A People's History of the United States

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF HOWARD ZINN

Howard Zinn was born to a working-class family in Brooklyn. As a young man, he educated himself by reading the complete works of Charles Dickens and by hanging out with Communists who lived in his neighborhood. While he was a teenager, Zinn attended a peaceful protect in Times Square, and was knocked out by a police officer. The experience left a lasting impact on his thinking. Zinn fought in the Air Force during World War II, and later received an M.A. and Ph.D. in history from Columbia University. In 1964, he began teaching at Boston University, where he quickly became a beloved member of the history faculty. He was actively involved in the Civil Rights Movement and anti-Vietnam protesting. In 1980, he published his most famous work, *A People's History of the United States*, which has proven enormously popular. He died at the age of 87, one of the most admired and beloved figures of the American left.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Another history book that covers similar territory is *Lies My Teacher Told Me* (1995) by James Loewen, which also takes a populist, left-wing view of history. Additionally, fans of Howard Zinn should consult the writings of his close friend and intellectual ally, the linguist and left-wing political activist Noam Chomsky. Many of Chomsky's books have studied American history and, like *A People's History*, argued that powerful, tyrannical leaders are ignoring the will of the American people. Chomsky's bibliography is vast—he's published well over 100 books—but many consider his masterpiece of left-wing social criticism to be *Manufacturing Consent* (1988).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present
- **When Written:** Late 1970s
- **Where Written:** Boston, Massachusetts, USA
- **When Published:** Fall 1980
- **Literary Period:** Revisionist history, left-wing history
- **Genre:** Nonfiction, history
- **Antagonist:** The Establishment (the elite, powerful people of the United States)
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Hey, if Matt Damon loved it … . Hundreds of famous people have listed *A People's History of the United States* as one of their favorite books. One of the book's more high-profile endorsements came in the 1997 Academy Award-winning film *Good Will Hunting*. In one scene, Matt Damon, playing a genius, tells Robin Williams to read Zinn's book, adding, "that book'll knock you on your ass." Matt Damon and Ben Affleck, the movie's screenwriters and stars, had grown up a few doors down from Zinn's house and were close family friends.

A memorable death-day. Howard Zinn was one of the most beloved historians of the second half of the 20th century. On the day Zinn died, however, relatively few news outlets ran stories about his passing. The reason? On the same day, an even more beloved American writer died: J. D. Salinger.

PLOT SUMMARY

In *A People's History of the United States*, Zinn aims to write an account of American history from the perspective of persecuted, powerless, marginalized people, rather than the usual pantheon of heroes and elites. He begins by studying Christopher Columbus's conquest of the New World in 1492; over the following century, European explorers wiped out entire Native American tribes and brought tremendous wealth back to their own countries. English settlers came to North America in the early 1600s, and soon afterwards, they were involved in a series of wars with the Native American tribes, during which they used terrorist tactics to assert their domination.

Another important feature of early colonial life in North America was slavery. English settlers used slaves kidnapped from their homes in Africa for free labor, and they also hired indentured servants—poor white people who were forced to spend years paying off their debts. Slaves frequently staged revolts and uprisings against their white masters; indeed, many elites in early colonial America were frightened that black slaves would unite with poor whites and take control over the colonies. Elites instituted policies designed to drive poor whites, Native Americans, and black slaves apart, and use them as "a check upon one another."

In the late 18th century, the Founding Fathers were responsible for organizing a revolution against the British. However, these figures weren't particularly radical in their vision of the future—rather, they were wealthy, powerful people who saw an opportunity to become even more powerful by manipulating the working classes against an external enemy, Britain. It was during the Revolutionary War that American leaders developed the rhetoric of freedom and equality, which

is, to this day, one of the most important tools that leaders use to control their people. In the 1780s, the Founding Fathers drew up the Constitution, which provided for a strong federal government, largely so that they would have a way of protecting their own property and interests.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, American women of all classes and backgrounds asserted their radicalism again and again, in spite of the pervasive sexism of their society. After it became more common for women to attend college in the early 19th century, educated women became more active in feminist causes.

In the early 19th century, America became a major imperialist power, first by expelling Native Americans from their ancestral lands (violating treaties that the American government had signed), and then by annexing Mexican territory in the Southwest. The Mexican-American War of the 1840s set a paradigm for American militarism: again and again, the American government would find a flimsy pretext for starting a war, and then use this pretext to acquire new territory and resources.

The Civil War is often remembered as the event that prompted the federal government to intervene and end slavery forever. But in fact, the federal government only did so because it had been pressured by generations of radical Americans who staged uprisings, slave revolts, and exercised their right to petition the government. When the government finally did free the slaves, it did so in a way that gave African-Americans minimal support. Indeed, in the years following the Civil War (the period known as Reconstruction) the federal government provided some financial and military support for African-Americans in the South. However, following 1876, the federal government backed away from supporting African-Americans and instead aligned itself with the interests of Southern business elites. In the second half of the 19th century, the federal government became bolder about cooperating with business; indeed, it supported military interventions, especially in Latin America, that were designed to strengthen American business. Nevertheless, there was widespread resistance to America's aggressive, imperialist foreign policy.

The 19th century was also a time of widespread labor and union activity. Faced with the fact that the law and the government didn't even pretend to protect the common American worker, laborers went on strike, protested in the streets, and demanded better wages and shorter hours. In response, the federal government again and again showed its support for the business establishment by deploying troops to break up strikes and enforcing business as usual. When the government did help the common worker, it was careful to provide modest, superficial reforms to the system, which were designed to satisfy the American people without helping them in any profound way. In the face of the government's dismissive attitude, laborers embraced Anarchism, Socialism, and Communism—ideologies that questioned the capitalist premise that private business should own production and manufacturing.

During World War One, the American government sent its poorest citizens to die in a conflict that had nothing to do with them. It also passed a series of laws preventing citizens from speaking out against the war in any way. Indeed, many Socialist activists of the era were imprisoned for daring to state the obvious—World War One was a corrupt, imperialist conflict. During the Great Depression, the federal government continued its policies of moderation and pacification: it passed some policies that benefitted workers, but did nothing to fundamentally challenge capitalism or the American business elite.

During World War Two, the U.S. claimed to be fighting for purely moral reasons: to end Fascism in Europe. In fact, Zinn argues, the government fought in World War Two because it saw the chance to make America the world's leading power. By the time the war was over, America had made inroads with leaders around the world, ensuring that its own businesses would be granted free trade rights abroad. The war ended when the American government detonated two atomic bombs in Japan that killed massive numbers of civilians, a decision made largely to assert America's new status as the world's leading superpower.

During the Cold War—the standoff between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., the world's other leading superpower—the U.S. government tried to frighten the American people by warning of a global Communist takeover. The government funded coups and right-wing dictatorships around the world, often deposing democratically-elected Socialist leaders in the process, always with the claim of protecting democracy and fighting Communism. In reality, the Establishment was trying to protect its own business interests, ensuring that the world's leaders would continue to cooperate with American corporations.

During the 1960s, America experienced an outpouring of pent-up radical frustration. The people fought for civil rights, women's rights, gay rights, environmental protection, Native American reparations, and hundreds of other radical populist causes. In many cases, the government's response to its people's actions was to institute tepid, superficial reforms that didn't address the root causes of the problem. For example, the government reformed the voting process to protect African-Americans' voting rights, but did nothing about the systematic poverty and racism that many black people faced every day.

In the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, radicalism seemed to die down in America. But in large part, this was because the media stopped reporting on popular protests. Meanwhile, the American government, despite shifting back and forth between Republican and Democratic leaders, enforced a virtually consistent political agenda, in which welfare was cut back and the military budget increased. Even after the end of the Cold

War, America's military budget continued to grow. Americans joined together in record numbers to protest the meeting of the World Trade Organization in Seattle in 1999, a sign that radicalism wasn't dead in America.

In the final chapter of the book, Zinn discusses the "war on terror," during which the government deployed troops to the Middle East, supposedly to fight Muslim terrorists. Zinn concludes that, while it's too soon to see what the American reaction to the war on terror will be, the American people need to decide if they stand on the side of morality and decency, or if they support imperialism and military aggression.

CHARACTERS

Abigail Adams – Wife of John Adams and an important figure in the American Revolution.

President John Adams – Founding Father and second American president.

Samuel Adams – 18th-century figure in the American Revolution who, Zinn argues, encouraged moderation and order in his working-class allies, perhaps because he wanted to avoid true, radical change in the American colonies.

Madeline Albright – Secretary of State under President Bill Clinton.

Nathaniel Bacon – Wealthy late 17th-century colonist who instigated "Bacon's Rebellion," an uprising against colonial leadership that was notable for uniting black slaves and working-class whites.

Joan Baez – Beloved American folk singer whose songs of the 1960s often had a strong anti-Establishment flavor.

Fulgencio Batista – Dictatorial, U.S.-backed leader of Cuba in the years leading up to the rise of Fidel Castro.

Charles Beard – 20th-century American historian who argued that the Founding Fathers supported the creation of a strong national state largely to protect their own property and business interests.

William Bennett – Secretary of Education under President Ronald Reagan.

Osama Bin Laden – Leader of the anti-U.S. terrorist organization al-Qaeda, believed to have masterminded the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Randolph Bourne – Early 20th-century radical writer who wrote, "War is the health of the state."

Stephen Breyer – Leftist, but relatively moderate Supreme Court justice appointed by President Bill Clinton.

John Brown – 19th century radical who led a raid on a military arsenal with the intention of arming slaves. He was later executed.

William Jennings Bryan – Democratic presidential candidate in 1896.

President George H.W. Bush – 41st American president, whose four years in the White House saw the continuation of many of President Ronald Reagan's policies, as well as a brief war in Kuwait.

President George W. Bush – 43rd American president, who presided over the country during the 9/11 terrorist attacks. He later declared a "war on terror" and deployed troops to the Middle East.

Albert Camus – 20th century French-Algerian writer whom Zinn cites when laying out his philosophy of history.

Andrew Carnegie – 19th-century steel industrialist.

President Jimmy Carter – 39th American president who was elected on the promise that he would honor the people's needs, but remained mostly loyal to the business and military Establishment.

Fidel Castro – Leader of Cuba for most of the second half of the 20th century.

Winston Churchill – Prime Minister of Great Britain during World War Two.

President Grover Cleveland – 22nd and 24th president of the United States. Like many powerful politicians of the era, he was an ally of businesses interests and a firm opponent of unions.

President Bill Clinton – 42nd American president, whose eight years in the White House were characterized by an active, militaristic foreign policy, a widening gap between rich and poor, and embarrassing sex scandals.

Christopher Columbus – European explorer who, in 1492, sailed to the Americas, beginning an age of European imperialism.

Hernando Cortés – 16th century Spanish explorer who conquered the Aztec empire.

Davy Crockett – Beloved American frontier figure of the early 1800s, notable for his friendships with Native American tribes.

Bartolomé de las Casas – A priest who became one of Christopher Columbus's most influential critics.

Eugene Debs – 19th and early 20th century Socialist leader who organized a series of influential railway strikes and was later imprisoned for speaking out against America's involvement in World War One.

Thomas Dorr – 19th-century Rhode Island lawyer who led a rebellion in support of white male suffrage in Rhode Island.

John Dos Passos – Famous American writer whose early novels, especially *Three Soldiers*, painted a bleak picture of World War One.

Frederick Douglass – 19th century black activist who played a critical role in growing the abolitionist movement and later in

convincing Abraham Lincoln to support legislation freeing slaves.

W. E. B. Du Bois – Early 20th century black academic and activist who linked racism and segregation in America to an overall moral bankruptcy stemming from capitalist expansion.

Bob Dylan – Beloved American musician and songwriter who, for much of the 1960s, wrote music criticizing the American Establishment.

Ralph Easley – Founder of the National Civic Federation during the early 20th century.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower – 34th American president.

Daniel Ellsberg – U.S. government insider who leaked thousands of documents exposing the government's lies and deceptions regarding the Vietnam War.

President Gerald Ford – 38th American president and successor to President Richard Nixon, who continued virtually all of Nixon's policies.

Henry Clay Frick – 19th-century industrialist who played an important role in brutally ending the 1892 Homestead Strike.

Betty Freidan – 20th-century feminist writer whose book *The Feminine Mystique* is still a feminist classic.

John Galbraith – 20th-century economist who linked the stock market crash of 1929 with the growing inequality of American society.

William Lloyd Garrison – 19th century white abolitionist.

Henry George – Late 19th-century economist who criticized the principles of land ownership and unsuccessfully ran for mayor of New York City.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg – Leftist Supreme Court justice appointed by President Bill Clinton.

Albert Gore – Vice president to President Bill Clinton, and later an unsuccessful presidential candidate in 2000.

Sarah Grimké – Early 19th-century feminist who challenged the domestic role of women.

Lani Guinier – Controversial prospective appointee to the Justice Department under President Bill Clinton, whom Clinton abandoned after she faced conservative criticism.

Alexander Hamilton – Founding Father and author of some of the Federalist Papers. As the first Secretary of the Treasury, Hamilton engineered the creation of America's national banking system.

Fred Hampton – Activist and local leader in the Black Panther Party who was shot in his sleep by Chicago police officers.

Katherine Harris – Florida secretary of state during the controversy surrounding the 2000 presidential election.

President Rutherford Hayes – Nineteenth American president, whose election was hotly contested by both political parties and resulted in the end of Reconstruction in the South, as well as a new alliance between Northern and Southern elites.

Big Bill Haywood – Early 20th-century union organizer, who later fled to the Soviet Union rather than face prosecution for organizing protests against America's involvement in World War Two.

Ernest Hemingway – Famous American writer whose early novels, especially *A Farewell to Arms*, painted a bleak picture of World War One.

Patrick Henry – 18th-century American statesman whose famous "Give me liberty or give me death" speech established the paradigm for Establishment rule: unite the people using patriotism and lofty rhetoric.

Anita Hill – Law professor who, in the midst of Clarence Thomas's confirmation hearing for the Supreme Court, accused Thomas of having sexually harassed her.

Adolf Hitler – Genocidal dictator of Germany during World War Two.

Ho Chi Minh – Communist leader of North Vietnam from the 1940s to 1969, during which time he led his people against American troops.

Oliver Wendell Holmes – Supreme Court justice who, during World War One, accepted the federal government's limitations on free speech by proposing the famous "clear and present danger" standard.

Langston Hughes – Black poet often associated with the Harlem Renaissance.

Saddam Hussein – Dictator of Iraq from the 1980s to the 2000s.

Anne Hutchinson – 17th-century Puritan thinker who antagonized the Puritan Establishment and later went to live in Rhode Island.

President Andrew Jackson – Seventh American president whom Zinn discusses largely for his role in expelling Native Americans from their ancestral homes.

George Jackson – Californian prisoner who, during his incarceration, penned a series of books attacking the injustices of American society. He was later murdered by a prison guard, which spawned the Attica prison riots.

William James – Late 19th- and early 20th-century philosopher and political activist who criticized America's militarism and imperialism.

John Jay – Founding Father and one of the authors of the Federalists Papers.

Thomas Jefferson – Founding Father and president at the beginning of the 19th century, whose words in the Declaration of Independence, "all men are created equal," masked the fundamental inequality in American society.

President Lyndon Johnson – 36th American president, responsible for signing the Voting Rights Act, among other pieces of legislation that gave institutional protection to African-Americans. He also presided over the country during some of the bloodiest years of the Vietnam War.

Irving Kaufman – The judge who sentenced the Rosenbergs to death.

Robert Kennedy – Attorney General during the administration of President John F. Kennedy, his brother.

President John F. Kennedy – 35th American president.

Helen Keller – Early 20th-century feminist and Socialist activist.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. – Black civil rights activist during the fifties and sixties who preached a doctrine of nonviolent resistance to white racism and intolerance. Later in his life, King alienated the federal government of the U.S. by criticizing the Vietnam War and calling for radical redistributions of wealth.

Henry Kissinger – Secretary of State under President Richard Nixon and President Gerald Ford.

Ron Kovic – Veteran of the Vietnam War who later became a key activist against the American military.

Monica Lewinsky – Young government worker with whom President Bill Clinton had sexual relations.

Abraham Lincoln – Sixteenth American president, who presided over the country during the Civil War while greatly expanding the power of the American state.

John Locke – 17th-century British philosopher who stressed the importance of property and ownership in state administration.

General Douglas MacArthur – World War Two hero who began his career by leading federal troops to break up a crowd of World War One veterans camped outside the White House.

President James Madison – Founding Father, author of some of the Federalist Papers, and fourth American president, who argued that the role of the state should be to arbitrate and referee conflicts between different factions of the population.

Thurgood Marshall – Highly respected Supreme Court justice who played a crucial role in many of the Court's landmark decisions of the 1960s.

Karl Marx – European philosopher, economist, and founder of the doctrine of Communism, who criticized capitalism on the basis that it wrongly deprived workers of the fruits of their own labor, concentrating wealth in the hands of the few.

Senator Joseph McCarthy –Senator who, during the 1950s, was instrumental in leading a series of "witch hunts" against suspected Communists in government and other institutions of American society.

President William McKinley – 25th American president, often credited with greatly expanding the role of business interests in the federal government, and a firm supporter of America's aggressive, militaristic foreign policy.

J. P. Morgan – 19th-century and early 20th century banker who bailed out the federal government in the 1890s.

Lucretia Mott – 19th-century feminist leader who helped organize the Seneca Falls Convention, a milestone in American feminism.

Ralph Nader – Third-party candidate for president in the year 2000.

Huey Newton – Leader of the Black Panther party during the late 1960s.

Ngo Dinh Diem – The U.S.-backed leader of South Vietnam.

Colonel Oliver North – American Colonel who was tried for his role in the Iran-Contra Scandal, and is often thought to have been a "fall guy" for higher-ranking American politicians involved in the incident.

Thomas Paine – Pamphleteer, thinker, and writer during the American Revolution, best known for his pamphlet, *Common Sense*.

Rosa Parks – Black activist who played an important role in initiating the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Commodore Matthew Perry – American naval commander who played a key role in using military force to intimidate Japan into opening its doors to trade with the United States.

Francisco Pizarro – 16th-century Spanish explorer who conquered the Inca empire in South America.

President James Polk – Eleventh American president, notable for his role in provoking war with Mexico and later annexing Mexico's territory in the Southwest.

Chief Powhatan – Early 17th century Native American leader who led his people against English settlers.

President Ronald Reagan – 40th American president, whose eight years in the White House were characterized by deregulation, cuts to welfare programs, and drastic expansions of the military budget.

Adrienne Rich – 20th-century poet and feminist who argued that sexism presupposed a fixed relationship between women and their own bodies, and that women needed to celebrate their bodies in radical new ways.

John Rockefeller – 19th century oil industrialist who ran the monopolistic Standard Oil company.

President Theodore Roosevelt – 26th American president, interpreted by Zinn as a racist, an enemy of the working-class, and a "secret conservative" who pretended to take up Progressive causes.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt – 32nd American president who presided over the country during much of the

Great Depression, and the entirety of World War Two.

Eleanor Roosevelt – Wife of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and a supporter of rights for African-Americans.

Archbishop Oscar Romero – Priest in El Salvador who was murdered, probably with the approval of the CIA, for speaking out against the U.S.-backed government in his country.

Julius Rosenberg – Alleged Soviet spy, and husband of Ethel Rosenberg, who was executed for stealing information about nuclear weapons.

Ethel Rosenberg – Alleged Soviet spy, and wife of Julius Rosenberg, who was executed for helping her husband steal information about nuclear weapons.

Nicola Sacco – Early 20th century anarchist who was executed for allegedly detonating a bomb.

Sequoyah – Cherokee chief who helped develop a written language for his people.

Arthur Schlesinger – 20th century historian whom Zinn regards as exemplary of the hidden alliance between the Academy and the Establishment.

Daniel Shays – Soldier in the American Revolution who later led a rebellion against the new American state, which was suppressed with military force.

Upton Sinclair – Early 20th-century "Muckraker" who criticized the squalid conditions of the meatpacking industry.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton – 19th-century feminist leader who helped organize the Seneca Falls Convention, a milestone in American feminism.

Lincoln Steffens – Early 20th-century "Muckraker" who criticized the corruption of city planners.

John Steinbeck – 20th century writer whose novels, including *The Grapes of Wrath*, portray the effects of the Great Depression on the working classes.

Ida Tarbell – Early 20th-century "Muckraker" who criticized the Standard Oil company.

Frederick W. Taylor – Early 20th-century pioneer of business management techniques.

President Zachary Taylor – Twelfth American president, and, previously, an important figure in the American military's war on Native Americans.

Clarence Thomas – Conservative Supreme Court justice and successor to Thurgood Marshall.

Henry David Thoreau – Writer and thinker who, in the 1840s, penned the famous essay, "Civil Disobedience," to protest America's involvement in the Mexican American War.

Samuel Tilden – Unsuccessful opponent of Rutherford Hayes in the 1876 presidential election.

President Harry Truman – 33rd American president, who made the decision to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki, effectively ending World War Two.

Sojourner Truth – 19th century black feminist who delivered the famous, "Ain't I a Woman?" speech in New York City.

Nat Turner – Black leader who, in 1831, led a rebellion of several dozen slaves and was later executed

Mark Twain – Celebrated 19th-century American author and noted opponent of American intervention in the Philippines.

Martin Van Buren – Eighth American president.

Bartolomeo Vanzetti – Early 20th century anarchist who was executed for allegedly detonating a bomb.

James Wadsworth – New York Senator during World War One.

Booker T. Washington – Early 20th century black activist who urged his followers to be moderate, prioritize economic independence, and accept the terms of segregation.

President Woodrow Wilson – 28th American president, who led the country during World War One.

John Winthrop – Governor of the Pilgrim settlements in New England in the mid-17th century.

Samuel Worcester – Georgian missionary who refused to take a loyalty oath against the Native American people.

Richard Wright – 20th-century black novelist who briefly joined the Communist party.

Malcolm X – Black activist during the 1960s who advocated a strong policy of self-defense in the black community. He criticized Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for being too passive and accommodating to the white Establishment.

President Richard Nixon The 37th American president. He campaigned on ending the Vietnam War, and did remove ground troops but maintained bombing, particularly in Cambodia. He was forced to resign in 9174 after the Watergate Scandal exposed criminal behavior among some of Nixon's administration members and touching Nixon himself, as well.

TERMS

Imperialism The system of state administration that involves the state extending its power by acquiring new territories. Zinn also uses the word "imperialism" to refer, more loosely, to the process by which the U.S. has used the pretext of war to gain access to new markets and cheap labor in foreign countries.

Capitalism The economic system in which private owners control the "means of production" (industry, manufacturing, and trade). Since the 1500s, most Western economies have been predominately capitalist, while incorporating elements of Socialism. In the 19th century, capitalist systems of production

incentivized the Industrial Revolution and the growth of science and technology, allowing some wealthy industrialists to become astonishingly rich. However, capitalism has been criticized for exploiting working-class people and creating a way of life that is petty, materialistic, and ultimately meaningless.

Anarchism The political and economic ideology that favors the abolition of government and the construction of a society in which people voluntarily organize themselves. Anarchism is one of the most vague and open-ended political ideologies, since its single organizing principle is a hatred for strong government. In the 19th century, some anarchist groups favored the use of violence to galvanize American society into revolution. Other anarchist groups have favored peaceful means of bringing about the abolition of government and centralized authority, and creating a society in which people socialized and cooperated voluntarily. In one of the final chapters of *A People's History*, Howard Zinn characterizes an ideal society as one that lacks centralized authority or bureaucracy—suggesting that, even if he's not a true anarchist, Zinn respects some anarchist ideas. Notable anarchist thinkers include Mikhail Bakunin, Alexander Berkman, and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon.

Socialism The economic system in which the whole community—or, in some cases, a government elected to represent the community—controls the means of production. In the 21st century, most Western societies incorporate at least some Socialist elements into their economies—in the U.S., for example, the public school system can be considered socialized, since a democratically-elected government collects funds (taxes) to pay for schools. At various points in modern history, however, socialism has been presented as a utopian ideology, calling for the abolition of private property. Some key socialist thinkers include Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Robert Owen, and Bertrand Russell.

Communism A political and economic system, often referred to interchangeably with Socialism. In Communism, however, a centralized government, acting on behalf of the people, protects access to resources and ensures that citizens do not accumulate large amounts of private property. Many countries incorporate aspects of Socialism into their economies, but few countries are truly Communist. In the 20th century, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China were two of the most powerful Communist countries. The definitive document of Communism remains "The Communist Manifesto," a political pamphlet written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

As its title would suggest, Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* is, above all, a history of the country from the perspective of the American people. However, when he talks about the "American people," Zinn means something very different from "every person who has ever lived in America." Zinn is talking specifically about the American people who have the least power and political representation, and who are least likely to be treated with respect in their society. At times, Zinn offers a numerical estimate of what he means by "the American people"—the ninety-nine percent of Americans with the least income (rather than the richest one percent of Americans, from whose perspective, Zinn claims, most works of history are written). At other times, Zinn talks about different demographics that, put together, comprise the least powerful and most commonly ignored American people: African Americans, women, homosexuals, etc. Most frequently, however, Zinn, an admirer of Marxism, defines the American people not by their race or gender, but simply by virtue of the fact that they are exploited by the wealthy, powerful Establishment (see Establishment theme).

Zinn acknowledges that the American people aren't all alike: they represent thousands of different religions, ideologies, and experiences. However, he argues that, by virtue of their common oppression at the hands of the powerful, the American people have in common a certain view of the world. Indeed, Zinn argues that the American people have almost always opposed unethical actions and causes that benefit the few at the expense of the many. Throughout American history, Zinn claims, the people have opposed many of the wars in which their country has been involved. Most dramatically, the vast majority of American people opposed America's involvement in Vietnam during the 1960s and 70s, even before the federal government had reinstated the draft. This might suggest that the American people opposed intervention in Vietnam not simply because of self-interest, but because they recognized that the Vietnam War was morally wrong. Zinn documents many other points in American history when the vast majority of the American people have opposed government policies that threaten their livelihood and contradict the principals of equality and fairness.

At times, Zinn admits, the American people have also thrown their support to causes that, in retrospect, seem bigoted or ill-advised. For instance, during the 19th century, Populist farmers' opposition to the greed of the East-Coast Establishment was laced with anti-black rhetoric and violence. Zinn also admits that, during the Mexican-American War, the majority of Americans supported America's imperialist

aggression in the Southwest, despite the fact that the war endangered their own lives and was premised on a series of calculated provocations by the federal government. However, in cases where the American people's behavior seems to contradict the left-wing causes that Zinn himself supports, Zinn tends to mitigate these examples. For instance, in the case of the Mexican-American War, he argues that the jingoistic media manipulated the American people into voicing their support for a corrupt war that they otherwise wouldn't have supported. Zinn further shows that the American people have voiced their support for left-wing, populist causes that favor the many over the few through riots, demonstrations, peaceful protests, petitions, and politically-charged works of art. Throughout American history, he repeatedly argues, the people have consistently used such means to push for freedom, independence, and skepticism of authority.

Zinn's vision of American history has not been without its critics, both on the left and the right. One of the most common criticisms of *A People's History of the United States*, voiced by many prominent historians, is that it paints an overly simplistic, even monolithic view of the American people. The Pulitzer Prize-winning radical historian Eric Foner, for example, has argued that Zinn doesn't pay enough attention to the divisions and changes within the enormous category of the American people. Zinn spends relatively little time discussing the rise of the middle-class in the 20th century, nor does he address the strong correlation between poverty and conservative voting patterns in the past twenty-five years. Similarly, critics have suggested that Zinn deliberately plays down racial and ethnic conflicts between different working-class groups, attributing such conflicts to the "manipulations" of the Establishment, rather than the "true" intentions of the American people. In short, critics suggest, Zinn lumps together many mutually antagonistic groups, calls them "the American people," and attributes to them a degree of unity and solidarity that they never really felt.

Another closely-related criticism of *A People's History of the United States* is that Zinn "intervenes" too much in his own evidence, writing off counterexamples to his arguments without any proof. He suggests that the American people didn't truly support the Mexican-American War, but were only tricked, through propaganda, into supporting it; this claim that calls into question how Zinn could possibly know what people's true motives were, and what it means to believe or support any government action. In spite of its critics, however, *A People's History of the United States* remains an important history text. Even if one accepts that Zinn's portrait of the American people is sometimes simplified and idealized, his book may be a necessary antidote to the vast majority of history textbooks that ignore the common American people and valorize elites.

THE ESTABLISHMENT

Although Zinn's book is, first and foremost, about the American people, he argues that American history is, in large part, about the clashes between the least powerful Americans and their opposites: powerful, influential, Americans, which Zinn terms the Establishment (and uses interchangeably with "the elite" and "the rich"). Much like the category of "the American people," Zinn's notion of the Establishment incorporates many different people, groups, and institutions, sometimes with mutually contradictory agendas. However, Zinn discusses some of the historical events and trends that have formed a loose coalition between the different members of the Establishment.

Perhaps the single most important milestone in the history of the Establishment was the alliance that arose between the federal government and the business community following the end of the Civil War. In this period, businessmen began donating more and more money to presidential elections in order to ensure that the government would protect business interests. With the growth of the business sector in the 19th century, businessmen began funding the university system, too, ensuring that generations of American college graduates would be trained to accept the status quo and, implicitly, to honor the interests of the government and the business sector. Zinn isn't saying that business, government, and university elites are members of literal organizations whose goal is to maintain power (although sometimes, he argues, they are). Rather, he argues that the most powerful people in America, more often than not, have strong incentives to cooperate with one another, and therefore, they will act in their own best interest by cooperating. Thus, the common characteristic that unites all members of the Establishment is that they have power and that they can cooperate with one another, both consciously and unconsciously, to ensure the continuation of their power.

One of the key strategies that the Establishment has used in the last century is cutting taxes for the wealthiest Americans; indeed, tax rates for the wealthy have gone down dramatically since World War Two. Moreover, Zinn shows that some of the key pieces of legislation lowering the tax rates for the wealthy were proposed by Democratic and Republican senators working together, confirming the point that powerful people often have more in common with each other than with the struggling "common man." By the same token, the Establishment has cut welfare programs for the working classes in recent decades. While Zinn admits that Democratic politicians have done more than their Republican counterparts to protect welfare, neither political party, he argues, has fought for anything more than a "pitiful" increase in welfare, suggesting a basic "consensus" between Democrats and Republicans, and between all Establishment elites. A final strategy that the Establishment has used to strengthen itself is to invade and take control over other countries. In these

conflicts, elites ensure that those countries' resources flow back into the U.S., benefitting elites far more than they benefit ordinary people. (For more, see Militarism theme.)

But it's not enough for the Establishment to fight to ensure its own health, Zinn argues—it must also work to weaken the American people. Zinn argues that, traditionally, the Establishment has tried to weaken and divide the American people by pitting different races, especially black people and white people, against each other. As far back as the colonial period, Zinn shows, elites deliberately passed laws preventing poor white servants and laborers from associating with (and, implicitly, befriending) black slaves, partly out of fear that poor whites and black slaves would rise up against their masters. Indeed, Zinn suggests that racism intensified in the colonial period because elites took great care to isolate and divide poor whites and slaves. Another key strategy that the Establishment has used to weaken the American people is to emphasize the rhetoric of equality and freedom. The American traditions of patriotism, equality, and meritocracy, Zinn argues, have the effect of masking the true inequalities of American society. In effect, Establishment rhetoric is the "opiate of the American masses"; it encourages people to accept their misery, or even blame themselves for it. The Establishment has also weakened the American people by declaring frequent wars, which have the effect of focusing the people's energies outwards, toward other countries, instead of inward, toward the Establishment itself.

At times, Zinn's discussion of the Establishment can seem overly simplistic. As with his treatment of the American people, he doesn't spend much time discussing the divisions and conflicts within the Establishment. For example, he treats President Franklin Roosevelt as a typical Establishment figure, rather than discussing the derision that Roosevelt faced from the wealthy elite for promoting policies to help the poor. Furthermore, Zinn offers no proof that Democratic politicians who fought for minor welfare reform were cooperating with Republican members of the Establishment. Zinn's descriptions give the impression of unity and solidarity within the Establishment when, in fact, there has been a lot of controversy and competition. However, Zinn's treatment of the Establishment gives a sense of the informal cooperation that sometimes arises between powerful people, and of the growing divide between the rich and the poor, a theme that has recently become more relevant to American life than ever.

RADICALISM VS. REFORM

In many ways, Howard Zinn's version of American history is depressing: again and again, he shows how the powerful Establishment uses violence and propaganda to thwart the American people's efforts to fight for change. However, at times, Zinn acknowledges that American society has seen significant changes for the better: women won the right to vote, black slaves won their freedom, and life expectancy and the literacy rate have risen. Zinn often offers a counterintuitive interpretation of these positive changes. In a Marxist mode, he argues that changes to American society have been small and relatively superficial, meaning that, ultimately, they have strengthened the power of the Establishment. In making such an argument, Zinn draws an important distinction between radical, revolutionary change—that is, fundamental changes to the system of American society, especially in the arena of property and ownership—and mere reform (i.e., small changes that do not address the basic injustices of American society). While reform may benefit people and improve the average American's quality of life, Zinn argues that it also staves off the radical change that could transform the people's live for the better and instead perpetuates injustice and inequality in America.

Zinn argues that reform staves off radical change in two main ways. First, reform removes some of the energy and indignation necessary to fuel revolutionary change. For example, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s culminated in the federal government initiating a series of laws, such as the Voting Rights Act, designed to protect the rights of African Americans. In Zinn's terminology, these laws are textbook examples of reform. The Voting Rights Act, for instance, protected black people's right to vote, but it did not address the core problems that African Americans faced in American society, such as their impoverishment, the systematic discrimination they faced every day, etc. However, the superficial "success" of the Voting Rights Act took some of the fire out of black activism—some African Americans, thinking that they'd emerged victorious, stopped fighting for radical change. Thus, in the early 1970s, there was no national black activist movement comparable with that of the 1960s, which is evidence that reform had deprived the movement of its full strength. In general, Zinn argues, the result of reform is to pacify the American people by giving them a tiny portion of what they really want.

Zinn also argues that reform staves off radical change in the sense that reform, because it is almost always conducted through the federal government, strengthens and legitimates the structures of the Establishment. For example, in the early 20th century women won the right to vote. As Zinn sees it, winning the right to vote is a classic example of reform, since women's victory did not address the root causes of sexism and misogyny in American society. By voting, women were effectively "honoring" the American electoral system—a major institution of the federal government and, therefore, of the Establishment. Throughout the 20th century, women almost never had the opportunity to vote for a female, or feminist, presidential candidate, since the Republican and Democratic parties consistently nominated male candidates with moderate, or sometimes sexist, views on gender politics. In short, the

result of voting reform in the early 20th century was that a) women won a superficial, symbolic victory, b) women were not able to use their right to vote as a way of electing leaders who shared their interests, and, most importantly of all, c) the institution of voting—and with it, the Establishment itself—won new respect and loyalty from the female population of the United States. By offering a mild reform (suffrage) the Establishment boosted its respectability in the eyes of the American people while sacrificing none of its own power. In general, Zinn argues, reform has the effect of increasing people's respect and admiration for the federal government and the Establishment far more than it increases people's freedom and economic well-being. As a result, reform staves off radical, revolutionary change.

It's important to recognize that Zinn isn't saying that reform is "good" or "bad"; he's making a much more sophisticated argument. In many ways, reform has benefited the American people, giving them better wages and healthier lives. However, reform has also staved off the equality and freedom that all Americans deserve. In effect, reform is good, but not good enough.

MILITARISM AND CONQUEST

From 1492 onwards, conquest has been one of the key themes of American history. The New World was founded on Christopher Columbus's military conquest of Haiti and, in the centuries that followed, Spanish and English explorers' bloodthirsty conquest of the Native American tribes who'd lived in the Americas for thousands of years. Throughout his book, Zinn shows how militarism—both the literal act of conquering other people with military force, and the more abstract ideology that celebrates fighting and conquering—has strengthened the American Establishment and weakened the American people.

Zinn offers a few different senses in which militarism strengthens the Establishment. On the most literal level, militarism has brought new wealth to the Establishment. Much of the land that America acquired during the Mexican-American War of the 1840s, for instance, ended up under the control of powerful railway companies. Even the land that went to poor farmers was often repossessed by large industrialized agricultural businesses, since many 19th century farmers struggled to pay their debts. In more recent years, however, militarism has strengthened the Establishment by bringing it into contact with new markets, plentiful resources, and cheap labor. Zinn argues that, during most of the Cold War, corporate interests encouraged the American government to conduct wars in countries where Socialist uprisings threatened corporations' ability to trade freely. In Vietnam, Chile, Iraq, and dozens of other countries, a major factor in the government's decision to go to war was the plentitude of resources. As Zinn sees it, the federal government wanted to ensure that American businesses would be able to access those resources. While the government offers many reasons for going to war—including, throughout the Cold War, the deadly threat of a worldwide Communist takeover—its real reasons are often much simpler: it wants to protect business.

Militarism doesn't merely strengthen the Establishment; it also weakens the American people. By focusing the people's attention on external threats (such as a global Communist takeover), the Establishment mitigates popular resistance to its own unjust policies. During World War Two, for example, labor unions pledged not to go on strike out of support for America's war with Germany and Japan. Similarly, war ensures that many young, energetic people are abroad, fighting for their country, rather than back at home, fighting against their government. Finally, militarism weakens the American people by bolstering patriotism, making citizens more loyal to their country and, therefore, to their government.

It's important to recognize that Zinn isn't saying that the American government intentionally starts wars to strengthen itself. (Indeed, Zinn spends several pages refuting one of the most beloved left-wing conspiracy theories, that Franklin Roosevelt provoked the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in order to enter World War Two). Zinn fully acknowledges that many elites sincerely believe they're taking their country to war to protect their own people. Nevertheless, Zinn argues that, whatever people's motives for war, the overall *effect* of war is to strengthen the Establishment and weaken the American people. Furthermore, Zinn argues that at least some elites in American history have supported war with the intention of benefitting themselves.

BIAS AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

Howard Zinn's book is a history of the United States, but it's also a critique of other books on the same subject. Zinn argues that many previous histories of the United States haven't been fair in their accounts of the past; in particular, they've glorified Establishment figures, marginalized or demonized the contributions of the ordinary American people, and celebrated superficial reforms for being revolutionary. While Zinn doesn't offer a full-scale investigation of bias in American history, he suggests that many historians write biased versions of history because they've gone through an education system that's funded by the Establishment (see Establishment theme), and they have been trained to give authority and tradition too much respect. With this in mind, *A People's History of the United States* represents Zinn's attempt to balance out some of the more unfortunate biases in American history texts. Because most books marginalize the American people and overemphasize the Establishment, Zinn chooses to do exactly the opposite. Unlike many historians, Zinn acknowledges his ideological and political biases upfront: he writes that he'll emphasize the American

people's contribution to history. Furthermore, Zinn was frank about being sympathetic to some of the political ideas of Karl Marx, the founder of Communism; partly as a result, his book treats history as a conflict between people of different classes.

In what ways does Zinn's version of history differ from other, more mainstream versions? At times, Zinn's approach is to write about a familiar, well-known historical event, but from an unfamiliar perspective—that of the persecuted people. When he discusses the "discovery" of America, for instance, Zinn refrains from glorifying Christopher Columbus in the manner of most elementary school textbooks. Instead, he draws his readers' attention to the suffering of the Arawak Native Americans whom Christopher Columbus murdered, tortured, and kidnapped. At other points in the book, however, Zinn makes an effort to write about events that are relatively unfamiliar to the average American, usually because they revolve around working-class people, and, as a result, have been omitted from history textbooks. Zinn spends many chapters analyzing the organized labor strikes of the 19th century, which had a profound impact on American society but which too-rarely show up in student textbooks.

Zinn also avoids the tendency to write about history by concentrating on the lives of a few important individuals. While his book is full of fascinating people, no single figure in *A People's History*—not even Dr. Martin Luther, Jr. or Abraham Lincoln—is portrayed as having played an indispensable part in changing the country. Instead, Zinn shows individuals like Lincoln and King to be responding to the will of the American people. At other times, Zinn's approach to history is more abstract; he idealizes alternative visions of society. For example, he devotes several pages to conveying the beauty and complexity of Native American society before the arrival of Columbus, and he even posits that Native American society was happier, more equitable, more democratic, and more stable than European society in the 15th century. By celebrating the societies that European conquest wiped out in America, Zinn challenges one of mainstream historians' most dangerous forms of bias: the assumption that society progresses over time, and that European society "improved" America by replacing Native American culture with science and rationality.

Zinn has been criticized by many writers and historians for being too one-sided—deliberately one-sided, in fact—in his account of American history. However, Zinn is open about his biases, and in interviews and other books, he repeatedly said that he didn't want *A People's History of the United States* to become the "last word" on American history (especially given his practices of ignoring contrary evidence and speculating about people's motives without grounds). Rather, Zinn wanted students to put his text into conversation with other, more mainstream history books, so that his work could balance out the bias in other books. If he were alive today, Zinn probably wouldn't appreciate that college students still treat *A People's History* like the unimpeachable truth, rather than as a primer designed to help them learn about American history and question their biases.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE TRILATERAL COMMISSION

A People's History of the United States contains few symbols, since it's a work of nonfiction. One interesting exception to the rule comes in Chapter Twenty, when Zinn discusses the Trilateral Commission, a 1973 meeting of political leaders from Japan, the U.S., and Western Europe. The Trilateral Commission brought leaders together to discuss the need to control their own populations and strengthen corporate interests. Thus, the Trilateral Commission is a powerful symbol of the Establishment: the alliance between the most powerful intellectuals, politicians, and businessmen, designed to help them maintain their power.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Harper Perennial edition of *A People's History of the United States* published in 2015.

Chapter 1 Quotes

These Arawaks of the Bahama Islands were much like Indians on the mainland, who were remarkable (European observers were to say again and again) for their hospitality, their belief in sharing. These traits did not stand out in the Europe of the Renaissance, dominated as it was by the religion of popes, the government of kings, the frenzy for money that marked western civilization and its first messenger to the Americas, Christopher Columbus.

Related Characters: Christopher Columbus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

A People's History begins with a description of the first encounter between the native people of the New World and the European explorers who arrived in the New World

in the late 15th century. As Zinn sees it, the Arawaks of the Bahama Islands were gracious and accommodating to the Europeans, while early European explorers were "frenzied" in their desire for gold and profit. As a result of their greed, Columbus and his successors ravaged Arawak society, enslaving tens of thousands of indigenous people and murdering others who refused to submit to European authority.

The passage is important because it depicts a familiar moment in history—one that all American schoolchildren have learned about—from an unfamiliar perspective. Instead of depicting the encounter from the point of view of Columbus and his followers, Zinn depicts it from the point of view of the indigenous people whom Columbus went on to annihilate. Throughout the book, Zinn adheres to a similar strategy: discussing well-known events and eras of U.S. history (the bombing of Hiroshima, the Civil War, the Progressive Era, etc.) from the perspective of the persecuted and the marginalized. In so doing, Zinn debunks some of the facile slogans of American history. Here, for example, Zinn questions the idea that Columbus was a hero or a visionary; as Zinn sees him, Columbus was a petty, greedy employee of the Spanish state, and there was absolutely nothing heroic about him.

> If history is to be creative, to anticipate a possible future without denying the 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 than in its solid centuries of warfare.
>
> That, being as blunt as I can, is my approach to the history of the United States. The reader may as well know that before going on.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

Later in Chapter One, Zinn takes a moment sketch out his overall project in *A People's History of the United States*. Zinn will tell the story of American history from the perspective of the American people—the common, persecuted people who typically get passed over in history books. Zinn acknowledges that such a view of American history, however honest, can seem repetitive and pessimistic: indeed, *A People's History* is, in large part, the story of how the American people repeatedly tried and failed to defeat their wealthier, more powerful oppressors. Why, then, is it worthwhile to tell this pessimistic version of American history?

Telling the story of American history from the point of view of the people, Zinn answers, is important because such a story can be inspiring, rather than dispiriting. Even if the American people have never entirely succeeded in banding together against the wealthy and instituting their own form of society, there have been periodic "brief flashes" in which many different Americans worked together in an effort to do so. The compassion, cooperation, and idealism of the American people of the past, Zinn believes, can be a powerful example for future generations of idealistic Americans.

In short, Zinn isn't just writing a work of American history. His goal isn't just to inform the reader, or even to debunk the reader's misconceptions about American history. Rather, Zinn wants to *inspire* readers to use their knowledge to change American society. Zinn's beliefs may seem radical, unrealistic, or even dangerous to some readers. However, he is honest and upfront about his left-wing point of view and his idealistic vision of the future of American society.

> Two sophisticated ways of controlling direct labor action developed in the mid-thirties. First, the National Labor Relations Board would give unions legal status, listen to them, settling certain of their grievances. Thus it could moderate labor rebellion by channeling energy into elections—just as the constitutional system channeled possibly troublesome energy into voting. The NLRB would set limits in economic conflict as voting did in political conflict. And second, the workers' organization itself, the union, even a militant and aggressive union like the CIO, would channel the workers' insurrectionary energy into contracts, negotiations, union meetings, and try to minimize strikes, in order to build large, influential, even respectable organizations.

Related Characters: President Franklin Delano Roosevelt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 402

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Zinn discusses how the New Deal—the

program of social changes and reforms that occurred under the presidential administration of Franklin Roosevelt—suppressed some of the dangers of the labor movement to the U.S. government. For example, the New Deal introduced new institutions designed to negotiate directly with labor unions' leaders. In effect, Zinn argues, these institutions weakened unions: first, because they made unions more eager to cooperate with the federal government, and therefore, to soften their demands; second, because they enlisted the help of union leaders to control their own members. As a result, in the years following the New Deal, the labor movement in the United States became less aggressive, and lost its most important weapon for enacting change: going on strike.

Many important historians have disputed Zinn's argument. He characterizes the New Deal, like most of the Progressive Era's legislation, as a series of reforms designed to pacify and placate the American people rather than fundamentally alter their lives. However, in some ways, the New Deal really *was* a radical program: it introduced new welfare programs, providing funds for the unemployed, the elderly, and the disabled, that had never existed before. Furthermore, the New Deal established a new paradigm for the relationship between the citizen and the government, whereby the government's duty was to provide for its citizens in times of need. One could argue that the New Deal didn't weaken the labor movement at all. Just because the New Deal weakened the effectiveness of the strike (a tactic that, per Zinn's own book, had in almost every case failed to give workers what they wanted) doesn't mean that the New Deal weakened *the labor movement* as a whole; indeed, one could make the argument that the Roosevelt administration gave labor unions a new voice. As before, Zinn interprets reform as a sign of failure for the American people, but this interpretation is controversial.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ Only one fear was greater than the fear of black rebellion in the new American colonies. That was the fear that discontented whites would join black slaves to overthrow the existing order. In the early years of slavery, especially, before racism as a way of thinking was firmly ingrained, while white indentured servants were often treated as badly as black slaves, there was a possibility of cooperation.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

In the early days of the American colonies, Zinn writes, the wealthy and powerful didn't have as powerful a hold on their society as their counterparts do in the 21st century. Indeed, colonial elites were badly outnumbered by working-class white servants and black slaves. As a result, elites in the 1600s and 1700s lived in near-constant fear of a working-class uprising.

Zinn argues that colonial elites responded by isolating the working-class white population from the black slave population. In so doing, Zinn reasons, elites prevented alliances from forming between the two most persecuted segments of the colonial population, alliances that could have feasibly challenged elite power.

The passage is, in many ways, exemplary of Zinn's approach to studying the motives of the Establishment (i.e., the coalition of the wealthy and powerful). Zinn doesn't offer much explicit proof that colonial elites were consciously trying to isolate whites and blacks. However, he treats the growing separation of the poor white and black slave populations in the 1700s as proof that there must have been some effort, conscious or unconscious, by colonial elites to weaken the proletariat.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ The point of noting those outside the arc of human rights in the Declaration is not, centuries late and pointlessly, to lay impossible moral burdens on that time. It is to try to understand the way in which the Declaration functioned to mobilize certain groups of Americans, ignoring others. Surely, inspirational language to create a secure consensus is still used, in our time, to cover up serious conflicts of interest in that consensus, and to cover up, also, the omission of large parts of the human race.

Related Characters: Thomas Jefferson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter Four, Zinn discusses the American Revolution. While many historians and American citizens think of the Revolution as the era in which the Founding Fathers, such as Jefferson and Washington, worked together to protect the people's rights to free speech, liberty, etc., Zinn argues that the Founding Fathers were trying to gain power for themselves by directing the working classes' aggression

outwards, toward Britain. In order to do so—to create a strong idealistic bond between all American colonists, rich and poor—the Founding Fathers developed a rhetoric of freedom and equality that masked the true inequalities of American society. The defining document of this rhetoric of freedom, Zinn argues, was the Declaration of Independence, in which Thomas Jefferson argued, "all men are created equal."

Zinn argues that Jefferson's words, contrary to popular belief, were *not* an idealistic statement of human equality. Rather, they represented a strategy designed to enlist working-class white colonists for the Revolutionary cause by convincing them that they and the wealthier, more powerful Founding Fathers, had a great deal in common. Even today, the U.S. government echoes the strategy of the Founding Fathers, using patriotic, egalitarian language as a smokescreen for its self-interested behavior.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ Under congressional policy approved by Lincoln, the property confiscated during the war under the Confiscation Act of July 1862 would revert to the heirs of the Confederate owners.

Related Characters: Abraham Lincoln

Related Themes:

Page Number: 197

Explanation and Analysis

In his chapter on the Civil War, Howard Zinn characterizes Abraham Lincoln, the president of the U.S. from 1861 to 1865, as a savvy pragmatist whose priorities were preserving the Union and protecting the property of its richest citizens, *not* looking out for the interests of black slaves. Lincoln has a reputation for being an idealistic defender of human rights, but the reality is that he took legal measures to free slaves in the Southern colonies because doing so was a good strategy for winning the Civil War, not because he felt a strong moral obligation to do so.

Zinn's characterization of Lincoln can seem harsh, and it's been widely disputed by other historians. However, Zinn bolsters his argument by citing the legislation Lincoln signed in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. Instead of taking actions to provide property and wealth for newly-freed African-Americans, Lincoln instead ensured that the balance of power and wealth in the South would remain virtually unchanged: a *de facto* aristocracy would continue to own the vast majority of the land and property. Zinn further treats Lincoln's actions as representative of the behavior of the American government in general. While the government may take some limited measures to provide freedom and equality for its citizens, its real priority is protecting the wealth and property of its most powerful people.

❝ As the first act of the new North-South capitalist cooperation, the Southern Homestead Act, which had reserved all federal lands—one-third of the area of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi—for farmers who would work the land, was repealed. This enabled absentee speculators and lumbermen to move in and buy up much of this land.

And so the deal was made. The proper committee was set up by both houses of Congress to decide where the electoral votes would go. The decision was: they belonged to Hayes, and he was now President.

Related Characters: Samuel Tilden, President Rutherford Hayes

Related Themes:

Page Number: 206

Explanation and Analysis

1876 was an important year for the United States. In the presidential election between Samuel Tilden and Rutherford Hayes, the results were too close to call. As a result, two factions of the federal government made a deal: Hayes, a Republican, would become the president, and, in return, he would recall all federal troops from the Southern states and take measures to promote trade alliances between Northern and Southern elites, especially with regard to the building of railroads. Northern and Southern elites benefitted greatly from the compromise of 1877—the only losers, as usual, were the common American people. In the South, newly freed African Americans suddenly lacked federal troops to support their freedoms, and, as a result, white racists persecuted them without consequences.

The compromise of 1877 is, in short, a good example of the bipartisan consensus that Zinn writes about in *A People's History*. It's often said that America is split along political lines, between Democrats and Republicans. The compromise of 1877 suggests that America *is* split, but between, on one hand, the powerful American

Establishment, representing elite politicians and businessmen, and, on the other hand, the American people, i.e., the common, working-class citizens. After the 1870s, the Establishment became more powerful than ever before.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ Meanwhile, the government of the United States was behaving almost exactly as Karl Marx described a capitalist state: pretending neutrality to maintain order, but serving the interests of the rich. Not that the rich agreed among themselves; they had disputes over policies. But the purpose of the state was to settle upper-class disputes peacefully, control lower-class rebellion, and adopt policies that would further the long-range stability of the system. The arrangement between Democrats and Republicans to elect Rutherford Hayes in 1877 set the tone. Whether Democrats or Republicans won, national policy would not change in any important way.

Related Characters: President Rutherford Hayes, Karl Marx

Related Themes:

Page Number: 258

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Zinn discusses the growth of the Establishment—the informal group consisting of elite politicians, powerful businessmen, and important academics and media figures—during the late 19th century. Zinn argues that, in this period, powerful politicians did not honor the wishes of the American people. Instead of looking out for their constituents, politicians took steps to favor the interests of their allies in business and the media. As Zinn will show, the government used federal troops to break up working-class strikes and demonstrations, interpreted the laws in order to strengthen businesses' monopolistic practices, and passed only the most superficial reforms to help average Americans. Both Republicans and Democrats, Zinn argues, were complicit in the bipartisan consensus: though they both pretended to be looking out for the people's interests, they more consistently protected business interests.

This passage is one of the rare occasions in which Zinn mentions the name of Karl Marx, the 19th century political thinker and father of Communism who argued that capitalist government feigns neutrality while worsening the situation of the proletariat. Though Zinn didn't always identify as a Marxist, he was a lifelong admirer of Marx's ideas. Here, he treats Marx as a sophisticated, prophetic thinker.

❝ There were only fitful, occasional connections between the farmer and labor movements. Neither spoke eloquently enough to the other's needs. And yet, there were signs of a common consciousness that might, under different circumstances, lead to a unified, ongoing movement.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 293

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Zinn tries to answer the question, "Why didn't the people of late 19th century America rise up against their corrupt leaders?" In effect, Zinn's answer is that 19th century working-class Americans, while dissatisfied with the economic system of their country, couldn't find effective ways of organizing themselves and joining together against a common enemy. Instead, the different sectors of the working class remained largely isolated from one another. Midwestern farmers often refused to extend an open invitation to poor black farmers; similarly, East Coast factory workers made little effort to unify with farmers. Instead of one cohesive anti-Establishment movement, the late 19th century saw a series of localized, sometimes mutually antagonistic groups.

Zinn is sometimes criticized for treating the American people as one, monolithic group. However, in this passage, he suggests that, at some points in history, the different persecuted peoples of America have failed to cooperate and recognize their common interests. It's interesting to note that, according to Zinn, one of the major reasons why different labor groups didn't cooperate in the 19th century was racism, particularly antipathy between whites and blacks. As Zinn has already shown, racism became ingrained in American society partly because colonial elites in the 1600s and 1700s separated whites and blacks and manipulated them against one another. In effect, Zinn suggests that American people, who might otherwise have cooperated, failed to rise up as one in the 19th century because the Establishment turned them against each other centuries before.

Chapter 13 Quotes

What was clear in this period to blacks, to feminists, to labor organizers and socialists, was that they could not count on the national government. True, this was the "Progressive Period," the start of the Age of Reform; but it was a reluctant reform, aimed at quieting the popular risings, not making fundamental changes.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 349

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter Thirteen, Zinn writes about the various activist movements that gained strength in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Even if these activist movements didn't always work together, they were united in their repudiation of the federal government and their commitment to traditional, political means of enacting change, such as voting.

In this passage, Zinn makes an important distinction between reform and radical change in American society. As he sees it, the federal government of the Progressive era had no choice but to offer to make some limited concessions to the American people: indeed, the government passed laws designed to reform the meatpacking industry, strengthen protections against monopolies, grant women the right to vote, etc. However, Zinn argues that such measures did not truly address the fundamental problems with American society—most of all, the inequalities between the richest and poorest American citizens. The effect of reform, then, was not to benefit the people, but rather to placate them by providing them with just enough to prevent a full-scale revolution.

Zinn's point is challenging and somewhat counterintuitive because it argues that, in essence, reform is a barrier to helping the American people, rather than a means of doing so effectively. The federal government will never voluntarily enact radical change—at best, it will institute some half-hearted reforms, leaving most of the American people's problems unaddressed.

Other historians and political writers take a much different view of reform and radicalism than Zinn. Some have argued that reform is good because it leads the way to radical change, rather than preventing radical change from happening. Others have argued that the social changes engineered by the federal government during the Progressive era really were radical. For example, during the Progressive era, the government passed a constitutional amendment requiring its citizens to pay an income tax—a massive reassessment of the relationship between citizen and government that forced even wealthy, powerful Americans to give up some of their income. (Tellingly, Zinn barely talks about the amendment, perhaps because it's inconvenient for his argument).

Chapter 14 Quotes

"War is the health of the state," the radical writer Randolph Bourne said, in the midst of the First World War. Indeed, as the nations of Europe went to war in 1914, the governments flourished, patriotism bloomed, class struggle was stilled, and young men died in frightful numbers on the battlefields—often for a hundred yards of land, a line of trenches.

Related Characters: Randolph Bourne (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 359

Explanation and Analysis

Chapter Fourteen, about World War One, begins with a quote from the radical journalist Randolph Bourne: "War is the health of the state." Bourne, and many other left-wing thinkers and writers, argued that the governments of warring countries strengthened their control over their own people during World War One. In the United States, for example, World War One had the effect of stifling the labor movement, which opposed American capitalism, and focusing the working classes' attention outward, toward Europe, rather than inward, toward big business.

Zinn argues that, throughout American history, war has had the effect of distracting the American people from their just grievances with the government, forestalling radical change at home. Notably, Zinn *isn't* saying that the government necessarily has to manufacture war by conspiracy (although Zinn argues that, at times, members of the federal government have done so). However, he argues that, whether consciously or not, the government strengthens itself during wartime. World War One was not without its critics in the United States, but, by and large, it gave the government an opportunity to strengthen its controls over its population, and the majority of Americans went along with supporting American participation in the war.

Chapter 16 Quotes

Would the behavior of the United States during the war—in military action abroad, in treatment of minorities at home—be in keeping with a "people's war?" Would the country's wartime policies respect the rights of ordinary people everywhere to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? And would postwar America, in its policies at home and overseas, exemplify the values for which the war was supposed to have been fought?

Related Themes:

Page Number: 408

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Zinn confronts the history of America's involvement World War Two, one of the few wars in American history during which a broad coalition, comprising rich and poor, left- and right-wing Americans, came together in support for America's foreign policy. To this day, World War Two is often seen as a triumph of American exceptionalism—a war waged for idealistic moral reasons (chiefly, the defeat of Adolf Hitler's Nazi state). Instead of agreeing with the usual interpretation of World War Two, Zinn questions it. He asks a series of rhetorical questions whose purpose is to make readers come to terms with their own preconceptions about the war and America's motives for entering it.

In some ways, this passage is exemplary of what many historians dislike about *A People's History*: instead of making direct claims, supported by evidence, Zinn prefers to create an atmosphere of paranoia and uncertainty, in which he can allege that the government's motives were corrupt without much proof. However, Zinn's use of rhetorical questioning in this section also exemplifies his book's greatest strength: it starts a conversation about American history, rather than falling back on familiar platitudes about the past.

Truman had said, "The world will note that the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, a military base. That was because we wished in this first attack to avoid, insofar as possible, the killing of civilians." It was a preposterous statement. Those 100,000 killed in Hiroshima were almost all civilians. The U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey said in its official report: "Hiroshima and Nagasaki were chosen as targets because of their concentration of activities and population."

Related Characters: President Harry Truman (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 423-424

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Zinn confronts one of the most controversial moments of World War Two: President Harry Truman's decision to drop an atomic bomb on the large Japanese city of Hiroshima, followed by another atomic bomb on Nagasaki. Generations of historians have argued that Truman's decision was morally justified by the fact that, without atomic bombs, American troops would have had to spend years endangering their own lives by invading Japan. However, Zinn argues that Harry Truman knew that Japan was in the process of pursuing peace with the U.S. He further argues that, even if one bought the usual arguments for Truman's decision, Truman wouldn't have needed to bomb *two* Japanese cities. (Zinn argues that the government chose to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki in large part to make a show of force to the Soviet Union, cementing America's status as the world's dominant superpower.)

Zinn cites Truman's deceptive claims immediately following the war—that the military had bombed cities without large civilian populations, and given civilians advance warning of the bombing—as evidence of the basic immorality of the American decision to bomb Japan. Truman seems to have lied to the American people because he knew that most Americans wouldn't have supported such an unethical action. Many Americans think of World War Two as a shining example of America's status as a moral leader. However, as Zinn shows here, if one confronts the basic facts about World War Two, it becomes clear that America made some hugely unethical decisions throughout the war.

In that same period of the early fifties, the House Un-American Activities Committee was at its heyday, interrogating Americans about their Communist connections, holding them in contempt if they refused to answer, distributing millions of pamphlets to the American public: "One Hundred Things You Should Know About Communism" ("Where can Communists be found? Everywhere"). Liberals often criticized the Committee, but in Congress, liberals and conservatives alike voted to fund it year after year.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 435

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the chapter, Zinn discusses the beginning of the Cold War in the United States. Confronted with the threat of an expanding Soviet Union, the U.S. government responded by tightening its controls over its own people. Indeed, Zinn argues that the government deliberately exaggerated the threat of a Soviet world takeover in order to excuse its own unethical actions. For example, a Congressional organization, HUAC, investigated thousands of Americans for their suspected Communist ties, effectively ruining many people's careers.

Zinn goes on to show that, contrary to what many history books suggest, there was a broad consensus, supported by Republicans and Democrats, about the necessity of investigating suspect Communists. Zinn's arguments bolster his claim that America's political leaders, regardless of their political party, have worked together against the best interests of the American people.

Chapter 17 Quotes

❝ What to others seemed rapid progress to blacks was apparently not enough. In the early 1960s black people rose in rebellion all over the South. And in the late 1960s they were engaging in wild insurrection in a hundred northern cities. It was all a surprise to those without that deep memory of slavery that everyday presence of humiliation, registered in the poetry, the music, the occasional outbursts of anger, the more frequent sullen silences. Part of that memory was of words uttered, laws passed, decisions made, which turned out to be meaningless.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 450

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter Seventeen, Zinn discusses some of the political movements of the 1960s, an era in which many Americans united to oppose what they saw as social injustice and government corruption. In particular, Zinn discusses the Civil Rights Movement, during which African Americans used a variety of means to fight for their rights. As Zinn characterizes the Civil Rights Movement, it was a radical movement born out of dissatisfaction with the symbolic reforms that had been put forward by the government to address racism. In the 1960s, African Americans had been free from slavery for a century, yet they continued to face systematic, societally-accepted racism and discrimination. The memory of past injustices and the relentless experience of present injustices meant that African Americans could see what most others could not: that the federal government had done nothing substantial to make black lives equal to white ones. In short, Zinn sees the Civil Rights Movement as more evidence that the federal government often stops short of protecting its people's rights and freedoms, and that the American people have repeatedly had to fight for their own rights.

Chapter 18 Quotes

❝ Back on September 26, 1969, President Richard Nixon, noting the growing antiwar activity all over the country, announced that "under no circumstance will I be affected whatever by it." But nine years later, in his Memoirs, he admitted that the antiwar movement caused him to drop plans for an intensification of the war: "Although publicly I continued to ignore the raging antiwar controversy. . . I knew, however, that after all the protests and the Moratorium, American public opinion would be seriously divided by any military escalation of the war." It was a rare presidential admission of the power of public protest.

Related Characters: President Richard Nixon (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 501

Explanation and Analysis

In this curious passage, Zinn argues that the anti-Vietnam movement of the late 1960s represented a rare victory for the American left. During the 1960s, when the United States was engaged in a long war with the left-wing Communist movement of North Vietnam, many Americans came together to denounce America's foreign policy, using a variety of means (including protests, strikes, art, music, and literature) to criticize the federal government. Zinn cites Nixon's memoirs as proof that the protest movement did, contrary to what Nixon claimed in the 60s, influence his policy decisions, and it encouraged him to scale back the war effort.

Zinn's characterization of the Vietnam protest movement seems questionable in a number of ways. Above all, Zinn doesn't address the fact that, for years after the anti-Vietnam movement was at its height, in 1968 and 1969, the U.S. government continued to wage war in Vietnam, and even started a secret war in Cambodia, leading to hundreds of thousands of deaths. Perhaps, in his haste to offer a rare, concrete example of the effectiveness of public protest, Zinn neglects the historical record. However, even if

Vietnam protests didn't by themselves convince Nixon to end the Vietnam War, it's clear that they intimidated the federal government and expressed the strength of the American people. This perhaps offers one of the "brief flashes" of resistance that Zinn alludes to in Chapter One of *A People's History*.

Chapter 19 Quotes

❝ For the first time, the sheer biological uniqueness of women was openly discussed. Some theorists … thought this was more fundamental to their oppression than any particular economic system. It was liberating to talk frankly about what had for so long been secret, hidden, cause for shame and embarrassment: menstruation, masturbation, menopause, abortion, lesbianism.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 511

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter Nineteen, Zinn studies some of the major activist movements of the 1960s. One of the most important such movements was the feminist movement. During the 1960s, feminism underwent some radical changes. As Zinn argues here, 60s feminism became much more concerned with protecting and celebrating the female body. Feminist theorists argued that, in part, patriarchal culture maintained its dominance over femininity by suppressing any discussion of the female body, or female bodily functions. By this logic, the very act of talking about abortion or menstruation was subversive, and it attacked the patriarchy's system of domination.

Some historians have criticized Zinn for not spending enough time discussing the distinctions between the different radical traditions in American history—in effect, for too often treating the American people as a monolithic group, with the same underlying assumptions about government and society. However, in this passage, and many others in Chapter Nineteen, Zinn emphasizes the uniqueness of the feminist movement, showing how it had its own particular ideology, quite independent from that of other radical movements of the era. While feminism joined forces with many other social causes of the 60s, including the anti-Vietnam movement and the Civil Rights Movement, feminists had their own unique agenda, based on opposition not just to the Establishment, but also to patriarchy.

Chapter 20 Quotes

❝ The televised Senate Committee hearings on Watergate stopped suddenly before the subject of corporate connections was reached. It was typical of the selective coverage of important events by the television industry: bizarre shenanigans like the Watergate burglary were given full treatment, while instances of ongoing practice—the My Lai massacre, the secret bombing of Cambodia, the work of the FBI and CIA—were given the most fleeting attention. Dirty tricks against the Socialist Workers party, the Black Panthers, other radical groups, had to be searched for in a few newspapers. The whole nation heard the details of the quick break-in at the Watergate apartment; there was never a similar television hearing on the long-term break-in in Vietnam.

Related Characters: President Richard Nixon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 547

Explanation and Analysis

Watergate—a political scandal of the early 1970s that culminated in the resignation of President Richard Nixon—is often seen as a sign that the federal government of the era had become too corrupt, and, implicitly, that when Nixon resigned, the government became more honest. However, Zinn shows that the Senate's investigations of the Watergate Scandal did not represent an alternative to the corruption of the Nixon administration. Put briefly, the fallout from Watergate, in which the Senate investigated Nixon and pressured him to resign, did not represent a change for the better, but only "business as usual."

As Zinn notes, after Nixon resigned, virtually all of his foreign policy decisions (including his bombing of Cambodia and his arguably illegal troop deployments in Chile, Indonesia, and Vietnam) remained in effect. Furthermore, when the Senate investigated Nixon, they focused on his role in the burglary of the Watergate Hotel, a laughably minor charge when compared to Nixon's other unethical actions. In effect, then, Nixon was a scapegoat for the overall corruption of the federal government. Nixon's resignation was greeted as a sign of justice being restored in Washington when, in effect, it was a mostly symbolic action that did nothing to address the fundamental injustices of America's leadership.

The Trilateral Commission apparently saw itself as helping to create the necessary international links for the new multinational economy. Its members came from the highest circles of politics, business, and the media in Western Europe, Japan, and the United States. They were from Chase Manhattan, Lehman Brothers, Bank of America, Banque de Paris, Lloyd's of London, Bank of Tokyo, etc. Oil, steel, auto, aeronautic, and electric industries were represented. Other members were from *Time* magazine, the *Washington Post*, the Columbia Broadcasting System, Die Zeit, the Japan *Times*, The *Economist* of London, and more.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 561

Explanation and Analysis

Zinn ends Chapter Twenty with a discussion of the Trilateral Commission, an international symposium on democracy, leadership, and state administration that united business, political, and media elites from dozens of different countries. As Zinn describes it, these elites met, exchanged ideas, and discussed different ways of maintaining their own power. One of the lasting consequences of the Trilateral Commission, Zinn shows, was that businesses became truly international—for example, banks and investment firms set up branches in many different countries. Another important consequence was that political leaders tried to curb their people's activism.

Zinn spends several pages discussing the Trilateral Commission, because it's a rare, concrete example of what he means when he talks about the Establishment. Loosely, Zinn defines the Establishment as the group of elites in politics, business, and the media, and one of the key arguments he makes in *A People's History* is that Establishment figures have, in most cases, worked together to further their own mutual interests, usually to the harm of ordinary people. At times, the alliances between Establishment figures have been loose and abstract, but here Zinn shows that these alliances can be literal and maintained with the explicit purpose of strengthening members' power and minimizing the power of the people. The Trilateral Commission, then, is a symbol of the Establishment in general, and it represents an occasion during which Establishment elites quite literally plotted how to maintain power.

Chapter 21 Quotes

The result of these higher payroll taxes was that three-fourths of all wage earners paid more each year through the Social Security tax than through the income tax. Embarrassingly for the Democratic party, which was supposed to be the party of the working class, those higher payroll taxes had been put in motion under the administration of Jimmy Carter.

Related Characters: President Jimmy Carter

Related Themes:

Page Number: 581

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter Twenty-One, Zinn discusses the presidents of the late 20th century. One of his key arguments in the chapter is that, whether Republican or Democratic, the presidents of the era adhered to more or less the same agenda: offering some minimal benefits to the American people while maintaining elites' property and power.

Zinn's argument might seem surprising, since it's often said that Republicans and Democrats have very different constituents, and therefore, very different political motives. However, while Zinn acknowledges that Democrats and Republicans sometimes compete with one another, he focuses on their common agenda. In this passage, Zinn discusses a piece of legislation, put in motion under the Democratic leadership of the Jimmy Carter administration, which cut taxes for the wealthiest Americans. Zinn treats the tax bill as a clear demonstration that the Democratic party, often said to be the political party that best represents the needs of ordinary American people, is really a party for business and Establishment elites, not unlike the Republican Party.

Chapter 22 Quotes

After the bombing of Iraq began along with the bombardment of public opinion, the polls showed overwhelming support for Bush's action, and this continued through the six weeks of the war. But was it an accurate reflection of the citizenry's long-term feelings about war? The split vote in the polls just before the war reflected a public still thinking its opinion might have an effect. Once the war was on, and clearly irreversible, in an atmosphere charged with patriotic fervor ... it was not surprising that a great majority of the country would declare its support.

Related Characters: President George H.W. Bush

Related Themes:

Page Number: 620

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Zinn discusses the presidential administration of George H. W. Bush. In the early 90s, Bush declared war on the regime of Saddam Hussein, the dictator of Iraq, and deployed American soldiers to the Middle Eastern country of Kuwait. While the Bush administration presented the so-called Gulf War as a triumph of American technology and militarism, with relatively few civilian casualties, the truth, unbeknownst to the American people, is that American troops killed many thousands of innocent civilians. Zinn acknowledges that, during the Gulf War, most Americans were enthusiastic about America's military actions; however, he argues that, had Americans known the truth, they would have opposed the war whole-heartedly.

In some ways, this passage is exemplary of Zinn's idealistic view of the American people. For the most part, Zinn argues that American people have supported ethical, left-wing causes, including downsizing the military budget and pulling out of Vietnam. However, in the case of the Gulf War, Zinn is confronted with an awkward dilemma: either admit that the American people enthusiastically supported a brutal, unjust war, or admit that the Gulf War was morally justified. Zinn resolves the dilemma by arguing that Americans didn't "truly" support the Gulf War: their support was based on irrational patriotic fervor. It's not clear why the early opposition to the Gulf War should be any more or less sincere than the American people's resounding enthusiasm for the Gulf War later on. Perhaps, because Zinn wants to assume the best of the American people and present them in a favorable light, he is forced to question their enthusiasm for a war he knows to be unethical.

Chapter 23 Quotes

❝ The great problem would be to work out a way of accomplishing this without a centralized bureaucracy, using not the incentives of prison and punishment, but those incentives of cooperation which spring from natural human desires, which in the past have been used by the state in times of war, but also by social movements that gave hints of how people might behave in different conditions. Decisions would be made by small groups of people in their workplaces, their neighborhoods—a network of cooperatives, in communication with one another, a neighborly socialism avoiding the class hierarchies of capitalism and the harsh dictatorships that have taken the name "socialist."

Related Themes:

Page Number: 639

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Zinn goes beyond his project to write a people's history of the United States, and he paints a picture of America's utopian future. If ordinary people were to gain control of their country, instead of having to submit to the authority of a corrupt, immoral government, they could work together to create a perfect society. In this society, Zinn argues, people would make their decisions together and get along with their neighbors, and there would be no powerful centralized institutions.

Zinn's vision of a utopian society reflects his interest in Anarchism, the political philosophy that rejects all centralized authority and non-voluntary organization. One of the unexplored premises of Zinn's utopia—and, for that matter, one of the unexplored premises of the book—is that common, ordinary people would get along with each other. Throughout *A People's History*, Zinn has argued that ordinary American people are, for the most part, moral and peaceful. They oppose unjust wars, help each other out, and transcend self-interest in their pursuit of justice. However, in order to paint such a picture of the American people, Zinn has sometimes bent or distorted history—he's underplayed the role of racism and sexism in certain activist movements throughout history, and glossed over occasions in which a majority of Americans supported violent military intervention in a foreign country. Perhaps the American common man isn't as peaceful and moral as Zinn wants to believe. In the end, whether or not you agree with Zinn's utopian vision depends, in part, on whether you agree with him about the virtues of the American people.

Chapter 24 Quotes

Clinton lied about his relationship with Lewinsky, and the House of Representatives voted to impeach him on the ground that he had lied in denying "sexual relations" with the young woman, and that he had obstructed justice by trying to conceal information about their relationship [...] What the incident showed was that a matter of personal behavior could crowd out of the public's attention to far more serious matters, indeed, matters of life and death. The House of Representatives would impeach the president on matters of sexual behavior, but it would not impeach him for endangering the lives of children by welfare reform, or for violating international law in bombing other countries (Iran, Afghanistan, Sudan), or for allowing hundreds of thousands of children to die as a result of economic sanctions on Iraq).

Related Characters: President Bill Clinton, Monica Lewinsky

Related Themes:

Page Number: 659-660

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter Twenty-Four, on the Clinton administration, Zinn discusses the scandal Clinton faced in the final year of his presidency. At this time, Clinton faced impeachment for lying about his sexual relationship with a young White House worker named Monica Lewinsky. The outrage of this incident, as Zinn sees it, is that Congress chose to impeach Clinton for a relatively minor, personal misdeed, when it could have impeached him for any number of unethical, destructive policies that he supported as president. For example, Congress could have impeached Clinton for supporting sanctions on Iraq that were later shown to have caused half a million infant deaths (and which were later characterized as "infanticide masquerading as politics").

For Zinn, the fact that Congress failed to impeach Clinton on a serious political charge—much like Congress's failure to bring President Richard Nixon to justice for his unethical foreign policy decisions—confirms that the federal government has reached a bipartisan consensus. According to such a consensus, Democratic and Republican politicians support cuts to welfare, a large military budget, and aggressive, militaristic foreign policy, all of which a consistent majority of the American people disapproves.

Clinton claimed to be moderating his policies to match public opinion. But opinion surveys in the eighties and early nineties indicated that Americans favored bold policies that neither Democrats nor Republicans were willing to put forward: universal free health care, guaranteed employment, government help for the poor and homeless, with taxes on the rich and cuts in the military budget to pay for social programs.

Related Characters: President Bill Clinton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 665

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Zinn addresses one of the most talked-about aspects of the Clinton administration: the strategy of triangulation (i.e., appealing to voters on both sides of the political spectrum by adopting moderate policies). Clinton was alternately praised and reviled for appealing to both liberal and conservative people. For example, he adopted a "tough on crime" stance that seemed designed to appeal to more right-ring voters, while also supporting some small cuts to the military budget, which seemed to echo a left-wing ideology. However, Zinn argues that Clinton's triangulation—his affinity for compromising and splitting the difference—reflected his indifference to the needs and wishes of the American people. Despite the fact that a majority of people supported major defense cuts and expansive welfare, Clinton ignored the people's will, providing only the most minimal reforms to the system.

Zinn has been criticized for being too harsh with Clinton, especially since Clinton supported a program of universal health care during his first term (and failed to pass the health care bill due to strong opposition from Congress). However, Zinn's criticism is consistent with the basic principles he's established throughout *A People's History*: America's elites practice moderation and tepid reform, despite their people's cries for radical change.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: COLUMBUS, THE INDIANS, AND HUMAN PROGRESS

At the end of the 15th century, in a place later known as the Bahamas, Arawak men and women emerged from their villages to watch as Christopher Columbus and his sailors came ashore. Columbus later wrote that the Arawak were primitive, beautiful, and hospitable, and that they would make "fine servants." Columbus had come to the New World in search of gold and spices. He'd been sent by the rulers of Spain—a newly unified nation-state—and promised a share of the riches. He had intended to sail to Asia; he was lucky that he found North America in the middle of his voyage, since, otherwise, he and his crew would have starved. In the New World, Columbus immediately built a fortress, kidnapped Arawaks, and ordered his crew to search for gold—however, they didn't find any.

Every American schoolchild knows the story of how "Christopher Columbus" discovered America. Zinn tells this story from the perspective of the Arawak, noting how Columbus, from his first days in the Bahamas, aimed to subjugate the Arawak. The tone and structure of this opening passage suggests that this book will study familiar historical events from an unfamiliar perspective: the perspective of "the people," not of heroes. Indeed, Zinn doesn't see Columbus as a hero at all—Columbus was greedy, ruthless, and arguably navigationally incompetent.

On his second voyage to the New World, Columbus again failed to find gold. Instead, he kidnapped more Indians, many of whom died on the voyage back to Europe. In Haiti, he enslaved entire tribes, ordering them to search for gold or be killed. In just two years, Columbus killed nearly half the population of Haiti. One of the few prominent European critics of Columbus's tyrannical regime was Bartolomé de las Casas, a young priest who owned a plantation in Cuba. Las Casas argued that the native peoples of the New World were polite and mostly peaceful, and that Columbus had destroyed the natives' way of life forever. Las Casas further claimed that settlers in the New World tortured the natives, putting them to work in horrific mines. "Thus," Zinn concludes, "began the history, five hundred years ago, of the European invasion of the Indian settlements in the Americas."

There was nothing noble or enlightened about Columbus's expeditions to the New World. His goal was simple: steal as much gold and wealth as possible in order to appease his employers in Spain. Some historians have argued that Columbus should be interpreted as a "product of his time" (in other words, that his genocidal acts were normal behavior at the time). However, Zinn brings up de las Casas, suggesting that, even in the 1490s, some Europeans regarded Columbus as a murderer and a thief. Columbus set a precedent for conquest and cruelty that continues, as we'll see, throughout American history.

Today, Americans celebrate Columbus's exploration on Columbus Day, seemingly oblivious to the fact that he was a genocidal killer. Most school textbooks paint Columbus as a hero, and either ignore his genocidal crimes altogether or mention them very briefly. By definition, all historians have to make calculations about what parts of history to emphasize and what parts to ignore. However, Zinn argues, if historians ignore or underplay Columbus's genocidal crimes—and the other human rights abuses in American history—they implicitly justify Columbus's deeds. As a result, ordinary people may come to accept violence as basic parts of history, and, perhaps, of the present, too. This kind of passivity is "deadly."

Zinn isn't just writing a history book—he's responding *to the many history textbooks that have presented history from the perspective of conquerors, colonizers, and tyrants. He creates a clear imperative for his project, suggesting that he has a moral duty to tell a version of history that holds people like Columbus accountable for their genocidal crimes. Otherwise, he (and other historians) would be implicitly accepting murder and violence. The crux of Zinn's argument is that historians aren't just passive collectors of information about the past—they have the power to inspire people to overcome their "passivity" and change the world.*

Too many historians treat American history as a list of heroic, larger-than-life people: Columbus, the Founding Fathers, the presidents, etc. The implication of such an interpretation of history is that "great men" are responsible for changing the world. Furthermore, many historians treat history as if all Americans—people of all ages, races, classes, and religions—have the same interests and priorities because they are American. Zinn strongly disagrees. America is not one community: throughout history, different Americans have been on different sides of the fight. Zinn quotes the writer Albert Camus: in world of "victims and executioners, it is the job of thinking people not to be on the side of the executioners."

Another major problem that Zinn sees in average history textbooks is the premise that all Americans are alike and that they're united in their common freedom and independence. Zinn argues, instead, that Americans have always been divided—specifically, that they're always been divided between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless. (However, one major criticism of Zinn's ideas is that Zinn himself is too general in his definition of "the powerless.")

Zinn will try to tell American history from the perspective of persecuted people—the people whose stories have often been ignored and whose lives have often been very difficult. His goal isn't simply to mourn for "victims" or denounce "executioners." Zinn freely admits that often victims turn on one another and behave cruelly themselves. However, his book will be skeptical of government and its attempts to control ordinary people by appealing to the concept of a "national interest." Zinn also acknowledges that a history of the U.S., told from the perspective of persecuted peoples, can be very pessimistic. However, he wants to give a sense of the "brief flashes" of history during which ordinary people banded together and sometimes emerged victorious. That, in short, is his "approach to the history of the United States."

Zinn acknowledges upfront that his history of the United States isn't free from his own personal biases. Zinn sees it as the duty of the historian not simply to relay what happened, but to remedy the marginalization that persecuted people have experienced, both in history and in history books. Many prominent historians—including those who share Zinn's sense of moral responsibility—have questioned whether Zinn is too quick to idealize the persecuted and demonize the powerful. Even though he admits that the persecuted can be cruel to one another, Zinn will focus, by and large, on the commonalities and alliances between the persecuted, rather than their differences.

Columbus's conquest of the Arawaks was soon followed by other explorers' conquests of other Indian tribes. The Spanish explorer Hernando Cortés conquered the Aztec civilization of Mexico, massacring hundreds of thousands of people, including women and children. In Peru, another Spanish explorer, Francisco Pizarro, used similar tactics to conquer the Inca civilization. Using the gold that explorers stole, European nation-states were able to finance a new form of society: in other words, the conquest of the New World paved the way for the growth of the industrialized world.

The growth of the Western industrialized world was intimately tied to the persecution of indigenous peoples in the New World—and, for that matter, to people in other undeveloped parts of the world, especially Africa, Asia, and South America. Columbus's successors seem not to have expressed any guilt about murdering and torturing innocent people: their desire for wealth impelled them to continue conquering.

17th-century English settlers colonized Virginia, warring with Indian tribes. English soldiers attacked Indian settlements, killing women and children. In response, Indians massacred English men, women, and children. In response, the English decided to wipe out the Indians altogether. The words of Chief Powhatan, who led his people against the English in the early 1600s, still resonate: "Why do you take by force what you may have quietly by love?"

Instead of the usual, idealized vision of North American colonization offered in history textbooks, Zinn offers some harsh realities about brutality of the colonization. Significantly, he includes quotes from Native Americans, rather than from the familiar European heroes found in high school textbooks. The implicit answer to Chief Powhatan's question is that the English colonizers' greed and desire for property led them to use violence to take what wasn't theirs.

The Pilgrims came to New England later in the 17th century, led by governor John Winthrop. Although there were Indians throughout the New England area Winthrop claimed that the land was a "vacuum," and that the Pilgrims had a right to the land. Winthrop further argued that the few Indians who did live in New England had no legal right to the land, because they hadn't developed it agriculturally. The Pilgrims lived in an uneasy truce with the Indians, but they seemed to be waiting for an excuse to fight. In 1636, New Englanders declared war on the Pequot Indians for attacking a white trader and "Indian-kidnapper." The New Englanders killed the Pequot, using tactics pioneered by Hernando Cortés: deliberately attacking noncombatants to create terror.

In this passage, Zinn establishes the "war paradigm" that American society would use for the next four hundred years: provoke the enemy into a minor skirmish, treat the skirmish as an excuse to fight, and then defeat the enemy using superior technology. Thus, Winthrop's Pilgrim colony—contrary to its reputation for peace and piety—brutally attacked the Pequot tribe, using terrorist methods.

Forty years after the Pequot War, New Englanders fought against the Wampanoags, who were supposedly threatening the safety of New Englanders in the Massachusetts Bay. Some historians have argued that most New Englanders didn't support a war with the Wampanoag, and that only the elite supported it. In 1676, the New Englanders won, having slaughtered some three thousand Indians. By the next century, the total Indian population in North America had fallen from around ten million to less than a million. Many Indians died from diseases spread by European settlers, such as smallpox. Why did the English settlers slaughter the Indians? While there are many explanations, Zinn argues that "that special powerful drive born in civilizations based on private property" motivated the settlers. The New Englanders were willing to kill anyone who obstructed their sovereign right to property and land.

Instead of treating "European settlers" as one, monolithic group, Zinn conveys the gap between the desires of the wealthy and the desires of the poor. In New England, the wealthiest citizens wanted a war on the Wampanoag, since they stood to gain significant property and land. Indeed, Zinn posits that the desire for more property motivated the early colonists in New England to resort to violence to conquer more territory. While Zinn doesn't expound on his point, it's interesting to note that the Pilgrims in New England (especially the wealthiest of them) believed that God had brought them to the New World, and they may also have believed that God gave them the further right to claim land for themselves.

Again and again, it's been argued that the murder of the Indians was necessary for the greater good of civilization. The problem with such an explanation, at the most basic level, is that the proverbial "greater good" is never good for everyone: it's usually just beneficial to a handful of privileged people. By this way of thinking, the only acceptable kind of "necessary sacrifice for human progress" would be one made by the victims themselves. A further irony of European nations' conquest of the New World is that, in almost all cases, the people of these nations didn't become any wealthier: rulers became more powerful while the poorest people continued to starve.

European colonists—and the historians who've deified them in textbooks—have offered the same explanation for colonial brutality: the ends justified the means. But of course, this excuse ignores the basic greed and acquisitiveness of the European colonists: what was "good" for Europe was lethal for the Native Americans. Furthermore, most Europeans didn't benefit in the slightest from the colonization of the New World—all the wealth flowed to the top of the social hierarchy.

Why, Zinn asks, are we so sure that the Indian culture that the Europeans destroyed was inferior to European culture? (Christopher Columbus called the people of the New World "Indians" because he made a colossal error and miscalculated the size of the globe. Zinn will, with some reluctance, call them Indians, too.) The Indians traveled to North America by foot, tens of thousands of years ago. They had ingenious agricultural and navigational techniques, and, thousands of years before Christ, they developed irrigation canals, ceramics, and weaving. Many Indian tribes were egalitarian, with minor differences between the rich and poor. European explorers reported that the Indians were incredibly kind, gentle, and generous. There is also evidence that there was less structural sexism in Indian tribes than in European societies: women tended crops, managed village affairs, and had a decisive say in matters of war. In all, Indian cultures of the New World were remarkably different from European culture: "a society of rich and poor, controlled by priests, by governors, by males heads of families."

This passage is a good example of Zinn's approach to historical bias. Zinn idealizes Indian society, suggesting that it was an enlightened utopia, in which people were treated more or less equally. Zinn celebrates Native American science and technology, and suggests that women weren't discriminated against in Native American tribes. In short, history textbooks are too quick to assume that European explorers conquered the Native Americans because they were inherently better (more technologically advanced, more "civilized," etc.). Indeed, the clearest advantage that the Europeans seem to have had over the Native Americans was their propensity for violence and cruelty. Also, notice that throughout his book Zinn refers to Native Americans as Indians: while he does seem to recognize that "Indians" is an inaccurate and, in some ways, offensive term, he seems to have decided to use the term because, at the time when he was writing, it was the most common, accessible term for his readers. (For the purposes of this LitChart, in our analysis we'll use the term "Native Americans," because it is less potentially offensive, more geographically accurate, and more commonly used in the 2010s than it was in the 1980s.)

The Indians were, arguably, culturally superior to the Europeans who conquered them over the course of the next five hundred years. Some thinkers have argued that, had the Europeans assimilated with the Indians instead of wiping them out, America would be a peaceful, egalitarian place. Such a view may be a little "romantic," Zinn admits—however, all the evidence points to the fact that the Indians really were peaceful, kind, and egalitarian. Thus, we must question the assumption that the Europeans were morally justified in conquering the Indians.

Zinn admits that he might be idealizing the Native Americans—i.e., assuming the best of them, in spite of the lack of a complete historical record about their societies. However, Zinn suggests that some idealization of the Native Americans is justified, not just because of the little we do know about pre-Columbian Native Americans, but because most history textbooks ignore *Native American culture altogether. Zinn's descriptions of the Native Americans aren't just intended to convey information: they are meant to "balances out" the depictions found in other history books.*

CHAPTER 2: DRAWING THE COLOR LINE

There is probably no country in the world where racism has played—and continues to play—a more important role than the United States. Beginning in the early 1600s, English settlers were desperate for unpaid labor. Without this labor, they could have starved to death. In Virginia, settlers tried to force Indians to work for them, but the settlers failed because they were heavily outnumbered. Furthermore, there weren't enough white indentured servants to be of use in agriculture. The solution was African slavery.

Zinn traces America's long history of racism and discrimination back to some immediate historical causes: in the 17th century, white colonists needed to survive by finding a system of unpaid labor. Black slaves represented a practical, though deeply immoral, system of survival for the colonists. Zinn implies that racism was the ideology the white colonists used to justify slavery.

By the early 1600s, the Portuguese had abducted more than a million Africans from their homes and brought them to the Caribbean and South America to work as slaves. African civilization, Zinn argues, was as advanced as European civilization: Africans had advanced agriculture, metallurgy, art, and city planning. Most African societies used an essentially feudal administrative system. However, some historical evidence supports the idea that African society wasn't as brutal in its punishments as European society: the death penalty was rare, and a strong communal spirit discouraged abuses of power. African societies had their own forms of slavery; however, the African slave system was milder and respected the rights of slaves in a way that American slavery never did. African slaves could marry, own property, and even own slaves themselves.

Zinn implies that the Portuguese subjugated the people of Africa not because the Portuguese were more technologically advanced or "civilized," but because they were greedier and more violent and, therefore, were willing to kidnap human beings from their homes and transport them around the world. Throughout modern history, Europeans have justified slavery by pointing out that Africans had a system of slavery, too. However, Zinn makes it clear that African slavery, while immoral, was far milder and gentler than its American successor.

Portuguese slavers abducted thousands of slaves at a time and then transported them across the Atlantic ocean. Many slaves died during the voyage, but, by 1800, there were at least ten million slaves in the Americas. These slaves were psychologically traumatized and left in a state of fear and helplessness. They were, tragically, ideal slaves for the Europeans.

As Zinn sees it, the nightmarish "middle passage" from Africa to America was a critical part of the process of enslavement: by torturing Africans for weeks or months at a time, European slave owners were trying to indoctrinate the Africans and prepare them for a lifetime of submission.

Some have argued that white people enslaved black people because of a natural antipathy between the races. But even if it is "natural" to feel racism—a hotly debated question outside the scope of this book—it's important to understand the concrete societal influences that fostered racism in America. Europeans enslaved Africans because they needed labor—not *just* because of a "natural antipathy."

In essence, the question Zinn is trying to answer is, "which came first, slavery or racism?" Zinn's argument is that, whether or not people are hard-wired to feel racism, racism as it arose in the American colonies was the product of a concrete, economic need for slavery, not the other way around.

Too many historians have characterized African slaves as frightened and submissive. However, if one looks more closely, one sees that slaves found many ways of resisting their masters. Examining Virginia slave codes, one notices how frightened slave masters were of losing their slaves to uprisings or escapes. All this would suggest that many slaves tried to rebel. In many early American colonies, slaves made up a significant chunk of the population; sometimes as much as a third. Wise slave masters did not take seriously the myth that Africans were naturally submissive—they knew that, unless they continued to torture their slaves, they faced the possibility of a revolt.

Even after being psychologically tortured and indoctrinated to be meek and docile, African slaves bravely fought for their freedom. Indeed, American slave owners were well-aware that African slaves were powerful and dangerous—that's why they took such care to keep their slaves frightened, even after they'd arrived in America.

In New York in 1712, twenty-five slaves banded together with two Indians to attack white settlers and burn buildings. The slaves were executed for their crimes; they were slowly burned to death, so as to set an example to other slaves. Afterwards, however, there were other fires in Boston and New Haven, perhaps started by slaves in homage to the New York revolt. In other slave uprisings in the 17th and 18th centuries, white servants joined with black slaves. For American elites at the time, the only thing more frightening than a slave revolt was the possibility that disenfranchised whites would join with the slaves. To drive slaves and poor whites apart, Virginia governors passed laws strengthening property rights for white servants.

What's notable about the New York slave uprising of 1712 is that it involved both black slaves and poor white settlers. One of Zinn's most important observations about race in America is that the elites in America have always wanted *white people to hate black people, and vice versa, to ensure that the persecuted people of America will be weak and divided. While Zinn can't directly prove that American elites have tried to foster racism, he suggests that they've passed laws creating economic boundaries between slaves and impoverished whites, distancing the two groups from one another.*

In all, it's important to notice that the racism in American history wasn't "natural"—it was the product of specific, sometimes deliberate, historical forces. In part, American elites encouraged antipathy between whites and blacks in order to strengthen their own position in society.

Zinn ends the chapter by reiterating his two main points: 1) the economic need for slavery caused *the rise of racism in America; 2) powerful Americans encouraged racism between blacks and whites to reinforce their own power.*

CHAPTER 3: PERSONS OF MEAN AND VILE CONDITION

In 1676, in Virginia, a group of black slaves and white servants united against their wealthy social superiors. This uprising was known as Bacon's Rebellion, after its leader, the wealthy colonist Nathaniel Bacon, who died of dysentery in the midst of the uprising. In part, the rebellion was about the Virginian government's hesitation to fight Indians encroaching on poor white servants' territory. In the years leading up to 1676, poor whites had fought in skirmishes with the Indians, and, by 1676, poverty and starvation were rampant. Bacon also faulted Virginia's leadership for overtaxing its citizens and monopolizing the lucrative beaver trade. Thus, Bacon's Rebellion represented both "populist resentment against the rich and frontier hatred of the Indians." Ultimately, colonial forces used force to disarm the rebels, and ultimately, twenty-three rebels were hanged.

Bacon's Rebellion is a challenging subject for historians, because it can be interpreted in any number of different ways. In some ways, the rebellion was a populist uprising; on the other hand, it was instigated by a wealthy, powerful Virginian (whom, characteristically, Zinn barely discusses). Similarly, the rebellion was both racially and economically charged (its anger was directed at Native Americans, but also at the wealthy). Notice that, as with the New York rebellion of 1712, whites and blacks worked together, overcoming the racism and mutual antagonism that the American elite attempted to instill in them.

Who were the white servants who rose up against the Virginian government in 1676? Most were criminals, vagabonds, or poverty-stricken English people who'd come to the New World in the hopes of a fresh start. However, there were so many impoverished people trying to come to America in the 17th century that they were, for all intents and purposes, the property of elites in America. Poor Englishmen signed contracts that required them to work for no pay for years, slowly paying off their debts. Indentured servants traveled to the U.S. in squalid conditions, often dying on the voyage. If they reached America alive, servants worked long hours, and weren't allowed to marry without their masters' permission. Indentured servants fought back in various ways—18th century legal records are full of stories of servants who struck their masters, refused to obey, etc. During the 18th century, indentured servitude was gradually phased out in favor of black slavery. Once freed from their debt, some indentured servants found fortune, but most continued to live miserable lives.

Notice that, when describing the lives of indentured servants, Zinn makes many implicit comparisons between indentured servants and black slaves from Africa: like black slaves, indentured servants had to work for no pay, they were transported across the country in squalid conditions, and their "masters" controlled their personal lives with an iron fist. So even though there were myriad differences between the lives of white indentured servants and the lives of African slaves, they had enough in common to work together. Most important, they shared some common enemies: in particular, the colonial elite.

In the 18th century, class lines hardened throughout the colonies, and the distinctions between rich and poor people became sharper. American "aristocracy"—that is, those who owned the most land and property—became increasingly ostentatious during the 18th century. On the other end of the social hierarchy, immigrants, mostly from Scotland, Ireland, and Germany, entered America in the hopes of making their fortunes. Black slaves poured into the colonies, representing an increasingly large portion of the total population. The biggest colonial cities, such as Boston and Philadelphia, tripled in size, generating more wealth. Most of that wealth went to the aristocracy, further widening the gap between rich and poor.

In many ways, the 18th century represented a time of crisis for the colonial elite. With the gap between rich and poor widening at a rapid rate, elites had to be wary of uprisings and rebellions. Furthermore, with the populations of cities like Boston and Philadelphia growing quickly, elites had to face the possibility that, in the event of a rebellion, they'd be greatly outnumbered.

In the 18th century, many wealthy Americans treated poor white workers as little better than slaves. Poor whites rioted and went on strike to protest taxes and food shortages. At this time, England was fighting multiple wars, and it passed on its economic burdens to the colonies, which further worsened the economic situation in the colonies. Throughout the colonies, white workers responded by rioting and burning down buildings to send a message to wealthy elites.

Zinn emphasizes the rising stakes of economic crisis in the colonies: the persecuted colonists of North America were rioting and expressing their frustration, while the elite colonists must have been terrified of losing their power to mob rule.

In response to threats of a white uprising, the governors of American colonies developed tactics to weaken the working classes. Their priority was making sure that whites didn't cooperate with slaves or Indians. It's revealing to study the administration of 18th century North and South Carolina, where the combined population of Indians and slaves greatly exceeded the white population. Governors in the colonies passed laws that prevented free blacks from traveling into Indian country, and they also forced Indian tribes to return fugitive slaves. The explicit goal of these measures was to make blacks and Indian "a check upon one another." Other laws prohibited interracial sex or marriage, in part to prevent strong alliances between blacks and whites. After Bacon's Rebellion (an alliance between slaves and poor whites) the process of driving blacks and whites apart through legal measures accelerated. Especially in the South, laws prohibited white business owners from hiring black people for skilled labor.

As Zinn has shown in the previous chapter, the colonial elites' main priority was to divide the persecuted people of North America, in particular, along racial lines. Thus, colonial leaders took legal precautions to separate blacks from Native Americans, and white servants from black slaves. Zinn suggests that anti-miscegenation (i.e., interracial marriage) laws, many of which stayed on the books until the end of the 20th century, were intended to prevent allegiances from developing between different racial groups. While Zinn can't explicitly prove that the laws were written with this purpose in mind, he argues that, in light of the instability of colonial society at the time, and the legacy of Bacon's Rebellion, the elite knew exactly what they were doing when they forbid interracial marriages.

Over time, America's urban centers created a new middle class, characterized by skilled labor and limited financial independence. American elites realized that they needed to win the middle class's loyalty in order to maintain power. But in the late 18th century, the elites had discovered an even more powerful tool for maintaining power: the rhetoric of freedom, through which they could "unite just enough whites to fight a Revolution against England, without ending either slavery or inequality."

Zinn is fond of ending chapters by foreshadowing the content of the next chapter. Here, he suggests that the American Revolution provided colonial elites with a new weapon with which they could assert power over their people: ideological rhetoric.

CHAPTER 4: TYRANNY IS TYRANNY

Around 1776, powerful people in the American colonies—whom we know as the Founding Fathers—discovered that, by creating the idea of a nation with its own culture and symbols, they could strengthen their own leadership and steal power from British colonial rulers. Their discovery was brilliant: they created "the most effective system of national control devised in modern times."

The idea that the American Revolution created new systems of control and domination might seem absolutely wrong—surely the Revolution created more *freedom, not less. Zinn's point, however, is that "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" can* be *forms of control. Put another way, he's arguing that the Founding Fathers pacified their people by giving them just enough freedom and power not to rebel, while still preserving an unjust status quo.*

In the years leading up to 1776, the local American leadership was becoming dissatisfied with British leadership. After the Seven Years' War, AKA the French and Indian War, Britain raised taxes in the colonies, which drove up starvation and unemployment. The Founding Fathers—an upper and middle-class group—realized that they could manipulate the working classes' resentment of Britain to strengthen their own power. Modern American politicians have followed the Founding Fathers' example, using working-class anger for their own agenda.

In Marxist terms, the Founding Fathers are a classic example of the bourgeoisie, the middle-class people who lead rebellions against the powerful by manipulating the working classes' hostilities. While most history textbooks suggest that the Founding Fathers were motivated by their love for liberty and equality, Zinn instead argues that their motive was much baser: they used war with Britain as a "smokescreen" for their own attempts to secure power.

Before the Revolutionary War, there had been political and economic conflict in the American colonies, but the conflict was mostly between the rich and the poor, not between America and Britain. In New Jersey, New York, and North Carolina, poor land tenants staged riots against their wealthy landlords. In North Carolina in the 1760s, a working-class movement called the Regulators, upset with excessive taxation, petitioned the local government with their grievances, and protested the "unequal chances the poor and the weak have in contentions with the rich and powerful."

In order to bolster his argument that the Founding Fathers' Revolutionary War was a conservative movement designed to protect their own power and property, Zinn contrasts the Revolutionary War with some of the populist movements that occurred in the years leading up to it. Notice that the land tenants and the Regulators didn't petition Britain with their grievances—they directed their anger at the nearest representatives of power (the colonial elites).

The majority of battles in the Revolutionary War took place in the Northern colonies. One reason for this is that, in the agrarian Southern colonies where poor tenants often worked alongside rich farmers, it was more difficult to redirect working-class resentment outward toward the British. In Boston, by contrast, the Stamp Act attacked the economic security of the working, middle, and upper classes; in response, the working classes staged riots and demonstrations against the British. After the Stamp Act, however, American elites faced a problem: they needed to foster resentment for Britain without allowing it to endanger their own property. Thus, leaders like Samuel Adams encouraged the working class to be moderate, rather than rioting again.

Having established what a proletariat, populist movement looks like (see, for example, the actions of the Regulators), Zinn contrasts populism with the Founding Fathers' efforts to take power from Britain. Leaders like Samuel Adams encouraged their working-class followers not to be too violent or aggressive in their actions, which Zinn interprets as a strategy designed to protect Adams's own property from violence. In many parts of the country, particularly, the South, working-class people continued to direct most of the aggression at colonial elites, not outward to Britain.

The American colonial elite faced a problem: how to fight the British without radicalizing the working classes. Patrick Henry's famous "Give me liberty or give me death" speech, delivered in Virginia, symbolized the solution. Henry was from "the world of the gentry," but he used the rhetoric of freedom to form a bond between upper and lower classes. Around the same time, Thomas Paine wrote his famous pamphlet, *Common Sense*, in which he attacked the divine right to rule. Instead of addressing the divide between rich and poor, Paine and Henry established a "safer" conflict, between the colonies and Britain.

Patrick Henry and Thomas Paine were important figures in American history, not so much because of their concrete actions but because of their rhetorical innovations. As Zinn sees it, the language of equality and liberty is critical to the preservation of inequality *in America, because such language can deceive people into believing that they live in a just, moral country.*

The crowning achievement of colonial rhetoric was, without a doubt, the Declaration of Independence. In this document, Thomas Jefferson blurs any distinctions between the rich and the poor by writing that "all men are created equal." The Declaration excluded many people from its vision of human equality: Indians, blacks, slaves, and women. In short, Jefferson's celebrated phrase, "all men are created equal," was not a visionary celebration of human rights so much as it was an attempt to mobilize specific groups of American society—most important, working class white men—and establish a firm bond between these groups and the colonial elites as they prepared to fight Britain.

Even a cursory consideration of colonial society suggests that Jefferson's claim that "all men are created equal" wasn't intended to be literally true. Rather, Zinn argues, Jefferson's claims were intended to enlist the loyalty of working-class white men—arguably the most dangerous and volatile people in colonial America—for the Revolutionary War.

Another famous passage from the Declaration of Independence argues that governments must protect people's rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." It's often pointed out that Jefferson's quote is borrowed from the works of the philosopher John Locke, especially his *Second Treatise on Government*, in which he celebrated man's rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of *property*. Locke, like Jefferson, was a wealthy man; partly as a result, Locke focused on "government and political rights, but ignored the existing inequalities in property." Locke was useful to the Founding Fathers because he provided intellectual support for their agenda: mobilizing "enough Americans to defeat England, without disturbing too much the relations of wealth and power."

Property, Zinn suggests, is the "blind spot" in the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson focused on human beings' abstract, ideology equality, but totally ignored the concrete, economic inequalities in colonial America. (Zinn's argument here owes a major debt to the writings of the 20th century German critical theorist Herbert Marcuse.) By emphasizing abstract equality and ignoring real-world inequality, the Founding Fathers were able to gain the loyalties of many American colonists without surrendering any of their power or property.

The Declaration of Independence galvanized the American colonists, inspiring many of them to take up arms against the British army. Most of the soldiers who fought in the Revolutionary War were working-class; rich people could avoid the draft by paying money. The fact that rich people could opt out led to more rioting: the rioters chanted, "tyranny is tyranny let it come from whom it may."

Although the Founding Fathers were successful in deceiving the working-class people of America to sacrifice their lives for revolution, not everyone was fooled. As the colonists in this passage seem to have realized, the Founding Fathers weren't truly liberating colonists from tyranny; they were only replacing an old, overt form of tyranny with a new, subtler kind of tyranny.

CHAPTER 5: A KIND OF REVOLUTION

The Founding Fathers won the Revolutionary War in large part because they used rhetoric to convince large numbers of working-class colonists to fight against Britain. However, it's important to note that a huge portion of the colonists were either neutral or supported the King. Many working-class whites who did join the American militia didn't join simply because of patriotic fervor: they believed that serving in the military would bring them fortune.

At many points in his book, Zinn will emphasize that the majority of people in the United States aren't convinced by their leaders' lofty rhetoric and arguments for patriotism. Here, for example, he makes the point that many colonists—indeed, the majority of colonists—either didn't support the revolution, or only supported it because they sought economic advancement.

Throughout the Revolutionary War, there continued to be conflicts between the rich and the poor in the American colonies. Some militia groups, furious with the wealthy colonists who claimed to support the Revolution but did not fight for it, staged mutinies. In Trenton, New Jersey, George Washington ordered the execution of three militia leaders planning a mutiny.

Few history textbooks talk about the colonists who refused to fight in the Revolutionary War, or who staged mutinies when they realized that the Revolutionary Army was no less tyrannical than the British government. In this chapter, Zinn remedies some of these omissions.

After the Revolutionary War, colonial elites had to decide what to do with the land left by fleeing Loyalists; by and large, they claimed this land for themselves or gave it to middle-class farmers who'd fought in the war. Women, slaves, and indentured servants didn't gain any property. In short, the Revolutionary War didn't create a new social class; it just allowed the wealthiest and most powerful Americans to become wealthier and more powerful.

The aftermath of the Revolutionary War established a pattern that would continue throughout American history: after implying that working-class people stood to gain a lot from military victory, the elites proceeded to claim most of the "spoils of war" for themselves, doling out only small rewards for the less powerful. War, Zinn argues, doesn't really benefit "America"—only a few wealthy American elites see any gains from war.

The Revolutionary War was a milestone for American Indians, because it encouraged American colonists to push Indians off their land, "killing them if they resisted." From the 1750s onward, with the colonial population increasing quickly, most Indian tribes opposed the colonists, and in the Revolutionary War they largely allied with the British. After the Revolutionary War, "Americans assumed now that the Indian land was theirs." Working-class colonists expanded westward, and continued to fight Indian tribes. Some historians have argued that the working-class colonists who went west acted as a "bulwark" against colonial elites, effectively protecting elites' property from Indian aggression.

It's telling that, both in the French and Indian War, and in the Revolutionary War, Native Americans supported European powers against the American colonists. By this time, American colonists had a lengthy history of disrespecting Native Americans' rights. With the end of the Revolutionary War, working-class colonists were able to claim new land in the west; however, Zinn suggests that these colonists were perhaps allowed to claim that land because of the benefits bestowed on elites by a working class population living between elite property and Indian lands.

The Revolutionary War was also a milestone for black slaves. Slaves fought in the war, usually on the American side. Zinn argues that the war created "opportunity for blacks to begin making demands of white society." Free blacks in the North petitioned their leaders to repeal discriminatory laws. However, the economic structure of early American society, resting on slave labor, prevented almost all positive changes for African Americans.

Zinn is willing to credit the Revolutionary War with providing some minimal advantages for black Americans; nevertheless, as he makes very clear, the Revolutionary War did nothing to end the fundamental problems with black life in America. Thus, slavery continued for almost a century after the war.

The Constitution is often called a work of genius. But other historians, such as Charles Beard, have argued that it represented a way for American elites to protect their own economic interests through a strong federal government. Most—though not all—elites favored a strong government because they wanted a force to protect their property from potential uprisings. In 1786, for example, the farmer Daniel Shays, who had fought in the Revolutionary War, mobilized other working-class veterans to protest the new American *status quo*. American elites were frightened that Shays' example would set off other rebellions.

It's telling that, even after the Revolutionary War, working-class people continued to demonstrate and exert force in the colonies. Zinn, following Charles Beard, argues that Shays' Rebellion helped convince the Founding Fathers that they needed to create a strong national state that could protect their property from future rioters and revolutionaries like Daniel Shays.

To understand the Founding Fathers' motives for signing the Constitution, it's instructive to study the *Federalist Papers*—the essays penned by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay at the time when the thirteen colonies were ratifying the Constitution. In *Federalist Paper #10*, Madison argues that American government must play the part of a referee, moderating disputes between different factions—especially factions that wanted the abolition of debts and an "equal division of property." Zinn posits that Madison wanted the government to "maintain … a certain distribution of power and wealth … in which government officials are not neutral referees but participants."

The Federalist Papers *are often praised in political science classes; however, Zinn interprets them very differently from how they're usually understood. Zinn argues that Madison's statement that the government should be a "referee" for factions suggests Madison's belief that powerful people need to sew discord and disunity in their subjects, in order to ensure that these subjects are too weak to rise up and rebel. In short,* Federalist #10 *codifies and intellectualizes the strategies of division that the colonial elites pioneered after Bacon's Rebellion.*

The Constitution was ratified throughout the colonies because it appealed both to the wealthy and to the middle class. Middle class merchants, farmers, and artisans were essentially nationalistic in their beliefs: they wanted a government that could protect their property from populist uprisings, especially those led by slaves and poor whites.

Zinn argues, somewhat cursorily, that the Constitution was, above all, appealing for wealthy and middle-class people, not the working classes. Historians have criticized Zinn for not clarifying what, precisely, he means by "middle-class" Americans—sometimes, he lumps this group in with the working-classes, and at other times, he links them with the elite.

Following the ratification of the Constitution, the first Congress of the United States passed the Bill of Rights, a series of amendments to the Constitution that seemed to protect personal freedoms. However, it quickly became apparent that the new American government had the power to limit personal freedoms however it saw fit. In 1798, under the John Adams administration, the federal government passed the Sedition Act, which made it a crime to say anything against the government.

Zinn sees the Bill of Rights as a symbolic tribute to American freedom, more than a strong protection of freedom—it didn't take more than a decade for the federal government to begin attacking people's right to free speech.

Also in the early days of the United States the federal government proved itself to be as aggressive with taxation as Britain had been. Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury, formed a Bank of the United States and levied a series of taxes—including the Whiskey Tax, which hurt small farmers. Hamilton personally led troops to enforce the tax and put down any potential rebellion among the farmers.

The early days of the United States eerily parallel the final days of British rule. Just like Great Britain in the 1750s and 60s, the early U.S. government levied a series of heavy taxes on the working class, and used military force to maintain its domination.

To this day, the Founding Fathers are often seen as wise men who wanted to maintain a healthy balance of power. In reality, the Founding Fathers wanted to maintain an unequal "balance," in the sense that they wanted to protect their own property and keep the working classes subservient. Furthermore, the women of early America were mostly "invisible" from the Founding Fathers' vision of democracy, as we'll see in the following chapter.

Zinn concludes the chapter by offering some harsh truths about the Founding Fathers. Most history textbooks paint Franklin, Washington, and Jefferson as heroic, larger-than-life people—an interpretation that's credible only when one ignores the experiences of common, working-class people during and after the Revolutionary War. The Founding Fathers were brilliant, but Zinn implies that their greatest achievement might have been "tricking" their followers (and generations of historians) into believing that their motives were loftier and more idealistic than they really were. For a more "balanced" account of the Founding Fathers—one which agrees with many of Zinn's points, but which also takes seriously some of the Founding Fathers' radical beliefs—consult Gordon Wood's The Radicalism of the American Revolution.

CHAPTER 6: THE INTIMATELY OPPRESSED

Reading the average American history textbook, it's easy to "forget half the population of the country." Women were largely invisible in public life, and they're still largely invisible in histories of the early United States. Much like slaves, women were treated as biologically inferior to men. White women in the early days of the colonies were brought to America for one reason only: to bear children. Later on, some white women worked as indentured servants, and were often harshly treated. However, on the early American frontier, white women commanded some respect because they were needed to do manual work, as well as bear children. Surely black women were the worst-off of all people in the colonies. They were given the least food and treated with the least respect.

As in previous chapters, Zinn talks about how the experience of women in the early days of America was unique. However, notice that he also emphasizes some of the commonalities between women's experiences and the experiences of other persecuted groups, such as slaves (e.g., both slaves and women had to endure condescending arguments about their "biological inferiorities"). Zinn makes a highly nuanced point in this section, simultaneously treating women as one cohesive group, as a combination of many distinct groups (for example, white women and black women), and as representative of persecuted people more generally.

All American women were "burdened" with the Christian ideals of marriage—in particular, the notion that women should be obedient to their husbands in all respects. Especially in Puritan society, women were punished for showing any signs of rebellion or disrespect. Thus, it's amazing that any women found ways of rebelling. Anne Hutchinson, a Puritan mother, was tried twice for heresy; she was banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony and went to Rhode Island.

Like many of the persecuted peoples in Zinn's book, women in the early colonial days found ways of rebelling against authority and injustice, even though ideological and economic forces urged them to remain passive and submissive.

During the Revolutionary War, many women were active in the fight against Britain: they formed patriotic groups, wrote articles, boycotted British goods. Most Revolutionary historians have ignored the contributions of working-class women—the few women they do discuss are genteel wives, such as Abigail Adams. The Revolutionary ideals of equality weren't primarily intended to apply to women, but some figures, such as Thomas Paine, spoke out for equal rights for women.

It's indicative of the class bias of most history textbooks that the most famous women of the Revolutionary era are upper-class women, such as Abigail Adams. In reality, working-class women played an active role in opposing British power in America. And even though Zinn admits that the Revolutionary rhetoric of equality wasn't primarily intended to apply to women, it inspired some thinkers to argue for equal rights for women. In other words, even if the precise, economic reasons for Jefferson's claim that "all men are created equal" had very little to do with women, other thinkers were able to co-opt Jefferson's rhetoric and use it to argue for forms of equality (such as gender equality) that Jefferson himself never envisioned.

Between the Revolutionary War and the Civil War, women's roles changed in various ways. With the rise of industry, more women worked in factories, disrupting the expectation that women remain "in the house." In part to push back against the changing roles of women in society, Zinn argues, early American culture stressed certain ideals that were designed to keep women subservient to men. Women were expected to be sexually pure, patriotic, and obedient. In all, this "cult of true womanhood" kept most American women subservient at a time when the country was going through radical changes.

Like many Marxist historians, Zinn takes a "dialectical" approach to the feminist history of the early 19th century: he explores some of the contradictory, oppositional ideas in American culture at the time. At the same time that economic forces were pressuring women to take roles outside the home, American culture seemed to compensate by reemphasizing the importance of obedience and domesticity in women.

In spite of the cult of womanhood encouraging women to be obedient, there were occasional outbreaks of radicalism among women in the early 19th century. In the factories of New England, for example, working-class women led strikes and riots to protest low wages and long hours. Also in the early 19th century, middle-class women began to "monopolize the profession of primary-school teaching." In their new role as teachers, middle-class women educated themselves and learned about "subversive ideas." By the middle of the 19th century, there were widespread antislavery and temperance movements led largely by women.

This passage is a great example of what Zinn meant in Chapter One when he wrote of the "brief flashes" of resistance in American history. Even if American women remained subjugated to men throughout the nineteenth century, they found some ways to resist. Thus, whether or not women's strikes succeeded in providing higher wages is not the point: the point is that women asserted their intelligence, strength, and compassion—a victory in and of itself.

In the early 19th century, certain American colleges and universities began admitting women, further escalating the process of female education and empowerment. Many of the women who attended college in the 1820s, 30s, and 40s went on to become feminist activists. One college graduate, Sarah Grimké, wrote a series of articles in which she argued that women were wrongly trained to believe that their only purpose in life was to marry and have children. Grimké analogized the treatment of women with the treatment of slaves. Later in her life, she became a notable abolitionist. Across America, women were instrumental in the growth of abolitionism.

Although Zinn often criticizes the American university system for indoctrinating its students to accept the status quo and protect the Establishment, he also seems to believe that the university system can be an important site for rebellion against the structure of American society. Here, for example, he shows how universities trained women not for a lifetime of domesticity and obedience, but rather for a lifetime of resistance to sexism and misogyny.

In 1840, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott organized the Seneca Falls Convention, a milestone of American feminism. At the Convention, Stanton, Mott, and their colleagues spoke about the need for equality between the sexes. Women found ways to resist sexism and fight, not only for their own cause, but also on behalf of other people who were marginalized and mistreated in American society.

In this chapter, Zinn has described feminism and resistance to sexism in 19th century America. However, he is careful to emphasize that feminism wasn't just about women protecting the rights of other women. Feminist activism encouraged women to participate in other *populist causes, too, including temperance and abolitionism. This suggests, perhaps, a common bond between very different kinds of persecuted people, including, for example, women and slaves.*

CHAPTER 7: AS LONG AS GRASS GROWS OR WATER RUNS

Between 1790 and 1830, the population of the United States tripled. As a result, the population expanded past the Mississippi Valley and the Appalachian Mountains. This population expansion occurred at the expense of American Indians.

In this chapter, Zinn will discuss the U.S.'s long history of deception and cruelty to Native Americans. One of his most important points is that the expansion and "glorification" of the United States wouldn't have been possible without the marginalization and terrorization of the Native American population.

After the Revolutionary War, Indian tribes—most of which had fought on the side of the British—continued to war with American colonists. In the early 1800s, Thomas Jefferson doubled the size of the country by buying the Louisiana Territory from France; Jefferson's decision necessitated the removal of Indians to clear way for farmers and industrialists. As white settlers encroached on their homes, many Indian tribes fought back, while some other tribes believed that they could coexist with settlers. One of the most famous figures to emerge from the fights with Indians in the new Louisiana Territory was Andrew Jackson. In 1814, he became a national hero by killing eight hundred Indians at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend.

At the time (and even today, in history textbooks), the growth of the United States was seen as a glorious event, whereby Americans would be able to explore empty, pristine lands. The truth, as Zinn makes clear here, is that these lands already belonged to Native Americans. Many of the greatest "heroes" in U.S. history, such as Jefferson and Andrew Jackson, cemented their legacies by marginalizing, or even killing, Native Americans in order to clear the way for settlers' farms and factories.

In the 1810s, American settlers in the Louisiana Territory reached an uneasy truce with the Indians. Under the terms of the treaty Andrew Jackson signed with the Creek Indians, for example, individual Indians were allowed to own property. However, Jackson used bribery and intimidation to force Indians off their land, and he encouraged working-class whites to "squat" on Indian land in the hopes that the Indians would leave. Amazingly, the vast majority of history textbooks on Andrew Jackson, and even some serious biographies, do not talk about his legacy as a briber, bully, and killer of Indians.

Andrew Jackson remains one of the most celebrated figures in American history (although, partly because of the scholarship of Howard Zinn, and other revisionist historians, Jackson has become much less popular than he was—his likeness was recently taken off the twenty-dollar bill). Jackson bullied and intimidated the Native Americans into leaving their land and going west.

After Andrew Jackson was elected president, the Southern states passed laws strengthening their control over Indians and encouraging whites to settle on Indian land. Many of these settlers harassed Indians—in effect, pressuring them to leave their lands and go west. Jackson deployed an army major to tell the Choctaw and Cherokee Indians to leave their territory, promising them that they'd be allowed to stay in their new territory, "as long as the grass grows or water runs." For generations of American Indians, the phrase has become a symbol for American duplicity.

Jackson's presidency is often described as a time of great populism and social progress in America. Instead, Zinn characterizes it as a time of terrorization and abject cruelty to the Native Americans in the Southern states. Jackson, like many other American politicians, made agreements with the Native Americans, and then proceeded to violate these agreements.

Throughout the 1810s and 20s, certain white frontier figures, such as Davy Crockett, became lifelong friends with Indian tribes. Furthermore, in Georgia, some Cherokee Indians tried to adapt to the U.S., and many of them became farmers. The Cherokee chief Sequoyah developed a written language for his people, and other leaders developed a "formal government." Despite their attempts to integrate with America, Zinn notes, "none of this made them more desirable than the land they lived on."

One of Jackson's arguments to support evicting the Native Americans was that they could never be integrated into American society. But plainly, Native Americans were actively trying *to integrate into "the white man's world" by developing a written language, imitating the structures of American society, etc. The problem wasn't that Native Americans wouldn't integrate—the problem was that they wouldn't surrender their valuable land.*


In 1830, Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act, formally ordering all Indians to abandon their land in the U.S. and go west. The military seized the Cherokees' lands and abolished their government. A missionary named Samuel Worcester was imprisoned for refusing to take a loyalty oath to the state of Georgia—an oath that would have forced him to say that he supported the Indian removal. Worcester took his case to the Supreme Court, and the Court found that the Georgia's laws violated the state's treaty with the Cherokee tribe. Jackson refused to honor the Court's decision.

This passage is a good example of how Zinn shows that "America" isn't a monolithic concept: during the 1830s, different Americans reacted to the Indian Removal Act in wildly different ways. Some supported the act, while others refused to comply with it, recognizing it as immoral. While some components of the federal government, such as the Supreme Court, challenged Jackson's authority to evict Native Americans from their land, Jackson ignored the Court's ruling, suggesting that the U.S. government is, first and foremost, an aggressive, expansionist entity.

At the same time that Jackson supported the removal of Indians, he remained hugely popular. Bolstered by reelection, he hurried the process of Indian removal. White settlers invaded the land of the Creek Indians, and the federal government did nothing to protect the tribe. The Creek tribe refused to leave its land and, in response, Jackson deployed the army to evict the Creek and march them westward. The military also evicted other Indian tribes, such as the Choctaws and the Chickasaws.

Zinn doesn't ignore the fact that the vast majority of Americans approved of Andrew Jackson's racist, even genocidal, policies of Native American removal. Although Zinn will often praise the working-class people of the United States, he acknowledges that, at times, they've supported some violent and profoundly bigoted policies.


The Seminole tribe, based mostly in Florida, refused to cooperate with the military's eviction policy. In 1835, Seminole Indians attacked a group of 110 American soldiers, killing almost all of them. Andrew Jackson sent in the army to restore "order" in Florida, and the war with the Seminole dragged on for years. At the same time, some Cherokee Indians refused to abandon their land, practicing a policy of nonviolent resistance. In 1838, under the Presidency of Martin Van Buren, federal troops marched onto the Cherokee territory, rounded up Cherokee Indians, and forced them to march west on what would later be known as the Trail of Tears. On the march, as many as four thousand Cherokees died of sickness and starvation. At the end of that year, Van Buren told Congress that the Cherokee eviction had had "the happiest effects."

In this moving passage, Zinn contrasts the corny patriotism and idealism of American leadership of the 1830s with the harsh realities of Native American removal. Even while the American military used physical force to march Cherokee women and children westward, resulting in mass starvation and death, the country's leadership claimed that Native American removal had been a great success. The passage is a stark reminder that history is often written by the winners—from Van Buren's perspective, the Indian Removal Act was, indeed, a "happy" success. Zinn's duty as a historian is to balance out Van Buren's naiveté and obliviousness with the truth about the Native Americans.

CHAPTER 8: WE TAKE NOTHING BY CONQUEST, THANK GOD

After Thomas Jefferson purchased the Louisiana Territory, the size of the United States doubled. The U.S. now bordered Mexico, which had won its independence from Spain in the 1820s. In 1836, Texas broke off from Mexico and formed its own republic; in 1845, under the presidency of James Polk, the U.S. brought Texas into the union, though the Mexican government continued to regard Texas as a part of Mexico. Polk was an expansionist president, and he ordered General Zachary Taylor (the future president of the United States) to provoke Mexican troops near the Rio Grande. In 1846, Taylor's quartermaster was found with his head smashed in, and later, Mexican troops attacked Taylor and his men. The Mexican military had, in short, done exactly what Polk wanted them to do: they had given America an excuse to declare war on Mexico, protect Texas, and claim some of Mexico's other territory in the Southwest. Journalists were mostly supportive of the war; one coined a term that was used to justify the fight: "manifest destiny."

During the first half of the 19th century, the U.S. took a series of measures to expand its territory. After the signing of the Louisiana Purchase, the government created a pretext for war between Mexico and the U.S. (much as it had done with the Native Americans in New England in the 1600s). Zinn notes that the journalistic community of the era supported America's aggressive, unethical expansion into the Southwest, even coining the phrase "manifest destiny" to suggest that the U.S. had an almost religious duty *to expand across the continent. As Zinn makes clear, the U.S.'s motives for expanding westward were far simpler and baser: the greed of its elite citizens.*

With the support of Congress, President Polk began the Mexican American War. Some politicians supported the war because they wanted to protect the troops, while others wanted to acquire more territory in the Southwest. A few, mostly from the Whig party, opposed the war for fear that war would spread slavery to the new territories. (One notable opponent of the war was Abraham Lincoln.) The American Anti-Slavery Society protested the war, and Henry David Thoreau was imprisoned for refusing to pay taxes that would be used to fund the fight. Thoreau wrote one of his most famous works, "Civil Disobedience," to describe why he chose to go to prison. Other notable opponents of the war included Frederick Douglass and the abolitionist journalist William Lloyd Garrison, both of whom believed that new territory meant the expansion of slavery.

The resistance to the Mexican American War was widespread: major politicians opposed the war, as did writers and intellectuals, such as Garrison and Thoreau. It's interesting to consider why so many elites opposed the war (especially in light of the arguments Zinn makes later in his book about how different factions of government favor essentially the same policies). While Zinn doesn't answer this question here, readers should consult the early chapters of Eric Foner's book, Free Land, Free Soil *for more information.*

What was the popular opinion about the Mexican American War? There's evidence that organized workers opposed the war, and in New York and Boston, many immigrants demonstrated against the war, calling it a "plot by slave owners." At the time of the war, ten percent of the country was foreign-born, and their patriotism was "probably not great." As a result, "manifest destiny" arguments probably weren't too persuasive. Many working-class Americans joined the military and fought in Mexico, but they did so largely because they believed they stood to make money and earn property.

As in other parts of his book, Zinn suggests that the working-class people of the country weren't convinced by the elites' rhetoric and appeals to patriotism. As with the Revolutionary War, many of the people who joined the military in the 1840s did so because it was a career, not because they particularly cared about annexing Mexican territory.

In Mexico's territories, the resistance to the American military was vast. American troops took Los Angeles in the middle of 1846, but in the fall of that year there was a revolt and the military didn't retake the region until January. American soldiers, in spite of their numerical and technological advantages over Mexico, suffered from dehydration and dysentery. During the Mexican American War, the wealthiest Americans had a vested interest in claiming Mexican territory, but instead of fighting, they sent working-class people to do so on their behalf. In all likelihood, most American troops in Mexico understood this and served resentfully.

The Mexican American War is sometimes remembered as a glorious war, after which the U.S. greatly expanded its territory. However, as Zinn makes clear, the Mexican American War was one of the most miserable wars in American history—soldiers died of awful diseases, and fought for a cause they barely cared about.

In 1847, Mexico surrendered to the United States, and the U.S., in addition to maintaining its control of Texas, annexed a huge amount of Mexico's territory (including modern-day California and New Mexico), greatly increasing the size of the country. This was a victory of "presidents and generals," not American soldiers. The U.S. paid Mexico fifteen million dollars for the territory, which prompted one newspaper to claim, "We take nothing by conquest … Thank God."

In contrast to the Establishment's claims that the Mexican American War was a mild, diplomatic conflict, Zinn makes it clear that, in reality, it was anything but mild. Soldiers died in squalid conditions, fighting for a cause they scarcely cared about. In the end, the spoils of war—the new American territory—benefitted the elite, not the working-class people who risked (or gave) their lives to acquire it.

CHAPTER 9: SLAVERY WITHOUT SUBMISSION, EMANCIPATION WITHOUT FREEDOM

For nearly a century, the United States government supported slavery for one reason: it was exceedingly practical. The U.S. depended on industry, and slaves provided free labor, which allowed the Southern states to produce massive amounts of cotton and other crops without going into debt.

Zinn begins his chapter on the Civil War by reiterating a point he made earlier in the book: the motives for slavery were not racial, but economic. Americans developed *racism largely as a way of justifying the brutal enslavement of African people.*

It's probably impossible for anyone living in America today to grasp slavery fully. Slave owners were cruel with their property. Simply by buying slaves, they tore apart black families; then, slave owners forced their slaves to work exhausting jobs from sunrise to sunset. Many slave owners recognized that they needed to devise "ingenious punishments" to frighten their slaves into submission. Additionally, some estimates suggest that, on average, half of all slaves were whipped every year. However, some slaves found ways to fight back; in 1831, Nat Turner gathered about seventy slaves and killed at least fifty-five white men, women, and children. As a result, slave owners lived in constant fear of slave rebellions, and they tried to prevent rebellions by punishing the slaves more harshly. Other slaves found ways to run away from their plantations. Still other slaves rebelled simply by not working very hard. At many plantations, poor whites (many of them Irish immigrants) worked alongside black slaves. Slave owners, recognizing the danger of an uprising, enforced laws to separate whites from blacks. Slave owners also used religion to control slaves, citing Biblical passages to justify slavery and enlisting some slaves to preach to other slaves.

Some slaves courageously rose up against their masters and fought for their freedom, frightening Southern slave owners into taking more drastic measures to protect their own power. One of the most important measures that slave owners took was to divide underlings along racial lines: poor white laborers weren't allowed to associate with slaves, perhaps for fear that they'd develop alliances against the slave owners. In this way, slave owners' policies echoed the laws instituted by colonial elites in the 1600s and 1700s. The goal was to make poor whites a check on black slaves, rather than an ally to black slaves.

It's often argued that slavery destroyed the black family. In fact, black slaves adapted to their changing situation by developing new family relationships. Some historians of slavery have argued that slaves practiced a complex kinship system, whereby all adults looked after all children, and older children looked after younger children. With the help of this "family," many slaves found ways to hang on to their dignity as human beings. Slaves turned to storytelling, music, song, and humor for comfort and resistance.

Zinn describes the various ways that slaves found of resisting slavery. Even if, by and large, slaves did not succeed in fighting off their tyrannical masters and winning their freedom, they were "victorious" in the important sense that they didn't give up their dignity as human beings, and they found ways to use art, family, and friendship to achieve "brief flashes" of freedom.

In 1850, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act, whereby northern states were required to return fugitive slaves who had made their way north to their masters down south. Zinn interprets the Fugitive Slave Act as confirmation that "the shame of slavery was not just the South's": the entire country was complicit.

Too often, historians paint slavery as an isolated evil, limited to the Southern states. The truth, Zinn makes clear, is that the U.S. government and northern states helped perpetuate slavery by cooperating with Southern slave owners.

In the North, free blacks thought about slavery constantly. The most famous black man in America, Frederick Douglass, spoke out tirelessly against slavery, partnering with white abolitionists. Although most history books focus on the activism of white abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison, free black abolitionists were the true "backbone of the antislavery movement." White abolitionists could be enormously condescending to African Americans, even as they fought on the same side. When Sojourner Truth, one of the most eloquent abolitionists, spoke to a crowd in New York City, she was mocked for being a black woman.

History textbooks often overemphasize the contributions of white abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison, whereas Zinn wants to suggest that black abolitionists were far more committed to the cause than most of their white allies. Abolitionism was, in many ways, a heroic, noble cause. However, as Sojourner Truth's life makes painfully clear, it wasn't without its share of racism and sexism.

In the years leading up to the Civil War, John Brown led a raid on a military arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, in an effort to arm slaves. His plan failed, and he was arrested. However, it has been argued that Brown's "failure" brought attention to the abolitionist issue and convinced the country that, as Brown said, "the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood." Brown was executed with the full approval of the federal government—the same federal government that enforced the Fugitive Slave Act, tolerated slavery, and ruled that black slaves were property, not people.

John Brown was a truly radical figure: someone who refused to use peaceful, institutional means to solve the problems of slavery. Instead, Brown believed that violence and physical force were necessary to end slavery in America. Meanwhile, the federal government continued to tolerate and perpetuate slavery by cooperating with Southern slave owners, enforcing racist policies, and generally preserving a status quo *in which millions of human beings were treated like property.*

In the end, the federal government ended slavery "under conditions controlled by whites, and only when required by the political and economic needs of the business elite of the North." Abraham Lincoln, the president during the Civil War, skillfully combined lofty anti-slavery rhetoric with economic practicality. He refused to denounce the Fugitive Slave Law publicly, and insisted on many occasions that Congress did not have the right to ban slavery. When Lincoln was elected president in 1860, the Southern states seceded in part because they predicted that Lincoln would enact a high tariff on manufacturers and strengthen the National Bank, policies that contradicted slave owners' interests.

Instead of portraying Abraham Lincoln as a heroic figure, Zinn argues that Lincoln was a skillful politician and a pragmatist, whose primary motivations for waging the Civil War were preserving the Union, not ending slavery. For a different perspective on Lincoln, readers might consult James Loewen's Lies My Teacher Told Me*, which argues that Lincoln was a conflicted figure who largely "transcended" racism toward the end of his time in the White House.*

Lincoln gradually changed his views on slavery throughout the Civil War. Some historians have characterized him as a "barometer," adjusting to the national opinion. When he issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862, it was worded so as to leave "slavery untouched in states that came over to the North." In spite of its wording, the Emancipation Proclamation spurred the antislavery movement; the Union army accepted black soldiers, and abolitionists became bolder in their demands. In the South, slaves deserted and fought in the Union army. It's been estimated that one in five slaves ran away at some point during the Civil War. However, even though African Americans joined the Union army in the hopes of fighting for equality, they weren't treated equally: they were given the toughest jobs.

Even if the Emancipation Proclamation didn't go far enough in its aims, Zinn can't deny that it had a profound impact on the abolitionist movement in America. Indeed, the fact that the Emancipation Proclamation was later followed with a Constitutional amendment banning slavery might confirm the success of the abolitionist movement: encouraged by their successes, abolitionists continued to pressure Lincoln to pursue more and more radical policies. However, as Zinn makes clear, federal legislation could not end the rampant racism and discrimination in the army, and in the U.S. as a whole.

After the Civil War, slaves were freed from bondage, but they weren't compensated with land or money. Indeed, Lincoln signed laws that ensured that the land of former slave owners passed down to their next of kin, not to the former slaves who'd worked on the land for years. The American government didn't fight to end slavery; it fought to "retain its enormous national territory and market and resources."

Although the freeing of the slaves was, in some ways, a radical, structural change to American society, Lincoln did not go far enough in radically reforming the structures of property in America. Overall, Zinn argues that the Civil War was, first and foremost, about preserving the power of the Union, not the moral cause of freeing the slaves.

Following the Civil War (during the period known as Reconstruction), the Republican Party enacted a series of laws that strengthened African American rights, giving them the ability to vote, own property, and avoid discrimination. The government also deployed troops to the South to enforce these laws. Furthermore, the government enacted laws allowing blacks to be elected to state legislatures, although they were a minority in almost every state. To this day, many history textbooks claim that, in the Reconstruction era, blacks "dominated" Southern government, and behaved ineptly. This is a myth—while it's true that some black politicians were corrupt (as many politicians are), the new black leadership helped enroll tens of thousands of black children in public school for the first time ever, among many other achievements.

The Reconstruction era is often regarded as a failure because it put incompetent black leaders in positions of power unlike anything they'd experienced before. However, as Zinn says here, such notions are wrong, and potentially racist. The reason Reconstruction didn't succeed isn't that it was too "hasty" or poorly thought out; rather, it failed because it didn't go far enough in rethinking Southern society. Racist white people still maintained almost all of their power.

In spite of some milestones in the black community in the years following the end of the Civil War, life remained bleak for most African Americans. Former slave owners organized terrorist attacks on black schools and churches. Whites rioted throughout the South, killing and intimidating blacks. The most notorious terrorist organization of the era was the Ku Klux Klan, which organized raids, lynchings, beatings, and burnings. By the 1870s, the violence in the Southern states was the worst it had been since the Civil War, but the federal government was reluctant to send more troops to enforce order. Around the same time, the Supreme Court nullified many of the legal protections for African Americans.

The federal government's protections for African Americans living in the South were minimal: the Supreme Court nullified or weakened the legal protections for black people in the South, and the military didn't do remotely enough to protect black people from the aggression of terrorist groups like the Ku Klux Klan. Without military or legal protection, African Americans in the South were left with a largely symbolic set of protections from the federal government.

In 1877, with the inauguration of Rutherford Hayes, the last Union soldiers left the South, signaling the end of Reconstruction and leaving free blacks with little federal support: legal, military, or even symbolic. Hayes had been elected due to a behind-the-scenes deal between his political managers and those of his opponent, Samuel Tilden. In exchange for putting Hayes in the White House, Northern politicians not only pulled troops out of the South, but they also assured Southern coal and iron businessmen that they'd be included in the Union's plans for industrial expansion. In short, the election of Rutherford Hayes ended Reconstruction and signaled that Northern elites were willing to cooperate with the wealthiest Southerners regardless of their political positions.

The election of Rutherford Hayes symbolized a new era in American history. Only a few years after the end of the Civil War elites in the South united with their counterparts in the North and promised to help one another maintain their wealth and power by sharing the lucrative coal and iron contracts that would accompany the growth of the railroad industry for the rest of the century. Thus, Hayes's election confirms one of Zinn's most important points: wealth is a better predictor of cooperation than ideology. In spite of some major political differences, Southern and Northern elites cooperated to protect their fortunes.

The 1880s and 90s were arguably the "low-point" for black people in the entirety of American history. Without government protection, blacks lived in fear, either of being attacked by white aggressors or of being arrested for trivial crimes. As one black journalist wrote in the 1890s, "The white man who shoots a negro always goes free, while the negro who steals a hog is sent to the chain gang for ten years." Some black Southern leaders, such as Booker T. Washington, emphasized organization and economic independence in the black community. Others encouraged blacks to leave the South altogether.

Without federal support of any kind, black people living in the South had to fend for themselves, contending with racist police officers and a corrupt court system. Booker T. Washington's approach to dealing with Southern racism—organize, uphold segregation, and become economically independent—has been criticized for "giving in" to the desires of Southern racists, but also praised for its pragmatism.

Looking back on the 1870s, the writer W. E. B. Du Bois wrote that the "betrayal of the Negro" was indicative of something even more horrible: "a new capitalism and a new enslavement of power." After the 1870s, he argued, American capitalists became more powerful and far more daring in exploiting working-class people. In a sense, Du Bois argued, the 1870s marked the beginning of an era in which, for all purposes, poor black *and* white people became slaves to capitalists and capitalism.

Although this chapter has mostly been about the discrimination and racism that black people faced in the second half of the 19th century, Zinn ends the chapter by making a broader point. Black persecution, while horrible, was not unique in the 19th century—poor white people were also, in a sense, "enslaved" to capitalist elites. Zinn's point emphasizes one of the major themes of his book: the commonalities between the different persecuted people of the United States.

CHAPTER 10: THE OTHER CIVIL WAR

In 1839, in the Hudson River Valley, a group of land tenants organized themselves and refused to pay rent. For generations, the Hudson Valley land had been owned by the same family, which made a huge income by renting out property to small farmers, or tenants. But following the national recession of 1837, many tenants found themselves unable to pay. Thousands of tenants joined together to protest the landlord system. In the end, the government sent troops, who threw more than three hundred tenants in prison. Thus, "the power of the law crushed the Anti-Rent movement."

This chapter is mostly about the people's resistance to the growing inequality of the United States. Zinn begins by talking about a little-remembered populist movement in the 1830s, the goal of which was attacking the unjust rent system of the Hudson Valley. This movement was crushed with the force of the American military.

Around the same time, there was a minor stir in Rhode Island, known as Dorr's Rebellion. In 1841, Thomas Dorr, a lawyer, mobilized working-class people to demonstrate for electoral reform, since, at the time, Rhode Island was the only state that didn't grant universal suffrage for its white male residents. Dorr penned his own constitution, abolishing laws that required voters to own property. Dorr's supporters unofficially voted for the constitution, and in 1842, Dorr led an attack on the state arsenal, hoping to arm his constituents and, it seems, found his own government. Dorr was arrested, charged with treason, and sentenced to jail time. Even after being imprisoned, he remained a martyr for many Americans who lacked property or power.

Dorr's Rebellion was notable because, like the Anti-Rent movement, it challenged the idea that certain people should be given special privileges because they own large amounts of land. As late as the mid-19th century, some white male Americans couldn't vote in state elections because they didn't own property (at the time, neither blacks nor women could vote).

One rarely hears about Dorr or the Anti-Rent movement in American history textbooks—in fact, one rarely hears about any kind of class struggle. Many textbooks characterize Andrew Jackson as a "man of the people," and yet the same textbooks spend little to no time talking about the "people" on whose behalf Jackson claimed to speak. Jackson may not have been a man of the people, but he was the first President to "master the liberal rhetoric" of speaking for the common man. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, presidents followed Jackson's example by appealing to ordinary voters while continuing to protect the upper classes.

The bias of history textbooks leads to the omission of a thorough discussion of populism in the first half of the 19th century. Textbooks praise certain leaders, like Andrew Jackson, for being populists, but spend little to no time discussing the actual American people. In truth, American leaders gain power by pretending to be populists, even though, in secret they cater to the needs of the American elite.

Jackson's demagoguery emerged at a time when the "common man" was becoming increasingly powerful. The 19th century was the age of the train, the canal, and the telegraph. Ordinary people had new opportunities to travel and organize themselves. The 19th century was also an era of "booms and slumps," when the economy grew at an unstable rate, so that working-class people were often unemployed. Wealthy industrialists, therefore, needed to be careful to keep the working classes submissive, while enlisting the government to protect business.

In the 19th century, the common man was gaining new power: the power to travel across the country, to publicize his views in newspapers, etc. Whether consciously or unconsciously, American elites realized that they needed to prevent the American people from becoming too powerful or too dissatisfied with their lives.

It's unclear how widespread populist movements were in the early 19th century. However, it is clear that the early 1800s were the era when Americans first formed trade unions as a defense against exploitation. Workers ran candidates in elections, but many seemed to think that rioting and demonstrating were more reliable means of getting what they wanted. In Philadelphia in 1835, trade unions organized factory strikes in support of a ten-hour workday (at the time, much less than the average work day). Workers intimidated those who refused to strike, often targeting poor Irish immigrants.

Noting that the historical record on radical populism in the early 19th century is incomplete, Zinn suggests that the early 19th century had its fair share of populist uprisings, strikes, and demonstrations. Most of these uprisings were reactions to the growing inequality of American society—for example, workers in Philadelphia protested their long hours and low wages.

In 1857, the labor movement was more widespread than ever. Women went on strike by themselves for the first time in years, and in New York and New Jersey, tens of thousands marched in support of higher wages and shorter hours. In 1860, the powerful shoe unions of New England went on strike, effectively ending the distribution of new shoes in the North. Strikes continued during the Civil War, when the price of food rose considerably. By 1864, about 200,000 workers belonged to a trade union. Many union workers opposed the Civil War, and went on strike to protest it—they couldn't see the purpose of fighting for black slaves when they themselves worked in slave-like conditions. The federal government regularly sent troops to break strikes and attack war protesters. In 1863, the Union army broke up a massive riot in New York City, leaving about four hundred people dead.

As the 19th century went on, American workers became more aggressive in their uprisings and their demands for equality and respect. As a result, the federal government became more aggressive in its responses to populist uprisings—indeed, it began deploying federal troops to quell strikes and peaceful demonstrations. It's important to notice that many working-class people in the 1860s weren't interested in fighting for the Union—in spite of the government's lofty rhetoric and patriotic proclamations, workers and immigrants couldn't see the point of fighting to free slaves, since their own lives were miserable and, in some ways, slave-like.

Around the time of the Civil War, the government took series of measures to strengthen business interests. In 1861 Congress instituted a high tariff that allowed businesses to raise prices. The next year, it passed the Homestead Act, allowing anyone to purchase a homestead for a mere dollar per acre, provided that they cultivated the land for five years. While such an act might seem generous, one should keep in mind that, around the same time, Congress gave railroad companies control of more than one hundred million acres, free of charge.

The Homestead Act is a perfect example of the injustice of the federal government. On the surface, the Homestead Act seems highly generous, since it essentially gave people free (or very cheap) land. However, the "generosity" of the federal government to the common man pales in comparison to the generosity of the government to the business community. As usual, the government seems to have been heavily biased toward the Establishment.

The 19th century, Zinn says, was a time when "the law did not even pretend to protect working people—as it would in the next century." When there were accidents at a factory, workers weren't compensated for their suffering, and they had no way of suing their employers. Nevertheless, trade unions continued to fight for worker's rights. In 1872, union strikers in New York succeeded in winning an eight-hour day. Other union strikes in the 1870s won with limited successes. Most unions of the late 19th century did not admit black people. However, some unions, such as the National Labor Union, gradually opened its doors to black and female members. Unions also began to tackle more ambitious reforms—for example, demanding the issuing of paper money, rather than scrip that could only be redeemed at a company-owned store.

The worker's movement of the second half of the 19th century arose from the miserable conditions of factories and the general indifference of the federal government to workers' plight. Union strikers knew that they couldn't pursue their grievance through the court system or the ballot box; as a result, they turned to strikes and riots to attract attention to their cause. Zinn acknowledges that unions, in spite of their populism and commitment to protecting their workers' rights, weren't perfect—indeed, many of them were bigoted and sexist. However, Zinn is careful to emphasize that some *unions, though not most, welcomed black and female workers.*

In 1873, the U.S. entered another recession. While some workers tried to migrate to South America or Europe, many workers who'd previously avoided unions now joined them. 1877 was the year of the Railroad Strike, still one of the most important strikes in American history. The strike began when railroad companies cut wages; in response, railway workers in Ohio and West Virginia went on strike, refusing to allow any trains to pass through. The governor of West Virginia asked Rutherford Hayes to send troops and, after the number of strikers entered the thousands, Hayes responded, temporarily restoring business in West Virginia.

As Zinn sees it, the Railroad Strike is representative of the federal government's usual response to working-class uprisings: in the event of a national strike, the government usually sent in the army to break up the strike by force.

In spite of the troops in West Virginia, the railway strike spread to other cities, including Pittsburgh and Harrisburg. In Chicago, workers demonstrated to demand the nationalization of the railroads. Police officers attacked the crowds, killing three people. A similar pattern held in other American cities: workers demonstrated, and police or the military stepped in to "restore order." In the end, the railroads made some concessions to the workers, but also strengthened their police force. By and large, the working classes' attempts to go on strike against the railroads had failed: they were "not united enough, not powerful enough … but there was more to come."

The workers involved in the Railroad Strike must have been phenomenally brave (and, perhaps, desperate), since even after Hayes sent federal troops to break up the strike, they persisted. However, the worker's strike failed to accomplish its intended goals of raising wages and decreasing hours. Nevertheless, Zinn suggests that the Railroad Strike of 1877 was important because it prepared American workers for some more successful strikes in the future.

CHAPTER 11: ROBBER BARONS AND REBELS

1877 was a bad year for the people of the United States: blacks found that the federal government was no longer willing to protect them, and workers learned that they weren't organized enough to fight railway companies. For the rest of the century, the elites of the North and South organized "the greatest march of economic growth in human history." Elites orchestrated this march, however, with the help of cheap labor. Between 1865 and 1900, steam and electricity became the key forms of power, and urban centers grew exponentially. While some historians have characterized the late 19th century as a time when anyone could go from "rags to riches," the data simply don't support such an argument: of the three hundred most powerful business executives of the 1870s, ninety percent came from upper- or middle-class backgrounds. Furthermore, much of the growth that the U.S. underwent in the 19th century was unethical or illegal. Railroad companies joined the East and West Coasts together, but only by underpaying laborers and overvaluing their own services.

Much as the expansion of the Western, industrialized world hinged upon the subjugation of the Native American population, Zinn argues that the expansion of the American industrial state in the second half of the 19th century hinged upon the subjugation and exploitation of the working class. The divide between rich and poor widened during this period—on one hand, industry generated tremendous wealth for the richest Americans; on the other, it forced poor Americans to take lower wages for exhausting work. Zinn suggests that the media (and, today, historians) emphasized the "American dream"—i.e., the idea that anybody could become rich and successful in America—to mask the fact that American society was rapidly developing into a caste system.

The 19th century was an age of "robber barons" such as J. P. Morgan and John Rockefeller. In 1895, with the government's gold reserves decreasing quickly, President Grover Cleveland was forced to buy gold from Morgan in exchange for bonds, which Morgan promptly resold at a huge profit. Morgan began his career by selling rifles to Union soldiers for a big profit—despite the fact that the rifles were defectives. Rockefeller put his competitors out of business by making illegal agreements with railroad companies.

The people who became wealthy and powerful during the second half of the 19th century were often highly unethical people, who made their fortunes by deceiving and, in some cases, hurting other people. The "pillars of society" during the era were, beneath all their money and fame, criminals—hence the nickname, "robber baron."

In the late 19th century, the U.S government behaved almost exactly as Karl Marx predicted: it claimed to protect the rights of the common man, when, in fact, it favored the interests of the wealthy. Under the leadership of Grover Cleveland, for example, the government bought steel at artificially high prices from Andrew Carnegie, the most powerful steel baron of the era. Cleveland vetoed bills intended to help struggling farmers, claiming that he opposed federal aid; yet, the same year, he paid federal bondholders a bonus of 45 million dollars.

Karl Marx was a philosopher and social critic who wrote most of his books in the mid-19th century. In his magnum opus, Capital, *Marx argued that the main purpose of government in a capitalist society was to ensure that the rich and powerful maintained their wealth and power. The government's cooperation with robber barons like Carnegie seems to confirm everything Marx predicted.*

It was also during the Cleveland administration that Congress passed the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887, which supposedly regulated railroads in order to protect consumer interests. As journalists observed at the time, the Act was "almost entirely nominal," its only purpose to satisfy the "popular clamor" for government supervision. Other reforms of the era, such as the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, which ostensibly prevented the existence of large monopolies, were billed as measures intended to protect American consumers against monopoly. However, in 1895, the Supreme Court interpreted the Act to mean that it had no power to break up *manufacturing* monopolies—meaning that the Court did nothing to break up the monopolistic organizations of Rockefeller, Carnegie, or Morgan. The Court also interpreted the 14th Amendment to provide protection for corporations, beginning the idea that "corporations are people, too."

While preserving the interests of the business elite, such as Rockefeller and Carnegie, the federal government continued to feign neutrality and impartiality, passing a series of impressive-sounding, but, in practice, insubstantial pieces of legislation that seemed to put checks and balances on the power of the business community but really preserved elite wealth. As Zinn sees it, the overall purpose of the federal government and the court system is to preserve property, meaning that most policy had the overall effect of protecting the fortunes of robber barons, at the expense of the American people.

The Supreme Court justices of the era hailed from upper-class backgrounds and were committed to the idea that the law should protect private property, even if doing so hurts the community. Many Supreme Court justices of the era (like those of the present day) attended schools founded by robber barons. Zinn argues that wealthy people funded such schools not out of the goodness of their hearts, but because they wanted to create places that "trained the middlemen in the American system … those who would be paid to keep the system going, to be loyal buffers against trouble." Indeed, much of the educational system as it existed in the 19th century was intended, quite explicitly, as a means of training people to enter the industrial system.

In this passage, Zinn poses the implicit question, "In the 19th century, why did so many different people work together to protect corporate interests at the expense of the American worker? Were they just bad people?" In response, Zinn suggests that the university system—along with many other American institutions—is an important entity for indoctrinating middle-class people to work on behalf of the Establishment. In effect, the Supreme Court justices may have ruled in favor of big business because their educations had trained them, in many subtle ways, to accept the status quo and be skeptical of change.

In response to the growing uniformity of the education system, there arose a tradition of dissent and unorthodoxy. Figures like Henry George, a self-educated worker from Philadelphia, argued that land was the basis of all wealth, and that it should be monopolized to prevent the growth of inequality in America. Other intellectuals supported Socialism as a means of correcting corruption and inequality.

Henry George's ideas haven't aged particularly well (the societies in which the government monopolized land ownership, such as Soviet Russia, didn't turn out to be particularly enlightened or well-organized), but his writings are indicative of an important trend: the growing resistance to capitalist ideology in the intellectual community.

The late 19th century also saw an increase in immigration and the fragmentation of the working class. Immigrants of different ethnicities competed for many of the same jobs, which drove wages down and led different groups to resent one another. Immigrant family members often worked long hours in order to make ends meet, meaning that they "became strangers to one another." Life was particularly difficult for poor immigrant women, a large number of whom were forced to become factory workers, servants, or even prostitutes in order to feed themselves.

At the same time that the corporate world was becoming more powerful, the working classes were becoming more internally divided. Instead of directing their hatred at the Establishment that conspired to keep them powerless, immigrant populations hated each other *for driving down wages. As Zinn has already shown, racism and prejudice usually have the effect of strengthening the elite.*

As the situation of the working class became increasingly bleak, unions became increasingly radical in the solutions they proposed. The Socialist Labor party, founded in 1877, gained a lot of attention from eastern European immigrants, and the International Working People's Association quickly expanded to more than five thousand members. Two other important unions of the era were the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor (AFL). In 1886, the AFL organized a series of strikes across the nation in support of the eight-hour work day. It's estimated that as many as a third of a million people went on strike that year.

The growing radicalism and energy of the American labor movement reflects the dire economic conditions of the country in the late 19th century. Immigrants and poor people gravitated towards Socialism, Communism, and Anarchism because these ideologies represented alternatives to capitalist exploitation.

The military and police responded brutally to the labor movement. During a demonstration in Haymarket Square in Chicago, someone (it's never been clear who) threw a bomb that wounded sixty-six policemen. Afterwards, four anarchists were blamed for the crime and executed. The executions outraged many workers—some said that the anarchists were innocent, while others alleged that the bomb had been thrown by an *agent provocateur* working for the police. To this day, the truth remains unknown.

Notice that Zinn himself never argues that police agents detonated the bomb as an excuse to persecute anarchists. His point, rather, is that, whether or not anarchists were guilty of killing people in Chicago, anarchists' crimes pale in comparison to the crimes of the Establishment and the American military—in a single riot in New York City in the 1860s, for example, troops killed at least 400 Americans and never faced punishment for their actions.

Another milestone of the labor movement of the 19th century was the electoral campaign for mayor of New York City in 1886. Henry George campaigned for the job on a platform of equal pay for women, police reform, and business reform. In the end, George came in second to an establishment Democratic candidate.

Henry George's campaign for the mayor of New York in 1886 is another good example of what Zinn means by "brief flashes" of resistance. On a literal level, George failed to achieve his goals because he lost the election—however, he succeeded insofar as he brought attention to populist causes and proved that the American people were tired of the capitalist consensus.

For the remainder of the 1880s, labor unions organized more riots and strikes. In 1892, Henry Clay Frick, a manager working for Andrew Carnegie, cut wages, fortified Carnegie buildings against strikes, and hired detectives from the Pinkerton agency to protect Carnegie employees from strikers. In July, fights broke out between Pinkerton employees and Carnegie strikers, and several strikers and detectives were killed. Later, strike leaders were charged with murder, though they were acquitted. The strike continued for four months, but Frick was able to hire strikebreakers, so that, in the end, the strike failed. Afterwards, an anarchist tried to assassinate Frick, but misfired.

The brutality of the strikes at Carnegie factories illustrated the desperation of the American worker and the greed of the American capitalist. The fact that the strike continued even after Pinkerton detectives killed some of the strikers further confirms that these factory employees were fighting to survive. They were making so little money as workers, and were so close to starvation, that they had nothing to lose by striking for four months.

In 1893, the country entered another recession. In the midst of the recession, a socialist organizer named Eugene Debs began mobilizing workers. In 1844, Debs organized a large group of employees of the Pullman railway company to go on strike. Debs was also able to convince members of the American Railway Union not to handle Pullman railway cars—meaning that, in essence, he orchestrated a national railroad strike. In response, President Grover Cleveland sent troops to Chicago, where troops killed thirteen people. Debs was arrested, and the strike "was crushed."

Debs's role in the Pullman Strike was to organize, with the force of his charisma and intelligence, a national strike on all Pullman railway cars. However, notice that Zinn, unlike many history textbooks, doesn't praise Debs at the expense of the American people. Even when he's writing about Debs, a man he clearly admires greatly, Zinn's focus remains on the common man, the "real hero" of the Pullman Strike.

The Homestead Act of 1862 was meant to incentivize people living in the eastern United States to "go west" by offering them land; in this way, Congressmen thought that it would mitigate the congestion and discontent in eastern cities. But the Homestead Act didn't improve congestion or discontent at all; the three decades following the Homestead Act were some of the most "bitter" in the history of labor. Furthermore, the Homestead Act didn't provide economic freedom for the people who moved west; many of the people who did so ended up badly in debt because, in order to make their free farmland financially viable, they had to borrow money to pay for industrial machinery.

Zinn argues that the Homestead Act was a typical act of Establishment reform, designed to placate the masses without doing anything to change their lives in a profound way. On paper, the Homestead Act may sound like an act of pure generosity, but in fact, it reflected Congress's fear that East Coast Americans would strike, riot, and challenge the status quo in their cities. However, Zinn doesn't address the strong possibility that at least some members of Congress were sincere in their desires to help starving American workers.

The political system of the 19th century was biased against farmers' interests and toward the interests of urban capitalists. In the western U.S., farmers had to purchase machinery from industrialists and merchants, and, if they couldn't pay off their debts in time, they often had to surrender their land to their moneylenders. The Populist movement of the late 1800s developed as a reaction to the growing inequality of the U.S., which threatened the financial independence of farmers. The Farmers Alliance, essentially an agricultural union, emerged in the 1880s and quickly gained a large membership. The Alliance sometimes boycotted businesses that sold farming machinery at inflated prices. However, the union could do nothing to cancel out existing debts on machinery.

For the rest of the chapter, Zinn will focus on the lack of cooperation between two working-class groups: western farmers and eastern laborers (indeed, this is one of the only chapters in the book in which Zinn emphasizes the differences, more than the commonalities, between two sectors of the proletariat).

In 1890, Farmers Alliance leaders met in Topeka, Kansas and formed the Populist political party. The party's platform was simple: the U.S. had come under the control of urban capitalists who didn't have the people's interests in mind. In many ways, Zinn acknowledges, the Populist party was racist: it didn't extend a warm welcome to independent black farmers, and it regarded landless black workers as a threat to their own economic survival. However, some farmers in the Populist party "saw the need for racial unity." Indeed, in Texas, a branch of the populist movement elected black farmers to the party's state executive committee. Other Populist leaders in Georgia pleaded for racial unity, and criticized the segregation and intimidation that prevented most blacks from voting.

The Populist movement has been very controversial for American historians, especially left-wing historians. Richard Hofstadter, one of the most important American historians of the 20th century, argued that Midwestern Populism was racist and anti-Semitic (its attacks on East-Coast capitalism had a particularly strong anti-Semitic flavor). Zinn suggests that Populism was less racist than some historians have claimed, though he largely ignores the suggestion that it was anti-Semitic. Some have argued that Zinn is being disingenuous in his defense of Populism, downplaying the racism of the movement in order to make Populism (and the American people in general) seem more enlightened and unified than it really was.

Perhaps the key failure of the various "people's movements" of the late 19th century was that they couldn't find ways to work together. Farmers' unions were regional, and, for the most part, made little effort to unite with the eastern labor movement. By the same token, eastern urban labor movements didn't try to unite with farmers in the west. Both eastern and western labor movements were divided on the question of racial inclusion.

Ultimately, Zinn concludes that populist movements of the 19th century failed to achieve their goals because, at a time when new technology could have united them, they remained regional, isolated, localized, and overly concerned with their own agendas. Thus, Midwestern farmers didn't reach out to factory workers, and vice-versa (whereas the American power elite, Zinn argues, had sophisticated strategies for working together, opposing populist movements as "one front").

In 1896, the Populist Party faced a difficult choice. Some Populists supported the presidential candidacy of William Jennings Bryan, the Democratic nominee. Populist officials made deals with their Democratic counterparts, promising to support moderate policies in order to ensure Bryan's election. By compromising, the Populist party locked itself into a "lose-lose" scenario: if Bryan won, the Populist Party would be absorbed into the Democratic party, and if Bryan lost, the Party would "disintegrate." There were many radical populists who argued that the Populist party needed to remain independent from the Democratic party. In the end, Bryan lost the election to William McKinley—the election is often regarded as the "first massive use of money in an election campaign." Afterwards, the Populist party splintered and faded away.

Like so many people's movements in American history, the Populist party "faded away" because its agenda was partly absorbed into that of a mainstream political party. Zinn's conclusion is that radical, left-wing political groups need to remain independent from the mainstream, lest their agenda be corrupted and twisted by mainstream Establishment interests. However, one could also argue that Populism's incorporation into the Democratic party was a victory for Populism, since it made the Democratic party more equitable in its outlook, and more sympathetic to Populist ideas.

CHAPTER 12: THE EMPIRE AND THE PEOPLE

In 1897, Theodore Roosevelt wrote, "I should welcome almost any war, for I think this country needs one." War serves an important purpose for any nation, Zinn argues: it directs the people's energy outward, toward a foreign threat. The elites of the U.S. probably didn't consciously plan a war, but the fact remains that war strengthened their power by focusing the people's attention on an external enemy.

Zinn makes a nuanced point: even if America's leaders don't consciously intend to fight wars to weaken and distract their people, war has the effect of weakening and distracting the people from the corruption of the Establishment.

Throughout the 19th century, the U.S. had been planning to expand overseas. The Monroe Doctrine, issued in 1823 during the presidency of James Monroe, proclaimed that the U.S. would "protect democracy" anywhere in the Western hemisphere. The U.S. military deployed forces overseas more than one hundred times between 1798 and 1895, almost all in Latin America, especially in the Caribbean. The U.S. military was also instrumental in "opening up" Japan in the 1850s—Commodore Matthew Perry "made a naval demonstration" in the ports of Japan, intimidating the country's leaders into securing commerce with America. In general, the U.S. subscribed to the belief that it needed to strengthen its navy and use force, or the threat of force, to establish trading networks in surrounding regions.

From the very beginning of the book, Zinn has shown how Europe's presence in North America has always been marked by violence and conquest. In the 19th century, however, America—now a major military power—became even more aggressive in its treatment of other nations, using a policy of intimidation to ensure free trade with Japan, as well as other countries. Roosevelt's famous saying, "Speak softly, but carry a big stick," is, in essence, a description of 19th century American foreign policy: appear *to be peaceful and gentle, while actually using military might to pressure one's neighbors into cooperation.*

The U.S. policies of naval expansion and displays of force were racially tinged; many Americans, including Theodore Roosevelt, regarded it as the right of the "white man" to take control of "uncivilized" countries and develop their land. Additionally, Populist leaders and farmers regarded the expansion of the U.S. as a necessary step to ensure that there was enough available land.

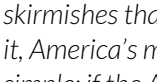
There were lots of different motives for expanding American territory, and these motives united many different factions of the country, including Populist farmers and elite politicians. As Zinn acknowledged in the previous chapter, the Populist party was guilty of bigotry; however, its real motive for supporting expansion was to help Midwestern farmers by providing them with new land.

While the U.S. had a clear interest in expanding its territory, its military interventions of the 19th century were never presented as self-interested. Rather, the U.S. government always characterized its expansionism as benevolent and even heroic. In 1898, for example, news of a populist Cuban uprising against Spain reached America. However, presidential records make it clear that the U.S. government did not support an independent Cuban state—partly for racial reasons, since Cuba contained a large number of black revolutionaries, and partly for economic reasons, since independent Cuba would be no friendlier to capitalism than a Spanish-Cuban colony.

America's intervention in Cuba in the late 19th century is characteristic of its foreign policy in general: while making sanctimonious statements about the importance of independence and freedom, the American government proceeded to act to further its own corporate interests, intervening in Cuba to ensure the future of capitalism on the island.

In 1898, the U.S. battleship *Maine* blew up in a harbor in Havana. Although it's still unclear what happened to this ship, American journalists portrayed the explosion as an act of aggression against America. Elites began pushing for war with Spain in Cuba because they recognized that they'd benefit from an American victory there. War would strengthen the iron industry, and a permanent American presence in Cuba would ensure new markets for manufacturers. Corporations across the U.S. sent President McKinley telegrams advising him to go to war. In April 1898, McKinley declared war on the Spanish government in Cuba. He didn't mention the Cuban revolutionaries in his speeches, but revolutionaries welcomed American forces because they thought that America would help them win independence.

The explosion of the Maine *was one in a long line of unexplained accidents that the American press spun into acts of open aggression against America (see, also, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, and the skirmishes that prompted the Mexican American War). As Zinn sees it, America's motives for entering war with Spain in Cuba were simple: if the American military controlled Cuba, Cuba would become a new market for American businesses. As Zinn suggested in the previous chapter, McKinley was already deeply indebted to American business interests, so when businessmen pressured him to invade Cuba, he complied. However, Zinn doesn't provide many details about how, exactly, businesses pressured McKinley to do so, which has led some to accuse Zinn of simplifying history.*



It's often been said that journalism or "public opinion" pressured McKinley into declaring war against Spain in Cuba. While it's true that journalists may have contributed to the aggressive, imperialistic spirit in America in 1898, it's simply not true that the "public" supported war. Initially, many of the most prominent labor unions, such as the AFL, criticized the war, recognizing that working-class people would have to fight while elites would reap the benefits. However, after Congress declared war, many unions "succumbed to the war fever." In some ways, the war strengthened the American working class by providing more jobs and higher wages.

In this passage, Zinn arguably skews the evidence to fit with his left-wing philosophy of American history. Notice that Zinn is dancing around the point that, in fact, the majority of Americans did support the Spanish American War (even if some important labor unions did not). Zinn then implies that the unions that supported the war had been manipulated into supporting it by the press and the overall spirit of jingoism in America at the time. In short, Zinn is taking a piece of information that doesn't fit his argument (unions supported the war) and trying to mitigate it by claiming, without any evidence, that unions did not "truly" support the war.

The Spanish-American War, as it came to be known, lasted three months. When the American troops emerged victorious, they barley acknowledged the contribution of the Cuban revolutionaries; indeed, when Spanish officials met in Cuba to sign peace terms, American officials ensured that no revolutionaries were present. Afterwards, American businesses flooded into Cuba; dozens of railway companies competed to gain control over transportation in Havana, and the United Fruit Company took over the Cuban sugar industry, taking advantage of the chaotic situation in Cuba by buying millions of acres for cheap prices.

The aftermath of the Spanish American War, Zinn argues, confirmed America's original motivations for entering the war: American corporations flooded into Cuba, scooped up cheap land and resources, and ensured new Cuban markets for their products for years to come.

In the end, the U.S did not annex Cuba, but neither did it allow an independence movement to flourish there. Indeed, the American military remained in Cuba until 1901 and refused to leave until the Cuban Constitutional Convention passed an amendment that would allow America to 1) intervene in Cuba at any time in the future, and 2) gain control over naval and coaling stations throughout Cuba. The Cuban revolutionary movement criticized the military's intimidation policies, calling them a "mutilation of the fatherland." Nevertheless, the Spanish American War brought Cuba "into the American sphere"—not as a colony, but as a market for American goods. Moreover, when the U.S. negotiated peace terms with Spain, it was able to purchase Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines for only twenty million dollars.

It's telling that Zinn doesn't answer the obvious implicit question here: why, if the majority of Americans enthusiastically supported a war in Cuba, didn't the U.S. government annex Cuba and incorporate it into the Union, especially since the government had annexed the Southwest under similar circumstances only half a century previously? Perhaps Zinn doesn't address this question because it would weaken his overall argument by making the U.S. government seem more ethical and respectful of Cuban independence than he believes it to be.

The next major American military venture after the Spanish American War was its interference in the Philippines. In 1899, William McKinley said that he considered it America's duty to send troops to the Philippines to "uplift and civilize and Christianize" the people. When the U.S. sent troops to the Philippines in 1899, however, Filipinos revolted, and it took the military three years to crush the uprising. McKinley insisted the fighting broke out after insurgents attacked U.S. troops, but later accounts of the war suggest that Americans fired the first shots.

As with other American military interventions, America's intervention in the Philippines was laced with racist condescension. Many Americans seemed to believe that the war was waged "for the Filipinos' own good."

In the late 1890s, there was a strong imperialist sprit in America. However, some prominent Americans, such as the philosopher William James, opposed intervention in other countries. James joined the Anti-Imperialist League, a group that criticized McKinley's policies and tried to negate the imperialism and racism that had motivated the Spanish American War. Other opponents of American imperialism from the period include Mark Twain, who recognized that America's intervention in the Philippines was a brutal, greedy venture.

Although Zinn has argued that the American university system can be a powerful medium for control and support for the Establishment, he also suggests that, under the right circumstances, it can be a place of resistance to the Establishment. Thus, William James, a Harvard-educated academic elite, used his academic influence to oppose intervention in the Philippines, and he enlisted some of his famous, elite friends to do the same.

In spite of the Anti-Imperialist League's actions, many unions supported American intervention in the Philippines, since they believed that new territory meant more jobs for workers. However, a vocal minority of labor unions argued that America's new territory would only benefit elites. The Central Labor Unions of Boston and New York held protests against the annexation of the Philippines. In the end, Congress voted to annex the Philippines, but only by one vote.

As with his treatment of the Populist movement in the previous chapter, Zinn acknowledges the bigotry and unethical behavior of the labor movement with regard to American military intervention. He then tries to mitigate his own point with example of the labor movement's more overtly left-wing behavior like union protests in New York.

The black community's attitude toward war in the Philippines was mixed. For many young black men, military service in the Philippines seemed like an opportunity to advance in the army despite widespread reports of racism in the U.S. military. Many black leaders of the era criticized the racist condescension with which American leadership treated Filipinos; in fact, some black soldiers deserted the American army and joined the Filipinos. Many prominent American church leaders opposed intervention, as well.

Zinn addresses the irony that, during the war in the Philippines (a war characterized by intense racism toward the Filipino people) many of the American soldiers were black, and therefore were also the victims of American racism. It's not surprising, then, that some black soldiers joined with the Filipinos (although, characteristically, Zinn doesn't specify how many).

At the height of the war in the Philippines, a group of black activists sent a letter to President McKinley. In it, they criticized McKinley for preaching patriotism and liberation while turning a blind eye to the suffering of black Americans. Zinn concludes that, in spite of the "demonstrated power of the state," the American people continued to feel "impatient, immoderate, unpatriotic."

Even though a huge portion of the American people chose to support military intervention in the Spanish American War and the war in the Philippines, Zinn chooses to end the chapter by focusing on the minority of Americans who opposed the war on moral grounds. Zinn was accused of cherry-picking examples that made the resistance to imperialism seem more widespread than it really was.

CHAPTER 13: THE SOCIALIST CHALLENGE

War and jingoism couldn't prevent the working-class of the early 20th century from lashing out against their oppressors at home. At this time, the working classes had an important ally: the Muckrakers, journalists who brought the public's attention to working-class issues. In 1906, Upton Sinclair published *The Jungle*, a shocking novel about the harsh conditions in Chicago meatpacking plants. Ida Tarbell attacked the corruption of the Standard Oil Company, while Lincoln Steffens criticized the corruption of municipal planning. Partly as a result of these Muckrakers' efforts, no amount of war could hide the truth: the American way of life wasn't working.

Although he has shown that the media often supports the Establishment's actions wholeheartedly, Zinn celebrates the achievements of journalists who challenged the Establishment's authority and drew the public's attention to Establishment corruption.

On the other side of the political spectrum, the early 20th century saw the continued dominance of capitalist leaders like J. P. Morgan. But even Morgan wasn't immune from financial recessions. Partly in reaction to financial instability, the early 20th century saw the rise of management science, a field pioneered by Frederick W. Taylor. Taylor sought to simplify workers' duties, dividing up the different "steps" in labor with a surgical accuracy. Industrialists embraced Taylor's techniques because they helped to deskill the labor force and make employees more expendable. Factory conditions didn't improve, but workers' jobs became more repetitive in the interest of "maximizing efficiency."

Taylor's theories of management science were instrumental in establishing the assembly-line system in American factories, guaranteeing that workers' jobs were as simple and easy-to-learn as possible. Deskilling the labor force was useful for wealthy factory owners, because it meant that the owners had to pay their employees lower wages, and that the labor force had less bargaining power in union disputes (in the event of a strike, factory owners often could hire new, deskilled laborers to replace the strikers).

There were thousands of horrific factory accidents in the early 20th century—indeed, it's estimated that in 1914 alone, almost a million workers were injured in factories. In response, workers took to the streets to demonstrate and union membership grew. Most unions continued to exclude black members, and most excluded immigrants and women. However, other unions, such as the I.W.W., or International Workers of the World, aimed for total inclusion. In 1905, the I.W.W., held a huge meeting, headed by the legendary union leader Big Bill Haywood. Other famous attendees included Eugene Debs, who'd been released from prison after organizing the Railroad Strike. At the meeting, the I.W.W. expressed the need for equality, inclusion, and "direct action" against capitalism. Zinn argues that elites, recognizing that the I.W.W. was dangerous to their interests, attacked the I.W.W. with "all the weapons the system could put together." I.W.W. members were harassed and local lawmakers passed ordinances preventing the I.W.W. from exercising its right to free assembly.

In reaction to the worsening conditions in American factories, and the increased disposability of the American worker, unions compensated by staging strikes and protests against capitalist greed. The I.W.W. was never a very powerful union—its membership never approached that of the Knights of Labor or the AFL. However, Zinn focuses on the history of the I.W.W. because it supports his argument that the American labor movement of the 19th century was inclusive, idealistic, and aimed for nothing less than the defeat of the capitalist elite. By the same token, Zinn focuses on the Establishment's attempts to silence the I.W.W., even though capitalists probably devoted more energy to silencing larger, less idealistic unions.

In 1912, the I.W.W. organized one of the most ethnically diverse strikes in history in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Wool and textile workers, many of them immigrants and women, went on strike, and the I.W.W. used its membership system to send soup and money to support the strikers. In response, the Lawrenceville mayor sent in the militia, and militia members killed or wounded many strikers. However, the surviving strikers continued to demonstrate, and, in the end, the American Woolen Company (AWC) decided to offer modest raises to its employees—around ten percent.

The Lawrence Strike of 1912 is notable because it incorporated an impressively diverse group of strikers, including women and immigrants from many different countries. Even if the strike was only ever a modest success in practical terms (it only encouraged the AWC to dole out a minimal pay raise to its employees) it proved to other labor unions that a diverse coalition of unskilled workers could come together for a common cause.

In the early 20th century, the number of strikes was growing at a startling rate. An increasing number of moderate and middle-class people were embracing the idea that capitalists exerted too much power over the country. Around this time, Eugene Debs emerged as a national leader once again. Debs had become a Socialist during his time in prison; in the early 20th century, he became the president of the American Socialist party. Debs was an eloquent, charismatic speaker, and he traveled across the country, building awareness of Socialism. Women and immigrants played active roles in Socialism—indeed, one of the key Socialist organizers of the era was Helen Keller.

During the late 19th and early 20th century, Americans embraced non-capitalist economic theories and ideologies. Many people, including moderate, middle-class people, recognized the dangers of capitalism (thanks, in part, to the achievements of the Muckrakers) and wanted radical change. Zinn also uses this passage to pivot from a discussion of Socialism and economic unrest to a discussion of feminism.

The feminist movement of the early 20th century faced a dilemma. Many of the key feminist leaders of the period were committed socialists; however, it wasn't clear if fighting for socialist ideals was an adequate solution to problems of sexism. Feminist leaders debated over whether they should focus on the socialist agenda first or prioritize gender equality. Some argued that, if socialism prevailed in America, gender equality would follow naturally. But many others believed that women's suffrage had to come before socialism. Still others prioritized feminist ideals, but argued that earning the right to vote shouldn't be the priority for feminists.

Early 20th century feminists faced a familiar problem: should they support a variety of populist causes, or should they support their own cause, gender equality? Zinn conveys some of the ideological debate within the feminist movement, between those who thought that Socialism could solve problems of sexism, and those who believed that Socialism—a program of social equality—could only take root in America if there was gender reform first.

The early 20th century is often known as the "Progressive era." And yet, throughout the era, life for African Americans remained virtually unchanged. Lynchings continued to be common occurrences in the South, in no small part because the government "did nothing" about them. Some black Americans joined the Socialist party, but the Socialist party "did not go out of its way to act on the race question." As a result, black activists formed their own political action groups. One of the key black organizers of the era was the intellectual W. E. B. Du Bois. Du Bois assembled leaders in Buffalo to discuss the role of African Americans in the country: the result was the "Niagara Movement," a black activist movement that supported immediate racial equality.

The absence of racial reform during the Progressive era might illustrate the racial bias of the American labor movement—a topic that some historians have accused Zinn of not addressing in sufficient detail. Black leaders of the era, including Du Bois, worked together to assemble their own coalitions of activists. Over the next twenty years, Du Bois's Niagara Movement formed the basis for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or NAACP, an organization that would be at the forefront of the early Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s.

There were, in short, many different political activist groups during the so-called Progressive era, each with its own set of ideals. The common thread between these groups was the belief that "they could not count on the national government." During the Progressive era, the government passed some laws improving worker conditions and monopolism; however, Zinn argues that these laws were "reluctant measures, aimed at quieting the popular uprisings." While it is true that ordinary people benefited from some reforms of the era (such as Roosevelt's Meat Inspection Act, which ensured the sanitation of food), "fundamental conditions did not change" for the majority of the working class.

In this passage, Zinn makes an important distinction between reform and radical change. "Progressive" leaders acquired a reputation for being high-minded and idealistic in their politics; however, as Zinn sees it, most of these leaders were interested in passing superficial reforms that continued to leave the American worker underfed, underpaid, and ignored.

To this day, Theodore Roosevelt has a reputation as a progressive leader who fought for the "people's interests." In reality, he was a firm friend of the powerful elite, and he appointed advisers almost exclusively from the ranks of "representatives of industrial and finance capital." He supported some limited reforms, but often "because he feared something worse," and in many cases he did not prosecute businessmen who had colluded illegally to form monopolies.

In many ways, Theodore Roosevelt is exemplary of American history books' bias toward the Progressive federal government. Roosevelt is too-often treated as a hero of the Progressive movement, when, according to Zinn, he acted out of fear of the masses, not moral commitment to their happiness. (However, Zinn doesn't cite the hundreds of private letters and other writings in which Roosevelt voiced his sincere commitment to the American working class.)

The Progressive era represents a milestone in the way we understand the term "liberalism." Arthur Schlesinger, the famous historian, defined liberalism as the movement to "restrain the power of the business community." But in practice, Zinn argues, liberalism is the process whereby protesters see their calls for radical change diluted into smaller, more superficial reforms, enacted "with the tacit approval of the large corporate interests."

"Liberal" has become such a common term that it's difficult to arrive on a single definition for it. As many people see it, a liberal is someone who supports equality, human rights, and cooperation between the different segments of society. However, as Zinn sees it, a liberal is someone who claims to support these things, but doesn't support them in practice.

One of the key organs of liberalism in the Progressive era was the National Civic Federation (NCF), an organization founded by a conservative journalist named Ralph Easley, with the stated goal of improving relations between capital and labor. In practice, the NCF was instrumental in placating the labor movement with minor reforms to the workday, compensation, and factory conditions. The NCF was characteristic of the Progressive era, Zinn argues, insofar as it presented itself as an agency of change, when, in fact, its purpose was to prevent radical change in America and, in particular, "fend off socialism." Some Progressive leaders were sincere in their desire for change; others, Zinn argues, were "disguised conservatives" like Theodore Roosevelt.

One of the key words in this section is "placate." Zinn isn't saying that Progressive reform was wholly bad or good; rather, his point is that the minimal, more superficial reforms instituted by the federal government during the Progressive era, regardless of their motivation, had the effect of staving off real, profound social change. In essence, Progressivism was just conservatism by another name. Zinn has been roundly criticized for being too hard on Progressivism and paying mere lip-service to the role of sincere, committed Progressive politicians of the era.

Faced with Progressive reform, Socialist leaders faced a dilemma: they could support Progressive reform, or they could denounce it for not going far enough. Many Socialist leaders recognized the need to keep making "impossible demands" rather than accept mediocre reforms. From 1913 to 1914, coal workers in Ludlow, Colorado participated in a massive strike. The government sent in the National Guard to "maintain order," and the National Guard set fire to strikers' tents, ultimately killing eleven children. President Woodrow Wilson ignored pressure from workers' unions to prosecute the troops responsible; instead, he sent more troops to break up the strike.

Zinn takes it as a sign of the insufficiency of government action during the Progressive era that unions and Socialist groups continued to strike and protest against the state of society. It's notable that both Republican and Democratic presidents resorted to physical force in order to break up strikes: it's a sign of the bipartisan consensus on the danger of the labor movement to the status quo.

Around the same time that Wilson's troops were breaking up the strike in Colorado, American troops were attacking soldiers in Mexico, supposedly because the Mexican military had arrested American sailors and refused to apologize. Perhaps it's just a coincidence that news of the attack in Mexico coincided with news of the Ludlow strike. Or perhaps, Zinn writes, "it was an instinctual response of the system for its own survival, to create a unity of fighting purpose among a people torn by internal conflict." Four months later, World War One began in Europe.

This passage is arguably exemplary of the limitations of Zinn's approach to history. Zinn never comes right out and says that the government deliberately attacked a foreign power to distract attention from labor unrest, but he strongly implies that it did. In short, instead of weighing the facts clearly and directly, Zinn uses implication and the reader's own paranoia to paint a picture of the government as a malicious, manipulative entity.

CHAPTER 14: WAR IS THE HEALTH OF THE STATE

At the height of World War One, the radical writer Randolph Bourne wrote, "War is the health of the state." Throughout the war, while millions died and entire cities were destroyed, the governments of the Western world "flourished," and "class struggle was stilled."

Zinn begins the chapter with the paradox that, at the time when the nations of the world were fighting against one another, the governments of these nations were doing just fine, even while their people were dying on the battlefield.

In 1914, the U.S. was not yet at war. Socialism was an ongoing threat to the power elite. James Wadsworth, a Senator from New York, proposed that war could prevent young people from being "divided into classes." For the duration of World War One, socialist leaders criticized the war for being "imperialist"—an opinion as uncontroversial now as it was controversial at the time.

Zinn cites James Wadsworth as proof that the American government deliberately tried to distract and weaken the American people. Furthermore, he praises the Socialist movement for denouncing the war for what, in retrospect, it clearly was: a fight between greedy, imperialist nations.

European governments convinced their people to fight in the war, in part by celebrating patriotism, but also by lying about the number of casualties in the war. The U.S. entered the war in 1917, despite the fact that President Woodrow Wilson had promised that the U.S. would stay neutral. Wilson claimed that he'd reversed his policy because German submarines had attacked American merchant vessels; however, historians have argued that this was a "flimsy" rationalization. It would have been incredibly naïve of Wilson to imagine that German forces would allow American merchant vessels to proceed, since they were selling war supplies to Germany's enemies.

Zinn suggests that President Wilson, much like James Polk and William McKinley before him and Lyndon Johnson after him, waited for a small, unclear "provocation" from a foreign power, and then used this incident as an excuse to declare a war he clearly wanted to fight.

The real reason for Wilson's decision to send his country to war, it's been suggested, was "economic necessity." In 1914, the U.S. was in the midst of a serious recession, since the conflict in Europe was threatening its foreign markets. Between 1914 and 1917, American capitalists traded with England, to the point where England became "a market for American goods and for loans at interest"—for example, J. P. Morgan loaned huge sums of money to England, knowing that he stood to make a huge profit if England prospered. Well before 1917, then, America's economic health was tied to the victory of England in World War I.

As with America's involvements in Cuba and Philippines, America's role in World War One was determined by its business ties to foreign lands. Bankers and capitalists had invested large amounts of their own money in the English economy, and they had every reason to want England to win the war. Therefore, Zinn implies, they pressured Wilson to start a war. (However, once again, Zinn doesn't say how, precisely, they pressured Wilson.)

In 1915, W. E. B. Du Bois wrote a prophetic article arguing that the war was motivated by a desire to control the immense natural wealth of Africa. Du Bois went on to argue that war was a necessary part of modern capitalist society: only through period conflict could the government unite the interests of the "rich man and the poor man" and trick the poor into forgetting about their own conflict with the upper class.

Du Bois's perspective on World War One was that it was waged in order to ensure the Western nations' external control over the resources of Africa and their internal control over their own people. Much like the fictional governments in George Orwell's 1984, Western nations use war as a way of organizing their people and protecting their own economic interests.

When America declared war, Americans didn't rush to enlist. The Socialist party held a meeting in St. Louis, where it called the war an injustice. Later in 1917, Socialists held anti-war protests, some with as many as twenty thousand people. Later in the year, Socialist politicians did surprisingly well in elections: in New York and Chicago, Socialist party candidates got more than 20 percent of the vote.

Zinn takes it as a sign of the popular resistance to war that many Socialist leaders opposed America's involvement in World War One. However, he doesn't address the fact that most American people, including, perhaps, the majority of the working class, continued to support America's involvement overseas.

In response to the opposition to the war, Congress passed the Espionage Act, which introduced a twenty-year sentence for anyone inciting insubordination or interfering with the war effort. The Espionage Act was designed to gag anyone criticizing the war. It was in this atmosphere that Oliver Wendell Holmes, the "great liberal" of the Supreme Court, introduced the famous "clear and present danger" standard and argued that the government could limit free speech if that speech could be shown to cause harm. Holmes's famous analogy—that free speech could be dangerous in the same sense that crying "fire" in a crowded theater was dangerous—was misleading. Almost nobody who criticized World War One was causing "clear and present danger" to other Americans—if anything, the war was a clear and present danger. Eugene Debs was imprisoned for criticizing the war, and he spent more than two years in jail.

The behavior of the Supreme Court during World War One illustrates the power of the Establishment. As Zinn sees it, Holmes's "clear and present danger" standard went hand-in-hand with the government's desire to suppress any widespread opposition to the war in Europe. Many legal scholars have agreed with Zinn that Holmes's legal standard was improperly applied to the protesters and dissidents of the era. They weren't causing any danger by voicing their disagreement with the war.

During World War One, the American government tightened its control over its own people, not only by limiting free speech but also by prosecuting draft dodgers. In 1918, the government arrested more than one hundred I.W.W. members, including Big Bill Haywood, who'd allegedly conspired to oppose the draft. In the end, Haywood was sentenced to twenty years in prison, and I.W.W. members were fined a total of 2.5 million dollars. (Haywood fled to Soviet Russia, where he lived for the rest of his life.)

The government, Zinn implies, used World War One as an excuse to persecute citizens with a long history of opposing the Establishment's power. Thus, Haywood, who'd previously organized many strikes against capitalists, was forced to flee the country.

In 1918, the war ended, and a mood of disillusion spread across America. Great novelists like John Dos Passos and Ernest Hemingway wrote bleak novels about the conflict in Europe. The American government continued to fear socialism. In 1919, the government prosecuted or deported thousands of immigrants suspected of socialist or anarchist ties. Two of the most famous such immigrants were Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. Sacco and Vanzetti were prosecuted for murder—the legal record strongly suggests that they were found guilty and executed largely because they were foreigners and anarchists.

Intellectuals, philosophers, and writers voiced their opposition to the war in various ways: for instance, Hemingway and other authors found ways of expressing their outrage through fiction (perhaps circumventing the "clear and present danger" standard). Many scholars have argued that Sacco and Vanzetti were unjustly convicted of a crime. Indeed, the jury at their trial was told that "anarchism was on trial," and that they needed to "make an example" of Sacco and Vanzetti.

The elite in the U.S. continued to fear their own people. During World War One, they used a mixture of patriotism and prosecution to send a message to the working classes: "certain kinds of resistance could not be tolerated." Even so, the working classes continued to fight injustice.

As with his treatment of the Mexican American War and the Spanish American War, Zinn focuses on the popular resistance to World War One, implying that the large numbers of people who did, in fact, support the war had only been fooled into supporting it by government propaganda.

CHAPTER 15: SELF-HELP IN HARD TIMES

In February 1919, in Seattle, Washington, 100,000 workers from virtually every industry went on strike, bringing their city to a halt. The strike stemmed from an alliance between the AFL and the I.W.W., and it was a peaceful form of resistance to what the workers saw as capitalist exploitation. However, in response to the strike, the federal government sent troops and the strike ended after five days, partly because of the soldiers and partly because of the difficulties of "living in a shut-down city." In the following weeks, the army arrested many union leaders and harassed I.W.W. members. Why was there such an uproar in response to the peaceful strike? In part, the strike infuriated the government because of what it symbolized: a growing resistance to order.

1919 was one of the most important years for populism in America, on par with 1848 and 1968. It's a sign of the coalition building between different unions (and the widespread opposition to American capitalism) that the AFL and the I.W.W. worked together to declare a strike in Seattle. Traditionally, the AFL took a different approach to union-building than the I.W.W., and didn't extend a warm welcome to black or female workers. Thus, the strike was dangerous to American elites because it symbolized the unity of the American people.

In the 1920s, the popular resistance died down: the I.W.W.'s leadership was "destroyed," and the economy was doing "just well enough for just enough people to prevent mass rebellion." Around the same time, Congress passed laws to prevent large numbers of foreigners from immigrating. The 1920s also saw the revival of the Ku Klux Klan. In all, the popular image of the 1920s as a fun, easy-going "Jazz Age" is a distortion of the truth. While unemployment was low in the 1920s and wages increased, prosperity remained concentrated at the top of society. There were few charismatic leaders left to speak out on behalf of the working class, as many of them were in jail. In the 1920s, with the Socialist party severely weakened by World War One, the Communist Party rose to a new level of prominence. The American Communist Party organized many strikes and protests.

Zinn is skeptical of the peace and prosperity of the 1920s; he points out that, although the average American worker enjoyed slightly higher wages and shorter hours during the twenties, these increases in wealth paled in comparison with those of the Establishment during the same era. In short, Zinn speculates that the labor movement in America died down during the twenties because the Establishment gave the common man just enough money not to rebel any further. Additionally, many of the most important labor leaders were in prison, leaving the American people unorganized.

In 1929, the stock market crashed. In many ways, the crash was the result of the inherent instability of the American economic system: as the famous economist John Galbraith wrote, the crash reflected unhealthy banking structures, economic misinformation, and, not least, the "bad distribution of income." In 1929, one could argue, capitalism proved to be "a sick and undependable system."

Zinn doesn't delve into the circumstances of the stock market crash of 1929; instead, he cites Galbraith (whose opinion hasn't been without controversy). Nevertheless, Zinn's fundamental point here is that the Great Depression proved that there were basic problems with capitalism. America faced a choice: should it try to reform capitalism, or replace it with "something completely different?"

Throughout the 1930s, a new spirit of radicalism suffused the working classes. In his novels, the writer John Steinbeck describes the working classes' sense of injustice. One of the key cultural artifacts of the 1930s is the folk song, "Brother Can You Spare a Dime?" in which a homeless World War One veteran begs for money. The Depression drove many veterans to homelessness, and, in 1932, some veterans, calling themselves the "Bonus Army," camped out in Washington, D.C. demanding that the government pay out on their "bonus certificates" (promises of payment that the army had given them in the war). In response, General Douglas MacArthur, a future World War Two hero, led U.S. troops to break up the Bonus Army with tear gas.

Zinn is attentive to the reaction of artists and intellectuals to the Great Depression; he seems to respect authors like John Steinbeck for paying homage to the dignity of the American people in such novels as The Grapes of Wrath. *At the same time, Zinn makes it clear that the Establishment continued to oppress the poor and suffering. Indeed, the government turned its back on its own former troops. MacArthur is still regarded as a war hero, but he began his career by brutally suppressing his fellow soldiers in Washington, D.C.*

In response to the Great Depression, what kinds of reforms did the administration of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt offer? Roosevelt's first significant action as president was to support the National Recovery Act, which was designed to protect business interests. In general, Roosevelt's New Deal programs were designed to protect the economic *status quo* while making some concessions to the poor (for example, providing jobs and lowering electricity rates for struggling families).

As with the Progressive movement, Zinn argues that the New Deal was, first and foremost, a way of preserving the status quo and providing minor reforms to placate the working class. (Zinn does not delve into the radicalism of Roosevelt's vision of welfare and social security, probably because such a discussion would contradict his argument for Roosevelt as a conservative figure.)

At the same time that Franklin Roosevelt was acting to protect business interests, the working classes were working hard to protect themselves, and each other. Starving people resorted to robbery to feed their families, and, in some cases, when people were evicted from their homes, crowds would gather around the house to prevent the police from forcing the resident to leave. Pennsylvania miners took it upon themselves to truck their "bootleg coal" to East Coast cities and sell it below the commercial rate.

Zinn provides many examples of how workers looked out for one another and protected their common interests. However, some of these examples don't necessarily prove what he wants them to prove. For instance, the miners who sold extra coal to city-dwellers may not have been looking out for their fellow Americans; they may have been trying to make some extra money. Furthermore, the miner's behavior suggests that, in a time of crisis, they mirrored the behavior of capitalist elites, further complicating Zinn's argument.

Zinn wonders if the Franklin Roosevelt administration understood "that measures must be quickly taken … to wipe out the idea that the problems of the workers could be solved only by themselves." In 1934, Congress introduced the Wagner-Connery Bill, designed to regulate labor disputes and provide elections for union representation. Zinn asks, "Was this not exactly the kind of legislation to do away with the idea that the problems of the workers can be solved only by themselves?"

Again, Zinn resorts to asking rhetorical questions about the motives of the Roosevelt administration, instead of studying the evidence carefully and providing explicit interpretations of it. Zinn's seems to be implying that Congress deliberately tried to stymy the labor movement by providing some minor, superficial reforms; however, it seems that Zinn could argue just as easily that some politicians were deliberately trying to protect American people.

Unions held strikes throughout the 1930s and were often attacked by federal troops for doing so. During the Great Depression, black farmers were "the worst off," and they began to organize into unions in greater numbers. The Depression also marked the founding of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), which had originally been a branch of the AFL designed for unskilled laborers. At factories and plants across the countries, union members pioneered "sit down" striking—i.e., staying in the plant without working, rather than leaving the building. In 1937 alone, there were 477 sit-down strikes, several of which succeeded in raising wages. Sit-down strikes were especially dangerous to the elite because they could be organized without unions' authority. Often, workers simply decided to strike without anyone's permission but their own. In some ways, sit-down strikes pushed businessmen to cooperate with union leadership—unions weren't desirable, but it was easier to work with unions than with the workers themselves.

Furthermore, Zinn argues, government bureaucrats preferred to deal with union representatives than with the workers directly. Therefore, the sit-down strikes were an effective negotiating strategy for the American worker: by refusing to be orderly or predictable, workers pressured the federal government to cooperate with union leaders who, while not perfect, were likely to look out for their members' well-being and wages. In short, sit-down strikes could be said to exemplify the process by which the American people take radical action and pressure the government to institute modest, but still important, reforms in policy.

The Wagner Act of 1935, the finalized version of the Wagner-Connery Bill, was an attempt by the U.S. government to stabilize the country by granting some minor relief to the working class. The Act allowed governments to regulate interstate commerce, protecting union interests. It also strengthened ties between government officials, businesses, and union leaders. After the Wagner Act, unions had to go through the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to gain legal status; henceforth, unions had to organize their members' grievances and try to minimize strikes "in order to build large influential, even respectable organizations." Union membership grew during the 1930s, but, thanks in large part to the Wagner Act and the NLRB, union power decreased: union gains "from the uses of strikes kept getting whittled down." Meanwhile, the Supreme Court declared sit-downs to be illegal.

As Zinn sees it, the Wagner Act created a new distance between union leadership and workers themselves. Henceforth, union leaders had to interact directly with politicians and government bureaucrats, and, Zinn suggests, they became more loyal to the Establishment than to their own members. In short, Zinn concludes, government instituted a series of impressive-sounding (but actually mild) reforms in union policy, which had the effect of weakening the strength of the American labor movement and dividing unions.

The New Deal reduced unemployment somewhat; however, it was World War Two that "put almost everyone to work." During World War Two, unions pledged not to engage in strikes. Furthermore, the working classes' energies were again directed outwards, rather than toward powerful elites in the U.S. In all, the 1930s and 40s marked some major gains for unions, but also a steady decline in the power of unions and the "old labor militancy." In many ways, the greatest legacy of the 1930s for organized labor was that the elite found new ways of controlling the working classes: most of all, "internal control by their own organizations." When the New Deal concluded, "capitalism remained intact," and many of the same wealthy people continued to control the country.

In this passage, Zinn foreshadows the events of the next chapter, in which he'll discuss the state of the labor movement during World War Two. Instead of celebrating the New Deal for giving the government a new obligation to respect unions, Zinn criticizes the New Deal for weakening unions' power. Many historians, including some left-wing historians, disagree with Zinn's pessimistic conclusions: it has been argued that the New Deal instituted a radical and fundamental change in American society by impelling the government to acknowledge the existence of and cooperate with unions.

The New Deal was somewhat encouraging for African Americans. During the 1930s, Franklin Roosevelt (largely because of his wife Eleanor Roosevelt's encouragement) appointed some black people to administrative posts; however, the New Deal largely ignored black farmers. Roosevelt needed the support of Southern voters; as a result, he was careful not to be too generous to blacks and not to criticize segregation or lynching. During the thirties, some radicals, especially Communists and Socialists, tried to recruit black workers with some success. The CIO, which was heavily influenced by its Communist members, organized black members "into the mass-production industries." And while there was "no great feminist movement in the thirties," many radical women became involved in labor organizing. Meanwhile, World War Two "was not far off."

Roosevelt may have been a sincere reformer, Zinn argues, but his political goals were weakened by his own desire to get reelected. Thus, he avoided alienating Southern voters with talk of equality or racial unity. Dissatisfied with the moderate nature of Roosevelt's reforms, many working-class Americans, including women and black laborers, worked together to oppose capitalism in their own way. However, as Zinn will show in the next chapter, World War Two largely shut down the radical movement in America.

CHAPTER 16: A PEOPLE'S WAR?

World War Two is unique in American history because it was widely regarded as the "people's war"—a fight that capitalist, Communist, working-class and upper-class Americans supported. World War Two was a fight against evil: the totalitarian, racist, militaristic German state, headed by Adolf Hitler. However, Zinn asks, did the governments fighting against Hitler "represent something significantly different?" During World War Two, did the U.S. conduct itself in a manner consistent with its commitment to human rights? And after World War Two, did the U.S. exemplify the values "for which the war was supposed to have been fought?"

In this chapter, Zinn asks a lot of rhetorical questions. His goal here isn't to provide explicit answers to his own questions—rather, he wants his readers to question some of their own assumptions about the ethics of World War Two. In so doing, Zinn aims to create a free conversation about imperialism, militarism, and foreign intervention in American history.

The U.S. has always positioned itself as a defender of helpless countries. But even a quick look at the historical record disproves any such claim: on the contrary, the U.S. has always acted to protect its own interests, particular the interests of the rich. Indeed, it has done this so consistently that it's difficult to believe that during World War Two the United States acted out of magnanimity. Many history textbooks claim that the U.S. entered World War Two in part because of its commitment to ending the racism of Hitler's regime. However, such a claim doesn't hold much water. Racism was rampant in America during the 1930s and 40s, and most Americans were unaware of the extent of Hitler's racist policies until the end of the war. For much of the 1930s, the U.S. traded with fascist countries; for example, American businesses sent oil into Italy, which strengthened the fascist government there.

Right away, Zinn questions some of the clichés about World War Two: that it was a "just war," waged for moral reasons; that it was waged to end Fascism in Europe, etc. In reality, Zinn shows, America did business with Fascist countries during the 1930s, showing that the government didn't let morality interfere with its business interests. (Also, America later supported many right-wing dictatorships around the world, further suggesting its lack of any strong moral commitment in its foreign policy.)

The U.S. only entered World War Two after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941. Franklin Roosevelt presented Pearl Harbor as a "sudden, shocking, immoral act," despite the fact that the bombing "climaxed a long series of mutually antagonistic acts." Throughout the 1930s, both Japan and the U.S. had been locked in competition for control of the Southwest Pacific, and Pearl Harbor represented Japan's attempt to assert its dominance there. While it's almost certainly untrue that, as some have argued, Roosevelt knew that the Japanese were going to bomb Pearl Harbor, he probably used Pearl Harbor as an opportunity to strengthen America's position on the global stage. In other words, he "lied to the public for what he thought was a right cause." Shortly after Pearl Harbor, Germany and Italy declared war on the U.S., meaning that the U.S. was now locked in a war with European countries as well as Japan.

While Zinn doesn't spend much time discussing the conflict between Japan and the U.S. in the 1930s and 40s, he suggests that Pearl Harbor represented the culmination of a long series of skirmishes and tense standoffs between Japanese and American forces in the Pacific. Notice that Zinn is not *saying that Roosevelt deliberately provoked a war with Japan (although he has essentially implied as much about James Polk in the case of the Mexican American War). Whether or not the American federal government consciously tried to go to war with foreign powers in the 1940s, Zinn suggests, the overall effects of war were beneficial to Establishment interests.*

In August 1941, Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of England, signed the Atlantic Charter, in which they claimed that their countries respected the "right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live." However, this was a mostly symbolic gesture—after the war, Churchill and Roosevelt supported France in maintaining its imperial colonies around the world.

Zinn portrays Roosevelt and Churchill as savvy realists who pretended to be much more committed to freedom and independence than they really were. Indeed, after the war, Roosevelt and Churchill carved out an informal "empire" for their own countries' business interests.

Although the U.S. did not fight in Europe, Asia, or Africa with the goal of annexing territory, American business elites spent the war years ensuring "that when the war ended, American economic power would be second to none in the world." One of the major goals of American business during World War Two was to ensure an "open door policy" after the war, especially in the case of Middle Eastern oil. Also during World War Two, America and England formed the International Monetary Fund (IMF), an organization designed to regulate international exchanges of money, giving a major advantage to its own currencies. American politicians and business elites recognized that, after the war, they would need to send economic aid around the world to influence political events.

As Zinn sees it, American businesses spent the entirety of World War Two preparing for the aftermath of war—during which they hoped to secure their power on a global stage. It was during the 1940s and 50s that America asserted its "dollar hegemony"—its ability to conduct international exchanges of money through the dollar, making the dollar the strongest, most reliable of all currencies. While many textbooks suggest that American businesses sent foreign aid to Europe after the war out of the goodness of their hearts, Zinn suggests that, in reality, they did so largely to influence politics.

The U.S. did not in fight in World War Two to oppose bigotry. Indeed, throughout World War Two, the American military separated blood donations from its black and white soldiers. Fascist countries were notorious for their sexism, and yet the American war effort didn't take steps to "change the subordination of women": throughout the duration of the war, the most powerful decision makers were men. Perhaps the U.S.'s most notorious World War Two policy was Franklin Roosevelt's executive order to arrest every Japanese-American on the West Coast and send them to internment camps. Japanese internment is often regarded as a horrible "mistake" on the American government's part. "Was it a 'mistake'" Zinn asks, "or was it an action to be expected from a nation with a long history of racism?"

In this somewhat controversial passage, Zinn draws some disturbing comparisons between Fascist Europe and the United States. Zinn isn't saying that the U.S. is comparable with Nazi Germany, but he points to the sexism and pseudoscientific racism of American society during the 1940s, and argues that America's unethical behavior during World War Two was indicative of much larger problems in American society, stretching back hundreds of years. In short, Zinn discusses the ills of American society, especially sexism and racism, to emphasize the point that America did not *go to war with Germany for moral reasons.*

The chief beneficiaries of the American war effort were the elite. During the war, the government awarded almost all military production contracts to large corporations. Although unions cooperated with the government and pledged not to strike, many non-unionized workers went on strike during the war years—indeed, there were more strikes during the World War Two years than in "any comparable period in American history."

War benefitted the American elite by providing businesses with lucrative contracts for cars, guns, and planes. In response to the growing power of the Establishment, American unions—according to Zinn, many of them, though he doesn't provide exact numbers—protested against American capitalism.

In spite of the overwhelming patriotism during the World War Two years, there were many who opposed the war. Tens of thousands of people refused to fight in the war, and in the black community, there was widespread opposition to the war, since many black leaders reasoned that the war wouldn't change the status of black people in the U.S. any more than World War One had. One small socialist group, the Socialist Workers Party, criticized the war, arguing that "the real war was inside each nation." However, there wasn't an organized black opposition to the war—or, for that matter, an organized Communist or Socialist opposition.

Zinn admits that, during World War Two, there wasn't a widespread protest movement. For the most part, different factions of American society, including powerful left-wing and right-wing institutions, stood together in support of America's fight in Europe and Japan. However, he briefly notes that there was some *opposition to the war.*

World War Two represented "the heaviest bombardment of civilians ever undertaken in any war." American troops bombed civilians, most notoriously in the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where atomic bombs killed more than 150,000 Japanese people, many of them women or children. The American government has always offered the same justification for its use of atomic weapons during World War Two: bombs ended the war quickly. However, recent historical evidence suggests that 1) President Harry Truman, who made the final decision to bomb Japan, had been advised to issue a warning to Japanese civilians before doing so; and 2) the U.S. government knew from radio intercepts that the Japanese government was on the verge of pursuing peace negotiations with the Allies.

When history textbooks discuss World War Two, they often take it for granted that civilian deaths were justified by America's need to win the fight. However, Zinn refuses to accept such a glib, simplistic conclusion. Truman's decision to bomb Japan—not once but twice!—flew in the face of military advice, radio intercepts from Japan, and, not least, the strong moral imperative to respect the enemy country's civilian population.

It's likely that the U.S. chose to drop atomic bombs on Japan because it wanted to end the war before Russia was scheduled to enter it. Dropping bombs sent a clear message to Russia—an assertion of America's military power. After the bombing, Truman issued a "preposterous" statement alleging that Hiroshima was a "military base" and that the military had been trying to avoid the killing of civilians. It's unclear why Truman ordered for a second bomb to be dropped on Nagasaki after the bombing of Hiroshima.

Zinn guesses that Truman ordered bombs to be dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki because he wanted to make a show of force, both to Russia and to the rest of the world. The fact that Truman lied and claimed to the American people that Hiroshima was a civilian-free population seems to suggest a guilty conscience: Truman knew that he'd made a highly unethical decision, and that the average American wouldn't stand for it.

After World War Two, the two most powerful countries in the world were the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Both countries proceeded to "carve out empires of influence," but without "swastikas, goose-stepping, or officially declared racism." War put the U.S. in a position to control the world and its own people. Only a few years after the Great Depression, war had rejuvenated capitalism and strengthened the elite. Workers and farmers benefitted from war in more modest ways. However, by and large, they believed that "the system was doing well for them."

As with previous economic advances in American history (the acquisition of land in the Southwest, for example), World War Two benefitted many different Americans, but it benefitted wealthy, powerful people far more than it benefitted ordinary people. Furthermore, America now had free reign over the world—its economy and military were the strongest in the world. In its own way, Zinn implies, America in the second half of the 20th century has carved out a far larger empire of influence than Germany ever did (although America didn't conquer and annex other countries, as Fascist Germany did—prompting some historians to criticize Zinn for drawing a false equivalence between Nazi Germany and the modern U.S.).

The greatest legacy of World War Two is that it created an alliance between business and the military. Zinn argues that this "alliance" explains why, almost immediately after World War Two, the Truman administration manufactured an atmosphere of paranoia and unease, directing the people's fear outwards toward the Soviet Union. While it's certainly true that the Soviet Union was America's rival, the U.S. government exaggerated the threat of the Soviet Union in order to justify 1) spending more on the military and 2) intervening in other countries.

In his discussion of the Cold War, Zinn takes the point of view that Truman and other government elites deliberately exaggerated the threat of the Soviet Union in order to manipulate the American people into remaining loyal to the government. The government justified violent foreign interventions and unethical invasions of privacy by claiming that it was acting to defeat the "bogeyman" of Communism.

In 1947, Harry Truman claimed that the U.S. would be sending money to rebuild Europe in order to protect people from "outside pressures." Truman's remarks were hypocritical, because the most significant "outside pressure" in Europe was the U.S. itself. With the full approval of Harry Truman and Winston Churchill, the U.S. and the Soviet Union divided up Europe along the famous "iron curtain," so that the Soviet Union intervened militarily and economically in Eastern Europe while the U.S. intervened in Western Europe.

During the rebuilding of Europe that took place in the 1940s and 50s, American leadership took a sanctimonious position, claiming that it was donating money to Europe for moral reasons and trying to protect Europe from Soviet influence. However, the U.S. was pretty clearly trying to further its own capitalist interests in Western Europe. (Zinn doesn't seem to consider the possibility, however, that the Establishment intervened in Western Europe for both moral and economic reasons—or, put another way, that self-interest and interest in helping other people aren't mutually exclusive.)

It's telling to study U.S. intervention in Greece in the late 1940s and early 1950s. At this time, there was a civil war in Greece between populist insurrectionists and the right-wing government. The U.S. shipped thousands of tons of military equipment to the government while characterizing the populists as "Soviet agents." Because of American intervention, the right-wing government of Greece defeated its populist opponents. Afterwards, American businesses invested heavily in Greece. Poverty and starvation remained widespread in the country.

America's intervention in Greece is still relatively unknown to the average American. To the extent that high school history textbooks discuss it, the intervention is usually portrayed as a disinterested, idealistic attempt to protect freedom and democracy in Greece. However, as Zinn shows, American intervention in Greece preserved the status quo and did very little to protect the economic freedom of the poor and starving in Greece. (For more on the controversy over intervention in Greece, see William F. Buckley's 1969 debate with Noam Chomsky, available on YouTube.)

In the early days of the Cold War, the U.S. tried to build a national consensus. The core principals of this "liberal consensus" were opposition to Communism, support for business interests, and support for an interventionist foreign policy. The first test of the "liberal consensus" arrived in 1950, when Harry Truman initiated war on Korea. Afraid that South Korea would fall into the hands of socialist leaders in North Korea, Truman deployed American troops, supposedly on behalf of the United Nations Army. The Korean War was a devastating conflict: for three years, the U.S forces used huge amounts of napalm and explosives. The war ended when the American army reached a stalemate with the North Korean forces in 1953. It was a sign of the strength of the liberal consensus that there was little opposition to Truman's deployment of troops to Korea.

Again, Zinn discusses the meaning of the word, "liberal." For Zinn, liberalism is, fundamentally, a moderate, middle-of-the-road ideology, which accepts state power, capitalism, and economic inequality, even as it honors democracy, freedom, and human rights. During the 1950s, America intervened in Korea, among other countries, but faced little opposition among its own people, due to the strength of the liberal consensus. Few were willing to question America's right to violate another country's sovereignty.

One reason that there was little opposition to the Korean War in American society is that, throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, American elites were searching for Communists and communist sympathizers. In the late 1940s, communists took control over the China, and the Soviet Union blockaded the city of Berlin. The American government presented such events to the American people as signs of a "world Communist conspiracy." Using the anti-Communist fervor at home, Truman and his allies tried to create "a new national unity," featuring "Justice Department prosecutions and anti-Communist legislation." Truman's anti-Communist acts weakened the left in America, silencing the most vocal critics of American government.

Zinn argues that the government used the threat of Communism to justify its own suppressions of free speech and invasions of personal privacy. Many historians have debated Zinn's arguments, claiming that, even if Truman did exaggerate the threat of Communism, he had reason to believe that the Soviet Union would, in fact, attempt further military expansion and endanger American lives. However, it's clear that the ideology of anti-Communism united Americans against an external threat, weakening the American labor movement.

In early 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy claimed to have information about members of the Communist Party who'd infiltrated the government. McCarthy rose to become an important prosecutor of suspected Communists. Later, he became bolder and began investigating the military for Communist ties. At this time, McCarthy began to alienate his Republican and Democratic allies, and in 1954, he was censured for his conduct. However, Congress continued to pass anti-Communist legislation. McCarthy had gone too far—not by prosecuting Communists, but by antagonizing members of the Establishment. In the 1950s and 60s, politicians denounced Communism, but they avoided McCarthy's mistake by directing their attacks away from institutions like the military.

It's indicative of the bias in most accounts of American history that Senator Joseph McCarthy is depicted as an isolated, "evil" person, rather than one of the many Democratic and Republican senators in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s who made their careers by accusing innocent people of being Communists. Much like Richard Nixon (as Zinn will show), McCarthy was a scapegoat for the systematic crimes of the U.S government; his mistake was to antagonize other sectors of the Establishment, such as the military, rather than directing his aggression at powerless people who couldn't fight back.

Many of the worst abuses of power committed in the name of anti-Communism took place during Truman's "liberal" administration. In 1947, Truman signed an executive order asking the Department of Justice to draw up a list of organizations suspected of harboring Communists. Within five years, there were hundreds of names on this list. It was also during Truman's presidency that the Justice Department sentenced Julius and Ethel Rosenberg to death for espionage. Julius Rosenberg was accused of stealing information about the atomic bomb, but the only witnesses the Justice Department could produce were already facing serious prison time themselves, and they may have lied to shorten their sentences. Irving Kaufman, the judge who sentenced the Rosenbergs to death, was later shown to have conferred illegally with the prosecutors. For the rest of the 1950s, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) prosecuted thousands of people for being Communists. Though Democratic senators sometimes criticized HUAC, most of them repeatedly voted to fund it. Liberal intellectuals regularly voiced their support for the government's anti-Communist agenda.

It's critical to note that anti-Communism occurred on the watch of both Republican and Democratic presidents. Even if Democrats are sometimes regarded as being more committed to human rights than their Republican counterparts, Zinn suggests that, during the Cold War, Democrats were perfectly willing to violate their people's rights, monitoring organizations for suspected Communist ties and even sentencing Ethel Rosenberg, a mother of two children, to death for allegedly helping steal information about the atomic bomb. Democratic senators violated their duties to their constituents by supporting HUAC and legitimizing the government's persecution of innocent people.

Anti-Communism was useful in giving the government a means of convincing people to support military buildup. Democratic and Republican presidents alike voted to increase the military budget, a decision that greatly benefitted the large industrial corporations that made military weaponry. At the same time, the U.S. created "a network of American corporate control over the globe," in the guise of fighting Communism. In Europe, for example, the Marshall Plan was presented as a way of rebuilding Europe, when, in fact, it also built up markets for American exports. Foreign aid in European countries also built up military power—supposedly to defend against the Soviet Union.

Whether or not politicians in the 1950s sincerely believed that a higher military budget was necessary (and it seems like that many of them, in fact, did), Zinn shows that anti-Communism was a convenient weapon for scaring people into supporting military buildup. In short, the 1950s were a time of business expansion around the world: munitions companies won lucrative government contracts, and banks extended their influence to Europe and beyond.

During the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower from 1953 to 1961, the U.S. continued to spend huge amounts on the military and intervene in other countries. In 1954, the U.S. sent forces to topple a Socialist, democratically elected government in Guatemala; four years later, U.S. forces deployed to Lebanon to ensure that the pro-American government wasn't "toppled by a revolution."

During the 1950s—and, really, throughout the Cold War—American foreign policy tended to follow the same strategy: protect pro-U.S. governments (some of which were highly oppressive) and, if necessary, depose democratically elected regimes. The U.S. government used such a strategy in Guatemala and Lebanon, and went on to use a similar strategy in Chile and Indonesia, among other countries.

In 1959, Cuba came under the control of Fidel Castro, a Communist revolutionary. Castro succeeded in defeating Fulgencio Batista, the U.S.-backed dictator of Cuba, and afterwards he established a nationwide system of housing and education, and he redistributed land to peasants. Castro tried to borrow money from the International Monetary Fund, but the IMF, largely run by Americans, refused to lend him any. Castro next turned to the Soviet Union for aid. The U.S., during the presidency of John F. Kennedy, responded by sending anti-Castro Cuban exiles to Cuba in an attempt to invade Cuba and assassinate Castro. This was later known as the "Bay of Pigs" affair. The invasion proved to be a humiliating failure, all the more so because it violated America's stated commitments not to "intervene, directly or indirectly, … in the internal or external affairs of any other state."

Zinn stresses Castro's commitment to empowering the peasant population by providing land and education for them. He does not, however, talk about Castro's often violent suppression of dissent and free speech in his country. Indeed, in some ways Zinn's portrait of Castro seems overly idealized: in his haste to balance out the traditional view of Castro as a horrible dictator, Zinn perhaps goes too far in painting Castro as a great leader, without holding him accountable for his human rights abuses. Nevertheless, Zinn provides an important, novel perspective on Kennedy's handling of the Bay of Pigs—an abject failure.

In short, the late 1940s and early 1950s saw America become "a permanent war economy," in which a few powerful people became extraordinary wealthy while the majority of the population made just enough money not to rebel against the status quo. Then, in the 1960s, quite unexpectedly, the people of the United States showed once again that "all the system's estimates of security and success were wrong."

In the 1950s, American became a war economy. And yet, few people protested against the growing corporatization of America, since they were distracted by the spirit of anti-Communism (as well as the government's persecution of suspected Communists, which had the effect of chilling free speech).

CHAPTER 17: "OR DOES IT EXPLODE?"

In the 1930s, the poet Langston Hughes wrote a poem that begins with the question, "What happens to a dream deferred?" The poem ends, "Or does it explode?" Hughes's poem is often interpreted as a response to the failure of the African American "dream" of equality. Hughes, like many other great African American writers of the 20th century, used literature to convey the mixture of hope and disillusionment in the black community.

Throughout this chapter (and, in a way, the whole book), Hughes's poem represents the reaction of the American people to the Establishment's indifference to justice—in short, the Establishment's habit of "deferring" the people's utopian dreams. Will people accept the Establishment's corruption and indifference, or will they fight back?

In novels like *Native Son*, the black novelist Richard Wright described the misery of the black community, and offered insights about how the white establishment pitted blacks against one another. Wright was briefly a member of the Communist party, and many other African American intellectuals of the early 20th century, including W. E. B. Du Bois, were Communists, too. After World War Two, "black and yellow people in Africa and Asia" cited Marxist principles in their freedom struggles.

In the mid-20th century, many black intellectuals and writers turned to Communism as a weapon in their struggle against capitalism. In spite of its human rights abuses, the early Soviet Union was widely seen as a paragon of gender and racial equality—as a result, many left-wing activists supported Communist ideas.


In 1946, President Harry Truman formed a Committee on Civil Rights, citing three reasons for doing so: 1) a moral imperative to end discrimination in America, 2) economic harms of discrimination, and 3) the international embarrassment associated with being seen as a racist country. Truman signed executive orders ending segregation in the military, though it would be decades before the process was completed. In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled that segregation in schools was unconstitutional and recommended that schools be integrated "with all deliberate speed." But even ten years later, the majority of schools in the South remained segregated.

Truman's three reasons for ending discrimination are, perhaps, indicative of what motivates government action in a variety of sectors: even if some people in the government are motivated by a strong moral imperative, many more are motivated by economic and political forces. As before, the federal government's attempts to fight segregation were half-hearted and slow-paced.

Black people in the 1950s and 60s weren't satisfied with government reforms on segregation. Across the country, they boycotted discriminatory institutions. This was most famously done to the Montgomery bus system, a protest initiated by Rosa Parks and led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In retaliation, racist whites attempted to kill King, and they blew up black churches. Nevertheless, King persisted in organizing boycotts and nonviolent resistance, and his message of love proved powerful. Still, there were many in the black community who found King naïve. In many cities, some activists encouraged blacks to arm themselves and exercise self-defense against the Ku Klux Klan.

Because the federal government was so slow in fighting racism and segregation in America, ordinary people worked together to change society, leading boycotts, nonviolent resistance, and other protests. Unlike many high school textbooks, which talk about nonviolent resistance far more than self-defense in the Civil Rights Movement, Zinn respects both traditions of black American radicalism.

Another key black activist group of the sixties was the Congress of Racial Equality, or CORE. CORE activists organized the famous "freedom rides," during which black and white people traveled South together to end segregation in interstate travel. In 1961, whites attacked the Freedom Riders' buses with iron bars. The federal government did nothing: FBI agents watched passively, and the Attorney General, Robert Kennedy, agreed to allow the Freedom Riders to be arrested in Mississippi. Even after many went to prison, the Freedom Riders remained defiant. Zinn writes, "There is no way of measuring the effect of that southern movement on the sensibilities of a whole generation of young black people."

In this moving passage, Zinn contrasts the energy and enthusiasm of the American people with the indifference and foot-dragging of the federal government. Even supposed liberals, such as Robert Kennedy, were exceptionally weak on matters of civil rights—they complied with racist governors and politicians in the South and allowed peaceful protesters to be arrested. (Zinn doesn't even address one of the most damning pieces of information about Kennedy: he allowed the FBI to tap King's phones and harass him.)

Throughout the early 1960s, black people demonstrated against racism and they often faced imprisonment and police brutality. One of the key organizations in these demonstrations was the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, or SNCC, which organized hundreds of protests. SNCC was instrumental in drawing attention to racism and discrimination, provoking widespread outrage and pressuring the government to make changes. In 1965 President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, ensuring federal protection of the right to vote. By 1968, black Southerners voted in the same numbers as whites. Though the federal government passed civil rights legislation, Zinn argues that its goal was to "control an explosive situation" without making any "fundamental changes" to American society, and, instead, channeling black anger into the "cooling mechanism of the ballot box."

As a younger man, Zinn himself was involved in some SNCC demonstrations. As before, Zinn contrasts the relatively moderate policies instituted by the federal government during the 1960s with the radical, even utopian visions of the American people. And, once again, Zinn claims, without any apparent proof, that the federal government's priority was to pacify black people, not to honor their rights to freedom and equality. Zinn seems to take it for granted that the government is more interested in self-preservation than in morality (not an unreasonable assumption by any means), and that, as with Progressive Era reform, the Voting Rights Act mostly "deferred" the American people's dream.

One of the defining events of the Civil Rights Movement was the March on Washington in 1963, during which Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his famous "I have a dream" speech. But other activists, including Malcolm X, argued that the March on Washington "lost its militancy" because the government endorsed it. Zinn argues that, faced with the possibility of black activists "laying siege to Capitol Hill," the John F. Kennedy administration tried to neutralize the danger of the Civil Rights Movement by incorporating it into the democratic coalition through cooperating with King, the least violent black leader of the era, and encouraging black people to express their feelings through political institutions. In spite of the Kennedy administration's attempts to pacify the Civil Rights Movement, black Americans continued to pursue radical forms of protest. Black people rioted throughout the country to protest the murder of women and children by racist whites.

In this passage, Zinn seems to side with Malcolm X against Martin Luther King, though he clearly has enormous respect for both leaders. King, Zinn argues, was too eager to ally himself with the federal government—in effect, making the same mistake that union leaders of the 1930s did when they allied themselves with New Deal politicians. Malcolm X's argument seems to be that black activism is at its most dangerous, and therefore its most effective, when it shuns alliances with the federal government. A potential rebuttal to this argument would be that, on the contrary, activism is at its most effective when it forms alliances with the federal government and enlists the government's power on its own behalf.

As the sixties went on, it became increasingly clear that nonviolence, while a useful tactic for appealing to the federal government for help, was not enough to address the problems of systematic poverty in the black community. In the late sixties, riots in black communities became more common as it became clear that the Voting Rights Act hadn't made life easier for the poorest blacks in America. King was gradually replaced with new heroes, including Malcolm X and Huey Newton, the leader of the Black Panthers. Malcolm X and Newton argued that black people needed to defend themselves against white violence and work together to fight poverty in America. Partly in response to the growing violence in the black community, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1968. This act protected black people against racial violence, but, tellingly, it also included a stipulation that penalized anyone for inciting a riot.

Ultimately, Zinn sees King as having been too eager to join forces with the Johnson administration and enlist the federal government's help on black people's behalf. By the end of the 1960s, Zinn argues, it was becoming clear that King's efforts to protect black rights were simply not enough to help poor, unemployed black people, who were the victims of institutional racism and whose lives were miserable whether they could vote or not. The Civil Rights Act of 1968, like many other progressive reforms in American legislative history, offered some relief to the American people, but also tightened the government's control over the people (by making it illegal to incite a riot).

Toward the end of his life, King became more concerned with addressing the problem of poverty in America. He argued that the Vietnam War was weakening American society and punishing the poorest Americans. In 1968, King was murdered, and his death set off another wave of riots. Furthermore, in the late sixties and early seventies, it became clear that legislation couldn't protect blacks against violence: around the country, police officers continued to use excessive force against unarmed blacks. Meanwhile, the FBI spent huge sums on monitoring black activist groups, in part "out of fear that blacks would turn their attention from the controllable field of voting to the more dangerous arena of wealth and poverty—of class conflict."

Even King began to recognize the necessity of broad, radical changes in American society—not just reforms in the practice of voting. A possible rebuttal to Zinn's argument about King would be that, contrary to what he claims here, the Voting Rights Act was a radical change in American society for black people—it allowed black people to elect sympathetic leaders at both the local and the national level, protecting their own interests. Zinn also writes about the FBI's surveillance of black activist groups, suggesting that the government continued to regard black activism as a threat to elites' power and property.

One strategy that the Establishment used to neutralize the threat of black empowerment was to coax a small number of blacks into the Establishment. Banks and firms invested a lot of money in developing "black capitalism," and during the seventies more black faces appeared on television and film, "creating an impression of change" and pushing black leaders into the mainstream. The creation of a new black elite and middle class was impressive, but unemployment and crime continued to ravage poor black communities. In this way, the "system" tried to "contain the frightening explosiveness of the black upsurge."

Zinn interprets the growth of a black middle class as a sign of stratification, fragmentation, and weakness in the black community. One could also argue that the growth of a black middle class signified some important positive changes in the black community. (It also seems very naïve for Zinn to claim that the Establishment "wanted" to create a black middle class and a black elite, since the economic empowerment of black people in the seventies was met with widespread racism.)

In the 1970s, it appeared that "no great black movement was under way," suggesting that, on some level, the system had neutralized the threat of black empowerment. Meanwhile, in 1978, six million black people were unemployed, their dreams of equality and respect "deferred" yet again. It wasn't clear if the dream would "dry up" or "explode."

Zinn looks back at the Civil Rights Movement with pessimism. While he has some limited respect for the achievements of activists like King, he argues that the federal government deferred real equality for the black community. Other historians have argued that it's important to recognize the achievements of the Civil Rights Movement as the profound, radical changes they were, rather than dismissing them as "mere" reform.

CHAPTER 18: THE IMPOSSIBLE VICTORY: VIETNAM

Between 1964 and 1972, the U.S. spent billions of dollars and tens of thousands of lives to fight a nationalist group in a "tiny, peasant country"—and failed. Following World War Two, the French continued to control colonies in Indochina (a region of Southeast Asia). By the late 1940s, a full-scale nationalist revolution was building in Indochina. Peasants and farmers, organized by a Communist named Ho Chi Minh, demanded their rights to self-determination, citing the American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. To quell the revolution, the French bombed Northern Vietnamese cities.

Zinn's portrait of the Vietnam War focuses on the North Vietnamese forces far more than does the average account of Vietnam found in a history textbook. Zinn even goes so far as to say that the North Vietnamese were the more idealistic side in the war, since they stressed the rights of freedom and self-determination. While Zinn's account of the Vietnamese may be a little idealized (Zinn doesn't question Ho Chi Minh's motives for leading his people to war, as he's done with Roosevelt and other American presidents), his account is an important "counterweight" to the jingoistic interpretations of Vietnam that high school students often read.

From 1946 to 1954, America funded the vast majority of the French war effort, providing advice, guns, and money. Why? Publicly, the government claimed that it was trying to prevent the spread of Communism in Asia. However, secret government memos also cited the importance of Southeast Asia's natural resources as reasons for ensuring that Vietnam remain under the control of a Western, capitalist power. The American government, cooperating with the existing French leadership, installed an official named Ngo Dinh Diem as the leader of South Vietnam; however, Diem's regime was unpopular, since he did very little to address widespread poverty. By contrast, Ho Chi Minh aimed to remedy poverty among his people. It is likely that the U.S., disappointed with Diem's performance, conspired with South Vietnamese generals to assassinate Diem.

As with other points in the Cold War, America claimed to be fighting on the side of democracy and equality when, as per Zinn's argument, it was actually fighting to preserve its own business interests in the Southeast Asian region. Ngo Dinh Diem is a controversial figure because, after the U.S. government installed him in South Vietnam, it's likely that it helped other Vietnamese figures kill Diem.

In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson, citing a "murky set of events in the Gulf of Tonkin," began a war in Vietnam. (It later turned out that there had been no "open aggression" against Americans in the Gulf of Tonkin, contrary to Johnson's claims.) Johnson deployed troops to Vietnam without asking for Congressional approval, as the Constitution requires. Despite petitions to declare the war unconstitutional, the Supreme Court did not consider the issue.

Johnson's declaration of war should remind readers of Polk's behavior during the Mexican American War and McKinley's behavior during the Spanish American War—once again, questionable circumstances were interpreted as an unambiguous show of hostility, and the result was war. Zinn doesn't even discuss how Johnson knowingly misrepresented the Gulf of Tonkin affair (as was later revealed in the Pentagon Papers).

The Vietnam War was brutal for the Vietnamese people; American troops treated them cruelly. In one of the most notorious episodes of the war, the 1968 My Lai massacre, American troops methodically murdered women, children, and the elderly. Later, the army tried and failed to cover up the incident. In the end, some officers involved in My Lai were tried, but only one officer was convicted, and he only served a three-year sentence. Zinn writes, "My Lai was unique only in its details"—across Vietnam, there were hundreds of other comparable incidents. Moreover, American generals fully supported the bombing of Vietnam's civilian population.

Few accounts of the Vietnam War do justice to the Vietnamese side, focusing instead on American casualties. Zinn argues that the My Lai massacre was not, contrary to popular opinion, an isolated incident for the military—it was indicative of a broader trend of brutality and cruelty among the American troops. In fact, it's been suggested that Vietnam's reputation as a chaotic, disorganized war was largely an alibi developed by the American elite to obscure the systematic, "top-down" brutality of the American military.

By 1968, it was widely accepted that the Vietnam War couldn't be won. Richard Nixon campaigned for president on the promise that he'd end Vietnam. Over the course of the next four years, Nixon withdrew troops; however, he continued the military's policies of bombing the civilian population of Vietnam. This meant that he didn't "end" the war, but only the most unpopular aspect of it (the involvement of American soldiers).

It's interesting that Zinn omits any discussion of Richard Nixon's illegal involvement in Vietnamese peace negotiations during the 1968 presidential elections, which, many have argued, had the effect of prolonging the war by at least four years. For a chilling account of the affair, consult the first two chapters of Christopher Hitchens's The Trial of Henry Kissinger

Some of the earliest opposition to the Vietnam War in the U.S. came from the Civil Rights Movement. As early as 1966, SNCC's official position on Vietnam was that the U.S. was violating international law there. Influential black leaders, including Martin Luther King, Jr., criticized the war effort for sending black people to die for a cause that had no relevance to their lives. Across the country, tens of thousands of young people refused to register for the draft and were jailed for their actions. Influential actors, musicians, and writers used their fame to speak out against Vietnam. Daniel Ellsberg, an employee of the RAND Corporation (a group that did secret research for the government) leaked thousands of pages of secret documents about the government's role in the Vietnam War, documents collectively known as the Pentagon Papers.

The popular resistance to Vietnam was enormous, Zinn shows: rich, poor, liberal, and conservative Americans opposed the war for idealistic, moral reasons. One potential problem with Zinn's characterization of the anti-Vietnam movement is that it makes the movement seem more radical than it truly was. Many have argued that the anti-Vietnam movement, by and large, did not protest America's fundamental right to intervene illegally in other countries, but only argued that the particular conflict in Vietnam had become a "bad investment." Or, to use Zinn's own language, the anti-Vietnam movement favored reform, not radical change, in American foreign policy.

Students were particularly active in opposing Vietnam. Although the press's coverage of student demonstrations against Vietnam gave the impression that opposition to the war was mostly limited to middle-class students, statistics show strong antiwar sentiment in the working classes as well. Indeed, some surveys suggested that people with less money and education were *more* likely to oppose the war than people with significant money and education. Instead of publicizing these statistics, the media suggested that blue-collar Americans were enthusiastic war supporters. Soldiers and veterans were among the most enthusiastic opponents of the Vietnam War. GIs, many of them low-income, formed groups like the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW). One influential veteran, Ron Kovic, was confined to a wheelchair after his service in Vietnam, and he experienced the squalid conditions of veterans' hospitals. As a member of VVAW, he spoke out against the war.

Zinn writes eloquently about the role of students in opposing America's involvement in Vietnam. Indeed, much of the anti-Vietnam movement took place when Zinn was a professor at Boston University, and he actively supported students who demonstrated, protecting them from punishment by the B.U. administration. Zinn also argues that the media have distorted the legacy of the anti-Vietnam movement, making it seem like an elite, academic movement, rather than a truly populist uprising against American foreign policy. Finally, Zinn stresses the opposition to Vietnam in the military community. In short, Zinn shows that there was a broad coalition—comprising young students, working-class people, and even soldiers—who put aside their differences and came together to oppose the Vietnam War.

The history of the Vietnam War suggests that Americans succeeded in pressuring the government to end the war. In the Pentagon Papers, it is clear that "public opinion" was a key factor in the government's decision-making with Vietnam. Especially in the late days of the Lyndon Johnson administration, the government deescalated the bombing campaign in response to demonstrations. Although Richard Nixon claimed that he wouldn't be influenced by protests, it's clear in his own memoirs that he was—a rare "admission of the power of public protest."

Zinn sees the Vietnam War as the rare example of populism influencing government policy for the better. It's curious, however, that Zinn is willing to credit populism with "ending" Vietnam, since, even after the height of the Vietnam protest movement (in 1968), the war continued on for years. Nor is it clear why Zinn regards America's withdrawal from Vietnam as a genuine triumph of American populism, whereas the Voting Rights Act (to name only one example) was a mere "reform" to appease the people.

CHAPTER 19: SURPRISES

After 1920, women could vote alongside men. And yet, "their subordinate condition" barely changed; sexism continued to be rampant in the U.S. One of the first major disruptions in sexism in America occurred during World War Two, when women were required to work outside of the home, since many young men were fighting overseas. However, even after World War Two, women continued to hold far less political power than men—they represented fifty percent of the voting population, but less than four percent of political office-holders.

In this chapter, Zinn will capture the diversity and multiplicity of populist causes in the 1960s. He begins by discussing the feminist movement of the 1950s and 60s, noting that even after the Second World War, women often returned to the same subservient positions they'd occupied before the war. Even so, they used populist tactics to lobby society for their rights and freedoms.

Women played a key role in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s. Around the same time, Betty Freidan published the feminist classic *The Feminine Mystique*, in which she denounced the social system that forced women to surrender their dreams and serve their husbands and children. Women of the late 1960s played key roles in demonstrating against Vietnam and fighting for Civil Rights. In 1968, a group called Radical Women protested the Miss American beauty pageant by throwing bras and beauty products into the trash.

Instead of discussing each "identity politics" movement of the 60s—women, black people, homosexuals, Native Americans, etc.—as an isolated phenomenon, Zinn makes an effort to show how these different movements worked together to further one another's agendas. Thus, Zinn shows that women didn't just fight for their own rights, but also for the rights of blacks, and for the end of the military draft.

The feminist movement took a unique form among working class women. Without "talking specifically about their problems as women," many working-class women organized neighborhood people to fight injustice and lobby for services. Many working-class female activists connected the problems of women with a need for overall social and economic change, so that the "antagonist" against which working-class feminists protested was not just "aggressive male domination," but also "capitalism."

While he suggests that the feminist movement was united in its opposition to societal sexism and misogyny, Zinn is careful to capture some of the diversity within the feminist movement of the 60s. Again, Zinn shows how feminists combined their fight against sexism with their opposition to the ills of capitalism and government control.

One of the key issues of the feminist movement of the late sixties and early seventies was abortion. Women protested for their right to control their own bodies; their protests contributed to the Supreme Court's 1973 decision, in *Roe v. Wade*, to legalize abortion and give women the right to decide whether or not to have a child. Women in the late sixties also began to speak openly about rape and domestic violence and to support a Constitutional amendment ensuring gender equality, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Another key aspect of the feminist movement of the 1960s and 70s was the emphasis on the female body. Influential feminist figures, such as the poet Adrienne Rich, argued that women were subjugated in part because they were stereotyped and judged for their bodies in ways that men never experienced. Rich and other feminists argued that the powerful elite used sexism as a tool to trick the people into controlling themselves: women were indoctrinated to be meek and submissive, and to teach others to be submissive, too. Therefore, by teaching women how to be revolutionary and active in society, feminism could free women (and, perhaps, all people) from the control of the state.

One of the great legacies of the feminist movement of the 1960s was to make the "personal political." Feminists began important conversations about their right to control their own bodies and to feel safe and secure in marriage, recognizing that traditional privacy norms were furthering the evils of sexism and spousal abuse. Notice that, again, Zinn is careful to link feminism with broader-reaching, radical programs of social change. For example, he cites Adrienne Rich, who argued that feminine liberation was a precursor to overall societal liberation. In characterizing the feminist movement in such a way, Zinn gives the impression that the different persecuted groups of the U.S. looked out for one another and saw themselves as having a common enemy: the Establishment.

The sixties also saw the beginning of a widespread movement against the prison system. There had always been prison riots in America, but in the 1960s the number and scale of these riots increased greatly. Furthermore, as countless studies have shown, poor, black, homosexual, or socially radical people were more likely to be arrested and sentenced to prison for a given crime than upper-class, white, conservative, heterosexual people, and the injustice of their sentencing prompted some convicts to become more radical in their thinking.

The prison movement is a great illustration of Zinn's approach to studying radicalism, because prisons united disparate persecuted groups (blacks, homosexuals, immigrants, etc.) and forced them to work together. Zinn suggests that different races and demographics joined forces to fight "the man" throughout the 60s.

One of the key prison riots of the 1970s took place in Attica Prison in 1971. There, prisoners learned that George Jackson—a Californian prisoner who'd been sentenced to ten years in jail for committing a seventy-dollar robbery, and who'd become a well-known radical writer—was shot in the back by his guards, allegedly because he was trying to escape. Enraged with the suspicious circumstances of Jackson's murder, prisoners rose up, took guards as hostages, and took over four prison yards. One of the most striking features of the Attica uprising was the racial unity between the different inmates. After five days of waiting, the New York state government, with the full support of the Nixon administration, sent in the National Guard to attack the prisoners (who had no firearms), violently ending the uprising. Attica, Zinn concludes, marked "the caring of prisoners for one another, the attempt to take hatred and anger of individual rebellion and turn it into collective effort for change."

George Jackson has become a legendary figure among activists and radicals. Jackson wrote many books and articles denouncing modern American society—later, he was shot by his guards, an act of brutality that many interpreted as the Establishment's attempt to suppress an eloquent voice of the opposition. In a way, the Attica prison uprising is the perfect symbol for 60s radicalism as Zinn sees it (he'll allude to the Attica uprising again in the final chapters of his book): the people of the United States are different from one another, but they have one thing in common, that they're persecuted by "the man." Thus, in Attica, different races worked together to fight guards and the institution of the prison itself.

For much of the 20th century, it seemed that Indians wouldn't organize into social activist groups. However, in the 1960s, Indians came to the forefront of social activism. In 1961, five hundred Indian leaders met in Chicago and formed the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC). As a result of NIYC action, Indians petitioned the federal government to address the hundreds of Indian treaties that the government had broken over the last four hundred years. When the government supported the building of a dam on Seneca land, Indians cited treaties the government had signed during the George Washington administration, promising that the U.S. wouldn't build on Seneca land. Other Indian groups organized "fish-ins," during which Indians fished in rivers that white residents wanted exclusively for themselves.

The Native American liberation movement of the 1960s was, in many ways, the most radical social movement of the era, because, unlike many other populist causes of the time, it attacked people's fundamental right to own their own property by arguing that American society was built on the theft of Native American lands. It's interesting that the Native Americans protested the American government by attempting to use the government's own treaties against it, exposing the American government as a dishonest institution.

A key event in Indian activism of the sixties took place in 1969, when Indians, led by the Mohawk leader and professor Richard Oakes, occupied the Californian island of Alcatraz and refused to leave. Oakes read a sardonic document stating that Alcatraz should, by all rights, be an Indian reservation, since it was isolated and rocky, had no running water, and housed prisoners. After six months, federal forces physically removed the Indian occupiers.

The Alcatraz occupation of 1969 was a milestone in American radicalism, partly because Native Americans used humor and satire to mock the American government's hypocrisy. However, the government's response was no different than its responses to union uprisings in the 1800s: it sent in the troops.

Indians were at the center of the anti-Vietnam movement; many who served in the war drew connections between American soldiers' treatment of Vietnamese peasants and past soldiers' treatment of Indians. Indians also staged protests against the holiday of Columbus Day, and lobbied history textbook companies to include more respectful accounts of Indian culture.

Zinn stresses that Native Americans didn't only fight for their own rights—they fought against the aggression of the American government in general, and the government's brutality to its own people and the people of Vietnam. One of the major victories of the Native American populist movement of the 1960s was to change textbooks. Even if contemporary textbooks aren't perfect, they're much more likely to include passages praising Native American culture.

In 1973, armed Indians occupied the town of Wounded Knee, where, in the 19th century, American troops had massacred Indians. They declared the town "liberated" from the U.S., citing an 1868 treaty that allowed the town to remain under Indian control. Hundreds of FBI agents and marshals blockaded the town and ordered the Indians to disarm. Over the next 71 days, Indians and FBI agents fought several gun battles. Finally, the blockade ended when the U.S. government promised to "investigate Indian affairs." Later, the government concluded that the 1868 treaty was superseded by the principal of "eminent domain." Nevertheless, the Wounded Knee incident provoked enormous international sympathy for Indian activism.

Native Americans at Wounded Knee believed that they needed to use physical force to challenge the status quo in American society. Thus, they brought guns to the town of Wounded Knee and refused to leave. It's hard to blame the Native Americans for their behavior, since, throughout American history, the federal government has robbed Native Americans of their lands with far worse acts of violence. During the Wounded Knee affair, the government seems to have twisted the laws to justify its illegal occupation of Native American lands.

The sixties and seventies represented nothing less than a "general revolt against oppressive, artificial, previously unquestioned ways of living." Sexual behaviors changed very quickly, and books and films appeared that explored sexuality in ways that hadn't been normal before. Musicians, such as Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, wrote songs protesting the Vietnam War. The sixties also saw a revolution within the Catholic church: while some "old-time religious revivalists" continued to be popular, other priests spoke out against their organization's sexism and racism.

The radicalism of the 1960s went far beyond the radicalism of earlier decades, because it challenged cultural norms and attitudes toward sex, violence, and profanity, in addition to the concrete economic forces of capitalist domination. As a result, artists played an important role in the era, teaching their admirers how to "see the world" differently. One sign of the cultural radicalism of the decade was that even the Catholic Church—one of the most conservative institutions in world history—instituted some reforms.

In all, the sixties represented a series of widespread, rapid changes, in which Americans questioned authority of all kinds: government, business, religion, and tradition. In the seventies, the powerful elite went to work trying to restore order.

Zinn sees the 1960s as a time of widespread, radical resistance to American authority, and the 70s as the era in which American elites tried to regain their power.

CHAPTER 20: THE SEVENTIES: UNDER CONTROL?

In the early 1970s, the "system seemed out of control." Americans of all backgrounds were coming together against the government and large corporations, and voters were increasingly refusing to identify with either the Republican or Democratic party.

Zinn picks up where he left off in Chapter 19: the 60s galvanized American society and encouraged people to challenge authority.

One of the major factors that encouraged people's disillusionment with the status quo was the growing scandal surrounding President Richard Nixon. In 1972, five burglars were caught trying to break into the offices of the Democratic National Committee in the Watergate apartment complex in Washington, D.C. Some of these burglars appeared to be closely connected to Nixon officials, including the Attorney General. In the following months, the arrest of the Watergate burglars prompted a "chain reaction," in which low-ranking Nixon officials informed on higher-ranking officials. In the end, it was revealed that top Nixon officials had accepted illegal donations from large corporations, allocated funds for interfering with the Democratic party, attempted to sabotage the reputations of Nixon's critics, and approved of a secret, illegal bombing of Cambodia.

The Watergate Scandal is a curious event, because it seemed *to represent the rare occasion when the powerful elite of the United States turned on itself and expelled one of their own members—in this case, the President of the United States. However, it's interesting to note that, over the course of Watergate, it was revealed that Nixon had tried to interfere with the Democratic party and tried to sabotage American citizens. Zinn suggests that these actions led the Establishment to distrust Nixon and turn on him.*

The fallout from the Watergate scandal was immense. The public turned against Nixon, suspecting that he was involved in many of the illicit actions his officials had told the grand jury about. At the same time, corporations and other social institutions began to turn against Nixon, too, reasoning that he was an unstable, vindictive politician. In 1974, Nixon resigned from the White House rather than face impeachment by Congress.

Much like Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s, Richard Nixon lost his power because he made the mistake of antagonizing the American Establishment, instead of saving his aggression for people and institutions that couldn't fight back.

When Nixon resigned, Gerald Ford, his Vice President, became President, and proclaimed, "Our long national nightmare is over." Despite Ford's words, the resignation of Nixon left intact "all the mechanisms and all the false values which permitted the Watergate scandal." Furthermore, Nixon's foreign policy continued, and the American government continued to cooperate with the business establishment. In short, Watergate allowed the Establishment to "cleanse itself" of rule-breakers without making any fundamental changes to the system. It is telling that, during the Watergate scandal, journalists focused mostly on Nixon's small-scale, local misdeeds, such as his bribes and threats, while mostly ignoring his illegal corporate connections and foreign policy decisions.

As Zinn sees it, Nixon's resignation was a kind of "totemic ritual," in which the American people channeled their hatred for the Establishment into one man (Nixon) and then celebrated Nixon's resignation, confident that government would be more honest from now on. However, as Zinn makes clear, Nixon's resignation didn't "purify" the government. Nixon was just a scapegoat for the overall injustice of the Establishment, and his resignation was a smokescreen for the continuation of the same corrupt policies that allowed Nixon to rise to power in the first place.

Under the Ford Administration, America ended its involvement in Vietnam amid widespread opposition to the war. American politicians and policy advisers at the time noted the necessity of recovering from this blow to America's reputation as a major military power. In 1975, Henry Kissinger, the Secretary of State under Nixon and Ford, wrote that America "must carry out some act somewhere … which shows its determination to continue to be a world power." Only one month later, a Cambodian ship apprehended an American cargo ship. In response, President Ford ordered the Cambodian government to release the ship's crew; when the Cambodian government gave no reply, Ford ordered the bombing of Cambodian ships, and then sent in American troops. Later, it was revealed that Ford had received word that Chinese diplomats were using their influence to release the American sailors. On the very day that Cambodia released the Americans, Ford's troops arrived in Cambodia and attacked the mainland. In the end, forty-one Americans died in the attack. Why did Ford order the attack on Cambodia so quickly? Because, Zinn answers, Ford wanted to show the world that "giant America … was still powerful."

As with Zinn's handling of other militaristic foreign policy decisions in American history, Zinn implies, without ever actually saying so, that the Cambodian incident was engineered to mislead the American people and encourage them to forget about the corruption and incompetence of the American government. Whether or not Ford consciously planned to mislead the American people in this way (and it's possible that he did), the Cambodian incident asserted America's power on the global stage.

During the mid seventies, the American establishment faced a crisis in the public's knowledge of the FBI and the CIA. During the course of the Watergate scandal, it was revealed that the CIA had worked to create a military coup in Chile, where the people had elected a leader democratically. Meanwhile, it was disclosed that the FBI had waged an invisible war against radical and left-wing groups throughout the sixties, forging letters, engaging in burglaries, and, "in the case of Black Panther leader Fred Hampton, [seeming] to have conspired in murder." The exposure of "bad deeds by the FBI and CIA" drastically increased the public's distrust of the government.

In the 1970s, the public became increasingly aware of the corruption and deceptiveness of the CIA and the FBI. Although Zinn doesn't have time for an extended discussion of the death of Fred Hampton (which occurred around the time of the Watergate Scandal), it's highly likely that the FBI was involved in orchestrating Hampton's murder—there seems to be no other explanation for why the police shot Hampton in his sleep late at night.

In response to widespread dislike for government, intellectuals researched how the 1960s had facilitated the decline in enthusiasm for the American Establishment. In a famous paper, "The Democratic Distemper," Samuel Huntington, a government policy consultant, made a series of surprisingly honest remarks about politics. The goal of the president, he wrote, was to cooperate with "key individuals and groups" in business, law, media, and government—in short, the "Establishment." Zinn writes, "This was probably the frankest statement ever made by an Establishment adviser." Huntington presented his paper in 1973 to the **Trilateral Commission**, a meeting of political leaders from Japan, the U.S., and Western Europe, and advised the Commission to find ways to prevent the "excess of democracy" in their own countries.

For Zinn, the Trilateral Commission is an important example of the way the Establishment maintains its power. Here, for once, Zinn offers readers a literal, concrete example of rich, powerful people from business, government, and academics coming together to discuss how to maintain power over their own people. The Trilateral Commission—and, Zinn implies, the Establishment as a whole—wanted to limit its peoples' freedoms in order to maximize their own strength.

Another issue facing the **Trilateral Commission**—and, for that matter, the powerful elite of all countries—was the growth of a truly international economy. By the mid-seventies, the largest corporations in the world had largely ceased to be national entities: the largest banks, businesses, and media companies had offices and employees around the world. In 1976, Zinn notes, the American Establishment invested a huge amount of money in celebrating the Bicentennial, perhaps to distract people from the mood of paranoia and disillusionment. But in Boston, people chose to celebrate the "People's Bi-Centennial" instead, dumping packages marked, "Exxon" in the ocean, symbolizing the popular opposition to corporate power.

An important part of the Establishment's growing power in the 1970s was the growth of the banking industry. By the 70s, corporations had become truly international entities, with branches in many different countries and continents. However, at the same time that the corporations and governments of the world became more powerful, Americans continued to rebel against control. Indeed, the People's Bi-Centennial suggests that Americans were well away of the growing tyranny of corporations.

CHAPTER 21: CARTER-REAGAN-BUSH: THE BIPARTISAN CONSENSUS

Throughout American history, the presidents have been both liberal and conservative. However, liberal and conservative presidents have mostly held to a common agenda: protecting "property and enterprise," and cooperating with the most powerful people in the country to ensure the continuation of their status as elites. In the years following the Watergate Scandal, a series of American presidents entered the White House promising both liberal and conservative solutions for society's problems. However, all of these presidents remained loyal to a vision of "property and enterprise."

In his book, Zinn has argued that the most powerful, wealthy, and educated people in the country tend to cooperate with one another far more than they cooperate with the common man. There have been many exceptions for this rule in American history. However, in the last thirty years, Zinn argues, Republicans and Democrats have largely stayed on the same side, protecting the property of the wealthy while pretending to be deeply committed to the needs of the American people.

The presidency of Jimmy Carter seemed, at first, like an attempt to reach out to the disenfranchised and the downtrodden. But Carter's gestures to blacks, women, and the poor tended toward the symbolic. He appointed black women to some important cabinet positions, but "his most crucial appointments" were classic Establishment figures: Cold War intellectuals, former supporters of the Vietnam War, advocates of a high defense budget, etc. Almost all of Carter's appointees had strong corporate connections. Carter conducted a foreign policy that mixed human rights protections with capitalist self-interest. For example, he spoke out against apartheid (racial segregation and discrimination) in South Africa, but, in private, made it clear that the U.S. had an incentive to promote peace in South Africa in order to protect its corporate investments there. Meanwhile, multinational corporations were active "on a scale never seen before." Corporations invested heavily in the Third World and reaped huge profits. Furthermore, the military budget continued to grow. Carter supported tax reforms and reductions that benefitted large corporations.

Zinn's first case study for the "bipartisan consensus" is Jimmy Carter. Carter was elected in large part because the electorate believed that he could be a dynamic, transformative president who would honor the needs of the American people. However, as Zinn shows, Carter's policies were, by and large, traditional and economically conservative, while his gestures of goodwill toward minorities were largely symbolic. Zinn questions Carter's motives for opposing apartheid in South Africa, suggesting that Carter spoke out against apartheid mostly because apartheid threatened American business interests, not because he was morally opposed to the practice. Carter's administration is often seen as being weak and disorganized, but Zinn seems to imply that Carter knew exactly what he was doing: he allowed business to prosper while largely ignoring populist political causes.

In many ways, Carter's foreign policy continued the policies of Nixon and Johnson. He lobbied Congress to fund repressive regimes in Nicaragua, the Philippines, and Iran. In 1979, the dictatorial Shah of Iran, an American ally, was forced to flee the country because his people were demonstrating against him. Carter provided the Shah with shelter and medical treatment in the U.S. In Iran, demonstrators took over the American embassy and took American hostages, demanding that the Shah be returned to Iran immediately. In response, Carter ordered the deportation from the U.S. of hundreds of Iranian immigrants who lacked valid visas.

Carter's foreign policy is sometimes praised for representing a return to America's status as a "moral leader." However, Zinn argues that, in fact, Carter supported many corrupt, human rights-violating regimes, continuing the traditional Cold War strategies of his predecessors, Johnson and Nixon. However, Carter's decision to provide medical treatment for the Shah of Iran seems far more morally acceptable than the foreign policy decisions of Nixon and Johnson, suggesting that Carter's "support" for repressive regimes was more peaceful than his predecessors' support.

In the 1980 presidential elections, Ronald Reagan defeated Jimmy Carter, and just before Reagan was inaugurated, the Iranian hostages were released, apparently unharmed. For the next twelve years, the right wing of the American Establishment was in charge, "erasing even the faint liberalism of the Carter presidency." During this era, Reagan and his successor as president, George H. W. Bush, transformed the federal judiciary, by appointing right-wing judges. The Supreme Court brought back the death penalty and declared that education was not a "fundamental right." After the retirement of the liberal justice Thurgood Marshall, George H. W. Bush nominated a conservative black judge, Clarence Thomas. Thomas was confirmed by the Senate, in spite of testimony from a law professor, Anita Hill, that Thomas had sexually harassed her. Corporate America benefitted enormously from the Reagan-Bush years: these presidents' deregulatory policies made it harder for workers to sue their companies.

During the Reagan-Bush years, the two back-to-back Republican presidents were able to institute a series of conservative policies and fill the court systems with conservative justices, ensuring the conservatism of the American court system for years to come (to this day, some of the most conservative justices on the Supreme Court were appointed by Reagan and Bush). Bush's decision to appoint Clarence Thomas, an African-American man who disagreed with almost all the liberal policies of his predecessor on the Court, Thurgood Marshall, suggests that Bush was more interested in symbolic gestures toward minorities (i.e., appointing a black man to a high office) than in genuinely helping the black community.

Between 1981 and 1993, Bush and Reagan avoided passing many environmental regulations. Reagan stated many times that businesses should be able to take a "voluntary approach" to environmental policy, and, although Bush signed into law the Clean Air Act of 1990, he also allowed manufacturers to increase pollution. At the same time that, around the world, governments and environmental groups were coming together in recognition of the impending ecological crisis, the U.S. government remained oblivious.

While it's certainly true that Bush and Reagan passed many deregulatory laws that gave businesses a free reign to pollute and endanger the environment, one gets the sense that Zinn is misrepresenting the record somewhat to make Bush seem even more opposed to environmentalism than he really was. The fact remains that he signed the Clean Air Act, an important piece of environmental legislation.

Reagan and Bush supported a fiscal policy that consisted of growing the military budget while cutting welfare. Reagan insisted that by cutting taxes for the richest Americans, the country would benefit from new investment. Reagan's tax cuts were shown to have no discernible impact on new investment; indeed, some studies have suggested that investment increases at times when corporate taxes are *higher*, not lower. By cutting social programs, Reagan contributed to higher unemployment, and guaranteed that some people with disabilities could no longer support themselves. Surprisingly, many Democrats joined Reagan in denouncing social programs. Indeed, many studies have found that, since World War Two, Democrats, more than Republicans, have been instrumental in lowering taxes for the wealthy. During the Carter administration, the Democratic Congress supported tax reforms that deducted greater amounts from low-income workers' checks. As a result of tax reform, the gap between rich and poor heightened.

Perhaps Reagan and Bush's most notable policies involved lowering taxes on the wealthiest Americans, on the basis that lower taxes for the wealthy would stimulate the economy as a whole. This theory of "trickle-down economics" has been hotly disputed by generations of economists. Furthermore, Zinn argues that Democrats have been even more aggressive in lowering taxes for the wealthy than Republicans. However, Zinn misrepresents the history of Johnson's Great Society welfare programs (which he barely touched on in earlier chapters, probably because it flatly contradicts his argument about a bipartisan consensus) to suggest that Democrats lowered taxes on the wealthy to help the Establishment. In fact, they did so largely as a gesture of compromise with Republicans to ensure that Republicans would support expanding welfare.

By the late 1980s a third of African American families had fallen below the poverty line, and crime in black communities was on the rise. Often, advocates of the "free market" claimed that poor people were victims of their own laziness, though, as Zinn notes, "they did not ask why babies who were not old enough to show their work skills should be penalized—to the point of death—for growing up in a poor family."

One of the worst aspects of the 1980s culture of success and prosperity was that poor people were blamed for their own poverty. Needless to say, such an idea obscured the structural inequalities in American society, which kept the poor in poverty.

The free market policies of Carter, Reagan, and Bush led to a major scandal. By the late eighties, many of the largest savings and loans banks in the country had drained their assets by betting on risky investments. The fragility of America's banking system was never a major factor in an election, however, because both the Republican and Democratic parties were involved in "covering up the situation" in Congress.

Zinn doesn't go into great detail when discussing the financial instability of the market in the late 1980s; however, he argues that both Democrats and Republicans were involved in covering it up, reinforcing his theory of a bipartisan consensus.

During the eighties, the federal government continued to lavish large sums on the military. While many government insiders privately confessed that they couldn't see how it would be profitable for the Soviet Union to try to invade Western Europe, the government continued to tell its people that the world was in danger of a Russian invasion, and that defense buildup was the only way to prevent such a catastrophe. In 1984, "the CIA admitted that it had exaggerated Soviet military buildup."

The federal government continued to exaggerate the danger posed by Soviet buildup in order to justify its own rampant defense spending—spending which the majority of Americans opposed.

During the Reagan-Bush years, the U.S. supported an active foreign policy. Under Reagan, the U.S. deployed troops to Nicaragua to quell the populist Sandinista movement against the Nicaraguan government (an ally of the U.S.). The government directed the CIA to train counterrevolutionaries, the "contras," to fight the Sandinistas. Even after Congress passed a bill making it illegal for the U.S. to support military action in Nicaragua, Reagan persisted in supporting the contras. To fund the contras, the Reagan administration secretly sold weapons to Iran—a violation of the Constitution—in return for hostages that Iranian extremists were keeping in Lebanon. When news of the administration's actions broke, the Reagan administration lied and claimed that the weapons hadn't been traded for hostages at all. Later, when the administration's lies were clear, Congress prosecuted Colonel Oliver North for overseeing the contra aid operation—Reagan himself was never indicted. Congress completely ignored the heart of the matter: "How were the president and his staff permitted to support a terrorist group in Central America to overthrow a government that, whatever its faults, is welcomed by its own people as a great improvement over the terrible governments the U.S. has supported there for years?"

During the 1980s, Reagan continued his predecessors' style of foreign policy: in essence, supporting right-wing, repressive regimes in order to ensure the health of American business and the weakness of Socialism abroad. Colonel Oliver North is often considered to have been a "fall guy" for Reagan. In other words, North was a scapegoat whose only function was to draw attention away from Ronald Reagan himself, who, it's quite likely, was personally involved in supporting the illegal sale of weapons in Iran. As Zinn sees it, the heart of the Iran-Contra Scandal was that Reagan was using federal funds to support a war on the Sandinistas, a widely supported group in Nicaragua, thereby challenging the Nicaraguans' rights of popular sovereignty. Congressmen criticized Reagan's personal behavior during the scandal, but didn't attack the basic principle of violent foreign intervention, suggesting that they agreed with him in principle.

At many other points during the Reagan-Bush years, the U.S. government broke the law by deploying troops abroad without consulting Congress first. Reagan deployed troops to the tiny island of Grenada, supposedly because a recent military coup was endangering American lives, but in reality because Grenada was a key American tax haven, which the Establishment had a vested interest in protecting. In Latin America more generally, the U.S. conducted a particularly "crass" foreign policy, in which the ties between military action and business interests were always very clear. The Carter and Reagan administrations funded the government in El Salvador, which was known to protect American corporate interests. Furthermore, it is very likely that, under the Carter administration, the CIA supported the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero, a prominent left-wing opponent of the government, by financing violent right-ring groups.

Carter, Reagan, and Bush conducted aggressive foreign policies in Latin America, ensuring that other countries in the Western hemisphere would protect American business interests. The U.S. government was, in all likelihood, involved in silencing vocal critics of American foreign policy, including a Catholic priest, Oscar Romero.

Early in the Bush presidency, it became clear that the Soviet Union was on the verge of collapse: there were mass demonstrations in Russia and Eastern Europe, and the government was weak and fragile. Conservative intellectuals claimed that Reagan's hard-line policies and defense spending had weakened the Soviet Union. However, in many ways, the "hard line" was an obstacle to the end of the Cold War, since it encouraged both sides to spend more on the military.

While it's still commonly asserted that Reagan's nuclear buildup accelerated the process by which the Soviet Union bankrupted itself, Zinn argues that such an assertion completely misses the point: by building up the nuclear arsenal for fifty years, both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. endangered their own people and prolonged the Cold War.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, America had a shining opportunity to rethink its military spending. However, instead of taking the opportunity to cut down on the military, the Establishment almost immediately launched new wars, one in Panama and one in Iraq, "as if to prove that the gigantic military establishment was still necessary."

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, America did not seriously reconsider its foreign policy; it continued to deploy troops around the world to ensure American businesses' continued prosperity.

In 1990, Saddam Hussein, the brutal dictator of Iraq, invaded the neighboring country of Kuwait. Bush, who needed "something to boost his popularity among American voters," deployed forces to Kuwait, despite the fact that the United Nations had successfully established effective sanctions against Iraq. Many journalists speculated that Bush unnecessarily sent troops to Iraq to ensure his reelection. Others suggested that Bush sent troops to the Middle East to secure control over lucrative oil fields. Nevertheless, the media presented only one motive for the invasion: to liberate Kuwait. Few journalists pointed to the large number of other countries that had been invaded around the same time without any response from the U.S., let alone the countries that the U.S. itself had invaded.

It's been suggested that George H. W. Bush deliberately started a war in Iraq in order make himself more popular with the American electorate. Even if this isn't true, it's plain that the first war in Iraq extended America's Cold War foreign policy and gave U.S. oil companies access to Kuwait's valuable oil reserves (although Hussein arranged for many oil fields to be burned before the American military could access them). As with other military conflicts in American history, the press was largely supportive of the war.

During the war in Kuwait, the Bush administration took care to publicize information about the sophistication of the military's technology, greatly increasing support for the war. U.S. forces bombed Iraqi cities, killing thousands of civilians, despite the Pentagon's insistence that there were almost no civilian casualties in Iraq. The media remained obsequiously loyal to the government during this time. Only much later did it become clear that the invasion of Iraq had caused starvation, disease, and the deaths of tens of thousands of children.

The government tried to downplay the number of civilian casualties in Iraq, probably because it knew that the American people would be less likely to support a war in which innocent Iraqi women and children died. While the Gulf War was highly popular at the time, it's unlike that so many Americans would have supported it had they known that it would cause the deaths of tens of thousands of children.

Surprisingly, the War in Iraq did not end with the deposing of Saddam Hussein. Instead, the American military pulled out before marching to Baghdad, leaving Hussein power. It seems that the U.S. government's goal was to weaken Hussein, while still leaving him as a stabilizing force against Iran. Indeed, the U.S. had previously sold weapons to both Iran and Iraq.

It's not immediately clear why the American military didn't attempt to depose Saddam Hussein, although it's been suggested that the U.S. needed Hussein to stabilize the region (in the last ten years, it's been pointed out that Hussein's fall in the mid-2000s destabilized the Middle East and paved the way for the rise of the Islamic State). However, the fact that the military allowed Hussein to continue as dictator of Iraq suggests that it was never interested in intervening in Iraq for moral reasons.

In the U.S., the powerful elite regarded the invasion of Iraq as a triumph of technology and organization. Both Democrats and Republicans celebrated the war effort, and Bush declared, "The specter of Vietnam had been buried forever." Throughout the country, journalists, politicians, and other elites saw Iraq as a "cure" for the public's opposition to war in Vietnam. On the other hand, a black poet in California said of the war, "It's a hit the same way that crack is, and it doesn't last long."

While the Gulf War was widely praised as a success, Zinn suggests that the American people would continue to be skeptical of American wars and military interventions. Thus, the Gulf War may have "seduced" the public into supporting war, but ultimately, it couldn't hide the injustices of American foreign policy.

CHAPTER 22: THE UNREPORTED RESISTANCE

In the early 1990s, a journalist wrote about the existence of a "permanent adversarial culture" in the U.S. The journalist was absolutely correct: throughout American history, millions of Americans have "refused, either actively or silently, to go along." The Democratic party has tried to win some of these people's votes, and, in fact, depends on these votes. However, the Democratic party has been unable to appeal to the adversarial culture in substantive ways, due to its loyalty to corporate interests and the American system's overall dependency on war.

Throughout this book, Zinn has praised the American people for their resistance to government propaganda and jingoism. Again and again, ordinary American people have resorted to demonstrations, riots, nonviolent resistance, and other forms of protest to express their dissatisfaction with the Establishment.

Dissatisfied with both political parties, Americans demonstrated against their government throughout the 1980s. In 1980, peace activists demonstrated outside the Pentagon against the buildup of the nuclear arsenal; later, they were arrested for their nonviolent civil disobedience. Later in the 1980s, as the movement against nuclear buildup expanded, peace groups encouraged referenda on nuclear disarmament. In 1982, the largest political demonstration in the country's history took place in Central Park, New York City, against nuclear buildup. Throughout the eighties, activists staged protests against Reagan's policies in the Middle East and Central America. Zinn notes that, during his time as a professor at Boston University in the 1980s, he rarely noticed selfishness or unconcern in his students. Rather, he found that young people were highly committed to social activism and social justice. Students protested Reagan's cuts to welfare and the arts, as well as his tepid responses to police brutality against blacks.

The 1980s aren't often thought of as a time of widespread political protest. However, Zinn shows that, in fact, millions of people protested and demonstrated against what they saw as government corruption and injustice during the 1980s. People of all ages and backgrounds joined together to protest America's unjust policies, both in other countries and at home.

Despite the abundance of committed social activism in America in the eighties, the press, by and large, did not report on activism. Furthermore, the press persisted in characterizing the elections of Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush as "landslides." In so doing, the press overlooked the facts that 1) about half the voting population didn't vote, 2) those who did vote were limited to two main candidates, 3) many of those who voted were unenthusiastic about either candidate, and 4) "there was little relationship between voting for a candidate and voting for specific policies." In the eighties and nineties, no president was elected with the support of more than thirty percent of the voting population. However, because of the idiosyncrasies of the electoral college system, the media pointed to each victory as a "landslide." Even so, most American voters didn't support their chosen candidates' policies. Despite the fact that a majority of Americans supported a "Canadian-type health system," reduction in the military budget, and increased welfare, neither Democrats nor Republicans were willing to entertain such policies.

Again, Zinn discusses the ways that the media colludes with the Establishment. In election years, news networks often focus on the electoral college more than the popular vote, because it's easier for presidential candidates to win "landslide" victories in the college than in the popular vote (for example, George Bush barely defeated Michael Dukakis in the popular vote in 1988, but he won a "sweeping victory" in the electoral college). By focusing so excessively on the electoral college, the media hide the fact that most Americans are disillusioned with voting, and have no interest in voting for any presidential candidate. They don't feel that the American political system is representing their needs and beliefs.

During the 1980s, there was no cohesive "national movement for radical change," but there were hundreds of smaller movements that reflected the people's dissatisfaction with the government. Protesters challenged the nuclear power plant industry. In the South, there were hundreds of "local groups organizing poor people, white and black."

Although he admits that the 1980s didn't see a cohesive national radical movement, Zinn insists that the American people continued to work together, transcending race, to protest what they saw as the Establishment's abuses of power.

One of the most important activist movements in the 1980s was the Chicano movement. Chicanos—people of Mexican descent living mostly in California and the Southwest, had been active in protests and activism in the 1960s, and in the seventies and eighties, when poverty "hit them hard,' they retaliated by going on strike. Some Chicano strikers in California and New Mexico succeeded in winning union contracts for themselves. Also during the decade, the Latino population of the U.S. grew until it matched the percentage of the population that was African-American. With the influx of Latin people in the U.S. came some significant changes in American culture, especially its music and art. Latino immigrants were instrumental in building awareness of the injustices the U.S. facilitated in Latin America.

In this chapter, Zinn gives brief accounts of the many different populist, radical movements of American society in the 1980s. The Chicano activists of the Southwest were influential because they brought awareness of America's foreign policy in Latin America, and also fostered important changes in American music and art.

In the eighties and nineties, the feminist movement faced a strong backlash from opponents of abortion. Congress passed laws that cut federal benefits designed to help the poor pay for abortions. However, the National Organization of Women (NOW) stayed strong in the 1980s, and in 1989, NOW held a rally in Washington, D.C. that attracted over 300,000 people. Other major forms of activism in the eighties and nineties included the gay rights movement, which, in 1994, held a Stonewall 25 march in Manhattan, commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall riots, when gay men fought against a police raid at the Stonewall bar in Greenwich village. Homosexual activists fought discrimination in the workplace and lobbied the government to fund AIDS research. However, the labor movement was greatly weakened "by the decline of manufacturing."

Zinn has been criticized for not spending enough time discussing the feminist movement of the 1980s or the massive AIDS movement of the same period. Indeed, Zinn mentions AIDS only four times in the 700 pages of his book. For a more thorough account of AIDS activism in the 1980s, readers should consult Randy Shilts's And the Band Played On.

In the weeks leading up to Bush's declaration of war against Iraq, Vietnam activists, including Ron Kovic, led protests opposing America's military involvement overseas, and college students across the nation demonstrated. After the war began, the tides turned, and popular support for the war increased. However, Zinn asks, "Was it an accurate reflection of the citizenry's long-term feelings about war?" Zinn posits that the American people were "swept up" in propagandistic support for the war, and didn't truly support it at all. And even if a majority of Americans did support the war, there were hundreds of protests and demonstrations against the war. Protesters pointed out that, until very recently, the American government had ignored Saddam Hussein's acts of genocide in Iraq. Only now was it deciding to "liberate" Kuwait, timing that suggested that the government had other motives.

In this section, Zinn is faced with the awkward task of accounting for the American people's widespread support for a war that, as per his own arguments, was unjust and deeply immoral. Zinn argues that, had the American people known the truth about the Gulf War, they wouldn't have been so eager to support it; furthermore, he suggests that government propaganda tricked Americans into supporting the Gulf War. Zinn has been criticized for skewing the evidence and making the American people seem more morally committed and opposed to foreign military intervention than they really were.

In the year following the end of war in Kuwait, support for the war, and for Bush, fell off. Activists continued to push for the idea of a "peace dividend"—in other words, the idea of taking a portion of the defense budget and using it for human needs. Americans demonstrated their understanding of the genocidal origins of their own country when, in 1992, on the 400th anniversary of Columbus's discovery of the New World, they protested Columbus's legacy. Indians across the country demonstrated on Columbus Day 1992 and lobbied textbook companies to "tell the truth" about Columbus. Indians' efforts proved influential and sparked a major rethinking of Columbus's legacy in K-12 classrooms.

Even though Zinn is mostly critical of the quality of contemporary American textbooks, he's willing to acknowledge that American history textbooks have gotten better in recent years, largely because of the activism of Native Americans and other left-minded activists.

The effort to rethink Columbus's legacy was greeted with horror by many powerful people in America. William Bennett, the Secretary of Education under Ronald Reagan, argued that Americans needed to respect their "common heritage" instead of questioning and criticizing it. But activists, especially feminists and advocates of black equality, questioned the idea that there was one "historical tradition" that bound all Americans together.

Zinn alludes to the "culture wars" of the 1980s; the widespread debate about which texts should be taught and studied in classrooms. Many elites believed that American students should respect tradition (and traditional books, heroes, versions of history, etc.) instead of learning to question it. However, in A People's History, *Zinn encourages readers to treat tradition with skepticism instead of reverence.*

In all, as the nineties dawned, the U.S. remained under the control of powerful people, some of whom were Republicans and some of whom were Democrats. The Establishment was enormously powerful, not only because of its wealth, but also because it controlled the media. Even if the media largely refused to report on activism in America, it was clear that the "adversarial culture" wasn't going away; on the contrary, people continued to fight for "a more equal, more humane society."

Zinn concludes his chapter on the bipartisan consensus by arguing that the differences between Republicans and Democrats are minimal compared to the differences between elites and the common man. As Zinn sees it, the common man will continue to fight for equality and justice, even though the American Establishment continues to maintain an unjust balance of power.

CHAPTER 23: THE COMING REVOLT OF THE GUARDS

The title of this chapter, Zinn begins, is a hope, not a prediction. Throughout his book, Zinn has tried to give a sense of the role of common, ordinary people in American history. Where most history textbooks emphasize heroic figures, who are usually elected throughout organized political means, Zinn believes that people need no such saviors to improve their own lives. Instead, Americans have taken change into their own hands.

This was the original final chapter of A People's History of the United States*—later, Zinn added two chapters, one on the Clinton presidency, and one on the war on terror. Here, however, Zinn summarizes some of his ideas and encourages readers to take history "into their own hands."*

"The American system," Zinn continues, "is the most ingenious system of control in world history." The U.S. is a rich, powerful country, and, in order to control its own people, the government doles out just enough money to just enough people to avoid a full-scale revolution. The powerful elite in America are masters of turning the working classes and middle classes against each other. Furthermore, these elites have used patriotism and the threat of war to strengthen their control over their own people. Again and again, however, the American elites have tried and failed to neutralize the inherent threat stemming from their own populations.

Throughout his book, Zinn has argued that America controls its people by giving them just enough freedom and income to prevent a full-scale revolution. From the earliest days of the American colonies, when elites separated slaves and poor white servants, to the modern era, when the Establishment fostered the stratification of the black community, powerful people have remained united in their common goals while trying to divide and weaken the American people.

In times of crisis, American people have mobilized against the Establishment, proving "the enormous capacity of apparently helpless people to resist." While it's unfortunately true that most rebellion in American history has been unsuccessful in achieving many of its goals, history textbooks do a disservice to the truth by underestimating the role of revolt and emphasizing the importance of individual statesmen and leaders.

While Zinn's vision of history—a constant process in which the American people try, and fail, to enact their dreams—may be somewhat depressing, it's important that students understand the radicalism of their country's history, instead of thinking of history as a collection of "great, dead, white men."

Many of the people reading this book, Zinn guesses, stand between the Establishment and the working class: they have some limited power and privilege, but not much. Members of the middle class need to face the fact that they're like the guards at the Attica prison riots: they're doing the bidding of the Establishment and destroying the possibility of a radical change in America. America is at a turning-point for the middle class: in particular, "white workers, neither rich nor poor, but angry over economic insecurity" are "open to solutions from any direction, right or left." In the 1920s, the white middle class faced a similar crossroads—while many white middle-class people joined organizations like the Ku Klux Klan, many others gravitated toward leftist causes like organized labor.

Throughout his book, Zinn has been mostly silent on the question of the middle class. Sometimes, Zinn has treated the middle classes as a part of the "American people"—a persecuted group. On other occasions, Zinn has treated the middle classes as a part of the Establishment—the metaphorical "guards" who help enact the Establishment's brutal policies. In a sense, Zinn sees the middle classes as having a choice: they can stand on the side of the elite and perpetuate injustice in society, or they can choose to cooperate with the working classes.

For much of the second half of the 20th century, the Establishment offered a simple solution to the problem of crime and civil unrest: expand the jails. As America enters the 21st century, it's clear to many that the expansion of the prison system will not keep society at peace, it will only create an endless cycle of crime and punishment. The future of the American middle class, Zinn predicts, rests on whether they will continue to accept prisons as a valid solution for the structural problems of society, or if they will support a deeper "change in the system" that addresses the root causes of crime and violence.

Zinn's observations about the growth of the prison-industrial complex proved prophetic. In the decades following the publication of Zinn's book, the number of incarcerated Americans increased dramatically, prompting widespread outrage. The prison system, it's been argued, actually perpetuates crime in America by creating a permanent underclass of felons who have no choice but to commit more crimes to survive.

Zinn asks, "Let us be utopian for a moment" and imagine "what radical change would require of us all." First, radical change would require the Establishment to lose their means of control: the media, the military, corporate pressure, etc. Then, it would require everyone to work together, even the young, the disabled, and the elderly. The great problem facing a radical society would be to ensure peace and harmony without creating a "centralized bureaucracy" or using the disincentives of prison. Surely the only way to create such a utopia would be to harness all the lessons accumulated in previous radical American movements. And the utopia could only be realized with the help of the middle class as well as the working class—the "guards" as well as the "prisoners."

It's striking that, after hundreds and hundreds of pages, Zinn has refrained from sketching out his vision of what American society should be like. Zinn's role is that of a teacher, not a prophet. In other words, he's trying to sketch out some of the injustices of history rather than proposing specific remedies for these injustices. Zinn was known to be supportive of some Anarchist ideas, and here, his vision of an ideal society seems heavily Anarchist: people would opt in to society voluntarily, rather than being compelled to join it. Zinn's utopian vision also reflects his Marxist training—like Marx, he recognizes that the middle classes must play a decisive role in bringing about world change.

While building utopia might be impossible, we need to remember all the times in American history when it *did* seem possible—during the 1960s, for example. The great lesson of the 1960s is that a determined population is much stronger than the American Establishment. Perhaps, in the 21st century, the working classes will continue to rebel and this time they'll be joined by the middle class, too. Middle-class figures—a group in which Zinn includes himself—need to realize that, by default, they're the guards of the prison. Once they realize such a fact, they can begin to engineer change so that, one day, "our great grandchildren might possibly see a different and marvelous world."

Zinn is an optimist, but he's also a realist. He wants the people of the United States to work together to challenge the power of the Establishment, but he also recognizes that it will be very difficult for them to do so. Nevertheless, in his role as a historian, Zinn tries to show his readers that it's possible to assemble broad, radical coalitions, just as people did in the 1960s, the 1910s, and the 1840s. Furthermore, Zinn addresses his own status as a middle-class "guard." Even though he's the product of a university system designed to perpetuate inequality in society, Zinn is trying to use his university education to dismantle the Establishment and promote equality and freedom.

CHAPTER 24: THE CLINTON PRESIDENCY

When Bill Clinton was elected president in 1992, many believed that he would be a transformative president. In the end, he was not. His final years in office were full of scandals, and he repeatedly "surrendered" to corporate and conservative interests. He barely won both of his elections, reflecting many Americans' indifference to the existing political order. While Clinton was a charismatic, likable figure, "his rhetoric was not matched by his performance."

In this chapter, Zinn will discuss the legacy of Bill Clinton, the President of the United States from 1993 to 2001. He begins by sketching out his basic argument: Clinton billed himself as a transformative president, but he just continued the policies of his predecessors.

Clinton repeatedly demonstrated his loyalty to the market system and made efforts to make the Democratic party a "business party." When appointing cabinet members, Clinton took care to appoint black, pro-labor people to lesser positions, but his main advisers were mostly "wealthy corporate lawyers" or "traditional players on the bipartisan Cold War team." His unwillingness to follow through on his rhetoric of equality and change became clear when Lani Guinier, a prospective hire for the Justice Department, made comments about racial equality that conservative critics found too strong; faced with a controversy, Clinton abandoned Guinier. Similarly, when nominating Supreme Court justices, Clinton chose two fairly moderate figures, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer, rather than a genuinely transformative justice in the tradition of Thurgood Marshall.

Much like Jimmy Carter before him, Clinton claimed that he would put representatives of historically marginalized groups—blacks, women, Latinos, etc.—in important leadership roles. However, most of Clinton's cabinet consisted of traditional Establishment figures: educated, business-friendly, etc. Zinn argues that Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer were moderate justices. Though many have argued that Ginsburg is the farthest-left member of the Supreme Court, this perhaps says more about the Court than about Ginsburg.

Clinton tried to prove that he was "tough on crime." During his campaign, he oversaw the execution of a mentally retarded criminal and later he sent the FBI to attack a group of religious fanatics in Waco, Texas. Instead of waiting to negotiate, the FBI fired on the fanatics, starting a fire that killed 86 people, including women and children. Clinton also introduced laws to toughen drug sentencing, ultimately adding around one million people to the prison population. During the Clinton presidency, immigrants—one of the quintessential "bogeymen" that American politicians have used to frighten their voters into obedience—began to face harsher treatment. Clinton's crime bills strengthened the power of America's border guards; Clinton also supported bills to allow the deportation of any immigrant ever convicted of a crime, "no matter how long ago or how serious."

Throughout his presidency, Clinton tried to assemble a broad coalition of voters by appealing to both conservative and liberal causes. Thus, he made an effort to appear "tough on crime"—a traditionally conservative cause. Like many conservative presidents, Clinton supported policies that protected American borders and made it more difficult for immigrants to enter the country.

The Clinton administration did not "establish government programs to create jobs." Indeed, Clinton claimed, "The era of big government is over," probably to appeal to more conservative voters in the 1996 presidential elections. Clinton's remarks were hypocritical, since his administration made no significant cuts to the military budget, even after it cut some forms of welfare.

At the time, many Republicans criticized Clinton for making cuts to the defense budget; however, in Zinn's book, these cuts were "minimal," and did not go far enough in remedying the structural problems with American society. Furthermore, Clinton cut some forms of welfare that further weakened the American working class.

Clinton supported an active, aggressive foreign policy. Within six months of inauguration, he ordered the Air Force to bomb Baghdad, allegedly because of a plot to assassinate George H. W. Bush, the evidence for which was weak. In so doing, Clinton violated Article 51 of the UN Charter, which expressly forbids military action that is not "in defense against an armed attack." Clinton also deployed troops to Somalia, though when a genocidal campaign broke out in the country of Rwanda the next year, Clinton ordered the UN forces in Rwanda to step down, effectively allowing the genocide to continue.

Like most modern American presidents, Clinton favored an aggressive, militaristic foreign policy, and he repeatedly violated international law by sending aggressive troops into foreign countries. Some have disputed Zinn's account of Clinton's role in the Rwandan genocide. Zinn attacks Clinton for being too interventionist and then he attacks Clinton for not being interventionist enough.

Clinton's foreign policy followed the Cold War paradigm of "maintaining friendly relations with whatever governments were in power, and promoting profitable trade arrangements with them, whatever their record in protecting human rights." The administration maintained alliances with Indonesia, a country with a horrific record of mass-murder. Military interests continued to drive policy; for instance, when the Red Cross launched a campaign urging governments to suspend the use of "cluster bombs," the U.S. refused to cooperate.

Clinton continued the Cold War policies of his presidential predecessors, despite the fact that the Cold War was over. In doing so, Clinton ensured that military interests would continue to drive American government.

It's instructive to compare the Clinton administration's relations with two Communist nations, China and Cuba. China has a lengthy history of human rights abuses, and yet Clinton gave the Chinese government economic aid and trade privileges in return for its support of U.S. corporate interests. Cuba, by contrast, has "no bloody record of suppression as did Communist China." And yet the Clinton administration continued to place an embargo on Cuba that deprived Cubans of food and medicine.

Zinn suggests that Clinton's administration lent some economic support to China to ensure business cooperation between the two countries, but didn't do the same for Cuba because Cuba wasn't a significant economic force in the Western hemisphere. (However, many would disagree with Zinn's claim that Cuba has no bloody record of suppression—Castro violently suppressed a great number of Cuban dissidents.)

During the Clinton presidency, "free trade" became an important slogan. In Clinton's first term, Congress signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which "removed obstacles for corporate capital" and allowed American business to move across the Mexican-American border. Later economic studies found that NAFTA had resulted in a net loss of tens of thousands of American jobs, since American corporations, now based in Mexico, hired cheaper Mexican labor. In reality, free trade was not "free" at all; the government interfered with trade whenever it felt that interference benefited "the national interest." For example, the Clinton administration prevented shipments of food and medicine from entering Iraq, a decision that may have killed as many as half a million children.

Clinton is often seen as a supporter of neoliberalism, the set of policies that favor "free trade" between different countries. As Zinn argues, however, "free trade" isn't as idealistic a system as its name might suggest. Indeed, businesses support free trade because it allows them to gain cheap labor for their factories and facilities, taking jobs away from American workers. Furthermore, the Clinton administration proved that it was more than willing to interfere with "free trade" whenever it wanted—for example, it interfered with trade in Iraq, depriving children of food and medicine. (One politician described Clinton's Iraqi sanctions as "infanticide masquerading as politics.")

In 1998, Clinton faced his biggest challenge: the accusations that he'd had sex with a young government worker named Monica Lewinsky. Clinton proceeded to lie about his relationship, and, as a result, he was impeached (i.e. called to stand trail before Congress). Congress impeached Clinton for his private sexual behavior—not his dangerous welfare cuts, his aggressive, illegal foreign policies, or his child-killing sanctions in Iraq. The same year, Clinton deployed NATO forces to Yugoslavia, supposedly to suppress the "ethnic cleansing" policies in Kosovo. However, data later showed that bombings had forced almost a million people to leave the country, including civilians and children. Some writers have argued that the international community should have pursued diplomacy instead of resorting to bombing. Yet the Clinton administration, like its predecessors, preferred displays of military force to diplomacy.

After everything Clinton had done to support inequality, starvation, and human rights abuses around the world, it's remarkable that Congress impeached him for something as relatively minor as his extramarital affair with Monica Lewinsky. Congress turned a blind eye to Clinton's foreign policy decisions in Yugoslavia, which, according to some political critics, including the activist and linguist Noam Chomsky (a close friend of Howard Zinn), resulted in the deaths of thousands of civilians,.

During the Clinton years, the richest one percent of the country grew to control a larger portion of the total wealth in the country—around forty percent. For many, the nineties were a time of economic growth, since the stock market was healthy. However, an appalling percentage of the population lacked health insurance, even while the military budget continued to grow. There continued to be a racial gap in America: children of black families were far less likely to attend college and succeed in life than children from white families, a gap largely attributable to a "terrible environment" that prevented success for "millions of Americans, whether white or black."

One of the defining themes of American politics in the last twenty years has been the growing inequality between the richest and the poorest American citizens. Clinton, as Zinn sees it, did nothing to prevent the widening inequality of the American economy. Zinn also argues that Clinton didn't do enough to address the income gap between black and white families, a gap which seems to illustrate the ongoing racism of American society.

Clinton did not profoundly change the structures of American society. Clinton raised taxes on the wealthy by a "pitifully" small amount, but continued to lavish money on the military. Clinton often claimed that his policies were moderate because the American people were moderate in their beliefs. However, polls regularly showed that most Americans wanted major cuts to the military, universal health care, and government help for the poor.

During his presidency, Clinton was widely seen as a skilled "triangulator"—someone who could make compromises between different political factions. Zinn believes that, by triangulating and compromising on so many political issues, Clinton failed to honor the American people, who wanted radical changes to the welfare, tax, and health care systems. (However, Zinn doesn't touch upon Clinton's widely publicized efforts to reform the healthcare system, perhaps in order to portray Clinton as more passive and disloyal to the American people than he really was.)

Americans protested and demonstrated against the Clinton administration. After the government announced that it would be bombing Iraq because Iraq had failed to allow anyone to inspect its "weapons of mass destruction," students at the University of California at Berkeley made banners saying that Madeline Albright, the Secretary of State, was a war criminal. Many writers and professors pointed out that Saddam Hussein, the dictator of Iraq, had previously fought wars in the Middle East with CIA funding. Other activists participated in the "Million Man March" on Washington, D.C. in 1995, and founded the Black Radical Congress in Chicago in 1998. Unions continued to strike, often under female leadership. Also during the nineties, students united with unions to demand better pay for school employees. Leftists founded alternative media to challenge the Establishment consensus. Evidently, some of the "spirit of the sixties" had survived into the nineties, despite the Establishment's efforts to wipe it out.

In spite of the overall health of the American economy, the American people continued to demonstrate and protest against what they saw as the injustice of American foreign policy under the Clinton administration. As in the 1960s, students were at the center of the protest movement of the 1990s. Black activism, feminism, and the labor movement remained strong, proving, once again, that the American people were resilient in their opposition to the Establishment.

Perhaps the most dramatic display of activist strength in the nineties took place in 1999, when hundreds of thousands of activists demonstrated outside a meeting of the World Trade Organization in Seattle, showing their opposition to the hypocrisies of "free trade"—which is to say, "the freedom of corporations to roam the globe in search of cheap labor and no restrictions on industrial policies that poisoned the environment." The corporate world found it hard to ignore popular opposition. Many businesses and international organizations declared their "concern for the environment and the conditions of their workers," though whether they'd do anything substantive to alter their policies remained unclear.

That so many people would demonstrate against the World Trade Organization suggests that, contrary to what the media often claim, American radicalism isn't dead. Huge numbers of common, everyday Americans sincerely believe that they're living in an unjust time and fear that business leaders and powerful politicians aren't doing enough to preserve the environment and address economic inequality in American society.

As America entered the 21st century, it remained clear that real, profound social change would not come from the "top." The country would change if and only if ordinary citizens worked together, "threatening those in power with disruption of the stability they needed."

Zinn ends the chapter by reiterating one of his most important points: although the most powerful people in American society like to take credit for social change, true, radical change can only come from the American people.

CHAPTER 25: THE 2000 ELECTION AND THE "WAR ON TERRORISM"

In the 2000 presidential election, the candidates were Albert Gore, Bill Clinton's Vice President, and George W. Bush, the son of George H. W. Bush and the Governor of Texas, "known for his connection to oil interests and the record number of executions of prisoners during his term in office." Neither candidate offered a plan for national health care or widespread environmental reform, and both supported the death penalty and the growth of prisons. Both were also considered to be friendly to business interests. The third-party candidate, Ralph Nader, who supported environmental reform and universal health care, was effectively shut out of television and national debates. Most Americans didn't bother to vote for anyone.

In the final chapter of his book, Zinn addresses the history of George W. Bush's war on terror. While this is the shortest and least thorough chapter in the book, Zinn makes the same fundament points that he's made already: in the early 2000s, a bipartisan coalition of politicians campaigned for power without offering any broad programs of change for American society. (However, Zinn doesn't address the fact that Gore was a well-known advocate of environmental reform, perhaps in order to make Gore and Bush seem more comparable in their political agendas).

Ultimately, the election came down to a handful of districts in Florida, where the election results were hotly disputed along partisan lines. Thus, the Republican secretary of state in Florida, Katherine Harris, rushed the recounting, and then certified that Bush had won by a few hundred votes. Gore appealed the decision to the Supreme Court, where the five conservative justices overruled the four liberal justices to find that no further recounts would be allowed, effectively handing the election to Bush.

The Bush v. Gore Supreme Court case was a clear example of two Establishment factions—Democrats and Republicans—fighting with each other for power. While Zinn doesn't deny that conflicts of this kind are common in government, he argues that, ultimately, they're less important than the commonalities between Republican and Democratic politicians, which lead them to pass legislation furthering elite interests at the common man's expense.


On September 11, 2001, shortly after his inauguration, Bush faced a crisis: an attack on the World Trade Center in New York and on the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. Nineteen Middle Eastern men, mostly from Saudi Arabia, were willing to sacrifice their lives to "deliver a deadly blow against what they clearly saw as their enemy." Bush responded by declaring a "war on terror," and Congress complied by passing resolutions giving him the power of military force. Bush claimed that his goal was to apprehend Osama Bin Laden, the engineer of the 9/11 attacks, and he ordered the bombing of Afghanistan, where Bin Laden was supposedly hiding.

Zinn's discussion of the 9/11 terrorist attacks is wildly different from that found in most textbooks, or elsewhere in the media. Zinn doesn't automatically demonize the nineteen terrorists who attacked the World Trade Center; instead, he suggests (later in the chapter) that they may have had some justifiable grievances with the United States. Zinn and his friend Noam Chomsky were widely reviled for their perspective on 9/11. As Zinn has written elsewhere, however, he's not trying to glorify the 9/11 terrorists. Rather, he's putting their acts into perspective by comparing them with those of the United States military. Thus, if we're willing to entertain the idea that 9/11 was a terrorist attack, we must also accept that America's bombing of Iraq, its invasion of Kuwait, etc., were terrorist attacks, too.

Bush should have known that terrorism "could not be defeated by force," as, historically, wars on terrorism never worked. Furthermore, he should not have bombed a country already weakened by decades of war. Nevertheless, the bombings proceeded, killing as many as a thousand civilians. In short, "the United States was reacting to the horrors perpetrated by terrorists against innocent people in New York by killing other innocent people in Afghanistan." Meanwhile, both the Democratic and Republican parties were enthusiastic about Bush's war. On CNN, executives arranged for footage of injured Afghani civilians to be "accompanied with an explanation that this was retaliation for the harboring of terrorists." Congress passed the Patriot Act, allowing the Department of Justice to detain any citizens on the mere suspicion of terrorist ties.

As in previous chapters, Zinn shows how the American media cooperated with the federal government throughout the War in Iraq, furthering the idea that America's brutal civilian bombings in the Middle East were "justifiable retaliation" for 9/11. Furthermore, Zinn cements his theory of the bipartisan consensus by discussing the Patriot Act, an unethical violation of Americans' right to privacy that was passed with the support of the vast majority of Congress, Republican and Democrat.

Some Americans spoke out against Bush's policies. Victims of 9/11, and the families of the victims, wrote letters to Bush, begging him not to match violence with violence. Others pointed out that the only way to end terrorism was to address the terrorists' grievances: the stationing of troops in Saudi Arabia, for example, or the Iraqi sanctions that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of children.

Zinn doesn't spend much time discussing the widespread opposition to the War in Iraq, which was often compared to the anti-Vietnam movement in the 1960s. However, he stresses the point that 9/11, as horrible as it was, was no worse than the American military's actions in Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

In the late nineties, a former colonel in the air force wrote an article in which he argued, "We are not hated because we practice democracy, value freedom, or uphold human rights. We are hated because our government denies these things to people in Third World countries whose resources are coveted by our multinational corporations." Such opinions were shut out of the media after 9/11. Still, "the future of democracy depended on people, and their growing consciousness of what was the decent way to relate to their fellow human beings all over the world."

Zinn ends on a cautiously optimistic note: with the war on terror, Americans of all races and backgrounds have an opportunity to rise up in opposition to the immoral actions of their own government. (Interestingly, Zinn doesn't make the argument that the opposition to the war in Iraq was fundamentally a reform, not a radical, movement, because it didn't question America's fundamental right to intervene in other countries—a point later made by Zinn's friend Noam Chomsky.) Zinn ends his history of the United States by celebrating the morality, sensibility, and basic decency of the American people.

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