

The
Cowtown Humanist

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A BOTTOM-UP VIEW OF AMERICA

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DICK TRICE REVIEWS HOWARD ZINN'S *PEOPLE'S HISTORY*

"History is the memory of states," wrote Henry Kissinger in *A World Restored*, telling the story of nineteenth-century Europe from the viewpoint of the rulers of the big powers, ignoring the millions who suffered from their policies. Howard Zinn proposes to rectify the balance. He notes that traditional historians relate almost exclusively the doings of the political and economic elite and scarcely take more than passing notice of the other 99 percent of the people. Columbus' biographer, Samuel Eliot Morison, for example, while acknowledging that the policies Columbus set in motion were to result in the eradication of millions of Indians, pretty much dismisses their importance with the observation:

He had his faults and his defects, but they were largely the defects of the qualities that made him great—his indomitable will, his superb faith in God and in his own mission as the Christ-bearer to lands beyond the

seas, his stubborn persistence despite neglect, poverty and discouragement.

Perhaps the historian is, consciously or unconsciously, pandering to the hero-worshipping appetites of his readership. Zinn, however, thinks that the fault lies mainly in ideology. To emphasize the heroism and achievements of great men serves to

The cry of the poor is not always just, but if you don't listen to it, you will never know what justice is.

-Author Unknown (Howard Zinn)

justify what was done, including, oftentimes, genocide and lesser atrocities as the price of progress. An unstated premise is the existence of a common entity, the nation, which embodies the interests of all its citizenry. Zinn's heroes, by contrast, are not presidents, explorers, Supreme Court justices, diplomats and generals; rather they are those who have resisted, those who have

gone against the tides of the times. The real heroes in his alternative history are the Mother Jones', the Dan Shayes', the Powhatans', the Lucretia Motts; the Helen Kellers', the Nat Turners' and countless others who have largely gone unsung in the history books.

Speaking to 25 Humanists on January 20 at West Side Unitarian Universalist Church, Dick Trice picked up on this theme of the underdog, often deceived and naively trusting, other times courageously risking life and well-being, to cope against overwhelming odds. Columbus set the tone for what was to come when he claimed the 10,000 maravedis owing to the

seaman, Rodrigo, of the Santa Maria who first spotted the land of the New World. To follow were the extinction of one to eight million Arawaks (variously estimated) on the island of Hispaniola alone, Cortez' and Pizarro's conquests of the Aztecs and the Incas for their gold, and the deaths of up to nine million Indians in North America over four centuries as the result of incursions largely by Anglo-Saxons. Hundreds of thousands of more pliable Africans were imported to work the fields and to do much of the grinding labor of household and workshop. Once safe from Indian incursions sponsored by the French, the less well-to-do were ready to be rid of the British and to appropriate the lands and political power of the largely Loyalist elite. Since America was a rich land, enough was also available to appease the appetites of the upwardly mobile. But there was nothing much or nothing at all in the way of freedom and opportunity for slaves, the landless, women and other minorities. The 55 who gathered in Philadelphia to rewrite the Articles of Confederation, instead, wrote a wonderfully flexible document that assured the predominance of the wealthy merchant, banker and planter class, always yielding just enough to stave off any very serious challenges to its power. Racism, religion and ethnic and sectional animosities were often played upon to undermine the organization of a united opposition despite occasional outbreaks of

rioting in the cities, slave uprisings, farmer unrest and, with industrialization, worker demands for higher wages and better working conditions. Unlike in almost all other Western countries, the U.S. was, except for the Civil War, to see a rather minimal level of political and social turbulence. What accounts for the relative docility of the 99 percent? At the time of the revolution one percent of the population held 40 percent of the nation's wealth; today the ratio is about the same while other western countries have seen a marked shift toward a more equal distribution of wealth and income. Howard Zinn thinks it is because the one percent has controlled the writing of history. He who controls the past controls the present and the future. His is a project toward rectifying the balance.

RECOMMENDED READING: *A People's History of the United States, 1492 - Present*. By Howard Zinn.
Secrets, Lies and Democracy. By Noam Chomsky
An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution. By Charles Beard

ANIMAL CONNECTION OF TEXAS TO ADDRESS ANIMAL SUFFERING

The Animal Connection of Texas (ACT) will speak about animal suffering at the next regular meeting.

ACT was founded in 1986 and is a grassroots, all volunteer, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to the elimination of animal suffering. ACT has been instrumental in fighting and winning a 4-year battle to end pound seizure in Dallas (the practice of selling dogs and cats from city shelters to research labs). ACT also established S.N.Y.P., a discount spay/neuter coupon program, used throughout the metroplex. S.N.Y.P. is a non-profit organization dedicated to ending pet over-population. An all-volunteer group, S.N.Y.P. has joined together with Dallas-Ft. Worth humane groups and veterinarians to promote spaying or neutering of pets by providing reduced-price spay/neuter coupons.

ACT has also helped bring to Dallas Pet-Fixx, a mobile spay/neuter clinic, free to low-income residents, and Luv-A-Pet, now Spay/Neuter Assistance Program, Inc., which provides free and low cost spaying, neutering, and veterinary care. They currently operate clinics in Houston, Los Angeles, Native American lands, San Antonio, and Monterrey, Mexico. The meeting topic will cover an introduction to the ACT organization, issues, and accomplishments. For More information on ACT, visit their web site: <http://www.animalconnectiontx.org/> SNYP can be reached at 214-349-SNYP for spay/neuter coupons and information.

ON CIVIL RIGHTS

LA JUDGE STIKES DOWN PROVISION OF PATRIOT ACT

For the first time a federal judge has struck down a part of the USA Patriot Act. In Los Angeles, judge Audrey

B. Collins on January 26 said that a provision in the law banning certain types of support for terrorist groups was so vague that it risked running afoul of the First Amendment. The provision in question prohibits anyone from providing "expert advice or assistance" to a known terrorist group. Humanitarian groups that work with Kurdish refugees in Turkey and Tamil residents of Sri Lanka had sued the government arguing that

they had stopped writing political material and helping organize peace conferences for fear they would be prosecuted. In largely symbolic votes, more than 230 communities have raised formal objections to the Act. Bush has threatened to veto any changes restricting governmental authority.

PUTTING POWER TO A TEST

The indefinite quality of the war on terrorism, as Bush calls it, may make infringements on individual rights more worrying (than those to date). No one can define how or when this “war” will end. An American detained as an “enemy combatant” could be imprisoned for the rest of his life. Two Americans have been held in solitary confinement as “enemy combatants” now for more than 18 months. ...The more than 650 men imprisoned at Guantanamo were captured in Afghanistan or turned over by the governments of other countries—some as remote as Zambia. The underlying question is whether they are prisoners of war or were acting outside the laws of war—as terrorists, for example. The Third Geneva Convention, which the United States has signed and ratified, says that when there is doubt about a prisoner’s status, the question is to be determined by a “competent tribunal.” That means an independent one. The Bush administration has refused to comply with the Geneva Convention. ...The Supreme Court has agreed to decide

only the jurisdictional issue—whether habeas corpus actions can be brought in U.S. courts—and not such underlying substantive questions as whether the administration must comply with the Geneva Convention. But if the decision goes against the government, it would be a setback for the administration’s pattern of using the attacks of 9/11 and the war on terrorism to assert claims of unreviewable power. ...In the American system, as it has developed, it falls on the Supreme Court to have the last word. Bush can hardly object to that role for a court that made him president.

-Anthony Lewis, former columnist, NYT

LAWYERS CHALLENGE PRESIDENTIAL POWERS AT GUANTANAMO

In mid-January five of the soldier-lawyers assigned to defend the first clutch of tribunal-bound detainees at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, filed a “friend of the court” brief to the Supreme Court contending the constitution “cannot countenance an open-ended presidential power with no civilian review whatsoever.” To

permit this would give Mr. Bush “monarchical” powers and cast the detainees into a legal “black hole”. The administration has already retreated a little on the question of civilian review. In December, it announced the creation of a special “review panel”, composed of four civilians, to look at the military tribunals’ findings. The panel will be able to order new hearings on a point of law or even dismiss the charges, but may only make recommendations to the Secretary of Defense on all other matters, including sentencing. The Supreme Court is examining the legal status of the American naval base. The detainees, the government has argued, have no legal rights (being held outside the U.S.), even if they were to be tortured or summarily executed.

The administration suddenly agreed in December to allow Yaser Hamid access to a lawyer, the first alleged enemy combatant to be given such a “privilege”. His lawyer visited him in early February. He was not allowed, however, to discuss the conditions of his imprisonment. (The Economist, AP)

CHURCH & STATE

OHIO TO BAN GAY MARRIAGES AND MORE

The Republican-dominated Ohio legislature on February 3 approved a sweeping ban on same-sex marriages. The Ohio measure, which also would bar state agencies from giving benefits to both gay and heterosexual domestic partners, would make Ohio the 38th state to prohibit same-sex unions. Gov. Bob Taft, a Republican, plans to sign the bill into law. Some of the state’s largest corporations and Ohio State University had raised concerns that

the ban would hurt the state’s business image and undermine their ability to recruit skilled workers. By contrast, nearly a dozen legislatures are expected to debate this year measures that would legalize same-sex civil unions, or provide state benefits to same-sex partners. Canada, Belgium and the Netherlands have expanded their marriage laws to include same-sex couples.

In the U.S., the Massachusetts high court in November ordered the legislature to make same-sex marriages possible this year and on February ruled that civil unions, as an alternative to marriage, would not pass muster to the court’s earlier

ruling. Same-sex marriages there presumably could begin as early as May 17. Vermont recognizes civil unions; California, Hawaii, New Jersey and more than 60 local governments have passed laws and ordinances granting various rights to unmarried same-sex unions. President Bush suggested in the State of the Union address and even more strongly in a written statement following the Massachusetts High Court’s latest ruling that a constitutional amendment might be needed to counter judges who try to redefine marriage to include gay couples. Social conservatives say that his remarks have galvanized their movement against gay marriage. (NYT)

MARRIAGE GOOD FOR THE POOR

President Bush insisted that heterosexual marriage was “one of the most fundamental, enduring institutions of our civilization” in his State of the Union address last week. Yet this statement came shortly after his own administration floated a proposal for a \$1.5 billion miracle cure: an initiative to promote “healthy” marriages, particularly among low-income couples. And what of all the millionaires in failing marriages or fleeing commitments? Where are the initiatives devoted to rehabilitating this group? Sorry, they’re on their own in the romance department. In this administration, the economic benefits filter upward, the marital meddling filters down. ...Only 56 percent of all adults are married, compared with 75 percent 30 years ago. The proportion of traditional married-couple-with children American household has dropped to 26 percent of all households from 45 percent in the early 1970’s. The demographers say Americans are voting no on marriage. ...As for those better communication skills the Bush administration wants to teach low-income groups, particularly regarding “difficult issues” like money, which could backfire. If the lower and middle classes did start communicating better about money, that could include communicating to their elected representatives that they’re fed up with condescension and election-year pandering for conservative votes while central issues in their lives like jobs, pay and working conditions are studiously ignored.

Laura Kipnis, Professor of Media Studies, Northwestern University

N.B. Of the 535 members in the Congress, 108 have been divorced at least once, according to a 2000 survey by Roll Call, a newspaper that covers Congress.

NEWS BRIEFS

TOP OF THE NEWS

SCHOOL VOUCHERS FOR D.C. NOW, NATIONWIDE LATER

Education Secretary Rod Paige told a Heritage Foundation audience on January 28 that, “the school-voucher program in the District will be available for low-income D.C. students this fall”, clearing the way to implement the program nationwide within the next few years. (Washington Times)

ROE v WADE: 30 YEARS LATE

A new CNN/USA Today/Gallup survey finds 38 percent of Americans believe abortion should be legal in most or all circumstances, 42 percent believe it should be available in a few circumstances, such as to save the mother’s life and 18 percent say abortion should never be legal. That is almost unchanged in the past 15 years.

Even though, as the Supreme Court said in 1992, “an entire generation has come of age free to assume Roe’s concept of liberty,” the right remains under threat. According to NARAL Pro-Choice America, 335 anti-choice measures have been enacted since 1995. President Bush has openly endorsed the goal of banning abortion, and some of his judicial picks have been anti-abortion zealots, a worrying indicator for his possible future nominees to the Supreme Court. (CNN and FindLaw)

COURT TAKES UP DEATH PENALTY FOR JUVENILES

The Supreme Court agreed January 26 to decide whether the Constitution prohibits the death penalty for crimes committed at the age of 16 or 17. Only two such death sentences were imposed last year and jurors in Virginia rejected the death penalty for Lee Malvo. (Attorney General Ashcroft had sent the case to Virginia rather than Maryland where Malvo was thought less likely to receive the death penalty.) The justices will consider whether there is a national consensus of the sort the Court discerned two years ago when it prohibited the execution of mentally retarded defendants. A Court decision in 1988 had struck down the death penalty for those age 15 or younger. Four of the nine justices previously opined that the death penalty for defendants younger than 18 was “inconsistent with evolving standards of decency in a civilized society.” Only three states, Texas, Oklahoma, and Virginia have executed juvenile defendants in the past ten years. Of the 38 states that have a death penalty, 17 have set a minimum age of 18, either by legislation or judicial decision. This is an increase of five since the Supreme Court found a lack of consensus on the question in a 1989 decision.

The U.S. is the only country in which the execution of those under 18 is officially sanctioned and the only country that has not signed the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, which prohibits the practice. Justices O’Connor and Kennedy, the two swing votes on the Court, have expressed growing interest in international legal developments, possibly boding a switch in one or both of their previous positions on this issue. Texas accounts for 13 of the 22 juvenile executions since the modern era of capital punishment began in 1976. Of the 76 people currently on death row for crimes

committed before the age of 18, almost one third are in Texas, including three scheduled for lethal injection in the coming months. In Texas 16 hear olds are exempted from the death penalty, receiving instead an automatic life prison term for capital murder. (NYT and AP)

GIBSON TO DELETE CURSE SCENE IN ‘PASSION OF THE CHRIST’

According to a source close to Mel Gibson, the scene in his controversial film “The Passion of Christ” in which the Jewish high priest Caiphas calls down a curse on the Jewish people by declaring of the crucifixion “His blood be on us and our children.” Will be cut from the version to be shown in theaters starting February 25. The \$25 million movie has been much criticized, particularly by Jewish groups, as possibly inflaming anti-Semitic feelings. An earlier controversy concerning whether the Pope had given his thumbs up to its “authenticity” has never been completely clarified. Allegedly the Pope, after viewing the film, had indicated that that was the way it was. Vatican spokesmen have subsequently claimed that the Pope never publicly comments on artistic matters.

FEDERAL JUDGE STAYS EXECUTION OF TEXAS SCHIZOPHRENIC

A federal judge halted the scheduled execution of Fredericksburg killer Scott Panetti Wednesday, ruling that the state courts should re-evaluate claims by the condemned man’s attorneys that he is not mentally competent to understand his fate. Panetti’s attorneys and mental health advocates claim that Panetti was long ago determined to be schizophrenic and was allowed to act

as his own attorney even though he had told the court that he planned to call Jesus Christ, John F. Kennedy and his alter ego, Sarge, as defense witnesses. (FWST)

JEANETTE POPP RUNNING FOR STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Our August 2003 speaker, Jeanette Popp, Chairperson of the Texas Moratorium Network, has announced her candidacy for State Representative, District 99.

Ms. Popp is a Board member of Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, a member of Amnesty International, and is on the Advisory board for Texas Cure. She is a resident of Azle. For her platform, visit www.texaspopp.com.

HoFW NEWS

FEBRUARY STUDY & QUESTIONNAIRE

Michelle Harvey, a doctoral student at the University of North Texas, will be continuing her research on the relationship between spirituality and health at the February meeting. She will be asking for volunteers to complete a questionnaire for her data collection.

TRASH BASHED

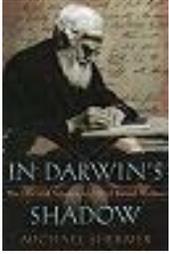
A hearty “Thank You” to all who participated in the February “Darwin Day Trash Bash”. The organizers believe it to have been very encouraging and even included some non-member supporters!

For those who could not attend, you will have another chance at the HoFW “May Day, Mayday” event on Saturday, May 1. Mark your calendars.



BOOK CORNER

In Darwin's Shadow: The Life and Science of Alfred Russel Wallace. A Biographical Study on the Psychology of History. By Michael Shermer.



publisher. He is a prolific writer of books as well. In his latest book he has rendered a highly readable account of the life of a great scientist, albeit not quite in the first rank. Perhaps to some extent the development of his scientific genius was stunted by the fact that his friend and rival Charles Darwin got their “firstest with the mostest”. Although their essays on natural selection were published simultaneously, Darwin had been developing his natural selection theory for 20 years

man’s evolution was unique, that supernatural intervention was necessary to explain the development of homo sapiens much larger brain. At the time, it seemed a very plausible argument: How could intellectual capacities have been selected for when man was still in a primitive state? (On one occasion Darwin wrote him to ask ruefully that Wallace not “kill your and my child”.) Albeit gullible and naïve in many respects, his formal education amounting to only about eight years, Wallace nonetheless achieved recognition as one of the most outstanding scientists of his time. His 90-year lifespan was to produce 22 books and scores of scientific studies in addition to much popular writing for his and his family’s support. Would he have constrained his labors more narrowly had opportunity beckoned for the development of natural selection theory? Had there been no voyage on the Beagle for Darwin, would we now be talking about Wallacean evolution? Shermer thinks probably not. Wallace appears to have lacked the doggedness with which Darwin pursued his vision. A socialist and egalitarian, he aspired to a more “rounded” view of man’s estate and destiny. He also lacked the wealth and the links to the scientific and social elites that greased the way for Darwin’s achievements. For all that, most of us, if projected back a century and a half in time, would probably feel more at home with the cheerful if somewhat eccentric Wallace than with the rigorously focused Darwin.

The human mind cannot go for ever accumulating facts which remain unconnected and without any mutual bearing.

Alfred Russel Wallace

That was pretty much the state of biological science in 1859 when Charles Darwin’s and Alfred Wallace’s papers on natural selection were presented to the Linnaeus Society in London. A vast amount of data had been accumulated on flora and fauna, particularly in the 18th and the first half of the 19th century. .But no one had been able to propound a credible theory for tying it all together. Evolutionary theories had been awash since antiquity, including one by Charles Darwin’s grandfather, Erasmus Darwin. None had gained much traction among the scientific elite, except for, perhaps, Lamarkism, which had been mostly discredited by the time Darwin and Wallace proposed natural selection as the chief mechanism driving evolution. As the great Russian/American biologist Theodosius Dobzhansky remarked: Nothing makes sense in biology without evolution. Hence, biology scarcely existed as a science. The author of *In Darwin’s Shadow*, Michael Shermer, will be familiar to all subscribers of *Skeptical* magazine and/or *Scientific American* to each of which he contributes a column and for the former he is also the founding

and needed only a short time in which to preempt the younger, by fourteen years, Wallace, who was at that time still in the jungles of Borneo. While Darwin was to spend the rest of his life mostly reinforcing their great seminal idea, Wallace was to turn to scientifically “heretical” ideas, particularly spiritualism. His association with mediums was to cast a penumbra of the “half-baked” over his scientific qualifications. At a later date these associations were to cause the scientific establishment in England to oppose for a time Wallace being granted a small government pension; however, at Darwin’s insistence, they relented and Wallace got his 200 pounds a year, much needed since until this point he had never had a steady income. An even greater source of consternation for Darwin was Wallace’s deviations from natural selection theory, particularly on the origins of man. Lacking any knowledge of genetics (Gregor Mendel’s path breaking discoveries were little known outside of his Austrian monastery) and laboring under the same misconceptions about the functioning of the brain as just about every other 19th century scientist, Wallace had concluded that

HoFW Events

For an up-to-date listing of meetings and events, see the calendar on the HoFW e-list group page.

February Meeting

The next regular HoFW meeting will be February 17 at 7:00 pm at West Side UU Church. Representatives from the Animal Connection of Texas will speak on issues related to animal suffering. Mark the occasion down in big red letters on your calendar.

March HoFW Meeting

The regular HoFW meeting will be Thursday, March 16 at West Side Unitarian Church. Speaker TBA.

YOUR OFFICERS, AND HOW TO REACH THEM

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Call to Humanists

Is there something we forgot to mention in the newsletter? Do you have a comment or suggestion? E-mail [Michael Rivera](mailto:Michael.Rivera) with:

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- Newsletter story ideas.
 - Photos for the newsletter.
 - Events to include on the newsletter or Internet Group.
 - Subscribe/Unsubscribe requests.

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