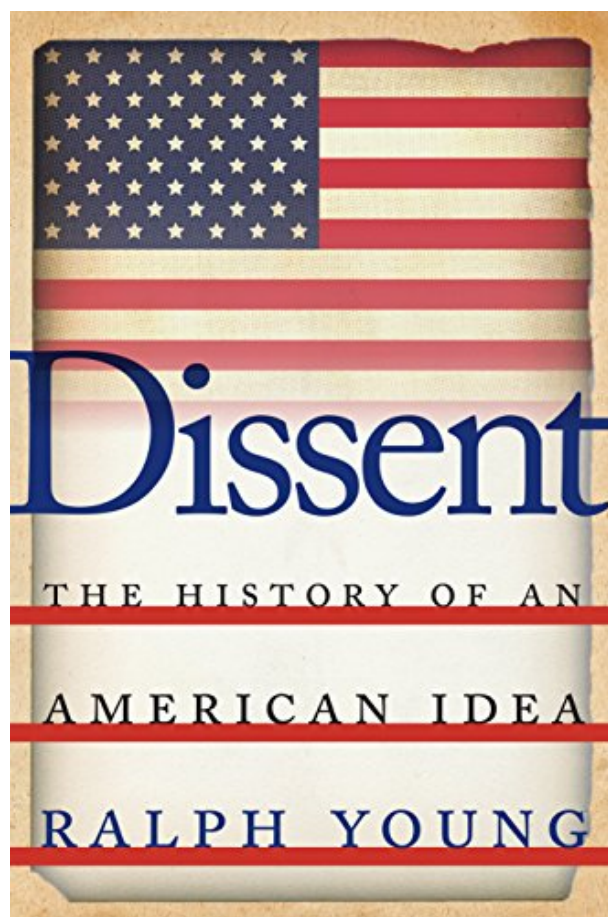
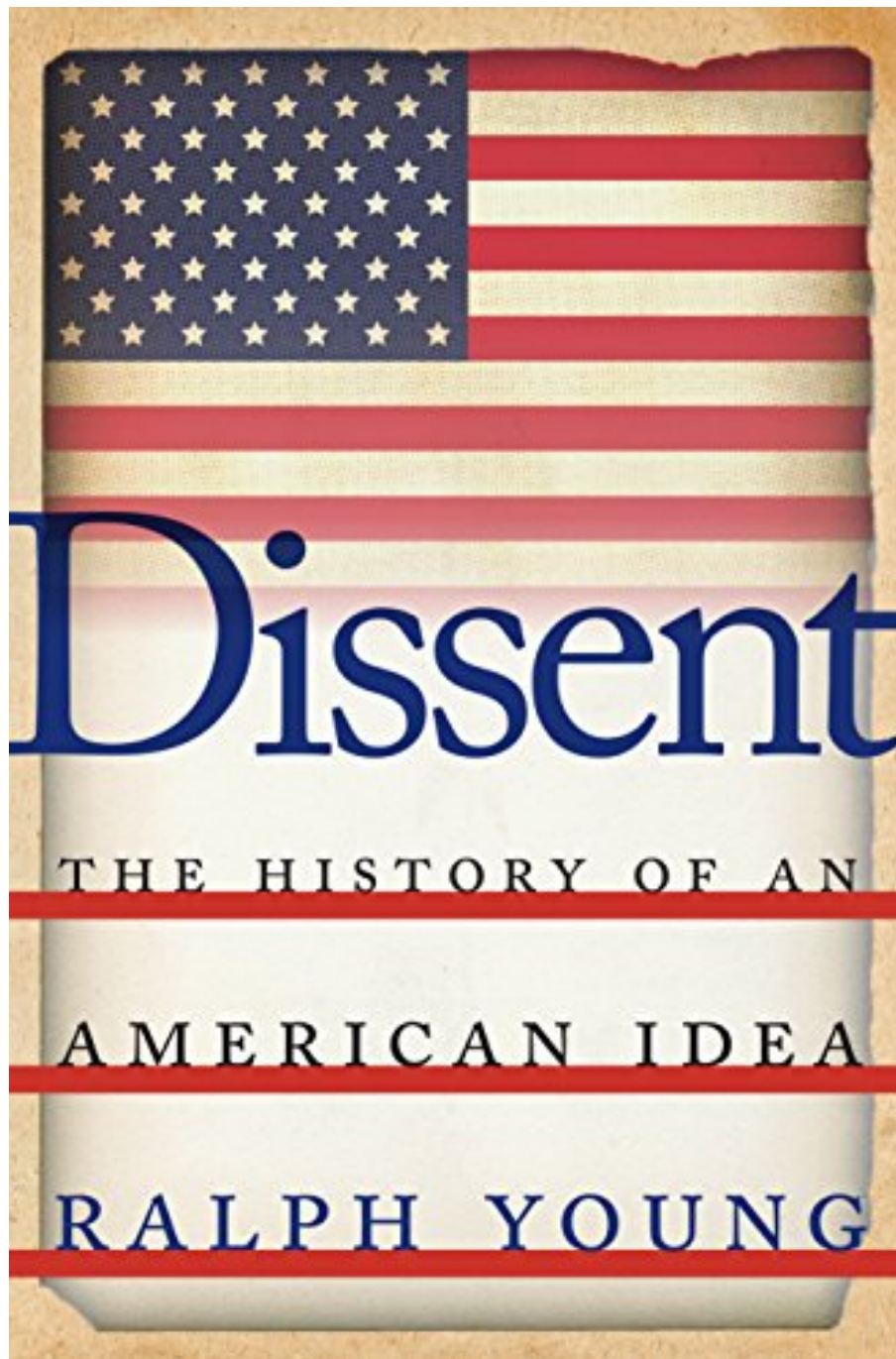


DISSENT: THE HISTORY OF AN AMERICAN IDEA BY RALPH YOUNG



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Dissent: The History of an American Idea examines the key role dissent has played in shaping the United States. It focuses on those who, from colonial days to the present, dissented against the ruling paradigm of their time: from the Puritan Anne Hutchinson and Native American chief Powhatan in the seventeenth century, to the Occupy and Tea Party movements in the twenty-first century. The emphasis is on the way Americans, celebrated figures and anonymous ordinary citizens, responded to what they saw as the injustices that prevented them from fully experiencing their vision of America. At its founding the United States committed itself to lofty ideals. When the promise of those ideals was not fully realized by all Americans, many protested and demanded that the United States live up to its promise. Women fought for equal rights; abolitionists sought to destroy slavery; workers organized unions; Indians resisted white encroachment on their land; radicals angrily demanded an end to the dominance of the moneyed interests; civil rights protestors marched to end segregation; antiwar activists took to the streets to protest the nation's wars; and reactionaries, conservatives, and traditionalists in each decade struggled to turn back the clock to a simpler, more secure time. Some dissenters are celebrated heroes of American history, while others are ordinary people: frequently overlooked, but whose stories show that change is often accomplished through grassroots activism. The United States is a nation founded on the promise and power of dissent. In this stunningly comprehensive volume, Ralph Young shows us its history. Teaching Resources from Temple University: Sample Course Syllabus Teaching Resources from C-Span Classroom Teaching Resources from Temple University

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"All tyranny needs to gain a foothold is for people of good conscience to remain silent." Edmund Burke
By Robert Morris

On occasion, I read two or more books at the same time if they address many of the same issues. For

example, this book and Carol Belkin's *The Bill of Rights: The Fight to Secure America's Liberties*. Dissent has indeed been one of the most powerful forces prior to, during, and following the War for Independence. It is also true had there been no Bill of Rights and what its ten amendments establish, it would have been difficult -- if not impossible -- to protest anything within the legal framework that has since preserved and protected the "inalienable right" to which the Declaration of Independence refers.

According to Belkin, "Despite the fluidity of meaning that marks the history of federalism, the Bill of Rights has fulfilled James Madison's fervent hope that this 'parchment barrier' would benefit from civic and moral development of the nation. It has proved a strong bulwark for our liberties and a safeguard against the majority's abuse of minorities. And it has established the vocabulary for our most critical discussion of, and fiercest debates over, who we are and what we think is best to do."

These are among the dozens of passages of greatest interest and value to me, also listed to suggest the scope of Ralph Young's coverage:

- o Dissent: American Revolution (Pages 55-78)
- o Dissent: War of 1812 (91-93)
- o Slave resistance and rebellion (115-122)
- o Dissent: Mexican War (161-166)
- o Dissent: Spanish American War (184-186)
- o John Brown (185-189)
- o Dissent: Civil War (191-212 and 204-205)
- o Ku Klux Klan (216-220)
- o Haymarket (262-263)
- o Emma Goldman (320-335)
- o Dissent: World War One (327-344)
- o Sacco and Vanzetti (344-348)
- o America First Movement (392-396)
- o Dissent: World War Two (393-406)
- o House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC): Pete Seeger and Paul Robeson hearings (410-413)
- o Freedom Riders (430-432)
- o Martin Luther King, Jr. and Selma (445-447)
- o Dissent: Vietnam War (455-460)
- o Eugene McCarthy (470-472)

In the final chapter, Young shifts his attention to the new elements that have entered the dissent narrative, notably the social media that "have the impact of reaching massive audiences and raising public awareness of [alleged] injustice." I agree with him that postings on Twitter and Facebook "spread the word of protestors of the time and place of the next rally or demonstration or civil disobedience action or spontaneous 'flash protest'...The possibilities are endless for dissenters to utilize these new tools to spread the word, educate people, and increase participation in their movement." However, Young goes on to share his concerns about dissent that does not serve as "the fuel for progress." He refers to irresponsible dissent that is, best uninformed and self-serving, and at worst, unethical or even criminal. There are significant needs that need to be addressed, such as demanding more responsible journalism, demanding that politicians "are beholden to the people and not to those who bankroll them, we need to question authority, we need to speak out [as he has], we need to make sure that 'We the People' really means something. We need to dissent."

Obviously it is impossible for a brief commentary such as mine to do full justice to the abundance of insights, and counsel that Ralph Young provides but I hope that I have at least indicated why I hold his book

in such regard. The idea of dissent can be traced back in time thousands of years but its nature and extent as well as its potential power are probably most evident in the history of the United States.

As I began to read this book for the second time, I was again reminded of this observation by Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

The book is written like a story

By Nan Callan

"Dissent" is an innovative way to tell the story of America. The book is written like a story; it keeps your interest from beginning to end. It is about Americans and the American spirit of standing up for one's self, regardless of the odds. It is our story.

As I was reading "Dissent" I kept thinking that this book is so full of information, I will enjoy reading it again.

The writers of academic history books could follow Ralph Young's lead and make history books far more interesting than they are now.

I highly recommend this book to all who enjoy reading for enjoyment as well as knowledge.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Dissent is Awesome!

By Randall Moore

This is an elegantly written, intellectually stimulating, and captivating book about American dissenters from colonial times through the present day. The author, Professor Ralph Young (Temple Univ.), is so familiar with the primary sources and secondary literature that he is able to offer both a great narrative and convincing analysis. Some will compare this to Howard Zinn's work, but Young offers a more sophisticated and less ideological history than Zinn. Young clearly is sympathetic to dissenters on the left, but his treatment of dissenters on the right is balanced. Read this book.

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