

Bringing Zinn to Class

Alum's nonprofit offered free books to Arkansas schools amid banning effort

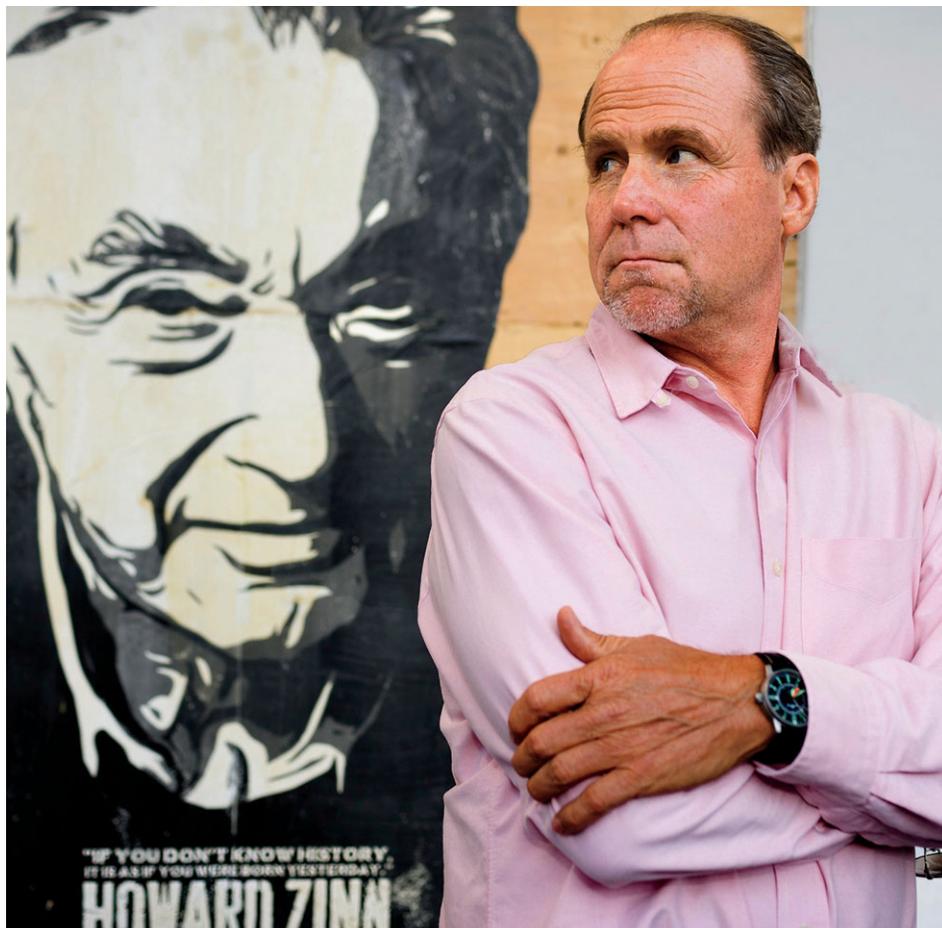
HUNDREDS OF ARKANSAS teachers now own new copies of books by historian and longtime BU professor Howard Zinn—thanks in part to BU alums who took action against an effort to ban Zinn's writings from their classrooms.

This spring, Republican state representative Kim Hendren filed a bill in the Arkansas House to prohibit the state's public schools from including materials by or about Zinn in their curricula. Hendren told media outlets that he was not personally opposed to Zinn's writings but that some of his constituents had raised concerns about Zinn's approach to American history.

Zinn, who died in 2010, taught in the College of Arts & Sciences political science department from 1964 to 1988. His best-known and sometimes controversial book, *A People's History of the United States*, tells the American story from the perspective of women, African Americans, Native Americans, immigrant laborers, and others who are often underrepresented in traditional textbooks.

The Arkansas bill died in committee, but not before it drew the attention of the Zinn Education Project (ZEP), a nonprofit that offers teaching materials to help middle and high school teachers present Zinn's brand of history in their classrooms. After hearing of the Arkansas legislation, ZEP offered to send a book by Howard Zinn and a teaching guide, *A People's History for the Classroom*, to any Arkansas teacher who requested them.

ZEP cofounder William Holtzman (COM'74) says more than 800 teachers asked for and received the books. "From March 2016 to March 2017," he adds, "Arkansas traffic on our website



William Holtzman (COM'74), cofounder of the Zinn Education Project, has fond memories of attending Howard Zinn's lectures, debating issues with him after class, and covering his activism for the *Daily Free Press*.

jumped 92 percent." One middle school librarian who wrote to request a book told the organization, "The proposed bill to ban Mr. Zinn's book has fired up the Arkansas librarian world. To combat ignorance, I must have knowledge. I respectfully request a copy so I can educate my tiny corner of the world."

The project's free book offer was made possible by donations from Zinn's publishers and from individual donors, including Riea Lainoff, who told ZEP that she came to BU and took Zinn's class after watching him speak about the Vietnam War on television. "He was one of the kindest, most honest, brightest, and most sincere people I have ever met,"

she says. "He left an imprint on me that remains a guiding force today. Our hope for the future lies with today's students. Let's help them learn the critical thinking skills that may help them navigate that future."

Book-banning efforts in schools appear to be on the rise, says James LaRue, director of the American Library Association's office for intellectual freedom, which tracks censorship attempts in schools and libraries. LaRue attributes the increase to overprotective "Velcro" parenting. Many parents today want to control everything their children see and read, he says, "and so we begin to see this sort of legislation where someone comes in

A RECORD 60,000 APPLY TO BU

**Adding to surge:
more applicants of color**

and says, ‘Our children are being led astray, and we have to take action.’”

While quieter local censorship attempts sometimes succeed, he says, well-publicized proposals like the one in Arkansas rarely do. In fact, they often backfire. “That is the irony of censorship,” he says. “As you know, the best way to best-sellerdom is to be ‘banned in Boston.’”

The Zinn Education Project was launched in 2007 after Holtzman, a retired tech executive, stumbled upon *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*, a documentary about Zinn's life and work. The film brought back fond memories, he says, of attending Zinn's BU lectures, debating issues with him after class, and covering his activism for the student newspaper, the *Daily Free Press*. “He was an extraordinary guy, and I really gravitated toward him,” Holtzman says.

He emailed Zinn to reintroduce himself and proposed they embark on some type of social project together. “We went through a whole list of ideas we could focus on—prison reform, immigration reform,” says Holtzman. They quickly decided they could make the largest impact by focusing on education, and Zinn connected Holtzman to two nonprofits, Rethinking Schools and Teaching for Change. The organizations now coordinate ZEP, focusing primarily on developing and promoting lesson plans and teaching activities that teachers can download for free from the ZEP website (zinnedproject.org). The site has around 70,000 registrants, and ZEP estimates that its materials reach over a million students around the globe each year, including many in Arkansas. **CORINNE STEINBRENNER**



BU saw increases in the number of African American and Hispanic applicants this year.

The University has broken the 60,000 mark for freshman applicants for the first time, with students of color driving the surge.

Kelly Walter, associate vice president for enrollment and executive director of admissions, says BU received 60,817 applications for the Class of 2021, which aims to enroll 3,400 freshmen. The number of applications is 6 percent greater than last year's applicant pool.

“BU is the first institution in New England to exceed 60,000 fall

freshman applications,” says Walter, adding that she knows of only one private school in the country, New York University, with a larger applicant pool. (Some public universities receive applications in the six digits.) Data for applicant numbers are shared among universities and are available from other sources, such as the federal government. The bigger pool mainly comes from US applicants, “and in particular underrepresented minority students,” she says. A total of 4,325 African Americans applied, representing 7 percent of the applicant pool and a 15 percent jump over last year's percentage of black applicants. Hispanic and Latino applicants, at 6,543, represent approximately 11 percent of the applicant pool, and mark an 11 percent increase over last year. Walter believes that new recruitment efforts played a key role. “We expanded our multicultural student outreach and access initiatives,” she says, with BU representatives visiting 105 community-based organizations. BU added a second contingent of students from California's Bay Area to its Posse Foundation scholars, awarding scholarships to high-achieving urban high schoolers. **RICH BARLOW**

TRUE GRID

Much has changed at Boston University in the past 20 years. The number of graduates rose, from 2,459 in 1997 to 3,302 in May 2017, and the number of majors available to BU undergraduates climbed, from 428 to 506. Student interests have also changed, as seen here. (All numbers refer to undergrads only.)

May 2017 graduates majoring in computer science

90

May 1997 graduates majoring in computer science

31

May 2017 graduates majoring in English

51

May 1997 graduates majoring in English

89

May 2017 graduates majoring in journalism

83

May 1997 graduates majoring in journalism

87