



A Century-Plus of Civic Education

What the Textbooks Show

Jed Ngalande

INTRODUCTION

Did the United States ever enjoy a golden age of civic education? Or has it always been fraught, contentious, and incomplete? Considering the depth of today's concerns with social unrest, questionable citizenship, and national malaise, the question is not trivial, and there is no better way to attempt to answer it than to scan prominent civics textbooks of the past century and a half. They are vivid, surviving mementos of the educational priorities of their time, as well as of the issues and challenges that preoccupied the nation. As there is a near-infinite number of such books—aimed variously at elementary, middle, and high school students, as well as colleges, educators, and sometimes the wider public—a complete analysis is impossible. However, the Stanford Libraries contain a vast collection that has yielded eighty-seven books that I believe offer useful insights into the evolution of civic education from the close of the nineteenth century to the dawn of the twenty-first.¹ I divide this period into three sections: 1885–1920, 1921–1945, and 1946–2000. Each contains emphases, events, and experiences that make the period's predominant approach to civic education more comprehensible.

FROM GOVERNMENT TO CITIZENSHIP (1885–1920)

The study of twenty-three civic education textbooks released between 1885 and 1920—ten aimed at elementary, three at middle school, eight at high school, and two at college students—reveals an arc from instruction focused exclusively on government structures to a version centered on a student's active role in the community. Specifically, of the thirteen textbooks published between 1885 and 1910, ten focused exclusively on government civics, one focused on the ethical building blocks of society, while just two divided their focus between government structure and community-centered citizenship. Of the ten textbooks published in the next decade, however, only four focused exclusively on government structures and operations. Two split their focus between government and the student's active citizenship in the community, while four dedicated themselves to the student's participatory and

vocational roles in the community. These later books, such as the *Vocational Civics: A Study of Occupations as a Background for the Consideration of a Life Career* (1919) by Frederic Mayor Giles and Imogene Kean Giles, style themselves “the new community civics,” attending to “one’s work in the world” and seeking to provide “a more adequate preparation” than the older government-focused style of civics.²

Civic education also became more personalized and mission-oriented, with Edwin W. Adams’s *A Community Civics: A Textbook in Loyal Citizenship* (1920) charging its elementary school reader with becoming a citizen who “serves his community,” “pulls with his fellows,” and says “with pride and love of country, ‘I am an American citizen.’”³

The oldest civics textbook available in the Stanford Libraries, Montague Richard Levenson’s *Primer of Morals: For Use in School and Families* (1885), was aimed at elementary students and had not adopted the nuts-and-bolts-of-government approach that followed. Levenson sought to tell children about society through the lens of the labor, economics, and ethics that build and connect communities. The book opens by detailing how every aspect of a child’s shelter and education results from labor, before making the larger point that we all “live on the products of past labor” and that this labor is built on a man’s “desire for his own happiness to gratify his own desires.”⁴ Stating that “man’s own happiness is his only motive to action,” Levenson argues that a society must develop to secure the happiness a person gets from their labor, warning that otherwise the “inducement to labor is diminished.”⁵ By this, Levenson declares interpersonal honesty and respect to be foundational to labor and society, and that “with this object in view, governments have been established.”⁶ In this manner, Levenson frames the law as a guide to the morality necessary for survival, and he concludes by attributing the “well-being and progress of society” to moral labor and the protection afforded by the government.⁷

Civics textbooks published during the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century generally veered in the opposite direction and consisted largely of government structures and functions, even though seven of the thirteen were aimed at elementary school students. Twelve of them discussed local, state, and federal law at great length and in roughly equal measure.⁸ Only Roscoe Lewis Ashley’s *The American Federal State: A Textbook in Civics for High Schools and Colleges* (1907) diverged from this pattern, focusing entirely on the federal state. Most reproduced the first three articles of the United States Constitution to describe the federal government, in addition to detailing the common structures of state and local governments and how they differed from the federal level in procession and responsibility.

Of the other twelve books, nine focused exclusively on the inception of the American government and its structure, while three—*First Lessons in Civics*, *Efficient Democracy*, and *Civics: The Community and the Citizen*—are broader. *First Lessons in Civics*, written by Samuel Eagle Forman for elementary school students in 1898, centers its discussion of government on a citizen’s own conduct. Forman assembled the chapters on government in ascending order to the federal level and started his book with “The Government of Self.” In this chapter, he advocated self-control as the center of society:

Thoughtless young people sometimes ask: “What is the use of doing right? What is the use of checking bad impulses and exercising self-control?” If you will look around you, and reflect upon what you see, you will find an answer to this question. You will find that the people who exercise control over themselves are happier than those who are carried along by passion and appetite. Sometimes, it is true, wicked and violent men seem to prosper and even to be happy. But they are not really happy. If you could learn the secret of their lives, you will find that bad, dishonest men lack one thing that is more precious than anything else in life. They may have wealth, and honor, and high social rank, but they have not their own self-respect, and no one can be truly happy without this.⁹

Forman went on to define a functional American as one who maintains a healthy relationship with their family. He writes, “The law of the home is the law of love, service, and sacrifice.” He then argues that this is foundational to community and government as “larger governments are simply a number of families bound together, and if all the families of a town or of a state were well governed, there is no doubt that the town or state itself would be well governed.”¹⁰

Efficient Democracy, written in 1908 for high schoolers by New York City urban researcher and civic advocate William Harvey Allen, took a unique approach by walking readers through government structures and functions, while inviting them to reflect on the most successful way to accomplish their duties at each level. Allen’s apparent purpose with this book was not just to teach about government but also to demonstrate that competence ranked as a good government’s most important attribute. In his first chapter, he writes: “Convinced that good government, in whatever field, will never be possible so long as goodness is to be the sole or even the chief qualification of public officers, it is proposed to substitute an Efficiency Test for the Goodness Test.”¹¹ He concludes by asserting: “Today, there is enormous waste of civic interest and of potential efficient citizenship. Everywhere it is the same story, the handful of citizens striving to lead their communities upward and forward are compelled to be superficial and to flit from one important subject to another.”¹²

Unlike the two books just discussed, Arthur William Dunn’s *Civics: The Community and the Citizen* (1910) did not charge its targets—elementary students—with a specific behavior with which to approach citizenship life or duties. Rather, it explored these concepts through the lens of the community and how the government grew out of them. Dunn referred to the family as the center of citizenship, terming it “a school of all the virtues,” writing that “if a man is a good husband, a good father, a good son, or a good brother, the probability is that he will also be a good citizen in the community.”¹³ He then related the ways that members of the community could help a citizen where the federal and state government could not, such as through housing affordability, neighborhood maintenance, firefighting, local commerce, practical education, and charity for the impoverished.¹⁴ He noted that, by the early twentieth century, many cities and towns had developed laws to support such efforts, which had previously been left to voluntarism and civil society, but he emphasized the service to the citizen’s fellows that formed the basis of those codes. Furthermore, while Dunn devoted the latter third of his book exclusively to government structures and duties, from city councilman to president, the first two-thirds focused on how community and government converged and diverged in supporting a citizen’s needs.

INDIVIDUAL CITIZENSHIP

The broader view of civics in Dunn's 1910 book foreshadows the general approach we see in most of the ten civics textbooks from the 1911–1920 period that I was able to review.¹⁵ Four of them concentrated on active personal citizenship, while minimizing or even excluding instruction on government structures. Two others—*My Country: A Textbook in Civics and Patriotism for Young Americans* and *The New Civics: A Textbook for Secondary Schools*—are divided between personal citizenship and government civics. Even the remaining four, while focused on government structure—*The American Republic*, *American Civics for the Seventh and Eighth School Years*, *Preparing for Citizenship*, and *School Civics: 2nd edition*—also give some attention to personal citizenship. In the preface of *The American Republic*, published in 1911, author Samuel Forman writes that this book, although based on his 1907 work, has a new aim: “to establish correct political ideals and indoctrinate in sound notions of political morality” so as to “improve citizenship” among America’s young.¹⁶

To this end, Forman writes: “The American voter should regard himself as an officer of government” as the “electorate has in its keeping the welfare and happiness of the American people.” He charged voters to “to try to understand the questions upon which he votes,” “to vote only for honest men,” “to place country above party,” and “to recognize the result of the election as the will of the people and therefore as the law”—all of which seems particularly relevant to America’s present moment.¹⁷

Adelbert Grant Fradenburgh devoted Chapter 9 of his *American Civics for the Seventh and Eighth School Years* (1913) to women’s suffrage, and invited students in the end-of-chapter questions to explain what they thought of Southern-state educational and poll-tax requirements as well as women gaining the right to vote.¹⁸ In *Preparing for Citizenship* (1913), William Backus Guitteau writes: “Every citizen in his individual life should live up to the same ideal of self-reliance.” The author promoted equality of opportunity, free public education, honesty, hard work, moral purity, and patriotism as other fundamental American ideals.¹⁹ In *School Civics*, Frank David Boynton cautions students that “the fundamental cause of municipal mismanagement, as of all political mismanagement, is to be found in what has been called ‘the lack of civic spirit’ on the part of citizens.”²⁰

The books of the 1910s, which focused on personal citizenship, incorporated instruction regarding citizens’ own lives and their effects on the community. In her preface to *Vocational Civics*, Imogene Kean Giles writes: “The new ‘community civics’ is being recognized as one of the most vital of junior high school studies.”²¹ In *My Country: A Textbook in Civics and Patriotism for Young Americans* (1918), Grace Alice Tarkington defined an American as someone who served his country daily, honored the United States above all countries, mastered the English language, knew how to use his hands and brain, and loved liberty.²² And in *The New Civics: A Textbook for Secondary Schools* (1918), in a comment that all but foreshadows President Kennedy’s inaugural address, Roscoe Lewis Ashley writes: “The greatest citizen of any community is the one who really does the most for it, not the one for whom the most is done.”²³

PERIOD SUMMARY

By the second decade of the twentieth century, civics textbooks had mostly shifted from a near-exclusive focus on government structures, founding documents, and laws to an emphasis on nurturing patriotic, community-oriented behavior from the students. Many of the newer books diminished or even dismissed the methodical detailings of earlier books in favor of this approach. It is important to add, however, that most of the 1910s books were aimed at middle or high school students. Perhaps the authors assumed that students would learn about governmental structures and functions in earlier grades and could now proceed on to citizenship itself.

FROM PROGRESSIVISM TO NATIONAL DUTY (1921-1945)

With the help of the Stanford Libraries, I reviewed thirty-nine civics textbooks published in the quarter century that started in 1921. Consistent with the Progressive Era in which this period opened, we initially find an emphasis on “personal citizenship” in one’s local community. This furthered the tendency in civics texts to emphasize personal citizenship and de-emphasize the structures and functions of governments.²⁴ Indeed, just one of the thirty books published between 1921 and 1937 could be described as centered on government structures. The rest emphasized teaching students “the meaning of his community life” and “the cultivation of certain habits, ideals, and attitudes essential to effective participation in that life.”²⁵ However, as the Depression deepened and World War II loomed on the horizon, we find further changes in the thrust of civics textbooks.

PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

This period opened as progressive education blossomed, expanding from experimental schools, such as the University of Chicago Laboratory School, into the mainstream. Its foremost proponent, John Dewey, viewed education as the cornerstone of every child’s life and an immersive experience more than theoretical learning from didactic instruction.²⁶ In the preface of *Community Life and Civic Problems* (1922), Howard Copeland Hill describes distributing a preliminary version for use in the Lab School for purposes of receiving feedback from teachers and students. His reason? To create a “classroom product” that would “inspire boys and girls with a desire to do their part in bettering their own groups and neighborhood as well as their state, their country, and the world.”²⁷ This perfectly complemented the philosophy of Dewey, who believed that the classroom itself functioned as a community and that students should be charged with improving the societies in which they found themselves.²⁸

Community Civics, written by Ray Osgood Hughes and published in 1921, demonstrates the shift from government-centric civics to an emphasis on students as agents of societal change. After devoting just seven pages to concepts of government such as checks and balances, Hughes enters into a lengthy discussion of the duties that citizens owe their communities.²⁹ He starts with these words: “Most people think and talk more about their own rights than about the rights of others or their own duties. It would not be fair to leave our discussion of

citizenship without suggesting the fact that rights and opportunities bring obligations along with them.”³⁰

Hughes places the onus of a functioning society on its individual citizens, asserting that “voting is not a right,” but rather “a privilege which the state gives to those whom it considers fitted to exercise it.” He makes a special point that if an American does not like certain laws, “he has the privilege of trying to get them changed by the peaceful means that are open to every citizen, but he has no right to refuse outright to obey them.”³¹ He then spends sixty pages detailing how neighborhood planning, community health, safety preservation, and local upkeep should be led by proactive individuals in the community. He illustrates this by depicting a “filthy alley, strewn with bottles, garbage, and slime” because “some officers do not dare to enforce ordinances which prohibit these eyesores.” Instead of suggesting penalties for the litterers, or better enforcement by police, Hughes proposes that “to arouse a public sentiment which will protest vigorously against any toleration of disregard of civic health is a work in which every child in school can have a part.”³²

Furthermore, Hughes links intelligence—“the ability to apply our knowledge and our talents to the condition in which we find ourselves”—to community development, beginning with the importance of culture, which “enables people to appreciate the finest and best elements in the various interests of men and women.”³³ Hughes writes that this allowed community planners to be efficient in their allocation of resources and encouraged all community members to be well-mannered toward each other. He directly attributes this to “good citizenship,” stating that “intelligence brings culture, and an intelligent, cultured patriot is the finest sort in America.”³⁴

The book later returns to the functions of government—federal, state, and local—yet Hughes continuously focuses on the citizen’s duty to uphold the order of society and proactively improve it. He minces no words, criticizing “hoboes” as individuals “unwilling to earn their own living” and “expecting other people to support them”—“glorifying in making the community feed them.”³⁵ He also begrudges the 2 billion dollars he estimates had been spent yearly on liquor pre-Prohibition. While praising the “moral reform” of Prohibition laws, he encourages readers to resist the “temptation” out of character rather than legal compulsion.³⁶

Sixteen other books published between 1921 and 1923 continue in this vein, actively charging students to improve society rather than simply instructing them on government structure and functions.³⁷ In the revised edition of *My Country: A Textbook in Civics and Patriotism for Young Americans* (1923), for example, author Grace Alice Turkington emphasizes the importance of citizens working to enable them to pay taxes for the community. Or, as she phrases it, “paying the people’s bills.”³⁸ She asserts that such services as libraries, education, law enforcement, and mail delivery are paid for by members of the community, and remarks that “perhaps fewer people would cheat the government if they understood that all of the government’s money has to come out of the people’s pockets.”³⁹ She further highlights the responsibility of those who work for the city, writing that if they “cheated the city,” then community services would be reduced for everyone.⁴⁰ To encourage pursuit both of one’s dreams and

of a viable vocation, Turkington likens life to a mountain climb: “Nothing beautiful or great was ever accomplished except by the one method of pegging away day after day at tasks that are often distasteful.” In conclusion, she stresses that “our nation cannot be powerful unless everywhere there are workers who put into their work the same kind of spirit that the mountain-climber puts into his climbing,” and that “the dreamers and climbers are the hope of the nations of the world.”⁴¹

Fast forwarding to Daniel Edward Phillips’s *The New Social Civics* (1926), we find that customs, social imitation, economic interdependence, mutual confidence, and a sympathetic bond are what knit communities together.⁴² Additionally, much like Hughes, Phillips writes that “free discussion and education” and “men of genius and insight,” as well as long-distance communication by means such as the radio, allowed discoveries and advancements to spread through the community faster.⁴³ “Patriotism,” in his view, manifests itself as a continual desire to seek improvement for one’s community and country.

THE VOCATIONAL QUESTION

The two final civics texts of the 1920s—*Vocational Civics* (1928) and *Planning a Career: A Vocational Civics* (1929)—focus specifically on training students for vocational pursuits. The former, also written by Howard C. Hill, places heavy emphasis on economics and the encouragement of work, including the scarcity of goods, the value of trade, and one’s material debt to others.⁴⁴ Hill notes that the modern era allowed young men and women occupational choices, “limited only by one’s ability, preparation, and character.”⁴⁵ He encourages readers to take advantage of this opportunity and choose only lines of work that interest them. He further highlights the importance of education past high school, stating that a more highly educated person would always hold an advantage in the vocational search. To this end, he suggests that those who do not have the finances or opportunity to attend college should pursue night school or some form of self-study. Then, after arming his students with advice, Hill charges them to apply maximum effort to the work they undertake, citing the words of Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.: “Any calling is great if pursued greatly.”⁴⁶

Gideon L. Blough and Lewis W. Smith center their *Planning a Career: A Vocational Civics* on “vocational citizenship,” which they define as “doing the best we know how, in everything we undertake, for the common good of all.”⁴⁷ They encourage students to aspire to climb the “ladder of occupations”—from unskilled laborer to the levels of executive and proprietor—and maximize their education so they could start as high on that ladder as possible.⁴⁸ As with Hill, Blough and Smith attribute vocational success to “diligent preparation, practical experience, and a determination to ‘climb.’”⁴⁹ Additionally, they tell each student that it is his “duty” to find the “native ability” he possesses that would “fit him to do one task better than another.”⁵⁰ In contrast to Hill’s book, however, Blough and Smith emphasize that one’s ultimate choice of vocation should come not only from the passion of the heart, but also from the predisposition of the mind. To this effect, their book provides a “score card” listing different character, emotional, mental, and physical capabilities and asks students to rank themselves as “below average, average, or above average” so as to help themselves determine their best career path.⁵¹

PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION MEETS THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Advocates for progressive civic education—indeed, for all forms of civic education, even for education itself—faced a severe test during the Great Depression, as schools across the land faced drastic budget cuts and many closed. To mitigate such damage, the National Congress of Parents and Teachers (NCPT) submitted a passionate defense of public schools to parents, with a specific appeal to the value of civic education. This is best seen in the organization’s 1934 book, *Our Public Schools*. Although not directed to students or educators, it qualifies as a sort of “civics text” because of its insistence that education serves as a “safeguard of democracy” and its views that education is more comprehensive than the standard reading, writing, and mathematics curriculum.⁵² The authors contend that World War I and Hitler’s rise in Germany demonstrate the “futility of an education that does not go farther than the mere disciplining of the individual and the imparting of facts.”⁵³ To prevent this from occurring in America, the NCPT argued that a child’s education is a joint responsibility of parents and teachers, which requires the two entities to work closely together.⁵⁴ Unsurprisingly, the NCPT regarded parent-teacher associations as the driving force of progressive schools and credited them for “having taken the lead in campaigning for funds to provide better buildings, better equipment, playgrounds, materials of instruction, and teachers who are more professional, more competent and better paid.”⁵⁵ Furthermore, the NCPT styled the purpose of parent-teacher associations such as itself as a restoration of the sort of intimacy that teachers and parents supposedly enjoyed in the early nineteenth century. The NCPT especially sought the collaboration of parents and teachers to establish education standards that would prepare students for the challenges of life—particularly during the Great Depression.⁵⁶

Civic education and related texts moved further toward national-oriented civic duty in the latter years of the 1930s. *The Promise of Tomorrow: The Long, Sure Road to National Stability, Family Security, and Individual Happiness* by Clay Coss and Walter E. Myer supplies a lengthy discussion of the role of “the good citizen of a democracy.”⁵⁷ However, while textbooks of the 1920s had charged students to strive for individual achievement and social betterment, Coss and Myer instruct readers of their 1938 book to “put courage, intelligence, and determination” into the reestablishment of prosperity and economic opportunity in America.⁵⁸ “Our best hope in America,” they write, “lies in the effort to get increasing numbers of people interested in doing the everyday job of doing their civic duty in their communities, states, and nation.”⁵⁹ In a slight deviation from the vocationalism of previous textbooks, they invite students to reflect on their individual intellect, social affinity, and mental abilities and suggest differing pathways based on self-assessment of the three. In their words: “One who is seriously seeking to achieve personal happiness, good citizenship, and vocational success should be able to analyze himself and determine whether his characteristics and habits are such as to take him in the direction he wants to go.”⁶⁰

NATIONAL DUTY

Much like other civics books of the late 1930s, *Community Interests: The Young American Civic Readers* (1938), by Jane Lynn Barnard, Samuel Berman, and Jane Eayre Fryer, urges

its elementary school readers to consider moral values, while teaching them about public utilities, the community, the nation, and America's relations with the world. Instead of focusing primarily on social change, however, the authors suggest (in a section on "The American Boy") that boys follow the mold set by Theodore Roosevelt—to be "fine, straightforward, clean, brave, and manly," to "be hated and feared by the wicked and corrupt," and to "use his strength on the side of decency, justice, and fair dealing."⁶¹

In 1942, with World War II underway, Coss and Myer returned with a broadened argument for nationally focused civic themes. *Education for Democratic Survival* was aimed primarily at teachers, charging them to make an "all-out effort" to teach "political preparedness" to America's young, so that they would do a better job at leading the nation than the previous generation, which the authors accused of having "fumbled with the issues of peace and security."⁶² Coss and Myer argue that the war meant teachers should prioritize education on national affairs over subjects such as mathematics and sciences, mainly because "if one misses civic training in school, he is not likely to find another opportunity for systematic education along that line."⁶³ Declaring that civic education at the time was too scant, typically relegated to a semester in middle or high school, and that it was rarely taught in connection with current affairs, they propose a twelve-unit "Education for Democratic Survival" program on national and international affairs to be taught over the course of a full academic year in conjunction with a yearlong course on current affairs.⁶⁴

PERIOD SUMMARY

The Roaring Twenties brought a progressive focus in civics textbooks, instructing students to become agents of social change and diligently contribute to the well-being of their communities. This focus shifted over the course of the Great Depression and, with the onset of World War II, toward a call for defending the nation as it was and considering one's societal place and vocational pathway through that lens. The challenges of war closed the era that fostered progressive education, but the fervor for civic education continued in a new direction.

INTERNATIONALISM TO INDIVIDUALISM (1946–2000)

The twenty-five civic education books published between 1948 and 2000 that I was able to review demonstrate a cooling of the fervor present in the era of Great Depression and World War II education. While Ward Wilbur Keesecker's *Education for Freedom: As Provided by State Laws* (1948) details the near-ubiquitous laws requiring instruction on the United States Constitution and a history or government class for all students, it also illustrates the diminished attention paid to personal citizenship and heightened attention to the democratic foundations of the United States, now urging students to consider those principles in the context of the international stage on which America now found itself a lead player.⁶⁵ Some education writers, such as Richard Spencer Childs of *Civic Victories: The Story of an Unfinished Revolution* (1952), emphasized how America's past should invigorate students of the present, that is, as much history as civics.

THE RETURN TO GOVERNMENTAL FUNDAMENTALS, WITH AN INTERNATIONALIST FRAMING

The 1949 textbook, *The American Political Mind: A Textbook in Political Theory*, by Elmer Pflieger and Grace Weston, recounts the evolution of American political philosophy from the Colonial Era to the Civil War before detailing the country's growing presence on the international stage, culminating with a chapter on "Democracy and the Struggle for the World Order."⁶⁶ The authors construct their history of America's political development to emphasize that "the United States has become a world power" and that America's young should view their nation in this context.⁶⁷ They utilize this to launch their central discussion of "the services of government" and "the improvement of American democracy" in light of "the development of world democracy" and the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union.⁶⁸ They conclude by weighing conservative and progressive visions of American internationalism, the political influence of religion, the government's role in the economy, the future of democracy, the role of education, and the values that should lead America.⁶⁹ They leave readers with the assertion that "part of the old and traditional will inevitably remain in the changing democracy of tomorrow," as well as making clear that how Americans choose to change their nation will affect other democracies across the world.⁷⁰

Keesecker's *Education for Freedom: As Provided by State Laws* reviews states' requirements for civic education as of the late 1940s, coupled with the admonition that "a thorough understanding of American ideals and principles affords a basis for international understanding and a realistic approach to international problems."⁷¹ Keesecker directly links education on "the way of government and the way of our social life" to "American freedom, patriotism, and national security."⁷² He declares that "it is always the duty of teachers to support the ideals and principles of our liberties by education, just as in times of crisis they support them by military effort."⁷³ As for states requiring teaching about the United States Constitution, Keesecker explains that forty-four of the then forty-eight (excluding Texas, Kentucky, Maryland, and Vermont) required this in elementary school, and just three (Kentucky, Maryland, and Mississippi) did not mandate it for high school.⁷⁴ Ultimately, his stated purpose in detailing state laws on civic education was to "afford students of the curriculum a basis for study and appraisal of the types of laws which seem to be most satisfactory."⁷⁵ At several points in the book, he stresses that "training for citizenship is one of the objectives of American education" and that "training for citizenship includes instruction designed to promote a knowledge of the ideals and principles of the American form of government."⁷⁶ In this fashion, Keesecker demonstrated the postprogressive trend of civic education—placing emphasis on how knowledge of government structure and America's founding principles will cultivate good citizenship in the next generation.

Childs's *Civic Victories: The Story of an Unfinished Revolution* focuses on elections and the author's contention that an excess of offices subject to election as well as the "phenomena of blind voting" threatens to undermine the democratic process.⁷⁷ He contends that placing many elective offices on a single ballot serves to "conceal the candidate from the public gaze."⁷⁸ He follows by writing that "a government divided into numerous elusive bits defies control," which he argues interferes with the people's influence over the government.⁷⁹ From

this, he constructs an appeal for reform of both government and electoral ballots, such that power is concentrated in only a few offices, and only these select offices would be put up for election.⁸⁰

Although William O. Penrose does not color *Freedom Is Ourselves: Legal Rights and Duties of the Citizen as a Basis for Civic Education* (1952) with a call for reform, he focuses his brand of civic education on civil liberties and civic duties. He describes citizenship as “a relationship between the individual and the state of which he is a member” and defines the relationship on the basis of “civil liberties, political privileges, and public duties.”⁸¹ He writes that citizenship education should focus on the “legal rights” and “corresponding obligations” of Americans.⁸² In a similar vein, Wesley Roehn’s *Study Guide for Understanding American Democracy* (1962) focuses on educating students in “economic, social, and political relationships in a world that has become increasingly complicated.”⁸³ While Roehn centers one of his first lessons on “strengthening the family,” he grounds it in the proposition that “the interest of the government in happy family life comes from the fact that national stability and security depend on the stability and security of the individuals who make up the nation.”⁸⁴ He goes on to devote the majority of his book to political parties, lobbying, public debt, national defense, weapons of war, world trade, and internationalism.

Ultimately, civic education in the first two decades following the World War II centered on citizens’ legal obligations and patriotic duties, with an explicit emphasis on preparing students to support the United States’ central presence on the world stage. In this, it veered away from the focus on individual civic presence within the community, as the practice of good citizenship became associated with actions that advanced America’s stability and security in the midst of the Cold War.

CIVICS BLENDS INTO SOCIAL STUDIES

As the peak of the Cold War gave way to the late 1960s and the 1970s, fewer civics-specific textbooks saw publication, for the subject now commonly known as “social studies” began to absorb the traditional disciplines of history, government, civics, economics, geography, and even sociology and psychology, at the K-12 level.

Traditional verities also softened as “values clarification” entered education. This can be seen in a 1975 book by Brian Burnham, John Cholvat, and John R. Meyer. *Values Education: Theory, Practice, Problems, Prospects* mainly proposes a “structural-developmental framework” for civic education that engages with children’s early and evolving social understanding and moral judgment.⁸⁵ The authors also explain the slow disappearance of civic education per se by writing that “during the 1960s, curriculum projects commonly called the New Social Studies drew attention away from traditional civic education.”⁸⁶ As a result, referring specifically to the influential 1966 *Values and Teaching*,⁸⁷ Burnham, Cholvat, and Meyer write that a “‘values clarification approach’ gained widespread popularity throughout American education.” They describe this as a system in which students are taught how to clarify the values they hold entering a class, followed by how to learn a “valuing process” that would direct their behaviors to “change in the direction of becoming more purposeful, consistent, and rational

as a result of value clarifying experiences.”⁸⁸ Although the authors applaud the expanded focus on tolerance that came with this system, they voice concern that it could still lead to a form of indoctrination—specifically, that which would “close minds on things that are open.”⁸⁹ They follow this by detailing their research into tests on moral judgment, concluding that the rigid scenarios offered in values clarification classes cannot properly teach students to “interpret moral dilemmas.”⁹⁰

The Civil Rights era also brought books centered on narratives from marginalized communities. This approach can be glimpsed in Helen Harter’s *Carmelo* (1962) and *The Slave’s Narrative* (1977) by Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates. *Carmelo* is a short illustrated book for the second grade that explores civics from the perspective of a fictional young Hispanic-American farm boy.⁹¹ The story follows Carmelo and his family, immediate and extended, as they help each other through a flood and successfully motivate the president and Congress to fund a dam, while also inducing their local community to build it.⁹² The purpose of the book, in addition to being “designed to provide pleasure in reading and to give children the information they need to enrich their lives and their school work,” was to demonstrate how a young boy could invest in and improve his community through the most trying of times.⁹³ Davis and Gates’s *The Slave Narrative* compiled essays from ex-slaves from 1750 to 1982 to provide an intimate account of slavery and the role ex-slaves played in American communities.⁹⁴

AUTONOMOUS CITIZENSHIP

As the Civil Rights era and Cold War ebbed, civic education shifted to a focus on individual freedoms and actions. Newer textbooks tended to promote “liberal democracy” that values “individual rights and autonomy” in a manner that does not impede “bonds of community and concern for the common good.”⁹⁵

Joan N. Burstyn’s *Educating Tomorrow’s Valuable Citizen* (1996) declares that “citizenship in a democratic republic is an office, morality is a social construct, and a person is required to possess certain virtues in order to hold the office of citizen.”⁹⁶ She argues that a citizen must be “expected to take an active role in framing those laws.”⁹⁷ In her view, proper expression and enforcement of the law ensure “certain virtuous actions” from the citizenry, even if the people may not “actually be virtuous.” Additionally, she charges educational institutions with the duty of instructing children on “the standards of decency in their society” so that they may “attain full membership.”⁹⁸

On a similar trajectory, Richard Dagger argues in *Civic Virtues: Rights, Citizenship, and Republican Liberalism* (1997) for greater attention to “individuals and individual rights” over “groups and group rights”—an issue he takes with cultural pluralism movements of the 1990s.⁹⁹ Dagger describes a “good liberal” as “someone who acts on the individual’s ability to judge what is good and nourishes its growth in the lives of others.”¹⁰⁰ In his view, the point of republican liberalism is to provide the opportunity and capacity for autonomy to as many citizens as possible but “not to produce more for its own sake.”¹⁰¹ Similarly, Eamonn Callan argues in *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy* (1997) that

autonomy is “the key to understanding what rightly holds together liberal and democratic principles.” Callan particularly emphasizes that without individual autonomy, there lies an “openness of a constitutional consensus to domination and manipulation.”¹⁰²

Finally, *Education for Citizenship*, published in 2000 by editors Jo Cairns, Roy Gardner, and Denis Lawton, argues that while there should be “some relationship” between moral education and citizenship education, “this agreement would not rest on any deep shared understanding of the nature of morality or of what it has to do with citizenship.”¹⁰³ In fact, the author of this particular section—Graham Haydon—states that societal morality should be taught as “an ideal which is in agreement of everyone concerned,” while citizenship education focuses on teaching Americans how to live both freely and productively.¹⁰⁴ In this manner, the turn of the century saw a turn away from rooting citizenship in a national set of social values, and instead advocated for Americans to follow their own path so long as it lay responsibly within the law.

CONCLUSION

A century-plus of civic education displays a major shift from imparting the structures of government and laws of the land to promoting individual autonomy and action in the community. However, the transformation from a legalistic national focus to an individual rights focus was not linear, as the emphases we see in the 1990s bear greater similarity to those of the 1920s than to those of the 1960s. Yet, it is clear how the gradual de-emphasis on civic knowledge has paralleled and likely fed the deepening ignorance of today’s students with regard to the structures and functions of government and the norms and expectations of citizenship. Although the government-centric education of the early twentieth century imparted great knowledge to students about the political foundations of the nation, it provided scant guidance on how one should conduct himself beyond following the law.

We observe that educators and textbook authors in every era prioritized forms of knowledge and behaviors that largely reflected the values, issues, and challenges of their day. The pre-progressive 1800s reflected an era of idealization in American values and destiny, and taught their students government in the context of its founding principles, structures, and evolution. However, the Dewey-inspired reforms of the first third of the twentieth century, mirroring the progressivism of the day, sought an immersive experience for children rather than pure theoretical learning. Civic education centered more on inspiring social change within students—and counseling them to find their own vocations—than on teaching them how things work and how they came to be. The pulling-together and patriotic fervor of World War II reversed this trend, as educators promoted national devotion in their pupils, a trend that continued through the 1950s. With the dawn of the Civil Rights era, however, civic educators focused on the values of their students in search of creating a more equitable and opportunity-rich society. De-emphasizing charges of the individual citizen’s duty to society, civic education melded into history and government—sometimes also with geography, economics, and sociology—creating the curricular realm we know as social studies. However, in the 1990s, civic education once again seemed to take a sort of shape of its own, as experts focused the

subject on individual freedoms and actions in society, with a marked de-emphasis on shared societal values.

We must hope that civic education in the second quarter of the twenty-first century evolves again to meet the heavyweight needs of the times in which we live, which might be described as the sum of those faced by our predecessors. With luck (and hard work), the multifaceted efforts we see around us to reboot, rekindle, and reemphasize education for citizenship in US schools and colleges will prepare more young people to grapple successfully with the challenges that they face today and are sure to face tomorrow.

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NOTES

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5. Levenson, *Primer of Morals*, 46.
6. Levenson, 47.
7. Levenson, 59.
8. S. E. Forman, *First Lessons in Civics: A Textbook for Use in Schools* (New York: American Book Company, 1895), elementary; Harry Pratt Judson, *The Young American: A Civic Reader* (New York: Maynard, Merrill & Company, 1897), high school; Frederick H. Clark, *Outlines of Civics: A Supplement to Bryce's "American Commonwealth," Abridged Edition—For Use in High Schools and Colleges* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1899), high school; Charles De Forest Hoxie, *How the People Rule: Civics for Boys and Girls* (New York: Silver, Burkett and Company, 1903), elementary; Frank David Boynton, *School Civics: An Outline Study of the Origin and Development of Government and the Development of Political Institutions in the United States*, 1st ed. (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1904), high school; John W. Davis and Charles Stewart, *A Civics for Elementary Schools* (Boston: Educational Publishing Company, 1905), elementary; S. E. Forman, *Advanced Civics: The Spirit, Form and Function of the American Government* (New York: Century Company, 1907), high school; J. R. Flickinger, *Civil Government: As Developed in the States and in the United States* (Boston: D. C. Heath & Company, 1907), middle school; William H. Allen, *Efficient Democracy* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1908), high school; and Arthur William Dunn, *Civics: The Community and the Citizen* (Sacramento: Superintendent State Printing, 1910), elementary.
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10. Forman, 27.
11. Allen, *Efficient Democracy*, 1.
12. Allen, 265.

13. Dunn, *Civics*, 26.
14. Dunn, respectively: 30, 27, 68, 86, 125, 155.
15. S. E. Forman, *The American Republic: A Text in Civics for High Schools, Academies and Normal Schools* (New York: Century Company, 1911); A. G. Fradenburgh, *American Civics for the Seventh and Eighth School Years* (New York: Hinds, Noble & Eldredge, 1913); William Backus Guitteau, *Preparing for Citizenship: An Elementary Textbook in Civics* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913); Ray Osgood Hughes, *Community Civics* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1917), high school; Grace Alice Turkington, *My Country: A Textbook in Civics and Patriotism for Young Americans* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1918), elementary; Roscoe Lewis Ashley, *The New Civics: A Textbook for Secondary Schools* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1918), high school; Frank David Boynton, *School Civics: An Outline Study of the Origin and Development of Government and the Development of Political Institutions in the United States*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1919), high school; Giles and Giles, *Vocational Civics*, high school; Edwin W. Adams, *A Community Civics: A Textbook in Loyal Citizenship* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), elementary; and Arthur William Dunn, *Community Civics and Rural Life* (Boston: D. C. Heath & Company, 1920), middle school.
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17. Forman, 82–83.
18. Fradenburgh, *American Civics*, 113–14.
19. Guitteau, *Preparing for Citizenship*, 231–38.
20. Boynton, *School Civics*, 322.
21. Giles and Giles, *Vocational Civics*, vii.
22. Turkington, *My Country*, 57.
23. Ashley, *The New Civics*, 18.
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29. On checks and balances, see Hughes, *Community Civics*, 11–17.
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31. Hughes, 25.
32. Hughes, 66.
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34. Hughes, *Textbook in Citizenship*, 124.
35. Hughes, *Community Civics*, 382.
36. Hughes, *Community Civics*, 385.
37. Henry Reed Burch, *American Economic Life in Its Civic and Social Aspects* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1921); Dunn, *Community Civics*; George W. Hunter, *Civic Science in the Home* (New York: American Book Company, 1921); Hughes, *Community Civics*; Ray Osgood Hughes, *Economic Civics* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1921); Charles Edgar Finch, *Everyday Civics: Community, State and the Nation* (New York: American Book Company, 1921); Jane Lynn Barnard, *Getting a Living: A Vocational Civics Reader* (Philadelphia: Franklin Publishing and Supply Company, 1923); Ashley, *The New Civics*; William H. Atwood, *Civic and Economic Biology* (Philadelphia: P. Blakiston's Son and Company, 1922); George W. Hunter and Walter G. Whitman, *Civic Science in the Community* (New York: American Book Company, 1922); Hill, *Community Life*; John Marks Brewer, Enoch Burton Godwin, and William Alonzo Wheatley, *Occupations: A Textbook for the Educational, Civic and Vocational Guidance of Young Boys*

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 40. Turkington, 235.
 41. Turkington, 309-10.
 42. Daniel Edward Phillips, *The New Social Civics* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1926), 129-39.
 43. Phillips, *New Social Civics*, respectively: 150, 151, 156.
 44. Howard Copeland Hill, *Vocational Civics* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1928), respectively: 4-5, 63-64, 151-52.
 45. Hill, *Vocational Civics*, 323.
 46. Hill, 324.
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 50. Blough and Smith, 408.
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 55. It is unclear why they did not extend that argument to all schools. National Congress of Parents and Teachers, 123.
 56. National Congress of Parents and Teachers, 179.
 57. Clay Coss and Walter E. Myer, *The Promise of Tomorrow: The Long, Sure Road to National Stability, Family Security, and Individual Happiness* (Washington, DC: Civic Education Service, 1938), 89.
 58. Coss and Myer, *Promise of Tomorrow*, 34.
 59. Coss and Myer, 111.
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 63. Coss and Myer, *Education for Democratic Survival*, 92.
 64. Coss and Myer, 33-34, 57-58.
 65. Ward Wilbur Keesecker, *Education for Freedom: As Provided by State Laws* (Washington, DC: Federal Security Agency, 1948), 20-38.
 66. Elmer Pflieger and Grace Weston, *The American Political Mind: A Textbook in Political Theory* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1949).

67. Pflieger and Weston, *American Political Mind*, 375.
68. Pflieger and Weston, 479, 485.
69. Pflieger and Weston, 479–495.
70. Pflieger and Weston, 495.
71. Although not a textbook, this provides great context for modern requirements in civic education. Keesecker, *Education for Freedom*, 1.
72. Keesecker, 2.
73. Keesecker, 4.
74. Alaska and Hawaii did not achieve statehood until 1959. Keesecker, 8–9.
75. Keesecker, 20.
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78. Childs, *Civic Victories*, 11.
79. Childs, 58.
80. Childs, 283, 333–38.
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91. The illustrations are by Aldren Watson.
92. Helen Harter, *Carmelo* (Chicago: Follett Publication Company, 1962), 11, 27.
93. Harter, *Carmelo*, 32.
94. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, *Slave’s Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), vii, 147.
95. Richard Dagger, *Civic Virtues: Rights, Citizenship, and Republican Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 175.
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98. Burstyn, 143.
99. Dagger, *Civic Virtues*, 176.
100. Dagger, 192.

101. Dagger, 194.
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104. Cairns, Gardner, and Lawton, *Education for Citizenship*, 144–46.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



JED NGALANDE

Jed Ngalande is a research assistant for the Hoover Institution Working Group on Good American Citizenship. He is a graduate of Stanford University, where he studied biology and economics, while also expressing a passion for civics and government through participation in the *Stanford Daily* as a beat reporter and the Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Partnership Fellowship.



About the Working Group on Good American Citizenship

Within the Hoover Institution’s Center for Revitalizing Americans Institutions (RAI), the Working Group on Good American Citizenship seeks to craft and communicate policies and practices that nurture good citizenship in the constitutional democracy Americans inhabit—policies and practices that support the principles, convictions, character traits, and associations upon which liberty depends. Consisting of high-quality, nonpartisan research, analysis, and communications, our work is anchored to what Alexis de Tocqueville called “reflective patriotism” and seeks to cultivate in Americans young and old an affirmative attachment to the nation that Lincoln termed “the last best hope of earth.”

For more information about this Hoover Institution initiative, visit us online at hoover.org/research-teams/good-american-citizenship-working-group.

Hoover Institution, Stanford University
434 Galvez Mall
Stanford, CA 94305-6003
650-723-1754

Hoover Institution in Washington
1399 New York Avenue NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20005
202-760-3200

