

9.1 Zinn - “A Power Governments Cannot Suppress”

Background: Howard Zinn (1922-2010) was a United States historian and political activist best known for the work *A People's History of the United States* (NY: Harper Perennial, 1995). This quote is from an essay, “If History is to be Creative,” written in 2006 (<https://www.howardzinn.org/if-history-is-to-be-creative/>). In the essay, Zinn argues that historians and citizens should know about the “creative power of people struggling for a better world.”

Instructions: Read the quote and write a response to Zinn explaining your view on this topic.



“To omit these acts of resistance is to support the official view that power only rests with those who have the guns and possess the wealth. I write in order to illustrate the creative power of people struggling for a better world. People, when organized, have enormous power, more than any government . . . Our history runs deep with the stories of people who stand up, speak out, dig in, organize, connect, form networks of resistance, and alter the course of history . . . I don't want to invent victories for people's movements. But to think that history - writing must aim simply to recapitulate the failures that dominate the past is to make historians collaborators in an endless cycle of defeat . . . If history is to be creative, to anticipate a possible future without denying the past, it should, I believe, emphasize new possibilities by disclosing those hidden episodes of the past when, even if in brief flashes, people showed their ability to resist, to join together, and occasionally to win.”

Note: “Teaching People’s History” at the website Zinn Education Project is a valuable resource for teachers and students (<https://www.zinnedproject.org/>).