

The No Kings rally in June closest to me was in New Milford, CT and it was a great success turning out the largest crowd I've ever seen in this area. However, one thing concerns me about No Kings, as I'm sure it does the rest of us --- the absence of youth and young adults --- because I remain convinced that, if we can get our youth enlightened and in regular discourse with their parents and friends about the current threats to our democracy, the authoritarian path that we're on can be reversed.

I have been preaching the importance of civics education for some time but primarily to my choir, you, my "Step Forward America" newsletter readers. However, the only real captive audience out there that we have that can guarantee that the young, some of them high schoolers currently eligible to vote, others voters to be, are "informed" is the student body in the classroom. And here's the key --- if done right, this could also have the advantage of reaching another somewhat captive audience, the parents and siblings of these students.

Decades ago, the country cut back on teaching civics in K-12, and the reasons are well described in a report by the Sandra Day O'Connor Institute for American Democracy, "When and Why did America Stop Teaching Civics?" The report quotes a political scientist David Campbell, whose research focuses on civics, stating that in America "civics is not superfluous or even secondary to the primary purpose of public schooling. It is the primary purpose.... The irony of inattention to civic education is that U.S. public schools were actually created for the express purpose of forming democratic citizens."

However, as the report goes on to state, in the 1960s, “the Vietnam War and then the Watergate scandal eroded the public’s faith in government, and the notion of assimilative civic education came under attack. Its initial foes saw American civic education as a form of cultural [indoctrination] that ignored the diversity within American communities and public schools. Civic education based on a common culture was not appropriate, they said, given the variety of experiences and backgrounds that students brought to the classroom.” More recently, the benefits of civic education were further eroded by the focus on the need for more STEM education.

Those of us now seniors have been more resistant to this erosion simply due to our backgrounds growing up at a time more conducive to appreciation, admiration and love of our country than might be the case for younger generations who grew up during less honored times. Our early youth coincided with WW II. My Dad and most of his friends enlisted immediately after Pearl Harbor and he served as a naval officer in the Pacific including at the landing on Iwo Jima. Away for four years, he was to me a much admired hero as well as a father. Then, the first trip of any significance with my parents was to New York City, the highlight being the Statue of Liberty. Also, I went to school in Concord, MA and have visited “the rude bridge that arched the flood” on innumerable occasions ever since. I simply had a great deal of exposure to the best of America during my most impressionable years.

Thinking what little my generation understood growing up about WW I, the “war to end all wars,” it's certainly understandable that recent generations don't have quite the same appreciation of what it took to emerge victorious and save the free world from the pending autocracies of Germany and Japan . Think what it would take now to rebuild the naval might that was massively depleted at Pearl Harbor --- to produce the fighter and bomber air power and the invasion

manpower to push the axis half way across Europe back to Berlin --- and wipe them off all their Pacific island fortresses --- all within a mere 3 ½ years --- and immediately thereafter lead the rebuilding of a devastated Europe through the Marshall Plan.

That said, civics education in primary and/or secondary schooling is available in most states, albeit much too limited, and, if reinforced throughout life by trusted news sources, is critical to maintaining our democracy. If we can get a significant focus on current events included in the civics, US History, or other social studies courses, we can be well on our way to reaching both misinformed and uninformed students and parents. If we put these lessons on paper --- referred to as “Weekly Readers” in my school days --- or a flash drive --- as a handout that students can take home and use to open an after school continuing dialog with their parents and siblings ---an opportunity to practice civil discourse--- what a positive effect it would have in increasing the number of informed adults, informed voters--- the ultimate in rebuilding our democracy from the bottom up.

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

Some of us may be teachers, school officials, or school board members and presumably most of us have friends or colleagues who are, and, if we would pursue them, it could go a long way to getting us back on track. Many teachers, at least in Connecticut, already do work current affairs into their curriculum, but it is not mandated.

In other words, attending the rallies that I first mentioned is a good start, but let's keep being heard in all ways possible. Talk it up at your senior centers, suggest to your minister that he address democracy, if only indirectly, in his sermons. Surely, religion and government can work hand in hand even in a democracy that separates church and state.

But there is another more efficient way to "spread the word" to all, both young and old, and that is simply through our day to day dialog with friends and family. Just as civics instruction in schools has been cut back, so has discussion of controversial issues for some of the same reasons. We have withdrawn into our "identity" groups and have failed in our responsibility for civil discourse with those outside of these groups. In doing so, we have weakened rather than strengthened our bonds with others. We discuss controversial issues with friends who share our same identity. And occasionally we reveal unwanted surprises that we have experienced and don't want to experience again, for example, Anti-Trumpers who make an anti-Trump statement and too late realize to our dismay that those with whom we are conversing are not of our persuasion.

So here's what we all should be doing. In daily conversation with others of any persuasion, known or unknown, bring up a political potentially controversial current affair. As I write this, the Iran bombing is an excellent example. There's plenty of opportunity for common ground here. If you lean to the left, you might say --- "What do you think about our bombing the Iran nuclear facilities? I must say it was remarkably well timed, executed, and successful." Then, a conversation starts with plenty of opportunity to civilly agree or disagree about the long term results, since the media both left and right is expressing the complete range of consequences. And there are so many similar very interesting current issues where the long-term consequences are at least

somewhat unknown, where both sides have rational arguments --- Ukraine --- global warming --- foreign aid --- electric vehicles --- the civil rights of immigrants --- crime control---- wealth inequality --- domestic manufacturing, etc. There are huge opportunities for common ground, huge opportunities to get both youth and elders more involved and to develop rather than erode friendships --- and, at the same time, to swing undecideds as well as some conservatives away from the path to autocracy.

How about “Shouldn’t there be some exceptions to obtaining citizenship simply by being born here” instead of “Why don’t Trump and SCOTUS read the Constitution.”

Then continue on with a good subject for a challenging discussion between those of opposite persuasions “Do you think that the originalists on the Supreme Court who unconditionally uphold the second amendment right to bear arms will also unconditionally uphold the fourteenth amendment birthright citizenship?”

For those of us seniors who have grandchildren in K-12 or college or starting careers, let’s not feel we’re intruding on what should be parents’ responsibilities, by talking to them about both current affairs and the past glories that make America great. Considering our present challenges, perhaps the one of the currently most pertinent lessons that we can give to keep America great is in the words inscribed under the Statue of Liberty : "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

For whatever reason, while in the past, preserving democracy and enhancing our governance has stood right beside living conditions as a determinant of our citizens’ concerns when electing our leaders, that is

no longer a guarantee, and this apparently applies to the younger generations or else we'd see them at the rallies. So these words of Lady Liberty applied to the immigration issue can be a good way to reverse this trend of citizens' concerns.

Democrats of the "elite" or "educated class" must realize that half the country is dissatisfied not just with the living conditions, but with our institutions that seem to ignore their culture which David Brooks in his *New York Times* June 6 article simplified as "faith, family, flag, respect for people in all social classes." The institutions are intended to preserve this culture, but are flawed in their methods. The Democrats should take the lead in effectively changing the institutions and make a strong message that Trump is merely destroying them. Immigration reform, crime control, USAID, and campus violent protests are all opportunities for changes that will restore confidence in our institutions.

For comments, further information or requests to unsubscribe, contact me at tedhol@charter.net

Ted Hollander
www.StepForwardAmerica.com