ibid., 9.
[121] Ibid., 8.

writer, anyone—is a judgment."[122] This judgment, inherent to every portrayal of history has the power to deem certain truths unquestionable and render other interpretations insignificant.

Many educators use Zinn's first chapter in their U.S. History courses to help students recognize the role bias, perspective and multi-narratives play in historical writing. One educator, Craig Miller, who teaches at The Bay School in San Francisco, has developed a teaching activity based on Zinn's approach to critical historiography as well as a full curriculum which highlights *A People's History*. Miller is currently in his fifteenth year of teaching, and before joining the History faculty at The Bay School he also taught U.S. History at the American School Foundation in Mexico City. He has included Zinn in his curriculum for thirteen years and continues to find new ways to incorporate Zinn's voice in impactful ways.

Miller's Zinn activity encourages students to remember issues of perspective and narrative using a concrete example. After assigning Zinn's first chapter, Miller seeks to simulate a historical event within the class that elucidates the complexity of perspectives in historical writing. "We use that to talk about perspective and interpretations and what different perspectives bring to an event," says Miller.[123] Miller begins to introduce the chapter when a student (whom he has asked to assist him prior to the beginning of class,) inexplicably goes to the board and writes a "statement of protest against

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[122] Ibid., 684.
[123] Craig Miller, interview by the author, January 12, 2012.

Columbus based on the reading." Miller pretends to punish the student, saying, "What are you doing? You're a junior! Why do you think it's okay to come up and write on the board?" He erases the statement, asks the student to stay after class to talk and continues to discuss the chapter. An argument then brakes out between Miller and a student who was also let in on the plan beforehand. Interjecting with critiques of Zinn's opinions, and challenging Miller's choice to include Zinn in their curriculum, tensions rise. Miller walks out of the room "saying [he] need[s] some space to collect [him]self," to the bewilderment of the class. One student is also asked to leave the room prior to the incident and when the student returns, he or she is unaware of the series of events and has to rely on their classmates to fill them in. Still not revealing the simulation, Miller returns to the room, asks students to write a personal reflection of the preceding events and to carefully consider the inappropriateness of the incident. After engaging the class in a discussion of the incident and allowing them to explain it to the absent student, Miller reveals the act. Discovering that the moment was entirely staged, the students are in disbelief and Miller shifts the conversation to connect the enactment with a critical analysis of Zinn's first chapter.

Demonstrating the complexity in writing history, Miller's exercise pushed students to think critically about perspective, sources, and the tools of emphasis, simplification, and the selection of "facts." Discussing the student reflections as historical accounts of the event, Miller encourages students to

confront and analyze the various narratives written by their classmates. The accounts from students who were primed about the exercise produces different, yet still accurate accounts in comparison to those witnessing the events unaware of the simulation. Complicating notions of which accounts constitute primary sources and the "range" and "gradients" within this category, students concretely engage in the difficulty faced by history writers. Miller asks them to consider if one group of students as a source could be deemed more valuable or reliable than another. Miller incorporates Zinn's explication of multiple perspectives to address the inherent opinions of all historical narratives. The comparison of the students' historical accounts demonstrated how historians' choice of perspective hugely affects the kind of narrative produced.

The class then discusses the potential effects of multiple interpretations, given the range of information students knew and what each student chooses to emphasize from their observation. The comparison of Morison's account of Columbus with Zinn's is mirrored in the potentially opposing accounts of the unaware students in Miller's class compared with the students involved behind the scenes. The accounts written by the former group of students projects a certain interpretation not only of the argument, but also of the student who spoke against their teacher causing him to leave the classroom. In contrast, the account of the student included in the simulation narrates the same series of events, but with an entirely different perception of the stakes of the argument,

and therefore he or she writes a different account of the incident. As Miller raises the questions about the validity of each perspective, students begin to recognize the need to take into account multiple perspectives to fully comprehend the event.

Building on Zinn's arguments about historiography, Miller enables his students to experience a real life example of the questions, complexities, and impossibility of objectivity in historical writing. Zinn's accessible and engaging explanation of historiography prepares students to engage the complex narrative of *A People's History* and provides a critical analytic lens through which to view other historical narratives. Miller's creative simulation demonstrates the way the Zinn Approach can help students gain the skills needed to question the intentions and motivations behind the information they read, see, and consume in their everyday lives. Miller presents this complex material in an easily accessible and straightforward manner that seized the attention of his students, in the same way Zinn's acts of civil disobedience informed the public about controversial issues.

Zinn's clear and direct language addresses Richard Posner, Russell Jacoby, and Ellen Cushman's critiques of public intellectuals' specialized and inaccessible writing. The teachers describe *A People's History* as "highly readable,"[124] and the fact that all of the educators use this text in their various high schools speaks to their belief in its accessibility for students around the

[124] Meyer, interview.

age of seventeen. Posner, Jacoby, and Cushman assert the importance of relevant public intellectual work to those outside of high level "insular societies" in academia.[125] Jacoby specifically critiques the decline of a "public prose" and Cushman speculates the lack of exposure of "popularized" public intellectual writings to audiences outside of the well-educated public.[126] The wide usage of *A People's History* for students demonstrates both its relevance to people outside of specialized academia and its use of accessible prose that students can comprehend. This also addresses Cushman's concern about where such texts are distributed given the popularity of Zinn's text in high school and college curriculum.

One teacher views Zinn's text as challenging material for her students who read below their grade level, but continues to include *A People's History* with her added educational support. Hasmig Minassian, a U.S. History teacher in the Communication Arts and Sciences (CAS) program at Berkeley High School, also uses Zinn's first chapter and the Columbus narrative to discuss the issue of primary sources and, in particular, the importance of the actual voice of whoever's history is being discussed. Minassian has been teaching for eleven years and has included Zinn in her curriculum since she first began her teaching career. Instead of assigning Zinn to her students for homework, Minassian reads the text aloud in class because "it is not their grade level. Some

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[125] Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals*, 7.
[126] Cushman, "The Public Intellectual, Service Learning, and Activist Research."

of them could do it. Very few of them would be able to do it unassisted."[127] With students ranging anywhere from a "fifth-sixth grade reading level on up," Minassian adapts her teaching methods to meet the needs of her students and continues to teach Zinn's themes of perspective and bias in ways that they can grasp. With Zinn's first chapter in particular, Minassian appreciates Zinn's "compelling" style, saying "It is the best hook into a history class." Because the students are expected to process his reading during class, Zinn's engaging and accessible writing style, coupled with Minassian's guided reading support, ensures student comprehension. Stopping to explain sections and encouraging students to annotate by "highlighting questions…and connections they make with the text," Minassian introduces Zinn's approach to U.S. History, making it accessible to students while still retaining the major points and themes of the chapter. Minassian highlights the "treatment of heroes and their victims [and] the quiet acceptance of conquest and murder in the name of progress [as] only one aspect of a certain approach to history."[128] Despite the challenge, students grasp Minassian's complex interpretation of *A People's History* and continue to use Zinn's text as a valuable tool to their learning of American history. Perhaps most telling of Zinn's significance to her class, Minassian says, "I use him to frame my approach to the U.S. History curriculum."

Zinn's interpretation of the unified American nation appeals to teachers seeking to complicate this narrative. Raleigh Werberger does not currently

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[127] Hasmig Minassian, interview by the author, January 18, 2012.
[128] Ibid.

teach a U.S. History course, but in the twelve years that he did, Zinn was part of the "philosophical purpose" of his class in several of the different schools where he taught. While at University High School in San Francisco, Werberger taught an A.P. U.S. History course and used the Zinn Approach to frame his assessments and the course overall. Believing that it is important for students to identify the "nature of the bias of the book" and the effects of that bias on how a text is interpreted, Werberger aligns Zinn's approach with increased critical thinking. Specifically, Werberger values Zinn's analysis of "the idea of nationalism and whether there is such a thing as a nation."[129] Zinn's inclusion of diverse voices calling for opposing goals in the American public suggests the absence of one unified nation. Werberger viewed *A People's History* as particularly effective in communicating this notion and the multiplicity of American experiences.

Teachers of color looking to highlight racial inequality in American history also use Zinn's narrative in the classroom. Clarke Weatherspoon, currently an educator in the History Department at The Urban School in San Francisco, and previously as a teacher at Marin Academy High School in Marin County has taught U.S. History for the last ten years and has included Zinn's work every year. Weatherspoon's first time reading *A People's History* resonated with him because Zinn's articulation of counter perspectives, often those of people of color, during moments of contention in American history

[129] Raleigh Werberger, interview by the author, January 9, 2012.

"just made sense to [him]." His experience as "a black person in America," enabled him to "understand that there are different narratives than the ones that are presented to you," notes Weatherspoon. Weatherspoon states that Zinn's emphasis on historiography and the stories of people makes him a "different historian," suggesting part of why so many educators value Zinn's work and continue to use it in their classes every year. Weatherspoon specifically regards Zinn's direct discussion about creating narratives and the "process of selecting particulars by experts" as hugely important and not often discussed.

Other teachers weave examples of perspective, emphasis, and bias together to elucidate Zinn's primary goal of constructing a socially conscious narrative to counter traditional accounts of American history. Jonas Honick, who teaches A.P. U.S. history at The Branson School in Marin County, uses many of Zinn's chapters because he appreciates how Zinn highlights individual actors throughout American history. Honick believes Zinn's "optimism" helps students to realize that "individuals can make a difference as long as they have the courage to stand up to authority."[130] *A People's History* emphasizes the idea of the power of individuals in his own political activism during the Civil Rights movement with his students at Spelman College. Moreover, Zinn not only emphasized this idea in his life and *A People's History,* but devotes a full article to America's "unsung heroes," deserving of recognition, who have "often in the

[130] Jonas Honick, interview by the author, January 10, 2012.

most modest ways, spoken out or acted on their beliefs for a more egalitarian, more just, peace-loving society."[131] Zinn's greater emphasis on these voices often suppressed in traditional American historical mythmaking is communicated through *A People's History.* Both Honick and another educator, Sally Matsuishi, emphasize Zinn's belief in "the countless small actions of unknown people" often deemphasized or omitted.[132] Honick similarly does not underestimate the value of individuals' impact when teaching Zinn. While some students may not immediately value the potential of their own voices, Honick teaches Zinn's idea because he believes "that you can influence some people…So it only impacts 5% or 10% [of students], that's his whole point! At least you're having an impact."[133]

Teachers value Zinn because his work increases students' ability to question social norms. Zinn's historiographical framework plays a critical role in the way teachers plan their curriculum. The concepts of historiography and perspective in *A People's History* constitute a major part of the Zinn Approach. This first component of the Zinn Approach prepares students at the high school level to critically read a text by questioning its intention and its potential blind spots, and improves their ability to critically analyze material.

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[131] Howard Zinn, "Unsung Heroes," in *A Power Governments Cannot Suppress* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2007).
[132] "Howard Zinn (1922-2010): A Tribute to the Legendary Historian with Noam Chomsky, Alice Walker, Naomi Klein and Anthony Arnove," *Democracy Now!*, n.d., http://www.democracynow.org/2010/1/28/howard_zinn_1922_2010_a_tribute.
[133] Honick, interview.

These skills are essential to college level work when analyzing texts in comparison to one another based on the viewpoint, unaddressed information, and strength of argument. The second interconnected piece of the Zinn Approach centers on *A People's History* as a counter narrative.

A People's History as a Counter Narrative

Ronald Takaki's articulation of the "master narrative" of American history is important to understanding Zinn's narrative as a counter to common ideologies of an exclusive quintessential American identity.[134] Students often encounter the hegemonic narrative that suggests the superiority of certain experiences over the lives of those who are "othered" in the American "master narrative." An "other" refers to those groups of people without social power as a result of discrimination or conquest. *A People's History* counters this narrative by telling the stories of the "other" throughout American History.

By consciously challenging the "master narrative" of the past, Zinn's text creates an alternate vision of an American identity. Ronald Takaki, in arguing for a multicultural approach to scholarship and history, defines the "master narrative" as the "pervasive," "racist," and dominant story that links America to a glorified "white" or "European" identity.[135] This narrative appears everywhere, from textbooks, to "the thinking of our policy makers," and is constantly

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[134] J. Q. Adams and Janice R. Welsch, "Multiculturalism: The Manifest Destiny of the USA: An Interview with Ronald Takaki," *Multicultural Perspectives* 11, no. 4 (2009): 227–231.
[135] Ibid.

projected through the media. Takaki equates it to a "current under the surface of our consciousness," suggesting its insidious power as a hegemonic discourse.[136] Taught to students from a very young age, this narrative of white supremacy and inferiority of all other racial and ethnic groups begins to appear as common sense and fact. This view of American history dangerously teaches students to justify existing power structures through stories of white achievement. Coupled with a belittlement or utter erasure of the oppressive stories of racial minorities and poor whites, students believe in the "master narrative" because they do not possess the knowledge to refute it. By acknowledging the "master narrative" as such, Takaki believes educators "have the obligation and the opportunity to offer a more inclusive and more accurate definition of who is an American."[137] Zinn's text seeks not only to widen the definition of "who is an American," but also to point to areas of contention around those considered to be the embodiments of American power.

Educators look to Zinn to question the "master narrative" in their classrooms. *A People's History* provides counter examples that show students the importance of incorporating alternate voices, and it helps students question the authenticity of the "master narrative." Teacher Sally Matsuishi characterizes the "master narrative" as a "mythology" on which America's history and "ideals" find grounding in heroes just like "Zeus and Hera." She

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[136] Ibid.
[137] J. Q. Adams and Janice R. Welsch, "Multiculturalism: The Manifest Destiny of the USA: An Interview with Ronald Takaki," *Multicultural Perspectives* 11, no. 4 (2009): 228.

suggests, similarly to Zinn, that glorified American heroes such as Teddy Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln support the existence of the "master narrative," but that closer inspection of hidden historical realities of conflict and discord reveals the construction of the myth. "Dominant culture," she explains, "has created a mythology for which we are all supposed to believe in."[138]

In stating his own particular approach, Zinn explicitly states his goal of analyzing a different set of historical truths, not from the perspective of "governments, conquerors, diplomats, [and] leaders," often expounded in textbooks, but from the opposite side. [139] He presents a viewpoint which encompassed and recognized the explosive conflicts between those in power and those without, while condemning the falsity and unification of American nationalism.

Zinn's articulation of his own approach is essential to understanding the approach taken by educators engaging with his text:

> Thus, in that inevitable taking of sides which comes from selection and emphasis in history, I prefer to try to tell the story of the discovery of America from the viewpoint of the Arawaks, of the Constitution from the standpoint of the slaves, of Andrew Jackson as seen by the Cherokees, of the Civil War as seen by the

[138] Sally Matsuishi, interview by the author, January 23, 2012.
[139] Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, 10–11.

> New York Irish…of the rise of industrialism as seen by the young women in the Lowell textile mills…of the Second World War as seen by pacifists.[140]

Zinn's text recognizes the existence of the popular narrative of American history written by those who emerged on the victorious side of the conflicts. Given the prevalence of such a narrative, Zinn explains his desire to tell a different story from the one often presented as fact in dogmatic textbooks. In choosing to emphasize "new possibilities by disclosing those… episodes…when people showed their ability to resist, to join together, occasionally to win," Zinn suggests a radical, yet surprisingly simple, reevaluation of objectives.[141] Instead of focusing on those voices consistently in power and with the upper hand in social, political, cultural and economic matters, Zinn suggests a reversal of the lens to highlight those rendered voiceless by such power. The impact of such a change in perspective from that of the victor to the oppressed forces students to question this power which has enabled certain individuals to conquer, dominate, and commit injustice throughout history.

Bill Meyer also equates the "master narrative" with myth, calling on historian Richard Slotkin's *Regeneration Through Violence*: *The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* to illustrate the mythically constructed nature

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[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.

of our "cultural identity."[142] Meyer sometimes pairs a particular quote from Slotkin's *Regeneration* with Zinn's chapter on Indian removal, emphasizing the power of ideology, myth, and the "master narrative" of white superiority to justify the violent oppression of natives.[143] Zinn's chapter, "As Long As Grass Grows or Water Runs" provides evidence for Slotkin's assertion of myth's role in the "process… by which knowledge is transformed into power; [providing] a prescription for action, defining and limiting the possibilities for human response to the universe."[144] In pairing these two texts together, Meyer reveals to students the construction of the "master narrative" of white superiority over Native Americans through mythmaking. Further analysis of *A People's History* illustrates the power of such a narrative to unjustly resulting in the displacement and destruction of Indian tribes under claims of civilizing them. Zinn's analysis of conflicts between the Native Americans and the American governmental reveals the underbelly of the "master narrative." Zinn undermines the heroic representation of figures like President Andrew Jackson by explaining his role in committing atrocities against Native Americans. In so doing, Zinn accentuates the acquisition of American land as an unjust conquest. He emphasizes these acts not as a blemish on the record of American expansion, but a form of genocide conducted by those in power.

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[142] Meyer, interview.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 6–7.

The Zinn Approach Vs. American History Textbooks

All of the teachers I interviewed saw the Zinn Approach in *A People's History* as distinctly contrary in emphasis and perspective to their traditional textbooks. Zinn's emphasis on the violent, oppressive and unjust actions of figures such as Christopher Columbus exemplifies such a difference. In his first chapter, Zinn outlines Columbus's conquest of the Americas through the perspective of the Arawak Indians whom he enslaved as "prisoners" and kidnapped from modern day Haiti to be sold into slavery in Spain. Zinn writes, "many of the slaves died in captivity" on the way to Spain and when they tried to resist their capture, "Spaniards took prisoners [and] hanged them or burned them to death."[145] Zinn's narrative heavily contrasts with the descriptions of the fate of the Arawak Indians in two different traditional textbooks. The first textbook I will consider is the 1982 version of the *Rise of the American Nation* text which was published only two years after Zinn's *A People's History*. Examining the texts of both *A People's History* and *Rise of the American Nation* demonstrates the dramatically opposing perspectives generated by differing choices of emphasis and omission. In describing Columbus's actions in the Americas, the textbook does not mention the Arawak Indians at all. There is no record in this text of any interactions between Columbus and the Native Americans beyond the phrase, "Columbus called the dark-skinned people on

[145] Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, 4.

the islands 'Indians'."[146] All violent conflicts between Columbus, Spain, and the Native Americans are erased and substituted with the word "claim." With no discussion of Columbus's enslavement of native peoples or any interaction beyond his naming of them as "Indians," the textbook notes, "Columbus tried three more times to find an all-water route to the East Indies and the riches of Asia. He failed in this, but his voyages established Spain's claims in the Americas."[147] The textbook omits the identity of the Arawak Indians and suggests that although Columbus failed in his mission, his contributions to American history were significant. In addition, *Rise of the American Nation* states how "other nations also established claims to large areas of North American soon after Columbus."[148] In both cases, the word "claim" is used instead of a description of the actions of enslavement and violence against the Arawak Indians. The different narratives between *A People's History* and *Rise of the American Nation* suggests that Zinn's emphasis of the experience on the oppressed in this situation is unusual in comparison to other history texts at the time.

Similar evidence from the seventh edition of the *America's History* textbook, published in 2011, reveals a slightly different perspective that still fails to fully describe the atrocities of this historical moment. Although it does mention the Arawak Indians, the descriptions of their interactions with

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[146] Lewis Paul Todd and Merle Curti, *Rise of the American Nation*, Liberty ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 12.
[147] Ibid., 12–13.
[148] Ibid., 12.

Columbus and the Spaniards are extremely limited. After mentioning Columbus's expectations of the "native peoples" as "easily [to] be made Christians," the textbook writes, "He claimed the islands for Spain…demanded tribute from the local Taino, Arawak, and Carib people…and returned triumphantly to Spain."[149] The word "claim" is used in both *Rise of the American Nation* and *America's History* to quickly brush over the process of stolen land without divulging the actions taken against the Indians. By describing Columbus's enslavement of Native Americans in order to find gold as a "demand" for "tribute," this textbook's awareness goes beyond that of *Rise of the American Nation*, but still does not fully illustrate the violent "demands" of enslavement exposed in *A People's History*. *America's History* insinuates an uneven exchange, but fails to fully expose the reality. Moreover, this description of Columbus's conquest as "triumphant" implies a heroic discourse rather than one tainted with criminality. The comparison of these three texts elucidates the differently constructed narratives of a pivotal moment in America's past.

Using Zinn's text in contrast to traditional American history textbooks allows students to pinpoint the value and variety of themes presented in different versions of the same story. Vielka Hoy asks her students to consider the textbook perspective specifically in comparison with Zinn's *A People's History*. As a U.S. History teacher, Hoy emphasized the biases of historical

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[149] James A Henretta, Rebecca Edwards, and Robert O Self, *America's History*, Seventh ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011), 25.

writing illustrated in the example above, by reminding her students that their textbook contains opinions in the same way that Zinn does in his book. Challenging students' ideas that "all history is the same," Hoy introduces the textbook as a "version" of U.S. History specifically written to advance a particular social or political agenda. At Berkeley High, where she used to teach before becoming the Dean of Students at Making Waves Charter School in Oakland, Hoy encouraged students to look outside of their own perspective and analyze how and why Zinn's differed from the textbook. She asked students, "What is the goal of telling the story this way versus that way?" and would return to this question throughout her curriculum.[150] Given the apparent dissimilarities between *A People's History* and both *Rise of the American Nation* and *America's History,* Hoy's students gain critical skills of analyzing the author's intent and purpose in their comparison.

Reflecting on both their own reactions reading the book as well as their students', educators commented on Zinn's ability to captivate the reader through his content, while retaining the balance in tone between formality and conversation. The teachers specifically commented on Zinn's ability to "hook" the reader in order to increase student engagement and investment in the material. Miller continues to place Zinn first in the curriculum, noting, "I still think Zinn can hook kids in ways that some of these other more kind of

[150] Vielka Hoy, interview by the author, January 15, 2012.

straight laced, traditional, academic historians don't."[151] Honick also believes in Zinn's ability to incite student engagement where textbooks often fail to inspire, and over his years of teaching has seen many students appreciate the text: "I think there were a lot of kids that just really enjoy a different perspective. I think it opens up new ways of seeing historical events."[152]

Other teachers utilize Zinn's ability to excite younger generations and reinforce significant factors in American history that textbooks do not. Meyer remembers the influence Zinn's narrative had made on him early in his career when his reading of *A People's History* suggested to him, "there might be more than one way to look at this." He remembers feelings of "empowerment" in how "liberating" and "exciting" the counter perspective appeared to him as a young teacher.[153] In speaking about what initially drew him into Zinn's text, Miller points to his "iconoclasm" and narrative that "made history inherently more interesting than it had been when [he] was taught as a high school student."[154] For Werberger, Zinn's autobiography *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train* inspired him to pick up *A People's History*. After reading it he concluded, "This was the book that you want to read when you're in high school."[155] Eager to contrast the manifestation and reproduction of "the master narrative" in textbooks, teachers use Zinn's text as an engaging tool that also

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[151] Miller, interview.
[152] Honick, interview.
[153] Meyer, interview.
[154] Miller, interview.
[155] Werberger, interview.

provides a critical analysis of dominant ideologies. Teachers focus on the different perspectives featured in *A People's History* and its specific vocabulary, themes, and attitudes. Weatherspoon assigns Zinn to his students at Marin Academy to accentuate the "nuances" of American historical events which he feels does not appear in American "national myth making." Through Zinn's text, students find the "sense that history is not just a book," explains Weatherspoon. Zinn's emphasis of people's cultural context adds depth to students' knowledge of the diversity of experiences. Weatherspoon values Zinn's analysis of this context, which reinforces his own viewpoint that students should "dig into music and dance and food and language and clothing…to get a sense of what a culture is about."[156] Similarly, Daniel Allen, a U.S. History teacher at San Rafael High School in Marin County, feels that Zinn's text often goes into much more detail than the textbook. He feels the textbook "limits" heavily the information it presents and overwhelming differs from Zinn's text in its perspective.[157] In addition, Miller calls *A People's History* the "anti-textbook" to emphasize the lack of suggestively objective "omniscient" narration of "most textbook authors." [158]

While Zinn does not write with the intention of appearing to be an objective scholarly voice, other educators referenced certain similarities between Zinn and traditional textbooks which aided their lessons. In

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[156] Clarke Weatherspoon, interview by the author, January 19, 2012.
[157] Daniel Allen, interview by the author, January 23, 2012.
[158] Miller, interview.

particular, the literary tone in *A People's History* and the textbook as well as largely the same ordering of events makes both texts accessible to students. Juan Carlos, the director of an organization called E3: Education, Excellence, & Equity (E3) in Marin County has used Zinn's book to teach students in middle and high school in addition to teachers of all levels of experience in a summer training program. E3's mission focuses on closing the achievement gap by "redefining educational expectations" to engage all students in a "culture of academic success" and training teachers to identify and "transform students' skills" to help produce academic achievement.[159] When teaching middle and high school students, Carlos often uses Zinn's book alongside the traditional textbook aided by what he described as Zinn's "mainstream normative style."[160] Because *A People's History* analyzes events in largely the same structure as the textbook but with a different emphasis on certain ethnic groups and their stories, Carlos uses Zinn's text to highlight events and perspectives missing form the traditional textbook. For example, Carlos might teach a lesson on immigration and, while maintaining the structure set up in the textbook, supplement the reading with Zinn's text to add the alternate racial and ethnic narratives often overlooked and oversimplified in the textbook.[161] Students benefit from seeing the multi-layers of history and the co-construction of both accounts to form a fuller picture of America's story. Teachers commonly use

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[159] "Home Page," *E3: Education, Excellence, Equity*, April 4, 2012, http://www.e3ed.org/.
[160] Juan Carlos, interview by the author, January 23, 2012.
[161] Ibid.

both *A People's History* and the traditional textbook to teach their course, appreciating the obvious contrast in perspective demonstrated in the example of Columbus and the Arawak Indians and the level of detailed explanation in Zinn's *A People's History*.

Sally Matsuishi teaches Zinn in a nontraditional classroom and asks students to draw comparisons similar to the one involving *Rise of the American Nation, America's History* and Zinn's text. Matsuishi serves as the executive director of a Marin County based non-profit college access organization called Next Generation Scholars (NGS). Officially started in 2005, this organization supports underprivileged, low-income and high-achieving middle school and high school students in their pursuit of higher education. Through highly rigorous supplementary academic classes, wrap-around social services, and community building focused programs, NGS seeks to "level the playing field by providing dedicated underserved students with all the advantages available to those of privilege."[162] Matsuishi teaches weekly classes for her high school students with an emphasis on American history through a social justice lens. Exposing her students to *A People's History* in contrast to the textbook they use in their public school classrooms reveals the implicit biases in both texts. Textual analysis of concepts such as "claim" and the heroic adventure often connected with Columbus enables students to concretely grasp these biases. In looking at certain terms and explanations represented in each text, Matsuishi's

[162] "Our Mission," *Next Generation Scholars*, accessed March 25, 2012, http://www.nextgenerationscholars.org/site/mission.html.

students begin to see "where the holes are" in both books and they begin to ask "why these holes exist," leading to a discussion of presenting different interpretations to achieve certain goals. Like Carlos, Matsuishi believes Zinn's literary style mirrors that of the textbook, enabling students to focus on comparing the content instead of the literary style. The activity works well because "Zinn is written actually oddly enough very much like this textbook," says Matsuishi. Not "archaic" or "overly casual," Zinn's language appears much like that of a history textbook and allows students to view both texts on the same level. Initially, students unsurprisingly view the textbook as "neutral" and see *A People's History* as "leftist," but after in depth analysis they reevaluate these judgments and find the "neutrality" more as an implicit bias.[163] They no longer view the textbook as an objective text, but one in which the obvious omission of certain details results in a narrowly focused and exclusionary narrative.

To further illustrate the existence of a "master narrative" disguised as "objectivity," Matsuishi asks students to reflect on incidences within their community of her students and write historical accounts from both the textbook and Zinn's point of view. When presenting this assignment on the subject of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids often performed in her students' neighborhoods, Matsuishi asks students to critically examine the ways their textbook and *A People's History* construct narratives

[163] Matsuishi, interview.

and to mimic these techniques in their accounts. Given that most students have either witnessed these events or know people who have, Matsuishi uses the assignment to show that their more detailed and personal accounts followed in the style of Zinn's narrative where their textbook accounts lacked urgency and a sense of importance. When asked to do the same assignment on the topic of a change of the school board in the wealthy city of Tiburon, students' lack of knowledge and investment, despite research, resulted in a style of writing that resembled the textbook. The students then questioned their original assumption about the textbook's "neutrality." Instead, the assignment suggested that the contrasting styles resulted from a different bases of knowledge and experiences on the part the authors. Both Carlos's and Matsuishi's educational usages of *A People's History* represents the larger Zinn Approach to raise student awareness of the creation of history and provide students with tools and questions with which to understand the repercussions of selection and emphasis.

Agency and the Citizen in the Zinn Approach

The Zinn Approach significantly complicates the "master narrative" and, in complicating traditional views of American history inspires students to view themselves as viable actors in the process of social change. The application of *A People's History* in high school U.S. history classes effectively fulfills Henry Giroux's outline of public intellectuals' responsibilities in the classroom. Giroux

believes that public intellectuals should enforce the discussion of democracy through informed social and political discourse aimed at prioritizing students' roles as engaged citizens. Zinn's approach to critical analysis of historiography and the implications of different perspectives on issues of social and political concern addresses questions important to the role of citizens. By providing an outspoken activist perspective, teachers encourage students to consider new American heroes and moments of celebration that emphasize factors such as race, class, and gender as driving forces throughout history. This enables students to draw connections to the current state of racial, class and gender inequalities. Zinn presents historical examples of people who questioned America's practices in regards to those issues and formed together to challenge Takaki's definition of the "master narrative," widening the definition of an American to encompass the present reality of citizens. Educators use Zinn's examples to frame central questions of their courses regarding what it means to be an American and what it means to be a citizen.

The Zinn Approach upholds America's initial promises of "freedom," "democracy," and "justice," through analysis of the voices of citizen resistance. The optimism of *A People's History* strives to diversify the images of American identity and provide examples of engaged citizens fighting for these initial promises. Many of the educators, including Minassian, Meyer, and Weatherspoon, explicitly frame their class with the essential question, "What does it mean to be an American?" but refrain from providing students with an

answer.[164] In line with Zinn's own approach, educators push students to apply the texts as possible answers to what it means to be an American and take into account the political and social reality of injustice and oppression. To help students grasp the diversity and fluidity inherent in forming their opinions, educators follow Zinn's approach by emphasizing moments in history when restrictions on who could be included in this definition called into question America's upholding of democratic values. Meyer focuses on questions of "citizenship" and "inclusion" to accent this complexity and discuss the implications of government action on this question throughout history and today.[165]

Many educators see Zinn's analysis of American history as a way to increase student awareness of the legacy of past efforts to fight for social and political change. Weatherspoon cites Zinn's discussion of the war in Vietnam, "post civil rights in the 1980s" and the significance of the Pentagon Papers as examples of Zinn's "democratic" way of analyzing history where he included the voices of many different participants to form his narrative. Zinn's analysis of the Revolutionary Period and "excluded groups" during this time helped Miller to generate an activity where students wrote the Declaration of Independence from the perspective of "the Black Americans, the Native Americans, women, and landless white men."[166] Using Zinn's detailed accounts

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[164] Minassian, interview; Meyer, interview; Weatherspoon, interview.
[165] Meyer, interview.
[166] Miller, interview.

of the experiences of these groups, students generate "powerful statements" closely matching real historical documents centered around the same issues, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton's the "Declaration of Sentiments" and other activist documents. This activity suggests that when they encounter the Zinn Approach to history students not only begin to understand the complexities and conflicts that made up significant historical events, but they also begin to identify the potentially similar concerns of oppressed groups in their own community or neighborhood.

The prevalence of Zinn-inspired activities and questions used by these educators alludes to the tremendous impact of his expansive and explosive content which exposed the reality of inequalities and injustice while reflecting the optimism of monumental past successes and the potential for continued achievement. Impacted by Zinn's own realization of the fabrications of war, his analysis of the context of WWII and the American consciousness at the time demonstrates Zinn's attempts to counter a constructed narrative. Weatherspoon notes Zinn's ability to break down American political rhetoric and expose the real concerns and factors which fundamentally comprised American political leaders' eagerness for war.[167] In presenting this lesson to his class, Weatherspoon articulates the impact of Zinn's analysis on students: "It lets the students in on the idea that governments act in pragmatic ways. And that emotions or sentimentalities often don't enter into political decision

[167] Weatherspoon, interview.

making."[168] By making students aware of past corrupt government actions, students acquire the impulse to question current policies. The Zinn Approach encourages high school students' to analyze and think critically about political and social issues, thereby fulfilling Giroux's emphasis on generating a citizen's approach to education.

Equipped with a fuller and more detailed understanding of America's social and political issues, students can connect their personal experiences to Zinn's analysis of groups who struggled throughout history. Miller references the "rebellious kind of radical nature of [Zinn's] writing" as appealing to young people who commonly share Zinn's "stance toward authority, tradition and norms."[169] Capturing students' attention in this way, but providing them with concrete evidence to support informed questioning creates an empowering effect on students. When Carlos first read Zinn's text, he remembers realizing that Zinn "had words for all the feelings [he] had his entire life" by providing a context for discrimination and subordination of people of color.[170] Werberger witnessed a similar reaction from his primarily African American middle school students who read excerpts from Zinn's chapter on the Civil Rights movement. He remembers students' unique fascination with *A People's History* and the experiences of African American repression. Importantly, students were inspired by Zinn's discussion of the radical activist resistance in response to

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[168] Ibid.
[169] Miller, interview.
[170] Carlos, interview.

these experiences. Werberger used *A People's History* to conduct a debate between the ideas of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King and remembers observing the students respond with such engagement that "it was one of the first times in [his] teaching career [he] felt [he] did something with meaning."[171]

Sally Matsuishi also uses Zinn's text to help ground her students' experiences in a larger historical narrative. With many Vietnamese students entering her program with little to no knowledge of the American War in Vietnam, Matsuishi values Zinn's chapter on Vietnam to help her students understand many of the reasons they live in America today. "They live in a world that is highly influenced by Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder" related to the war, says Matsuishi. In educating her students to increase their knowledge of such a pivotal event, she finds that the textbook's brief account of the war does not suffice. Matsuishi uses Zinn's detailed account of these events to unpack the complicated phenomenon of the American War in Vietnam, which continues to have a significant bearing on her students' lives.

Educators' approaches to teaching *A People's History* encompasses Zinn's ability to redefine the public intellectual role outside of elite academic circles. The Zinn Approach emboldens student understanding of historiography and perspective by providing a contrasting account of America's history of social and political issues. Educators who use Zinn's approach in teaching American history increase student awareness of counter narratives

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[171] Werberger, interview.

which highlight the voices of lesser known heroes and events. This emphasis strengthens students' abilities to not only critically examine texts, but also to uncover implicit biases and perspectives of the author. These skills when applied to an analysis of larger social and political events, empowers students to become active citizens in a democratic society.

The Zinn Approach also enables students to see the impact of individual actors throughout history who, through small acts of defiance, changed the status quo. Reading *A People's History* with teacher guidance, helps students to place themselves within the larger historical narrative of America's past. Learning about the history of conflicts which greatly impacted students' communities can promote activism of similar conflicts existing today. Zinn's counter narrative both actively deconstructs the "master narrative" which reinforces white hegemony and widens the definition of what it means to be American.

CONCLUSION

> There's that African proverb that says until lions learn to write, the history will always glorify the hunter. Howard Zinn is the writing lion. Because he comes from this world and he writes from it.[172]

Howard Zinn's life and work demonstrates his commitment to widening the impact of his public intellectual role beyond the university and to promoting the democratic values of freedom and justice for all people. Growing up aware of the inequality of wealth and education inspired Zinn to actively fight these issues with powerful public engagement throughout his life. Zinn's involvement with the civil rights movement at Spelman College and anti-Vietnam War activism at Boston University exemplified his drive to produce change beyond the classroom. Years of teaching students, researching the conflicts and complexities of history, and maintaining undying optimism in reaction to past examples of radical change make Zinn a public intellectual uniquely dedicated to voice of the people.

His legacy not only lives on in classrooms through the teaching of *A People's History,* but also in the public realm in events aimed to promote social and political equality. Zinn's belief that "we are always a short step away from a new student movement, however bleak things may look" exemplifies his

[172] Matsuishi, interview.

confidence in the "idealism" of the public to fight for palpable social improvement. [173] Six months later, activism remains strong in the OWS movement, despite aggressive police action assigned to dismantle the base. Zinn's presence in the literature and the ideological framework of the movement illustrates his larger impact on current activism today.

[173] Ibid.

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