

Learning for Self-Government: A K–12 Civics Report Card

By David Randall



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Vision

Success for Pioneer is when the citizens of our state and nation prosper and our society thrives because we enjoy world-class options in education, healthcare, transportation and economic opportunity, and when our government is limited, accountable and transparent.

Values

Pioneer believes that America is at its best when our citizenry is well-educated, committed to liberty, personal responsibility, and free enterprise, and both willing and able to test their beliefs based on facts and the free exchange of ideas.



This paper is a publication of Pioneer Education, which seeks to increase the education options available to parents and students, drive system-wide reform, and ensure accountability in public education. The Center's work builds on Pioneer's legacy as a recognized leader in the charter public school movement, and as a champion of greater academic rigor in Massachusetts' elementary and secondary schools. Current initiatives promote choice and competition, school-based management, and enhanced academic performance in public schools.



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Executive Summary

This report, intended primarily for civics reformers considering how best to defend and improve traditional American civics education, surveys a selection of different civics offerings, both the traditional and the radical. Surveyed providers include organizations such as the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, We the People, and Hillsdale College's *1776 Curriculum*. The report assesses both *how* they approach civics education and their ideological content. The report will also judge each organization's effectiveness—although no one knows exactly what is being taught in each classroom in America, much less precisely what students take from their education. Finally, it will provide recommendations about how civics reformers should build upon this existing array of civics curriculum resources to work most effectively to reclaim America's civics education.

The subject of this report is K–12 civics education, but the organizations it inventories include several devoted to undergraduate education and national politics. These organizations, and their tactics, form the regulations and the personnel of the educational establishment. They act with great effect on K–12 civics education, even when they do not provide textbooks and lesson plans.

The report includes summary judgments of the true academic level of several K–12 civics resources. Most resources that claim to be for high-school students are at best at a ninth-grade level, often a middle-school one. The simplest way to substantiate this judgment is to say that Hillsdale College's *1776 Curriculum* provides lesson plans aimed for intelligent, curious twelfth-grade students, and that no other institution provides curriculum anywhere near Hillsdale's level.

For quick reference, we provide here summary grades of the effects of these different civics resources. The radical establishment receives Ds and Fs not because they are incompetent, but because they are all too effective in their mission to destroy traditional civics.

Resource	Focus	Ranking
1619 Project Curriculum	K-12; limited higher education	F
1776 Curriculum (Hillsdale College)	K-12	A-
1776 Unites Curriculum	9–12; K-8 forthcoming	A
Bill of Rights Institute	K-12; esp. 9–12	B
Core Knowledge	K-8	B+
Educating for American Democracy	K-12 public policy	F+
FAIRstory Curriculum	K-12	B-
Florida K-12 Civics and Government Standards (Proposed)	K-12	A
Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History	all levels	B+
Generation Citizen	K-12	F
iCivics	K-12	D+
Jack Miller Center	teacher training	A-
Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life	Higher education	F
Teaching American History (The Ashbrook Center)	teacher training	A
We the People: Citizen and Constitution	K-12 (9–12 reviewed)	B+

Introduction

In 2021, the American people awoke to the longstanding crisis in K–12 civics education. Not the old crisis of plummeting test scores and abysmal knowledge of our republic's structure and our nation's history, but the new crisis—that radical advocates have seized control of our K–12 public education system and have imposed a curriculum that forwards their dogmas in the guise of civics and history—and, indeed, not only in these subjects but also in classes ranging from literature to science to mathematics. Critical Race Theory (CRT) has emerged as the flashpoint of political conflict regarding the Woke Educators' curriculum,¹ but subjects of dispute include action civics (vocational training in community organizing)² and a host of other radical distortions of our school curricula, imposed piecemeal over several generations.

Radical advocates have seized control of our K–12 public education system and have imposed a curriculum that forwards their dogmas in the guise of civics and history.

American schools traditionally have upheld the principle that classroom instruction, above all in the public K-12 schools, should be nonpartisan—that students should not be taught to support a particular party, political position, or ideology. Teachers knew that they had great power to influence young minds, so they chose pedagogies that restricted their ability to impose their personal predilections on the students entrusted to their care. Civics and history, in particular, sought to convey a broadly consensual account of American history and government, which would teach students an intelligent love of their country founded on knowledge of how it came to be, how its system of government worked, and what their fellow Americans had done since their country’s founding. Students would be prepared by this education to act as they saw fit as self-reliant citizens of the United States of America.

The new radical pedagogy destroys virtually every aspect of the old curriculum. Above all, it replaces the old commitment to nonpartisan education with a commitment to partisan education. The partisan positions they support are, in substance, revolutionary and illiberal departures from the American tradition, including the primacy of group “identity” over individual membership in the republic, the replacement of equality of individual opportunity with *equity* (equal outcomes for each identity group in every component of the polity, society, and culture), quasi-Marxist economics, a commitment to revolutionary “liberation” from an “oppressive” status quo, and a redefinition of intellectual inquiry from the collective pursuit of truth to the imposition of power.³ These positions in themselves appall most Americans—but even more appalling is the basic fact that the advocates of this new radical pedagogy believe that school instruction should forward *any* partisan position.

Radical activists are defined by their basic commitment to remolding America’s education system to facilitate ever more avowedly partisan teaching by means of a host of obscurely denominated pedagogies—and by their equally basic redefinition of “civics education” to mean “exercises in political activism” instead of “classroom instruction in American history and government.”

The national coalition Educating for American Democracy has published a *Pedagogy Companion to the EAD Roadmap* that usefully catalogues a substantial number of the new curriculum’s pedagogies in its Appendix:

Action Civics, Applied Civic Learning in Community, Carpet-Time Democracy, Chrono-Thematic, Civic Agency, Civic-Focused Schools, Collaborative Teaching, Community-Based, Constructivist Teaching, Cooperative Approach, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Democratic Competency-Based, Democratic School Climate, Experiential Learning, Inquiry-Centered Learning, Open Climate, Problem-Based Learning, Positive School Climate, Project-Based Learning, Service Learning, Simulation of Democratic Processes and Roles, Social Emotional Learning.⁴

These pedagogies are articulated in impenetrable, jargon-heavy terms that are hardly clarified by the Appendix’s paragraph-length definitions. “Action civics,” for example, was defined above as “vocational training in community organizing.” What this means is that in “action civics” history and government classes, students spend class time and receive class credit for work with “nongovernmental community organizations.” This substitution degrades teachers’ and students’ esteem for classroom instruction, which is deemed not to have sufficient civic purpose in itself. It reduces the scarce time available for students actually to learn about the history of their country and the nature of their republic. Most importantly, it introduces a pedagogy that *facilitates* teachers’ ability to impose their personal predilections on their students, by influencing the process by which students choose “community partners” with which to work. It also facilitates the ability of peer pressure to impose group predilections on individual, dissenting students. We may note that the advocates of “action civics” explicitly distinguish this activity from *volunteering*: action civics is meant to change the political system, not to support civil society.

Practically speaking, it is extraordinary how many “action civics” projects support groups affiliated with progressive political goals, such as *environmental justice* or *immigration amnesty*, and how few—to my knowledge, none—support conservative goals such as *Second Amendment rights* or *immigration enforcement*. “Action civics” exemplifies a putatively nonpartisan pedagogy that is,

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in fact, a means to commit students' to work, *during school time and for class credit*, for progressive nonpartisan organizations. It is essentially a form of Saul Alinskyite organizational tactics, with students serving a double role as the subjects and the means of community organizing.

Generation Citizen, one of the more radical of the organizations surveyed in this report, expresses the ambitions of this radical curriculum, and in particular of action civics, with particular clarity: "The road to a more equitable democracy begins with our schools—institutions whose historical purpose has always been to educate the next generation of citizens. ... Through student-driven projects, youth learn how to effect policy change by engaging with local government and leaders to solve community problems."⁵

In substance, this radical curriculum reduces to disaffecting Americans' children from their country, providing tactical tips on how to undermine it, and providing a moral education to fit our children to be the subjects of a managerial-therapeutic regime,⁶ divided into identity groups, rather than the self-governing citizens of a republic, united by their common membership in the American nation. The radical activists seek to introduce this curriculum by an extraordinarily wide variety of means, which includes federal grants, national "frameworks," state laws and curriculum standards, school district policies, and teacher initiatives in the classroom. The careful combination of putatively bipartisan compromise, impenetrable jargon, and euphemized but extensive ideological commitments together radicalize America's sprawling K-12 civics education.

These means, cumulatively, have been extraordinarily effective. Scarcely a school in America has not marbled some portion of the radical catechism into its curriculum, camouflaged by education-school jargon.

The American people awoke in 2021—but the battle began decades ago. The republic's champions, justly alarmed by our schools' increasing alienation from America, have been fighting back against the advancing radical tide for a generation and more. They have funded textbooks, founded teacher training programs, and crafted lesson plans. So too, of course, have those educators who would remold Americans to assent to their authoritarian ideologies—and those cautious souls who have sought to follow a middle road between the old civics and the ersatz new. We possess, in tribute to America's loose-knit sprawl, a variety of institutions that have experimented with different ways to forward civics education.

Civics reformers in 2021 do not need to reinvent the wheel. They need an inventory of the different attempts to improve civics education, an assessment of how effective each has been, and a recommendation about how they should build upon these different reform efforts.

This report provides a preliminary to a more comprehensive inventory, assessment, and recommendation. It surveys a selection of different civics providers, both the traditional and the radical, assessing both *how* they approach civics education and their ideological content. The report will also judge effectiveness—although no one knows exactly what is being taught in each classroom in America, much less precisely what students take from their education. Finally, it will provide recommendations about how civics reformers should build upon this existing array of civics curriculum resources to work most effectively to reclaim America's civics education.

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The Radical Establishment

The radical activists have seized control of the central institutional machinery of our K-12 educational system. This report does not cover, or only briefly touches upon, such topics as state and federal laws, state and federal education departments, education schools, accreditation organizations, state standards, College Board assessments, private foundations, and nongovernmental organizations, all of which contribute to the imposition of radical education on our schools. The redemption of American civics education will require complete liberation from this institutional K-12 system. This report will focus, rather, on select portions of this K-12 system, whose tactics are most useful to know.

It should be emphasized that much of what the radical establishment does in the name of civics education is really political activism. Their efforts are not equivalent to those of civics reformers, who actually work for civics education by a strict definition of the term. The different natures of these two activities illustrates just how terrible is the radical deformation of civics education.

University Bastion: Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life

The radical assault on civics education proceeded first from universities. Universities educated the radical cadres who then entered and conquered the schools of education, state bureaucracies, education trade groups, and many foundations that govern American education, as well as providing crucial personnel within the classrooms. This method of takeover did not appear efficient—rather, an expensive means for foolish experts to talk to one another and to credential the few young fanatics who followed their creeds. But it has proven effective; cumulatively, the university centers have educated and coordinated the rise of a new radical elite. The Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, located in Tufts University, provides a useful example of how such a university center affects civics education.

Tisch, of course, promotes the new definition of civics that redefines the subject as *preparation for radical activism*: “Tisch College builds an enduring culture of active citizenship at Tufts. ... Through curricular and co-curricular activities, these students address pressing social issues by working with local, national, and international organizations.”⁷ It does so by the standard means of a university—*teaching, activist research, funding, and networking*.

Teaching: Tisch trains activists via its **Civic Studies Major**, which offers courses such as *Internship—Social Change, Community Organizing, The Flow of Power, Intermediate Journalism, Social-Emotional & Civic Learning in Schools*; and *Transformative Justice*.⁸ Tisch also offers an **Entrepreneurship for Social Impact Minor**, a **Peace and Justice Studies Minor**, and an

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Optional Peace and Justice Studies Track.⁹ More intensively, the **Tufts Civic Semester** is “a transformational first-semester program that combines academic and experiential learning with a focus on community engagement and social and environmental justice.”¹⁰

Tisch Scholars for Civic Life trains a yearly cohort of *ca.* 20 students in course work and vocational training in radical activism: “The course will provide students with a framework to critically analyze the root causes of social issues, and will allow Scholars to develop skills to take action for positive social change in community settings.”¹¹ Recent Tisch Scholars’ intellectual interests include “menstrual equity through service, education, and advocacy,” “allyingship [*sic*] and participation in social movements such as Black Lives Matter, March For Our Lives, the Women’s Movement, and recently, Stop Asian Hate,” “community organizing, anti-capitalism, and environmental justice,” and “dedication to social justice through community organizing centered around gender equity, racial justice, gun control, and climate action.”¹²

Tisch complements these academic tracks with the **Civic Science Initiative**, which offers courses that focus its cadres’ activism on science policy: e.g., *Food Justice: Critical Approaches in Policy and Planning*, *Health Care Activism, Community Health, and Patient-Centered Research*; and *The Mathematics of Poverty and Inequality*.¹³ In *Food Justice*, for example,

This class offers students different lenses, such as critical race theory to see how the intersectionality of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability and citizenship play out in the development of systemic structural and socio-spatial inequities and injustices in food systems. It develops an understanding and contextualization of the role of food justice activism within the broader narrative of the alternative food movement and offers emerging ideas about how policy-makers and planners can take a role in increasing food justice beyond the more mainstream and ultimately contested notions of what is “local” and “sustainable.” The course will help participants chart their role(s) in advocating for ‘just sustainability’ as a defining factor in becoming food systems planners and policymakers.¹⁴

Tisch’s **Initiative on Social-Emotional Learning and Civic Engagement**, meanwhile, fuses activism and “social-emotional learning”: “The Social-Emotional Learning and Civic Engagement initiative also focuses on diversity and inclusion, with special attention to how multiple, diverse identities (e.g. race, socioeconomic status, gender, religion, sexual orientation, etc.) interact and affect the experiences and wellbeing of Tufts students, faculty, and staff.”¹⁵ **Community Service Learning at Tufts Professional Schools** further extends Tisch activism to the Tufts Schools of Medicine, Dental Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, and Nutrition Science and Policy.¹⁶

Activism Research: The new generation of activists call *research* what most people would call *propaganda with footnotes*. Tisch focuses activism via “research” centers such as **The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement** (“CIRCLE works nationally with youth-serving organizations to help them understand and assess the impact of their programming, as well as make the case for policy and infrastructure that supports youth engagement”); the **Tisch College Community Research Center** (“supports research projects undertaken jointly by community members in partnership with Tufts faculty and/or students. ... priority is given to research[h] focused on redressing issues of social inequity”); and **Equity Research Group** (“brings together researchers from across Tufts University to discuss and investigate aspects of equity and inequity in the United States and the world”).¹⁷

Tisch also offers a summer course in **Conducting Participatory Action Research in Academia and the Community**, which teaches students how to conduct activism research: “participants will learn how to employ Participatory Action Research (PAR), an approach to data collection that emphasizes participation of underrepresented groups in determining the questions to be studied and then helping to collect, analyze, and disseminate the data collected about them. PAR advocates for collaboration, shared learning, and broader social change.”¹⁸ Tisch additionally offers a **Program for Public Humanities** to publicize activism research in the humanities.¹⁹

Funding: Tisch directs considerable resources to fund the education and the work of the activist cadres. **Tisch Summer Fellows** funds Tufts students to take summer internships to acquire vocational training in radical activism.²⁰ **Tisch Fund for Civic Engagement** also provides

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\$500–\$1,500 grants to Tufts students and student groups for projects that “bring theory to practice” and forward ‘civic’ issues such as “promoting diversity and equity, education, political participation, environment and food justice, technology and other societal issues. ... We especially encourage students to apply for funding that will support projects related to racial justice.”²¹ The **Institute for Nonprofit Practice**, which “equips the most promising nonprofit leaders with the skills, confidence, and resources they need to make their organizations effective, innovative, and sustainable,” funds the **Community Fellows Program**, a “fellowship for social justice oriented emerging leaders, with a focus on advancing people of color.”²²

Networking: Tisch also convenes activist cadres from around the nation, for intellectual stimulation and social networking. Civic Studies hosts an annual Frontiers of Democracy Conference, with panel topics such as *Democratizing Research for Environmental Justice and Health*.²³ The Summer Institute of Civic Studies gathers an advanced interdisciplinary seminar for graduate students, faculty, and external activists.²⁴ Tisch also hosts the Talloires Network of Engaged Universities, which connects higher education leaders committed to “civics” activism.²⁵

Analysis

This extensive description illustrates what the radical establishment *means* by “civics education”—a complex of teaching and research subordinated to training for and practice in radical activism, as well as measures to fund and network activists. So too does an in-depth examination of the *curriculum vita* of Peter Levine, Tisch’s Associate Dean, a prominent figure in the radical civics establishment, and “Principal Investigator on 81 grants or contracts totaling \$8.7 million and co-PI on three grants totaling \$8 million.”²⁶ Levine is an avatar of Tisch, as Tisch is of radical civics—a nexus of foundation money, university support, and administrative empire-building, which extends its influence via teaching, researching, funding, and networking.

Civics reformers should aim in the long run to create rivals to our nation’s Tisch Schools, the strongholds of the radical education establishment. In the short run, they should take notes on Tisch’s individual initiatives—both to emulate them and to oppose them.

Educating for American Democracy

Educating for American Democracy (EAD) is the central political-administrative push to reshape American civics education into a radical mold. EAD’s material centerpiece consists of *Educating for American Democracy: Excellence in History and Civics for All Learners*,²⁷ *Roadmap to Educating for American Democracy*,²⁸ and *Pedagogy Companion to the EAD Roadmap*.²⁹ These three works collectively provide a ‘framework’ for civics education—ostensibly not a curriculum, but principles that will inform state and local standards.

EAD, in other words, weaves a web to stifle all local efforts to escape from action civics. It crafts a framework; the framework ‘informs’ state standards; and then all textbooks and lesson plans must conform to the framework. School districts and individual teachers may retain some capacity to choose *how* to teach action civics, but they will be required to spend a substantial portion of their courses teaching it in some form. The framework, moreover, will allow school districts and teachers to tell parents the ready excuse that they have no choice but to teach civics this way—the state requires them to do so. EAD efficiently disseminates the new radicalism throughout America’s sprawling education system.

Educating for American Democracy, whose core proponents include Louise Dubé of iCivics and Peter Levine of Tufts University, incorporates limited input from moderate-to-right-leaning figures, such as David Bobb, President of the Bill of Rights Institute, and Paul Carrese, Founding Director of the School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership at Arizona State University. For the most part, however, it is the creation of the sort of activist cadres formed by university institutions such as the Tisch College—individuals such as Louise Dubé, Executive Director of iCivics; Emma Humphries, Chief Education Officer and Deputy Director of CivXNow; Peter Levine of Tisch College; and Andrew Wilkes, Senior Director, Policy and Advocacy, of Generation Citizen.³⁰ Tisch College created the new radical education establishment; Educating for American Democracy declares that establishment’s vision for K–12 civics education. EAD’s vision for civics contains a light amount of traditional civics content, to satisfy its more traditional

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members, but surrounded by the far heavier emphasis on hollow educational “skills,” video games civics, and a very large amount of radical action civics.

Bipartisan Cooperation: A Mug’s Game?

Should civics reformers cooperate with radicals in pursuit of “bipartisan cooperation”? This is a dubious pursuit to begin with, both because the radicals conceive of “civics” as a mean to eliminate their political opponents from the public square and because civics reformers are only accepted in such “bipartisan” endeavors as very junior associates rather than equal partners. But practically we may note that Educating for America’s *Roadmap* has reduced a traditional civics curriculum to 1 theme of 7: “**Theme 4: A New Government and Constitution**[.] This theme explores the institutional history of the United States as well as the theoretical underpinnings of constitutional design.”³¹ A “bipartisanship” that abandons six-sevenths of the traditional civics curriculum appears a futile endeavor.

The *Pedagogy Companion* contains a remarkable amount of the radicals’ language and programmatic priorities:

- “EAD teachers deepen students’ grasp of content and concepts by creating student opportunities to engage with real-world events and problem-solving about issues in their communities taking informed action to create a more perfect union.”³²
- “[Teachers] Affirm diverse identities and provide inclusive instruction and examples.”³³
- “Substantive student leadership and democratic practice opportunities within schools include student government, student voice committees, and participatory budgeting, all of which allow increasing levels of student participation in developmentally appropriate decision-making. Connecting with local civic and political leaders and community organizations allows students to take informed action.”³⁴
- “Project-based learning (PBL) is an instructional approach that helps students to acquire deeper content knowledge and academic and civic skills by working for an extended period of time actively exploring complex and real-world issues. ... Examples of these activities include:
 - Authentic writing tasks/media production
 - Critical service-learning
 - Civic engagement projects leading to informed action
 - Interdisciplinary research projects
 - Collaborative projects
 - Action civics”³⁵

The EAD website’s Educator Resources³⁶ also include links to *Activism Online* (link to the Southern Poverty Law Center’s Learning for Justice)³⁷ and *Advocating for a Cause* (link to C-SPAN).³⁸ Learning for Justice, devoted to “tackling systemic injustice,” usefully illustrates by the lessons it offers the substance behind EAD’s blandly bureaucratic language.³⁹

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The Southern Poverty Law Center’s Learning for Justice Lesson Plans: The “Bibi” Lessons

‘Bibi’ Lesson 1: What Makes Us Who We Are?⁴⁰

In this first lesson in a series of three, students will explore how people are comprised of personal and social identities.

‘Bibi’ Lesson 2: Intersectionality in ‘Bibi’⁴¹

In this second of three lessons on the film ‘Bibi,’ students will apply the concepts of intersectionality, privilege and oppression to characters from the film ‘Bibi.’

‘Bibi’ Lesson 3: The Power of Letter Writing: Enhancing Communication and Understanding⁴²

In this third and final lesson on the film ‘Bibi,’ students will write a letter to Ernesto explaining the concepts of intersectionality, privilege and oppression.

It is worth emphasizing that the introduction of EAD coincided with and has been used to justify the proposed Civics Secures Democracy Act, an effort to direct billions of federal dollars toward the radical version of civics, and to yoke state civics to this radical model.⁴³

Analysis

EAD demonstrates the art of bureaucratic politics—the careful combination of putatively bipartisan compromise, impenetrable jargon, and euphemized but extensive radical commitments that will provide the ‘framework’ to radicalize America’s sprawling K–12 civics education. It further demonstrates that the radical activists’ focus on political action does train them well in the arts of administration and obfuscation, if not to cherish and preserve a free republic. EAD encapsulates the America they would make: *democracy* and *equity* imposed and maintained by the Byzantine arts of career bureaucrats.

Civics reformers should note that *these administrative approaches to K–12 education work*. They must now fight defensively to resist the imposition of action civics nationwide by means of this stifling bureaucratic web. Yet these tactics cannot be imitated without committing civics reformers to restoring a free republic’s civics education by the means of illiberal bureaucracy. The very success of EAD points to the necessity of eliminating as much of our education bureaucracy as possible, so as to eliminate the means by which the radicals spin their webs. Reformers must fight to reduce federal power over states and state power over school districts, including by such banal-sounding means as “frameworks” and “standards.” Education reformers’ true and only standard must be liberty.

iCivics

iCivics, founded in 2009 by Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, began as an organization focused on providing actual civics resources for K–12 education. It provided, and still provides, lesson plans and educational games for classroom use. Its focus, as well as its content, was very different from that of the Tisch College and Educating for American Democracy. Yet radicals took over iCivics some years ago, and now it works in tandem with the activist cadres. Louise Dubé, Executive Director of iCivics, identifies the explicit turning point as 2017, when iCivics founded CivXNow: “In 2017, we realized that no matter how much we grew, we would not fulfill the vision of Justice O’Connor unless the country made a fundamental change in how civic education was viewed and made it a priority to educate students for American democracy.”⁴⁴ iCivics’ content now softly forwards the radical curriculum—and iCivics has shifted its strategic purpose from education to political action.

Free⁴⁵ educational games comprise one half of iCivics’ educational core. The list of 14 games includes *Court Quest*, *Executive Command*, *Immigration Nation*, and *NewsFeed Defenders*.⁴⁶ iCivics’ focus on games generally dovetails with the progressive pedagogy that lacks confidence in challenging texts or expert instruction by a teacher and prefers and substitutes graphics, music, and “student-led learning.” The content, which appears suited for elementary- or middle-school students, contains soft biases. The game *Cast Your Vote*, for example, emphasizes local issues such as Civic Engagement, Green Spaces, and Public Transportation—where iCivics provides language for Public Transportation that states blandly that “We need to make equal access a priority,” rather than (say) maintenance or labor costs. It does not mention such issues as Taxes, Municipal Pension Reform, or Illegal Aliens’ Imposing a Fiscal Burden on Municipal Services.⁴⁷ iCivics games soften educational standards and provide a soft progressive bias in their presentation of the issues.

Lesson plans comprise the other half of iCivics’ educational core. iCivics provides a variety of lesson plan modules, generally suited for middle-school students, which include activities, questions, and documents—all the material necessary for a teacher to lead a class session.⁴⁸ These include *Limiting Government*; *Slavery: No Freedom, No Rights*; *Civic Action and Change*; *William Blackstone: Mini-Lesson*; and *Why Do We Have a House and Senate, Anyway?* The modules outline the intellectual background and the structure of our government.

iCivics provides enough lesson plan modules to constitute a comprehensive civics curriculum. Curriculum Units collate groups of lesson plans, and the Scope & Sequence webpage provides a possible course structure, but iCivics explicitly eschews a required sequence or

iCivics’ content now softly forwards the radical curriculum—and iCivics has shifted its strategic purpose from education to political action.

narrative by which the lesson plans should be taught.⁴⁹ iCivics uses the modular format to fit the decentralized structure of American education and to accommodate teacher initiative. iCivics encourages teachers to adopt individual modules into their own curriculum plans rather than to adopt its own curriculum wholesale.

These lesson plans also betray progressive bias. *Stipulating Speech*, on the constitutional protections for free speech, gives the strong impression of anticipating with relish a constitutional “evolution” that will allow *safety from hate speech* to trump *free speech*.⁵⁰ *Immigration: Pathway to Citizenship*, goes out of the way to avoid either the phrase *illegal alien* or even *illegal immigrant*: “**Undocumented immigrant** refers to a foreign resident who did not follow the steps for permanent residence in the U.S.”⁵¹ *Pathway to Citizenship* combines propaganda for DACA and DREAM, detailed information on who is eligible for these programs and what their benefits are, and tips on how to apply for the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program.⁵²

iCivics also includes action civics lesson plans, such as *County Solutions Civic Action Plan*.⁵³ This action civics content substitutes “protest” education for real civics education. *Students Power Elections* includes a primer on *Protesting*, with links to *Field Guide to Protesting* and *Organizing a Protest*.⁵⁴ *Civic Action and Change* teaches students to “Bring attention to the cause through protests, meetings, and petitions. Inform the public. Get laws passed that address your problems & meet your goals.” The Examples it provides reflect identity politics priorities—Women, Farm Workers, People With Disabilities, American Indians.⁵⁵ iCivics never mentions right-leaning efforts, including Election Integrity, Right to Life, Immigration Control, or Gun Rights as examples of civic action.

iCivics, however, is substantially more radical than its curriculum resources initially reveal. iCivics’ Strategic Plan declares its devotion to “equity” and to “catalyze a movement.”⁵⁶ The *movement*, as iCivics Executive Director Louise Dubé stated, is the iCivics-sponsored CivXNow coalition, which is devoted to gaining government resources for iCivics-brand civics education. So Dubé helped craft the 2018 Massachusetts History and Social Science Framework, which replaced its excellent 2003 predecessor with a farrago of action civics and identity politics.⁵⁷ iCivics and CivXNow work hand in glove with the Educating for American Democracy initiative and roadmap analyzed above.⁵⁸ *Equity*, meanwhile, is hazily defined, but includes a “diversity, equity, and inclusion curriculum” and “equity in the classroom,” and iCivics assures the readers that by 2026 all its products will be “updated with an **equity lens**.”

The white paper *Equity in Civics Education*, co-authored by iCivics and Generation Citizen, and hosted as a Resource on the CivXNow website, helpfully fills out what iCivics means by *equity*:

our ongoing work gained renewed urgency in the wake of the death of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, along with [the deaths of] far too many other unarmed Black Americans at the hands of the police, ... [which have] elevated public concern around racial inequity in our society, causing millions of people to reconsider their responsibility in combating systemic racism. ... By equitable civic education, we mean: a civic learning experience that is inclusive, representative, and relevant; one that promotes diverse student voices and draws on students’ lived experiences and perspectives in order to engage them in understanding social issues, the power dynamics that cause them, and the power that young people have to bring about change.⁵⁹

A variety of CivXNow Resources further articulate this radical version of “equity.”⁶⁰ The entire iCivics project provides support for special-interest lobbying to fund this radical agenda.

Analysis

iCivics’ games and modular lesson plans have substantial influence, which disseminate a soft-progressive bias that is transforming swiftly toward advocacy of *equity* and action civics. iCivics now seeks to force America’s schools to abandon political neutrality and politicize school instruction. iCivics illustrates how progressive advocates interweave factual instruction with progressive advocacy and tactical advice for progressive protest.

Yet it is difficult to measure that influence. In 2021, iCivics carefully claimed that “iCivics games and lesson plans are used annually by more than 140,000 teachers and more than 9 million students.”⁶¹ The word *used* artfully avoids claiming the material had any effect. iCivics’ decision

iCivics illustrates how progressive advocates interweave factual instruction with progressive advocacy and tactical advice for progressive protest.

to shift toward political advocacy may reflect uncertainty as to whether the provision of modular lesson plans ultimately provides good return on investment. iCivics has made a tactical decision to focus on legislative and regulatory change—to force all teachers and students to adopt their curricular priorities, rather than rely on voluntary use. Partly this registers their ambition; partly it registers the limits of an educational strategy based on modular lesson plans.

Teachers' inertia may also blunt legislative and regulatory change. Yet the point of such changes is to make following the mandated curriculum the path of least resistance. iCivics has chosen a tactic that will use teachers' inertia to hasten the shift to their new pedagogy.

Civics reformers should note both the nature of iCivics' shift from education to advocacy, and the limits of the original iCivics model. Modular lesson plans have utility, but it is difficult to assess how many teachers use them or their effectiveness. iCivics ultimately decided they provided a limited return on investment. Civics reformers should take that judgment seriously.

Generation Citizen

Generation Citizen forwards more explicitly radical action civics, but with more limited scope than iCivics.⁶² It funds and supports radical action civics in relatively few states and school districts—albeit it spreads its influence further by its collaborations with larger organizations such as iCivics. Generation Citizen serves putatively anodyne action civics advocates by spelling out their ultimate goals, but within a discrete organization that allows for plausible deniability.

Generation Citizen begins where iCivics ended, as a special interest group that transforms advocacy for more action civics spending into a “curriculum.”

GC engages in advocacy and policy work—building the demand for action civics—so that educators, philanthropists, and policymakers alike recognize the importance of educating young people to be active citizens. Our direct service program results make the case that action civics should become a staple of the educational curriculum across the U.S.⁶³

Yet Generation Citizens also states Critical Race Theory assumptions explicitly in its mission and its consequent pedagogy:

Despite the idealistic promises of an American nation founded with declarations of equality, the political and economic system was historically designed to privilege, include, and prioritize the power and well-being of certain groups over others. This systemic marginalization of communities of color and low-income communities has resulted in a lack of equitable representation and political power at all levels of government, in addition to the perpetuation of policies that disadvantage, and often actively oppress individuals in those communities. ... The road to a more equitable democracy begins with our schools—institutions whose historical purpose has always been to educate the next generation of citizens. ... Through student-driven projects, youth learn how to effect policy change by engaging with local government and leaders to solve community problems.⁶⁴

Generation Citizen's pedagogy and programs all inculcate equity ideology and teach equity activism: “In order to reach the ultimate goal of a more equitable democracy, in which all individuals can effectively use their voices to make a difference, civics education must explicitly address the political and social marginalization from the formal democratic process that specific communities have faced.”⁶⁵

Or as Generation Citizen puts it in *Returning to Our Roots*,

a concrete way to interrupt this cycle is through democracy education, and through changing the very foundations from which the cycle emerges—the behavior, motivations, and knowledge of young people. By teaching, training, and empowering young people, especially low-income and people of color, to recognize their ability to change the political system, unequal power structures can change.⁶⁶

Generation Citizen's pedagogy and programs all inculcate equity ideology and teach equity activism.

Generation Citizen’s preferred “youth activism” is a catalogue of radical activist groups: “The recent #BlackLivesMatter activism and the Movement for Black Lives, in response to the wave of police brutality cases, is an illustration of promising youth activism, as are the DREAMers, undocumented students who have positively influenced the Obama Administration on issues of immigrant rights.”⁶⁷

Generation Citizen’s Curriculum Framework is radical action civics: “We promote political engagement, which we define as interaction with power, and specifically, governmental institutions. This is different than [*sic*] broad-based civic engagement or volunteer service—we believe that systemic change requires political participation.”⁶⁸ Generation Citizen’s curriculum includes lessons in such skills as how to Lobby A Legislator.⁶⁹ Its conception of *democracy education* includes Action Civics, Youth Organizing, and Youth Participation in Governance,⁷⁰ and its ideal is Black Lives Matter:

The current #BlackLivesMatter movement is an important example; it is explicitly political and movement-oriented, it originates with youth and is led by young people, and it raises the national profile of a set of issues that are closely related to youth civic development and inequality. Most importantly, it elevates youth power and voice on issues that not only affect young lives but also our broader democracy, such as criminalization, racial equity, and mass incarceration.⁷¹

Most bluntly, Generation Citizen is radical youth organizing smuggled into the schools,⁷² with an associated apparatus of teacher workshops, lesson plans, and curriculum.⁷³

Generation Citizen’s individual programs are tailored to forward its radical political agenda as effectively as possible. Generation Citizen works to lower the voting age to 16 via Vote16USA—on the explicitly racial grounds, it should be noted that, younger voters are less white than older voters.

It is estimated that by 2030, the 65+ population will be three-quarters white, while the population of those under the age of 18 will be less than one-half white. By including 16 and 17 year olds in the electorate, and experiencing the subsequent increase in turnout among voters in their 20s, the interests of diverse young people will be represented during a time of historic demographic change.⁷⁴

Generation Citizen’s Democracy Lab, moreover, is designed to take advantage of Massachusetts’ new Action Civics requirements to insert Generation Citizen material into the public schools:

Targeted for the expansion of civic learning in social studies education, Democracy Lab is tailored for 8th-grade Massachusetts teachers responding to the newly released Framework while preparing students for success on the proposed MCAS evaluation and mandate for civics project-based learning. Primary Source and Generation Citizen’s innovative and comprehensive approach to civic learning is fully aligned with the 2018 Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework.⁷⁵

The Democracy Lab: 8th Grade Civics for the 21st Century Detailed Table of Contents and Sample Lessons unsurprisingly emphasizes lessons such as Youth Activism, Citizenship and Social Change, The Role and History of Protest.⁷⁶

Generation Citizen’s own list of its action civics projects tilt remarkably toward the progressive political agenda. These projects include:

- Climate change/Green New Deal;
- Fighting “issues of oppression”: Islamophobia, the school-to-prison pipeline, and undocumented drivers’ licenses, specifically through lobbying and protesting;
- Walkout to protest gun violence in schools; Dream Act, climate change, and making reusable bags commonplace;
- Posters displaying #NoBanNoWall, lobbying against gentrification, mass incarceration, and gun violence, and branding the Founding Fathers as wealthy, white, economically motivated slaveowners;

Generation Citizen is radical youth organizing smuggled into the schools, with an associated apparatus of teacher workshops, lesson plans, and curriculum.

- Power analysis, feminist perspectives, influencing public policies, social justice orientation, and critical stances to help people rethink what is normal;
- Three excused absences to participate in protest during the school day;
- Petitioned governor to create a climate change task force; and
- Youth organizing, “including a workshop to educate students about injustices in the school system, like inequitable funding.”⁷⁷

Analysis

Generation Citizen serves as the vanguard for Action Civics. It shows the broad coalition of action civics advocates how to import radical youth organizing into schools, as an explicit and implicit model. It does not need to affect the vast majority of classrooms directly. It provides a template and a preview for action civics advocates as a whole.

Civics reformers should note the usefulness of a vanguard organization, which can change the range of policy debate by making more far-reaching proposals than can broader, softer-edged organizations—while noting that it is more difficult for reformers than the educational establishment to engage in such maneuvers. Nevertheless, some civics reformers could take on a Generation Citizen role, to model more thoroughgoing reform.

The 1619 Project Curriculum

The 1619 Project Curriculum, produced by the Pulitzer Center, provides a distorted vision of American black history keyed to *The 1619 Project*.⁷⁸ Its historical fallacies, which serve to forward highly radical polemic, include the implications and outright assertions that:

- slavery was uniquely American;
- Americans fought the Revolution to preserve slavery from the threat of British emancipation;
- Lincoln was a racist intent on keeping blacks and whites apart;
- blacks “fought back alone” to secure their rights;
- American capitalism was founded on plantation slavery; and
- America’s history is fundamentally characterized by black struggle against white supremacy.⁷⁹

The 1619 Project resembles Generation Citizen in that it is a more hard-edged, more narrowly focused organization than iCivics. It provides classroom lessons rather than action civics, however. Its format more closely follows iCivics: the 1619 Project Curriculum provides individual and modular Lesson Plans,⁸⁰ heavily crowd-sourced rather than provided by the Pulitzer Center itself.⁸¹ This approach, as the iCivics approach, draws on organic support from America’s loose education system at the cost of coherence and comprehensive structure.

The organic support does not appear to have been overwhelming. The 1619 Project Curriculum possesses relatively few crowd-sourced lesson plans. Its lesson-plan library includes *The 1857 Project* (a lesson plan based on “a special issue of the *Gateway Journalism Review* that chronicles the history of racial injustice in St. Louis, Missouri and Illinois”),⁸² *Why do migrants make the choices they make at different stages of migration?*,⁸³ and *Buffalo Public Schools & 1619 Curriculum*.⁸⁴ These lesson plans do damage, but there are relatively few of them.

These lesson plans all cite extensively how they align with Common Core Standards.⁸⁵ Given that K-12 schools now are subject to extensive requirements to meet Common Core Standards, this bureaucratic apparatus appears both necessary and useful.

The 1619 Project Curriculum’s own lesson plans include courses ranging from K-12 instruction⁸⁶ to a Law School Initiative.⁸⁷ These lesson plans focus on areas such as Wealth, Labor, and Mobility (five modules on “the intersections of race, labor, and economics”),⁸⁸ Mass Incarceration (four modules on “the intersections of race, the legal system, and incarceration”),⁸⁹ and Arts and Culture (four modules on “the intersections of race, American culture, and the arts”).⁹⁰ The 1619 Project Curriculum includes support such as The 1619 Project Education Network: “a cohort of 40 education professionals will receive grants of \$5,000 each to support exploration of key questions of racial justice and other pressing issues in a community that also includes award-winning journalists and the Pulitzer Center education team.”⁹¹

Analysis

The 1619 Project Curriculum appears somewhat amateur in its approach—the product of journalists and free-ranging ideologues rather than education professionals. As such, it is a salutary reminder that educational professionalism has its place: the 1619 Project Curriculum appears to do less damage because it is not crafted by experts. Its most useful aspect is its extensive mention of Common Core standards—surely a touch from a professional contributor.

Yet the 1619 Project Curriculum’s indirect effect presumably is more damaging. Education bureaucrats are progressively remodeling their standards to conform to the 1619 Project travesty of history. The journalists and the ideologues will inspire the workaday professionals to ruin America’s history education more effectively.

The 1619 Project Curriculum appears to do less damage because it is not crafted by experts.

Civics Education: Necessary Principles

A proper civics education should teach students about all of America’s foundational ideals. These include *ideals of liberty, constitutional order, the expansion of liberty, the preservation of the republic, the expansion of the republic, commercial expansion, national interest, national unity, moral crusade, populist revolt, and moderation.*

Civics classes should teach our *ideals of liberty*. These include ideals of political, religious, and economic liberty embedded in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, Greek philosophy, Roman republicanism, English ideals of local self-government, common law, and Parliamentary sovereignty, and Enlightenment philosophy; the enduring importance of liberty secured in natural law; and the long struggles by America’s forebears to achieve and to institutionalize ever greater amounts of liberty. Students should learn the outline of the millennia of intellectual and political history encapsulated in Lincoln’s phrase “a new nation, conceived in liberty.”

Civics classes also should teach how our *constitutional order* was framed to secure Americans’ liberty within the framework of an enduring republic. They should learn the importance of separation of powers, federalism, and the individual liberties secured by the Bill of Rights, as well as the effect on our constitution of later amendments and judicial decisions. This history of the later changes to the American constitution should be framed as the history of how Americans in each generation have sought to work within their extraordinary constitutional inheritance to reaffirm their natural liberty.

Students should learn how Americans have *expanded their liberty*. They should learn about the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln, and America’s rededication to liberty for all. They also should learn about all our struggles for economic, social, and political liberty, whose successful outcome has characterized our republic. They should, finally, learn about the challenges to liberty posed by the ever-expanding administrative state, and the need to defend Americans’ hard-won liberties from illiberal managers who seek to govern in the stead of the people.

Civics classes should teach the fundamental need to *preserve the republic*. The republic first must survive before it can assure the liberty and well-being of its citizens. The survival of the Union is as important a moral goal as any substantive liberty the republic forwards. This, after all, was the moral imperative behind so much of antebellum political thought—that Americans should sacrifice other goals for the preservation of the Union. We cannot understand the spirit that animated men such as Andrew Jackson, Henry Clay, and Stephen Douglas, the Compromises of 1820 and 1850, or indeed why Lincoln and the bulk of Northerners fought to preserve the Union, if we do not understand the power of that ideal. Nor can we teach our children that the preservation of the Union matters more than some crusade for liberty or social justice—that *compromise to preserve the Union* is a fundamental moral good. It is no use to teach children the way our republic works if we do not also teach them to cherish its survival.

Civics classes also should teach why our forefathers worked so hard to *expand the republic*—for a larger republic is a more durable republic, and one better able to foster the well-being of its citizens. The older republican tradition focused on *military and territorial expansion*; the

A proper civics education should teach students about all of America’s foundational ideals.

American civic tradition has incorporated this imperative. Our children should understand that our conquest of half the continent fulfilled the moral imperative to expand the republic—and left as its residue in our constitutional architecture the expansion of the number of states from 13 to 50, a fact that any civics course should accord fundamental importance. It has also bequeathed to us the territorial resources for our prosperity and greatness. Our civics classes should teach students to be grateful to the pioneers whose conquests established our nation, and to whom we owe every comfort and private joy.

The newer commercial republican tradition focused on *commercial expansion* as the means of republican greatness; so too has America. Students should know that we foster economic growth in service of the republic—and in service of republican liberty, for the republican argument for commerce has always depended upon the concomitant that it buttresses our liberty. Students should understand that we support commercial expansion not as an absolute good in itself, but only insofar as it serves the republic and its citizens' liberties; that we support *American* businesses only insofar as they support the republican order and do not decay into oligarchic malefactors of great wealth.

Both territorial and commercial expansion are meant to serve the *national interest*, which also has been served by the extension of our diplomatic influence on foreign nations. Students should understand and esteem the thread of national interest that links the Monroe Doctrine, the Roosevelt Corollary, our interventions in successive world wars, the Cold War, and our shifting trade policies—all to serve the republic and the liberty and prosperity of America's citizens. Students should understand that our foreign policy should serve the national interest.

Students also should understand the imperative of *national unity*—the need to unite and preserve the American nation. Here students should understand that the American nation was *not* founded in 1776, but in 1607 and 1620, by boatloads of English settlers. The American nation is the daughter of England, much augmented by adopted children from other nations, and its customs remain those of the English nation, as transplanted to American soil. The American republic was born in a declaration of abstract principle, but it was born in the American nation and to forward “its posterity.” The new republic built itself and has continued to depend upon the manners of these transplanted Englishmen—their religion, their law, their books, their entertainments, their attachment to liberty, their mutual affection for one another, and their con-mingled pride in their nation and their republic. It is a civic imperative to assimilate America's adopted children to the manners of the Englishmen who founded the nation, to foster affectionate reverence for their adopted forefathers, to build in them affection for other Americans that supersedes all other affections of kith, creed—and ideology. Civics classes must teach student to love their fellow Americans as members of a common nation, no matter what principles they uphold.

Civics classes should teach students to cherish America's national characteristics, including its Puritan predisposition to *moral crusade*. They also should teach students to recognize that the Founders framed our republic to slow the adoption by government of crusading zeal. The dispersal and balance of power within government, the difficulty of making amendments, the repeal of Prohibition, the failure to adopt the Equal Rights Amendments—all these, as much as the successful crusades for the abolition of slavery and for women's suffrage, witness the character and history of a government designed to ensure that an enthusiastic people only changes its constitution when the enthusiasms are general and enduring.

Civics classes also should teach students to cherish America's national characteristic of *populist revolt*—a conviction, frequently justified, that our social and political elite have turned the rules of the game into an exercise in self-dealing corruption. The limitation of government power, and its dispersal, both articulate that same suspicion—but our constitutional machinery is not a sufficient means to prevent such corruption. Populist revolt, a radical suspicion of government, is itself an aspect of America's civic disposition—the complement of the mutual good faith needed for the republic's constitutional machinery to run in ordinary times. Our republic can grow brittle without regular populist rebellion against the sons of Belial and Mammon.

Students also should understand the imperative of *national unity*—the need to unite and preserve the American nation.

Finally, civics classes should teach the virtue of *moderation*. Barry Goldwater provided the best retort: “Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice! And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue!” But it is not entirely true. Moderation, even in the pursuit of justice and the defense of liberty, is also a virtue, and an eminently civic one. The spirit of moderation animates the desire to preserve the republic and to tolerate our fellow Americans, to check our own deepest convictions with some accommodation to the deepest convictions of our fellow citizens who disagree with us. Moderation eschews the desire for justice, though the skies fall; the moderate man would prefer the skies to stay where they are while he works slowly for justice. We should educate our children to praise and practice this virtue.

Civics Education: Curriculum Sketch

This catalogue of civic principles requires a complex syllabus, with a varied cast of American heroes to emblemize America and its virtues.

A civics curriculum should provide sustained coverage of colonial America, and not rush from the Mayflower Compact to the Declaration of Independence. Students should learn of the birth of the American nation, from Puritan theology and English common law, the practice of town meetings and colonial assemblies, the farmers’ conquests of the frontier and the merchants’ sea-borne search for profit, the fire of the First Great Awakening and the unruly mobs who made the American Revolution. They should know above all of the civic virtues of the self-made Benjamin Franklin, but also of the preacher Jonathan Edwards, the rebel Jacob Leisler, and the pioneer Daniel Boone.

A civics curriculum should tell students of the founding of their country—of Thomas Paine who argued that liberty was common sense, of Thomas Jefferson who wrote the Declaration of Independence, of George Washington who led the Patriot army to victory and independence, of James Madison who thought out how our Constitution could preserve liberty. They also should know of the ordinary Americans who fought and died to achieve independence—and who deliberated at length before they voted to adopt our constitution as the best means to secure liberty for their posterity.

A civics curriculum should provide sustained coverage of the desire to preserve and expand America. The iconic figure here should be Andrew Jackson—the man who fought the British and opposed John Calhoun, as well as the avatar of radical populism who fought and defeated the banking elites. A civics curriculum also should explain how the doctrine of Manifest Destiny and the Monroe Doctrine have served as the charter assertions of our continental republic and its right to act abroad for liberty and national interest.

A civics curriculum should teach of the expansion of American liberty. It should teach of Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Ronald Reagan. It should teach that crusades for liberty should be confident, but never self-righteous; and that Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address teaches us to pursue freedom “with malice toward none, with charity toward all.”

A civics curriculum should emphasize the importance of national unity and of assimilation into a common culture. The civics curriculum should praise iconic figures who have contributed to and been committed to the forging of a common American culture, including Noah Webster, William McGuffey, Irving Berlin, John Wayne, and Jackie Robinson.

A civics curriculum should praise the virtues of populist revolt. The iconic figure should be William Jennings Bryan, both preacher and rebel, who thundered, “You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns; you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.” The civics curriculum should explore how the Populists discomfited both the Jim Crow Democrats and the Wall Street Republicans—and how, if temporarily defeated, most of the measures they advocated eventually became law. A civics curriculum should mention both the successes of populist revolt and how populist revolts can go astray, and evaluate the contributions of the recurrent icons of populist revolt, including Huey Long, Ross Perot, and Donald Trump.

A civics curriculum should give due weight to the power of moral crusade in American

A civics curriculum should teach of the expansion of American liberty.

history. A whole slew of figures should be placed within this tradition of moral crusade—William Lloyd Garrison and John Brown, Anthony Comstock and Charles Parkhurst, Carrie Nation and Woodrow Wilson, Alice Paul and Jerry Falwell. A civics curriculum should evaluate the positive and negative contributions of these crusades, inspire students to crusade—and warn them to be wary of crusaders.

A civics curriculum should praise the virtues of moderation in the exercise of national interest. The iconic figure should be Dwight Eisenhower, who practiced moderation both as military commander of our European armies during World War II and as president at home—the great compromiser who made his peace with the New Deal but prevented its further expansion, whose appointees Earl Marshall and Herbert Brownell carefully forwarded the cause of civil rights, and who presided over the apogee of American prosperity.

Such a civics curriculum should be taught in history and literature classes as well as civics classes. There are limited numbers of classroom hours. By shorthand, however, we should say that a civics curriculum should teach together Washington and Jackson, Lincoln and Bryan, Eisenhower and King—the love of liberty, republic and nation; the populist radicalism and the smooth moderation; the crusading heart and the commitment to natural law. Together they articulate the civic virtues that have made America.

Non-Partisan

Several education groups work to articulate a non-partisan, pedagogical compromise between advocates of traditional education and the radical establishment.

We the People: Citizen and Constitution

We the People has addressed the core of civics education and written a textbook, also named *We the People*, that provides comprehensive coverage and for decades has worked for a nonpartisan approach. In its strengths and weaknesses, it illustrates what can be gained by this approach.

On the plus side, *We the People* provides a lucid analysis of much of the history and structure of our government. It provides a fair accounting of the intellectual background of the foundation, and a lucid analysis of many aspects of how our government works. It is particularly good at presenting relevant Greco-Roman history, Founding Document sources, and key cases from the history of the Supreme Court of the United States.

We the People was written several years ago, with a different set of political issues at the forefront. *We the People* makes a number of quiet concessions that illustrate the weakness of the “non-partisan approach.” It goes through the importance of the amendments chapter by chapter—but grants the Second Amendment only two paragraphs.⁹² It talks about reforms “to make it easier to vote” without talking about the need to prevent voter fraud, much less raising the notion that voter fraud is a thoroughly uncivic method of disenfranchisement.⁹³ *We the People* works very hard to be nonpartisan, and often with great success. This pattern of concessions, however, reveals that the “nonpartisan approach” comes with real costs.

The edition of *We the People* reviewed is from 2019. Observers should be wary about newer editions of *We the People* in any way moving away from its more traditional, nonpartisan position.

Analysis

We the People has well-crafted a coherent, largely solid civics textbook, the framework of a decent civics course. Civics reformers should take from *We the People* the intelligent decision to craft a civics textbook that aims toward broad acceptance. Yet they should make their civics textbook even more academically challenging. Above all, they must continue to ground their textbook on the republic’s foundational principles and be vigilant against growing pressure to enter the partisan political fray.

Bill of Rights Institute

The Bill of Rights Institute (BRI) “develops educational resources on American history and

Civics reformers should take from *We the People* the intelligent decision to craft a civics textbook that aims toward broad acceptance.

government, provides professional development opportunities to teachers, and runs student programs and scholarship contests.⁹⁴ BRI proclaims by its name its intellectual focus: the Enlightenment principles of liberty that animated the Bill of Rights. Within the European intellectual tradition, it is notable that for its *The Tradition of Rights* lesson plan it selects Plato’s *Republic* to compare with Madison’s writings in the *Federalist*—there is some Platonizing idealism in BRI’s classic liberal philosophy.⁹⁵ BRI’s materials evince a mild preference for free markets.

This classic liberal focus, however, does not prevent them from aligning with the modern Action Civics movement. BRI has developed MyImpact Challenge as a “national civic engagement initiative,” which includes all the components of Action Civics.⁹⁶ BRI presumably believes it can rework action civics pedagogy toward unpoliticized ends—an endeavor for which we must wish them good fortune, but with no great anticipation of success. Its lesson on civic engagement only cites the women’s movement and the International March for Science rather than Phyllis Schlafly or the March for Life—a choice of exemplars that suggests that BRI’s engagement with Action Civics has already succumbed to the politicized roots of Action Civics.⁹⁷

BRI focuses on providing lesson plans for teachers. It provides two important sequences: a *Yearlong Civics Course* and, for American history, *Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness*.⁹⁸ The *Yearlong Civics Course* provides seven study units, each possessing several individual lesson plans. *Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness*, more structurally detailed, contains sixteen chapters, each with its own collection of individual plans. Both sequences are modular—BRI provides no textbook narrative, but rather a series of loosely coherent lesson plans that teachers may select from as suits their preferences. BRI thus provides more curricular coherence than iCivics, but less than *We the People*.

BRI advertises these lessons as suitable for high school—in the case of *Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness*, even for Advanced Placement U.S. History courses. Their academic rigor seems more to be solid material for eighth-grade or ninth-grade students. Save for BRI’s unfortunate inclusion of Action Civics, the tone seems traditionally bipartisan.

Analysis

BRI has created a lightly right-of-center curriculum, solidly crafted and moderately challenging, although marred by its inclusion of action civics. As with iCivics, its choice to focus on modular lesson plans allows for greater flexibility of adoption, although at the cost of forfeiting use by those teachers who desire a textbook framework for their course. Civics reformers should regard BRI as a good model, if not a stellar one.

Core Knowledge

Core Knowledge provides a range of curricular materials to support E. D. Hirsch’s “knowledge-based schooling.”⁹⁹ Core Knowledge’s offerings include *CKHG: A History of the United States*,¹⁰⁰ whose materials are intended to support *The Pathway to Citizenship*.¹⁰¹ Core Knowledge would appear to have constructed a history curriculum first and then added a civics component. The materials seem to incorporate civics as an add-on component more than an integral core.

Core Knowledge crafts its materials for K–8 rather than K–12, so *CKHG: A History of the United States* aims at a middle-school audience rather than a high-school one. This is respectable, as writing middle-school material for use in high schools is not. Nevertheless, civics reformers will not find high-school level civics material among Core Knowledge’s offerings. The material it does provide, moreover, could facilitate teachers who wish to settle for a crib-notes provision of lists of facts. Core Knowledge’s approach far outshines the fact-free ignorance too common in American schools—but civics reformers should ensure that civics education is always more than memorization of a list of facts.

Core Knowledge’s most interesting innovation is to tie its framework to the answers on the U.S. Civics Test: “In choosing to designate specific content as part of *The Pathway to Citizenship*, we have been guided by a test developed by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).”¹⁰² Civics reformers should consider whether to imitate this approach, since 25 states already have passed laws linking their K–12 civics curriculum to the USCIS test.¹⁰³

Core Knowledge’s most interesting innovation is to tie its framework to the answers on the U.S. Civics Test.

Analysis

Core Knowledge provides a solid middle-school curriculum in history and civics, which could also be used for junior high school students, albeit one whose emphasis on factual knowledge could be taught as an exercise in rote memorization. Civics reformers should take most note of its explicit ties of its curriculum to the USCIS test. Indeed, Core Knowledge’s approach suggests an interesting further priority—to reform the USCIS test so as to strengthen civics education. At the very least, reformers should be alert to defend the USCIS test against attempts to weaken or politicize it. The states have made the USCIS test inform the civics curriculum of half the nation; civics reformers must not be indifferent to the content of that test.

Reformers

Hillsdale College: The 1776 Curriculum

Hillsdale College is one of the bastions of the resistance to the radical establishment’s takeover of American education.¹⁰⁴ Hillsdale maintains its independence from the federal government by refusing to accept federal student loans and grants—and the strings that go with that money, and have made puppets of virtually every American college. Hillsdale also sponsors both a K–12 curriculum and a network of affiliated schools that use American Classical Education: “Hillsdale College teaches K–12 schools to provide an education that is both classical and American in its orientation; one that is rooted in the liberal arts and sciences, offers a firm grounding in civic virtue, and cultivates moral character.”¹⁰⁵ Hillsdale’s intellectual commitments emphasize, within the broader American tradition, the virtues of natural law, the Founding, and Abraham Lincoln, and the Progressive movement’s gravely deleterious effects on America.

Hillsdale, building upon the federal government’s *The 1776 Report* (2020),¹⁰⁶ in 2021 published its *1776 Curriculum*, a comprehensive and lucid high-school civics curriculum.¹⁰⁷ The *1776 Curriculum* immediately became the gold standard for civics curricula.

The *1776 Curriculum*, perhaps because it is still new, eschews all the web-friendly devices of competing institutions. It provides comprehensive, lengthy text in PDF files that assemble questions for students, primary sources, and everything necessary for a lesson plan, without breaking them up into numerous files with individual weblinks for each component. This sober-sides approach will attract the serious—although it may not allure teachers and parents addicted to web-friendly formats. Hillsdale may plan already to reissue the *1776 Curriculum* in a more web-friendly format; if it has not, it should.

The *1776 Curriculum* provides three separate curricula, for elementary school, middle school, and high school. These repeat the same lesson at three different levels—indeed, the *1776 Curriculum* appears to be a high-school curriculum that was repeated in pruned-down form for elementary—and middle-school students. Teachers and parents who use the *1776 Curriculum* at all three levels might want to vary the lessons.

Yet these lessons, in themselves, are extraordinarily good. The *1776 Curriculum*’s high-school curriculum is the sole curriculum reviewed that will challenge intelligent twelfth grade students. Its rich selection of primary sources provides a true and thoughtful introduction to our civic past—it includes both extracts from *The Federalist* and from Lincoln’s speeches and documents by un-Lincolnian notables such as the Anti-Federalist “Brutus,” as well as mid-19th century states’ rights and popular sovereignty proponents John Calhoun, Stephen Douglas, and Roger Taney. Hillsdale has done well by ensuring that these documents include some of these figures’ strongest arguments.¹⁰⁸ It is virtually impossible for students to understand the American Civil War without reading a wide variety of authors and political figures from antebellum America.

We the People, albeit somewhat incomplete, focuses on providing a textbook introduction to the Constitution’s sources and structure. The *1776 Curriculum* focuses on providing a traditional interpretation to the Constitution, but sometimes abbreviates the Constitution’s nuts and bolts. It would be improved by a tincture of the textbook.

Moreover, the *1776 Curriculum*’s focus on the Founders and Lincoln, and abhorrence of the Progressives, leads to generous treatment of these topics—and too little on other topics. Some

The 1776 Curriculum immediately became the gold standard for civics curricula.

additional coverage of (for example) Andrew Jackson, William Jennings Bryan, and Dwight Eisenhower would provide broader coverage of the canvas of American ideals and heroes.

Analysis

Hillsdale College's *1776 Curriculum* is by far the best K-12 civics curriculum reviewed—and, not to damn with faint praise, splendid overall. It includes enormous amounts of essential material—the Founding, Lincoln, an assessment of the malign effect of Progressivism on America, and a fair emphasis on Reagan's ability to synthesize large elements of America's civic creed. The high-school sequence is splendidly challenging, successfully defying the nigh-universal degradation of academic standards in K-12 education.

Civics reformers also should note that its format is not as yet terribly adapted for the web—that if the 1619 Project Curriculum sometimes seems a journalist's attempt to craft a K-12 curriculum, the *1776 Curriculum* sometimes seems the parallel attempt of a college professor of political theory. It is comprehensive, but not modular—Hillsdale has chosen a curricular structure the reverse of iCivics, with all associated costs and benefits. It also lacks a textbook—and a civics education ultimately does need a textbook. Hillsdale can fix many of these flaws in time—and should.

The Ashbrook Center: Teaching American History

The Ashbrook Center, an independent academic center that makes its home at Ashland University, provides a variety of educational programs that focus on American history and civics.¹⁰⁹ The centerpiece, “Designed especially for teachers and working professionals,” is Ashbrook's *Teaching American History* graduate program, which provides a Master of Arts in American History and Government, by a combination of in-person, hybrid, and on-line courses.¹¹⁰ Ashbrook's courses have a softly but not exclusively conservative tenor: recent offerings include *The American Revolution*, *The American Founding*, *Civil War and Reconstruction*, *The Progressive Era*, *Great American Texts—Heller & Vonnegut*, *Gender and Equality in America*, and *Indian Assimilation, Resistance, and Removal*.¹¹¹ Ashbrook makes sure to include a healthy portion of traditional (political) history in courses that also include social and cultural subject matter that aligns with liberal concerns. If Ashland has conservative aims, it achieves them by teaching traditionally bipartisan courses.

Ashbrook complements its graduate program with a range of one-day seminars, weekend colloquia, and webinars, each framed around study of primary source documents.¹¹² Recent offerings include one-day seminars on *Liberty and Equality in American Politics*, *Nationalism and Imperialism in the Gilded Age*, *Madison & Hamilton: Competing Visions*, and *Early Reformers in the Labor Age*.¹¹³ Ashbrook's teaching focus is discussion based on primary source documents—and it has also provided a truly extraordinary Historical Documents collection for the use of teachers and ordinary citizens.¹¹⁴ Ashbrook provides its own helpfully edited core selections, which include *50 Core American Documents*, *Documents and Debates in American History and Government: Vol. 1, 1493–1865*, *Documents and Debates in American History and Government: Vol. 2, 1865–2009*.¹¹⁵ It also provides a selection of historical and thematic collections, including *The American Revolution*, *The Great Depression and the New Deal*, *Westward Expansion*, and *Religion in American History and Politics: 25 Core Docs*.¹¹⁶ In addition to these collections, Ashbrook provides a selection of American History Toolkits, on major subjects such as *Expansion & Sectionalism* and *The Progressive Era*.¹¹⁷ Ashbrook encourages users (teachers) to search through its collection themselves, and sorts documents by era and theme.¹¹⁸ It also encourages users (teachers) to create their own document collections—albeit it limits this option to Teaching American History members.¹¹⁹ Ashbrook further provides a selection of Lesson Plans, Homeschool Resources, and other Resources, although these are not its institutional focus.¹²⁰

Ashbrook's rich documentary collection also enables teachers to create their own coherent courses, linked to the sources of American history. Its explicit nod to Homeschool Resources also reminds us that there are millions of schoolrooms now in the family hearth—all of whom also need to be reached by civics educators.

If Ashland has conservative aims, it achieves them by teaching traditionally bipartisan courses.

Analysis

Ashbrook’s focus usefully reminds civics reformers that half of what is at issue is *educating teachers*, rather than students as such. This is implicitly the point of providing lesson plans, and indeed textbooks—they are to teach teachers as much as students. But *Teaching American History* makes the point explicit by focusing on providing graduate level courses focused around an MA Program.

Jack Miller Center

The Jack Miller Center has worked to strengthen higher education for a generation, particularly by sponsoring programs within universities that provide a traditional education in Western Civilization and American history.¹²¹ Its Founding Civics Initiative (FCI) now concentrates on broad-based support for teacher training: the FCI “introduces graduate courses and professional development for teachers that deepen their understanding of foundational texts and ideas in the American political tradition and help them develop curricula for their classrooms.”¹²² So it has funded a Virtual Seminar Series for Florida Teachers, with an admirable list of sessions including Historical Antecedents to the Bill of Rights, Freedom of Religion, and The Second Amendment,¹²³ as well as funding for the Summer Civics Institute at the University of Virginia,¹²⁴ Civic Spirit in New York City,¹²⁵ and summer graduate courses at the University of Wisconsin Madison, Tufts University, and the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia.¹²⁶

JMC’s support for the Civics Program for Teachers (CPT), hosted by Lake Forest College, deserves particular mention, because CPT “consists of a series of graduate courses designed to help teachers respond to the new State of Illinois civics requirement for high-school students.”¹²⁷ Illinois’ civics standards, unfortunately, have been extensively remodeled by radical activists.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, teacher training programs ought to be intelligently crafted to meet state standards—if only to encourage teachers to take advantage of these offerings.

Analysis

The Jack Miller Center and its funding beneficiaries have taken a thoughtful and productive approach to teacher training programs.

Other Programs

There are far too many programs to survey in any comprehensive fashion. A few should be mentioned, to provide a sense of the variety of offerings.

1776 Unites Curriculum

1776 Unites was founded by Robert Woodson, Jr. as a patriotic and optimistic movement largely (but not exclusively) by and for black Americans, intended to act as an antidote to the 1619 Project.¹²⁹ 1776 Unites now has provided a *1776 Unites Curriculum*, available to registrants rather than immediately visible on the website.¹³⁰ The *Curriculum* includes a series of downloadable modular lesson plans that provide a more uplifting version of black American history, including *Crispus Attucks, Part 1 (1723–1770)*; *Benjamin Banneker (1731–1806)*; *Crispus Attucks, Part 2 (1851–2020)*; *Paul Cuffe (1759–1817)*; *Biddy Mason (1818–1891)*; *Elijah McCoy (1844–1929)*; *54th Massachusetts (1863–1865)*; *Bessie Coleman (1892–1926)*; *Booker T. Washington and the Rosenwald Schools (1912–1932)*; *Tulsa: Terror & Triumph (1921–2021)*; *Alice Coachman (1923–2014)*; *Jesse Owens & The Berlin Olympics (1936)*; and *Resilience and Learned Optimism; The Woodson Principles*. These provide a solid alternative to the 1619 Project Curriculum’s lesson plans.

The FAIRstory Curriculum

The Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism (FAIR) is opposed to progressive neo-racism.¹³¹ It now has begun the FAIRstory Curriculum, which crafts modular lesson plans (e.g., *Norwalk’s Heritage Wall: The Meaning of Diversity in an American Town*; *Our Shared Human Story*; *The Declaration of Independence and the Problem of Slavery*) to work within ethnic studies courses or ethnic studies units within broader history courses.¹³² Civics reformers should be skeptical about whether the ideologues that administer and teach ethnic studies courses will ever accept materials that contradict their radical agenda. They may also be skeptical whether it is the wiser strategy to

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engage at all with ethnic studies courses. Yet *some* organization should try this tactic, to see if it will have any positive effect. FAIR should be commended for making this effort.

Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History

The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History supports K–12 American history education.¹³³ It primarily provides an endless well of more than 70,000 primary source documents, for the use of teachers (or programs) that wish to provide material for classes, but it also provides curricula and lesson plans—unfortunately largely restricted to members rather than open-access.¹³⁴ Its efforts parallel those of Ashbrook’s *Teaching American History*.

Florida K–12 Civics and Government Standards (Proposed)

The state of Florida has published draft civics standards, in response to a law requiring greater civics instruction, and political will in the Governor’s office and staff to restore more traditional civics.¹³⁵ They include, for example, an explicit acknowledgement of the Hebraic and Christian roots of our civic culture and a detailed requirement to study colonial history. The standards provide a framework for each grade through eighth grade, and then a detailed sequence for grades 9–12. Florida’s standards have been made more softly “bipartisan” by the usual practice of consultation with school administrators and teachers, but they show what state education machinery can achieve. Civics reformers should take note: no amount of civics materials will do any good in public school if they don’t align with the state standards.

Conclusion

This survey of approaches to civics education cannot pretend to provide more than the barest outline of the currently available civics resources, or of the relative effectiveness of the approaches used by the radical establishment and by civics reformers. What it can do is provide a map for future civics reform campaigns. These varied approaches argue for a comprehensive approach to civics reform, which incorporates the different successes of different organizations, and which operates with sufficient integration to maximize return on investment. Simply crafting more modular lesson plans, for example, may no longer be a very productive use of scarce resources. We possess a great many such lesson plans; what matters more is a coordinated strategy by which to ensure teachers in classrooms actually use them.

Civics reformers should work together to provide the following elements of comprehensive civics education reform.

Education Framework

Educating for American Democracy and iCivics have perfected the “education framework” as a masterwork of bureaucratic progressive governance. Civics reformers don’t wish to impose a curriculum by such illiberal means. Nevertheless, it would not hurt to produce an alternate roadmap, equal in scope and detail to Educating for American Democracy’s *Excellence in History and Civics for All Learners*, *Roadmap to Educating for American Democracy*, and *Pedagogy Companion to the EAD Roadmap*, endorsed by a broad range of nonprofit organizations dedicated to civics education. Such a roadmap, unlike Educating for American Democracy’s, should not aspire to be a backdoor national curriculum, but rather provide a model for varying state standards and local curricula.

Higher Education Institutions

The Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University and other such higher education institutions provide the core support for action civics—the education of a cadre of activists, the production of supporting pseudo-scholarship, and the spread of influence from there to civil society, education schools, and K–12 schools. While these are often expensive endeavors that preach to a small choir of the converted, they have proved to have massive cumulative influence. Since a critical mass of teachers and administrators have been converted to radical pedagogy by such Centers, the entire strategy of civics reformers is now predicated upon the radical establishment’s strategic dominance over American civics education. This dominance cannot be

challenged easily or soon. To attempt to do so too soon would be a waste of scarce resources. But civics reformers should seek to do so in the long run, as the capstone of their campaign.

State Standards

Florida's draft K-12 Civics and Government Standards (Proposed) provide civics reformers a template for how to remodel K-12 state civics standards. Civics reformers should push for Florida-level standards in every state in the nation which has centralized state civics standards. They also should push for legislation that gives state legislatures the ability to review state content standards and prevent state education departments from arbitrarily imposing a radical curriculum. Civics reformers also should work to ensure that state curriculum standards give school districts the ability to select from a range of rigorous textbooks and curricula. Civics reformers in states that give school districts autonomy to set curricula, however, should seek to preserve such autonomy, since establishing state curriculum standards, even good ones, is too likely to give dangerous power to radical bureaucrats in state education departments.

Assessments

In a perfect world, civics reformers could link reformed American history and civics curricula to rigorous statewide assessments that would inform parents how their children's teachers performed. Such assessments would provide permanent incentives to education administrators and teachers to teach civics and history properly. Yet we do not live in a perfect world. The 2003 Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework¹³⁶ provided the best real-world example of standards linked to statewide assessment—and dogged bureaucratic resistance prevented the statewide assessment from being implemented. Nor can civics reformers trust state education departments to implement an assessment standard that is not hopelessly politicized. The College Board's Advanced Placement Examination in United States Government and Politics now asks students to complete a Project Requirement of action civics.¹³⁷ Civics reformers must seek for effective civics and history assessment from a competitor to the College Board such as the Classic Learning Initiatives.¹³⁸ To function properly, however, this assessment would need to be linked to 1) advanced placement at a significant number of American colleges and universities; and/or 2) substantial scholarship support for students who do well on these assessments. Civics reformers should seek to establish such assessments, but they must be aware that the campaign will be long and expensive.

Home Schools

Civics reformers should enter the home school market, but they should be aware that it already contains large numbers of existing curriculum resources, many of them self-generated. This campaign should be conducted by an organization familiar with home schools. More explicitly religious civics instruction should have greater viability for this market than for public schools.¹³⁹ Modular lesson plans should be more useful than rigidly standardized curricula for home schools, since home school parents characteristically dislike standardized instruction.

Teacher Training

Civics reformers must educate teachers before they can educate students. The Ashbrook Center and the Jack Miller Center (JMC) have both done excellent work, which should be copied and extended. In the long run, civics reformers should seek to transform teaching licensure requirements, so as to remove the keystones that the radical establishment has used to remold the teaching profession. In the short run, civics reformers should work to educate teachers as best they can within the states' existing legal frameworks. JMC's intelligent tailoring of teacher education to different states' licensure requirements should be extended to each state. Civics reformers should establish an institution in each state to provide proper teacher training, tailored to the state licensure requirements. For maximum effect, these teacher training courses should be designed to familiarize teachers with a range of rigorous textbooks, curricula, and lesson plans. (See below.)

Florida's draft K-12 Civics and Government Standards (Proposed) provide civics reformers a template for how to remodel K-12 state civics standards.

Civics reformers need a coherent textbook to provide a narrative for a civics course, and appeal to the many teachers who rely on such a textbook to provide the backbone for their classes.

Professional Development Support

iCivics and the 1619 Project Curriculum, among other such institutions, provide teachers professional development grants linked to their educational program. Civics reformers should imitate this practice—although with an eye to establishing an effective eligibility screen, since some radical teachers gladly and cynically take money from civics reformers.¹⁴⁰ Civics reformers might concentrate on providing free tuition for summer courses rather than stipends.

Textbook

Civics reformers need a coherent textbook to provide a narrative for a civics course, and appeal to the many teachers who rely on such a textbook to provide the backbone for their classes. Such a textbook might usefully be conceived of as a complement to Wilfred McClay's textbook *Land of Hope: An Invitation to the Great American Story* (2019), which provides just such a coherent narrative for a United States History course. *We the People* provides a good example for how generally to craft such a textbook—albeit weakened by its 'bipartisan' concessions to the radical left. Core Knowledge also provides a decent textbook model, albeit crafted for middle school rather than high school. Civics reformers should craft a rigorous textbook, aimed for intelligent twelfth-graders—or rather, they should craft two or more such textbooks. One should simply teach American civics properly. The other(s) should teach American civics as well as it can be taught and still comply with state civics standards. Civics reformers must work to make available the best possible textbook for students captive in public schools run by the radical establishment.

Curriculum

Hillsdale College, iCivics, the Bill of Rights Institute, and Core Knowledge have all provided a more-or-less unified civics curriculum. Of these, Hillsdale's *1776 Curriculum* is the most impressive, both for its intellectual rigor and for its comprehensive nature, with distinct sequences for elementary school, middle school, and high school. Civics reformers should disseminate a proper civics curriculum, which emulates Hillsdale's in structure—but which is scaffolded around a textbook that includes a nuts-and-bolts explanation of how our Constitution works.

Thematic Curricular Units

Groups such as the 1619 Project and 1776 Unites focus on creating thematic curricular units of multiple lesson plans, in these cases on aspects of American history and civics as they pertain to black Americans. Generation Citizen similarly focuses on radical action civics. Given that groups such as the 1619 Project and Generation Citizen exist and are creating curriculum, civics reformers need alternatives. But in neither case can one judge how effective these efforts have been. The 1619 Project Curriculum could be a boondoggle that uses radical foundation money inefficiently. Providing thematic lesson plan suites probably is a more efficient use of resources than simply providing individual lesson plans (see below), but that does not mean that procedure is very efficient. Philanthropists seeking to make them more effective might usefully link support for teacher training courses to support for associated thematic curricular units. Commissioned textbooks also should craft their narratives to support natural jumping-off points for a catalogue of thematic curricular units. Organizations creating thematic curricular units also should craft their materials to align with these textbooks.

Lesson Plans

iCivics, the Bill of Rights Institute, and the 1619 Project have all focused on creating individual, modular lesson plans, so that teachers and homeschool parents may choose freely to adopt them. Some part of the civics reform campaign must include the provision of such lesson plans. Indeed, the civics reform campaign can benefit by enlisting educators to provide crowdsourced materials. Yet Americans already have available a great many lesson plans on the internet, and it is difficult to tell how many teachers actually use them, much less how much they actually affect student learning. iCivics states that as of August 2021, "iCivics games and lesson plans are used annually by more than 140,000 teachers and more than nine million students. These users are

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in every state in the nation.”¹⁴¹ This is an impressive number at first glance—but *used annually* actually tells us very little about how intensive this use is, or how great the effect. iCivics doubtless has a large, negative effect on America, but it is not clear how effectively it does its damage. A philanthropist seeking an efficient Return On Investment (ROI) is operating in a black box when he subsidizes the creation of such modular lesson plans. It would seem more sensible to create a textbook first and then create a series of lesson plans to support the textbook. This procedure would increase the likelihood that any lesson plan created actually will be used.

Primary Sources

The Ashbrook Center’s Teaching American History (TAH) and the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History now provide an extraordinary wealth of American history primary source documents—and TAH provides the means for each teacher to create his own documentary collection. Civics reformers’ challenge now is to facilitate the adoption of this material. Here we must acknowledge the extraordinarily low literacy expectations in our K–12 schools. Far too few high-school students are capable of reading the documents of our past—and far too few of their teachers. The Common Core straitjacket further inhibits genuine literacy education in favor of remedial “skills.” Civics reformers must campaign for a larger reorientation of our K–12 system to give our children the ability to read the words of America’s founders. Civics reformers might call for teaching licensure to include the requirement for teachers to take an American History and Government Primary Sources class, focused on intensive reading of challenging primary sources and training in how to get students to read them. Such a course could ensure that our wealth of easily accessible documentary resources does not go to waste.

Professional Format

Civics resources should be designed with professional polish and crafted to be web-friendly. Professional educators also should help craft them, so that they are varied, interesting, and age-appropriate. We make this second recommendation cautiously, since professional educators have a well-deserved reputation for foisting radical pabulum on students. Yet amateurs don’t always know how to make their proffered resources attract teachers or suit young learners—or even present a professional appearance. Civics reformers should apply as high standards to the professional mechanics and marketing of their materials as they do to its textual content.

Common Core Requirements

The 1619 Project articulates how its lesson plans fulfil Common Core Requirements. Given that a majority of states have signed on to Common Core, this seems useful. Civics reformers should not adjust their curricula and lesson plans to suit the academically mediocre, demonstrably failed Common Core, but should create an easy template by which to give Common Core justifications for their material.

The Civics Test

Core Knowledge has tied its civics curriculum to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Test questions. This innovation usefully reminds civics reformers that 25 states have incorporated the USCIS test into their public school civics curricula. Civics reformers ought to consider whether to imitate Core Knowledge and integrate those questions into their civics resources. Civics reformers also should consider campaigning to strengthen the USCIS Test so as to strengthen the states’ civics education. They should at the very least defend the existing USCIS Test against efforts by the radical establishment to weaken or politicize it.

Language

The radical establishment foists Orwellian jargon on students to support their policy agenda. Civics reformers should consciously avoid their vocabulary and use traditional language—*slave* rather than *enslaved*, *illegal alien* rather than *undocumented immigrant*, *sex* rather than *gender*. The radical establishment’s war on English is a central component of their war on America. Civics reformers must not surrender our language, or they will surrender our liberty.

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Access

Civics reform organizations sometimes require interested parties to send in their email addresses before they can view their curriculum resources. Some also require membership payments. These choices are comprehensible—organizations like to build membership lists and recoup expenses. Nevertheless, civics reformers' greatest goal is to get their curriculum resources universally accepted. They would do better to make their products available at the click of a button.

Multiple Strategies

The tenor of these recommendations has been for civics reformers to align their efforts, not least so as to increase the productivity of scarce resources. Yet America always has relied on federalism, localism, and competition, and civics reform efforts should support these principles. Furthermore, even coordinated civics reform efforts should include a proportion that remain independent of any overall alignment and test new strategies so as to improve civics reformers' overall campaign. Civics reformers need their equivalents of Generation Citizen, which will keep the civics reform impulse from stagnating in consensus and compromise.

Accommodations and Enduring Ideals

We the People tailors its textbook to be consensually 'bipartisan.' The Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism's (FAIR) FAIRstory Curriculum provides modular lesson plans for ethnic studies courses. The Jack Miller Center provides teacher training tailored for state licensure requirements. Civics reformers should not *a priori* reject such accommodations: we cannot simply abandon the millions of American children the radical establishment has imprisoned within their maze of curricula and education standards. But we should never make such accommodations an ideal in themselves. They should be used as necessary expedients until we can reform teacher licensure and change the 'bipartisan consensus.' Our north star must be to liberate our children from their prison, not to paint their prison walls.

Our north star must be to liberate our children from their prison, not to paint their prison walls.

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About the Author

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Mission

Pioneer Institute develops and communicates dynamic ideas that advance prosperity and a vibrant civic life in Massachusetts and beyond.

Vision

Success for Pioneer is when the citizens of our state and nation prosper and our society thrives because we enjoy world-class options in education, healthcare, transportation and economic opportunity, and when our government is limited, accountable and transparent.

Values

Pioneer believes that America is at its best when our citizenry is well-educated, committed to liberty, personal responsibility, and free enterprise, and both willing and able to test their beliefs based on facts and the free exchange of ideas.

