

The Progressive

Thank You, Howard Zinn

By Matthew Rothschild • January 28, 2010

Thank You, Howard Zinn, for being there during the civil rights movement, for teaching at Spelman, for walking the picket lines, and for inspiring such students as Alice Walker and Marian Wright Edelman.

Thank you, Howard Zinn, for being there during the Vietnam War, for writing “The Logic of Withdrawal,” and for going to Hanoi.

Thank you, Howard Zinn, for always being there.

Thank you, Howard Zinn, for being a man who supported the women’s liberation movement, early on.

Thank you, Howard Zinn, for being a straight who supported the gay and lesbian rights movement, early on.

Thank you, Howard Zinn, for being a Jew who dared to criticize Israel’s oppression of the Palestinians, early on.

Thank you, Howard Zinn, for being a great man who didn’t believe in the “Great Man Theory of History.”

Thank you, Howard Zinn, for taking the time to write your landmark work, “A People’s History of the United States,” and for educating two generations now in the radical history of this country, a history, as you stressed, of class conflict.

Thank you, Howard Zinn, for grasping the importance of transforming this book into “The People Speak,” the History Channel special that ran in December and that should be used by secondary, high school and college classes for as long as U.S. history is taught.

Thank you, Howard Zinn, for opposing war, all wars, including our own “good wars,” our own “holy wars,” as you called them—and for pointing out that a “just cause” does not lead to a “just war.”

Thank you, Howard Zinn, for pointing out that soldiers don’t die for their country, but that they die for their political leaders who dupe them or conscript them into wars. And that they die for the corporations that profit from war.

Thank you, Howard Zinn, for urging us to “renounce nationalism and all its symbols: its flags, its pledges of allegiance, its anthems, its insistence in song that God must single out America to be blessed. We need to assert our allegiance to the human race, and not to any one nation.”

Thank you, Howard Zinn, for stressing that change comes from below, and that it comes at surprising times, even when things seem bleakest, if we organize to make it happen.

Thank you, Howard Zinn, for stressing the value of engaging in action to make this world a better place, even if we don't get there.

Thank you, Howard Zinn, for this amazing, inspiring paragraph, which I've had on my wall for years now:

"To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places—and there are so many—where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction. And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory."

Thank you, Howard Zinn, for recognizing the beauty and power of culture, and for exalting the poet, the singer, the actor, the artist.

Thank you, Howard, for being kind enough to write your columns this last decade for a relatively obscure magazine called *The Progressive*, and for doing so with the utmost intelligence and grace.

Thank you, Howard, for calling me your editor.

Thank you, Howard, for your wry and self-deprecating sense of humor.

Thank you, Howard, for your kindness.

Thank you, Howard, for your friendship.

Thank you, Howard.

Thank you.

Matthew Rothschild is the editor of *The Progressive* magazine.