**HIS-100 1-3 A Tale of Two Historians**

**Perspective 1: Howard Zinn**

The sections below provide more information about historian Howard Zinn’s assumptions, beliefs, and values.

**Assumptions:**

“When I actually sat down to write [A People’s History of the United States], it took less than a year to write it. I wrote it because after the movements of the sixties people had been radicalized and people became dissatisfied with the traditional history, and wanted histories that showed working people and black people and Native Americans and women. And I was aware that no such book existed, that no such history existed. So I decided that I would try to fill that gap.”

**Beliefs:**

“I don’t believe in neutrality because the world is already moving in certain directions and wars are going on and children are going hungry. Terrible things are happening. And so to be neutral in a situation like this when things are already moving is to collaborate with the world as it is. I want to intrude myself. I want to participate in changing the direction of things (last sentence is in bold type).

**Values:**

I was just a seventeen-year-old kid, going to Times Square to participate in this leftwing (the words left-wing are in bold text) demonstration. I really didn’t know what was going on. But it seemed good. The signs were for peace and justice and so on. But then at this peaceful demonstration, I was attacked by police mounted on horseback and on foot. Before I knew it, I was clubbed and knocked unconscious. You might say I woke up with a new consciousness. I woke up realizing that things my radical friends had been saying to me were really true, that the police and the government were not detached bystanders, that freedom of speech did not really exist for dissenters, for radicals, for troublemakers. So it gave me a radical view of the United States, a critical view of the role of the state and of the instruments of the state-the police, the Army, and so on-as not being neutral at all in political battles, but being generally against workers and against striking people, against dissenters of all kinds.”

Quotes excerpted from:

Zinn, H. (2004, October 27). Interview with Howard Zinn. Retrieved from:

https://www.guernicamag.com/interviews/a\_peoples\_history\_of\_howard\_zi/

Image source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Howard\_Zinn\_at\_lectern.jpg

**Perspective 2: Larry Schweikart**

The sections below provide more information about historian Larry Schweikart’s assumptions, beliefs, and values.

**Assumptions:**

“Just 35 years ago, [A Patriot’s History of the United States] would have simply been called, A History of the United States.” Today, virtually all of the so-called “mainstream” texts range from moderately biased to completely and overwhelmingly biased against a free-market, limited-government perspective. Their slant is sometimes blunt, often clever and always varied to make absolutely certain that if one technique doesn’t work on unsuspecting students, another will.

**Beliefs:**

“Likewise, despite 40 years’ worth of regulatory attack, the American economic system still remains the most productive in the world, due to a higher degree of private property rights and competition. In our book, we celebrate those who created and cultivated these pillars, while at the same time deconstructing numerous myths of the Left (the word left is in bold print). The result is that any student reading “A Patriot’s History” will have a hard time suppressing pride in being an American.”

**Values:**

“The history of the United States is not only inspiring; it is essentially “conservative,” in that it reaffirms many of those values that conservatives (and many libertarians) today hold dear. And the best news is that one does not have to distort the evidence to tell the story of a great country. Ultimately, learning “just the facts” of the American past leads a student to inevitably conclude that the United States is the best place on earth, and that it has acted, for the most part, far better than any other nation at any other time. If that generates a feeling of patriotism – or makes one a patriot – so be it.”

Quotes excerpted from:

Schweikart, L. (2005, June 9). Why Student’s Need “A Patriot’s History of the United States.” Retrieved from: https://www.mackinac.org/713

**Perspectives: A Tale of Two Historical Biases**

Now that you have learned a bit about Zinn’s and Schweikart’s personal assumptions, beliefs, and values, take a look at how they have written about the same historical events: Christopher Columbus’s arrival in the Americas in 1492. As you read through each excerpt, be sure to consider what biases may be present in their work.

**Zinn, H. (2010). A people’s history of the United States. New York, NY: Harper Perennial**. “To emphasize the heroism of Columbus and his successors as navigators and discoverers, and to de-emphasize their genocide, is not a technical necessity but an ideological choice. It serves—unwittingly—to justify what was done.

My point is not that we must, in telling history, accuse, judge, condemn Columbus in absentia. It is too late for that; it would be a useless scholarly exercise in morality. But the easy acceptance of atrocities as a deplorable but necessary price to pay for progress (Hiroshima and Vietnam, to save Western civilization; Kronstadt and Hungary, to save socialism; nuclear proliferation, to save us all)—that is still with us. One reason these atrocities are still with us is that we have learned to bury them in a mass of other facts, as radioactive wastes are buried in containers in the earth. We have learned to give them exactly the same proportion of attention that teachers and writers often give them in the most respectable of classrooms and textbooks. This learned sense of moral proportion, coming from the apparent objectivity of the scholar, is accepted more easily than when it comes from politicians at press conferences. It is therefore more deadly.” (p. 9)

**Schweikart, L., & Allen, M. (2004). A patriot’s history of the United States: From Columbus’s Great Discovery to the war on terror. New York, NY: Sentinel**. “The five‐hundred‐year anniversary of Columbus’s discovery was marked by unusual and strident controversy. Rising up to challenge the intrepid voyager’s courage and vision—as well as the establishment of European civilization in the New World—was a crescendo of damnation, which posited that the Genoese navigator was a mass murderer akin to Adolf Hitler.

Even the establishment of European outposts was, according to the revisionist critique, a regrettable development. Although this division of interpretations no doubt confused and dampened many a Columbian festival in 1992, it also elicited a most intriguing historical debate: did the esteemed Admiral of the Ocean Sea kill almost all the Indians? A number of recent scholarly studies have dispelled or at least substantially modified many of the numbers generated by the anti‐Columbus groups, although other new research has actually increased them.” (pp. 7–8)