

HOWARD ZINN REVISITED

By Prof. Christine Fogler '71

The historian, author, playwright, and social activist Howard Zinn passed away on January 27, 2010. Howard Zinn was a political science professor at Boston University and also taught at Spelman College. He wrote more than twenty books, including his best-selling *A People's History of the United States*, which sold over two million copies.

When I was a student in 1970, Howard Zinn came to Saint Peter's College to speak. He told a small audience in Dinneen Auditorium that the problems of the United States are "rooted" in the conspiracy "of the law." Zinn said, "If we are to overcome the injustices which have become legitimate by due process of law, we must develop a selective disrespect of the law."

I did not know Howard Zinn until later in my life when I had been teaching history for a number of years. The first time I met Howard was in a coffee shop in New York City where he said to me, "You must read *Johnny Got His Gun*." (Of course, I followed his advice, and to this day the book is one of my favorite anti-war novels.) After that, I had the privilege of knowing Howard, reading many of his books, and using *A Young People's History of the United States* in my own classroom. What impressed me most about Howard was how he told history through the eyes of many of the unsung heroes of our nation.

Even though Howard is no longer here with us, his legacy lives on through his writings, his plays, and in the hearts of those who admired him.

As a professor now at Saint Peter's University, it is my hope that I can inspire my students to continue the work that Howard Zinn started when I was an undergraduate here.

In remembering Howard Zinn, the words of John Steinbeck come to mind, when he wrote *The Grapes of Wrath*. In the novel, Steinbeck's character Tom Joad so eloquently said, "I'll be all around in the dark. I'll be everywhere. Wherever you can look, wherever there's a fight, so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever there's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad. I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry and they know supper's ready, and when the people are eatin' the stuff they raise and livin' in the houses they build, I'll be there, too."

I will try to capture the spirit of Howard Zinn in my own modest way in the following poem:

Whenever there is injustice toward the poor, I'll be there.

Whenever there are unjust wars, I'll be there.

As the climate crisis worsens, I'll be there.

I'll be there as the middle class is shrinking and the prison population is growing.

I'll be there as unions are struggling and education is becoming "standardized."

And when the people say "enough" and fight back, I'll be there too.