

# Some Readings

## For Your First Day of High School Civics Class

### I. Howard Zinn

From *The Progressive*, April 2006

A careful reading of history might give us another safeguard against being deceived. It would make clear that there has always been, and is today, a profound conflict of interest between the government and the people of the United States. This thought startles most people, because it goes against everything we have been taught.

We have been led to believe that, from the beginning, as our Founding Fathers put it in the Preamble to the Constitution, it was "we the people" who established the new government after the Revolution. When the eminent historian Charles Beard suggested, a hundred years ago, that the Constitution represented not the working people, not the slaves, but the slaveholders, the merchants, the bondholders, he became the object of an indignant editorial in *The New York Times*.

Our culture demands, in its very language, that we accept a commonality of interest binding all of us to one another. We mustn't talk about classes. Only Marxists do that, although James Madison, "Father of the Constitution," said, 30 years before Marx was born that there was an inevitable conflict in society between those who had property and those who did not.

Our present leaders are not so candid. They bombard us with phrases like "national interest," "national security," and "national defense" as if all of these concepts applied equally to all of us, colored or white, rich or poor, as if General Motors and Halliburton have the same interests as the rest of us, as if George Bush has the same interest as the young man or woman he sends to war.

Surely, in the history of lies told to the population, this is the biggest lie. In the history of secrets, withheld from the American people, this is the biggest secret: that there are classes with different interests in this country. To ignore that—not to know that the history of our country is a history of slaveowner against slave, landlord against tenant, corporation against worker, rich against poor—is to render us helpless before all the lesser lies told to us by people in power.

If we as citizens start out with an understanding that these people up there—the President, the Congress, the Supreme Court, all those institutions pretending to be "checks and balances"—do not have our interests at heart, we are on a course towards the truth. Not to know that is to make us helpless before determined liars....

### II. George Carlin

From "Dumb Americans," *Life is Worth Losing* (2005)

There's a reason education sucks, and it's the same reason it'll never ever be fixed—it's never going to get any better, don't look for it, be happy with what you got, because the owners of this country don't want that. I'm talking about the real owners now. The wealthy big business interests that control things,

and make all the important decisions.

Forget the politicians, they're irrelevant. The politicians are put there to give you the idea you have freedom of choice—you don't. You have no choice. You have owners. They own you. They own everything. They own all the important land. They own, and control the corporations. They've long since bought, and paid for the senate, the congress, the state houses, the city halls, they got the judges in their back pockets, and they own all the big media, so they control just about all the information you get. They got you by the balls. They spend billions of dollars every year lobbying—lobbying, to get what they want.

Well we know what they want. They want more for themselves, and less for everybody else, but I'll tell you what they don't want—they don't want a population of citizens capable of critical thinking. They don't want well informed, well educated people capable of critical thinking. They're not interested in that—that doesn't help them. That's against their interests. That's right. They don't want people that are smart enough to sit around a kitchen table, and think about how badly they're getting screwed by a system that threw them overboard 30 fucking years ago. They don't want that. You know what they want? Obedient workers—Obedient workers, people who are just smart enough to run the machines, and do that paper work. And just dumb enough to passively accept all these increasingly shittier jobs with the lower pay, the longer hours, the reduced benefits, the end of overtime, and vanishing pension that disappear the minute you go to collect it, and now they're coming for your social security money. They want your retirement money. They want it back so they can give it to their criminal friends on Wall Street, and you know something? They'll get it—they'll get it all from you sooner or later cause they own this place. It's a big club, and you ain't in it. You and I are not in The Big Club.

By the way, it's the same big club they use to beat you over the head with all day long when they tell you what to believe. All day long beating you over the head with their media telling you what to believe, what to think, and what to buy.

The table has tilted folks. The game is rigged, and nobody seems to notice. Nobody seems to care.... Good honest hard working people... continue to elect these rich douchebags who don't give a fuck about you. They don't give a fuck about you—they don't give a fuck about you. They don't care about you at all—at all—at all, and nobody seems to notice. Nobody seems to care.

That's what the owners counted on. The fact that Americans will probably remain willfully ignorant of the big red, white, and blue dick that's being jammed up their assholes everyday, because the owners of this country know the truth. It's called the American Dream cause you have to be asleep to believe it.

### **III. Maj. Gen. Smedley Butler, USMC Ret.**

**From "I Was a Racketeer for Capitalism," *Common Sense*, November 1935**

The U.S. has routinely destroyed democracy throughout the globe while its leaders claimed to be spreading democracy. I spent 33 years and four months in active military service and during that period I spent most of my time as a high class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism. I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street. I helped purify Nicaragua for the International Banking House

of Brown Brothers in 1902-1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for the American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras right for the American fruit companies in 1903. In China in 1927 I helped see to it that Standard Oil went on its way unmolested. Looking back on it, I might have given Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was to operate his racket in three districts. I operated on three continents.

## **IV. Kevin Carson**

**From “Think For Yourself,” Center for a Stateless Society, June 17, 2010**

It’s a bit late for a column better suited to Memorial Day, but sometimes these things come to me on their own schedule.

I’ve never seen Arlington National Cemetery in person. But even seen on television, its scale is beyond comprehension. And the world is full of such places, in many countries, overflowing with war dead in their hundreds of thousands and millions. Hundreds of thousands and millions of men who left the farm, their jobs, their families, to die — because they believed those who said it was for “their nation’s interest.”

We libertarians sometimes take a philosophical approach and argue from general principles, like self-ownership and nonaggression. We own ourselves, but we don’t own others. We have rights whose exercise and defense we can delegate to others, but we can’t delegate a right — a right to control others — that we don’t ourselves possess.

That’s all well and good, I suppose. But there are lots of people out there who will never be convinced by such philosophical arguments, but who can be reached by old-fashioned common sense. And if such people simply evaluated the claims and demands of government in the light of their own horse sense, the destructive power of the state would be greatly weakened.

The problem is, people usually don’t. They’re taught from earliest childhood to put claims about Our Country, like claims about God, in a special class of propositions not subject to the normal rules of skepticism.

This makes no sense. If you break down the artificial compartmentalization between the propositions of a man trying to sell you a used car, and the propositions of a man trying to sell you on a course of action dictated by Our Country or God, there’s really no difference at all.

Think about it. The people who run the government are just human beings, exactly like the human being who wants to sell you the used car. And they have interests, just like every human being. When someone wraps himself in the Flag and uses the Holy Words, there’s a pretty good chance there’s something in it for him. Really. God won’t strike you dead for thinking it.

So for the love of God, when someone asks you to put on a uniform and fight for Our Country, stop and use your mind to evaluate his claims with the same skepticism you’d have for the pitch of a used car salesman.

What are the real interests of the people trying to sell you on a war? Whose other interests are they serving? When they talk about a “threat,” about “enemy aggression,” about the “national interest,” just

what do they really mean by it?

“Threat”? What kind of military threat sounds plausible to you, against a country whose military budget is larger than those of the rest of the world combined, with bases and garrisons in dozens of countries, a country that’s overthrown and installed more governments than most of the other empires in history? “Aggression”? What kind of meaningful aggression can we fear from a country on the other side of the world that’s barely capable of projecting military force three hundred miles outside its own borders? “National interest”? What country ever had a legitimate national interest in picking the winner of a contest between two such feeble countries on the other side of the world, neither of which could fight it at all unless it went all the way around the world to meet them?

Stop and evaluate those claims with the same common sense you reserve for used car pitches, and other propositions outside the special class of propositions involving God and Our Country. If you subject them to common sense, you’ll probably find that any government making such claims, using the words “threat” and “aggression” and “national interest” in such a perverse way, is itself what you’d call an aggressor if it were any other country.

And you may find that the “national interest” the government claims isn’t your interest at all, or that of your neighbors, but rather the interests of those who get rich off other people’s sweat and blood.

You may find, in fact, that the government is selling you a used car.