

# Analyze the a people`s history of the united states essay

[History](#), [American History](#)



In *A People's History of the United States*, Howard Zinn has contentions with nationalism as an ideology. This will not be the first time he raises such a sentiment.

More than a quarter century after the publication of *A People's History*, Zinn 'celebrates' Independence Day with an essay called *Put Away The Flags*, in which he urges that Americans renounce nationalism.

For Zinn (2006), nationalism is a dangerous concept that insists devotion to the flag and to a boundary “ so fierce it engenders mass murder - one of the great evils of our time, along with racism, along with religious hatred” and maintains an “ insistence in song that God must single out America to be blessed.”

In *A People's History*, Zinn quotes Henry Kissinger's declaration that “ History is the memory of states” and takes issue with it because the memory of states flattens the perspectives and interests of a heterogenous population of varying races, sexes and classes into a homogeneous one that valorizes governments and diplomats and privileges the elite (Zinn 9-10). His skepticism is founded on the idea that the United States of America as a family of 'common interest' is one that is utter pretense .

Zinn does give some exceptions to this statement, noting that nationalism is relatively harmless in small countries such as Switzerland and Norway that have not the military power or expansionist ambition that characterizes the United States:

“ But in a nation like ours – huge, possessing thousands of weapons of mass destruction – what might have been harmless pride becomes an arrogant nationalism dangerous to others and to ourselves.” (Zinn 2006)

He maintains this position further by insisting we:

“... refute the idea that our nation is different from, morally superior to, the other imperial powers of world history. We need to assert our allegiance to the human race, and not to any one nation.”

All this goes back to the opening statement of the fourth chapter of A People's History (Zinn 59), where he notes that the creation of a “ legal unity called the United States” would permit the elite persons of the British colonies to harness the resentment of the working class towards England and channel it towards a “ consensus of popular support for the rule of a new, privileged leadership.”

I find myself agreeing with Zinn, to the extent that nationalism presupposes common interest and denies the conflicting interests of communities, for the very simple reason that it denies the plurality of American culture.

It ignores the fact that America's citizenry is made up of a heterogeneously varied population from all cultures: Jews, Asians, Irish, Italians, etc and that what makes the country so different from others is that it is truly a melting pot in which cultural conflict and class differences should – in an ideal America – enrich and strengthen the culture.

It is the resolution of such differences, the means by which we acknowledge dissent among the classes, races and sexes that are key to maintaining the democratic ideal that the United States so frequently lays claim to.

At present, it is a bit late to attempt some kind of topical commentary of how this connects to the post-9/11 zeitgeist, but permit me the following screed. A lot of mainstream news media reporting on the post-9/11 "condition" reflects this tendency to conflate dissent into "common interest". In *Voices of a People's History of the United States*, Zinn and co-author Anthony Arnove presents the words of Amy Goodman:

What kind of critical reporting do we get? It's this parade of retired generals that are on the network's payrolls. [...] This is journalism in America today. They have redefined "general news," and we have got to challenge that. 'Why is it that if they have these retired generals on the payroll, they don't have peace activists and peace leaders also on the payroll?

[...] Aaron Brown had some interesting comments. He said he admits CNN Newsnight came "a little late" to the peace movement. But once the war started, those voices are irrelevant because then the war is on. (Arnove 612)

The general disregard for concerns incompatible with the concerns of the elite is further exemplified by two incidents in Chicago: The Great Railroad Strike which paralyzed most of the industries in The Windy City and the Haymarket affair in which a reasonably peaceful assembly led to the arrest of eight anarchists after sixty-six police officers were injured by a bomb explosion thrown by individuals or parties unknown. (Zinn 264-265)