

*Falsified Education*

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In A Peoples History of the United States, Howard Zinn discusses how victors of wars and conquests have written history. The people who won these wars and conquests, write history from their perspective while suppressing the causes and interest of the opposition. Written and taught history allows the victors the opportunity to indoctrinate their own versions of truth, to give a self-perpetuating justification of their actions. These biased stories and so called truths have justified and perpetuated the continued demise of our planet for the benefit of very few, all the while arguing that this is all for the greater good. Howard Zinn's alternate perspective on US history is remarkable and it makes me think about the following questions; where does our information come from? Why is something news? What makes particular history more important than other? What role does education play in perpetuating these biases? How can we have an education, which considers a world-view that includes biophysical economics as a necessary step towards consilience and towards true economic assessments of value to the material world? These are big questions, so in order to get to the root of this issue, I would like to address where it all starts. I believe education play a key role in acquiring a broader world-view.

I would like to examine what are the truths in education and where are the lies. In American society today, a child is mandated to go to school (or be home schooled to a certain curriculum) in order to be socialized, normalized, and taught skills necessary to function in contemporary culture and society. But who makes the rules? Who creates the curriculum, who decides that standardized learning equivocal for all children is the answer? Children are taught certain things over and over again. By the time they are done with the mandatory 12 years or highly recommended 20+ years of education these repeated statements have become ingrained in the students' mind as well known truths. Zinn argues that no one really checks the facts we learn in school because it is considered to be a well-known fact and therefore widely accepted as truth, not needing to be questioned or checked.

In this essay, I would like to recount my personal experience of deception in education, therefore instead of citing history books, that may or may not be true I will cite my own experience of truth and lies in the realm of education. Early on in my personal life, I came upon a dichotomy of thought. You see, I was born in the former USSR and was educated there until second grade, not much really. But I recall quite clearly, we were taught that the proud, noble Soviets were the first people to go into space and land on the moon. We were also taught that the Soviet army was responsible for ending WWII. When the German army got caught in the blistering cold of Russian winters just outside of Moscow the Soviets pushed on. Hitler was defeated by the great Soviet Union. I do not recall other allies mentioned at all in that early stage of my education. We were told over and over again and made to repeat that ours was the greatest nation in the world and that anyone believing or saying otherwise is a traitor to Grandpa Lenin's revolution and the nation. All the wonderful things communism has brought us we must put our country first, even before family. I was just a child; I had no reason to question these facts. Only by listening to my parents I began to

see the discontent of the state of the USSR. Having to question my loyalty to my parents before my country seemed odd. But how can I express these feelings at the age of 7? I could not have realized then we were being taught only part of the truth. Shortly after I was in for a real surprise.

When I was 8.5 years old my family immigrated to New York City. I started to attend public school in America. The math we were learning was about 3 years behind what we were taught in USSR, so it was a known fact in Russia that “American education was poor.” The history lessons we learned were mainly about the formation of the 13 colonies and the forefathers of the beginnings of the United States. We learned about slavery and civil rights, and then again back to the 13 colonies. I wondered if they teach us the same history over and over because America is a young country, I recall having 3 consecutive years of history repeating the same things. The heroic journey of Christopher Columbus and good deeds of John Smith, the voyage of the Mayflower, the pilgrims and puritans. I was taught that America is the best nation in the world and that we have amazing freedoms that everyone else wants. We had a lesson one day about how America was the first nation to put a man on the moon. The teacher never mentioned the great Soviet hero Yuri Gagarin and the famous dog Laika, who was truly the first earthling in space. This was frustrating and puzzling, but what can I do. I am the student and they are the teachers, I am not in a position to challenge these statement, what do I know. Then we learned that Hitler was defeated because the US decided to join the war efforts against Germany and the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This action alone had stopped World War II. I never learned about this back in the USSR. The American teacher never mentioned the heroic tales of the brave Soviet soldiers who camped out for months in the dead of winter outside of Moscow and defeated the Germans by being strong and heroic. I was stumped again. It was then that I began to realize that history is not universal as one might like to think, but that it varies significantly, contingent on geographic location and the biases of the person delivering the history to you. And with this thought my true dichotomy of identity began to grow inside of me.

These falsified accounts of history continued. In fourth grade, I was taken out of my “bad” public school and put into a small all girls religious based private school, for mostly Russian Jews. Now, I am not even Jewish per-se. My father’s family is of Jewish descent, but by Jewish law your jewishness has to come from your maternal side, and my mother is of Christian lineage, though not Christened herself. The Greek/Russian orthodox faith carries the Christian lineage from the paternal side, interestingly. Which means that from the moment I was born, I was rejected by both the “religions” that my family originates from. Which further confused my notions of identity. That said, I was surprised that this Jewish school felt like it was more important to teach women to read, write, cook and sew instead of focusing on math and science. The gender biased and skewed emphasis was blatantly evident in this particular education system. One experience truly struck me. Our history class was at a point in our textbook where we were going to learn about African Tribes. I was excited for this lesson, I was always fascinated with the unfamiliar and exotic and wanted to learn about the great continent of Africa and its people. But at the start of the lesson the teacher told us to skip over the next 3 chapters, I was confused by this jump in the book and asked her why we were

skipping so much. She replied to the class “African tribes worship many gods and we all know that there is only one true god, Hashem, therefore we are skipping the African people because they are polytheistic.” I was upset. I could not believe it. This was outrage. How can one teacher have such power and potentially racist and negative influence over so many children? She subversively ingrained the idea that the African people are somehow lower than those of “true faith” and have been and continue to live their life as a lie. Africa is not worthy of our time and effort! How terrible. Shortly after that, mid year I transferred schools to PS. 87. A Manhattan public school that was situated in a better district and claimed to have better education.

I will spare you my recount of educational experiences for the following 17 years of my life. But I hope my point is clear. Modern education is largely seduction. The people responsible for education should understand that they are largely perpetuating a truth of the victors, and erasing the other side of the story. Currently, as an adult who is interested in pursuing education as a career, I hope and wish to change at least myself as a teacher: to assess with a skeptical eye the system one follows and takes facts from to pass on to the future generations. Society has to understand that the normalizing and standardizing education is killing creativity, that all men and women are not created equal, and some learn well in the standardized system currently in place and some do not. When I worked as an after school tutor for “troubled” children grades 3-5, as a part of this “No Child Left Behind” program I realized first hand the constraints a school teacher faces when trying to integrate individuality and creativity into their personal curriculum.

Currently the public school system is a huge bureaucracy, teachers have books and binders they must follow, and benchmarks they must meet in order to “follow” the prescribed curriculum. I understand how over the years teachers have been defeated after years of struggle and warnings to do as they are told, not too far from the way students must do as they are told. We now know, due to studies of the education system, that young boys have a much harder time in the current education system. Sitting still and doing as they are told does not come as naturally to them at a tender age of kindergarten. These students who might be dancers or actors if not suppressed instead get into trouble and are labeled as outcasts, troublemakers and “poor” students, and worst-case scenario put on drugs to “calm” them down. Perhaps if we work towards consilience and try to integrate the education system to account for the future of our planet, the abundant variety of methods one can learn from others as well as teach themselves. We can work towards a more tolerant, integrated future that will not result in a demise of humankind. Luckily in recent years the emergence of alternative schools and education methods provides a glimmer of hope for the success of the education system, which is the key to sustaining a healthy planet and a balance of sentient beings that share earths matter energy and perpetuate this beautiful thing we call life.