

# Howard Zinn

HOWARD ZINN WAS an author, a history professor, and a political activist whose writings changed the lives and minds of BU students and readers around the world.

Zinn taught in the College of Arts & Sciences political science department for twenty-four years, from 1964 to 1988. He was a hero of the political left, a consistent and cogent critic of American policies, domestic and foreign. He is best known for his 1980 book *A People's History of the United States*, which defied the notion that history is defined and written by and for "the winners."

A television documentary released last year, *The People Speak*, translated Zinn's work to the screen for yet another generation of progressive thinkers.

Zinn died of a heart attack on January 27, 2010, in Santa Monica, California. He was eighty-seven.

TO HONOR Zinn's memory, CAS has established the Howard Zinn Graduate Fund for Studies of Democracy. The fund will support graduate students in the political science Ph.D. program who are researching all aspects of democracy. Contributions may be sent to Karen Weiss Jones, chief advancement officer, Boston University College and Graduate School of Arts & Sciences, 595 Commonwealth Ave., West Entrance, Suite 700, Boston, MA 02115, or made online at [bu.edu/makeagift](http://bu.edu/makeagift). Donors are asked to enter the name of the fund in the comments/question box.



← HOWARD ZINN taught in front of crowded lecture halls and clashed with the administration during his twenty-four years at BU.

MATT KALINOWSKY

Inspiration of political left dies at 87

Caryl Rivers, a College of Communication professor of journalism and one of the famous BU Five, a group of faculty who with Zinn refused to cross a University picket line in 1979, says that even though Zinn hadn't taught here for many years, his death would change BU forever. "He was such a righteous man," she says. "He was such a gentleman, a wonderful scholar; he had such charm and such erudition. He will be sorely missed."

President Robert A. Brown describes Zinn as "an iconic writer and educator" who had an impact on generations of BU students. "Hopefully," says Brown, "his spirit will live on at the University through the Howard Zinn Lecture

Series in the College of Arts & Sciences."

Alex MacDonald (CAS'72), a former student of Zinn's, and his wife, Maureen A. Strafford (MED'76), made the gift that endowed the lecture series. Zinn's impact was profound, he says, particularly on undergraduates who came of age at BU in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as the Vietnam War raged.

"Howard Zinn's teaching style was a dynamic one: that students should *learn* history in the classroom, but also *make* history in the public square, on the Ellipse in front of the White House, on a packed Boston Common, and on the sidewalks of Commonwealth Avenue," says MacDonald.

At the October 2009

Howard Zinn Lecture Series, James Carroll, a National Book Award winner, a *Boston Globe* columnist, and former University

chaplain, recalled that during his early years at BU, he was one of those who sat in, without permission, on Zinn's history lectures. "In those lectures I

heard a language," he said. "I heard a rationale, an ethical argument that defined the feelings I was having, and enabled me eventually, still timidly, to claim them as my own."

Zinn grew up in a working class family in New York City, and at eighteen landed a job as an apprentice ship-fitter at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. At twenty-one, he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force

**WEB EXTRA**  
Watch Howard Zinn speak at the first lecture of an annual series bearing his name at [bu.edu/bostonia](http://bu.edu/bostonia).

Three endowed professorships included in major new gift

# Feld Family Foundation Pledges \$10 Million

and flew combat missions in Europe during World War II.

Following college and graduate school, he became chairman of the history and social sciences department at Spelman College, in Atlanta, where he was active in the civil rights movement and encouraged African-American students to fight racial discrimination. Soon students were challenging the restrictions they faced, and the administration viewed Zinn as “an instigator rather than supporter,” he wrote in his 1994 autobiography. In 1963 the college fired him for insubordination.

He joined BU’s political science department in 1964, at the beginning of the anti-Vietnam War movement. He had been opposed to war since hanging up his flight jacket. “War is not complicated,” Zinn told *Bostonia* in 2005. “War is simple. It’s like a drug. It’s like crack. You get a high from victory in war . . . My conclusions about war led me to become an activist against the war in Vietnam and to write about the nature of war.”

At BU Zinn taught in front of crowded lecture halls, clashed with the administration, and joined teach-ins, debates, and rallies. He testified for the defense at the 1973 Pentagon Papers trial of his friend Daniel Ellsberg. He retired from BU in 1988.

“His entreaty to his students was to participate in the great moral issues of one’s time,” MacDonald says. “From his first college post at Spelman College in segregated Atlanta starting in 1957, Howard Zinn was the embodiment of how to live an engaged and principled life. And he led by his example.”

THANKS TO THE generosity of a family of BU graduates, three endowed professorships will be established at Boston University.

The Feld Family Foundation has pledged \$10 million to establish the professorships, one in each school attended by a Feld family member: the Feld Family Professorship of Marketing in the School of Management, the Feld Family Professorship of Teaching Excellence in the College of Arts & Sciences, and the Feld Family Professorship of New Media in the College of Communication. The balance of the donation, \$2.5 million, will be allocated by mutual agreement between the Felds and the University.

“The Feld family’s generous gift points directly to the heart of the University’s strategic plan to strengthen the quality of the faculty,” says President Robert A. Brown. “The family’s philanthropic initiative provides a shining example for alumni and friends of the University to emulate. We truly appreciate their benevolence and leadership.”

The Feld Family Foundation is a private philanthropic organization administered by the Feld family, Kenneth Feld (SMG’70), Bonnie Feld (CAS’73), and their daughters, Nicole, Alana (COM’02), and Juliette. The foundation is dedicated to supporting

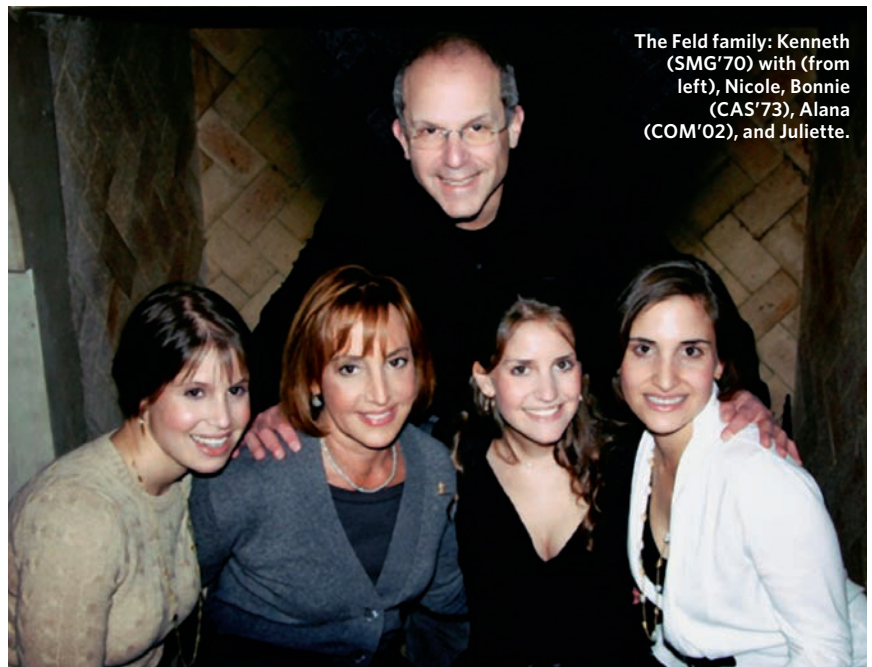
higher education, the performing arts, and conservation of the endangered Asian elephant.

Prior foundation support established the Feld Family Career Center at the School of Management and the Feld Family Skating Center at Agganis Arena. This new pledge is a key facet of the University’s multiyear development plan led by Brown and the Board of Trustees.

“Our goal at the Feld Family Foundation is to support higher education, particularly as it relates to those educators setting the pace and challenging the minds of tomorrow’s leaders,” says Kenneth Feld. “We are an alumni family, and we have all benefited from our experiences with BU and are very pleased with the direction Dr. Brown is taking the University. Through the Feld Family Foundation, we are in a position to give back to BU so others can experience the same opportunities.”

Feld Entertainment, a privately owned and operated family company, is the parent company of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, Feld Motor Sports, Disney on Ice, and Disney Live!

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The Feld family: Kenneth (SMG’70) with (from left), Nicole, Bonnie (CAS’73), Alana (COM’02), and Juliette.