



Press Release

Contact: Deborah Menkart, co-director, 202-294-2703
dmenkart@teachingforchange.org

www.zinnedproject.org

Teachers Across the U.S. Teach People's History—Indiana Included

The Zinn Education Project Responds to Mitch Daniels' Attacks on Howard Zinn

On July 17, 2013 the [Associated Press \(AP\)](#) revealed that former Indiana Governor and current Purdue University President Mitch Daniels had tried to ban Howard Zinn's writing, including [A People's History of the United States](#), in K-12 public schools.

In a public statement on July 18, [Purdue University stood by their president](#), stating that it is not an issue of censorship because it did not impact higher education, only K-12 public schools.

In other words, academic freedom and censorship do not apply to K-12 teachers and students.

The Zinn Education Project network of more than 30,000 teachers, from every state in the country, [strongly disagree](#). We know that what and how children in K-12 learn history does matter. It is in K-12 classrooms that students' sense of themselves, as part of and contributors to history and civic life today, are shaped. Students can either learn that history is made by a few heroic individuals or they can learn that history is made by people's choices and actions—people like them—thereby also learning that their own choices and actions matter. [Read [A People's History](#), [A People's Pedagogy](#).] The difference depends on whether schools are required to use corporate textbooks or have the freedom to choose from a wide range of books, including but not limited to *A People's History of the United States*.

The Zinn Education Project launched five years ago, with the support of Howard Zinn, to provide middle and high school teachers with resources to teach people's history, outside the textbook. The response has been overwhelming, especially considering that in this era of high-stakes testing, even standard textbook history receives minimal attention in schools. More than a million people have visited the Zinn Education Project website and the lessons have been used by millions of students in every state and territory of the United States. The Zinn Education Project is a collaboration between two non-profit organizations, Rethinking Schools and Teaching for Change.

The best explanation for this widespread commitment to teach outside the textbook is found in teachers' own words as they describe why they believe people's history is critically important for students:

"I use Howard Zinn's [A People's History of the United States](#), [A Young People's History of the United States](#), and [A People's History of American Empire](#) in my high school social studies classes because it offers a new and different perspective without the feel of a traditional textbook, which helps my students hone their evaluation skills and learn to synthesize information while discussing and interacting with the content. Zinn's resources are very accessible both to teachers and students, and the [Zinn Education Project](#) has worked diligently to make high quality teacher resources to supplement these texts making them user-friendly. Most

importantly, I use Zinn in the classroom because I want to give a voice to those that have been silenced and marginalized in traditional history textbooks; those are the voices that my students identify with the most. Identifying with history helps my students remember, learn from, and engage with it.” —**Shannon White, Indiana Public Schools, High School Government and Economics Teacher**

I teach people's history because it provides my students with buried but important perspectives on the history they assume they already know. It is vitally important that young people discover that history is not the sole province of rich, famous, White, straight men (like Mitch Daniels). Instead, we can all contribute to the development of our country. And, indeed, we all have! —**Franklin D. Oliver, Indianapolis, Indiana, Social Studies Teacher, Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School**

“Howard Zinn's books have made more sense than any history I've read about the Americas!”—**Robin Brennan-Perez, Fort Wayne, Indiana, High School ESL/Bilingual Teacher**

A long list of “good guys” with no one to struggle with is neither a true story nor a good story. It doesn't resonate because it leads the student to believe that we are all waiting for the next exceptional leader, instead of becoming a force for change in our own communities. *A People's History* helped me recognize this as a student of history and inspires my attempt to bring true stories to young people, weary of the inaccessible lists that history teaching has become. —**Reynolds Bodenhamer, 11th-Grade U.S. History, Gulfport, Miss.**

Howard Zinn's [*A People's History of the United States*](#) gave me the resource I needed to capture the internal sense of justice so many urban students have... As an educator, I am filled with excitement that although I opened the window, with the help of Howard Zinn, [my students] have made the effort to examine what is outside. —**Dawn Fontaine, Springfield, Mass., 10th- and 11th-Grade U.S. History Teacher**

A People's History inspired me to change the focus of my teaching from a traditional government—and hero—centered focus to the very place where change ultimately originates: with the people. It's not that the other history is ignored but is instead further contextualized by what ordinary people were doing and experiencing at the same time. After all, my students are by and large the ordinary people of today. If society is going to progress, Howard teaches all of us, it's going to come from the people and not the select few. I have used Howard's book to, well, complicate matters. —**Michael J. Swogger, Gettysburg, Penn., 10th- and 11th-Grade American History Teacher**

I read *A People's History of the United States* when I was in grad school and feel like a fire was ignited in my brain. It totally shifted the way I viewed history (and society in general) and of course has been the foundation of the way I teach history today. I came to the Zinn Education Project website in search of new ways to light a similar fire in my students. —**Tristan McCoy, San Diego, Calif., U.S. History Teacher and Head Football Coach**

As one of my 8th graders put it a few years back: “History isn't so much about what happened in the past. It's about how to change the future.” I could not state any better why I use *A People's History* in my classroom. —**Bryan Hoang, Irvine, Calif., 10th-Grade U.S. History Teacher**

These teachers do not “force feed” students with *A People's History*, nor is *A People's History* a textbook. At the Zinn Education Project we support teachers' efforts to “teach outside the textbook,” using multiple sources. And while Mitch Daniels has focused on Howard Zinn, we believe his goal is not just to censor Zinn in K-12, but also to prevent the kind of content and participatory pedagogy that Zinn represents—people's history, multicultural history, and working people's history by many authors—similar to the Mexican American Studies program [banned in Tucson, Arizona](#).

People stood up to these McCarthy era tactics in 1954 with Indiana's [Green Feather Movement](#) (to challenge a plan to remove Robin Hood from textbooks), and they are standing up again. Teacher educators, teachers, parents, and students in Indiana are defending their right to people's history in the classroom and their right not be force-fed a textbook as the sole and complete source of U.S. history.

Read more about Indiana's Anti-Howard Zinn Witch-hunt:

<http://zinnedproject.org/2013/07/indianas-anti-howard-zinn-witch-hunt/>

Read more teacher comments about the impact of teaching people's history:

<http://zinnedproject.org/2011/01/what-teachers-are-saying/>

###