

Not a day goes by without various news sources reporting as “breaking news” the continuing decline of Trump’s approval rating. Yes, over the past 12 months, it has gone down, but only from the mid 40s percent to the high 30s. With all the negative press that anyone with a modicum of judgement would consider disgraceful, the latest the meme of his depiction as Jesus healing the sick, wouldn’t we expect a greater decline? 83 percent of Republican’s still give him a positive approval rating and 52% strongly approve, down only from 58% earlier this year.

Well, no we wouldn’t expect a greater decline. Corruption, disgraceful rhetoric, bullying tactics, and chronic lying about serious matters of state on his Truth Social media platform are apparently of little concern if they don’t currently adversely affect us. Most of us can fully support some of Trump’s achievements, recently and most notably destroying (not necessarily obliterating) Iran’s defenses, war making capabilities, and nuclear weapons precursors. But some of us tend to look at the short term gain and find it easy to forget about consequence that don’t directly affect us personally e.g., the Iranian responsive attacks on our Middle East allies, closing the Strait of Hormuz, and depleting our missile inventory. We can’t just say as the President seems to imply “well, that’s just the way it is.”

I was reminded recently of the resignation of President Eisenhower’s Chief of Staff, Sherman Adams, for having accepted a vicuna coat from a businessman whom he supported who was under investigation by a federal regulatory agency--- a vicuna coat, not a Boeing 747! Again, considering the “way it should be,” recall Senator Joseph McCarthy who had a large following in his fictitious branding of many scientific and academic notables as Communists. He lost his hold on the government and the public, and met his demise when Joseph Welsh, Chief Counsel

for the US Army, at a hearing thundered “Have you no sense of decency?” Do we even consider decency now in evaluating our elected officials and their actions?

In the past, we certainly wouldn't have reelected a man whom we knew had little regard for truth or the rule of law. Were we just plain better people in those days? No, but we were apparently better nurtured. In his recent book *The Cradle of Citizenship*, James Traub *quoted* educator and slave abolitionist Horace Mann, known by many as The Father of American Education. Mann said that “the theory of our government is not that all men, however unfitted, shall be voters--- but that every man, by the power of reason and the sense of duty, shall be fit to be a voter. Education must bring the practice as nearly as possible to the theory.” You know what I'm about to say---what I've harped on in a couple of other newsletters---civics education I remain convinced is the only answer, if we ever expect to regain our virtue, respect and envy at home and abroad.

As we've discussed in the past, civics education in primary and/or secondary schooling is available in most states, albeit much too limited, and, if reinforced throughout life by trusted news sources, is critical to maintaining our democracy. And, if we can get a significant focus on current events included in the civics, US history, or other social studies courses, we can be well on our way to reaching both misinformed and uninformed students. If we put these lessons on a flash drive or on paper --- referred to as a “Weekly Reader” in my school days --- as a handout that students can take home and use to open an after school continuing dialog with their parents and siblings ---an opportunity to practice civil discourse--- what a positive effect it would have in increasing not only the number of informed students but also informed adults i.e., informed voters--- the ultimate in rebuilding our democracy from the bottom up

We can ensure that students as well as adults, especially voters, have an enlightened understanding of our government and our Constitution, and how they relate to the issues, both those that divide us and those that unite us. And what better time to teach about this. Most of the issues that now concern us relate to current situations e.g., affordability, crime, and immigration, basically current affairs.

All of us, children and adults alike, are naturally curious about the world we inhabit. Questions and conclusions addressing the current world are more apt to motivate than those addressing the historic world. In order to foster motivation and a natural almost automatic desire to discuss with friends and family what is taught in class, and to foster civic engagement, the focus should be shifted more in the direction of the current issues.

How do we get to those who have no access to, and/or no interest in, media based on which to become literate? First, we need to get to our youth when they are a captive audience in school when they have to listen or view. Here we educate them in civics and government and US history. Teachers can address applicable current affairs in these lessons or other lessons if they choose to, although at present, at least in my state of Connecticut, they are not specifically required to.

Periodic, perhaps bi-weekly, high school lessons in civics and government and possibly US history should focus on a current issue. There could be 10 or so issues selected for a school year that would be predetermined by the state Board of Education in a menu from which to select. This year, for example, the list might include immigration, gun safety/control, and birthright citizenship. Recommendations for this menu could be provided by recognized experts---think tanks---colleges--or any other organizations like the Center for Civics Education and iCivics that schools currently use for high quality education materials.

These organizations might be asked to submit competitive proposals to be the source for these recommendations. The issues would be presented offering both sides of controversial issues for classroom discussion and homework to evaluate sources and use evidence, all in accordance with our state's social studies inquiry arc.

Of course, it is essential that the teaching staffs be specifically trained to address these lessons so that both sides of any controversies are covered in an objective manner. The teachers would avoid expressing their opinions at the outset, nor would they be required to express their opinions at the conclusion of the lesson unless they choose to. As we all know, this is especially important in today's climate of misinformation with misdirected elected officials beholden to the most vocal extremists, liberal and conservative---and uninformed parents beating up on both school boards and school staff over books and curriculum. According to an article in *Education Week*, "Most teachers didn't plan to address the 2024 presidential election in their classrooms, with many citing the possibility of parent complaints and disrespectful classroom discussions...." But I contend that the more enlightened teachers see this as the perfect opportunity to address both media literacy and civil discourse. Many teachers already do work current affairs into their curriculum, and not just in US history and civics, but it is not mandated. A 2026 iCivics survey of more than 2,000 civics teachers showed that "89% of respondents agree that their teaching should ground students in core civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions; prepare students to be engaged citizens in a democracy; foster respect for a pluralistic society with diverse viewpoints; and connect constitutional principles to current events!"

I doubt very much that teachers and other mentors 50 years ago when teaching citizenship and patriotism was paramount shied away from controversial issues. Or how about the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries

when Hamilton's and Jefferson's ideas on effective government were taught?

And here's the real key. As I said, the lessons and takeaways that we've addressed should reach the students' parents whose opinions may be based on no sources of information whatsoever other than comments from misinformed friends and colleagues. Even when and where unbiased news is relatively accessible, there are many adults whose work schedules keep them too busy to access it, or they are too apathetic or negative about the state of national affairs to bother getting involved.

I fully realize that the challenges facing K-12 education these days present an entirely different environment than in past days when more attention was given to civics and we didn't have to deal with disruptive student classroom behavior, the distraction of smart phones, and many more students for whom English is a second language.

School test scores across the nation have been declining dramatically over the past decade and the emphasis now is to focus on the basics of reading and writing, generally at the expense of social studies e.g., civics, history, geography, economics and philosophy. In discussing this with Michael Blauw, a Director at the Center for Civic Education, he opined that the best way to get more social studies included, specifically civics and US history, would be to work them into the literacy, reading, and writing now taking precedence. Another opportunity in Connecticut would be to require mastery of applicable written material in the requirements now under review by the state Department of Education for award of the new State Civics Seal. And, when doing so, the written material must accurately reflect historical fact, both past and current, in story form that will appeal, setting aside

some of the progressive pedagogy that emphasizes the acquisition of content neutral skills such as critical thinking and inquiry based learning on which much of today's education is structured. James Traub in *The Cradle of Citizenship*, included a quote to the effect that "skills absent from content are leaving our children bereft of actual content knowledge"---young children love great stories---and "history , told chronologically, was not a bleak desert of enforced memorization but a great unfolding narrative."

Today's divisive and threatening social and political climate demands for all of us a thorough grounding in good citizenship including civics and US history. Without this, much of our exposure to arts and sciences cannot be fully absorbed and appreciated.

In my book *Bachelors of Citizenship*, I envisioned a future in which Associate degrees and Bachelor's degrees would be available specifically in Citizenship as well as in Arts and Sciences. Lately, however, I think it would be even more beneficial if every citizen were required to pass a citizenship test at least as demanding as that now required for naturalized citizens---when?---incentives?---penalties? I'll have to give those some thought--- good subject for a future newsletter. But for now, and for those of us who are not as well schooled in the Constitution as we should be or in our senior years have difficulties with our memories, how about carrying around with us when we anticipate discussing political issues a pocket copy of the Constitution. They're readily available from, among others, The Center for Civic Education and the Cato Institute.

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