

Citizenship versus the New Civics

Published online: 6 June 2017

© Springer Science+Business Media New York 2017

Civics, Citizenship, and Eroding Academic Freedom

KC Johnson

A little more than a decade ago, my history department colleague Margaret King and I noticed an unusual new development in the Brooklyn College curriculum. The college’s provost, Roberta Matthews, announced that the institution would be participating in an initiative organized by the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) called the “Arts of Democracy.”

Despite the title, the Brooklyn branch of the program (which was hosted by a dozen schools) contained no courses on topics that would commonly be understood as associated with democracy—such as U.S. political or constitutional history. Instead, all the offerings revolved around themes of race, class, gender, or ethnicity. It turns out that this upside-down view of “democracy” very much fit in with the AAC&U’s agenda. The purpose of the program: to produce a pro-diversity, “twenty-first-century” education that would create “knowledgeable, empathetic members of society” who would “help ensure enlightened policy decisions.” And what might those decisions be? A support for “diversity” and the beginning of “work toward another kind of global community.” That this agenda was associated with a specific set of policy preferences seemed to be the goal of the “Arts of Democracy.”¹

Although Margaret and I had no way of knowing it at the time, we had encountered an early version of the “New Civics.” The AAC&U’s role in the

¹Robert David Johnson, “School for Scandal,” Standard Reader, *Weekly Standard*, December 29, 2003, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/article/4772>.

KC Johnson is professor of history at Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, NY 11210; RobertJohnson@brooklyn.cuny.edu. He is the author, with Stuart Taylor Jr., of *The Campus Rape Frenzy: The Attack on Due Process at America’s Universities* (Encounter Books, 2017) and *Until Proven Innocent: Political Correctness and the Shameful Injustices of the Duke Lacrosse Rape Case* (St. Martin’s, 2007; rev. and expanded ed., Thomas Dunne, 2008).

movement would, as David Randall’s *Making Citizens: How American Universities Teach Civics*, an important new study by the National Association of Scholars, demonstrates, continue to this day.² And the agenda would remain similar as well: employ terms and concepts that had one, mainstream meaning to state legislators and another to the faculty activists that staff the curricular program.

While depressing, Randall’s discoveries should come as no surprise. Colleges and universities have little chance of providing a well-rounded civics education without ensuring that students encounter specialists trained in the core subject matters (U.S. political and constitutional history, Western civilization) associated with the theme. Yet recent decades have witnessed diminishing attention to each of these topics in hiring and (to a lesser extent) curricular matters. Few institutions any longer require Western civilization classes, or hire in U.S. constitutional history. If students want to learn U.S. constitutional history from a specialist, they almost always will need to attend law school.

U.S. political history, meanwhile, has increasingly been “re-visioned” to exclude traditional approaches to the topic.³ In this “new” political history, the field has been redefined to focus on topics more amenable to the field’s race/class/gender/ethnicity dominance. Much of this work is good scholarship; some of it is excellent. But a generation ago, much of it would have been considered African American or women’s or ethnic history. Meanwhile, topics critical to state civics requirements get crowded out.

In an August 2016 *New York Times* op-ed, historians Fredrik Logevall and Kenneth Osgood brought the demise of U.S. political history to the public’s attention. “Fewer scholars build careers on studying the political process,” they lamented, “in part because few universities make space for them. Fewer courses are available, and fewer students are exposed to it. What was once a central part of the historical profession, a vital part of this country’s continuing democratic discussion, is disappearing.”⁴ The op-ed drew strong academic criticism; the New School’s Claire Potter, author of *War on Crime: Bandits, G-Men, and the Politics of Mass Culture* (1998), responded to the op-ed by tweeting to six other advocates of “new” political history: “According to @nytimes we don’t exist.”⁵

²David Randall, *Making Citizens: How American Universities Teach Civics* (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2017), https://www.nas.org/images/documents/NAS_makingCitizens_fullReport.pdf.

³Mark H. Leff, “Revising U.S. Political History,” *Journal of American History* 100, no. 3 (June 1995): 829–53.

⁴Fredrik Logevall and Kenneth Osgood, “Why Did We Stop Teaching Political History?” Opinion, *New York Times*, August 29, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/29/opinion/why-did-we-stop-teaching-political-history.html>.

⁵Claire Potter, personal Twitter account, @TenuredRadical, <https://twitter.com/TenuredRadical/status/770437133341487104>.

But, of course, not only do figures such as Potter exist, they represent the mainstream of what passes for U.S. political history in many departments around the country.

This demise of U.S. political history is critical to understanding the shortcomings of the New Civics. In one way or another, most public universities tell their prospective students—and, critically, the state legislatures that appropriate funds for the institutions—that they seek to train future citizens of the United States. The University of Michigan, for example, has promised “to serve the people of Michigan” in part by “developing leaders and citizens who will challenge the present and enrich the future.”⁶ The University of Illinois has sought to “create a brilliant future” for the school in which the “the citizens of Illinois”—and of “the nation”—would benefit.⁷ James Madison University holds itself out as “a community committed to preparing students to be educated and enlightened citizens who lead productive and meaningful lives.”⁸ The University of Maine at Presque Isle affirms—“as central to its mission,” no less—a commitment to “public service which promotes the well-being of the State’s citizenry.”⁹

These promises are not empty ones. Many public universities have a central obligation—through their Education programs, as well as through the awarding of M.A. degrees—of training the next generation of public school teachers. (New York, for instance, requires its social studies teachers to obtain a master’s degree in history.) These teachers, in turn, do their part to train the next generation of students—and, eventually, citizens.

Public school curricula represent one of the few areas in which the public has at least an indirect impact on college pedagogy. Most states collaboratively develop their social studies curricula, with state legislators, state bureaucrats, professors, public school teachers, and concerned parents all playing a role. For that reason, state educational requirements reflect a *public* will of what students should learn unlike anything else in the academy.

Though they often use the same kind of language, these state guidelines fall a long way from the New Civics movement. My home state of Maine, for instance, intends for its high school history students to be able to “explain that the study of government includes the structures, functions, institutions, and

⁶“Mission,” University of Michigan, Office of the President, <http://president.umich.edu/about/mission>.

⁷“Creating a Brilliant Future for the University of Illinois: Strategic Planning Framework,” University of Illinois, August 8, 2005 (updated February 17, 2006), <https://www.uillinois.edu/common/pages/DisplayFile.aspx?itemId=129804>.

⁸“Mission, Vision, and Values,” James Madison University, JMU Plans, About, <https://www.jmu.edu/jmuplans/about.shtml>.

⁹“Mission Statement,” University of Maine, Presque Isle, <http://www.maine.edu/pdf/umpiprescri.pdf>.

forms of government and the relationship of government to citizens in the United States and in other regions of the world”; “evaluate current issues by applying democratic ideals and constitutional principles of government in the United States, including checks and balances, federalism, and consent of the governed as put forth in founding documents”; “describe the purpose, structures, and processes of the American political system”; “explain the relationship between constitutional and legal rights, and civic duties and responsibilities in a constitutional democracy”; and “evaluate the relationship between the government and the individual as evident in the United States Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and landmark court cases.”¹⁰

According to New York State guidelines, the high school U.S. history teachers that I encounter in the Brooklyn College M.A. program must ensure that their students can “analyze important debates in American history (e.g., ratification of the United States Constitution, abolition of slavery, regulation of big business, restrictions on immigration, the New Deal legislation, women’s suffrage, United States involvement in foreign affairs and wars), focusing on the opposing positions and the historical evidence used to support these positions” and “analyze key Supreme Court decisions (e.g., *Marbury v. Madison*, *McCulloch v. Maryland*, *Dred Scott v. Sanford*, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, *Miranda v. Arizona*, and *Roe v. Wade*) in terms of the ongoing struggle to realize democratic ideals; explore how these decisions embody constitutional civic values and the evolution and application of constitutional values within American political, economic, and social life.”¹¹

For students who need to master this material in order to become public school teachers, the New Civics would provide either pabulum—or, even worse, instruction so ideologically and pedagogically slanted as to be useless. For this reason, the New Civics is doubly dangerous. Not only does it provide students with a substandard education, it risks alienating the legislators who fund (at least in part) the nation’s public universities.

The culmination of these developments is the elimination of all U.S. history requirements, even for history majors. A 2016 ACTA report revealed that only twenty-three of the nation’s seventy-six leading colleges and universities required history majors to graduate with even *one* course in U.S. history.¹²

¹⁰“Maine: 12th-Grade Standards,” [TeachingHistory.org](http://teachinghistory.org/teaching-materials/state-standards/maine/12), National History Education Clearinghouse, State Standards, <http://teachinghistory.org/teaching-materials/state-standards/maine/12>.

¹¹New York State Education Department, *Learning Standards for Social Studies*, rev. ed. (Albany: New York State Education Department, 1996), 7, 28, <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/socst/documents/sslearn.pdf>.

¹²American Council of Trustees and Alumni, *No U.S. History? How College History Departments Leave the United States Out of the Major* (Washington, DC: American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 2016), 4, https://www.goacta.org/images/download/no_u_s_history.pdf.

And the justifications for the move raise serious questions about the departments' good faith. A spokesperson for George Washington University's history department, for instance, oddly traced the change to a dislike of its majors for required courses—even as the department retained a requirement for a pre-1750 course.¹³ An instructor at Duke was more candid, suggesting that requiring history majors at a U.S. university to take a single course in U.S. history raised a “worry about the politics of privileging American history.”¹⁴ This view came despite Duke's mission statement, which speaks of providing students with “a sense of the obligations and rewards of citizenship.”¹⁵

By promising something it has no intention of delivering, the New Civics—and the academic philosophy behind it—is all but inviting a political backlash. In early 2017 Republican legislators in Iowa and Missouri—following the lead of an earlier initiative in Wisconsin—have introduced bills to eliminate tenure at public universities.¹⁶ A GOP-proposed bill in Arizona goes even further, prohibiting courses at public universities that “promote division, resentment or social justice toward a race, gender, religion, political affiliation, social class or other class of people.”¹⁷

This reaction should come as little surprise. Since academics have no special ability to discern the qualifications of citizenship, if universities are going to stay in the business of citizen-training, as opposed to educating, then they can expect to see the foundations of academic freedom—which is based on the idea that professors are rigorously trained in their academic subject matter, and therefore deserve deference from those outside campus—erode. Indeed, with regard to citizenship, the body best qualified, in any state, to outline the central qualifications would be the state legislature.

In the end, adherents of the New Civics will have to make a choice: they can either drop their citizen-training, or state legislators, at least in red states, will almost certainly assume greater oversight of their actions.

¹³Lily Werlinich, “History Department Changes Requirements to Draw in Majors,” *GW Hatchet*, November 13, 2016, <https://www.gwhatchet.com/2016/11/13/history-department-changes-major-requirements-to-draw-in-students/>.

¹⁴Heather Zhou, “Should History Majors Be Required to Take U.S. History?” *Duke Chronicle*, February 13, 2017, <http://www.dukechronicle.com/article/2017/02/should-history-majors-be-required-to-take-u-s-history>.

¹⁵“Mission Statement,” Duke University, <https://trustees.duke.edu/governing-documents/mission-statement>.

¹⁶Colleen Flaherty, “Killing Tenure,” News, *Inside Higher Ed*, January 13, 2017, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/01/13/legislation-two-states-seeks-eliminate-tenure-public-higher-education>.

¹⁷“An Act Amending Section 15-112, Arizona Revised Statutes, Amending Title 15, Chapter 14, Article 9, Arizona Revised Statutes, by Adding Section 15-1892; Relating to Curricula,” HB 2120, January 17, 2017, <http://www.azleg.gov/legtext/53leg/1R/bills/HB2120P.htm>.

Making Citizens: A Response

Harry C. Boyte

I welcome the conversation sparked by the NAS report, *Making Citizens: How American Universities Teach Civics*. It takes place in a troubled context. I have common concerns as well as differences with the report, but one area of agreement is the need for respectful conversation across partisan divides. It doesn't often happen on campuses and seems to have almost disappeared from the larger public debate.

Respectful conversation requires movement beyond inflamed binary thinking. President Trump is a master at picking fights and debasing the other side. Binary thinking, “us versus them,” is also fed by progressives. George Lakoff, emeritus professor of cognitive science at the University of California, Berkeley, perhaps the leading figure in shaping Democratic Party messaging, holds that the country is divided between liberals who believe in “government as nurturing parent,” and conservatives who believe in “strict father” authoritarian government. Speaker after speaker at the 2012 Democratic Convention sounded as if he were reading from Lakoff's books. The Clinton campaign's closing argument in 2016 was similar: “Hillary Clinton's fought for children and families her entire career.”¹

Making Citizens, authored by David Randall, unfortunately also feeds binary thinking. It is a caricature to propose that my aim and the aim of the “civic engagement movement” generally in higher education is “to create a thoroughly administered state” and turn America's young people into left-wing radicals.”² That simply isn't true. It is a diverse movement with many strands of thought whose motivating spirit is revitalization of citizenship.

Our own work, in particular, cannot be put into binary boxes. For instance, I have long been a critic of “global citizenship.” I detailed my critique in “A Challenging Patriotism,” in the July/August 2012 *Change*, written in explicit contrast to the *Crucible Moment* global citizenship theme during the American

¹“Hillary Clinton's Fought for Children and Families Her Entire Career,” [HillaryClinton.com](https://www.hillaryclinton.com/briefing/factsheets/2015/05/19/fact-sheet-childcare/), The Briefing: Factsheets, <https://www.hillaryclinton.com/briefing/factsheets/2015/05/19/fact-sheet-childcare/>.

²David Randall, *Making Citizens: How American Universities Teach Civics* (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2017), 92, https://www.nas.org/images/documents/NAS_makingCitizens_fullReport.pdf.

Harry C. Boyte is senior scholar in public work philosophy at the Center for Democracy and Citizenship, Augsburg College, Minneapolis, MN 55454; boyte@augsborg.edu. He teaches graduate and undergraduate courses on politics, democratic theory, and civic organizing at the University of Minnesota's Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs, and is the author of nine books on citizenship, democracy, political theory, American history, and civic and community organizing.

Commonwealth Partnership year.³ “Challenging patriotism” differs from bellicose or ethnic nationalism and global citizenship alike. It draws from the founding ideals of the nation, as well as from civic practices over American history—building communities, caring for common goods, striving for a “more perfect union.” The sense of American democracy as an ongoing work in progress to which waves of immigrants contribute has been the source of its magnetic appeal for people across the world, just as our founding documents have often formed the basis for struggles against despots elsewhere.

Old civics alone teaches an overly narrow, legalistic, and state-centered understanding of citizenship. Here are three resources for a more active, expansive view.

Building civic life. Across partisan divisions, Americans for centuries have “made America.” This sense of co-creative citizenship animated Thomas Jefferson’s vision in the Declaration of Independence and later amazed the French observer Alexis de Tocqueville when he traveled the nation in the 1830s. “In democratic peoples, associations must take the place of the powerful particular persons,” he wrote in *Democracy in America*. “In democratic countries the science of association is the mother science; the progress of all the others depends on the progress of that one.”⁴ Tocqueville located the “science of association” in a grassroots citizen politics, different than partisan politics, located especially in associations through which citizens learned civic skills and values as they argued, negotiated, and created a shared way of life. “The Americans, in Tocqueville’s account,” wrote the late political theorist Sheldon Wolin, “began with a political culture rather than a state....[They] introduced an entirely new conception of democracy as rooted in, and corresponding to, the democracy of daily life.”⁵

Our public work approach highlights the work-centered traditions of citizenship, as well as the voluntary associational life emphasized by Tocqueville. This work-centered tradition of citizenship was grounded in local experiences like building libraries, schools, congregations, and businesses. It

³Harry C. Boyte, “Perspectives: A Challenging Patriotism,” *Change* 44, no. 2 (July/August 2012): 22–26, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00091383.2012.691859?journalCode=vchn20>.

⁴Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835), ed. and trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 491–92.

⁵Sheldon Wolin, *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 222, 224. Recent explorations of the meaning of “democracy” in Athens, where the term originated, shows that Athenian understandings were similar, emphasizing not voting but rather the power of citizens to act. As Josiah Ober puts it, democracy for the ancient Greeks “means, more capaciously, the empowered *demos*...in which the *demos* gains a collective capacity to effect change in the public realm... the collective *strength* and *ability* to act within that realm and, indeed, to reconstitute the public realm through action.” “The Original Meaning of ‘Democracy’: Capacity to Do Things, Not Majority Rule,” *Constellations* 15, no. 1 (2008): 7, available at <https://www.princeton.edu/~pswpc/pdfs/ober/090704.pdf>.

predates Independence. Benjamin Franklin’s Leather Apron Club, founded in Philadelphia in 1727, included tradesmen, artisans, and shopkeepers—“the middling people.” It combined hard work and civic commitment—“doing well by doing good” was its motto. It birthed a myriad of projects including a street-sweeping corps, volunteer firefighters, tax-supported neighborhood constables, health and life insurance groups, a library, a hospital, an academy for educating young people, a society for sharing scientific discoveries, and a postal system. Franklin’s view of education combined practical and liberal arts and was paralleled by many colleges and universities, from land grants and religious schools, such as our center’s new home, Augsburg College, to research universities.

Thus, for instance, Liberty Hyde Bailey, founder and dean of the College of Agriculture at Cornell—both a land grant and a research institution—argued that every specialty at the college must be infused with a spirit of public work. Indeed Bailey, one of the world’s leading horticulturalists, believed specialists eroded the vitality of rural life unless they understood their work in a larger context, grounded in respect for the farmers and rural communities and dedicated to developing their capacities for collective action. “Our present greatest need is the development of what may be called ‘the community sense,’ the idea of the community as a whole working together toward one work,” he argued. Bailey saw the most important focus of agricultural specialists as increasing civic capacities for self-directed action. “The re-direction of any civilization must rest primarily on the people who comprise it, rather than be imposed from persons in other conditions of life.”⁶ For decades colleges and universities prepared graduates who saw themselves as *citizens through their work*, as citizen teachers, citizen business leaders, citizen nurses—and citizen politicians.

Government of the people. The report’s proposal to return to teaching only “old civics,” like how bills become law, neglects Abraham Lincoln’s view of government as partner, “of the people, by the people,” as well as “for the people.” America’s strength comes when “old civics,” the study of republican institutions, is joined with skills of active citizenship that build up civic life, a case I have constantly made (strangely not noted in *Making Citizens*). Politicians today, across parties, generally prefer approaches that mobilize people against their opponents.

There are strong, if submerged, traditions of government and political leadership taking a different view and role, as empowering partners for collaborative public work, partnerships in which universities often played

⁶Liberty Hyde Bailey, *Cornell Nature Study Leaflets* (Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon, 1904), 52–53, 29–30.

central roles. For instance, Jess Gilbert's *Planning Democracy: Agrarian Intellectuals and the Intended New Deal* (2015) richly describes the ways in which a group of agrarian intellectuals in the Department of Agriculture worked with land grant colleges from 1937 to 1942 to develop deliberative discussions about the future of rural America. The effort involved farm organizations and unions, churches, youth clubs, professional and business groups, and government agencies, training about sixty thousand discussion leaders. It involved three million people. It launched a process of participatory land use planning across the country that helped to birth soil conservation districts and plans for preventing soil erosion and fertility depletion, and for protecting family farms.⁷

To return to Tocqueville, such an understanding of higher education embodies cross-partisan "citizen politics," teaching everyday skills of talking and working across differences, as well as knowledge of government and voting. I agree with the report's concern about the erosion of civics, but it is not a left-wing plot. It comes from high-stakes testing and the loss of public purposes in education. Education for citizenship supplements civics with skills of working across differences that strengthen civic life and civic institutions, including businesses. Studies by the National Association of Colleges and Employers show that skills of negotiating ethnic, cultural, and gender diversity are highly prized by employers.⁸

Relational power: Another odd feature of the NAS argument, developed by David Randall in a January 24 guest blog in *Education Week*, is the idea that the theory of power informing our concept of public work comes mainly from Saul Alinsky, who had a one-directional view of power as defeating one's enemies.⁹ Here I summarize my response.¹⁰

Unilateral power does, indeed, animate *Rules for Radicals*, Alinsky's last book, published in 1971. The book fed mobilizing approaches to civic action and political campaigns. Mobilizing includes the door-to-door canvass, robo-calls, direct mail fundraising, Internet mobilizations, and other mass communications methods. Mobilization has taken "us versus them" to new levels of psychological sophistication, using advanced communications

⁷Jess Gilbert, *Planning Democracy: Agrarian Intellectuals and the Intended New Deal* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).

⁸"*Job Outlook 2016: Attributes Employers Want to See on Now College Graduates' Resumes*," National Association of Colleges and Employers, Spotlight for Career Service Professionals, November 18, 2015, <http://www.nacweb.org/s11182015/employers-look-for-in-new-hires.aspx>.

⁹David Randall, "Does Civics Belong in the Classroom?" Opinion, *Bridging Differences* (blog), *Education Week*, January 24, 2017, http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/Bridging-Differences/2017/01/old_civics_versus_new_civics_b.html.

¹⁰Harry C. Boyte, "Beyond 'Civics' versus 'Citizenship,'" Opinion, *Bridging Differences* (blog), *Education Week*, February 21, 2017, http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/Bridging-Differences/2017/02/Beyond_22Civics%22_Versus_Citizenship%22_Possibilities_for_Common_Ground.html.

techniques based on a formula: find a target or enemy to demonize, stir up emotion with inflammatory language using a script that defines the issue in good-versus-evil terms and shuts down critical thought, and convey the idea that those championing the victims will come to the rescue.

Today, mobilizing is the approach of the Right as well as the Left. Thus, as Elizabeth Williamson described in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Rules for Radicals* is widely used by Tea Party activists.¹¹ Ironically, *Making Citizens* also employs the good-versus-evil mobilizing approach. Mobilizing culminates in Donald Trump.

Working with a team, I started Public Achievement in 1990¹² with the aim of countering mobilizing politics and unilateral power.¹³ We called the alternative “citizen politics,” retrieving the skills of association that Tocqueville called the “mother science” of democratic society. Public Achievement teaches how to work across partisan and other differences on constructive civic projects—improving interactions with governance, promoting social justice, and “creating a more perfect union.” It also builds on the public work tradition, building communities and their civic and material infrastructure. Both depend on a relational view of power I learned in the civil rights movement and saw in cross-partisan strands of community organizing. Relational power is based on the concept that power interactions, even in situations of inequality, always involve changes on both sides. Power is interactive and evolving. It is “power to,” the capacity to act. These features of Public Achievement won it support from conservative foundations such as the Bradley Foundation and the Lilly Endowment as well as progressive foundations such as the Kellogg Foundation.¹⁴

Civic Education Challenging Technocracy

There is a leftward tilt to higher education, but the civic engagement movement, for all its complexities, is a counterweight. It begins to overcome the technocratic, state-centered bent of left-wing politics by re-growing connections with the world beyond the Ivory Tower.

¹¹Elizabeth Williamson, “Two Ways to Play the ‘Alinsky’ Card,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 23, 2012, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204624204577177272926154002>.

¹²“Public Achievement,” Augsburg College, Sabo Center for Democracy and Citizenship, <http://www.augsburg.edu/sabo/what-we-do/publicachievement/>.

¹³See Harry C. Boyte, *Everyday Politics: Reconnecting Citizens and Public Life* (Philadelphia: PennPress, 2004).

¹⁴For a relational view of power combining “power” and “love,” see Martin Luther King Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958).

Citizens' capacity to act is reduced not only by concentrations of economic power, a legitimate concern of the Left, but also by "expert knows best" positivism and its technocratic expressions throughout our institutional life. Conservatives such as Peter and Brigitte Berger, William Schambra, Yuval Levin, Bob Woodson, and others have been much more insightful in identifying this problem than progressives. They detail how technocracy has turned once-robust mediating institutions like families, congregations, local businesses, and ethnic groups into service providers where detached experts render citizens as clients and customers.

Catholic social thought spotlights this problem. Thus Pope Francis in his 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, describes the epistemological shift that prioritizes rational, informational approaches for dealing with human problems over relational and cultural approaches. "The basic problem goes even deeper" than concentrated economic and knowledge power, he argues. "Many problems of today's world stem from the tendency, at times unconscious, to make the method and aims of science and technology an epistemological paradigm which shapes the lives of individuals and the workings of society."¹⁵

In my view, Loyola University sociologist Philip Nyden, excoriated in *Making Citizens* for drawing on wisdom outside the academy, in fact responds to the problem of technocracy. The public work approach challenges technocracy by valuing the public contributions of citizens from many backgrounds, whatever their formal credentials. Public work is often used to strengthen mediating institutions. Thus the Citizen Professional Center at the University of Minnesota organized by Bill Doherty, a leading family therapist, uses the public work framework in partnerships with many conservatives on issues such as strengthening marriage, enhancing authority of religious laity, and organizing families to moderate hyperactive lifestyles.

What the report calls the civic engagement movement revives cross-partisan education for active citizenship and strengthening civic life, a concern of all the nation's Founders. I believe that we have new possibilities for cross-partisan collaboration in developing civic life as a counterweight not only to the power of large institutions but also the dangers of metastasizing technocracy, vividly described in the recent *Scientific American* article, "Will Democracy Survive Big Data and Artificial Intelligence?" by a group of nine scientists and scholars. "A centralized system of technocratic behavioral and social control using a

¹⁵*Laudato Si' of the Holy Father Francis: On Care for Our Common Home*, encyclical letter, May 24, 2015, chap. 3, paras. 106, 107, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

super-intelligent information system would result in a new form of dictatorship,” they warn. New technologies feed social polarization, “resulting in the formation of separate groups that no longer understand each other and find themselves increasingly at conflict with one another.”¹⁶ Higher education needs to take leadership in countering this dynamic.

To do so we need to recall older traditions of democratic education in American higher education that joined civics and citizenship. This was the tradition, for instance, of James B. Angell, president of the University of Michigan from 1871 to 1909, who believed that public universities needed to embody and also help shape the dynamics of a changing democracy. He built on the pioneering admission of women in 1870 to create a “democratic atmosphere” on campus, full of debate, discussion, experimentalism, and open play of different viewpoints. The seminar as a teaching method was increasingly used to engage students in interactive education. There was a growing emphasis on scientific approaches to problems and analysis of the world with an understanding of science that emphasized its cultural dimensions and values, capacities for cooperative inquiry every citizen should know.¹⁷

These traditions flow into today’s efforts to educate for civics and citizenship. Recognizing our common ground, as well as our differences, will allow the creation of a broad civic life center beyond Left and Right. We need it now more than ever.

¹⁶Dirk Helbing et al., “Will Democracy Survive Big Data and Artificial Intelligence?” *Scientific American*, February 25, 2017, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/will-democracy-survive-big-data-and-artificial-intelligence/>.

¹⁷This account is from Brian A. Williams, *Thought and Action: John Dewey at the University of Michigan* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Bentley Library, 1935). For a discussion of the movement of “scientific democrats” see Andrew Jewett, *Science, Democracy, and the American University: From the Civil War to the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

Winning the War of Ideas

Nicholas Capaldi

After two millennia of research we have arrived at the following incontrovertible conclusions:

- The world is not coming to an end via global warming.
- Mother Nature is a “bitch” and the only way to protect ourselves from her is through the imaginative and responsible use of technology.
- You can’t get the full advantages of technology without free markets.
- You can’t have free markets unless you have a limited government.
- You can’t have a limited government without the rule of law.
- You can’t have the rule of law without a culture that promotes personal freedom and responsibility.

That’s the good news.

Now for the bad news. Although we have won every major intellectual battle, we are not winning the War of Ideas.

Why?

We are not winning this war because the enemy controls the commanding heights of communication: the media, publishing, even many of the pulpits, and, of course, the academy—the nerve center and home base of all that is wrong in our society.

This control is not exercised through serious argument, but through systemic ignorance, lies, damned lies, misrepresentation, character assassination, and the promotion of envy and malice.

Now a new enemy appears on the scene: the “New Civics,” which “redefines civics as progressive political activism. Rooted in the radical program of the 1960s’ New Left, the New Civics presents itself as an up-to-date version of volunteerism and good works.” It is transforming institutions of higher learning through “academic study, extra-curricular pursuits, and off-campus ventures.”¹

The New Civics builds on “‘service-learning,’ which is an effort to divert students from the classroom to vocational training as community activists.”² It

¹David Randall, *Making Citizens: How American Universities Teach Civics* (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2017), 9, https://www.nas.org/images/documents/NAS_makingCitizens_fullReport.pdf.

²*Ibid.*, 9.

Nicholas Capaldi is Legendre-Soulé Distinguished Chair in Business Ethics and director of the Center for Spiritual Capital, College of Business Administration, Loyola University New Orleans, New Orleans, LA 70118; capaldi@loyno.edu. He is the author of seven books, including *John Stuart Mill* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), and has served most recently as editor of *Public Affairs Quarterly*.

is “hostile to the free market; supports racial preferences in the guise of *diversity*; supports arbitrary government power in the guise of *sustainability*; and undermines traditional loyalty to America in the guise of *global citizenship*” (emphasis in original).³ It advocates “de-carbonizing the economy, massively redistributing wealth, intensifying identity group grievance, curtailing the free market, expanding government bureaucracy, elevating international ‘norms’ over American Constitutional law, and disparaging our common history and ideals.”⁴

I will explain the intellectual origin of this view, and then propose a program to combat it.

The eighteenth century was enamored of the success of Newtonian physics. Some of its thinkers sought to extend this success by arguing that there could be an equivalent social science that would explain, predict, and control the social world. In short, we could have a social technology based on science. France being the home of all bad ideas, the early advocates of this idea were primarily French philosophers including Diderot, Helvétius, Holbach, and Condorcet. This notion of a science of society was further advanced in the nineteenth century by Comte and Marx and eventually found its way to twentieth-century America via the progressives (Charles Beard, Woodrow Wilson, etc.). This movement found a home in the alleged social sciences, educated several generations of radicals, and then, when higher education expanded, eventually populated its administration.

If you think you are in possession of “the” truth, and “the” truth authorizes a social technology, then, voilà, we move from education to indoctrination. Scholars who oppose this indoctrination posing as education are considered simply wrong (incompetent) and hence should not be hired, promoted, or given tenure.

Many worthy organizations exist to combat these evils, among them academic centers and institutes such as the National Association of Scholars. We scholars associated or sympathetic with the goals of these organizations teach the real truth, we publish the truth, we host conferences, speakers, have websites, etc., etc., etc. In every generation of students, those who want to can still hear the truth; they will hear sophisticated defenses of what they intuitively cherish, are reminded that the university is not the real world, and are encouraged to go out and become the next generation of creators, not whiners.

These are victories, but small ones. I grow weary of winning such battles; I am running out of space for trophies and have too much scar tissue. We need to win the war, and that can only be achieved with a radical new strategy.

³Ibid., 36.

⁴Ibid., 9.

I have come to the conclusion that no institution can dramatically change itself from within; radical change only comes about when it is invited in from the outside.

We need to find the leverage point to use against these Houses of Dissimulation. That leverage point is money. Universities can be brought to their knees by cutting off endowments.

And who provides the biggest endowments? Ironically, the biggest endowments come from the most despised of all groups: members of the business community, often graduates of schools of business.

Here is our strategic response:

Stage 1: Create a “Leadership Academy” for prominent entrepreneurs that

- a. hosts seminars for business leaders, at which we remind them that
 1. *the business of America is business,*
 2. the most influential people in the U.S. are entrepreneurs, and
 3. entrepreneurs make possible all of the material and spiritual benefits and opportunities we possess,

with the aim of identifying business people with leadership potential.

- b. invites selected business leaders to join a network where they can meet like-minded individuals and host events for them.
- c. publishes a national magazine—not another journal with footnotes—that sings the praises of a commercial culture (rather than recommending stocks) and makes business leaders aware of the value of their leadership role and what they do.
- d. opens a Museum of Shame—preferably in midtown Manhattan, perhaps across the street from CNN or CBS—that identifies every individual and every institution that has historically opposed technology, markets, limited government, the rule of law, and personal freedom. No doubt, the diorama for the *New York Times* will be larger than all other exhibits.

Stage 2: Take aim at business schools.

- a. Show how
 1. business ethics courses and publications in particular are largely exercises in business-bashing and advocacy of government regulation as their default position for addressing all problems.

2. the curriculum is often run by people with an adversarial attitude toward commerce (the Carnegie Foundation fifty years ago...).
3. this adversarial attitude permeates accreditation bodies (whose incestuous, conflict-of-interest nature would amaze even Ken Lay) and spreads the virus.

b. Organize

1. MBA students in a national organization like the Federalist Society.
2. business leaders to withhold donations until the school gets a new dean, a new curriculum, divorces itself from the school of liberal arts, and establishes a new ranking system and accreditation structure that includes outside business leaders.

Stage 3: Take aim at law schools.

- a. Repeat the steps for stage 2, knowing that aside from criminal defense attorneys, most practicing attorneys understand the value of commerce.
- b. Employ attorneys who are on our side to
 1. sue the American Bar Association for misrepresenting Supreme Court decisions.
 2. bring a class action suit against the law schools themselves for trashing the Constitution and failing to teach the rule of law.
 3. bring class action suits against universities and foundations that violate donor intent.

Stage 4: Take aim at schools of journalism.

This will be more challenging and adversarial because outside of Fox Business Network we cannot identify any intelligent journalists. On a recently administered multiple-choice exam, students at schools of journalism could only identify one amendment to the Constitution, namely, the First Amendment.

Stage 5: Take aim at the university in general and liberal arts colleges in particular.

By this stage the task will be easy because most board of trustee members will be graduates of our Leadership Academy. This is how we shall close the circle.

Are there organizations that try to take some of these steps? Yes, but they do it in bits and pieces.

Is there an organization that tries to do all of this in a coherent, systematic way, incorporating the work of other organizations into a huge network, drawing a new line of battle instead of fighting a continuous rearguard action? Could it be the National Association of Scholars?

Unmaking Citizens

Michael I. Krauss

In early January I wrote my *Forbes* column about a remarkable “statement” delivered by more than 1400 law professors to the chairman and ranking member of the Senate Judiciary Committee. The statement urged the committee to reject then President-Elect Trump’s nomination of Senator Jeff Sessions as Attorney General of the United States.¹ I wrote about this because I was struck by the irrelevance of the reasons given by the signers of the statement to the actual office of Attorney General.

For example, the statement claims that some (it never says how many) of its signers object to:

- Sessions’s view that illegal entry into America should be prohibited. But wanting to enforce existing laws is not disqualifying for an Attorney General, except perhaps in a Bizarro world. Law professors should know better!
- Sessions’s willingness to enforce America’s existing drug laws. Again, it is fatuous to criticize a would-be Attorney General for desiring to enforce existing laws. Law professors should know better!
- Sessions’s opposition to unnamed legislative efforts of which the signatories approved but which apparently were not adopted, and which would in the signatories’ opinion have favored women, homosexuals, and transgendered people. The signatories don’t elaborate on any of this, nor do they note that the Attorney General can neither propose nor enact new legislation, but is solely entrusted with enforcing legislation that has already been adopted and enacted. They never claim that Sessions would not enforce legislation of which he disapproves. Law professors should know better!
- Sessions’s views about the relationship between fossil fuels and climate change. But as regards his fitness as Attorney General, I don’t care what those views are, any more than I care what Sessions thinks about NATO or the Designated Hitter rule. How can law professors claim that such

¹Michael I. Krauss, “The Law Professors’ Scandalous Statement against Jeff Sessions,” Opinion, *Forbes*, January 5, 2017, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelkrauss/2017/01/05/the-law-professors-scandalous-statement-against-jeff-sessions/#5bd2ed7b3475>.

Michael I. Krauss is professor of law at the Antonin Scalia Law School of George Mason University, Arlington, VA 22201; mkrauss@gmu.edu. His most recent book is *Principles of Products Liability*, 2nd ed. (West, 2014).

(undefined by the signatories) “views” disqualify Sessions? What has happened to their understanding of our constitutional structure of government? Law professors should know better!

The puerile nature of this massively-signed professorial “statement” about then Senator (now Attorney General) Sessions is explainable as a typical effort to inject “New Civics” into the pondered choice of the person who will be our nation’s chief federal law enforcement officer. Presumably, according to the signatories, that man or woman should understand that immigration laws, drug laws, family benefit laws, and environmental laws are not “real” laws—at least not when stacked up against the Attorney General’s “civic” duty to further “social justice.”

Making Citizens: How American Universities Teach Civics goes a long way toward explaining to folks like me what would be an otherwise unexplainable departure from the rule of law found in this “statement.” The new NAS report patiently and painstakingly details the Newspeakean transformation of civics in American higher education, a transformation made possible by the large-scale abdication of civics education in our public high schools.

Making Citizens shows the *modus operandi* of those who would replace civics (which I roughly take to be the *process*-oriented understanding of how America operates politically and of the rights and duties of her citizens) with New Civics (which I roughly take to be the *result*-oriented striving for certain social and political goals through indoctrination and practice). Basically, the strategy seems to consist of further hijacking what remains of our universities’ core education requirements—already disintegrating due to the proliferation of politicized and specialized course offerings—and replacing it with one particular version of “social justice” programming. The goal is for students to graduate fully indoctrinated, even if functionally uneducated.

Making Citizens details how this goal is pursued in four mountain state institutions. It’s a fascinating read, and I won’t repeat it here. Rather, I thought it might be useful to review how the New Civics has been implemented at my own institution, George Mason University (GMU).

An online listing indicates that current B.A. students must complete these core requirements (those that cover or potentially cover New Civics are in italics):²

- Written Communication (6 credits): ENGH 100 or 101 and ENGH 302
- Oral Communication (3 credits): COMM 100 or 101

²“Mason Core and College Requirements,” George Mason University, <http://chss.gmu.edu/general-education/all-requirements>.

- Quantitative Reasoning (3 credits)
- Information Technology (minimum 3 credits)
- Arts (3 credits)
- *Global Understanding* (3 credits)
- Literature (3 credits)
- Natural Science (7 credits)
- *Social and Behavioral Science* (3 credits)
- *Western Civilization/World History* (3 credits): *HIST 100 or 125*
- *Synthesis or Capstone Experience* (varies; minimum 3 credits)
- *One course* (3 credits) in *Philosophy or Religious Studies: Fulfilled by any course in PHIL or RELI except PHIL 323, 324, 327, 393, 460*
- *One course* (3 credits) in *Non-Western Culture*; the same course cannot be used to fulfill both this requirement and the *Mason Core requirement in Global Understanding*
- Proficiency in a foreign language through the intermediate level

Global Understanding is satisfied by selecting one course from among a considerable array that includes History 364, “Revolution and Radical Politics in Latin America”; History 365, “Conquest and Colonization in Latin America”; and Religion 320, “Religion and Revolution in Latin America.” (Perhaps this collection of courses is the forerunner of a “New Latino Civics.”)

The *Social and Behavioral Science* core requirement can be satisfied by taking one or two among dozens of courses. These promisingly include Government 103, “Introduction to American Government,” but that particular course is not mandatory, and I have not been able to determine what percentage of GMU undergrads actually takes it. Alas, the requirement is equally satisfied by selecting: African American Studies 200, “Introduction to African American Studies”; Education 203, “Disability in American Culture”; Sociology 355, “Social Inequality”; Tourism 311, “Women and Tourism”; and Women’s Studies 200, “Introduction to Women’s and Gender Studies,” among other options.

The *Western Civilization* requirement can be satisfied by taking one of two courses: History 100, “History of Western Civilization”; or History 125, “Introduction to World History.” Not bad, but I note that this means students can graduate without taking any course focused on Western notions of progress, justice, and knowledge.

The *Capstone Experience* can be replaced by a “synthesis course” in many departments. Such courses in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (the largest college at GMU) include, for example, Psychology 427,

“Community Engagement for Social Change”; and Spanish 388, “Introduction to Latino/a Studies.” (How is an “introduction” course a “synthesis”?) The “synthesis” requirement at other GMU colleges can be met by selecting from dozens of courses, among them: Environmental Policy 480, “Sustainability in Action”; Global and Community Health 465, “Community Health Capstone”; Conservation 491, “Comprehensive Conservation Planning”; and Geography and Geo-Information 303, “Conservation of Resources and Environment.”

There is no course on Judaism among Spring 2017 Religion offerings, but Religion 379, “Law, Society, and Ethics in Islam,” satisfies either the Philosophy and Religion requirement or the non-Western Civilization requirement, at the student’s option. Ditto for Religion 272, “Islam.” For some reason, however, Religion 591, “Approaches to the Study of Islam,” satisfies only the Philosophy/Religion requirement and not the non-Western Civilization requirement. If one wishes to select a philosophy course to fill the synthesis requirement, Philosophy 338, “Philosophy, Sex, and Gender,” is an option.

This new “core” demonstrates that civics has taken a back seat to other goals/concerns/fields. Even outside the classroom, this New Civics is favored. As part of the Patriot Experience: Growth Beyond the Classroom, students are presented by the university with a portfolio of four “pathways” they are strongly encouraged to complete before graduation, and for which they can earn “rewards” and credit.³

Civic Learning and Community Engagement, one of the pathways, will “*apply ethical knowledge and learning with democratic ideals and principles to make positive and meaningful changes locally and globally*” (emphasis in original).⁴ For example, Mason Core Engagement Series in Sustainability, which is listed under the Civic Learning and Community Engagement pathway, combines academic coursework with sustainability-related co-curricular activities.⁵ One lucky student a year is awarded the Storm Sustainability Scholarship for “excelling in one of Mason’s many green leaf academic programs.”⁶ Another, “who displays exceptional leadership and

³“Patriot Experience: Growth Beyond the Classroom,” George Mason University, <http://patriotexperience.gmu.edu>. Rewards include: “Patriot Experience Shirt,” “Patriot Experience Bag,” “FastPass for Mason Day,” and “Patriot Experience Sash for Graduation.” “What Is Patriot Experience?” <http://patriotexperience.gmu.edu/what-is-the-patriot-experience/>.

⁴“Civic Learning and Community Engagement,” George Mason University, Patriot Experience: Growth Beyond the Classroom, <http://patriotexperience.gmu.edu/civic-learning-and-community-engagement/>.

⁵The Mason Core Engagement Series in Sustainability, George Mason University, <http://catalog.gmu.edu/content.php?catoid=29&navoid=6680>.

⁶“The Storm Sustainability Scholarship,” George Mason University, Funding, Sustainability Studies, <http://sustainabilitystudies.gmu.edu/funding/storm-scholarship/>.

involvement in sustainable efforts,” is featured in a GMU Office of Sustainability “Student Spotlight.”⁷

The Global and Multicultural Competency pathway enables students to “understand the ways in which they perceive, evaluate, believe, and solve problems, based on their own self-awareness and attained cultural knowledge. They will conscientiously negotiate diversity among individuals of various cultures and ethnicities, within individual cultures and subcultures, by becoming aware of one’s own and others’ perspectives.”⁸ This pathway claims it will allow students to:

- Demonstrate *sensitivity* toward others
- Articulate the worldview of *self and others*
- Articulate the *impact their behavior* has globally
- Serve as an *effective ally and advocate* [for] people of other identities than their own
- Articulate an *awareness of the roots and impact* of system-based power and privilege⁹ (emphases in original)

These pathways are operated by administrative staff and funded by university resources. GMU’s University Life staff, for example, claim to “provide opportunities for Global and Multicultural competency and experiences” in

- Diversity, Inclusion and Multicultural Education
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Resources
- International Programs and Services
- Women and Gender Studies Center
- Housing and Residence Life
- Living Learning Communities
- Student Involvement
- Leadership Education and Development¹⁰

⁷“Zuri Gagnon,” George Mason University, Office of Sustainability, Student Spotlight, May 2016, <http://green.gmu.edu/spotlights/student.cfm>.

⁸“Global and Multicultural Competency,” George Mason University, Patriot Experience: Growth Beyond the Classroom, <http://patriotexperience.gmu.edu/global-and-multicultural/>.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰“Global and Multicultural Competency,” George Mason University, University Life, <http://ulife.gmu.edu/global-and-multicultural-competency/>.

George Mason students and parents should be confident that the university participates actively in the New Civics. We are on track to produce talented community organizers—though it's perhaps less clear that all will graduate with an understanding of the role of the United States Attorney General.

Citizenship Outside the Academy

Allen Mendenhall

Anyone who’s taught college freshmen, as I have for the past seven years, knows that many of them lack a basic understanding of civics and American government. When the Intercollegiate Studies Institute conducted its annual civic literacy reports, it revealed in quantifiable terms just how ignorant college students really are.¹ For example, the 2006 report found that 7,405 freshmen from fifty schools scored just 51.7 percent on a sixty-question multiple-choice exam testing basic American civics; 6,689 seniors from those same schools scored 53.2 percent on the same exam, suggesting they gained little knowledge of civics during their four years in college.² The 2011 report demonstrated that knowledge of civics, more than holding a college degree, influences civic engagement beyond voting.³

As an administrator in a law school, I’ve discovered that law students—who will be expected to implement, follow, and enforce the rules that inform and direct our social institutions—also require rudimentary instruction in government and political theory to prepare them to practice the profession they wish to enter.

What happens when students who are unequipped with even an elementary knowledge of American ideas and institutions graduate into political and professional life? The answer can be gleaned from the remarks of certain public officials:

- In 2011 Democratic Senator of New York Chuck Schumer, omitting any reference to the judiciary, told CNN that the United States has three branches of government—the House, the Senate, and the President.⁴

¹The Intercollegiate Studies Institute conducted these reports from 2006 until 2011. The last report was *Enlightened Citizenship: How Civic Knowledge Trumps a College Degree in Promoting Active Civic Engagement* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2011), https://www.heartland.org/_template-assets/documents/publications/civic_literacy_report_11.pdf.

²*The Coming Crisis in Citizenship: Higher Education’s Failure to Teach America’s History* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2006), 5.

³Intercollegiate Studies Institute, *Enlightened Citizenship*, 13–14, 15–16.

⁴Although video footage of this CNN segment is available on YouTube and various websites, Senator Schumer’s gaffe went unreported by most media outlets except for those associated with political conservatism. See, e.g., Jeff Poor, “Chuck Schumer’s Civics Lesson: Omits Judiciary as ‘Branch of Government,’” *Daily Caller*, January 31, 2011, <http://dailycaller.com/2011/01/31/chuck-schumers-civics-lesson-omits-judiciary-as-branch-of-government/>; Greg Hengler, “Senator Schumer’s 3 Branches of Govt: House, Senate, & President,” *Townhall.com*, January 30, 2011, <https://townhall.com/tipsheet/greghengler/2011/01/30/senator-schumers-3-branches-of-govt-house,-senate,-president-n668587>; Mike Opelka, “Sen. Schumer’s ‘Three Branches’ of Government No Longer Includes Judiciary,” *Blaze*, January 30, 2011, <http://www.theblaze.com/news/2011/01/30/sen-schumers-three-branches-of-government-no-longer-includes-judiciary/>; and Sam Foster, “Chuck Schumer’s Version of the Three Branches of Government: House, Senate, and President,” *Red State*, January 31, 2011, <http://www.redstate.com/diary/samfoster/2011/01/31/chuck-schumers-version-of-the-three-branches-of-government-house-senate-and-president/>.

Allen Mendenhall is associate dean of Thomas Goode Jones School of Law and executive director of the Blackstone & Burke Center for Law & Liberty, Montgomery, AL 36109; amendenhall@faulkner.edu.

- Writing in 2014, Judge Arenda Wright Allen of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, an appointee of the Obama administration, claimed that the United States Constitution “declared that ‘all men’ are created equal.” This line, of course, appears in the Declaration of Independence, not the Constitution.⁵
- That same year, Democratic Congresswoman of Texas Sheila Jackson Lee announced that the Constitution was four hundred years old. Her point, oddly, was to establish the obviousness of the unconstitutionality of an act that enjoyed Republican support.⁶
- In the 2011 presidential primary debates, Republican candidate Governor Rick Perry of Texas was unable to name three federal agencies that should be eliminated.⁷

These examples suggest that the decline in civic literacy is a longstanding problem that will only worsen as the current generation of leaders educates the next generation. More than mere gaffes or slips, these remarks reflect ideological commitment that is used to justify political policies and programs—in other words, they expose partisan presuppositions that will affect the everyday lives of ordinary American citizens.

When those who govern do not understand their governing foundations and institutions, government and the governed suffer. Renewed efforts to provide civic education are clearly necessary.

The “New Civics,” however, is not the answer. In fact, it accelerates and compounds the problem, as *Making Citizens: How American Universities Teach Civics*, a 523-page report by the National Association of Scholars, ably demonstrates. Under the regime of the New Civics, students have become useful innocents whose impressionable minds and tuition dollars are redirected toward leftist propaganda, progressive activism, and systematized indoctrination, all to the benefit of particular interest groups.

Rather than rehashing the findings of this report, which everyone in higher education should read, I offer some hope in anecdote form. These testimonial

⁵Bostic v. Rainey, 970 F. Supp. 2d 456, 460 (E.D. Va. 2014).

⁶“Math Problem: Rep. Jackson Lee Claims Constitution Is 400 Years Old,” *FoxNews.com*, March 13, 2014, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2014/03/13/math-problem-rep-jackson-lee-claims-constitution-is-400-years-old.html>; Ben Jacobs, “The Constitution Is 400 Years Old and More Pearls from Sheila Jackson Lee,” *Daily Beast*, March 13, 2014, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/03/13/the-constitution-is-400-years-old-and-more-pearls-from-sheila-jackson-lee.html>; Cheryl K. Chumley, “Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee Claims Constitution Is 400 Years Old,” *Washington Times*, March 13, 2014, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/mar/13/sheila-jackson-lee-claims-constitution-400-years-o/>.

⁷Amy Gardner and Philip Rucker, “Rick Perry Stumbles Badly in Republican Presidential Debate,” *Washington Post*, November 10, 2011 https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/repUBLICAN-presidential-candidates-focus-on-economy/2011/11/09/gIQA5Lsp6M_story.html?utm_term=.97aa7ceca63a.

examples are supplied not simply to invert the “leftist” and “rightist” features of civics education, thereby reverse-politicizing the curriculum toward ends I find more attractive, but to seek out effective approaches to the study of government and political theory that can enable students to sharpen and challenge whatever partisan beliefs they may already possess.

The first example comes from my home institution, where Dean Robert McFarland and Prof. Adam MacLeod have established a course called “Foundations of Law” that all first-year law students must take. Currently in its fifth year, the course combines practical elements of law with liberal education in the roots of the American legal order—a sort of Great Books approach that teaches students not simply to read and brief cases but to examine the historical and jurisprudential arc of the law down through the centuries of Western civilization. McFarland and MacLeod demonstrate with their forthcoming textbook, moreover, that vocational education does not equate to service learning or community activism.

Those who would object that such a course fails to train students to pass the bar exam or secure a job—valid concerns—ignore the extent to which discourse about rights and duties, history and tradition, and sovereignty and liberty find expression in appellate cases, from state supreme courts and federal courts up to the United States Supreme Court. Law, in short, is applied philosophy. Lawyers without philosophical learning don’t understand what they’re carrying out; they’re part of a tradition, whether they like it or not, and if they’re unaware of which tradition, then they’re just going through the motions, as it were.

Anyone who’s clerked for a knowledgeable appellate judge can attest to the value of having studied the jurisprudence of figures such as Sophocles, Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Blackstone, Bentham, or Locke. Attorneys familiar with Rawls, Hart, Dworkin, and Finnis are ready to contextualize the statutes and constitutional claims that shape appellate practice. Although I don’t advocate delaying “foundations” teaching until law school, I do believe that the traditional pedagogy and curriculum of McFarland and MacLeod is an important corrective—one that can be replicated in other settings, perhaps with younger students.

Other promising examples are outside the academy. In recent years, I have organized, attended, or observed programming by such groups as the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, the Liberty Fund, the Foundation for Economic Education, the Institute for Humane Studies, the Federalist Society, the Ludwig von Mises Institute, the Acton Institute, the James Wilson Institute, and the Russell Kirk Center for Cultural Renewal. Other such institutes and organizations conduct similar events. Although they may be susceptible to accusations of

ideology or political partiality, these events bring together people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives and emphasize points of disagreement and tension.

I have never attended an event hosted by one of these organizations at which participants were ideologically uniform or predisposed to unanimous agreement regarding the topics under discussion. Nor was the point of the event to forge partisan conformity or develop a homogenous community of purpose. Rather, the events focused on exploring ideas and investigating differences of opinion. Attendance was voluntary; participants completed rigorous reading requirements prior to their attendance. They spoke freely and openly and criticized each other carefully and civilly. In many ways, such events are model fora of intellectual exchange that universities should mimic and encourage. They seek the genuine pursuit of truth and to contribute to the sum of knowledge. With only a few exceptions I can think of, these gatherings facilitated not consensus or activist planning but further inquiry and debate.

The final example involves the local classical Christian academy where I serve on the board of directors. The school has adopted an integrated curriculum based on the trivium. Rather than mandating volunteer hours with advocacy groups, the school takes middle and high school students to observe sessions of the legislature or attend oral arguments at the Alabama Supreme Court. These outings allow students to observe the competing interests and goals that characterize politics and the law, and they show them that the “real world” is often messy and complicated—and that the rhetorical skills the students are developing can be put to good use.

It’s easy to despair when politicized initiatives like the New Civics gain popularity and deplete financial resources that could fund more constructive programming. Yet any system built on widespread ignorance and general incompetence is bound to fail. I have given examples of educational methods that offer hope and rehabilitation during dark times. If we become the society that the New Civics strives to create, however, we’ll deserve the inevitable demise of our civic values and institutions. And if that happens, let us hope there are enough serious learners remaining to cultivate a happy, ethical, flourishing, and literate society once again.

On *Making Citizens*

William Voegeli

Making Citizens: How American Universities Teach Civics is the latest NAS contribution to the cause of restoring American higher education’s intellectual seriousness and political responsibility. For examining an important but, until now, poorly understood problem, it deserves to be considered with respect and gratitude.

The report will also be met with scorn and vituperation by the people causing that problem. Those committed to the “New Civics,” having fused progressivism and careerism, will denounce as philistine and totalitarian this attack on their worldview and livelihoods.

It is impossible to think of this debate over *Making Citizens* without recalling William F. Buckley’s famous observation in 1963: “I should sooner live in a society governed by the first two thousand names in the Boston telephone directory than in a society governed by the two thousand faculty members of Harvard University.”¹ Buckley preferred to take his chances with a cross section of citizens than with eminent scholars “because I greatly fear intellectual arrogance, and that is a distinguishing characteristic of the university which refuses to accept any common premise.” Elaborating on the common premise universities arrogantly reject, Buckley said, “The Ten Commandments do not sit about shaking, awaiting their inevitable deposition by some swashbuckling professor of ethics.”²

Fifty-four years on, the common premise Buckley invoked is far less common. In Boston, Hillary Clinton won 82 percent of the vote against Donald Trump’s 14 percent,³ indicating that two thousand random Bostonians’ sensibilities and inclinations would affirm more than reject those of two thousand Harvard professors. A leading cause of this convergence is the relentless expansion of the entire credentials-industrial complex in the

¹William F. Buckley Jr., *Rumbles Left and Right: A Book about Troublesome People and Ideas* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1963), 134.

²Ibid., 138.

³Daigo Fujiwara, “Massachusetts Election Results: How Your Town or City Voted,” *Politicker*, November 8, 2016, <http://www.wbur.org/politicker/2016/11/08/massachusetts-election-map>.

William Voegeli is a senior editor of the *Claremont Review of Books* and the author of *Never Enough: America’s Limitless Welfare State* (Encounter Books, 2012, reprint); wvoegeli@claremont.org. A visiting scholar at Claremont McKenna College’s Henry Salvatori Center, his work has appeared in the *Christian Science Monitor*, *City Journal*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *National Review*, the *New Criterion*, and other publications.

half-century since Buckley's essay. In 1960, one of every thirteen American adults held a bachelor's degree; by 2015, the figure was one in every three.⁴

The political outlook of this growing cohort of the highly educated—or, at least, the additionally credentialed—has not been left to chance. In 2008 an *Inside Higher Ed* blogger, writing behind the safety of a pseudonym, “UD,” made the project and its purpose unusually clear:

We need to encourage everyone to be in college for as many years as they possibly can, in the hope that somewhere along the line they might get some exposure to the world outside their town, and to moral ideas not exclusively derived from their parents' religion. If they don't get this in college, they're not going to get it anywhere else.⁵

“UD” put into words what the New Civics movement is putting into practice, the use of pedagogical means to pursue political ends. The goal is to disabuse students of any precollegiate ideas about America being an admirable nation, a republic worth understanding, sustaining, and improving. All such notions will be replaced with lurid depictions of America's historical failings, along with insinuations and tendentious arguments that these failings are distinctively American rather than regrettably but undeniably human. Little surprise that one professor, who over eleven years gave quizzes to his incoming students to ascertain what they knew and believed, discovered a consensus that chattel slavery was not only the defining feature of U.S. history, but an institution that was “almost exclusively an American phenomenon.”⁶ More generally, his students were “stridently vocal about the corrupt nature of the Republic, about the wickedness of the founding fathers, and about the evils of free markets.”⁷

Slate associate editor L.V. Anderson presumably received many gold stars in the classes that impart such wisdom, and now as an adult of sorts continues trying to earn still more. The 2016 election, she informed her readers, disabused everyone “who had distanced themselves from the ugliness in American society enough” to believe “that we were making meaningful progress.” Freed from all such illusions, they “could at last see our unjust, racist, sexist country for what it

⁴Table 104.10, “Rates of high school completion and bachelor's degree attainment among persons age 25 and over, by race/ethnicity and sex: Selected years, 1910 through 2015,” *Digest of Education Statistics*, National Center for Educational Statistics, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_104.10.asp?current=yes.

⁵UD, “Charles Murray on Elites,” *University Diaries* (blog), *Inside Higher Ed*, September 2, 2008, https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/university_diaries/charles_murray_on_elites.

⁶Kate Hardiman, “Most College Students Think America Invented Slavery, Professor Finds,” *College Fix*, October 31, 2016, <http://www.thecollegefix.com/post/29719>.

⁷Ibid.

is.” And seeing it, they could set about the work of transforming it, far more fundamentally and lastingly than anything Barack Obama promised in 2008.⁸

It is crucial, then, to understand that the fight against the New Civics is political, and so must be fought by political means. One thing this requires is realizing that the goals of the New Civics project are audacious, not modest, and directed to the subversion rather than the perpetuation of the American republic.

Another requirement is for opponents of the New Civics to pick their battles shrewdly. We read that the four institutions examined in *Making Citizens* are “a rough proxy for the American university.”⁹ That all four are public institutions, however, indicates opponents of the New Civics should start the fight against it where they possess favorable correlations of forces: sympathetic, astute public officials who enjoy voting majorities and other forms of leverage, and are bold rather than shy about using them, are essential.

The necessary boldness means, among other things, that elected officials must refuse to be cowed by educators. The republic rests on the truth that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. The principal means of that derivation is that power be wielded by officials subject, directly or indirectly, to periodic elections. Progressivism, by contrast, holds that governments derive their just powers from the expertise of the experts. Expertise is a real thing, so government officials are better advised to build bridges according to the judgments of engineers, for example, than to rely on crowd-sourced opinions about structural integrity.

But experts abuse the expectation that they will be deferred to when they treat their political opinions as professional ones. As Buckley warned, people in the grip of intellectual arrogance don’t know what they don’t know. Experts are strongly inclined to dismiss those who challenge them as ignoramuses, and many laymen will stand down rather than get into a fight where they feel overmatched. The politicians who accord minimal rather than maximal deference to professional educators’ opinions are standing up for their constituents, and for democratic principles. Armed with the kind of copious data *Making Citizens* presents about the New Civics as a bait-and-switch scam, legislators are fully within their rights to demand compliance with voters’ intentions, and continuous, strict monitoring to assure that public universities are advancing those purposes that have been endorsed by the public.

⁸L.V. Anderson, “2016 Was the Year White Liberals Realized How Unjust, Racist, and Sexist America Is,” *XX Factor: What Women Really Think* (blog), *Slate*, December 29, 2016, http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2016/12/29/2016_was_the_year_white_liberals_learned_about_disillusionment.html.

⁹Randall, *Making Citizens*, 166.

The bad faith argument of the New Civics educators, and academic Jacobins more generally, is that they do share the common premise of parents who send their children, and taxpayers who send their dollars, to college. On the pretext of fulfilling expectations about transmitting cultural and political norms, however, modern universities get on with the work of demolishing them. *Making Citizens*, like so many other NAS projects, points out the true nature and purpose of the Trojan horse. Whether it has already spent too much time inside the city walls for such warnings to make a difference is a question to be answered by those who read the report.