

Zinn, Howard. *Violence and Human Nature*

Summary

Violence and Human Nature is one chapter among many in Howard Zinn's Book, *Passionate Declarations: Essays on War and Justice*. In this particular essay, Zinn takes a look at the various ways people have tried to explain why humans are violent. He begins by investigating the conversation between Einstein and Freud, which brought this investigation to the forefront and spurred a number of studies into why human beings commit acts of violence and engage in war. Zinn also reflects on his own war experience in World War II and how they connect with reflections and accounts from other veterans.

Content

- What was the Stanley Milgram experiment?
- What does Zinn argue are the causes of war and violence?
- What examples from history does Zinn give to prove an instinct *against* war?
- What question did Albert Einstein pose to Sigmund Freud and when did he pose it?
- What is Zinn's reaction to Freud's response to Einstein's question?

Reflection/Analysis

- Is obedience to government authority necessary to remain a stable society?
- How can one's environment affect their willingness to be violent?
- Do you think history proves humanity's inherent desire to commit violence?
- Do you know any veterans of wars and have they shared their experiences with you? If so, what did they say and how has that informed your opinion on war?
- When is it necessary to kill, if at all?
- How would Zinn respond to Einstein's question?

Connections

Freud, Sigmund. *Why War?*

Thoreau, Henry David. *Resistance to Civil Government*.

Hedges, Chris. *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning*

Mead, Margaret. *War is an Invention – Not a Biological Necessity*

Kohn, Alfie. *Human Nature Isn't Inherently Violent*.