

Letter to the Editor

Thank you so much for your special feature “Mitch Daniels/Howard Zinn: An Indiana Exchange” (June 2014).

Lee Iacocca said that “in a completely rational society, the best of us would be teachers and the rest of us would have to settle for something less, because passing civilization along from one generation to the next ought to be the highest honor and the highest responsibility anyone could have.” That responsibility requires history teachers at all levels to present multiple viewpoints and to resist any personal bias or professional pressure to eliminate some ideas from consideration. That responsibility is seldom perfectly balanced, and not just because textbooks are often worthless, as William Munn noted. Nevertheless, as Aristotle observed, “It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.” The effort to educate minds—by multiple teachers using a variety of resources over a dozen years or more—empowers students to draw their own conclusions about civilization.

One measure of an educated mind is a willingness to acknowledge and fairly examine the views of others. Exposure to many viewpoints is essential to a well-rounded education that informs and supports effective participation in society and prepares students to become tolerant leaders and teachers. U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart wrote that a willingness to censor the views of others reflects a lack of self-confidence and is the hallmark of authoritarianism. As Keith Erikson pointed out, Mitch Daniels and Purdue University successfully recast the clearly stated intent of Daniels’ email messages about book banning as a concern about middle school education and faculty academic freedom. That diverted attention away from the facts revealed by his words: not Daniels’ personal distaste for the opinions of Howard Zinn—which, as Anthony Arnone noted, is unsurprising—but his political willingness to ban Zinn’s works from Indiana teacher-training programs as a matter of public policy. Erikson shines a strong light on what the media ignored: that the controversy was not about Howard Zinn and his understanding of history but about Mitch Daniels and his understanding of education.

Thank you again for your willingness to document this in the pages of the *Indiana Magazine of History*.

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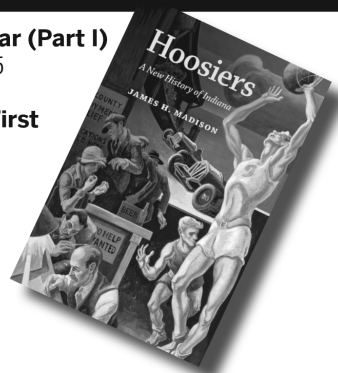
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