

Women, Gays, and Other Voices of Resistance

by Jack Bareilles

In most of our classrooms, discussions of movements of the 1960s generally focus on those big endeavors—civil rights and the antiwar efforts—that are discussed in the traditional textbooks. Yet this approach, as Howard Zinn reminds us, omits an essential topic for discussion—the emergence of a counterculture with “radically different ideas about how people should live their lives.” Indeed, “The United States experienced a general revolt in the culture against oppressive, artificial, previously unquestioned ways of living. This revolt touched every aspect of personal life,” Zinn suggests. Certainly the civil-rights movement and the Vietnam Era protests affected us all, but our lives were also changed forever by the poetry, literature, speeches, and protests of women who demanded their liberation, gays and lesbians who “came out of the closet,” native peoples who launched the Red Power movement, and prisoners who questioned their rights as incarcerated Americans.

As teachers, it is important to bring the voices of the counterculture to our students. And in so doing, we must remain ever mindful that to our students, this revolt has colored and textured the only history they have known. Indeed, in their eyes, today is the way the world has always been. It is imperative, then, that we give our students the tools to understand the events leading up to this transformation, the voices that shaped it, and the way in which it changed the American social landscape.

Document-Based Questions:

ALLEN GINSBERG

1. In his introduction to “America” by Allen Ginsberg, Howard Zinn states that the poem “gives voice to his critique of the nation’s Establishment.” What are Ginsberg’s criticisms of the establishment?

2. How many of those criticisms from 1956 are still relevant today?
3. Why do you think Ginsberg wrote this poem? What was his motivation? What point was he trying to convey?

MARTIN DUBERMAN

1. What were the short- and long-term causes of the Stonewall Riot?
2. Later, when talking about the night in general and perhaps the “chorus line of mocking queens,” Sylvia said that “Something lifted off my shoulders.” What do you think Sylvia meant?
3. Why should we care, many decades later, about what happened at Stonewall?

WAMSUTTA (FRANK B.) JAMES

1. Wamsutta James says “Sometimes we are arrogant but only because society has pressured us to be so.” What do you think he means?
2. What does James say was “perhaps our biggest mistake”? How do you think the citizens of Plymouth would have felt about this statement?
3. Why do you suppose the “officials who checked the speech” suppressed it?

ADRIENNE RICH

1. Why do you think Adrienne Rich’s work was called *Of Woman Born*?
2. Rich writes, “I know of no woman . . . for whom the body is not a fundamental problem.” What does she mean?
3. Re-read the last two paragraphs, which start, “We need to imagine a world.” What future do you think Rich envisions for womankind?

ABBIE LINCOLN

1. What are Mark Twain’s three steps toward enslaving a people, as paraphrased by Abbie Lincoln? Does Lincoln believe that all three of these steps had been accomplished? How and why?

2. What does it mean to revere something or someone? What does Lincoln mean when she asks, "Who will revere the black woman?" What does Lincoln say is the role of black men in their own oppression and that of black women?
3. Reread the last paragraph of Lincoln's essay. Whom is she calling to step forward? Do you believe that end has been accomplished in the last forty years?

SUSAN BROWNMILLER

1. According to Susan Brownmiller, what was the reality for most women who experienced unwanted pregnancies prior to the legalization of abortion?
2. What tactics did pro-abortion advocates adopt from the protest movements of the 1960s?
3. Why do you think Brownmiller chose to include the story of St. Louis debutante Jane O'Reilly?

ASSATA SHAKUR (JOANNE CHESIMARD)

1. What do you think Assata Shakur means when she writes, "There are no criminals here at Riker's Island Correctional Institution for Women . . . only victims."
2. Why would Shakur deliberately misspell the word America throughout her essay, as in the sentence, "One thing is clear: amerikan capitalism is in no way threatened by the women in prison on Riker's Island."
3. Some of the prisoners seemingly believe that a stint in Riker's is a "vacation." How could they justify that view, and what does that belief say about their conditions outside?

KATHLEEN NEAL CLEAVER

1. What was, in Kathleen Cleaver's words, "the first order of business" in the early to mid-1960s?
2. After pointing out that a 1969 survey showed that two-thirds of the Panthers were women, Cleaver asks, "why isn't this the image that you have

of the Black Panther Party?” What is her answer? What does Cleaver feel to be distinctive about gender relations within the Black Panther Party?

3. Based upon your reading of Shakur and Cleaver, which is the greatest challenge—to be black, poor, or a woman?

Main Points in *Voices*, Chapter 19, “Women, Gays, and Other *Voices* of Resistance”

After reading Chapter 19 in *Voices*, students should be encouraged to identify what they believe to be the main points therein. Following are five possible main points.

1. Throughout history, those in power used a long-standing practice of “divide and conquer” to keep marginalized groups of ordinary people from demanding their rights.
2. The voices of resistance from the 1960s are the direct consequence of historical social, political, economic, and ideological oppression.
3. A counterculture comprised of persons and groups who are ignored and marginalized by society profoundly influenced United States politics in the 1960s and 1970s.
4. Many of the counterculture social movements saw issues of oppression as being interlinked.
5. An ideology of social control and punishment has dominated United States incarceration practices, rather than a philosophy of rehabilitation.

Main Points in *Voices*, Chapter 19, “Women, Gays, and Other *Voices* of Resistance” and in *A People’s History*, Chapter 19, “Surprises”

If your students are also reading *A People’s History*, they should be encouraged to identify what they believe to be the main points in Chapter 19 in both books. Following are five additional points to be stressed when *Voices* and *A People’s History* are used together.

6. The political, economic, and social ferment of the 1960s created a positive environment for the growth of the counterculture movement.
7. Women of the 1960s united in many ways to give voice to their desire for liberation: demanding equality; legally challenging the right to make decisions about their own bodies; joining consciousness-raising women's groups; and frankly discussing sex and sexual roles.
8. Within the myriad liberation efforts of the 1960s, many people expressed a desire to unite against the "common oppression . . . of control and indoctrination."
9. Because the United States prison system was "an extreme reflection of the American system itself," it was in need of the same dramatic reforms that the counterculture demanded for United States society as a whole.
10. During the 1960s and 1970s, there was a "loss of faith in big powers" and a corresponding "stronger belief in self."

General-Discussion Questions for *Voices*

While the following questions are designed for classroom discussion about all the voices read in Chapter 19, they can also be rewritten and included as evaluation tools.

1. Who or what were the Wobblies, Tom Mooney, the Spanish Loyalists, Sacco and Vanzetti, and the Scottsboro Boys, discussed in earlier chapters? What role do they play in understanding the voices in this chapter?
2. Why do you think the gay-rights movement has placed such emphasis on the Stonewall Riot?
3. "To seek visions, to dream dreams, is essential, and it is also essential to try new ways of living, to make room for serious experimentation, to respect the effort even where it fails." With this line Adrienne Rich begins her afterword in the paperback edition of her book *Of Woman Born*. How might the other voices in Chapter 19 feel about this line?
4. How do you think the activists of the 1960s might measure the changes achieved by the beginning of the twenty-first century?

5. How important is the fact that the authors of the last five excerpts in Chapter 19 are all women? Does their womanhood make all three topics they write about secondary to the question of where women fit into this society?
6. How does each document support Howard Zinn's assertion that "With the loss of faith in big powers—business, government, religion—there arose a stronger belief in self, whether individual or collective"? How do the documents illustrate this belief in individual or collective self-worth and the desire to be treated equally?
7. Did any of these four movements arise independently of the others and the more general civil-rights and Vietnam War movements? How and why?
8. How is rage and indignation expressed by the various authors of the eight documents? Do you think these feelings were justified?
9. Why did Black activists feel the need for a new movement—a Black Power movement—after fighting a two-decade battle for civil rights?
10. Why do you think many people left SNCC and joined the Black Panthers?
11. Do you think any of the voices in this chapter reinforce any of five themes listed in "Main Points in *Voices*"?
12. Which of the voices in this chapter did you find most powerful? Least powerful? How and why?

General-Discussion Questions for *Voices* and *A People's History*

These general-discussion questions are additional questions for students who have read Chapter 19 in both books. For all questions, discussion must focus on ways the materials in both chapters help students formulate and articulate their answers.

13. Why do you think Howard Zinn entitled Chapter 19 of *A People's History* "Surprises"?
14. What is feminism? How did the movement begin? What achievements have feminists made? What gains remain to be made?
15. The voices and stories in these chapters are representative of groups that have

historically been marginalized. Are the voices of representatives of these groups commonly heard in the United States today?

16. What is the spark that sets off each of the movements in this chapter? Do similarities exist among the sparks that ignite the different movements?
17. What are the similarities between the women's rights, gay rights, prisoners' rights, and Native American rights movements? How are they interconnected?
18. Why do you think all these movements arose at approximately the same time? What was it about the 1960s that allowed, and even encouraged, protest?
19. What do you think about the uprising at Attica? What were the goals of the prisoners? Did their conditions justify the uprising? Do you think prison conditions have changed in the last three decades? Should they change?
20. Should prisoners be allowed to organize in prison? What do you think the role of the prison should be—rehabilitation or punishment? What are the pros and cons of each position?
21. What issues surrounding treaties formed the basis for the early civil-rights movement among Native peoples? Why are some Indian Nations allowed to have year-round fishing and hunting rights in areas where non-natives must get seasonal permits?
22. Do you think the Indians of All Tribes were justified in their occupation of Alcatraz? Why, or why not?
23. How are American Indians portrayed in your textbook? In the movies? Is this portrayal accurate? Why, or why not?
24. Where is Pine Ridge Reservation? What conditions led to the American Indian Movement (AIM) confrontation at Pine Ridge? Do you think the actions of the AIM activists were justified? Why, or why not?
25. What other voices might have been added that might have provided a more complete understanding of Chapter 19 in *A People's History*?

Evaluation Tools

SUGGESTED ASSIGNMENTS

These assignments can be adapted to meet any classroom need—homework, short- or long-term research projects, individual or group work. The end product should be flexible, depending on teacher interest and student abilities—papers, journals, oral reports, visual aides, and the like.

1. Using a search engine of choice, find out how the *New York Times* and other New York City newspapers reported the Stonewall Riot. Then search for journalistic and eyewitness accounts of the riot. How do these accounts of the goals, accomplishments, and consequences of the riots compare and contrast with Duberman's version of events? Compare accounts of the event from 1969 to accounts written on the twenty-fifth, thirtieth or thirty-fifth anniversary of the event.
2. Wamsutta James concludes the speech he was not allowed to give by saying, "We are determined, and our presence here this evening is living testimony that this is only the beginning of the American Indian, particularly the Wampanoag, to regain the position in this country that is rightfully ours." Earlier, he asked, "Has the Wampanoag really disappeared?" Using a search engine of choice, see if you can answer James' question. Then try to determine whether or not in the years since 1970, American Indians have regained "the position in this country that is rightfully ours."
3. Read Angela Davis's book *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers, 1989). How does it compare and contrast with the information you learned about African American resistance in both Chapters 17 and 19 in *Voices* and *A People's History*. What new information does her voice add to your understanding of the civil-rights movement and the women's movement? What can you find out about her life since the book was written? How and why do you think she has become so involved in the movement for prisoner's rights?
4. Using a search engine of choice, gather statistics of violence against women from all ethnicities and socio-economic groups in the United States over the last three decades. What major conclusions did you reach after examining

the statistics over time? Prepare a statistical chart that demonstrates what you found.

5. In *Voices*, Howard Zinn calls Abbey Lincoln “one of the nation’s greatest jazz singers.” Using a search engine of choice, find lyrics of her songs and the songs themselves. Are they what you would have expected? Learn more about other jazz singers of the 1960s. How do their lyrics compare and contrast with those of Lincoln? What did their music contribute to the movement?
6. Learn more about the poets of the 1960s. Who else was writing poetry, and how did their messages compare and contrast with those of Allen Ginsberg? How influential was their poetry to the social movements of the time? Compare and contrast the resistance poetry of the 1960s with resistance poetry of the early twenty-first century. Which poems and poets from which generation most resonate with you? Explain.
7. *Roe v. Wade* remains perhaps the most controversial Supreme Court decisions of the past few decades. Using a search engine of choice, learn more about the case—its origins, its findings, and its consequences. Read what newspaper editorials wrote about the decision in 1973. Then trace the history of the decision from 1973 forward. What other court cases have dealt with the abortion issue? Have these decisions undermined *Roe*? How and why? What do you think is the future of the decision?
8. Susan Brownmiller claims that prior to *Roe v. Wade*, one million women underwent abortions each year. Now that abortion is legal, how many women undergo abortions each year today? How accessible are abortions to women across the nation? Has accessibility increased or decreased since the *Roe* decision? Explain.
9. Learn as much as possible about COINTELPRO. What were its historical origins, and who were its targets? What were some of its most famous activities? What led to its demise? Under the guidelines of the PATRIOT Act, do you think it is possible that a program similar to COINTELPRO could re-emerge? Explain.
10. Find the latest crime statistics and incarceration statistics for Riker’s Island or the New York State Penitentiary System. Be certain to check for the number of women and the socio-economic data of the prisoners. Then compare them to the statistics from your state or local prison system.

11. Learn more about the historical origins, goals, and activities of the Black Panther Party. How many of its goals was it able to achieve? How were its growth and actions influenced by white public opinion? By the FBI? What happened to the party? To some of its best-known members? What other groups have been involved in an organized black-power movement during the latter decades of the twentieth century? What have been their goals and accomplishments?
12. Abbey Lincoln wrote, “Maybe if our women get evil enough and angry enough, they’ll be moved to some action that will bring our men to their senses.” Learn more about the goals and actions of the Million Man March that was held in Washington, D.C., in 1995. Do you think that the marchers may have been responding in some way to Lincoln’s hope? Explain.
13. Learn as much as possible about how the struggle for gay liberation has changed since the Stonewall Riot. You may want to start by watching the documentaries *Before Stonewall* and *After Stonewall*. What were the goals of the movement in the late 1960s, and how do they compare with contemporary goals? How has the AIDS crisis influenced the course of the movement? Which issues surrounding gay liberation have found their way into the national political arena? How and why?
14. Learn more about the prison-reform movement. You may want to begin with *Are Prisons Obsolete* by Angela Davis (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003). What are the major issues surrounding prisons and imprisonment in the United States today? What are the current racial and gender-related issues related to the American prison system in the twenty-first century? How have corporate prisons changed prisons and prison culture?
15. Learn more about Indian activism in the last several decades. What were the goals, actions, and accomplishments of AIM, and how have they changed over the past four decades? What are the issues surrounding the efforts of today’s Indian Nations to regain greater tribal sovereignty?

SUGGESTED ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. What are the similarities between the excerpts in Chapter 19 of *Voices*? Taken as a whole, what do they tell you about life in the United States before the 1960s? About the counterculture movement of the 1960s?

2. What rights (both civil and social) were all the authors of the eight documents demanding? In your opinion, which of these civil and social rights have been achieved? Which do you think will not be achieved until well into the twenty-first century?
3. Adrienne Rich wrote, “We need to imagine a world in which every woman is the presiding genius of her own body. In such a world, women will truly create life, bring forth not only children (if we choose) but the visions, and the thinking necessary to sustain, console, and alter human existence—a new relationship to the universe.” What achievements have women made toward this end? What obstacles still remain?
4. In 1999, Susan Brownmiller wrote, “Abortion is a woman’s right.” Using information from both chapters to back up your response, as well as your own understanding about the issue, support or refute Brownmiller’s premise.
5. Why did all of these movements arise at approximately the same time? What was it about the era we call the Sixties that allowed (some would say encouraged) protest?
6. How was the long-standing strategy of “divide and conquer” used by elites to keep the groups in Chapter 19 from demanding their rights? In which documents is this strategy particularly exposed? How and why?
7. Assata Shakur wrote that the women who are incarcerated at Riker’s Island “come from places where dreams have been abandoned like the buildings.” Where are these places, and what are these dreams? How do they compare and contrast with the places in your life and your dreams? What do you believe should be the goals of United States prisons? Do you feel they are achieving such goals?
8. How has listening to the voices in Chapter 19 broadened your understanding about the protest groups of the 1960s and 1970s?
9. Since the 1960s, annual Thanksgiving Day protests have been staged across the nation. What are the goals of American Indian people involved in such efforts? Do you think non-Native people understand these goals? How and why should non-Native people be aware of the events that occurred in the almost 400 years since the first Thanksgiving?

10. As you read these voices, decades after the events in them occurred, how do they relate to the world today?
11. At the end of “Surprises,” Howard Zinn writes, “Never in American history had more movements for change been concentrated in so short a span of years.” Using examples from both chapters, support or challenge this statement. Do you think it could also be said that these movements made more progress in the decade than had resistance movements in the past? Explain.

SIMULATIONS AND OTHER CREATIVE APPROACHES

1. Compose a protest song or poem on a contemporary topic/issue about which you are committed. In your composition, be sure to provide clues about what you are protesting, why you are committed to this topic, and how you think things should be changed. Present your composition to any group that will listen.
2. Write a speech to be given at the Four-Hundredth Anniversary of the Pilgrim’s landing at Plymouth. While writing it, think about how Wamsutta James might have responded to your comments. Be prepared to present your speech to you classmates.
3. Invite the five women in *Voices* to a town meeting to be held in the early twenty-first century. The two topics for discussion are: the similarities and differences of the role and treatment of black and white women in the 1960s; the ways in which the role and treatment of black and white women have changed in the early twenty-first century.
4. Organize a discussion to which you will invite some of the female freedom fighters Kathleen Cleaver identifies in her essay (including the historical figures Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Ida Wells Barnett). At the party, be sure that the women discuss their various roles as freedom fighters—the goals they hoped to accomplish, the actions they undertook, their achievements. Have them compare their gains and losses, as well as discuss what still needs to be achieved. After their initial discussion, invite some of the male freedom fighters she identified to join the party. How will their inclusion change the discussion? How are the goals of male and female activists similar and different?