

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 252 TRANSCRIPT

Steve Skrovan: Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. My name is Steve Skrovan along with my co-host David Feldman. Happy New Year, David, how was your new year?

David Feldman: I'll let you know when it's over.

Steve Skrovan: David, we've got to get back to work. It's time to sober up.

David Feldman: I'm sober.

Steve Skrovan: Okay. I'm gonna take your word for it. And of course, we have the man who is always sober, the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hello and happy, productive, hopeful New Year to everybody.

Steve Skrovan: Yes. And we are kicking off the new year right with a tremendous program today that's going to cover, or a better word, uncover, the world of sports, politics and how we teach and learn history. Our first guest, I've been wanting to book for a long time because I am an unabashed fan boy. I'm talking about the sports editor for *The Nation* magazine, the inimitable, Dave Zirin is with us today. He hosts the only sports talk show that I listen to. It's called the "Edge of Sports" where Dave explores the intersection between sports and politics. We're going to try to cover a wide array of topics today including what Dave refers to as the story of the year, which is the exposure of the sexual predator Dr. Larry Nassar, by courageous women gymnasts. We'll also try to squeeze in his take on the latest on Colin Kaepernick and the latest stadium scams.

And that's just the first half of the show. In the second half, we're going to welcome Sociologist and Historian James Loewen. Professor Loewen spent two years at the Smithsonian, surveying 12 leading high school textbooks of American History. What he found was an embarrassing blend of blind optimism, blind nationalism and plain misinformation. In response he wrote *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your High School History Textbook Got Wrong*. Originally published in 1995, Professor Loewen has a new updated paperback edition out now, and if that's not enough, somewhere in between we will take a minute to uncover the latest shenanigans being

pulled off by the captains of industry operating in the corporate underworld with our *Corporate Crime Reporter*, Russell Mohkiber.

But first, let's make our way to the intersection of sports and politics with our first guest.

David Feldman: Dave Zirin is Sports Editor for *The Nation* magazine and the author of eight books on the politics of sports, most recently, *Brazil's Dance with the Devil: The World Cup, the Olympics and the Fight for Democracy* (Updated Olympics Edition). Mr. Zirin is a frequent guest on ESPN, MSNBC and *Democracy Now!* He also hosts *The Nation's* "Edge of Sports" podcast. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Dave Zirin.

Dave Zirin: Oh, it's great to be here and it's an honor to be on the same show as James Loewen who is a hero of mine and one of the great historians we have.

Ralph Nader: Yes, thank you very much for coming on, David. It's been long overdue for our program. And I want to start with something that is affecting grassroot America in sports and that is the major revelations in recent years of concussions, not just in professional sports or big-time college sports, but in high school sports. There's an estimate that about 20% of all high school football players suffer concussions before they graduate. And there is now a modest movement, urging the abolition of football at the high school level. There are lawsuits, tort law lawsuits by injured players now in their 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s, suffering from severe brain damage, some of these settlements have not been adequate in my judgment, but they produced even more information.

You've been talking about this for a long time. How do you see it resolving both in terms of on-the-field testing--instead of saying get out there again, buster, after suffering concussion--all the way to the status of high school sports?

Dave Zirin: Well, big picture, concussions and chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) represent an existential threat to what is the largest sports empire in the United States, professional football. It really is remarkable if you look at say the top 20 watched shows of the last year. I believe 19 of the 20 were NFL games at some time or another. Ratings are up this year; the Super Bowl is more watched than ever, and it's remarkable given our fraying attention and our culture of distraction that you still have this one focus on football. So, it's importance to America and the American psyche has never been more pronounced than it is in 2019. And yet

this issue of head injury—much more so than anybody kneeling during the anthem or sniping with Trump or any such nonsense—that's what represents the true existential threat to the sports. And my belief about where this is going to go, is that it reminds me of a quote from James Reston, that we're much more adept at understanding revolution than evolution. There is an evolution going on. It may take 50 years, but there is an evolution going on where I think the sport is going to eventually leak out the next generation of talent, particularly because of concerns about the high school level, and the more we learn about concussion, I think the more difficult it's going to be to insure these programs just to make them legally viable to affordable in your typical high school district. It's going to be something to watch, because it threatens the underpinning of this American institution that so many people have so much stock in.

Ralph Nader: So, the fear of legitimate liability is freaking out the insurance companies who ensure high school sports all over the country. Do you think 10, 20 years from now, there will be more than a handful of big-time high school football sports programs?

Dave Zirin: I think there's going to be a whole network of liability releases, that there's going to be pressure on families and minors to sign. I think there's going to be huge swaths of the country where it just does not exist anymore. And I think that there's probably going to be private funding not dissimilar to the AAU [Amateur Athletic Union] leagues in basketball, which is going to further though winnow the talents, because it's going to mean that the typical folks who play football high school level and the typical talent bases in places like rural Florida and Texas and California, they tend to come from very poor communities. And for those families who don't have the option to pay for private leagues, in order to be recruited out of, it's going to winnow the talent even further and further undercut the ability of the sport to be competitive and to be interesting.

In many respects, I think boxing is a useful parallel in that it can still generate excitement, but it's nothing close to the broad-based popular sport that it was 50 years ago.

Ralph Nader: You know, more and more parents are getting the grim reality. They don't want their youngsters to end up with serious brain damage when they're in their middle age. And they're pulling their students back out of high school sports. Also, more and more parents realize that better helmets don't decrease the level of concussions.

Dave Zirin: No, they don't. In many respects, these new-age helmets actually make it more dangerous, because it's more difficult to see the damage that's being done. I mean, oddly, if players are still wearing those leather helmets, counter-intuitively, one would at least see the bruising and damage on the face or on the side of the head, which would give an indication that a player needs to come out of the game. And yet without seeing that physical exterior damage, it's more likely for a player to be sent back in or a player to feel pressure to go back in and try to deny the effects of concussions.

Ralph Nader: Let's talk about soccer heading. Where are you on that in terms of concussions?

Dave Zirin: Yeah. I live in a community where heading the soccer ball at the youth level is not allowed. And that's something that you're seeing more and more in youth soccer around the country. It's becoming the norm, actually, in youth soccer as opposed to it being seen as an exception as recently as 10 years ago, or seen as some far-out ridiculous overreaction by overly concerned parents. But we know a lot more now than we did 10 years ago and we know the threat of heading in terms of concussions. And that's the main thing about this issue, Ralph, that I think people have to get their--pardon my expression--their heads around. And that's that science is not a friend of football and the same way science was not a friend of the heading of soccer balls.

The more we know, the more we know how deep the damage can be and the more it creates, I think, not just a sporting question or a medical question, but it creates an ethical question about whether our society, particularly our universities, should be underwriting something to such a profound degree that causes brain damage.

Ralph Nader: Well, you know, the Ivy Leagues, if I'm not mistaken, have now initiated a rule where there is no contact in their football programs during practice, just in regular games, which is too late for Steve Skrovan, who was a Yale football player back when. Sorry, Steve.

Dave Zirin: Right.

Steve Skrovan: Yeah, I'm feeling the effects as you obviously can tell.

Dave Zirin: Is that true?

Steve Skrovan: No, no actually.

Ralph Nader: No, I mean, is that true about IVY Leagues?

Steve Skrovan: You know, that I'm not sure of. I don't know it on that molecular level. That's actually a piece of new information that Dave has given me. It wouldn't surprise me. And when I played, we did have contact during the week, during the season, two days of the week. So it wouldn't surprise me that they've cut it out.

Dave Zirin: Yep, that is the case. It was described in the *New York Times* as an extraordinary step when they first initiated this in 2016. But I got to tell you that you're also seeing some signs of that in the National Football League, where they've eliminated a lot of the full contact practices. And again, this is about science not being a friend of the sport itself. And by the way, it's interesting by the way that the NFL is taking greater steps to do this in, say, the Southeastern Conference and it's because NFL players have unions, and therefore they have more power than your typical college player to actually enforce their will about how these practices are run. And one thing we know is that it's not the big hits that you see on Sundays that make the crowds ooh and ah. That's not what causes the concussions. It's the repetitive, what are called sub-concussive hits, that happen every time you say hike and the two sides of the line crash into each other and so if you eliminate that kind of practicing, you're actually arguing for doing the players a great deal of good.

Ralph Nader: You know, we should say in the memory of Coach Girardi, the great coach, perhaps the greatest football coach of all time with apologies to Alonzo Stagg. He coached the St. John College team and for years he never allowed contact during football practice. And when I asked him, I did a piece on him for television once and I asked him why did he do that? He said, "Well, they're stronger during the football game; they're not banged up from practice." And so his football team was one of the greatest winning records in the history of college football. So I just wanted to inject that. Let's move to LeBron James and you know the recent controversy, which I had a different reaction to. I've always been on LeBron James since he went into the league as a teenager. When I wrote him two letters, which probably may not have reached him, his agent may have intercepted them, saying, "Well, now you're starting out and unlike Michael Jordan, you can show a compassion for all those workers in Vietnam and Indonesia who build your brand name shoes on behalf of the manufacturers. But these are thousands of workers

laboring for surf wages in dungeon-like factories to make LeBron James rich.” Well, there was never any response and then a few years ago, a friend in Maine came up to LeBron, when he was playing against the Celtics, and asked him about it. And he said, “I am concentrating on the playoffs; I can't think about that now.” Have you ever paid attention, because LeBron has now got a reputation more and more of being a liberal, a progressive--he challenges Donald Trump; he has 40 million followers on his tweet account. Have you ever looked into that side of LeBron James, why he has never done anything?

Dave Zirin: Yeah. I mean, I don't have an easy reason for that except you don't really see, I mean, the power of the shoe companies is so all-encompassing in these sports and they're so lucrative for the players themselves that it's not something that we've necessarily seen. I mean, you've seen some instances of players challenging the shoe companies. You've had Chris Webber once, when he left his shoe deal, he talked about the way workers were being treated. Stephon Marbury attempted to create a shoe that cost less than \$20 because of the materialism that goes into it and he said, “I'd rather own than be owned,” when he talked about the shoe industry. But as far as like the direct linkaging with labor and the treatment of labor, particularly by Nike in Southeast Asia and in China, I mean, that's not something you've seen. You've seen universities take a strong stand on this and you've seen the athletes in universities take strong stands on this, but not the top-tier pro players.

Ralph Nader: It's too bad, because when he came in the league, he was seen as he the new Michael Jordan. He had huge bargaining power to say to Nike or whatever company was selling his brand of shoe: You've got to increase the wages of these people; you got to increase the working conditions/safety of these workers. And he never did that and, all right, so he was a youngster and he was coming in new and making a lot of money and trying to find his way and he was under a lot of pressure to perform. But in the last few years, all of that doesn't obtain. I mean, he's a very secure, stable, athletic hero, and I hope that you can bring some attention with your audience about this.

Dave Zirin: Yeah, absolutely.

Ralph Nader: I almost wanted to bring in some of these workers to the United States for a visit in order to confront LeBron James but logistics were very difficult on that. Anyway, let's talk

about something that we go back a long way, David Zirin, and that is our concern with the dark side of sports--both amateur and professional. Back in the late 70s, I started the League of Fans. We had a nice newsletter that was pretty full of exposes of abuses of consumers, very high-priced tickets, high-priced food, high-priced parking, et cetera; blackout dates on local TV if the stadium wasn't full, taxpayer subsidies to stadiums. And a lot of these have been current themes in your work, in your writings and in your books. But I want to ask you a question I can't answer, which is Ken Reid is our policy director. He's out in Colorado. He's a former coach, a former baseball player, a former corporate marketing expert. He loves sports. He got disgusted with marketing abuses and he became our policy director. And in the process, he's written three books that are very well-documented called *Ego vs. Soul in Sports*, the second one is *How We Can Save Sports: A Game Plan*, and the third is *The Sports Reformers*, his interviews of many sports reformers. And these books just got virtually no media apart from not being reviewed in the general press, they are blacked out in the sports pages and there are a lot of sports pages. As a consumer advocate, I would only love to have a fraction of the space in a daily newspaper that's devoted to sports. How do you explain this kind of studied disinterest in such serious matters that affect the health, safety and economic well-being of tens of millions of Americans, many of them young?

Dave Zirin: Oh, that's a terrific question. I mean, I think it starts with the bizarre nature of what sports journalism is all about. And the bizarre nature of it is that you're both partnered with these big industries and depend on these big industries while being asked at the same time to follow your journalistic ethics and be watchdogs of these industries. And unfortunately, the pressures and counter pressures that take place often produces media that is not up to task. Now I think we see similar things, not just in the sports section of the paper, as you very well know, whether you're talking about particularly political news, where there's a dependence on sources and sourcing in a way that can sometimes blunt the facts, or actual investigative journalism, but I just think in the sports pages, it's far more pronounced.

Ralph Nader: You know, what's interesting about the sports pages is, there's a lot of free-thinking writers. I mean, it's exciting writing, it's full of metaphors, full of specific commentary judgments, much freer in a way than the rest of journalism. But do they ever self-censor themselves! I mean, it is absolutely staggering how they black out a whole set of certain stories. Like we exposed the maniacal number of in-play advertising on New York Yankees Radio. And

we actually listed all these ads and sent it to the top executives of Major League Baseball and the New York Yankees and said, what's going on here? You're killing the spirit of the game. Someone hits a homerun and you call a Geico driven home run or someone has a consultation on the mound and you call it by some beer consultation. Years ago, when I was listening to New York Yankees and Mel Allen, they never had in-play ads, only between innings, for example. A complete non-response. And I said it again and again - complete non-response. Do you think that fans can ever be organized in their own interest?

Dave Zirin: I think they're going to have to. And I think we've seen small instances that show that it's possible for fans to organize themselves on their own interests especially when it comes to rejecting big projects like the Olympic Games coming to a city, the World Cup coming to a country, and protesting the building of stadiums, or just the stadium boondoggles that you've seen in places. Like I live here in Washington, and as you know Daniel Snyder is attempting to get the city to pay for a new stadium for himself, and there's a lot of resistance to that. And I think that kind of resistance is the sort of thing that we have to count on and see as the basis for future movements of fans. But it is very difficult to organize fans for the most basic reason of all and that fans see sports as escape, but I'm proud of some of the fan movements that have taken place. I mean, the reason why the blackout rule, which you mentioned earlier, no longer exists in the National Football League, is because of the fan-base movement.

Ralph Nader: That's true; the fans really hate these tax subsidies. It's a left-right coalition in effect. And the only way they get these stadiums and ballparks and arenas built on the back of taxpayers, and Washington DC is an example of that excess; soccer stadium was built with taxpayer money as well. Yeah, and the only reason they get away with it is that they never go to referendum. If they ever went to referendum, none of these tax-supported stadiums and ballparks would ever be built. It's driven by wined and dined city council people, like in Minneapolis St. Paul, and driven by secrecy. They negotiate with the city and the state or whatever, for these tax freebies and that's the way they get away with it. So, you're right there.

Dave Zirin: Well, that's the famous line from Rudolph Giuliani, is that we can't have referendums on these stadium deals because if we did, we'd lose.

Ralph Nader: That's true. Before we get the Colin Kaepernick, just one other beef of mine, as an inveterate Yankee fan - but it's pre-Steinbrenner, it's off of Lou Gehrig and Joe DiMaggio

days - I'm amazed at how the press has given Brian Cashman, the General Manager, a free ride. Is there anybody who has made more errors in buying players and destroying the farm team of the Yankees, until very recently, than Brian Cashman? And there's never any criticism in the New York sports media. Is that another example of self-censorship and why?

Dave Zirin: Absolutely. I mean, because the Yankees are the great show in town and you need to be able to connect with the Yankees however you can. And let's remember, I mean, it's not just self-censorship, because organizations like the Yankees, they will exact their pound of flesh. They will try to reap punishments if you attempt to report on them in a way that makes them look bad. And so all of these are real concerns for reporters, so sometimes it is self-censorship. Reporters, they create walls that do not in fact exist and they end up spiking their own stories, but sometimes it's of the fear of very real retribution.

Ralph Nader: We're talking to David Zirin, the great sports commentator, writer, author podcaster. David, who are your all-time five greatest sports writers?

Dave Zirin: Oh, well, without question, I would start with Bob Lipsyte from the *New York Times*, who I've got a deepest respect for in the world. And then you've got the old school folks like, my goodness, Lester Rodney, back over at *The Daily Worker* in the 1930s was amazing, and the work he did to fight segregation in baseball; the great Sam Lacey, a Baltimore Afro-American (and Native American) on the groundbreaking work he did with his sport. I'm a sucker for someone like Grantland Rice and the old poetics of sports writing. I can't help myself in that regard. And then number five, I mean, I would go more modern and say how much I respect the work of Howard Bryant who writes for ESPN, but also writes a great deal about militarism in sports and the way they intersect. And I'd be remiss if I didn't also mention folks like Christine Brennan, Sally Jenkins, Jemele Hill and the true groundbreakers of women in sports writing, which is so important to get these alternative perspectives.

Ralph Nader: And how about the late Frank Deford?

Dave Zirin: Oh, my God, you see, I didn't prepare for this answer, so I'm invariably gonna forget people, but Frank Deford was a mentor of mine. I mean, I was fortunate that my dad and him worked on the same New Jersey newspaper when they were in their teens. And my dad strayed away from journalism. Obviously, Frank Deford did not. And when I wrote my first

book, *What's My Name Fool?*, which you were kind enough to blurb for me--an unknown sports writer; Frank Deford was also kind enough to blurb for me--an unknown sports writer. And that made a huge difference. So that's the point of connection between you and Deford, both very generous people to those of us, trying to start out.

Ralph Nader: Well, that's a great list. Let's get to Colin Kaepernick and Steve and David, jump in on this. What's the situation now with Colin Kaepernick and others who have taken the knee to protest police brutality against minorities?

Dave Zirin: Well, the current situation is that it's somewhat muted. There are individual players like Eric Reid of the Carolina Panthers, who kept it going throughout this year and made a point of doing so. Kenny Stills of the Miami Dolphins, another player that attempted to keep the torch lit; Michael Bennett as well from the Philadelphia Eagles. But the thing was that the NFL, they pulled away from what would have been a disastrous decision. And the disastrous decision was going to be to punish players who took a knee and either fine them or even release them from teams if they dare do so. And when they said that, this was last spring, it caused an eruption among players and you got the feeling there was going to be an unbelievable amount of protest in the year to come. But then something happened. And that's when the NFL talked to the unions and took their heads out of their behinds, took a step back and said, "Well, actually we're not going to do any punishment whatsoever," or they said it was under advisement. They said that in a way that just made it clear that they were going to try to like just to pass the buck and move on from this. And by doing so, it actually had the effect of muting, and that deal within a day or two of Donald Trump yelling at them. But the league has done so well this year, and Colin Kaepernick has done so well, becoming a spokesperson for Nike, that kind of eliminated any ability for the league itself--well, it eliminated the ability of Trump to attack the league, and it eliminated the need for the league itself to come down hard on players for this. So that's really where things are right now.

Ralph Nader: But he's still being blacklisted because Daniel Snyder of the Washington Redskins lost two quarterbacks, to broken legs, unheard of this year; never had a situation with two quarterbacks in one team, one year had their legs broken.

Dave Zirin: It's really unheard of. And, that's the point I was just about to make is that if the collusion suit goes forward, it's absolutely brutal and there's so much evidence piled up for Colin

Kaepernick. What's brutal about it is that it's so difficult to prove because even though it's obvious and right there for anybody who wants to look and all you really have to do is look at some of these quarterbacks who have found teams and you're able to see like right away like what a terrible situation it is for Colin Kaepernick, and how the collusion just runs rampant. There actually has to be some sort of paper trail or whistleblower between two or more owners or between the commissioner and an owner to prove collusion. So, the bar is very high. It's much higher than it should be.

Ralph Nader: Steve and David, any input here?

Steve Skrovan: Yeah, well, I'd actually just wanted to touch on a different story that, David, you called the story of the year about a woman who defeated a cartel. Tell us who is that woman and what is the cartel?

Dave Zirin: The woman is Rachel Denhollander. She's an attorney, she was a USA gymnast and between the ages of 15 and 30 she attempted to bring this story to light of Dr. Larry Nasser. And once she was able to go public, she inspired hundreds of other gymnasts to really expose the worst sexual abuse case that we know of in the history of sports and thereby saving, God knows how many other people, from a similar fate. And it's so difficult to actually break these cartels. And the cartels I'm talking about the NCAA, FIFA, the International Olympic Committee and the USOC and USA Gymnastics. They're so difficult because they are closed societies with no congressional scrutiny, although hopefully this will provoke congressional scrutiny and that's something I've called for in this particular case. But her ability to go public, her ability to show that courage is in fact contagious, cracked the cartel. And it was unquestionably, in my mind, the story of the year.

Ralph Nader: It's amazing that it took courage to uncover such an atrocity that they covered up. I mean, that shows you how bad the situation really is and involves hundreds of young women as well.

Dave Zirin: Yeah and makes you wonder what else is out there, which is also something that really is important for us to think about.

Ralph Nader: Well, our time is up unfortunately, David. Can you give our listeners how they can contact you as they can listen to you, how they can listen to you?

Dave Zirin: Absolutely.

Ralph Nader: How they can see what you have on your daily blog, which is one of, if not the most realistic news service on sports?

Dave Zirin: Thank you so much. You can find my writing at thenation.com, or I have my own blog at edgeofsports.com where I post my columns. And you can see a bunch of the back columns, access them easily including the podcast which is called the “Edge of Sports”, which you can download at iTunes, Stitcher or wherever you like. And you could reach me through Twitter @edgeofsports.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very, very much, David Zirin. I hope we can continue this dialogue in the coming future and give the fans the power they need and they deserve to reshape sports, get the best out of sports and squeeze out the yoke on sports, which is win at any cost and profit at any cost, to paraphrase the words of Ken Reid of leagueoffans.org.

Dave Zirin: Right, that sounds good to me.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much, David.

Dave Zirin: Thank you.

Steve Skrovan: We have been speaking with Dave Zirin, Sports Editor for *The Nation* magazine and the Host of the “Edge of Sports” podcast. We will link to his extensive body of work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. When we come back, we're gonna talk about all the lies your teachers told you in high school. Right now, we're going to take a minute and check in with our *Corporate Crime Reporter*, Russell Mohkiber. You're listening to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, back after this.

Russell Mohkiber: From the National Press Building in Washington DC, this is your *Corporate Crime Reporter* “Morning Minute” for Friday, January 4th, 2019, I'm Russell Mohkiber. Olympus Medical Systems Corporation and a former senior executive in Japan pled guilty in

Newark, New Jersey to failing to file required adverse-event reports involving infections connected to Duodenoscopes and to continuing to sell those scopes in the United States despite those failures. Olympus was fined \$85 million. Olympus must also abide by an agreement with the Justice Department requiring the company to enact extensive compliance reforms. Olympus admitted that it failed to file with the Food and Drug Administration required adverse-event reports in 2012 and 2013 relating to three separate events involving infections in Europe, connected to the infection of approximately 22 patients at Erasmus Medical Center in the Netherlands; in early 2012 the infection of three patients at Clinique de Bercy in France in November 2012; and the infection of five patients at Kremlin Bicetre in France in July 2012. For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mohkiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russell. You know, back in 1995, our next guest was a sociologist at the University of Vermont, who spent two years at the Smithsonian, examining 12 leading high school textbooks of American history. What he found in those textbooks was a lot of bad information. David?

David Feldman: James W. Loewen is a Sociologist and Historian, is the author of a number of books including, *Sun Downtowns*, *Teaching What Really Happened*, *The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader* and the new paperback edition of his most famous book, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your High School History Textbook Got Wrong*. welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, James W. Loewen.

James Loewen: Hi, glad to be with you.

Ralph Nader: Thank you. I'm gonna call you Jim, with your permission, and start out with a peculiar frame of reference, which is where are you on Howard Zinn's book, *A People's History of the United States*, which has sold over a million copies. Your book has sold over two million copies; it's actually used in classrooms.

James Loewen: Yes. Zinn's book just for the record, has sold over three million. So, he's ahead of me in sales

Ralph Nader: Wow.

James Loewen: And I knew him, and I liked him when he was alive. However, about his book, well, I like it and I don't like it at the same time. It maybe even depends on the chapter. First thing I don't like, it doesn't have footnotes. Now, in that regard, it's exactly the same as all high school history textbooks; they don't have footnotes either. Well that's a problem, because it keeps kids or anybody else from knowing whether he got it right--from having any place to go and check him out. The second thing I don't like about it is, well, let's just pick on a chapter of his book. He wrote a chapter on the Constitution and he points out that the Constitution leaves out women, which it does; pretty much leaves out American Indians, which it does; leaves out black folks, which it does; and pretty much leaves out poor people and it does. And that's his chapter. Well, that's fine. Those are for valid criticisms to make. But, it's also true that the Constitution did accomplish some things. It did get some things right. I mean, just one, here we are sitting on the eastern edge of a huge continent, goes 3,000 miles over there to Sacramento, say. And it provides a method for creating new states, so that Virginia, which initially claimed all the way to the ocean, the Pacific Ocean, Virginia is giving up that land and really diluting her power by having competitors by eventually, it's going to be Kentucky and it's going to be Ohio and so on. Well, that's very generous and it was done very, very well. There's a bunch of other things it gets right too. So, it just isn't really adequate to only point out the bad stuff. And he does that kind of with Abraham Lincoln and with a bunch of other topics.

Ralph Nader: Well, yeah and he doesn't put enough emphasis on the victimization of consumers generally in the consumer movement. But he does I think perform quite a service in terms of filling gaps.

James Loewen: Absolutely. Absolutely, I think it's great. I'll tell you, after I give a talk, my talks are usually not very positive about the textbooks, but all the time I have somebody coming up afterward saying, my history textbook, my history textbook was just like you described. But my history course was interesting, because my teacher compared the textbook to Howard Zinn's *People's History*, so we had to think; we'd look at this and we'd look at that and then we had to think. And that's what some other teachers also do with *Lies My Teacher Told Me*. They will say, all right, here is what the textbook says about Columbus; here is what *Lies My Teacher Told Me* says. Now you got to think about it and that's really, I think, an exciting way to get high school students interested in history.

Ralph Nader: Well, I'm going to go through some of your evocative chapter titles and have you give our listeners some summaries of the points you're making in these chapters. Before that, I want to relate to you a conversation I had with Eric Foner, who is one of the great American historians and deals with realities and not myths. He said that his observations lead him to the conclusion that a lot of high schools today are de-emphasizing the teaching of American history. There's so much emphasis on science, technology, math or other things. And I thought that was a surprising comment.

James Loewen: Well, that's also true and amazingly enough the initiative that was put through by George W. Bush, who had help from some Democrats as well. The Leave No Child Behind Movement, which had some good ideas in it, also unfortunately kind of became the Leave No Child Untested Movement. And so it devolved into multiple-choice tests, in all kinds of fields including US history. And my one-liner is, the only thing worse than having a multiple-choice test in history, which is really boring and teaches twigs--Columbus sailed the Ocean Blue in, well, I don't know, 1491, 1492--we sort of put up four more dates or three more dates. The only thing worse than a multiple-choice test is no test at all because if you don't make history one of the key things you're testing, then people aren't going to emphasize it at all. They're going to emphasize those things that are tested, because they know full well that they can get hired or fired on the basis of how their students get tested. And so, a lot of school systems in many states have dropped all standardized testing in history and therefore the teaching of history gets similarly de-emphasized.

Ralph Nader: Of course, it'd be nice if you just had essay tests instead of that.

James Loewen: Wouldn't that be interesting.

Ralph Nader: You know, instead of A, B, C, D, none of the above.

James Loewen: If you have to write an essay you almost have to think about the darn topic.

Ralph Nader: That's right. Well, the purpose, listeners of this interview, among others to get you to be interested in your own high school history courses and have parent-teacher associations begin reflecting, what I hope you will receive as the wisdom of James Loewen. So, let's start

with chapter one, which is a “Handicapped by History, the Process of Hero Making”. What's that about?

James Loewen: Well, it focuses on two folks actually, a guy named Woodrow Wilson, who a lot of historians actually, who should know better, and a lot of Americans think, should be the fifth face on Mount Rushmore, if there were going to be five. But then of course during World War I, focuses on him and on this woman named Helen Keller. Of course, almost everybody knows that she wasn't born blind and deaf but soon became blind and deaf maybe as a two-year-old, but she overcame and was able to read and write and even speak and so on. And what? That is to say I have asked hundreds and hundreds of students, okay what did she read about, what did she write about, what did she speak about, what did she do when she learned how to read and write? And what did she do, in other words, with the rest of her adult life. And about one in 500 knows and often that person is someone who is deaf or who has some connection with somebody who is deaf, because the deaf community actually learned something about her, but we, mostly don't. We just learned she's the little girl who overcame.

Ralph Nader: It's very true because she was a tremendous progressive. And she fought for workers' rights, women's rights.

James Loewen: Exactly.

Ralph Nader: And it's all about overcoming a handicap, which of course was a spectacular breakthrough.

James Loewen: Yeah, and she too overcome. But then she did stuff, exactly and actually became a socialist (joined the Socialist Party 1909), and she really became a communist. Well, that last statement, even the socialist part is kind of a bad thing in American life. So let's not talk about that. So that means let's not talk about what she did that might be considered controversial, and the same thing about Woodrow Wilson. In fact, just this morning, I read maybe a six-page interview on the web with a new biographer of Woodrow Wilson. And this interview goes on and on and on and never mentions the two things he did that I mentioned in this chapter. The first one is, he was in an incredible racist. He was more racist than any president we've had since the Civil War or at least since Andrew Johnson. So, for example, he segregated the United States Navy. I didn't realize that it wasn't always segregated, but he certainly did segregate it. And he

eliminated jobs; he eliminated black folks from the job of say mail carrier, which they had had from just all kinds of jobs in Washington DC in the federal government. Under his aegis, he was so racist just in the way he talked and the way he ran things that there was the terrible 1919 Red Summer, it's called, which was a summer of race riots from Washington, D.C. and Chicago all the way down little bitty towns in the north that became *sundown towns*, another subject I write about. So, he was a terrible racist and he also invaded the other countries. He invaded other countries routinely--invaded Mexico, almost a dozen times. He invaded Latin American countries. And finally of course he invaded Russia in 1918 in a hapless enterprise trying to take sides in the Red/White Civil War and we took the wrong side in terms of winning. Well, instead he's considered a great peace-lover and of course he did push for the League of Nations; he did do some good things. But we have to teach about people as they are.

Ralph Nader: That's true. I think that's unchallengeable what you're saying, Professor Loewen, and I might add in 1916, he ran for reelection saying that he kept America out of the World War and then a year later, he plunged America into this brutal war and the effects of World War I, as you know in terms of the Versailles Treaty and the impact on Germany, with the inflation and the punishment...

James Loewen: That wasn't quite the War to End Wars, was it?

Ralph Nader: Not at all, that there's a straight line to World War II in terms of the revenge factor of the Nazi regime.

James Loewen: That sets the standard in a way for Lyndon Johnson in the Vietnam War, that is to say both of them, while they were running for reelection were overtly planning to enter the conflict, in Lyndon Johnson's case, of course the war in Vietnam. And both of them treated the United States public as something to be manipulated, not something to be informed.

Ralph Nader: Yeah and that's your chapter nine, "See No Evil, Choosing Not Look at the War in Vietnam".

James Loewen: Yeah, I've jumped ahead.

Ralph Nader: Right. Okay. Your next chapter, 1493, the “True Importance of Christopher Columbus.” I must say, one time I came home as a child, excited. My father said, what did you learn, I said, I learned that Christopher Columbus discovered America.

James Loewen: Yeah.

Ralph Nader: He said, “Sit down son. He invaded America, looking for gold and slaughtered a lot of natives.”

James Loewen: Wow, well you had a father who was way ahead of his time. You know, I mean I think most kids come home and they get patted on the head and say, well that's very good. I mean, and that's the end of it. And of course in 1493, among other things, Columbus did something new. He hadn't done anything new in 1492. If you think about it, the **Norse** had already gotten here; they had been here for two whole years. They actually harvested lumber off of Newfoundland and probably off of Labrador for 300 years. So they were crossing the Atlantic routinely. But in 1493, he didn't just cross the Atlantic, he brought 17 ships; he took over the Island of Haiti, renames it Hispaniola or Little Spain and he proceeds to take over the whole island--take over several million people.

And the population of Haiti then proceeds to go from probably about three million to probably about *zero* in terms of the native population by 1560. So, he started the process of the transatlantic slave trade--only from left to right, from West to East--namely in, shall we say, red people--in Native Americans. He doesn't get credit for that because again, that might be controversial; that might be bad. But we can't have Columbus Day if we're going to be saying bad things about him. So we don't learn anything real about Columbus. We learn a bunch of unreal things like “He proved it round.” Well, any sailor already knew that the world was round because you can see its roundness when a ship goes over the horizon as the roundness of Earth gets in the way. When it goes over the horizon, first you can't see the hull, then you can't see the sails, finally you can't see the little flag on top. So he didn't prove the world round. We knew it to be round. Instead, he started the slave trade; he did various other things that aren't quite so nice.

Ralph Nader: Well, we named the day after him, Columbus Day as a holiday but that's beginning to be changed with the people in this country saying, we should really have a day in

the memory of the indigenous natives of our land who were subjected to genocide--tribe after tribe wiped out and others diminished.

James Loewen: A lot of states have actually; several states have switched and a whole bunch of cities have switched and they call it Native American Day or Indigenous Peoples' Day and you know what, it works just the same. You still go out and buy stuff and capitalism works and the system has a nice sale day and you know.

Ralph Nader: Commercialism über alles, yes.

James Loewen: Yes.

Ralph Nader: The next chapter is "The truth about the First Thanksgiving". I'm looking forward to that one.

James Loewen: Yeah. Well, we don't get Thanksgiving totally wrong. Thanksgiving did actually kind of occur. There was this nice three-day get-together of the people that we now call Pilgrims. They weren't called Pilgrims back then. They were called the English or they were called Separatists. There are several interesting things about Thanksgiving. And this is coming out pretty well every November these days. Like last November somebody wrote a whole kind of expose on Thanksgiving for the *New York Times*, that relied a lot on what this chapter says in *Lies My Teacher Told Me*. The first thing that is kind of obvious is the United States didn't start in 1620. A lot of people kind of think it did. Well, if we started with white folks rather than say with black folks or Native Americans--well what about the Spanish who were in New Mexico and in Florida in the 1500s, or if you have to speak English in order to count, well then what about Virginia, which gets founded in 1607? But, besides that, and of course there's some things that happened in Virginia that caused us to not want to emphasize that so much. Let's just talk about Massachusetts, it's nicer. But then we got to think about why did the pilgrims succeed so well in Plymouth, Massachusetts? And the reason, the key reason is, because it already had been a town. It had been a town called Patuxent. It had cleared fields; it had a nice cleared-out spring; about 2,000 Native Americans had lived in this town. What happened to them? Well, just before the Pilgrims landed, in about 1615 or '16, there was a huge plague that swept through coastal New England, killed 95% of all the people. And in the case of Patuxent and soon to be Plymouth, the few remaining natives, they were so few and there were so many dead people,

they just had to abandon the place. And the only guy who survived was a guy named Squanto. And we all know the story of Squanto. But the interesting reason why he survived because he wasn't there at the time. He was from that village, but he was in England at the time; he had been stolen and enslaved. The slave trade didn't stop with Columbus; the British fishermen were continuing the slave trade of native people; so were other--the Portuguese stole so many people off of Labrador, they called it Labrador because that's a place they got laborers. And Labrador and laborer comes together in Portuguese. So that's why Squanto knew English and that's why Squanto could interpret; he had been taken back to America by a really nice British fisherman. In other words, what I'm going to conclude by saying is, the truth about the Pilgrims is more interesting than the kind of sanctimonious wonderful meal that they fed to the Indians' myth.

Ralph Nader: Well, let's go to "John Brown and Abraham Lincoln: The invisibility of antiracism in American history textbooks".

James Loewen: We can jump there. You actually kind of skipped a chapter.

Ralph Nader: Just in the interest of time.

James Loewen: Yeah, I understand. There's two chapters about racism; the first one is the invisibility of racism. And the reason that that's important is because we talk about slavery--the textbooks are actually halfway good about slavery I'm happy to say; they didn't used to be. But we did end slavery, didn't we? I mean, it's over. So, it's kind of an American success story even if it was a terrible while it was going on. But racism, which is slavery's handmaiden--the ideology that accompanies slavery that makes it "okay"--that didn't just go away in 1863 or four or five whenever slavery ended in a given place. So, you look in the textbook index, you don't even find racism under "R" and it's not because of bad indexing; it's not treated very much, because it's a continuing problem and it's therefore controversial--can't have any controversy. So, I pair that chapter with Lincoln and John Brown, because both of these people of course were anti-racist and they were certainly anti-slavery. But the way the textbooks treat them, they make one of them crazy--kind of still, kind of crazy--that's of course John Brown. He's getting a little better; he's now just a religious fanatic; he's not just plain crazy. And Lincoln, well, I asked audiences. I say, what do you think, is the number one thing they quote about from Abraham Lincoln--what address, what speech, whatever? And audiences always say the Gettysburg Address, which is a

good answer, but it's not the right answer. They love to quote this letter he wrote to this New York newspaper in the summer of 1862, where he says, "What I do about slavery and the colored race, I do to hold the country together and what I forbear, I forbear to hold the country together. My only interest is in preserving the Union." That's what you're supposed to infer from that. Well that's not even true and one of the ways you know it's not true, because the very next sentence in the letter goes "What I have just written is my formal official capacity about slavery, but I mean no change whatsoever in my oft expressed personal wish that all men everywhere may be free." And they leave that out and why would they do that? Why do they make Lincoln indifferent to slavery? Well, the answer is because they're still affected by this terrible period, 1890 to 1940, which is called the nadir of race relations. Some people say nadir, and I have to tell you, Ralph, I use a joke, I say "It's not NADER; we're not talking Ralph here." [Laughter] And audiences always laugh and I'm teaching them this new word nadir, right. And nadir means of course low point with an "i". And during this era, 1890 to 1940, we didn't want to talk about Lincoln's anti-racism, because we had gone so racist even in the North. So, we just kind of left it out. And they're still doing it; they still copy the old textbooks from the past.

Ralph Nader: How much is this is due to that they want to sell the textbooks in the South which has a long memory?

James Loewen: Well, you know, it used to be that. That's exactly what it used to be. But I think that the textbook industry is just simply overcome by inertia. I continually get invitations to do workshops with school districts, for example, the North Carolina Statewide Council for the Social Studies. I've been invited repeatedly to South Carolina to speak, and I always speak there about the truth about why South Carolina seceded. I don't bother them about what Massachusetts gets wrong. I bother people in Boston with that. So, I think that the South--the white South--is absolutely ready to move on. And we even see, of course, many of these cities now relocating or at least removing their Confederate Monuments.

Ralph Nader: Chapter 10 was fascinating. You say, "Down the Memory Hole: The Disappearance of the Recent Past". What do you mean by that?

James Loewen: Yeah, that's of course a reference to some guy, George Orwell, who wrote a pretty fascinating novel that dealt with these kinds of things. What I mean by that is that we don't

want to talk about the recent past because, again, it's controversial; it's too recent. There's going to be parents who are going to object if you make George W. Bush, for instance, heroic. There's going to be other parents who object if you make Bill Clinton, say, heroic. And so let's not talk very much about either one of them. And so, as a result, the period of time, let's say, after 1970, gets far less talk than it should, and far less attention. And then on top of that, we got the problem that the teachers never get to the end of the book anyway.

Ralph Nader: Well, you know, unfortunately we're running short at a time. I want to, what is the chapter 12, "What Is the Result of Teaching History Like This?" and make your point on causation?

James Loewen: The result of the way we teach history is, it comes across as just one damn thing after another and you're supposed to learn all these, I call it, "twig history". We're not teaching the forest with the trees, we're not even teaching trees, were teaching twigs. And so the result is that students can't think causally. They don't apply history to the present. If you did apply history to the present, again, it might be controversial. For example, we know from the nadir of race relations, what causes racism to increase when it has increased; we also know from some other periods what causes racism to go down when it has decreased. Well, we could think about that today and we could see whether there's some things going on today that are overtly causing racism to go in each of those two directions actually, depending on what time period you look at.

Ralph Nader: That is such an important point, and what would you tell parents listening to this program? What should they do in terms of middle and high school history courses for their children and what history texts would you recommend?

James Loewen: Well, I actually don't recommend any of the big fat history textbooks because we have the web. And the web has all kinds of bad stuff on it, sure, but it also has the Constitution. It has like 200,000 historic photographs at the Library of Congress alone. It's got websites on the Civil War that have all kinds of solid information and even the bad information has the advantage of sometimes being so overtly bad, that it almost forces you to become a critical leader and a critical thinker. So, I think we need to adopt the 300-page paperback. And then we can't just read the dead history book; we have to go read some outside sources. We have to think. So, I wouldn't recommend one textbook above others, although you mentioned Foner's.

Foner's is kind of aimed at college, but he did write it, unlike most of the textbooks not by the people who are listed as the authors, and I proved that incidentally and have never been sued for saying it. These people just rent their names out and they don't even bother to read what they supposedly wrote, which is one of the reasons why these books continue to have all these errors. What I think a parent should do, actually, is to read my book. And I even think they should buy it and here's why. I don't usually hawk my work. But the reason they should buy it is they should read the book; don't mark in it; keep it nice; take notes, but read it and then if you think I make some good points, give it or have your kid give it to his or her high school history teacher. Hit him (or her) upside the head with it if necessary. And the teachers will, under those circumstances, read it, because I've actually talked with a number of people who have had students do that and they have to read the book just in self-defense, because the student is criticizing them from the back of the room if they don't.

Ralph Nader: Well, we're out of time, but it's a great educational service that you've been engaged in for over 20 years, Professor Loewen.

James Loewen: Well, it's been fun too and I think if people get into history, they will find it's fun.

Ralph Nader: Well, on that note, thank you very much. We've been talking with Professor James Loewen, Author of the book the raging, best-selling book, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*. Thank you again and a happy and productive New Year.

James Loewen: It's been my pleasure.

Steve Skrovan: And that's our show. I want to thank our guests again today, Dave Zirin, Sports Editor for *The Nation* and James W. Loewen, Author of *Lies My Teacher Told Me*. For those of you listening on the radio, we're gonna check out for a moment. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material, we call the Wrap Up. We've got some more great stuff with Professor Loewen. And a transcript of this show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.

David Feldman: Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody. A Happy hopeful, productive New Year, and if you're interested in Ken Reid's books, you can get them by going to leagueoffans.org. They're very down to earth and they relate to your neighborhood as well as your society at large.