

[PDF] You Can't Be Neutral On A Moving Train: A Personal History Of Our Times

Howard Zinn - pdf download free book

Books Details:

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Author: Howard Zinn

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Description:

By any standards, Howard Zinn has led a remarkable life as teacher, writer, and social activist, a life in which those three categories are viewed not as compartmentalized tasks but as part of a unified identity. *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*, a title taken from his advice to students about his take on American history and current events, is a powerful testament to that life.

It begins with his 1956 acceptance of a teaching post at Atlanta's Spelman College, a school for black women that would soon be caught up in the civil rights movement. Zinn, who had already been radicalized on the streets of Brooklyn as a teenager, got caught up along with his students (who included the future head of the Children's Defense Fund, Marian Wright Edelman, and author Alice

Walker), and was kicked out in 1963 for "insubordination." He moved to Boston University, where he became an outspoken critic of the Vietnam War, and would prove a constant thorn in the side of university president John Silber throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Zinn writes in plain language that brooks no nonsense when it speaks of moral urgency, but he isn't above a sense of humor. Noting that the FBI was watching him constantly during the war era, he wryly observes that, "I have grown to depend on them for accurate reports on my speeches." Individual scenes leap out at the reader: Zinn's horror when he realized, years after WWII, that he had dropped napalm bombs on German troops; a meeting in a college classroom with the sister and parents of one of the victims of the Kent State massacre; Selma, Alabama, police beating blacks attempting to register to vote while federal agents stand by and do nothing. Through it all, Zinn writes, "I see this as the central issue of our time: how to find a substitute for war in human ingenuity, imagination, courage, sacrifice, patience." --*Ron Hogan*

From Publishers Weekly Noted left-wing historian Zinn (*A People's History of the United States*) believes that activism and education are inextricable, and his memoir illuminates a well-engaged life. Teaching at Atlanta's Spelman College in the early days of the civil rights movement, he found allies in principled students like Marian Wright (now Edelman) and budding writer Alice Walker. He advised SNCC in Selma, Ala. He volunteered to fight the Nazis but, after Hiroshima, developed a skeptical pacifism he further exercised as a passionate opponent of the Vietnam War. Zinn's narrative is oddly disjointed: not until late in the book does he recount his youth in the slums of Brooklyn, his discovery of Dickens, Marx and Steinbeck and his post-WW II years as a laborer and a 27-year-old college freshman. If Zinn is a bit Pollyannish, he's also inspirational, arguing that, because much has changed in history, "We can be surprised again. Indeed, we can do the surprising."

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