



Legendary Historian Howard Zinn Dies At 87

December 31, 1969

The NAACP is saddened by the passing of Howard Zinn, a historian and professor who was deeply rooted in the fight for social justice. Zinn died on January 27 at the age of 87.

“Howard Zinn was an American hero, and was cherished by many for his firm commitment to social justice,” said NAACP President and CEO Benjamin Todd Jealous. “He urged dissent, protest and activism against injustice. He will be missed, but leaves an important legacy for us to uphold.”

Zinn authored more than 20 books, including *A People’s History of the United States*, which chronicled history from the rich perspective of the nation’s working class — including African Americans, Native Americans and the oppressed — and *A Young People’s History of the United States*. He was a professor at several universities, including Spelman College, where he was fired for encouraging his students’ involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. He was later exonerated when he was honored by Spelman at the 2005 commencement.

“Howard Zinn was an early advisor to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the early 1960s freedom movement pioneered by Black youth,” said NAACP Chairman Julian Bond. “He was a path-breaking historian who put ordinary women and men back into American history where they belonged; and he was a lifelong activist always on the right side of history.”

One of Zinn’s famous sayings was, “you can’t stay neutral on a moving train,” instructing citizens that neutrality and abstention from the fight for social justice was not an option. He often wrote about the struggle for civil rights, lending perspectives both as a participant and as a historian. Zinn was a passionate and outspoken advocate for peace, and wrote several books in opposition to the wars in Vietnam and Iraq.

Zinn’s life and lasting impact may be best summed up by a quote from Bertolt Brecht: “The weak ones don’t struggle. The stronger ones struggle for perhaps an hour’s length. Those still stronger ones struggle for many years. But the strongest struggle their life long. These are indispensable.” Howard Zinn undeniably is among those who are indispensable.

Founded in 1909, the NAACP is the nation’s oldest and largest civil rights organization. Its members throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil

rights in their communities, conducting voter mobilization and monitoring equal opportunity in the public and private sectors.

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