

Original: http://thirdworldtraveler.com/Zinn/History_WarTerrorism_Zinn.html 2007-09-18

Link here: http://blog.lege.net/content/History_WarTerrorism_Zinn.html

PDF "printout": http://blog.lege.net/content/History_WarTerrorism_Zinn.pdf

**THIRD
WORLD
TRAVELER**



The Uses of History and the War on Terrorism

a talk by Howard Zinn in Madison Wisconsin

Democracy Now, www.zmag.org/, 11/26/06



Madison is a very special place. I always have a special feeling when I come here. I have a feeling I am in a different country. And I'm glad, you know. Some people get disgusted of the American policy, and they go to live in some other country. No. Go to Madison.

So, now I'm supposed to say something. I am glad you're there, whoever you are, and this light is shining in my eyes to wake me up.

Well, do you get the feeling sometime that you're living in an occupied country? Very often that's a feeling I get when I wake up in the morning. I think, "I'm living in an occupied country. A small group of aliens have taken over the country and are trying to do with it what they will, you know, and really are." I mean, they are alien to me. I mean, those people who are coming across the border from Mexico, they are not alien to me, you see. You know, Muslims who come to this country to live, they are not alien to me, you see. These demonstrations, these wonderful demonstrations that we have seen very recently on behalf of immigrant rights, say, and you've seen those signs saying, you know, "No human being is alien." And I think that's true. Except for the people in Washington, you see.

They've taken over the country. They've taken over the policy. They've driven us into two disastrous wars, disastrous for our country and even more disastrous for people in the Middle East. And they have sucked up the wealth of this country and given it to the rich, and given it to the multinationals, given it to Halliburton, given it to the makers of weapons. They're ruining the environment. And

they're holding on to 10,000 nuclear weapons, while they want us to worry about the fact that Iran may, in ten years, get one nuclear weapon. You see, really, how mad can you be?

And the question is, how has this been allowed to happen? How have they gotten away with it? They're not following the will of the people. I mean, they manufactured a will of the people for a very short time right after the war started, as governments are able to do right after the beginning of an armed conflict, in order to be able to create an atmosphere of war hysteria. And so for a short time, they captivated the minds of the American people. That's not true anymore. The American people have begun to understand what is going on and have turned against the policies in Washington, but of course they are still there. They are still in power. The question is, you know, how did they get away with that?

So, in trying to answer the question, I looked a little at the history of Nazi Germany. No, it's not that we are Nazi Germany, but you can learn lessons from everybody and from anybody's history. In this case, I was interested in the ideas of Hermann Göring, who, you may know, was second in command to Hitler, head of the Luftwaffe. And at the end of World War II, when the Nazi leaders were put on trial in Nuremberg, Hermann Göring was in prison along with other of the leaders of the Nazi regime. And he was visited in prison by a psychologist who was given the job of interviewing the defendants at Nuremberg.

And this psychologist took notes and, in fact, a couple of years after the war, wrote a book called Nuremberg Diary, in which he recorded -- put his notes in that book, and he recorded his conversation with Hermann Göring. And he asked Göring, how come that Hitler, the Nazis were able to get the German people to go along with such absurd and ruinous policies of war and aggression?" And I happen to have those notes with me. We always say, "We happen to have these things just, you know, by chance."

And Göring said, "Why, of course, the people don't want war. Why would some poor slob on a farm want to risk his life in a war? But, after all, it is the leaders of the country who determine the policy. The people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. All you have to do is tell them they're being attacked and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism. It works the same way in any country."

I was interested in that last line: "It works the same way in any country." I mean, here, these are the Nazis. That's the fascist regime. We are a democracy. But it works the same way in any country, whatever you call yourself. Whether you call yourself a totalitarian state or you call yourself a democracy, it works the same way, and that is, the leaders of the country are able to cajole or coerce and entice the people into war by scaring them, telling them they're in danger, and threatening them and coercing them, that if they don't go along, they will be considered unpatriotic. And this is what really happened in this country right after 9/11. And this is happened right after Bush raised the specter of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and got for a while the American people to go along with this.

But the question is, how did they get away with it? What about the press? What about the media? Isn't it the job of the press, isn't it the job of the media, isn't it the job of journalism to expose what governments do? Don't journalists learn from I.F. Stone, who said, "Just remember two words," he said to young people who were studying journalism, he said, "Just remember two words: governments lie"? Well, but the media have not picked up on that. The media have gone along, and they embraced the idea of weapons of mass destruction. You remember when Colin Powell appeared before the United Nations just before the onset of the Iraq war and laid out to the UN this litany of weaponry that Iraq possessed, according to him, and gave great details in how many canisters of this and how many tons of this, and so on and so forth. And the next day, the press was just aglow with praise. They didn't do their job of questioning. They didn't do their job of asking, "Where? What is your evidence? Where did you get this intelligence? Who did you talk to? What are your sources?"

Isn't this what you learn as a freshman in college? "Hey, what are your sources? Where are your

footnotes?" No, no. They were just -- the Washington Post said, "It is hard to imagine how anyone could doubt that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction." And the New York Times, you know, it was just beside themselves with admiration for Colin Powell. Of course, it all turned out to be untrue, all turned out to be lies. But the press did not do its job, and as a result, the American people, watching television, reading the newspapers, had no alternative source of information, no alternative opinion, no alternative critical analysis of what was going on.

And the question is, why still did the people believe what they read in the press, and why did they believe what they saw on television? And I would argue that it has something to do with a loss of history, has something to do with, well, what Studs Terkel called "national amnesia," either the forgetting of history or the learning of bad history, the learning of the kind of history that you do get, of Columbus was a hero, and Teddy Roosevelt is a hero, and Andrew Jackson is a hero, and all these guys who were presidents and generals and industrialists, and so on. They are the great -- they are the people who made America great, and America has always done good things in the world. And we have had our little problems, of course -- like slavery, for instance, you know -- but we overcome them, you know, and, you know. No, not that kind of history.

If the American people really knew history, if they learned history, if the educational institutions did their job, if the press did its job in giving people historical perspective, then a people would understand. When the President gets up before the microphone, says we must go to war for this or for that, for liberty or for democracy, or because we're in danger, and so on, if people had some history behind them, they would know how many times presidents have announced to the nation, we must go to war for this reason or that reason. They would know that President Polk said, "Oh, we must go to war against Mexico, because, well, there was an incident that took place on the border there, and our honor demands that we go to war."

They would know, if they knew some history, how President McKinley took the nation into war against Spain and Cuba, saying, "Oh, we're going in to liberate the Cubans from Spanish control." And in fact, there was a little bit of truth to that: we did go in, we fought against Spain, we got Spain out of Cuba, we liberated them from Spain, but not from ourselves. And so, Spain was out, and United Fruit was in, and then the American banks and the American corporations were in.

And if people knew their history, they would know, you know, that President McKinley said, when -- as the American army was already in the Philippines and the American navy was already in the Philippines, and Theodore Roosevelt, one of our great presidential heroes, was lusting for war, then people would know that McKinley, who did not know where the Philippines were, but very often now presidents need to be briefed and told where something is. You know, George Bush, "This is Iraq is," you know. Lyndon Johnson, "This is where the Gulf of Tonkin is." You know, they need it.

And president -- they would know, if they knew history, that President McKinley said, "We're going into the Philippines to civilize and Christianize the Filipinos." And if they knew their history, if the history books spent some time on the war in the Philippines in the early part of the 20th century, instead of, as history books do -- they spend a lot of time on the Spanish-American War, which just lasted three months -- they spend virtually no time on the war on the Philippines, a bloody war which lasted, oh, seven years, and which involved massacres and the extermination of populations. That history doesn't appear. You know, we had civilized and Christianized the Filipinos and established our control.

They would know, if they heard the President say, "We are going to bring democracy to the Middle East," they would know how many times we brought democracy to other countries that we invaded. They would know if we brought democracy to Chile, when we overthrew a democratically elected government in Chile in 1973. They would know how we brought democracy to Guatemala when we overthrew, again, a democratically elected -- oh, we love democratic elections, we love free elections, except when they go the wrong way. And then we send either our army in or the CIA in or secret agents in to overthrow the government.

If people knew that history, they would never for a moment believe President Bush, when he says, oh, we're going into Iraq, you know, because of this reason and that reason and liberty and democracy, and they're a threat, you know. I mean, it takes -- yeah, it takes some historical understanding to be skeptical of the things that authorities tell you.

When you know history, you know that governments lie, as I.F. Stone said. Governments lie all the time. Well, not just the American government. It's just in the nature of governments. Well, they have to lie. I mean, governments in general do not represent the people of the societies that they govern. And since they don't represent the people and since they act against the interest of the people, the only way they can hold power is if they lie to the people. If they told people the truth, they wouldn't last very long. So history can help in understanding deception and being skeptical and not rushing to embrace whatever the government tells you.

And if you know some history, you would understand something which is even more basic, perhaps, than the question of lying about this war or lying about this invasion, lying about this intervention, something more basic, if you knew some history: you would understand a sort of fundamental fact about society, and including our society, that the interests of the government and the interests of the people are not the same.

It's very important to know this, because the culture tries very hard to persuade us that we all have a common interest. If they use the language "national interest" -- there's no national interest. There's their interest and our interest. National security -- now, whose security? National defense, whose defense? All these words and phrases are used to try to encircle us all into a nice big bond, so that we will assume that the people who are the leaders of our country have our interests at heart. Very important to understand: no, they do not have our interests at heart.

You will hear a young fellow who is going off to Iraq. I remember hearing the same thing when a young fellow went off to Vietnam. And a reporter goes up to the young fellow and says, "You know, young man, you're going off, and what are your thoughts and why are you doing this?" And the young man says, "I'm doing this for my country." No, he's not doing it for his country. And now, she's not doing it for her country. The people who go off to war are not doing fighting for their country. No, they're not doing their country any good. They're not doing their families any good. They're certainly not doing the people over there any good. But they're not doing it for their country. They're doing it for their government. They're doing it for Bush. That would be a more accurate thing to say: "I'm going off to fight for George Bush. I'm going off to fight for Cheney. I'm going off to fight for Rumsfeld. I'm going off to fight for Halliburton." Yeah, that would be telling the truth.

And, in fact, you know, to know the history of this country is to know that we have had conflict of interest in this country from the very beginning between the people in authority and the ordinary people. We were not one big happy family that fought the American Revolution against England. I remember, you know, in school, that's how it seemed, you know: they're the patriots, and there's all of us, working, fighting together at Valley Forge and Bunker Hill, and so on, against the Redcoats and the British, and so on. It wasn't that way at all. It wasn't a united country.

Washington had to send generals down south to use violence against young people to force them into military service. Soldiers in the revolutionary army mutinied against Washington, against officers, because there was class conflict in the army, just as there had been class conflict all through the colonies before the Revolutionary War. Well, anybody who knows the military, anybody who's been in the military, knows that the military is a class society. There are the privates, and there are the officers. And in the Revolutionary War, the privates were not getting shoes, and they were not getting clothes and not getting food, and they were not getting paid. And the officers were living high in splendence. And so, they mutinied, thousands of them.

I don't remember ever learning about that when I studied history in school, because the myth comes down: oh, we're all one big happy family. You mean, including the black slaves? You mean, including

the Native Americans, whose land we were taking from them, mile by mile by mile by mile? We're all one big happy family? The women, who were left out of all of this, were -- no, very important to understand that fundamental fact: those people who run the country and we, our interests are not the same.

So, yes, history is useful for that, for understanding -- understanding that we are a nation like other nations, for understanding that we are not, as again we are taught from early on, we are the greatest, we are number one, we are the best. And what -- it's called American exceptionalism in the social sciences. The United States is an exception to the rule of nations. That is, the general rule of nations is they're pretty bad. But the United States, our country, we are good. We do good in the world.

Not long ago, I was on a radio program, interviewed by -- this was sort of a regular commercial station. I like to be interviewed on regular commercial stations, where the guy really doesn't know who he's invited, you see. And he says, "Professor Zinn, don't you think America has, in general, been a force for good in the world?" "No, no, no." Why not ask me, "Do you think the British Empire was a force for good in Africa, or the Belgians were a force for good in the Congo, or the French were a force for good in Indochina? You think the United States was a force for good when they sent the Marines into Central America again and again and" -- no.

But there's this notion of, you know, we are different. We are the great -- I mean, sure, there are very great things about America, but that's not what we did to other countries, not what we did to black people, not what we did to Native Americans, not what we did to working people in this country who suffered twelve-hour days until they organized and rebelled and rose up. No, we have to be honest with ourselves.

This is a very hard thing to do: be honest about ourselves. I mean, but, you know, you're brought up and you say, "I pledge allegiance," you know, etc., etc., "liberty and justice for all," "God bless America." Why us? Why does God blessing us? I mean, why is He singling us out for blessing? You know. Why not, "God bless everybody"? If indeed, you know -- but, you know, we're brought up -- if we were brought up to understand our history, we would know, no, we're like other nations, only more so, because we are bigger and have more guns and more bombs, and therefore are capable of more violence. We can do what other empires were not able to do to such an extent. You know, we are rich. Well, not all of us. Some of us are, you see? But, no, we have to be honest.

Don't people join Alcoholics Anonymous so that they can stand up and be honest about themselves? Maybe we ought to have an organization called Imperialists Anonymous, you know, and have the leaders of the country get up there on national television and say, "Well, it's time, you know -- time to tell the truth." It would be -- I don't expect it to happen, but it would be refreshing.

And then, if we knew this history, we would understand how often fear has been used as a way of getting people to act against their own interests to work up hysteria and to get people to do terrible things to other people, because they've been made afraid. Wasn't it fear and hysteria that motivated lynch mobs in the South? Wasn't there created fear of black people, hysteria about black people, that led white people to do some of the most atrocious things that have been done in our history? And isn't it today -- isn't it fear, fear of Muslims, not just terrorists, in general? Of course, fear of terrorists, especially fear of Muslims, you see? A very ugly kind of sentiment to inculcate on the American people, and creating a kind of hysteria, which then enables them to control the population and enable them to send us into war after war and to threaten, you know, still another war.

And if we knew some history, we would know about the hysteria that accompanied the Cold War, the hysteria about communism. It's not that communism didn't exist, just as terrorism does exist, yes. It's not that communism -- communism existed, and there was a Soviet Union, and it was repressive to its own people, and it did control Eastern Europe, but there was an enormous exaggeration of the Soviet threat to the point where -- oh, it's not just that they're in Eastern Europe. It's, they're going to invade Western Europe.

By the way, no evidence of that. CIA analysts who were specialists in the Soviet Union in recent years came forth and said there was never any evidence that the Soviet Union were going to invade Western Europe. But against that, NATO was created. Against that, the United States built up an enormous nuclear arsenal.

The Soviets were always behind the United States. They built up the Soviets as a threat, but after all, who had the atom bomb first? And who had more atom bombs than anybody? And who was the only country that actually dropped atomic bombs on ordinary people in two cities in Japan? And so, we who use the atomic bomb, we who accumulate the atomic bomb, we create a hysteria about countries that are desperately trying to catch up. Of course, Iran will never catch up, and North Korea will never catch up. The Soviet Union tried to catch up. But in creating this monster threat, we took trillions of dollars of the wealth of this country and expended it on military budgets.

And the hysteria about communism reached the point where -- and I'm not just talking about school kids hiding under their desks, you know, because the Soviets were going to drop an atomic bomb. There was no evidence the Soviets were going to drop an atomic bomb. By the way, there is evidence that the joint chiefs of staff, the people high up in the American government, at various, various times proposed preventive war, dropping nuclear weapons on the Soviet Union. But we created a threat so ominous, so omnipresent, that kids were, yeah, hiding under their desks, and also so that anything that happened anywhere in the world that was not to the liking of the United States became part of the world communist threat.

And so, to deal with that, we could go into any country in Latin America that we wanted. And because it was a communist threat, we would send an army over to Vietnam, and several million people would die, because Vietnam became the symbol of the communist threat in the world. When you think about how absurd it was to worry that Vietnam, already divided into a communist north and anti-communist south, to worry that, oh, now half of this tiny country is going to become communist, and just to the north a billion people had turned to communism. And there's something a little bizarre.

But, you know, bizarre thinking is possible when you create fear and hysteria. And we're facing, of course, that situation today with this whole business of terrorism. And if you added up all the times in speeches of George Bush and his Cabinet and all the times they used the word "terrorism" and "terror," it's a mantra they have created to frighten the American people.

I think it's wearing off. You know, when you -- I think there's beginning to be some recognition, and that accounts for the fact that public opinion has turned against the war. People no longer believe that we're fighting in Iraq in order to get rid of terrorism, you know, because the evidence has become so overwhelming that even the mainstream media has reported it -- you know, the National Intelligence Estimate. And this is the government's own intelligence agencies saying that the war in Iraq has caused a growth of terrorist groups, has increased militancy and radicalism among Islamic groups in the Middle East.

But terrorism has supplanted communism as an attempt to get people to do things against their own interests, to do things that will send their own young people to war, to do things that will cause the depletion of the country's wealth for the purposes of war and for the enrichment of the super-rich. It doesn't take much thought about terrorism to realize that when somebody talks about a war on terrorism, they're dealing with a contradiction in terms. How can you make war on terrorism, if war itself is terrorism? Because -- so you respond to terrorism with terrorism, and you multiply the terrorism in the world.

And, of course, the terrorism that governments are capable of by going to war is on a far, far greater scale than the terrorism of al-Qaeda or this group or that group or another group. Governments are terrorists on an enormously large scale. The United States has been engaging in terrorism against Afghanistan, against Iraq, and now they're threatening to extend their terrorism to other places in

the Middle East.

And some history of the use of fear and hysteria and some history of the Cold War and of the anti-communist hysteria would be very useful in alerting people to what we are going through today. I mean, with Iran, for instance, it's shameful, and the media have played such a part in this, of the Iran nuclear weapon. They want a nuclear weapon. They don't say they have a nuclear weapon. They want a nuclear weapon. So do I. Yeah, it's easy to want a nuclear weapon. And small countries that face enormous military powers and who cannot possibly match the military power of these enormous countries, they are following what was the strategy of the United States: the United States said, "We must have a deterrent." How many times have you heard, when you ask, "Why do we have 10,000 nuclear weapons?" "We must have a deterrent." Well, they want a deterrent: one nuclear weapon. You know.

Not that situation with Iraq. I mean, you know, Condoleezza Rice: "a mushroom cloud." We were the only ones who created mushroom clouds, over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Iraq was in no position to create a mushroom cloud. All the experts on the Middle East and atomic weapons said, you know, Iraq was five-ten years away from developing a nuclear weapon, but we were creating, you know, hysteria about nuclear weapons.

Now we're doing the same thing with Iran. And the International Atomic Energy group of the UN flatly contradicts a congressional report which talks about the danger of Iran's nuclear weapons, and the international group, which has conducted many, many inspections in Iran, says, well, you know, you need to -- and they give the American people a kind of half-education. That is, they say, they use the phrase, "They're enriching uranium." Well, that scares me. You know, they're enriching uranium. I don't really know what it means, you see, but it's scary. And then you read the report of the International Atomic Energy group, and you see, well, yes, they are. They've enriched uranium to the point of 3.5%. In order to have one nuclear weapon, they have to enrich it to 90%. They're very, very far from even developing one nuclear weapon, but the phrase "enriched uranium" is, you know, repeated again and again, you know.

And so, yes, we need some historical understanding, yeah, just remembering back to Iraq, just remembering back to the hysteria around Vietnam. My god, a communist might take over South Vietnam! And then what? Just a short hop to San Francisco. No, some of you may remember that when Reagan was supporting the Contras in Nicaragua, he was saying, "You know, you see where Nicaragua is? It wouldn't take much for them to get to Texas." I wondered about that, you see? And then I wondered, why would the Nicaraguans want to get to Texas? And this is no slur on Texas, but -- and once they got to Texas, what would they do? Take a United Airlines flight to Washington. What would they -- but really, it's very important to know some of that history to see how hysteria absolutely cripples consciousness about what is going on.

I would suggest something else. I'm getting worried about how much time I have taken. Well, actually, I'm not getting worried about how much time I've taken. I don't care. I'm looking at my watch to pretend that I care. And since I don't know when I started, I can't figure out how long I've been talking.

But at some point the war in Iraq will come to an end. At some point, the United States will do in Iraq what it did in Vietnam, after saying, "We will never leave. We will never leave. We will win. We will stay the course. We will not cut and run." At some point, the United States is going to have to cut and run from Iraq, you see. And they're going to do it because the sentiment is going to grow and grow and grow in this country and because more and more GIs are going to come back from Iraq and say, "We're not going back again," and because they're going to have more and more trouble supplying the armed forces in Iraq, and because the parents of young people are going to say more and more, "We are not going to allow our young people to go to war for Bechtel, you know, and Halliburton. We're not going to do that." So at some point, yes, at some point we are going to do what they say we mustn't do: cut and run.

We don't have to cut and run. Cut and walk. Cut and swim. Cut, but get out, as fast as you can, because we're not doing any good there. We're not helping the situation. We're not bringing peace. We're not bringing a democracy. We're not bringing stability. We're bringing violence and chaos. We're provoking all of that, and people are dying every day. When a Democratic leader says, "Well, I think we ought to withdraw by May 14th, 2000-and-whatever." You know, yeah, every day from now until then more people will die, and more people will lose arms or legs or become blinded. And so, that is intolerable. And so, we have to do everything we can.

And in the case of Vietnam, at a certain point the government realized it could not carry on the war. The GIs were coming back from Vietnam and turning against the war. They couldn't bring people to join the ROTC. Too many people were running to Canada. Too many people were not signing up for the draft. Finally, it had to do away with the draft. They were losing the support of the population. They were losing support of the military. And at a certain point, no.

And something like that is going to happen. And the sooner we help it happen, of course, the better. The more we go into the high schools -- you know, there's a very practical thing, very practical thing that everybody can do, and that is, go to their local high schools and make sure that all the parents and all the kids in high schools understand that they don't have to give their information to the military recruiters, you see, as, you know. And more and more have teams of people who will counter the propaganda of the military recruiters.

You know, they are having trouble. They're getting desperate about recruiting for the military, going to all sorts of lengths and, or course, they're concentrating -- they send their military recruiters into the poorest schools, because they know that the working class kids are the most vulnerable, the most needy, the ones who, you know -- they need an education, they need a skill, and so. And so, they're trying to prey on the working class. Eugene Debs said -- if you don't mind my quoting Eugene Debs -- but Eugene Debs said in a speech during World War I, which landed him in jail, "The master class has always started the wars. The working class has always fought the wars." And, of course, that has been true all the way. So we will at some point get out of Iraq.

But I want to suggest one thing: we have to think beyond Iraq and even beyond Iran. We don't want to have to struggle against this war and then against that war and then against the next war. We don't want to have an endless succession of antiwar movements. It gets tiring. And we need to think and talk and educate about the abolition of war itself, you see.

I was talking to my barber the other day, because we always discuss world politics. And he's totally politically unpredictable, as most barbers are, you see. He said, "Howard," he said, "you know, you and I disagree on many things, but on one thing we agree: war solves nothing." And I thought, "Yeah." It's not hard for people to grasp that.

And there again, history is useful. We've had a history of war after war after war after war. What have they solved? What have they done? Even World War II, the "good war," the war in which I volunteered, the war in which I dropped bombs, the war after which, you know, I received a letter from General Marshall, general of generals, a letter addressed personally to me, and to 16 million others, in which he said, "We've won the war. It will be a new world." Well, of course, it wasn't a new world. It hasn't been a new world. War after war after war.

There are certain -- I came out of that war, the war in which I had volunteered, the war in which I was an enthusiastic bombardier, I came out of that war with certain ideas, which just developed gradually at the end of the war, ideas about war. One, that war corrupts everybody who engages in it. War poisons everybody who engages in it. You start off as the good guys, as we did in World War II. They're the bad guys. They're the fascists. What could be worse? So, they're the bad guys, we're the good guys. And as the war goes on, the good guys begin behaving like the bad guys. You can trace this back to the Peloponnesian War. You can trace it back to the good guy, the Athenians, and the bad guys, the Spartans. And after a while, the Athenians become ruthless and cruel, like the

Spartans.

And we did that in World War II. We, after Hitler committed his atrocities, we committed our atrocities. You know, our killing of 600,000 civilians in Japan, our killing of probably an equal number of civilians in Germany. These, they weren't Hitler, they weren't Tojo. They weren't -- no, they were just ordinary people, like we are ordinary people living in a country that is a marauding country, and they were living in countries that were marauding countries, and they were caught up in whatever it was and afraid to speak up. And I don't know, I came to the conclusion, yes, war poisons everybody.

And war -- this is an important thing to keep in mind -- that when you go to war against a tyrant -- and this was one of the claims: "Oh, we're going to get rid of Saddam Hussein," which was, of course, nonsense. They didn't -- did our government care that Saddam Hussein tyrannized his own people? We helped him tyrannize his people. We helped him gas the Kurds. We helped him accumulate weapons of mass destruction, really.

And the people you kill in a war are the victims of the tyrant. The people we killed in Germany were the victims of Hitler. The people we killed in Japan were the victims of the Japan Imperial Army, you know. And the people who die in wars are more and more and more people who are not in the military. You may know this about the different ratio of civilian-to-military deaths in war, how in World War I, ten military dead for one civilian dead; in World War II, it was 50-50, half military, half civilian; in Vietnam, it was 70% civilian and 30% military; and in the wars since then, it's 80% and 85% civilian.

I became friends a few years ago with an Italian war surgeon named Gino Strada. He spent ten years, fifteen years doing surgery on war victims all over the world. And he wrote a book about it, *Green Parrots: Diary of a War Surgeon*. He said in all the patients that he operated on in Iraq and Afghanistan and everywhere, 85% of them were civilians, one-third of them, children. If you understand, and if people understand, and if you spread the word of this understanding, that whatever is told to you about war and how we must go to war, and whatever the threat is or whatever the goal is -- a democracy or liberty -- it will always be a war against children. They're the ones who will die in large numbers.

So, war -- well, Einstein said this after World War I. He said, "War cannot be humanized. It can only be abolished." War has to be abolished, you know. And it's -- I know it's a long shot. I understand that, but you have to -- when something's a long shot, but it has to be done, you have to start doing it. Just as the ending of slavery in this country in the 1830s was a really long shot, but people stuck at it, and it took 30 years, but slavery was done away with. And we can see this again and again. So, we have a job to do. We have lots of things to do.

One of the things we can learn from history is that history is not only a history of things inflicted on us by the powers that be. History is also a history of resistance. It's a history of people who endure tyranny for decades, but who ultimately rise up and overthrow the dictator. We've seen this in country after country, surprise after surprise. Rulers who seem to have total control, they suddenly wake up one day, and there are a million people in the streets, and they pack up and leave. This has happened in the Philippines, in Yemen, all over, in Nepal. Million people in the streets, and then the ruler has to get out of the way. So, this is what we're aiming for in this country.

Everything we do is important. Every little thing we do, every picket line we walk on, every letter we write, every act of civil disobedience we engage in, any recruiter that we talk to, any parent that we talk to, any GI that we talk to, any young person that we talk to, anything we do in class, outside of class, everything we do in the direction of a different world is important, even though at the moment they seem futile, because that's how change comes about. Change comes about when millions of people do little things, which at certain points in history come together, and then something good and something important happens.

Thank you.

 **Howard Zinn page**

 **Home Page**

(In accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107, this material is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving the included information for research and educational purposes.)