

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America.

A Broadside for the Nation

Preparing College Students for Informed Citizenship

2026

A document prepared by the National Commission on American History and Civics Education American Council of Trustees and Alumni



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IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. — We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such Principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object, wins a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security. — Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world. — He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good. — He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them. — He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only. — He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their Public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures. — He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people. — He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within. — He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Law for Naturalization of Strangers; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands. — He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers. — He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries. — He has created a multitude of new Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our People, and eat out their substance. — He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our Legislature. — He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power. — He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our Laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation: — For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us: — For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States: — For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world: — For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent: — For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by jury: — For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences: — For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies: — For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments: — For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever. —

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Since its founding in 1995, ACTA has advocated requiring all college students to complete a foundational course in United States government and history. Our **What Will They Learn?**[®] project rates the general education programs at over 1,100 American liberal arts colleges and universities, evaluating whether they require students to take courses in seven core subject areas, including U.S. government and history.

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A Broadside for the Nation

**Preparing College Students for
Informed Citizenship**

2026

**A document prepared by the
National Commission on American History and Civics Education
American Council of Trustees and Alumni**



ACTA
AMERICAN COUNCIL OF
TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI

“ If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.*

THOMAS JEFFERSON

A Broadside for the Nation

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Executive Summary

True patriotism includes a commitment to and appreciation of American values and principles. Since the Founding of our nation, our greatest leaders have recognized that our freedom and our prosperity depend on informed and engaged citizens.

But we face ever-deepening civic illiteracy, which is particularly dangerous at a time when America is beset by such fiercely partisan politics.

Recognizing that America's 250th anniversary is cause for both celebration and a long-overdue call for renewal, 24 historians, political scientists, and education leaders have joined in a National Commission on American History and Civic Education. The National Commission has a simple, yet essential goal: the restoration of the requirement that every college student complete a semester-long course on the American story. Our schoolteachers, our business leaders, our professionals, our government leaders must not receive a diploma without this training.

It is an ambitious goal, a multi-year project, which will do much to fulfill the vision of the American Founders. In this *Broadside for the Nation*, we explain in detail why American higher education must restore this foundational requirement for college graduates to know the American story, what such a course might include, and, crucially, how to make this vision a reality.

The National Commission noted the recent, extensive surveys that show the depth of the crisis:

- Sixty percent of college students cannot identify term lengths for senators and U.S. representatives, and 48% believe that the president, and not Congress, holds the power to declare war.
- While only 43% of students would fight to defend the United States against a foreign invasion, 27% are willing to condone violence to stop a speech on campus.

And yet, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) documents in its What Will They Learn?[®] project that only 19% of U.S. colleges and universities mandate even a single course on American history or government. This scandalous situation must end.

The National Commission maintains that the required course should be carefully crafted, incorporating essential primary texts: at a minimum, the Declaration of Independence; the United States Constitution; the Federalist and Anti-Federalist Papers; the Emancipation Proclamation and the Gettysburg Address; and documents of the civil rights era. The course should offer a broad survey of the major moments and themes in American history.

Implementing the requirement will be most effective when institutions and faculty can claim ownership, and the ways for this to happen may vary depending on the nature of the institution.

The National Commission took note of legislatively mandated American history or government courses, with 14 out of 50 states having such a requirement. South

Carolina's REACH Act, which mandates an American history or government course covering a minimum core of primary texts, has served as a model for various other states since its passage in 2021.

Centers or institutes of civic thought, several of which have been legislatively established at public universities, promote a culture of civic education. They often take the lead in developing and teaching foundational American history and government courses.

At both private and public institutions, trustees and donors have an important role to play in advocating for robust civic education. It is a matter that transcends academic departments and their particular interests: Governing boards should exercise leadership to ensure that it happens. They should partner with faculty and university administrators to build a sense of campus ownership as the requirement takes shape. Donors can provide incentive grants and gifts targeting the creation and maintenance of a required course on the American

story, as well as civics centers. This support is essential at private universities.

The required course on American history and government should always be vibrant and engaging. A wide array of resources are available to fire students' imagination. Throughout the nation are landmark sites where major historical events happened. Museums with historical collections bring immediacy to the American story through the objects that inform political, military, and social history. Online archives and collections provide the visual evidence that can make the moments of America's past come alive. Debate and dialogue are the DNA of a free society, and giving students the opportunity to debate pro and con the decision points in the American story helps them walk the walk of our history. We must get this right.

A rebirth of civic knowledge would be a most fitting 250th anniversary gift to America.

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A Broadside for the Nation

Preparing Students for Informed Citizenship

I. Democratic Republicanism is Fragile

Ignorance of America's institutions, principles, and history weakens commitment to our nation and its future. It threatens the country as much as any foreign army. Without a knowledge of the country's history, young people will struggle to realize how important, precious yet fragile, our constitutional order remains.

Two recent surveys vividly demonstrate the risk we face.

A survey of 1,000 Americans was released by Quinnipiac University on March 7, 2022, two weeks after Russia invaded Ukraine. President Volodymyr Zelensky and his nation have fought a long war against fearful odds for their independence and freedom. But when the Quinnipiac survey asked Americans, "If you were in the same position as Ukrainians are now, do you think that you would stay and fight or leave the country?" 48% of the respondents, aged 18–34, signaled that they would flee.¹ The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) followed with a survey of 3,026 college and university students in April 2025 and asked a similar question: This time, 57% percent responded they would flee.²

Those findings should cause alarm, but what ought to strike genuine terror into the hearts of American citizens is that over half of college students who *said they were very or somewhat likely to pursue careers in public service* would choose flight over defending our nation.³

The dangers we face cannot be dismissed as hypothetical: When an angry mob broke into the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021, to overturn the presidential election, news outlets in the People's Republic of China held the event up to the world as a sign of the failure of

liberal democracy.⁴ It could only have brought delight to America's foes when surveys showed a level of cynicism so deep that few would defend her borders.

In the words of the late Bruce Cole, past chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities: "Defending our democracy demands more than successful military campaigns. It also requires an understanding of the ideals, ideas, and institutions that have shaped our country."⁵ That is what sustains a lasting patriotism.

We must regain "the mystic chords of memory" that Abraham Lincoln invoked, hoping in 1861 to dispel the gathering clouds of what would be the war that cost more American lives than any other in our history. As Lincoln put it, those "chords" stretch "from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land."⁶ We need

“There is little that is more important for an American citizen to know than the history and traditions of his country. Without such knowledge, he stands uncertain and defenseless before the world, knowing neither where he has come from nor where he is going.

—President John F. Kennedy

that history; we desperately need to learn from past mistakes and from what has brought about America's brilliant successes.

Education can provide only part of the response to the danger of civic dissolution, now clear from disregard for the rule of law and the sanctity of our Capitol. But though only one part of the solution, it is a crucial one.

Many of the country's great statesmen have made the urgency of understanding American values, principles, and history explicit. As John F. Kennedy wrote, "There is little that is more important for an American citizen to know than the history and traditions of his country. Without such knowledge, he stands uncertain and defenseless before the world, knowing neither where he has come from nor where he is going. With such knowledge, he is

no longer alone but draws a strength far greater than his own from the cumulative experience of the past and a cumulative vision of the future.”⁷ In his Farewell Address, Ronald Reagan expressed concern that America was, indeed, losing its memory: “If we forget what we did, we won’t know who we are. I’m warning of an eradication of the American memory that could result, ultimately, in an erosion of the American spirit. Let’s start with some basics: more attention to American history and a greater emphasis on civic ritual.”⁸

These concerns rest on a long, long history.

The American Founders worried about the future of the Republic, but put their faith in an educated and virtuous citizenry committed to upholding constitutional government.⁹ Even in the early nineteenth century, Alexis de Tocqueville noted this strategy was working when he observed that an informed citizenry helped preserve America’s democratic character.¹⁰ The ensuing years seemed to prove the Founders’ judgement as American democracy withstood the Civil War and the threats of fascism and communism, steadily providing a democratic model for foreign powers.¹¹

Civic education also needs to help students understand the nation’s historical role in the world and its interactions with other nations and regimes. Throughout its history, the United States has engaged internationally in ways that differ from those of traditional empires, relying not only on military force and formal diplomacy but also on commerce, private initiative, technological innovation, and cultural exchange. Understanding this record matters. It provides essential context for evaluating American power with historical seriousness, especially in fraught times of international tension.

In every era, America has faced challenges at home and abroad. The troubling signs are before us, however, that American democracy is now urgently in need of informed recommitment. Americans’ limited understanding of history and government lies at the heart of the problem, and higher education is the gateway to the solution.

■ The Civics Crisis on Campus

Not only do Americans know ever less about history and government, but a recent Pew study also suggests civic knowledge is weakest among college-aged Americans.¹²

According to a 2024 multiple choice survey conducted by ACTA, 60% of college students could not identify the term lengths for senators and members of the House of Representatives, and 48% believed the president, not Congress, holds the power to declare war.¹³ A majority had so vague a knowledge of the Founding that they chose 1776 as the year the Constitution was written.¹⁴ Since so many students remain ignorant about the Constitution, it is unsurprising that they also show confusion about the nation’s values and principles: Not only did 20% on the same survey suggest that government should be allowed to censor or punish blasphemy (which is protected by the First Amendment), 14% identified imperialism as a “core principle of American civic life.”¹⁵ Worse yet, nearly 12% of those who responded that they were very or somewhat likely to enter public service identified white supremacy as a core principle of American civic life.¹⁶

Given that many hold a dim—and ignorant—view of the United States, it becomes tragically comprehensible that a majority would flee the country if invaded, rather than stay to fight.

Lincoln once observed that America would not succumb to foreign enemies, but rather it could “die by suicide.”¹⁷ This would happen when citizens’ recollection of democracy’s vulnerability grows too weak to restrain them from violence, political paralysis, or even—may it never happen again—civil war.¹⁸ George Washington insisted that “public opinion should be enlightened” in order to promote civic virtue and avoid “attempts to shake the foundation” of free government.¹⁹ Worrying signs, however, suggest deficient knowledge and limited understanding are beginning to lead America down that path.

While only 43% of students would fight to defend the country, 27% in a different survey said they might condone violence as a way to stop a speech on campus.²⁰ Other data suggest Americans remain frighteningly open to settling political disputes by force.²¹ Students are morally and civically confused: They know too little about the country to realize why they should defend it and protect its values.²² Their cynicism is too often fueled by a pedagogy that uses American history as a tribunal of judgment rather than a complex story of human striving. When students are taught to view the United States merely as a colonial power or an imperial aggressor, rather than as a commercial republic that has frequently secured global

stability and freedom, and has the potential to do far more, they are left without the moral framework to understand how to maintain its principles and why their nation is worth defending.

The way out of this dysfunction is clear: Students need to learn about the country's history and enduring values.

■ Educating Citizens

Requiring all college students to complete an introductory class on American history and government could help allay the threat of civic breakdown.

It would not pose an insurmountable burden: Most colleges and universities mandate that undergraduates fulfill general education requirements or a core curriculum in fields outside their major and minor. Eighty-one percent of the programs surveyed by *What Will They Learn?*⁸, for example, sensibly require all students to take a natural science class.²³ Likewise, nearly every higher education institution *offers* classes on American history and government. That, of course, does not mean they *require* students to take such a class. Therein lies the problem: While 81% require a science class, only 19% mandate any class on American history or government.²⁴

As Richard Haass, a member of this National Commission, observes in his book entitled *The Bill of Obligations*:

The Ten Habits of Good Citizens, requiring an American history and civics course may meet with apathy and possibly hostile rejection from many students, professors, and administrators.²⁵ Although trustees and legislators should always respect and maximize academic freedom, it falls entirely within their rights and duties to establish, in collaboration with faculty experts, the framework for core requirements. Ensuring students understand the American story should be high on any list of priorities. Ron Daniels, president of Johns Hopkins University, has insisted that “democratic citizenship must be learned. Universities must do their part to teach it.”²⁶

Outlining the nature and key components of the course is also important. Some curricula emphasize engagement in community projects at the expense of understanding America.²⁷ Encouraging students to serve their communities and the needs of their fellow citizens is vitally important, and, properly structured, enhances civic education. But unless students acquire an understanding of America's free institutions and how they developed over time, their civic education is tantamount, in the words of National Commission member Wilfred McClay, to giving everyone a chemistry set without instructions, assuming that they will all learn chemistry. Therefore, what undergraduates should learn and how to ensure that a robust curriculum is required matter greatly. These issues are the subject of the following sections.

II. A Course on American History and Government

■ Teaching American History and Government

Colleges and universities will have legitimate concerns about the resources needed for a new required course on American history and government.²⁸ Institutions themselves, however, already have more resources than might be apparent to create cost-effective, high-quality courses on American history and government. A reenvisioning and streamlining of general education requirements, for example, might not only provide more effectively the foundational skills and knowledge that college students need but could save up to 10% of the instructional budget, crucial at a time of increasingly limited higher education funding.²⁹ Introducing a carefully designed American history and government

requirement can actually be the springboard for a careful reconsideration of one of higher education's biggest cost drivers: the excessive number of course options to fulfill distribution requirements or credit hour requirements.

Furthermore, reinstating an American history and government requirement offers an opportunity for a team-taught course that becomes a distinguishing experience at a college or university that ultimately will be shared across generations of alumni. The institution's most eminent faculty and guest lecturers could speak on their academic specialties, supplemented by small group discussions led by junior faculty, adjuncts, and graduate students. The course thus could pool expertise from political science, economics, history, art, classics, literature, and music. It might feature, for example, an economist on the New

Deal and the Great Society, a classical scholar on the ancient models that influenced the Founders' vision of a democratic republic, and a musicologist on the significance of jazz, blues, and other musical forms developed on our shores. It could prompt the creative genius of the institution's faculty to work in collaboration. A new introductory course could offer an opportunity for an overdue reset: Institutions also could use the opportunity to emphasize the importance of vibrant, effective pedagogy and offer training for instructors who are likely to feel particular responsibility for the course, given the large number of new students.³⁰

Universities might also consider prohibiting students from taking the class on a pass-fail basis as a way of emphasizing its importance. Likewise, many institutions allow students to substitute credit from Advanced Placement (AP) classes or in some cases to test out of the requirement. This is an opportunity to drop that undesirable expedient.

This white paper identifies crucial primary sources without which no foundational class can be considered complete. The creative instructor will find a cornucopia of resources to enliven the course: documentaries, multimedia, historical artifacts, and visits to museums and historical sites.

Likewise, professors should not hesitate to give students opportunities to reflect on the defining events in American history in exciting ways. They could host debates in class where students argue, for example, the Federalist and Anti-Federalist positions on the adoption of the Constitution or the respective visions of Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton of what kind of nation the new republic should be. In addition to deepening historical knowledge, such experiences will help students realize that debate and discourse over key policies and decisions in our history are part of America's DNA.

■ Essential Texts

No student should leave college without a deep understanding of the country's most important documents, from the Founding to the civil rights movement. Any required course should include them. But faculty should enjoy full

freedom to shape the course in a way that is appropriate for the particular institution. The key texts described are inter-related closely with others that instructors can incorporate to widen students' understanding of the documents and their significance. We emphasize primary documents because of their power and depth as well as the importance of habituating students to the practice of grounding opinion in evidence.

These texts are timely and urgent. Each one takes us to moments when decisions were made that dramatically affected the lives of those who made them and turned

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the course of the nation's history. A glance at the controversies of our own times will quickly answer for college students why every American citizen needs to understand the

texts and their continuing resonance in our history. In the compass of this short section, we can only provide a few suggestions for ways to present these documents as an invitation to a discourse that embraces the American story.

1. The Declaration of Independence

In the context of Britain's steadily tightening control of the American colonies and restriction of freedoms the colonies had enjoyed, study of the Declaration of Independence opens a world of political thought and human drama. What was it that made prosperous and comfortable men pledge their “lives, fortunes and sacred honor” in the hazard of a revolution against the mightiest empire of its day? As students examine the Declaration to answer that question, they will learn the origin and meaning of our rights, the meaning of equality, and, ultimately, the legitimate purposes of government.

In that light, the Declaration invites comparison with the 1620 Mayflower Compact and the emergence of concepts of consent of the governed and social contract. An ambitious instructor could draw comparisons with elements of Enlightenment philosophy that underlie the Declaration and Thomas Jefferson's ideals, especially John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* and “Letter Concerning Toleration.” Those ideals not only permeated the colonies through academic discourse, but they also made their way into coffee houses and taverns where

patriots debated Thomas Paine's 1776 pamphlet *Common Sense*. Studying these texts in their historical context offers a window into the spirit of the day: The course can address the radical nature of what the American Revolution wrought, resetting the political order based on concepts of equality, natural rights, liberty, and consent of the governed. It can even include study of how the Declaration affected other nations, from the French Revolution to invocation of its principles in the 1930 Declaration of Purna Swaraj of India and in the 1948 Declaration of Israel's Independence.

2. The United States Constitution

An extensive unit on the U.S. Constitution forms arguably the most important part of an American history and government requirement. It reflects in its amendment process its aspirational goal of a more perfect union. The most intense controversies of our day—the power of the president, how presidential elections are to be decided, and the necessity of checks and balances among the three branches of government—are all constitutional issues. The rising generation should know what it means when those entering federal, state, or military roles take an oath to uphold the Constitution.

While the Constitution is a distinctly American document, the Framers did not draft it in isolation. They were influenced by a long tradition of thought on the ideal form of government, particularly ideas about balance, made operational in the separation of powers, which are prominent in Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws* and even before him in the work of Polybius on the Roman constitution. Thus the Constitution offers a segue to an appreciation of the Western tradition of political philosophy.

Study of the Constitution should involve a discussion of representation, the separation of powers, federalism, the creation of an energetic executive power, and independent courts. It should also include a rigorous look at the Bill of Rights, especially the First Amendment, because of its importance in political debates throughout America's history. Faculty could assign, for example, John Dickinson's (rejected) religious liberty clause, Frederick Douglass's "A Plea for Freedom of Speech in Boston," or opinions in Supreme Court cases such as Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.'s dissent in *Abrams v. United States* (1919) and Louis Brandeis's concurrence in *Whitney v. California* (1927).

3. The Federalist and Anti-Federalist Papers

Faculty have many options among the 85 *Federalist Papers* for assembling a selection for students to read. The members of the National Commission called attention to several that might be particularly useful for articulating key principles of the American constitutional order. Commissioners especially commended to the attention of instructors Federalist 1 on the uniqueness of the American republic and Federalist 51 on the separation of powers. These might be meaningfully set in the context of some of the most important *Anti-Federalist Papers*, such as Brutus 1. Together with Federalist 51, the Anti-Federalist position could facilitate discussion about the powers of the federal and state governments. Federalist 10, where Madison argues that a larger republic is more likely to curb the danger of "faction," might inspire debate about contemporary partisanship, and it could also be a valuable lesson in tolerance of differing political perspectives. The less often read Federalist 14 urges readers to think not as citizens of their respective states but as Americans. Federalist 37 would readily spark discussion about the roles of the House of Representatives and the Senate. For those classes that include discussion of Montesquieu, in Federalist 9, Hamilton argues that the ideas proposed by Montesquieu would allow Americans to overcome the defects of many ancient republics.

4. The Emancipation Proclamation, Gettysburg Address, and Other Civil War Era Documents

The Emancipation Proclamation focuses students on America's second great revolution: the end of slavery, which was the reaffirmation of the goal of the Declaration and the beginning of the path to full civil rights. It inevitably will provide a window into the ferocious and terrifying battles of the Civil War as well as the presidential leadership of Abraham Lincoln and his commitment to saving the Union. So does Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, whose call for a "new birth of freedom" summons Americans to the self-evident truth of the Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal. At the same time, it provides an ever-timely reminder of the vulnerability of free government.

Study of this period encourages deeper exploration of the story of slavery and its abolition. This might include readings from the Founders who opposed slavery, including Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and John

Dickinson, as well as works by prominent antebellum abolitionists, among them the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* and articles from William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator*.

5. The “I Have a Dream” Speech and Other Texts on the Struggle for Justice

Although the Founding and Civil War played crucial roles in fashioning the American political order, the following centuries also would see profound struggles for freedom. Perhaps foremost among the relevant documents is Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, “I Have a Dream” speech which encapsulates African Americans’ protests for equal rights. It belongs

in its historical setting of the August 28, 1963, March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, when approximately 250,000 demonstrators gathered before the Lincoln Memorial

on the National Mall. This speech and other documents on the same topic, including John Lewis’s “Wake Up America!” speech, which was delivered at the same march, along with King’s own “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” helped lay the groundwork for the passage of the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965).

Instructors could consider enriching discussion of the civil rights movement through study of other twentieth-century fights for and debates over liberty and justice, by interweaving texts such as Congressional acts of the Progressive Era; Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points speech of 1918; Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s 1933 First Inaugural Address; the “Why We Fight” film series; John F. Kennedy’s 1961 Inaugural Address; and Ronald Reagan’s 1987 address at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin.

■ Major Moments in American History

In a one-semester class, faculty inevitably will need to select with care the time periods and events that are particularly important for understanding our history. The story of America begins before the arrival of the first settlers with the history and cultures of the American Indians who inhabited the continent for thousands of years. The colonies’ steady development and sometimes

difficult brushes with the crown set the stage for a revolution marked at times by bloody fighting and the heroic resistance of patriots against the most powerful military power in the world. The American Revolution needs to be seen through the extraordinary bravery and perseverance of the patriot militias but also, in the words of National Commission member Gordon Wood, as “a momentous upheaval that not only fundamentally altered the character of American society but decisively affected the course of subsequent history.”³¹

Understanding the controversies and debates that led to the drafting and ratification of the Constitution and subsequent adoption of the Bill of Rights offers a window into political process, raising questions that remain today. Missteps, disputes, and their resolutions in the early years of the nation, such as the Alien and Sedition Acts and the heavily contested presidential election of 1800, offer more insight into the country’s constitutional tradition and the workings of the young democratic republic.

Faculty will face difficult choices about how to cover events between the Founding and Civil War in a one-semester course, including the expansion of the right to vote that helped bring Andrew Jackson and the Democratic party to power. This era saw the settlement of the west, which sparked war with Britain (1812–1814), war with Mexico (1846–1848), and wars with numerous Indian tribes. As in so many aspects of American history, students will grapple with moral complexity: Jackson’s decision to expel Indian tribes from much of the south to pave the way for western settlement led to immense suffering and a crisis over the authority of the Supreme Court.

Teaching the period after the Civil War is rich with options. Faculty could prioritize integrating social, economic, and military events that had strong impact on American history. These include Reconstruction, the Gilded Age, and the Progressive Era as well as the Spanish-American War, World War I, women’s suffrage, Prohibition, and the Roaring Twenties. In any course, the Great Depression and World War II are particularly essential for understanding the twentieth century. Study of World War II is also an opportunity to engage students in

“Understanding the controversies and debates that led to the drafting and ratification of the Constitution and subsequent adoption of the Bill of Rights offers a window into political process, raising questions that remain today.”

the topic of American grand strategy, showing how victory was secured not just by military valor, but by the “arsenal of democracy”—the dynamism of a free people harnessing their private and civilian energies for the war effort. Students should learn how the United States, unique among great powers, used this strength after the war not for territorial conquest, but to rebuild former adversaries in Europe and Asia, fostering a global order of prosperity and freedom.

Likewise, the dangers of the Cold War and the nuclear age will prompt consideration of the American practice of civilian control of the military, and students should be encouraged to assess America’s global role comparatively. While the United States military has been an enormous factor in geopolitics, open trade, political self-determination, and postwar reconstruction have been similarly determinative. Examining these differences helps students evaluate America’s record, recognizing moral complexity, failures, and successes, while also seeking to understand goals and vision. Discontent in the 1960s and 1970s, and the conservative response in the 1980s, when many Americans grew increasingly focused on crime, high taxes, and policies toward the Soviet Union, remain relevant today and are topics that encourage different perspectives in analyzing this relatively recent history. Most college students in 2026 have no personal recollection of the September 11, 2001, terror attacks and the resulting War on Terror. It is a history essential for understanding the present.

■ Themes in American History and Civics

Instructors may wish to use major themes in our history as organizational threads to enhance student learning.

The ancient models that informed the American project illuminate the worldview of the Founders as they sought to establish a republic of a size and durability unprecedented in history. Likewise, the influence of the Enlightenment widens perspectives on the Founding generation and the constitutional order it wrought. Battles for equal rights demand similar attention since they pervade American history. This subject also encourages debate and discussion

of difficult moments in our history, when America failed to live up to our principles.

Economic history, including the development of free market capitalism, is essential for understanding the American story. The topic includes the tensions of economic growth that sparked the emergence of unions and labor laws, ongoing debates over taxation, and persistent worries about the distribution of wealth. Scientific and technological progress is another part of America’s heritage. It is a rich story extending from Revolutionary experiments with a submarine to the invention of the telegraph to the building of the

“**The ancient models that informed the American project illuminated the worldview of the Founders as they sought to establish a republic of a size and durability unprecedented in history.**

transcontinental railroad to development of the telephone by Alexander Graham Bell and the airplane by the Wright brothers, to the conquest of many infectious

diseases, all the way up to the moon landings and the frontiers of AI and quantum computing.

Likewise, organized religion has always held an important place in American private life, sometimes receding before waxing again over a series of Great Awakenings. Religion accounts for the founding of many colonies that offered havens to Puritans (Massachusetts), Catholics (Maryland), and Quakers (Pennsylvania), among others. The Founders’ commitment to religious freedom in a government that, in Washington’s words, “gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens,”³² set a distinctive tone for the country as it grew, and it remains a distinguishing element of contemporary life.

In coming to understand American foreign policy, a comprehensive perspective is very important, acknowledging both successes and failures. Students will benefit from exploring the aspirations within the nation to oppose tyranny and enable freedom, and how the nation’s republican civic character—rather than an imperial one—has shaped its engagement with the world.

It will take the vision of the institution and the skill and knowledge of faculty to weave the complex and challenging story of America into a course that will inspire a lifelong engagement with the American heritage and the ongoing duties of citizenship. Done properly, it cannot fail to achieve this goal.

III. Restoring the American History Requirement at Public and Private Universities

Members of the National Commission view restoring a requirement for a foundational course in American history and government as a major priority. This task is urgent for the future of the nation and for the future of higher education. At a moment when public support for higher education has fallen to one of the lowest points in its history, education leaders can embrace a strong American history and government requirement as a step toward restoring confidence in the country’s colleges and universities.

This effort will be most effective when it inspires a sense of faculty and institutional ownership. The following section addresses how to make this happen at both public and private institutions and in environments with established procedures of shared governance.

Public Universities and State Law

Public colleges and universities educate 77% of America’s higher education students.³³ Over the years, many state legislatures and state higher education boards have either mandated a full, three-semester-hour course on American history and government or prescribed a body of core primary texts and general themes that students must study. According to a recent report, 14 of the 50 states already have mandated such a course at public institutions.³⁴ We now have the benefit of seeing how different state policies have fared in restoring the requirement for a foundational course.³⁵

Several state bodies have recently established or reaffirmed requirements.³⁶ South Carolina’s Reinforcing College Education on America’s Constitutional Heritage (REACH) Act, signed into law in 2021, requires a course that “provides a comprehensive overview of the major events and turning points of American history and government.”³⁷ It prescribes a list of documents students must read, including the United States Constitution in its entirety, the Declaration of Independence in its entirety, the Emancipation Proclamation in its entirety, a minimum of five essays from the Federalist Papers as selected by an instructor, and one or more documents that are foundational to the African American freedom struggle.

South Carolina’s REACH Act has served as a model (and inspiration) for states that wish to adopt a requirement or strengthen existing policies. One of those states is neighboring North Carolina, and it provides an illuminating comparison. When its legislature began debating its own version of the REACH Act, it faced strong opposition from the faculty of the University of North Carolina (UNC)–Chapel Hill.³⁸ The UNC Board of Governors then implemented a similar requirement on its own initiative, the “Foundations of American Democracy” policy. The policy currently prescribes a course (or courses) in which students “evaluate key concepts, principles, arguments, and contexts” in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Federalist Papers, as well as “the arguments and contexts surrounding” the Gettysburg Address, the Emancipation Proclamation, the “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” and other texts that “reflect the breadth of American experiences.”³⁹

The UNC Board of Governors’ policy is an important first step, but compliance with its letter and spirit varies among and even within public institutions in the state. At UNC–Chapel Hill, a faculty committee determines whether a proposed course fulfills the Foundations of American Democracy requirement. Qualifying courses may vary in their fidelity to the spirit of the policy. Some courses, such as those offered through the university’s School of Civic Life and Leadership, clearly provide the rigorous treatment of American civics envisioned by the policy. Institutions should be encouraged to take ownership of academic improvement, and thorough quality control is crucial.

Although the UNC Board of Governors’ policy applies to 15 institutions, only three so far require a course focused on American history or government that compares favorably with the standards prescribed by other state legislatures. The remaining 12 allow students to satisfy the policy with courses that often address unrelated topics.⁴⁰

By comparison, most of South Carolina’s public colleges and universities comply with the REACH Act, which prescribes strong sanctions for noncompliance: Ten of the 12 institutions subject to the REACH Act require a

course on American history or government.⁴¹ These include courses strongly focused on the American story, such as Clemson University’s “HIST 1010 – History of the United States.”⁴²

Senate Bill 1, the Advance Ohio Higher Education Act, passed in 2025, prescribes a robust requirement for every undergraduate at the state’s public universities.⁴³ The bill stipulates a three-semester-hour civics course to include, at a minimum, the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, five essays from the *Federalist Papers* selected by the department chair, the Emancipation Proclamation, the Gettysburg Address, “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” and writings of Adam Smith, including a study of the principles in *The Wealth of Nations*. Every student who takes the course is required to pass a cumulative final examination that assesses understanding of the documents listed above.⁴⁴

The directors of Ohio’s five university civics centers, which were established and funded by the state legislature in 2023, regularly exchange ideas on how to implement the requirement. The Ohio legislature also established the Ohio Civics Board, which may review and accredit courses to fulfill the civic education requirement, hold conferences, and suggest further general education improvements.

Legislation introduced in Tennessee in 2026 would likely establish similar expectations for undergraduate study at the state’s public universities. Tennessee House Bill 291/Senate Bill 1077 sets forth requirements that are very similar to those in Ohio Senate Bill 1, including a cumulative exam on key historical documents.⁴⁵ The bill also calls upon the Institute of American Civics at the University of Tennessee–Knoxville to develop appropriate curricular materials and distribute them to other Tennessee public universities as a model.⁴⁶

Legislation offers one approach for ensuring universities fulfill expectations. States will still struggle to provide a sound education if faculty do not support teaching American history. This should serve as a reminder of the importance of encouragement and incentives which the legislature or the institution (or both) can provide.

Another challenge to face is that some key historical fields—including diplomatic, constitutional, and military history, important components of an introductory course—are often underrepresented within academic departments. As the momentum grows for colleges and universities to establish an undergraduate requirement in American history and government, they will need more qualified and committed instructors. This presents a challenge in the short term, but it may be welcome news for graduate students aspiring to an academic career in America’s political tradition and history.

Centers of Civic Thought

The momentum for restoring the American history and government requirement is mirrored by the increasing number of states that are investing significant public funding in the creation of new civics centers on university campuses. These centers or institutes focus on the American constitutional and political tradition and typically operate independently from established departments. Often, they adopt a commitment to intellectual diversity and the free exchange of ideas in their charters and are well-suited to explore the debates and decision points that characterize our national history. As

is particularly evident in Ohio, these centers help establish networks promoting best practices in civic education, an advantage that scholars and teachers of the American story cannot readily find elsewhere.

They have bipartisan appeal. The first of the civics institutes, at Arizona State University, was established with Republican funding in 2016 and since earned support from a Democratic governor and legislators. In 2022, Governor Bill Lee called for founding the Institute of American Civics at the University of Tennessee–Knoxville, “a beacon celebrating intellectual diversity at our universities and teaching how a responsible, civic-minded people strengthens our country and our communities.”⁴⁷ The Tennessee General Assembly approved initial funding of \$6 million by an overwhelming bipartisan majority of 120-6.

Increasingly, civics centers are assuming a larger role in providing quality courses that meet the state requirements. In Fall 2025, the University of Florida’s Hamilton School for Classical and Civic Education offered 13 sections of “Civil Discourse and the American Political Order,” a class that fulfills Florida’s civic education requirement.⁴⁸ Furthermore, as noted above, the Institute of American Civics at the University of Tennessee–Knoxville is likely to play a seminal role in developing a statewide template for a required course on the American story. That process began in Summer 2025, when the Institute of American Civics hosted 24 faculty from eight different institutions for a workshop on its new Foundations of American Civics course.

Likewise, the UNC–Chapel Hill School of Civic Life and Leadership, noted above, already offers a minor in American Civic Life with courses on the Declaration of Independence, American democracy, and Foundations of American Civic Life, among others.⁴⁹ The University of Texas–Austin School of Civic Leadership is offering courses in Spring 2026 on Constitutional Principles, Abraham Lincoln, Democracy and Capitalism, American Institutions, and other topics related to the history and principles of America: Thirty-three sections are available for students across its various courses.⁵⁰

Beyond the prominent new centers of civic thought at flagship public universities, others are also appearing at private institutions, sometimes with the help of private donors. Johns Hopkins University, for example, received a \$150 million gift in 2017 to establish the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Agora Institute which offers a bachelor’s degree in Moral and Political Economy and a minor in Civic Life among other offerings.⁵¹ Yale University established a new Center for Civic Thought last spring.⁵² The Chang Chavkin Center for Liberal Education and Civic Life at Bard College, directed by National Commission member Roosevelt Montás, is opening its doors in Spring 2026. As civics centers become more prominent at private institutions, they could also help design and coordinate a new required class.

■ The Role of Boards and Philanthropy

The establishment (or re-establishment) of the undergraduate American history and government requirement is a duty for which governing boards by all rights should take responsibility, whether the institution

is public or private. In states where a legislative mandate was the impetus for the curricular requirement, the enthusiastic support and oversight of the board can help to make it part of the institution’s culture. Boards of trustees have a particularly important role at private universities, since these institutions will not be subject to a state mandate, but the urgency of setting the American history and government requirement is equally great at private and public institutions. There are good models from which to learn. Although not specifically focused on American history or civics, Columbia University and St. John’s College have long maintained robust core curricula that include the Founding documents.⁵³ Similarly, Virginia Union University, a historically black institution, and Baylor University require all undergraduates to take American history courses.⁵⁴ Trustees can emphasize that in these cases, the strong requirements help establish the institutions’ reputations, attract students, and build public trust.

Although trustees hold ultimate governing authority, boards (or their academic affairs committees) generally will achieve the most by partnering with presidents, provosts, and sympathetic faculty. As an important early step, they can help to form a faculty working group to plan the structure of an introductory course (or courses).

While boards bear a crucial responsibility, so do donors, especially those who support private institutions.

Universities will establish course requirements more readily if they do not have to draw all the needed resources from existing budgets; therefore, incentive grants from philanthropists could spur faculty and administrators to promote civics and history. While legislatures may provide them to public institutions—or on an ad hoc basis to their private counterparts—boards also can consider special fundraising initiatives, as well as reallocating money from existing budgets.

Donors can help make sure their gift is put to good use by targeting their funds for the creation of an appropriate required course on the American story. They can not only condition gifts on universities’ implementation and maintenance of American history standards but also consider funding civics centers, which by charter could bear that responsibility. Many alumni share concerns about whether students will continue to honor the

same traditions and institutions as they did themselves; supporting mandatory standards for American history and government is one of the best ways to ensure posterity upholds their values.⁵⁵ Together, stakeholders can help private universities match or even exceed the standards legislators are setting for their public equivalents. But gaining foundational understanding of American history and government must not remain optional, as it now is at too many institutions.

■ Excellence in Education

What a course on the history and government of our nation should never be is a stale, dry exercise of memorization bereft of the drama and immediacy of the nation's ongoing story and the quest for a more perfect union. There are abundant resources throughout America to make such a course dynamic and engaging. The National Endowment for the Humanities' (NEH) long standing Landmarks of American History and Culture programs identify sites from coast to coast that invite deep exploration of the story of America. There are hundreds of museums, large and small, where college classes can examine historical objects that provide direct, often dramatic evidence of past eras. In commemorating America's 250th anniversary, many museums have built special exhibits. In addition to its storied, extensive displays of Americana, the New York Historical, for example, is launching an event in Summer 2026 at which visitors can view original documents from the Revolution. Philadelphia's Museum of the American Revolution has special exhibitions in celebration of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration, including *The Declaration's Journey* and the opportunity to view George Washington's war tent.⁵⁶

Historical engagement with local sites is intellectually and even emotionally effective. Tours of George Washington's Mount Vernon help visitors realize how much the first president's worldview was shaped not only by his experience as a general and statesman, but also as a farmer. The advantage of these experiences is not only that they

enliven history for students but that they provide a second point of contact with history that can stimulate interest long after the course concludes. Depending on a college's location, visits to Valley Forge, Monticello, Gettysburg, the Alamo, Pearl Harbor, the Wounded Knee National Landmark, Ford's Theatre, the Women's Rights National Historical Park at Seneca Falls, and a host of other places where history happened will fire the imagination.

There is a wealth of information and opportunities for teachers and students available online to enhance the study of the American story. Khan Academy offers vivid online instruction. Judge Douglas Ginsburg's Civics Fundamentals is of particular importance as students with limited knowledge encounter the documents of our Founding.⁵⁷ ACTA's College Debates and Discourse (CD&D) Alliance has developed a robust set of curricular tools designed to enable college faculty to immerse students in debates, dialogues, and civil discourse programming that closely align with civic education and preparation for engaged citizenship.⁵⁸ On college campuses across the

“ Reestablishing the expectation that all college students take a course on American history and government will require building nationwide consensus. . . . As mentioned earlier, debates of decision points in the American story are an ideal way for students to sharpen their understanding and recognize that our history is indeed complex and worthy of deep discussion.

state of Virginia during academic year 2026, the CD&D Alliance is launching a series of intergenerational “Public Square” debates on topics related to American democracy and governance. Studium's High School Law Review, a social

studies supplemental program centered on the life skill of agreeable disagreement, uses the Constitution and Supreme Court cases to help students practice civil discourse, analytical writing, and reasoned debate, with applications far beyond secondary school and learning opportunities that are both lively and enduring.⁵⁹

Reestablishing the expectation that all college students take a course on American history and government will require building nationwide consensus. The emerging civics centers typically offer excellent public programming that can also be incorporated into a college class. As mentioned earlier, debates of decision points in the American story are an ideal way for students to sharpen their understanding and recognize that our history is indeed complex and worthy of deep discussion.

IV. In Summary: The Nation at a Crossroads

Americans stand divided, perilously divided. A 2022 Pew Research Center poll determined that 72% of Republicans view Democrats as more immoral than their own party, while 63% of Democrats say the same about members of the GOP.⁶⁰ These percentages grew dramatically from 2016: an increase of 25% and 28%, respectively, and it bodes ill for national unity. Studies also show that the will to use political violence is growing alarmingly, rising in parallel with ignorance of the country's history and political institutions. More than ever, we need to learn from past successes and past mistakes and be inspired by the mystic chords of memory that Lincoln invoked.

Political systems that rest on the consent of the governed depend on unbroken commitment. When people forget their history and how vulnerable free governments are, they relax their efforts to uphold them, neglect the dialogue, debate, and compromise that are the lifeblood of free societies, and risk spiraling into violence and anarchy. They have little idea of how past generations have faced divisive issues. The United States must redouble efforts to educate posterity or face the erosion of our constitutional order.

As a commission, we encourage all colleges and universities to require a class on American history and government. We believe that a sound course must trace the major events of American history, particularly those bearing on the structure of government, like the Founding and the Civil War. The course must not omit key topics underlying the nation's institutions, such as the intellectual origins of republicanism and the people's struggles to ensure the country realizes the ideals of our Founding documents. Those documents necessarily form an essential component of any serious course.

The optimal path for re-establishing the requirement lies at the institutional level; trustees, administrators, and

faculty can work together. Incentives are naturally better than mandates at building a culture of commitment to teaching the American story. But the nation cannot wait indefinitely as the crisis deepens. When public institutions fail to restore the requirement, legislatures have a responsibility and a duty to set curricular expectations. They can take South Carolina's REACH Act and Ohio's Senate Bill 1 as models, while looking for ways to encourage implementation through grants and additional funding. Legislators also can contribute to the quality of American history and government courses by founding centers of civic thought at state universities that also can be resources for other public institutions as they implement the new requirement.

Legislatures cannot mandate a similar requirement at private institutions, but it remains no less important that private institutions set such a requirement. At private institutions, trustees can give direction to administrators, citing donors' support for civics and public disaffection with higher education.

But above all, they can emphasize that America stands at a crossroads between restoring civic consciousness and the erosion of our constitutional order. The measures our commission has outlined would help set her more than a few steps down the former path. It is a choice that depends on a cross section of society, including legislators, trustees, donors, professors, and of course, students themselves.

It can be done.

Leaving the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin is said to have remarked that America would have a republic if we "can keep it."⁶¹ He did not mean that we lacked the ability to maintain it. He feared that we eventually might choose not to do so.

That choice lies before the nation.

ACTION ITEMS: What Needs to Be Done and How to Make It Happen

The only effective remedy for ignorance of America's story is studying and learning. The benefits of establishing (or re-establishing) an American history and government requirement for college students are manifold. Doing so will provide students a shared experience in seeking to understand the nation in which they reside. Their discussions and debates will invigorate campus life, igniting a common conversation on America's values and principles that will prepare college students for informed citizenship.

The National Commission accordingly calls for the following actions to be taken to ensure that all students gain this foundation on which the future of our free society depends.

Colleges and Universities

Reinstituting the American history and government requirement must be a priority for the institution. Colleges and universities err if they assume, despite the evidence, that students arrive on campus with an acceptable level of knowledge and understanding of the American story.

Civic education should be an important part of the culture of the institution: Therefore, exemptions based upon high school-level work should be granted only sparingly, if at all. Pre-collegiate work cannot substitute for true, college-level exploration of the richness and complexity of America's history and its free institutions.

Both public and private institutions looking for models as they plan their own new courses can readily find them. There are examples of statewide requirements, such as those in Ohio, Florida, Texas, and South Carolina. There are also examples of American history and government requirements at private institutions, including Columbia University, St. John's College, Virginia Union University, and Baylor University.

At a time when public confidence in higher education is at an all-time low, the commitment of colleges and universities to the preparation of informed and engaged citizens will send a powerful signal of their dedication to the public good.

Faculty

Faculty expertise and creativity will play a determinative role in shaping an effective course. Whatever the configuration of the course may be, it must include close study of a core of key texts and historical moments to be a valid fulfillment of the requirement. The National Commission pointed to a core that includes, at a minimum: the Declaration of Independence; the United States Constitution; selections from the Federalist and Anti-Federalist Papers; the Emancipation Proclamation and the Gettysburg Address; and texts illuminating the African American struggle for equal rights, such as Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, "I Have a Dream" speech. Along with those texts, the course must offer a survey of the major moments and themes in American history. This will extend from the colonial period through the twenty-first century, and it will engage the political debates on rights and freedoms, scientific and technological innovation, religious history, military and foreign policy, and economic history.

It is inexcusable for such a core course to be perfunctory and dull. Effective faculty will encourage and structure classroom debates on historical issues. The course should also include visits to historical sites and museums to see and experience the material evidence of history. The wealth of historical archives, museum collections, maps, and videos available online can add depth and excitement to teaching and learning.

Trustees

While deferring to faculty expertise and respecting academic freedom, trustees are ultimately responsible for the quality of the educational programs of their institutions. Shared governance means that governing boards, working with the academic administration of the president, provost, and deans, have a duty and right to ensure that students complete a full-semester course on American history and government before they graduate. Trustees should never attempt to micromanage academic work, but it is within their purview to ensure that students receive an education of quality.

■ State Governments

When public institutions fail to establish and implement an appropriate requirement for the undergraduate study of American history and government, it falls to state legislatures to establish guidelines that ensure that these taxpayer-funded institutions deliver the civic education students need. In many states, legislatures have mandated general education course requirements and outlined the subjects to be covered. Creating and funding independent centers for civic education, as some legislatures have done, is a powerful way to provide campus resources for the study of American history and government.

State governments can enable the restoration of robust undergraduate study of American history and government with incentive grants to help institutions build greater capacity for faculty development. Nothing precludes legislatures from also providing such incentive grants to private institutions for the same purpose.

Voters should insist that gubernatorial candidates address historical literacy as a statewide and national crisis. It falls

to governors to appoint public university trustees who understand the importance of the undergraduate study of the American story.

■ Donors

Foundations and individual donors have the potential to incentivize and enable institutions to establish and maintain a strong American history and government requirement. Major foundations, including the Rockefeller Foundation, the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, and the Lumina Foundation, have made efforts in the past to strengthen civic education: A large-scale restoration of a degree requirement has high likelihood of drawing philanthropic support. Alumni who remember the core curriculum of their collegiate study are likely to support enthusiastically its restoration.

It is hard to imagine a moment more ripe for institutions of higher education, state government, philanthropists, and the academic community to join forces to solve the crisis in civic education.

Endorsements

ACTA thanks the teachers, scholars, and public leaders listed below who have signaled their endorsement of the work of the National Commission on American History and Civic Education. We are grateful for their commitment to restoring the requirement for all undergraduates to complete a course on the story of our nation.

Samuel Abrams

Sarah Lawrence College
American Enterprise Institute

John Altman

American Council of Trustees and Alumni
Board of Directors, Chairman Emeritus

Michael Auslin

Hoover Institution, Stanford University

Lee Barnes

The Barnes Family Foundation of North Carolina

James Bennett

Granby Capital Management, LLC

Douglas Bradburn

Historian

Carlos Campo

Museum of the Bible

Paul Carrese

School of Civic & Economic Thought and
Leadership, Arizona State University

Courtney Chapin

National History Day Board of Trustees

Michael M. Crow

President, Arizona State University

John Danielson

USC Schwarzenegger Institute Board of Advisors

Justin Dyer

School of Civic Leadership, The University
of Texas at Austin

Sir Niall Ferguson

Hoover Institution, Stanford University

Steven Frankel

Hamilton School of Classical and Civic
Education, University of Florida

E. Gordon Gee

The Ohio State University

Robert P. George

James Madison Program in American Ideals
and Institutions, Princeton University

Claire McCaffery Griffin

Formerly with the Bill of Rights Institute

Aimee Guidera

Harvard Kennedy School
Former Virginia Secretary of Education

Victor Davis Hanson

Hoover Institution, Stanford University

Harlan Crow

Crow Holdings

Roger Hertog

Hertog Foundation

William Inboden

The University of Texas at Austin

Pano Kanelos

Civitas Institute, The University of Texas at Austin

Jeff Kaplan

The Ohio State University Board of Trustees

Dolores Kohl

Dolores Kohl Education Foundation

Bruce Kovner

The Kovner Foundation

Suzie Kovner

The Kovner Foundation

Robert Lewit

American Council of Trustees and Alumni
Board of Directors, Chairman Emeritus

Glenn Loury

Brown University

Charles T. (Tom) McMillen

University System of Maryland Board of Regents
Former U.S. Representative

John McWhorter

Columbia University

Jack Miller

The Jack Miller Center for Teaching America's
Founding Principles & History

Eli Noam

Columbia Business School

Pete Peterson

Pepperdine University

Joel Picket

Gotham Organization

...to declare the causes which impel them to the separation. . . . We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, . . .

Thomas Rollins
Founder, The Teaching Company

Diana Schaub
Loyola University Maryland
American Enterprise Institute

Colleen Sheehan
Arizona State University

Elizabeth Spalding
Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation

Matthew Spalding
Hillsdale College

David Bruce Smith
Grateful American Foundation

Steven Smith
Yale University

R. Scott Stephenson
Museum of the American Revolution

Lee J. Strang
Salmon P. Chase Center for Civics, Culture, and
Society, The Ohio State University

Nadine Strossen
New York Law School

Donald W. Sweeting
Colorado Christian University

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Florida Atlantic University

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University of South Carolina Board of Trustees

George Will
The Washington Post

Ruth Wisse
The Tikvah Fund

Robert Woodson
The Woodson Center

Hans Zeiger
The Jack Miller Center for Teaching America's
Founding Principles & History

Affiliations are listed for identification purposes only and do not necessarily imply an official endorsement by the listed institution.



THE SIGNER by Evangelos Frudakis 1982, Independence National Historical Park, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The statue depicts George Clymer, Founding Father who signed both the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution.

Endnotes

1. Another six percent did not answer or said they had no opinion. “Vast Majority Of Americans Say Ban Russian Oil, Quinnipiac University National Poll Finds; Nearly 8 In 10 Support U.S. Military Response If Putin Attacks A NATO Country,” Quinnipiac University Poll, March 7, 2022, <https://poll.qu.edu/poll-release?releaseid=3838>.
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27. Kelly Field, “Teaching ‘action civics’ engages kids—and ignites controversy,” *Hechinger Report*, August 1, 2021, <https://hechingerreport.org/teaching-action-civics-engages-kids-and-ignites-controversy/>. Note the analogy very similar to Dr. McClay’s above.
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37. “Reinforcing College Education on America’s Constitutional Heritage Act (REACH Act).”
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40. Jeffrey Schulman, “REACH Act would put teeth in UNC System’s civics requirements,” *Carolina Journal*, December 10, 2025, <https://www.carolinajournal.com/opinion/reach-act-would-put-teeth-in-unc-systems-civics-requirements/>. For example, North Carolina Central University designates “HIST 1320 – World Societies” as fulfilling the Foundations of American Democracy policy. Likewise, Elizabeth City State University only slightly modified the description of a preexisting class, “HIST 141 – Making of the Modern World,” to satisfy the policy.
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When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them; a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. — We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and Happiness. — Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. — But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security. — Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. — The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. — To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world. — He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good. — He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation, till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them. — He has refused to assent to other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only. — He has called together legislative Bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their Public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures. — He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people. — He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean-time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within. — He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Law for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands. — He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers. — He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries. — He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance. — He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our Legislatures. — He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the civil power. — He has combined with the Kings of France to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation: — For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us: — For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States: — For compelling us to accept of a Trade with all parts of the world: — For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent: — For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by jury: — For transporting us beyond seas to be tried for pretended offences: — For abolishing the beneficial System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies: — For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments: — For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever. — He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us. — He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people. — He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation. — He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands. — He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the Inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions. — In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms. — Our repeated Petitions have been answered by repeated injury. — A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people. — Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our British brethren. — We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarranted Jurisdiction over us. — We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. — We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. — They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of conciliation. — We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind; Enemies in War, in Peace Friends. — We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to lay War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. — And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the Protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes



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