

Historian Howard Zinn: “Largest Lie” is the “U.S. War on Terrorism”

By [Sherwood Ross](#)

Global Research, January 29, 2010

29 January 2010

Region: [USA](#)
Theme: [Terrorism](#)

The “largest lie,” wrote historian Howard Zinn who died yesterday at age 87, is that “everything the United States does is to be pardoned because we are engaged in a ‘war on terrorism.’”

“This ignores the fact that war is itself terrorism, that the barging into people’s homes and taking away family members and subjecting them to torture, that is terrorism, that invading and bombing other countries does not give us more security but less security.”

In an article published previously in “The Long Term View” magazine of the Massachusetts School of Law, Zinn said that in the Fallujah area of Iraq Knight Ridder reporters found there was no Ba’athist or Sunni conspiracy against the U.S., “only people ready to fight because their relatives had been hurt or killed, or they themselves had been humiliated by home searches and road stops.”

Zinn, popularly known as the people’s historian, pointed out that the U.S. may have liberated Iraq from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein but afterwards it became Iraq’s occupier. He noted this is the same fate that befell Cuba after the U.S. liberated it from Spain in 1898. In both nations, the U.S. established military bases and U.S. corporations moved in to profit from the upheaval.

Zinn recalled the words of then Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld before the NATO ministers in Brussels in June, 2002, “the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence” of weapons of mass destruction. “That explains why this government, not knowing exactly where to find the criminals of September 11, will just go ahead and invade and bomb Afghanistan, killing thousands of people, driving hundreds of thousands from their homes, and still not know where the criminals are,” Zinn wrote.

“This explains why the government, not really knowing what weapons Saddam Hussein is hiding, will invade and bomb Iraq, to the horror of most of the world, killing thousands of civilians and soldiers and terrorizing the population,” he continued.

The historian pointed out that even if the U.S. experienced few battle casualties in its invasion of Iraq, casualties would mount afterwards in the occupying army from sickness and trauma, which took a high toll both in Viet Nam and after the Gulf War. In the 10 years after the Gulf War, 8,000 veterans died and 200,000 veterans filed complaints about illnesses incurred “from the weapons our government used in the war.”

Zinn predicted accurately that once the American public realized President Bush had lied to them about Iraq they would turn against the government. "When it loses its legitimacy in the eyes of its people, its days are numbered," he said of the Bush administration.

Writing of his personal feelings, Zinn said, "I wake up in the morning, read the newspaper, and feel that we are an occupied country, that some alien group has taken over... I wake up thinking this country is in the grip of a President (George W. Bush) who was not elected, who has surrounded himself with thugs in suits who care nothing about human life abroad or here, who care nothing about freedom abroad or here, who care nothing about what happens to the earth, the water, the air. And I wonder what kind of world our children and grandchildren will inherit."

Zinn called on his readers "to engage in whatever nonviolent actions appeal to us. There is no act too small, no act too bold. The history of social change is the history of millions of actions, small and large, coming together at critical points to create a power that governments cannot suppress. We find ourselves today at one of those critical points."

The Massachusetts School of Law at Andover is a non-profit law school purposefully dedicated to the education of students from minority, immigrant, and low-income households who would otherwise not have the opportunity to obtain a legal education. Zinn's article in The Long Term View first appeared in The Progressive magazine.

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Sherwood Ross formerly worked as a reporter for the Chicago Daily News. Currently, he is a media consultant to Massachusetts School of Law at Andover. Sherwoodross10@gmail.com

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