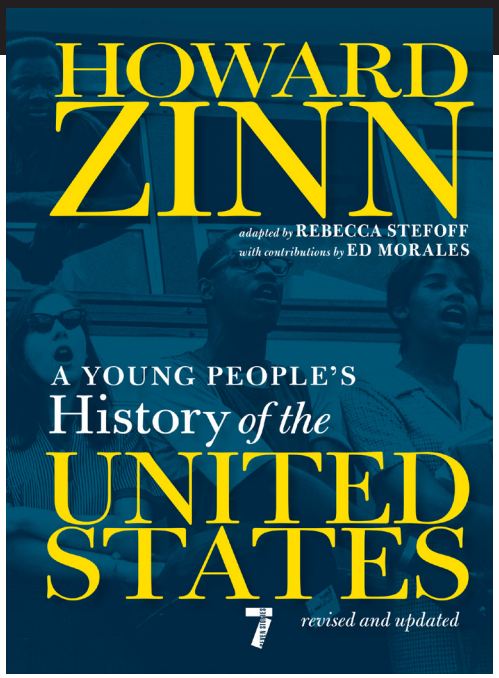
A Young People's History of the United States

Revised and Updated

by Howard Zinn, adapted by Rebecca Stefoff with contributions by Ed Morales



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PURPOSE: This teaching guide offers ideas on how to use *A Young People's History of the United States* within both the middle school and secondary school classrooms. These approaches include suggestions for preparing the classroom environment, entry points into the text, chapter preview ideas, discussion questions, and further reading suggestions.

SUMMARY: *A Young People's History of the United States* explores key events in our nation's history when people fought against oppression and exerted their collective powers to create lasting change within society. Adapted for the young reader, it is aligned chapter-by-chapter with the content in Howard Zinn's highly praised radical nonfiction work *A People's History of the United States* and in the primary source anthology *Voices of a People's History of the United States* edited by Howard Zinn and Anthony Arnove and the new edition, *Voices of a People's History of the United States in the 21st Century*, edited by Anthony Arnove and Haley Pessin. Major themes include the continued struggles for economic justice, racial equality, human dignity, and active citizenry. Interspersed within its chapters are highlights of young people who rose to civic action.

Each chapter highlights a particular time when everyday people engaged in acts of justifiable resistance and revolt against misguided laws and unfair practices. Critical of war, racism, and economic injustice, Zinn's text can be used in a variety of ways in middle and high school grade classrooms. It can serve as a primary text for U.S. history, as a counternarrative to mainstream history, as a reference source for independent or group research, or to provide relevant background and context for a U.S.-based historical fiction novel.

Howard Zinn, an acclaimed historian, author, and educator, approaches history from the vantage point of people who questioned and rallied against authority and oppressive laws and social constructs. *A Young People's History of the United States* explains history from the viewpoints of everyday people who rose up in solidarity for justice and democracy. This includes the letters, songs, speeches, and other historical documents of Native peoples, the working class, enslaved peoples, immigrants, and women.

Background Resources

RECOMMENDED TEXTS:

- *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn
- *Voices of a People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn and Anthony Arnove

For the teacher, there are two recommended books that complement this young reader's text. The first is *A People's History of the United States*, Zinn's original book for adult readers, which will provide the teacher with additional historical background and context. The second book, *Voices of a People's History of the United States*, is a collection of primary source material. This includes such material as speeches, diary entries, letters, narratives, and petitions. Both of these texts follow the same sequence of highlighted history within *A Young People's History of the United States*.

INTERNET SOURCES:

- The Zinn Education Project, zinnedproject.org
- Howard Zinn's website, howardzinn.org

The Zinn Education Project (zinnedproject.org) is an ideal supplement to *A Young People's History of the United States*. This site enables the viewer to access additional material based on selected time periods, resources, and themes. Resources are easily navigable and include such material as teaching activities, articles, film clips, audio files, songs/poems, and profiles of influential people. Howard Zinn's website (howardzinn.org) includes radio and television interviews, a photo gallery, articles, a biography, obituaries, awards, archival material, and a list of his full bibliography of his books and adapted works.

Preparing the Classroom

QUOTES FROM HOWARD ZINN: To prepare the classroom for this approach to history,

consider putting some of Howard Zinn's quotes around the room or in a nearby hallway. Students in pairs could then do a "walk and talk" and explore their own experience learning about U.S. history while reading and discussing the author's quotes. Students could then add to these posted statements by locating additional Zinn quotes from the internet and his other publications. They could also add their own statements about patriotism, history, U.S. society, activism, and democracy. The following quotes are suggestions for this purpose from the introduction and final chapter of *A Young People's History of the United States*.

- "Patriotism, in my view, does not mean unquestioning acceptance of whatever the government does." (From the introduction, p. x)

► "If you live in a democratic state, it means you have the right to criticize your government's policies." (From the introduction, p. x)

► "Most histories say little about revolt. They place the emphasis on the acts of leaders, not the actions of ordinary citizens." (p. 494)

► "Social movements of the past give hints of how people might behave if they were working together to build a new society." (p. 494–495)

PREVIEWING KEY CONCEPTS: Woven within the chapters of this text are concepts including people power, activism, civil disobedience, equity, justice, questioning authority, and social change. Ask students to explore these topics in their own lives and in the world around them. Songs, poems, and images can be utilized as auditory and visual entry points and ways to explore concepts related to social justice.

Music: A sampling of songs related to social justice include: Marvin Gaye's "Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler)," Billy Joel's "We Didn't Start the Fire," Alicia Keys's "We Gotta Pray," Public Enemy's "Fight the Power," Patti Smith's "People Have the Power," and Cat Stevens's "Where Do the Children Play?"

Poetry: Poetry can spark discussions about facing adversity and resisting societal injustices. Consider introducing students to such poems as Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise," Amanda Gorman's "The Hill We Climb," and Langston Hughes's "I Look at the World." For additional poetry related to social justice, explore poets.org/poems or poetryfoundation.org.

Art: Public art provides a visual way to explore key concepts related to social justice. These images could include the *AIDS Memorial Quilt* conceived by Cleve Jones, *Guernica* by Pablo Picasso, the Stop Telling Women to Smile project by Tatyana Fazlalizadeh, and the 2016 untitled refugee life jacket installation by Ai Weiwei.

Further reading: To delve deeper into the concept of civil disobedience, students could explore the writings of M. K. Gandhi (e.g., Non-Violent Resistance), Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (e.g., "Letter from Birmingham Jail"), and Henry David Thoreau (e.g., "Civil Disobedience").

Entry Points into the Text

BOOK STRUCTURE AND FEATURES: First, ask students to take time to explore the elements and organization of the book. They might consider the title, cover (front and back), table of contents, dedication, acknowledgments, introduction, chapters, special grey pages, visuals, glossary, index, and information about the authors. Questions could be posed, such as: "What meaning do you derive from the full title of this text, *A Young People's History of the United States*?"

Highlighting the illustrations and photographs in the book is another great way to orient students to the content. The following questions about the visuals could be presented to small groups of students for discussion. After considering the questions, students could then collaborate to create captions for selected images, or they could choose a single image and consider its message.

- What do you notice about the various types of illustrations and photographs in this text?
- Do the images portray individuals or crowds of people; action shots or posed portraits? How do the people interact?
- Do the people portrayed represent a range of ages?

UNDERSTANDING THE GENRE: *A Young People's History of the United States* can be classified in multiple ways. It is nonfiction as it is based on what actually happened in the past. It is an adapted text for young adults as it is based on *A People's History of the United States*, which was geared for the adult reader. As such, the text is considered juvenile nonfiction. In addition, it is an informational text as it is based on the historical record. Finally, it uses a "chronological survey" approach; each chapter depicts various events in the order they occurred throughout history.

CONSIDERING HISTORICAL PERSEPCTIVE: Before reading the book, hold a discussion with the class about the nature of history texts and historical perspectives.

- What are some reasons to study history and who is in charge of documenting it?
- What is the difference between understanding history written from the people's perspective compared to studying the decisions of influential leaders, consequences of military outcomes, or the actions of heroic figures? What are other historical perspectives can you think of?
- Does a historical account glorify an image of the past or show the collective struggles for fairness and reform? What perspective do you think this book takes?

LISTENING TO HOWARD ZINN: To introduce students to Howard Zinn, have them listen to audio or video interviews about his work and his ideas on history and democracy at howardzinn.org. The independent news program *Democracy Now* has a number of episodes with Howard Zinn. Explore the content at democracynow.org/topics/howard_zinn.

Chapter Preview Ideas

VISUAL DISPLAY: An intriguing display on a classroom wall can trigger student curiosity and questions for what they are about to study. Each chapter in *A Young People's History of the United States* contains a chapter title, images (e.g., illustrations, photographs, political cartoons, documents), historical detail, and quotations from primary sources. As a previewing strategy for each chapter and as a way for the walls to "teach," photocopy and display selected material. Encourage students to interact with the material in some way before they read. For instance, students could work in pairs to create an alternative chapter title, pose a question, list observations, or make a photo collage.

PEOPLE'S POWER: Each chapter depicts pivotal moments in our nation's history when people confronted with oppression took action. Beginning in 1492 with the Arawak people's stance in Hispaniola against Christopher Columbus, his crew, and the Spanish Empire, to the anti-war movement against the Iraq War in the 2000s, Zinn details the collective struggles for justice and the varied ways that people have taken to the streets to fight for human rights and dignity.

As students begin to read the text, ask them to identify the various ways that people rise up against injustice and inequity.

- What patterns do they notice in how and why people have protested?
- What histories do they see as a result of resisting authority and unfair laws?

AUTHORITY: As students read the text, suggest that they take note of the various ways that governing forces and systems have sought to control people.

- How are people prevented from joining together and acting in solidarity against oppression (e.g., breaking treaties, enslavement, dividing people through self-interest, military invasion, competition, misinformation and propaganda, violence)?
- How does this make students feel?
- What is the relationship between authority and power of the people?

HISTORICAL DETAIL AND STUDENT COMMENTARY: On a classroom wall (or in a nearby hallway), post memorable details from a particular chapter. This could include actual quotes from primary source material or background context provided within the text. As students read the selected chapter, they could then conduct their own research and locate more material from that time period (e.g., poetry, songs, or images) to add to the display. *Voices of a People's History of the United States* contains a wealth of primary source documents related to each chapter. Consider having students post their written reflections about this period in U.S. history. To further the experience, students could then respond to a few of their peer postings.

Discussion Questions

The following questions can be explored in various settings. For a full class discussion, intersperse the experience with quick journaling at strategic times to gather thoughts, to reflect, to react. As an alternative to the full class setting, hold a "fishbowl" discussion, where six students discuss an issue and the rest of the class listens in. At some point, pause this discussion and allow the onlookers the opportunity to engage. Then reactivate the fishbowl and have the original six students continue and conclude their discussion. As another option for small group settings, consider assigning individuals different roles for the discussion, including clarifier, notetaker, timekeeper, presenter, and facilitator.

1. Read the new introduction to this updated edition called "A New Narrative" by Ed Morales and also the two new chapters: "The Latino Emergence" and "Our Voices Need to Be Heard." Based on the reading or your own experience, what ways do you think the Latino contribution to U.S. culture is more influential than is often recognized?
2. How is history that is told through acts of resistance and social movements different from history told from the domain of the powerful and the elite? What is lost and what is gained from these different ways of telling history? Do you prefer learning history from the "top down" or from the "bottom up"? Explain.
3. The Declaration of Independence (1776) argues that it is the "consent of the governed" that provides the government the power to lead. In your readings, when did the government pursue actions (domestically or internationally) that were not necessarily aligned with the interests of the people (i.e., the governed)? How did the people take action to have their voices heard?
4. "We the People" are the first three words in the preamble of the U.S. Constitution (1787), stating that the nation is to be ruled by the people who live there—not by corporate control, military force, political insiders, or foreign power. Based on your readings, how have collective actions made an impact on U.S. society? To what extent has "We the People" become more inclusive over time? Who remains left out in "We the People"?
5. How does knowing about people's struggle for justice and dignity help you to look deeper at our nation's history? How does understanding our past help us to understand the present and to imagine a better future?
6. How have children and young adults played a role in fighting for justice and human dignity? What triggers someone to engage in activism? What guidelines do you suggest to children, peers, and adults for engaging in civic action? What are the various ways, historical or recent, that people have engaged in civil disobedience?

7. How would our society be different if the following movements did not occur: Civil rights movement? Women's suffrage movement? Environmental movement? Black Lives Matter?
8. What is the definition of a democracy and why does democracy demand vigilance? An independent press? Active participation? Protest and dissent? What else does democracy entail?
9. The U.S. Constitution articulates the goal of creating "a more perfect union." How can we work to make that happen? What roles do education, civic mindedness, and political activism play in this process?

Projects

VOICES FROM THE PAST: Assign students to research and then perform readings from the words of some of the individuals highlighted in the text. To obtain additional source material, explore *Voices of a People's History*. Consider having students first listen to a professional performance of this material, noting how the historical context is first introduced and then how the document is read. The following link includes dramatic readings of work by Bartolomé de Las Casas (1542), Frederick Douglass (1852), Fannie Lou Hamer (1964), and others: democracynow.org/2008/7/4/july_4th_special_readings_from_howard.

Another great resource is peopleshistory.us. This site has a number of recorded events where famous (and less famous) people read the original speeches, letters, poems, and more from *Voices of a People's History*. For example, you can hear Danny Glover read Langston Hughes or Alice Walker read Sojourner Truth. It is engaging and inspiring to hear the recordings and watch these videos.

ARC OF HISTORY AND DEMOCRACY: History and democracy are always in the making. Have students visualize and sketch society's pattern of progress. Is it a bold vertical line moving ever upward to social, economic, and racial justice? Or an unpredictable line sometimes spiraling downward and then upward? Or a thin straight line under constant assault and scrutiny?

RESEARCH: In pairs or triads, assign students a specific chapter or social movement to read, research, and then present to the class. As part of their task, they could then develop a dossier that could include primary documents, timeline, notes, visual display, map, personal reflection, and analysis.

TIMELINE: Locate a long corridor at your school and have students create a visual timeline of U.S. history. Include such information as key dates, summary of people's protest, and primary source material. Students could access additional material from primary source sets at The Library of Congress. Notable categories include Hispanic Exploration (1500), Westward Expansion (1830), Women's Suffrage. For more inspiration go to: loc.gov/programs/teachers/classroom-materials/primary-source-sets.

NOTETAKING: Challenge your students to write a summary of a specific chapter in 250 words, 100 words, 50 words, and then 10 words.

LABELS: Explore the role that language plays in how historical figures are depicted. For instance, Christopher Columbus could be described as an explorer, navigator, conqueror, or murderer. Explore other figures and how they have been labeled (e.g., Harriet Tubman, Helen Keller, Theodore Roosevelt, Malcolm X). How do these labels affect our understanding of these figures and their place in history?

PERSPECTIVE WRITING: Based on their reading and research of a particular social movement from the text, have students envision life during that time period within a particular role (e.g., as a concerned citizen, as a witness to an unjust act, as a participant in a protest). Ask them to write a personal narrative about their experience. This could take the form of a diary entry, letter, or essay.

CONDUCTING ORAL HISTORY: History is happening all the time, and we are all a part of making history. Invite students to reach out to family members, neighbors, or local community activists to learn more about their lives and their individual stories. What challenges have they faced? How did they persevere? To give students an idea on how to collect oral histories, have them explore the National Park Service's collection of personal stories at the Ellis Island Oral History Collection: nps.gov/elis/learn/education/classrooms/oral-histories.htm.

CLASSROOM TRANSFORMATIONS: Transform the classroom space to an entirely different setting and have students take on constructed positions. As Arawaks, students can discuss strategies for addressing the changing realities of life due to the recent arrival of ships from Spain (council meeting); as abolitionists, they can speak against the practice of enslavement (anti-slavery meeting); as suffragists, they can march for the right to vote (protest march). Using sources from primary documents and profiles from historical figures as a frame of reference, students can then construct their particular role in these classroom dramas. The Zinn Education Project has a number of structured role plays, including the trial of Christopher Columbus and the congressional hearing on the Indian Removal Act. Search for "teaching activity" in the search bar at zinnedproject.org.

SONGS OF SOLIDARITY, PROTEST, AND CHANGE: Ask the class to investigate songs that were an integral part of a defined social movement. For instance, explore traditional Black gospel songs that originated during American slavery (e.g., "Wade in the Water"). Examine Billie Holliday's "Strange Fruit" when discussing lynching and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan. Share Nina Simone's "Mississippi Goddam" when discussing the fight for civil rights. It is recommended that you discuss the lyrics first. Then, listen to the music. How do the lyrics and melody work together to send a message? In thinking of current societal issues, students can create their own playlist of songs that promote social justice and action.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S ROLE IN SOCIETAL PROGRESS: Do students realize that young people have been activists throughout our nation's development and history? Have the class read about Claudette Colvin and her protest bus ride (pp. 282–85) and John Tinker and his decision to wear an anti-war armband (pp. 318–20). How can seemingly ordinary actions have momentous consequences? What role does courage and belief play in acts of protest? For additional stories, students could explore the other special grey pages within various chapters and do their own research about today's young activists.

INTERNATIONAL RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS: To develop a global perspective on activism, students could explore recent citizen movements from around the world. To name a few: France's yellow vest movement demanding economic and societal reform, Greta Thunberg's global school strike movement protesting government policies on our planet's health, and Hong Kong's umbrella movement demonstrating for freedom and democracy.

NEW CHAPTERS: *A Young People's History of the United States* ends with a new chapter called "Our Voices Need to be Heard" by Ed Morales. What has happened since? Have students in small groups update the text with recent history. Two sites that are particularly useful are the Southern Poverty Law Center (splc.org) and Teaching Tolerance (tolerance.org). Their research could then lead groups to develop public service announcements or posters to inform the school about pertinent issues and ways to participate in taking action.

References

WEBSITES:

- Academy of American Poets, poets.org
- Democracy Now, democracynow.org
- Howard Zinn, howardzinn.org
- Library of Congress, loc.gov
- National Park Service, nps.org
- Poetry Foundation, poetryfoundation.org
- Southern Poverty Law Center, splc.org
- Teaching Tolerance, tolerance.org
- Voices of a People's History, peoplehistory.us
- Zinn Education Project, zinnedproject.org

TEXTS:

- The Declaration of Independence
- Gandhi, M. K., *Non-Violent Resistance*
- King Jr., Martin Luther, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"
- Thoreau, Henry David, *Civil Disobedience*
- The Constitution of the United States
- Zinn, Howard, *A People's History of the United States*
- Zinn, Howard and Anthony Arnove, *Voices of a People's History of the United States*

SONGS:

- Alicia Keys, "We Gotta Pray"
- Billy Joel, "We Didn't Start the Fire"
- Cat Stevens, "Where Do the Children Play?"
- Marvin Gaye, "Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler)"
- Patti Smith, "People Have the Power"
- Public Enemy, "Fight the Power"

POEMS:

- **Amanda Gorman, "The Hill We Climb"**
- **Langston Hughes, "I Look at the World"**
- **Maya Angelou, "Still I Rise"**

ART:

- **Ai Weiwei, 2016 untitled refugee life jacket installation**
- **Cleve Jones (originator), the *AIDS Memorial Quilt***
- **Pablo Picasso, *Guernica***
- **Tatyana Fazlalizadeh, Stop Telling Women to Smile project**

About this Guide

This curriculum guide was written by Catherine A. Franklin, Associate Professor within the School of Education at The City College of New York, City University of New York. She is the author of the book *Civic Literacy through Curriculum Drama* and has published various articles on the teaching and learning of social studies.