

# CEO



## Commonwealth Education Organization

# Education Advocate

Special Edition

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Commonwealth  
Education  
Organization

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## *America is facing an identity crisis*

### **E Pluribus Unum**

The Commonwealth Education Organization has been committed to using our newsletter to advance sound educational practices and high academic achievement. Over the years, we have also provided programs for teachers where they have had an opportunity to expand their knowledge of classical curricula related to history, government, civics, and social studies. With that in mind, we have decided to devote this Special Edition of our newsletter to the publication of a recently released report by the Bradley Foundation entitled

### ***E Pluribus Unum.***

The report addresses the startling fact that the next generation is not adequately taught about our history, compared to previous generations. In particular, our founding ideals, and how our government was formed and structured. It is difficult to support what is not understood.

### **America is facing an identity crisis**

The next generation of Americans will know less than their parents about our history and founding ideals. Many Americans are more aware of what divides us than of what unites us. We are in danger of becoming not “from many, one” - E Pluribus Unum —, but its opposite, “from one, many.”

The Bradley Project on America’s National Identity was created to initiate a national conversation on this challenge and to affirm that what unites us is far greater than what divides us. A sense of national identity is necessary to enable individuals to transcend self-absorption and commit to the common good. Without it, Americans can neither perpetuate its institutions nor defend itself.



*“History is the means by which a nation establishes its sense of identity and purpose”, President John F. Kennedy.*

### **American’s Views**

To inform its work, the Bradley Project asked Harris Interactive to conduct a study on American’s views on national identity. While 84 percent of the respondents still believe in a unique American identity, 63 percent believe this identity is weakening. Almost a quarter - 24% - believe we are already so divided that a common national identity is impossible. In their minds, it is already too late. And young people, on whom our continued national identity depends, are less likely than older Americans to be proud of their country or to believe that it has a unique national identity. **This is an identity crisis.**

## *America is facing an identity crisis*



*The kind of unity Americans celebrate does not demand uniformity.*

The solemn rows of silent graves at Arlington National Cemetery are a somber reminder to all of us that the blessings of liberty comes at a price.

*“This is the clearest, most powerful summons yet, to all of us, to restore The American story to its rightful, vital place in American life and in how we educate our children. It couldn’t be more timely and important.”*

*--Pulitzer Prize historian David McCullough on the E Pluribus Unum*

### **A Nation Based on Ideas**

America is unique among nations in being founded not on a common ethnicity, but on a set of ideas. A nation based on ethnicity perpetuates itself by the fact of birth. But a nation based on ideas starts anew with each generation and with each new group of immigrants. Knowing what America stands for is not a genetic inheritance. It must be learned, by the next generation and by those who come to this country. In this way, a nation founded on an idea is inherently fragile. And a nation that celebrates the many ways we are different from one another must remind itself constantly of what we all share.

### **Preserving America’s Memory**

“History,” wrote President John F. Kennedy, “is the means by which a nation establishes its sense of identity and purpose.” But America’s memory appears to be slipping away. On the 2000 National Assessment of Educational Process (NAEP) Civics Test, the majority of eighth graders could not explain the purpose of the Declaration of Independence. Only five percent of seniors could

accurately describe the way presidential power can be checked by Congress and the Supreme Court.

The reasons for these failings are not hard to find; boring textbooks that lack narrative drive, a neglect of America’s heroes and dramatic achievements, curriculum standards that push the founding period out of high school into the lower grades and teachers inadequately prepared in American history. Too often, students are taught more about America’s failings than its successes. Absent are those “mystical chords of memory” that Abraham Lincoln believed held our country together. A rich and balanced history best prepares young people for informed democratic participation.

### **Promoting Informed Patriotism**

There are dangers to certain kinds of patriotism, but there are equal dangers to no patriotism at all. There is a middle ground, “a patriotism of principles, to use the language of the American Federation of Teachers, based on a “common core of history (that) binds us together.” Americans should embrace an

informed patriotism that expresses our devotion to our country and our bond with our fellow citizens.

### **Becoming Americans**

Today immigration is at its highest levels since the 1920’s. The more people who come to this country, the more crucial it is that all become Americans in the fullest sense. America has successfully met this challenge in the past and can do so again, but it will take effort. Newcomers to America should be encouraged to participate fully in American social, economic and civic life.

### **Unity not Uniformity**

In a nation that celebrates its diversity, we need to remind ourselves that we are also part of “one nation, indivisible.” Parents of school children regardless of background, agree.

In too many ways, current attitudes sanction dual citizenship, multilingual ballots, and bilingual instruction rather than English immersion. Instead of one America, there are voices for many America’s or even no America at all. Few would intend this result, but it may be the inevitable consequence of citizens not being able to communicate

## *America is facing an identity crisis*

in a common language and place other loyalties above their allegiance to the flag and “to the republic for which it stands.”

The kind of unity Americans celebrate does not demand uniformity. America is enriched by diversity. It is preserved by unity. Yet while appreciating the benefits of diversity, Americans should affirm their commitment to national unity, a shared culture, a common language and defining ideals. It is noteworthy that 96% of those surveyed in the Harris Interactive poll believed that it was important for the “future of American political system that all citizens (be) able to speak and read English.” We should not adopt policies that perpetuate division or that compromise our national allegiance.

### **Providing for the Common Defense**

The solemn rows of silent graves at Arlington National Cemetery are a somber reminder to all of us that the blessing of liberty comes at a price. A nation cannot long survive with full respect and support for those willing to pay the price.

### **Understanding American Citizenship**

Citizenship is of a nation and democratic citizenship is of a democratic nation. But some believe the idea of national citizenship is outmoded, not in keeping with the requirements of a global economy, or the challenges of world peace.

It seems to some that nations pose a barrier to the efficient movement of workers, investment and technology. But there are other values at stake, such as what American companies owe their fellow citizens and to the nation that charters and protects them.

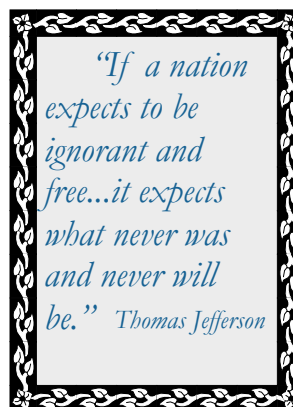
A person cannot literally be a “citizen” of the world or of a continent or any other geographical entity. The idea of “global citizenship” confuses and undermines meaningful civic education. Civic education should be based on the distinctive features of citizenship in American democracy, not on the misleading idea that one can be a “citizen” of the world.

### **Let us Begin the Conversation**

The challenges are great, but so are the opportunities. Being an American involves rights, as well as responsibilities. The Bradley Project offers a number of thoughts for how we might go forward as a people, from a renewed focus on the teaching of American history at all levels, to encouraging efforts designed to ensure immigrants learn English, understand democratic institutions and participate fully in the American way of life.

*An excerpt from The Bradley Project on America's National Identity, June 2008*

*CEO acknowledges and appreciates all the important work of The Bradley Project.*



**For a full report on THE BRADLEY PROJECT ON AMERICA'S NATIONAL IDENTITY visit:**

[www.bradleyproject.org](http://www.bradleyproject.org)

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To make your tax deductible contribution, contact CEO at 412-967-9691 or visit our website: [www.ceopa.org](http://www.ceopa.org)

**Dear Parents, Educators, and Citizens of Pennsylvania,**

Did you know that in January, 1999, the Pennsylvania State Department of Education mandated history, civics, and geography be reduced to a subsection of social studies?

The PA education reformers:

- *stripped the power of the local school districts to require American History and civics as distinct disciplines and as a graduation requirement.*
- *reduced American History from a distinct course offering to the option of including it in a watered down “social studies stew”.*
- *reduced civics, American History, geography and economics from being required courses to the option of “an instructional unit within another course, or part of an interdisciplinary activity”. ( 1)*

(1) The Pennsylvania Bulletin Vol. 29, Number 3 , Part II, January 16, 1999



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