

# Our Underachieving Civics Curriculum



## *Toward a K-16 Education for Informed Citizenship*

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Center for Higher Education  
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by Thomas K. Lindsay, Ph.D.

## Key Points

- It is not accidental that the word “liberal” in “liberal education” has the same root as the word “liberty.” Liberal education is an education for and through liberty.
- The cultivation of free minds simultaneously transcends and depends on the political freedom enshrined in the American Constitution.
- All students, regardless of major, should be required to study the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and *The Federalist*—as well as the other sources that both informed the Founding and reacted to it.
- According to U.S. Department of Education statistics, only one in three college students graduate having taken even one course in American government.
- With the view to enhancing fidelity to the letter and spirit of Article VII of the Texas Constitution, university regents and the State Board of Education should institute reforms that place more focus on teaching students basic American history, government, economics, and Western civilization.

*Whenever the people are well-informed, they can be trusted with their own government; that, whenever things get so far wrong as to attract their notice, they may be relied on to set them right.*

—Thomas Jefferson

*The best service that can be rendered to a Country, next to that of giving it liberty, is in diffusing the mental improvement equally essential to the preservation, and the enjoyment of the blessing.*

—James Madison

*If a nation expects to be ignorant and free...it expects what never was and never will be.*

—Thomas Jefferson

We at the Texas Public Policy Foundation agree with Jefferson and Madison that, if we fail to restore to our colleges and universities the civic-education function with which they have been entrusted, in short order we shall lose the capacity for self-government on which individual liberty and limited government ultimately depend.

Moreover, so long as civic education is ignored at the collegiate level, we can expect the same neglect at the K-12 level: Our K-12 instructors receive their teacher training from colleges and universities.

To address this challenge, the Texas Public Policy Foundation’s recommendations for a proposed K-16 civics curriculum follow.

## Education for Informed Citizenship

While nearly all of us expect students to acquire employable skills while in college, at the same time, we hope for something more, something higher, than job training alone. This hope is reflected in the distinction we draw between “vocational” and “liberal” education. Vocational education is oriented chiefly by what it might enable students to *do* with their education.

Liberal education is oriented chiefly by what it might enable students to *be* by virtue of the education they have received.

It is not accidental that the word “liberal” in “liberal education” has the same root as the word “liberty.” Liberal education is an education for and through liberty. In one important respect, Western civilization may be said to be built on Socrates’ premise that the “unexamined life is not worth living.” From this it follows that the highest liberty of which human beings are capable is the liberty of the mind, that is, freedom from unexamined assumptions; for example, swings in intellectual fashion, politics, and ideology. Liberty at its peak is thus identical with the quest for truth. This quest not only defines a university’s deepest and highest purpose but also constitutes the best defense of its claim to academic freedom.

In the course of educating students, our university leaders should come to recognize that the intellectual liberty they pursue depends on their institutions being situated in a system of political liberty. That is, the cultivation of free minds simultaneously transcends and depends on the political freedom enshrined in the American Constitution. This dependence, along with the commitment to enhancing their students’ self-knowledge, should lead all universities to require of all their students, regardless of major, that they study in a comprehensive fashion the principled foundations of American democracy, beginning with the Founding documents—the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and *The Federalist*—as well as the other sources that both informed the Founding and reacted to it.

Such an approach is required if we are to fulfill both Jefferson’s and Madison’s mandates, which grow out of the unique character of the American experiment in self-government. This uniqueness becomes clear on examination of the document that seeks to provide the justification for our very existence as an independent nation—the Declaration of Independence. Its claims are meant to be universal, addressed not only to King George III, but to a “candid world.” The Declaration announces that, in the new American order, blood, creed, and national origin—the constituents of citizenship throughout history—have been dethroned. Instead, U.S. citizenship entails adherence to moral and political principles the truth of which, says the Declaration, is

“self-evident” to those who reason rightly. These principles, which form what has been called the “American theory of justice,” argue for human equality; for the inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; for government established by popular consent; and for the right of the people to rebel should government cease to fulfill the purposes for which it was instituted. On this basis, the United States is more than a mere address, more than its history, and more than its demographics. It is, in its essence, an *idea*.

Yet how many of us today can recount the Declaration’s four self-evident truths? More crucial, how many of us have even a rudimentary grasp of the moral and intellectual foundations of the American theory of justice? For years, surveys have told us that the answer to both questions is, precious few. This cannot help but alarm those of us who believe, with the Declaration’s author, Thomas Jefferson, that no nation can expect to be “both ignorant *and* free.” But neither should we be surprised at the surveys’ results, says Derek Bok. The former

### American higher education can and must do better at providing civic education, without which our democracy cannot survive.

president of Harvard University argues in *Our Underachieving Colleges* that American higher education can and must do better at providing civic education, without which

our democracy cannot survive.

Bok laments the fact that most colleges in the country today do not require even an introductory course in American government, the result of which, according to Department of Education statistics, is that only one-third of undergraduates ever complete such a course. With such a paucity of college courses, how are today’s students to become tomorrow’s leaders? How can we the people fully defend what we do not fully understand? Bok adds a lesser yet legitimate point that the obligation to provide civic instruction is not limited to state-funded public institutions of higher learning: Because our private universities benefit from tax exemptions and federal financial aid, they too have a duty to provide civic education as part of their claim to providing a “public good.”

The issue becomes clearer when we survey the history of higher education in this country, from which we discover that required courses constituting a “core curriculum” of studies in American history and government, economics, and the history of Western civilization were attacked during the late 1960s and early 1970s as irrelevant to the crises of the day. There followed a

gradual withering away of such requirements. Forty years later, a study by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), entitled *The Hollow Core*, finds that core curriculum requirements have not been reinstated in the overwhelming majority of our colleges and universities ([American Council of Trustees and Alumni 2004](#)).

In 2007, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI), a nonprofit educational organization, issued a study that found Texas undergraduates failed at civics ([Scott](#)). Nationwide, 50 universities were surveyed, three of them in Texas—Baylor University, West Texas A&M, and the University of Texas at Austin. Nearly 1,000 Texas freshmen and senior students were given a 60-question test on American history and institutions.

Texas students at these institutions performed worse than their peers nationwide. More troubling still, the survey found that only 2.9 percent of students' civic knowledge is learned in the college classroom. Texas' comparative deficiency in knowledge of civics may be explained by another of the study's findings: undergraduates at these three Texas universities were below the national average in the number of history, government, and economics courses taken during college.

Again, Texas is not alone in attempting to deal with this problem, which has been with us for some time. For example, in 2000, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni commissioned the Roper Organization to conduct a survey of seniors from the nation's 55 best colleges and universities. The results were published in *Losing America's Memory: Historical Illiteracy in the 21st Century* ([American Council of Trustees and Alumni 2000](#)). The survey found that "four out of five seniors—81 percent—received a grade of D or F on test questions drawn from a basic high school history curriculum."

## Recommendation

Article VII, Section 1 of the Texas Constitution states:

SUPPORT AND MAINTENANCE OF SYSTEM OF PUBLIC FREE SCHOOLS. *A general diffusion of knowledge being essential to the preservation of the liberties and rights of the people, it shall be the duty of the Legislature of the State to establish and make suitable provision for the support and maintenance*

of an efficient system of public free schools. (Emphasis supplied.)

With the view to enhancing fidelity to the letter and spirit of Article VII of the Texas Constitution, university regents and other administrators should be encouraged to institute reforms that place more focus on teaching students basic American history, government, economics, and Western civilization, whether through a standardized test or more course options/requirements.

The study of American government should focus on our polity's core principles of human equality and individual liberty. This focus should proceed through examination of a number of fundamental documents and major speeches. The questions regarding the meaning of human equality, inalienable rights, popular consent, and the right of revolution require study of the Declaration, along with Frederick Douglass' 1852 address, "The Meaning of the Fourth of July for the Negro," and Chief Justice Taney's infamous opinion for the majority in the *Dred Scott* case (where Taney denies that African-Americans have any rights that whites are bound to respect).

Against Taney, Frederick Douglass' and Lincoln's

scathing critiques of the *Dred Scott* opinion need to be taught.

The Declaration needs also to be scrutinized in its relation to the pro-women's-suffrage, 1848 Seneca Falls "Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions" and the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, delivered on the National Mall in 1963. Students' attention should be directed to these questions, among others:

*Why did Elizabeth Cady Stanton look to the form and substance of the Declaration of Independence in crafting the Seneca Falls Declaration?*

*What did the Reverend King mean by asserting, contrary to Taney, that the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution constituted a "promissory note to which every American was to fall heir"?*

The U.S. Constitution, of course, must be taught to all Texas students. As both critics and admirers of the Constitution agree, there is no more authoritative commentary on that document than *The Federalist*, the series of 85 newspaper essays defending and explaining the Constitution, written during the period that the states

## Texas students performed worse than their peers nationwide on a 60-question test on American history and institutions.

were debating its ratification. Specifically, the issues of representation, minority rights, and the economics of democracy require examination of the Constitution and *The Federalist*, which should then be contrasted with writings and speeches on economic democracy of both Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt.

To argue for the need to reform Texas' public universities' civics curriculum is not to deny its merits. Far from it. To its credit, Texas receives a "B" grade from ACTA on core curriculum requirements. However, our state can do better. For example, few of our public universities require the study of economics as well as a foreign language. In the ACTA survey, for example, Texas is shown to require courses in comparative literature, government and history, mathematics and science, but not economics. In a global economy, we can ill afford to be indifferent to our students' need to master economics.

More important, the founders of this country believed that history demonstrates that where there is no protection of property rights, there is no reliable protection of human rights. For both reasons, Texas students need to understand economics generally as well as its relation to politics. Accordingly, the governor of Texas should appoint a commission to examine whether, how, and at what cost the core curriculum requirements at Texas public community colleges, colleges, and universities might be increased to incorporate economics.

The commission also should be directed to ascertain what percentage of the Texas higher education system's core curriculum is available via the internet. The commission should explore the question of whether opening access to these courses via the internet could improve the civic education of Texas' college students and citizenry. ★

## Lower Elementary-Level Civics (K-3) Syllabus

### George Washington

[\*My Little Golden Book about George Washington\*](#) by Lori Houran

[\*A Picture Book of George Washington\*](#) by David Adler

[\*I Am George Washington\*](#) by Brad Meltzer

[\*Who Was George Washington?\*](#) by Roberta Edwards

[\*George Washington and the General's Dog \(Step into Reading\)\*](#) by Frank Murphy

### Thomas Jefferson

[\*A Picture Book of Thomas Jefferson\*](#) by David Adler

[\*Who Was Thomas Jefferson?\*](#) by Dennis Fradin

[\*The Story of Thomas Jefferson\*](#) by Patricia Pingry

[\*Thomas Jefferson: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Everything\*](#) by Maira Kalman

[\*Thomas Jefferson's Feast \(Step into Reading\)\*](#) by Frank Murphy

### Abraham Lincoln

[\*I Am Abraham Lincoln\*](#) by Brad Meltzer

[\*A Picture Book of Abraham Lincoln\*](#) by David Adler

[\*My Little Golden Book about Abraham Lincoln\*](#) by Bonnie Bader

[\*Abe Lincoln: The Boy Who Loved Books\*](#) by Kay Winters

[\*My Best Friend, Abe Lincoln: A Tale of Two Boys from Indiana\*](#) by Robert Bloch

[\*Abe Lincoln at Last! \(Magic Tree House Book\)\*](#) by Mary Pope Osborne

### Frederick Douglass

[\*Who Was Frederick Douglass?\*](#) by April Jones Price

[\*A Picture Book of Frederick Douglass\*](#) by David Adler

[\*Frederick Douglass for Kids: His Life and Times, With 21 Activities\*](#) by Nancy Sanders

[\*Frederick Douglass: The Last Day of Slavery\*](#) by William Miller

[\*Words Set Me Free: The Story of Young Frederick Douglass\*](#) by Lesa Cline-Ransome

## Ulysses S. Grant

- [\*Who Was Ulysses S. Grant?\*](#) by Megan Stine  
[\*The Story of Ulysses S. Grant\*](#) by Tamara Smith  
[\*Ulysses S. Grant\*](#) by Mike Venezia  
[\*History for Kids: The Illustrated Life of Ulysses S. Grant\*](#) by Charles River Editors  
[\*Ulysses S. Grant \(A Discovery Book\)\*](#) by Colonel Red Reeder

## Civil War

- [\*Civil War on Sunday \(Magic Tree House Book\)\*](#) by Mary Pope Osborne  
[\*The Silent Witness: A True Story of the Civil War\*](#) by Robin Friedman  
[\*B is for Battle Cry: A Civil War Alphabet\*](#) by Patricia Bauer  
[\*If You Lived When There Was Slavery in America\*](#) by Anne Kamma  
[\*Drummer Boy: Marching to the Civil War\*](#) by Ann Turner

## American Revolution

- [\*The Boy Who Carried the Flag\*](#) by Jana Carson  
[\*Quit Bossing Us Around: The Declaration of Independence\*](#) by Carole Marsh  
[\*What is the Declaration of Independence?\*](#) by Michael Harris  
[\*Revolutionary War on Wednesday \(Magic Tree House Book\)\*](#) by Mary Pope Osborne  
[\*The American Revolution\*](#) by Bruce Lancaster  
[\*Explore Colonial America!\*](#) by Verna Fisher

# Upper Elementary-Level Civics (3-5) Syllabus

## Unit 1

### Core Question: What is the Constitution?

- What basic ideas about government did the Founders have?  
 Why did the Founders believe that people needed a government?  
 What ideas did the Founders use in the Declaration of Independence?  
 What were the first state governments like?  
 How did the Framers write our Constitution?  
 What was the first national government like?  
 How was the Philadelphia Convention organized?  
 How many representatives should each state have in Congress?  
 What did the Framers do about the problem of slavery?

#### Core Readings:

- Preamble to the U.S. Constitution  
 Preamble to the Declaration of Independence  
*Federalist No. 1* (Alexander Hamilton)

## Unit 2

### Core Question: How was the Constitution formed?

- How did the Framers write our Constitution?  
 What was the first national government like?  
 How was the Philadelphia Convention organized?  
 How many representatives should each state have in Congress?  
 What did the Framers do about the problem of slavery?

#### Core Readings:

- “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” (Frederick Douglass)  
 “Gettysburg Address” (Abraham Lincoln)  
 “Corner Stone Speech” (Alexander Stephens)

### Unit 3

#### **Core Question: How does the Constitution organize our government?**

What basic ideas about government are included in the preamble to the Constitution?

How does the Constitution limit the powers of our government?

What is the legislative branch?

What is the executive branch?

What is the judicial branch?

How did the Constitution create a federal system of government?

*Core Readings:*

*Federalist No. 1* (Alexander Hamilton)

*Federalist No. 10* (James Madison)

*Federalist No. 51* (James Madison)

### Unit 4

#### **Core Question: How does the Constitution protect our basic rights?**

How does the Constitution protect your right to freedom of expression?

How does the Constitution protect your right to freedom of religion?

How does the Constitution protect your right to equal protection of the laws?

How does the Constitution protect your right to due process of law?

How does the Constitution protect your right to vote?

*Core Readings:*

Bill of Rights

“Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom” (Thomas Jefferson)

### Unit 5

#### **Core Question: What are the responsibilities of citizens?**

What is the role of the United States in the world today?

What are some important responsibilities of citizens?

How can citizens promote the common good?

*Core Readings:*

“First Inaugural Address” (Thomas Jefferson)

“Farewell Address” (George Washington)

“Speech on the 150th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence” (Calvin Coolidge)

## Middle School Civics (6-8) Syllabus

### Unit 1

#### **Core Question: What were the Founders’ basic ideas about government?**

What were the British colonies in America like in the 1770s?

Why do we need government?

What is republican government?

What is constitutional government?

How can we organize government to prevent the abuse of power?

*Core Readings:*

Excerpt from Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, Chapters XIII–XIV

Excerpt from John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government*

“Speech to St. John’s Church” (Mar. 3, 1775) (Patrick Henry)



## Unit 2

### Core Question: What shaped the Founders' thinking about government?

How did constitutional government develop in Great Britain?

What experiences led to the American Revolution?

What basic ideas about government are in the Declaration of Independence?

What happened during the American Revolution? How did the government function?

How did the states govern themselves after the Revolution?

How did the Articles of Confederation organize the national government?

*Core Readings:*

Declaration of Independence

Monroe Doctrine (James Monroe)

“Farewell Address” (George Washington)

Letter to Henry Lee (Thomas Jefferson)

Letter to Roger C. Weightman (Thomas Jefferson)

The Webster-Hayne Debates

## Unit 3

### Core Question: What happened at the Philadelphia Convention?

Who attended the Philadelphia Convention?

How was it organized?

How did the Framers resolve the conflict about representation in Congress?

How did the Framers resolve the conflict between the northern and southern states?

How did the Framers resolve the conflict about the powers of the legislative branch?

How much power should be given to the executive and judicial branches?

*Core Readings:*

*Notes on Debates at the Federal Convention of 1787* (James Madison)

*Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments* (James Madison)

## Unit 4

### Core Question: How was the Constitution used to establish our government?

How did the Constitution create a federal system of government?

How did the people approve the new Constitution?

How did Congress organize the new government?

How did political parties develop?

How does the U.S. Supreme Court use the power of judicial review?

How does the U.S. Supreme Court determine the meaning of the words in the Constitution?

*Core Readings:*

*Federalist No. 1* (Alexander Hamilton)

*Federalist No. 10* (James Madison)

“Speech on Amendments to the Constitution” (James Madison)

## Unit 5

### Core Question: How does the Constitution protect our basic rights?

How does the Constitution protect freedom of expression?

How does the Constitution protect freedom of religion?

How has the right to vote expanded since the Constitution was adopted?

How does the Constitution safeguard the right to equal protection of the law?

How does the Constitution protect the right to due process of law?

*Core Readings:*

Bill of Rights

“Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom” (Thomas Jefferson)

**Unit 6****Core Question: How was the Constitution used to establish our government?**

What is the relationship of the United States to other nations in the world?

What are the rights and responsibilities of citizenship?

How might citizens participate in civic affairs?

*Core Readings:*

Voting Rights Act (1965)

“First Inaugural Address” (Thomas Jefferson)

**High School-Level Civics (9-12) Syllabus****Unit 1****Core Question: What is justice?**

Where do we see the need for justice?

How did the Framers of our government view justice?

What are some of the issues with competing definitions of justice?

What is the relationship between justice and law?

*Core Readings:**Marbury v. Madison* (1803)*Dred Scott v. Sanford* (1857)*Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896)*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka I and II* (1954)**Unit 2****Core Question: What are the philosophical and historical foundations of the American political system?**

What did the Founders think about constitutional government?

What ideas about civic life informed the Founding generation?

What historical developments influenced modern ideas of individual rights?

What were the British origins of American constitutionalism?

What basic ideas about rights and constitutional government did colonial Americans hold?

Why did American colonists want to free themselves from Great Britain?

What basic ideas about government and rights did the state constitutions include?

*Core Readings:*

“Speech to St. John’s Church” (Mar. 3, 1775) (Patrick Henry)

Preamble to the Declaration of Independence

*Federalist No. 1* (Alexander Hamilton)*Federalist No. 10* (James Madison)*Brutus I* (Brutus)

Excerpt from Magna Carta

Excerpt from *Second Treatise of Government* (1689) (John Locke)

## Unit 3

### Core Question: How did the Framers create the Constitution?

What were the Articles of Confederation, and why did some Founders want to change them?  
 How was the Philadelphia Convention organized?  
 Why was representation a major issue at the Philadelphia Convention?  
 What questions did the Framers consider in designing the three branches of the national government?  
 How did the delegates distribute powers between national and state governments?  
 What was the anti-Federalist position in the debate about ratification?  
 What was the Federalist position in the debate about ratification?

#### Core Readings:

Topics: extent of Union, states' rights, Bill of Rights, taxation ("Pennsylvania Minority"; *Brutus I*)  
 "Government Resting on the People" (*John Dewitt No. III*)  
 "Responsibility and checks in self-government" (*Centinel No. 1*)  
 Letter from Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, December 20, 1787

## Unit 4

### Core Question: How has the Constitution been changed since its inception? Do these changes reflect the ideals in the Declaration of Independence?

How have amendments and judicial review changed the Constitution?  
 What is the role of political parties in the constitutional system?  
 How did the Civil War test and transform the American constitutional system?  
 How has the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment changed the Constitution?  
 How has the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment changed the Constitution?  
 How has the right to vote been expanded since the adoption of the Constitution?

#### Core Readings:

[Message to Congress on the 14th Amendment \(June 22, 1866\)](#) (Andrew Johnson)  
[Petition from Susan B. Anthony to Congress](#) (1874)  
[Petition for Woman Suffrage Signed by Frederick Douglass, Jr.](#) (1877)  
[House of Representatives passes the 15th Amendment on February 25, 1869](#)

## Unit 5

### Core Question: How have the principles in the Constitution shaped American institutions and practices?

What is the role of Congress in American constitutional democracy?  
 How does Congress perform its functions in the American constitutional system?  
 What is the role of the president in the American constitutional system?  
 How are national laws administered in the American constitutional system?  
 What is the role of the Supreme Court in the American constitutional system?  
 How does American federalism work?

#### Core Readings:

*Federalist No. 1* (Alexander Hamilton)  
*Federalist No. 10* (James Madison)  
*Federalist No. 14* (James Madison)  
*Federalist No. 39* (James Madison)  
*Federalist No. 51* (James Madison)  
*Federalist No. 70* (Alexander Hamilton)  
*Federalist No. 78* (Alexander Hamilton)  
*Federalist No. 84* (Alexander Hamilton)  
*Nature and Powers of the Union* (Patrick Henry)

*Need for Stronger Union* (John Dewitt)  
Letter from James Madison to George Washington (April 16, 1787)  
Speech of Patrick Henry (June 7, 1788)

## Unit 6

### Core Question: What is responsibility?

What intellectual tools are useful in determining responsibility?  
What is the importance of responsibility?  
How should conflicts between conflicting responsibilities be resolved?  
What are the responsibilities of an American citizen?

#### Core Readings:

“First Inaugural Address” (Thomas Jefferson)  
*The Duties of American Citizenship* (Theodore Roosevelt, 1883)  
Bill of Rights (14th Amendment)  
Preamble to the Declaration of Independence

## Unit 7

### Core Question: What rights does the Bill of Rights protect?

What are Bills of Rights and what kinds of rights does the U.S. Bill of Rights protect?  
How does the First Amendment affect the establishment and free exercise of religion?  
How does the First Amendment protect free expression?  
How does the First Amendment protect freedom to assemble, petition, and associate?  
How do the Fourth and Fifth Amendments protect against unreasonable law enforcement procedures?  
How do the Fifth, Sixth, and Eighth Amendments protect rights within the judicial system?

#### Core Readings:

Bill of Rights  
Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (Thomas Jefferson)  
*Property* (James Madison)  
“Speech on Amendments to the Constitution” (James Madison)  
Letter to the Hebrew Congregation at Newport (George Washington)

## Unit 8

### Core Question: What challenges might face American constitutional democracy in the 21st century?

What is the importance of civic engagement to American constitutional democracy?  
How have civil rights movements resulted in fundamental political and social change in the United States?  
How have American political ideas and the American constitutional system influenced other nations?  
What key challenges does the United States face in the future?  
What are the challenges of the participation of the United States in world affairs?  
What does returning to fundamental principles mean?

#### Core Readings:

“Speech on Amendments to the Constitution” (James Madison)  
“Gettysburg Address” (Abraham Lincoln)  
“Second Inaugural Address” (Abraham Lincoln)  
Letter from Birmingham Jail (Martin Luther King)  
“New Nationalism” (Theodore Roosevelt, 1910)  
“A Time For Choosing” (Ronald Reagan, 1964)

## Collegiate Civics Course Syllabus

### Unit 1

**Introduction: Why a “core questions” approach to the study of American democracy, and why should such study include the examination of “old books”?**

### Unit 2

**Core Question: What is American democracy? Over two centuries of dispute about our national identity.**

*At the Founding: Was America founded as a democracy or a republic? The confusion regarding the Founders’ intentions.*

James Madison, excerpt from *The Federalist*, No. 10 (1787)

James Madison, *The Federalist*, No. 39 (1788)

*What is Jeffersonian Democracy, and what is its contemporary relevance?*

Thomas Jefferson, “First Inaugural Address” (1801)

*The demographics of American political equality:*

*Early-American democracy, according to Tocqueville*

*Equality of conditions*

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, author’s introduction (1833)

*Majority rule*

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, “The Principle of the Sovereignty of the People in North America”; “The Omnipotence of the Majority in the United States and Its Effects” (1835)

*The “House Divided”—What the battle over slavery reveals about America’s core principles*

Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, “Query XVIII” (1784)

Frederick Douglass, “The Meaning of the Fourth of July for the Negro” (1852)

Alexander Stephens, “Cornerstone Speech” (1861)

Abraham Lincoln, “Address Delivered at the Dedication of the Cemetery at Gettysburg” (“Gettysburg Address”) (1863)

*Critiquing the Founders’ vision: The Progressive argument that a genuine political democracy requires “economic democracy”*

Theodore Roosevelt, “Two Noteworthy Books on Democracy” (1914)

Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Commonwealth Club Campaign Speech” (1932)

Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Message on the State of the Union” (The Economic Bill of Rights) (1944)

Lyndon B. Johnson, “The Great Society” (1964)

*The rise of “civil-liberties democracy”*

*Are courts or the people and their representatives the best guardians of liberty?*

Justice Robert Jackson, opinion of the Court in *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette* (1943)

*What is the proper balance between individual liberty and national security?*

U.S. Senator Russ Feingold, “On the Anti-Terrorism Bill” (2001)

U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft, “Address before the Federalist Society” (2003)

*Extending the national government’s reach to ensure protection of minorities: The movement toward “civil-rights democracy”*

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., “I Have a Dream” (1963)

Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, opinion of the Court in *Grutter v. Bollinger*; Justice Clarence Thomas, concurring in part and dissenting in part (2003)

## Unit 3

### Core Question: What political–economic conditions and character in the American people might best allow American democracy to balance both liberty and equality?

*The earlier argument over “small” versus “large” democracy, and why it still matters today.*

*Democracy can succeed only in a large country:*

James Madison, excerpt from *The Federalist*, No. 10 (1787)

*Democracy can succeed only in a small country:*

*Brutus I* (1787)

*Centinel I* (1787)

*What competing notions of democracy drive our ongoing debate over decentralized local government versus centralized federal government?*

Thomas Jefferson, “On Citizenship” (1824/1816/1814)

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, “The American System of Townships,” “Of Individualism in Democracies,” “How the Americans Combat the Effects of Individualism by Free Institutions” (1835)

Lamar Alexander, “Cut Their Pay and Send Them Home” (1994)

*Does it matter whether America is an agrarian or an industrial democracy?*

Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1784)

Alexander Hamilton, *Report on Manufactures* (1791)

*Federalism*

*What is the optimal relationship between the national and state governments with the view to enhancing both liberty and equality?*

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, “Advantages of the Federal System” (1835)

Ronald Reagan, “State of the Union Address” (1982)

Justice Harry Blackmun, opinion of the Court in *Garcia v. San Antonio* (1985); Justice Lewis Powell (with whom Chief Justice Burger, Justice Rehnquist, and Justice O’Connor join, dissenting); Justice Sandra Day O’Connor (with whom Justice Powell and Justice Rehnquist join, dissenting)

*Might equality both make democratic liberty possible and then destroy it?*

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, “Why Democratic Nations Show a More Ardent and Enduring Love for Equality than for Liberty” (1835)

## Unit 4

### Core Question: Who has the right to vote, on what, and why?

*Why do we hold elections?*

James Madison, *The Federalist* No. 52 (1788)

*If everyone must have the right to vote in order for America to qualify as a democracy, when did it become a democracy?*

*Voting eligibility under the original Constitution*

Excerpts from the U.S. Constitution on Voting Eligibility

Chancellor Kent, “On Universal Suffrage” (1821)

*Extending the right to vote to women: Does the Declaration of Independence provide a principled basis for the equal rights of women?*

“The Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions” (1848)

*Jane Addams’ argument for the practical benefits of extending the franchise*

Jane Addams, “Why Women Should Vote” (1910)

*Why did an earlier Supreme Court deny that the 14th Amendment extends the vote to women?*

Chief Justice Morrison Waite, opinion of the Court in *Minor v. Happersett* (1875)  
19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (1920)

*Competing visions of sexual equality*

“Complementarity” versus “sameness”:

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, “How the American Views the Equality of the Sexes” (1835)  
Barbara Jordan, “Change: From What to What?” Keynote Address at the Democratic National Convention (1992)

*Extending the right to vote to African-Americans*

15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (1870)  
Lyndon B. Johnson, “Voting Rights Act Speech” (1965)

*Extending the right to vote to 18-year-olds:*

*What was the chief argument employed to justify this extension?*  
26th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (1971)

*Are any principled limits on the right to vote consistent with American democracy?*

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, “The People’s Choice and the Instincts of American Democracy in Such Choices” (1835)  
U.S. Senator Carol Moseley-Braun, “Speech on the Motor-Voter Bill” (1994)

*Whom and what should voters have a right to vote for directly?*

James Madison, *The Federalist No. 63* (1788)  
17th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (1913)

*Presidential election through the Electoral College, rather than by direct popular election:*

U.S. Constitution: Art. II, Sec. 1 (1787)  
12th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (1804)

## Unit 5

### Core Question: What is democratic representation meant to accomplish, and what is the role of race?

*Representation in the view of the Founders and Tocqueville:*

Alexander Hamilton, *Publius Letter III*, “On the Character of the Legislator” (1778)  
Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, excerpts on “Parties” and “Governance of the People” (1835)  
 (“Why It Can Strictly Be Said That the People Govern in the United States” and “Parties in the United States”)

*Recent judicial concerns over representation:*

Chief Justice Earl Warren, opinion of the Court in *Reynolds v. Sims* (1964)  
Justice John Harlan, dissenting opinion in *Reynolds v. Sims* (1964)  
Chief Justice Earl Warren, opinion of the Court in *South Carolina v. Katzenbach* (1966)  
Justice Anthony Kennedy, opinion of the Court in *Miller v. Johnson* (1995)  
Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, dissenting opinion in *Miller v. Johnson* (1995)

*Should representation take account of individuals or groups, or both?*

Lani Guinier, “Groups, Representation, and Race-Conscious Districting: A Case of the Emperor’s Clothes” (1993)  
Justice Thurgood Marshall, “Remarks at the Annual Seminar of the San Francisco Patent and Trademark Law Association” (1987)  
Robert Goldwin, “Why Blacks, Women, and Jews are Not Mentioned in the Constitution” (1987)

*Recent presidential reflections on race and the Constitution*

Bill Clinton, “Mend It, Don’t End It” (1995)

Barack Obama, “A More Perfect Union” (2008), National Constitution Center, Philadelphia, Penn.

**Unit 6****Core Question: Why does American democracy separate the powers of government?***The original Constitution’s design for the separation of powers*

James Madison, *The Federalist No. 47* (1788)

James Madison, *The Federalist No. 48* (1788)

*How does separation of powers aim to secure liberty?*

James Madison, *The Federalist No. 51* (1788)

Justice Louis Brandeis, dissenting opinion in *Myers v. U.S.* (1926)

*How and why does separation of powers aim to make possible an “energetic” president who is “independent” of the legislature?*

James Madison, *The Federalist No. 37* (1788)

Alexander Hamilton, *The Federalist No. 70* (1788)

Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Interview by Arthur Krock” (1937)

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, “How American Democracy Conducts the External Affairs [Foreign Policy] of the State” (1835)

*How and why does separation of powers aim to make possible an independent judiciary?*

Alexander Hamilton, *The Federalist No. 78* (1788)

Thomas Jefferson, “Against Judicial Supremacy in Constitutional Interpretation” (1815)

*Should the state courts enjoy the same independence afforded the federal courts?*

Theodore Roosevelt, “The Recall of Judicial Decisions” (1912)

**Unit 7****Core Question: What do our persistent debates over religion, citizenship, and law reveal about the nature of American democracy?***The debate over whether religion is a problem for, or an essential institution of, American democracy.**How can religion be understood to be a “political institution” in American democracy?*

George Washington, “Farewell Address” (1796)

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, “On Religion as a Political Institution” (1835)

*How can religion be understood to be a political problem for American democracy?*

Thomas Jefferson, “A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom” (1786)

Thomas Jefferson, “Letter to Nehemiah Dodge and Others: A Committee of the Danbury Baptist Association, in the State of Connecticut” (1802)

Justice Hugo Black, opinion of the Court in *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947)

Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at an Ecumenical Prayer Breakfast at the Republican National Convention” (1984)

Walter Mondale, “Remarks to the International Convention of B’nai B’rith” (1984)

*Citizenship: What makes one an American?**Dispute over the role of race in citizenship*

14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (1868)

Abraham Lincoln, “Speech in Reply to Douglas at Chicago, Illinois” (1858)

Stephen A. Douglas, “From the Fifth Joint Debate [with Lincoln]” (1858)

Abraham Lincoln, “Reply to Douglas at the Fifth Joint Debate” (1858)

Chief Justice Roger Taney, opinion of the Court in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857)



*The status of law under American principles:*

*Is lawlessness built into the very foundations of American political life?*

The Declaration of Independence (1776)

*What is law-abidingness in the American context?*

Abraham Lincoln, "Speech on the *Dred Scott* Decision" (1857)

Frederick Douglass, "On the *Dred Scott* Decision" (1857)

*Why should we obey the law?*

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, "Respect for Law in the United States" (1835)

Abraham Lincoln, "The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions" (1838)

*The case for civil disobedience*

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (1963)

## **Unit 8**

**Postscript: Democracy outside America—To what extent might America's experience with democracy provide guidance to countries struggling to establish it?**

Czech President Vaclav Havel, "Address to a Joint Session of the U.S. Congress" (1990)

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## About the Author



**Thomas K. Lindsay, Ph.D.**, is director of the Foundation's Center for Higher Education. He has more than two decades' experience in education management and instruction, including service as a dean, provost, and college president.

In 2006, Lindsay joined the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) staff as director of the agency's signature initiative, We the People, which supports teaching and scholarship in American history and culture. He was named Deputy Chairman and Chief Operating Officer of the NEH in 2007.

Lindsay received his B.A., *summa cum laude*, in Political Science, and went on to earn his M.A. and Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Chicago. Oxford University Press published Lindsay's American Government college textbook, *Investigating American Democracy* (with Gary Glenn). He has published numerous articles on the subject of democratic education, many of which have appeared in the world's most prestigious academic journals, including *American Political Science Review*, *Journal of Politics*, and *American Journal of Political Science*.

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In recognition of his scholarship on democratic education, Lindsay was made the 1992-93 Bradley Resident Scholar at the Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C.

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