

America Needs History and Civics Education to Promote Unity

A plan to help teachers instill an understanding that is complete and honest but not cynical.

March 1, 2021 6:32 pm ET



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Editor's note: This article is signed by six former U.S. education secretaries: Lamar Alexander, Arne Duncan, John King, Rod Paige, Richard Riley and Margaret Spellings.

Following years of polarization and the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, the world's oldest constitutional democracy is in grave danger. We stand at a crossroads, called to protect this democracy and to work toward unity. Current and future generations will look back to examine how we chose to act, and why.

A key part of our task is to reinvigorate teaching and learning of American history and civics in our nation's schools. A constitutional democracy requires a citizenry that has a desire to participate, and an understanding of how to do so constructively, as well as the knowledge and skills to act for the common good. Yet a history and civics education for the 21st century must also grapple with the difficult and often painful parts of our history—including enslavement,

segregation and racism, indigenous removals, Japanese-American internment, denials of religious liberty and free speech, and other injustices.

We need teaching and learning that pursues an account of U.S. constitutional democracy that is honest about the wrongs of the past without falling into cynicism, and appreciative of the American founding without tipping into adulation. To turn *pluribus* into *unum*, we need curriculums that achieve a more plural and complete story of U.S. history, while also forging a common story, the shared inheritance of all Americans.

Regrettably, civics, which teaches skills of participation and the knowledge that sustains it, and history, which provides a frame of reference for the present, have been sorely neglected over the past half-century in U.S. schools. This cannot continue to be the case.

Right now, we collectively spend about 1,000 times more per student on science, technology, engineering, and math education than we do on history and civics. Where civics education is taught, it is often hampered by a lack of consensus about what to teach and how.

But there is a way forward that will let us rebuild civics and history alongside STEM education.

Despite our differences on policy and priorities, we believe that the Roadmap to Educating for American Democracy provides a promising path. The project is the result of a 19-month collaboration among more than 300 scholars, educators, practitioners and students from diverse backgrounds. The ambition of this plan is to re-establish civics and American history as essential components of education.

The Roadmap aims to renew the study of history and to rebuild civic education from the ground up, by providing guiding principles for states, local school districts and educators across the U.S. They, in turn, can establish their own standards and tailor curricular materials to their local communities. For example, using the plan, Texas may choose to devote more attention to the war between the U.S. and Mexico in the 1840s, while Massachusetts may choose to look more

closely than others at the early phases of the colonial conflict with Great Britain, in which Boston played a dominant role. The plan recommends key content and instructional strategies for history and civics at every grade level. And it does so with an eye toward meeting the wide-ranging needs of today's students.

The Educating for American Democracy Initiative offers a new vision for history and civics that supports educators in dealing effectively with fundamental tensions inherent in civic learning, integrates a diversity of experiences and perspectives throughout, and cultivates civil disagreement and reflective patriotism. As an example, the Roadmap can help teachers guide conversations among students about how we can integrate the perspectives of Americans from all backgrounds when analyzing the content of the philosophical foundations of American constitutional democracy. The recommendations of the Roadmap weave history and civics together and inspire students to learn by asking difficult questions, such as "What does our history reveal about the aspirations and tensions captured by the motto *E pluribus unum*?" then seeking answers in the classroom through facts and discussion.

Importantly, the Roadmap is not a set of national standards or a national curriculum. It is instead a call to action to invest in strengthening history and civic learning. It lays a foundation to deliver opportunities for excellence in civic learning equitably to all students.

The American K-12 education system has always worked to respond to the needs of the nation. The early republic emphasized history, reading and math. In the mid-20th century, the launch of the Soviet satellite Sputnik and the dawn of an era of global economic competition drove a turn toward investment in STEM education. And during the early part of this century, our attention has turned to preparing students from marginalized communities to succeed in high school and college.

Now the fragility of our democratic institutions is in plain sight. This is the time to give priority to history and civics education for American children

OPINION

'Equity' Is a Mandate to Discriminate

By Charles Lipson

On his first day as president, Joe Biden issued an "Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities." Mr. Biden's cabinet nominees must now explain whether this commitment to "equity" means they intend to abolish "equal treatment under law." Their answers are a confused mess.

Arkansas Sen. Tom Cotton raised the question explicitly in confirmation hearings. Attorney General-designate Merrick Garland responded: "I think discrimination is morally wrong. Absolutely." Marcia Fudge, slated to run Housing and Urban Development, gave a much different answer. "Just to be clear," Mr. Cotton asked, "it sounds like racial equity means treating people differently based on their race. Is that correct?"

Ms. Fudge's responded: "Not based on race, but it could be based on economics, it could be based on the history of discrimination that has existed for a long time." Ms. Fudge's candid response tracks that of Kamala Harris's tweet and video, posted before the election and viewed 6.4 million times: "There's a big difference between equality and equity."

Ms. Harris and Ms. Fudge are right. There is a big difference. It's the difference between equal treatment and equal outcomes. Equality means equal treatment, unbiased competition and impartially judged outcomes. Equity means equal outcomes, achieved if necessary by unequal treatment, biased competition and preferential judging.

Those who push for equity have hidden these crucial differences for a reason. They aren't merely unpopular; they challenge America's bedrock principle that people should be treated equally and judged as indi-



HUD and attorney general nominees Marcia Fudge and Merrick Garland,

viduals, not as members of groups.

The demand for equal outcomes contradicts a millennium of Anglo-Saxon law and political evolution. It undermines the Enlightenment principle of equal treatment for individuals of different social rank and religion. America's Founders drew on those roots when they declared independence, saying it was "self-evident" that "all men are created equal."

That heritage, along with the lack of a hereditary aristocracy, is why claims for equal treatment are so deeply rooted in U.S. history. It is why radical claims for unequal treatment must be carefully buried in word salads praising equity and social justice.

Hidden, too, are the extensive measures that would be needed to achieve equal outcomes. Only a powerful central government could impose the intensive—and expensive—programs of social intervention, ideological re-education and economic redistribution. Only an intrusive bureaucracy could specify the rules for every business, public institution and civic organization. Those unhappy implications are why advocates of equity are so determined to hide what the term really means.

Americans have demanded that all levels of government stop giving special treatment to the rich and powerful. That is simply a demand for equality. Likewise, they recognize that equal treatment should begin early, such as with adequate funding for K-12 students.

The new buzzword tries to hide the aim of throwing out the American principle of equality under the law.

Since the New Deal, most Americans have supported some form of social safety net for the poor and disadvantaged. But this safety net doesn't demand that out-of-work coal miners receive the same income as those who are working. The debate has always been about how extensive the safety net should be and how long it should last for each recipient. There is broad agreement that no worker should be laid off because of his race, gender or religion. Again, that is a demand for equal treatment.

What we are seeing now is differ-

ent. It is the claim that the unfair treatment of previous generations or perhaps a disadvantaged childhood entitles one to special consideration today as an adult or young adult. Most Americans, who are both generous and pragmatic, have been willing to extend some of these benefits, at the margins and for limited periods. They don't want to turn these concessions into large, permanent entitlement programs, giving substantially different treatment to different groups, even if those groups have suffered historical wrongs.

One measure of how unpopular these unequal programs are is how often their proponents need to rename them. "Quotas" were restyled as "affirmative action." The goal was still to give special benefits to some groups to achieve desired outcomes. Now "affirmative action" has also become toxic, rejected most recently by voters in deep-blue California. Hence, the new name, "equity."

Instead of making their case openly and honestly, advocates of equity twist and turn to avoid revealing their radical goal of re-engineering society through coercion. If the results fall short, as they inevitably would, the remedy is obvious: more money, more rules and more indoctrination. Why not tell us who will receive these special benefits and for how long? At whose expense? Who will administer these programs? Who will judge whether the outcomes are fair enough? When will it all end?

Since the ultimate goal is achieving equal outcomes, these evasions raise the hardest question of all. Isn't equity just a new brand name for the oldest program of achieving equal outcomes? Its name is socialism.

Mr. Lipson is a professor emeritus of political science at the University of Chicago, where he founded the Program on International Politics, Economics, and Security.

Most American Schools Are Damaging Your Child

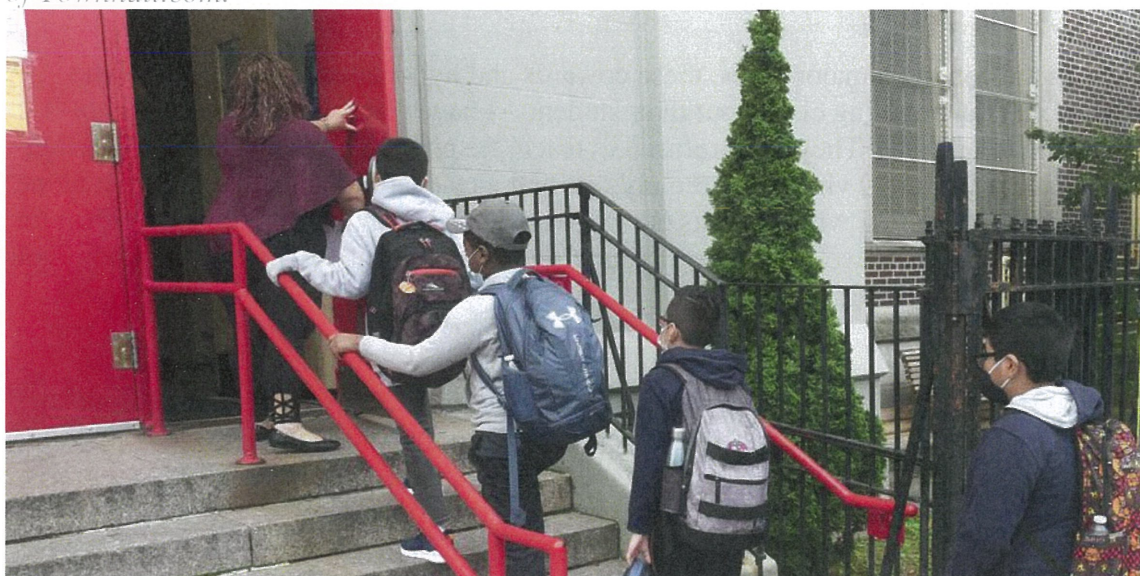


Dennis Prager

Posted: Mar 09, 2021 12:01 AM

[Share](#) [Tweet](#)

The opinions expressed by columnists are their own and do not necessarily represent the views of Townhall.com.



Source: AP Photo/Mark Lennihan

But it is a different version of Russian roulette. In the traditional version, only one of the gun's six chambers contains a bullet. In the college version of Russian roulette, 5 of the 6 chambers contain a bullet. If your child attends almost any university in America (or Canada or anywhere else in the English-speaking world), the odds are that your child's decency, intellectual acuity, faculty of reason, character and moral compass will be damaged, perhaps permanently.

The worse news is that sending your child to almost any elementary school or high school -- public or private -- is fast becoming equally toxic. More and more schools are being taken over by left-wing ideologues and by nonideologues who lack the courage to confront the ideologues. Once infected with leftism, these schools teach children to hate reason, tradition, America, Christianity, whites, excellence, freedom and masculinity.

To cite one example, thanks to a million-dollar grant from Bill Gates through his Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Oregon Education Department has announced that teaching there is "one right answer" in math -- yes, in math -- is an expression of white supremacy. Why, then, would an Oregon parent who cares about his or her child's mind, send that child to an Oregon school?

In addition to perverting education, teachers and their unions have exhibited a contempt for children that has taken even conservatives by surprise. Teachers' unwillingness to show up in class for more than a year is as unscientific as it is unprecedented. On Feb. 3, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky told reporters during a White House news briefing that teachers do not need to get vaccinated against COVID-19 before schools can safely reopen: "There is increasing data to suggest that schools can safely reopen and that safe reopening does not suggest that teachers need to be vaccinated. Vaccinations of teachers is not a prerequisite for safely reopening schools."

Nevertheless, in the country's major cities, these cowards and hypochondriacs -- people who claim to care more than anything else about their students -- have refused to return to school (while demanding to be paid). They have refused to teach, despite the facts that child-to-teacher transmission of the COVID-19 virus is extremely rare and a teacher being hospitalized, let alone dying, as a result of interaction with students is rarer than a teacher dying in a traffic accident on the way to school. Why, then, would you send your child to be "taught" by people for whom you have -- or should have -- so little respect?

Why would you send your young child to a school that sponsors a "Drag Queen Story Hour" or that dwells on "nonbinary" gender identity? Do you think such things do not damage your child's innocence? Do you want your child to be challenged about his or her sexual identity?

Why would you send your child to any school that teaches The New York Times' "1619 Project"? This project holds that America was not founded in 1776 but in 1619, with the arrival of the first black slaves in North America, and that the Revolutionary War was fought not to gain independence from Britain but to preserve slavery. Virtually every leading historian specializing in American history -- most of whom are liberals and Democrats, and some of whom were anti-Trump activists -- have labeled "The 1619 Project" a lie.

Whenever I meet adults who hold traditional American values, I ask them three questions:

The first is, "Do you have children?"

If they do, my second question is, "How many of them share your values?" It is not common to meet people all of whose children share their parents' traditional values.

If they respond that any of their children do not share their values, my third question is, "What happened?"

In every instance, these parents attribute the alienation of their child(ren) from their (the parents') values to the college and, increasingly, the high school their child attended.

Moreover, not only are these children alienated from their parents' values, but they are often also alienated from the parent(s). One thing you learn when you become left-wing is to have contempt for those who hold other beliefs.

Had these parents known how their children would turn out, they would never have sent them to college -- or even to the high school they attended. It appears, however, that no matter how many people lose their children's hearts and minds to left-wing indoctrination, and no matter how much information accumulates about the perversion of education in American schools, parents continue to take risks with their children they would never take in any other sphere.

I am well aware of the enormous obstacles. If your child wishes to study STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) or law, college remains a necessity. Otherwise, it isn't.

As for elementary and high school, parents must either find a school that teaches reading, writing and arithmetic rather than America-hatred, or they should home-school their child. This, understandably, sounds terribly daunting. However, it is becoming considerably easier to do so as home-school groups and quality home-school curricula proliferate around the country.

Whatever your decision, never say you weren't warned.

Dennis Prager is a nationally syndicated radio talk-show host and columnist. His latest book, published by Regnery in May 2019, is "The Rational Bible," a commentary on the book of Genesis. His film, "No Safe Spaces," was released to home entertainment nationwide on September 15, 2020. He is the founder of Prager University and may be contacted at dennisprager.com.

ANNOUNCING

1776 Unites

A *patriotic movement* to liberate
tens of millions of Americans by
helping them become agents of
their own uplift

1776  UNITES

Share

Donate

#1776Unites

1776 Unites is a movement to liberate tens of millions of Americans, by helping them become agents of their own uplift and transformation, by embracing the true founding values of our Country. 1776 Unites is part of WoodsonCenter.org.

Representing a nonpartisan and intellectually diverse alliance of writers, thinkers, and activists 1776 is focused on solutions to our country's greatest challenges in education, culture, and upward mobility. 1776 is a movement to shape the American future by drawing on the best of its past. Radically, pragmatic and unapologetically patriotic, at Woodson, we hope to speak for Americans of all races, creeds, and political convictions who oppose the efforts to demoralize and demonize our country and its foundations from within, and to turn its people against one another with false history and grievance politics.

www.WoodsonCenter.org