

Building Patriotism in the United States of America through Education of History

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Abstract

The paper discusses building one of the values of American people such as patriotism through the education of history. Nowadays this topic is important because of the Capitol attack on January 6, 2021 damaging democracy and making American people polarized. The goal of the government of the United States is to strengthen American Democracy by refining education of history. The article discusses curriculums of different states and the roadmap – “Education for American Democracy: Excellence in History and Civics for All Learners” which is supported by the “Department of Education” and the “National Endowment for Humanities”.

As a result of the research, I made the following conclusions:

- Considering the Social Studies Standards of some states patriotism building is not mentioned;
- Teaching history is paid less attention in the United States which is one of the causes of the Capitol attack;
- “Education for American Democracy: Excellence in History and Civics for All Learners” aims to strengthen education of history which will have results by 2030.

Keywords: Education, history, patriotism.

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Introduction

"Democracy is fragile" – said President Biden in his inaugural address. The United States of America is the longest-lived constitutional democracy which will have its 250th anniversary in 2026. The task of the Founding Fathers was to ensure the existence of the newly created republic and wanted to have education that would guarantee the survival of democracy. Years later when American people were highly divided during the Civil War, the aim of Abraham Lincoln was to maintain the union and make it more perfect. Saving democracy depends not only on presidents but "We the People who seeks a more perfect union" – said President Biden. Recent event - the Capitol attack on January 6, 2021 damaged democracy and disagreement led American people to disunity (Biden, 2021) therefore Biden-Harris administration aims to strengthen American Democracy - a released roadmap which is supported by the "Department of Education" and the "National Endowment for Humanities". The roadmap of "Education for American Democracy" aims to promote history education and teaching civic values (Educating for American Democracy, 2021, p. 2).

Building Patriotism through the Education of History

The event which I have mentioned made the building patriotism more important. After the presidential election Donald Trump accused democrats in stealing the votes addressing his supporters: "I know that everyone here will soon be marching over to the Capitol building to peacefully and patriotically make your voices heard". Trump ended his speech with words that if citizens did not fight they would not have the country any more. After the speech American citizens attacked the Capitol, the rioters were called "Great Patriots" by President Donald Trump (BBC News, 2021). The word patriot is a misnomer. Patriotism is an important part of citizenship, it is love

and loyalty of the country, honoring democratic values on which the country is based, respecting and obeying the laws, respecting national symbols of the country. Also, a good citizen is always informed about national issues, voting, volunteering and serving the country in times of war (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). One of the judges told a capitol rioter on the trial: "You called yourself and the others patriots, but that is not patriotism. Patriotism is loyalty to country, loyalty to the Constitution, not loyalty to a single head of state. That is the tyranny we rejected on July 4th of 1776" (Spencer, 2021).

The event represented not only attacking the political institutions, also disregard for the values of the American people who have not been so divided since the Civil War. This is the reason why Joseph Biden Jr. mentioned the word Union for several times in his inaugural address (Biden, 2021). Disunity is the word which has not been said since the Civil War by any president. Joe Manchin, senator from West Virginia mentioned in one of his interviews that American people are as divided as during the Civil War (Hoover, 2021). The citizens who attacked the capitol do not know the values upon which the United States was founded. Historians agree with the senator's opinion and believe that the division of Americans has deep reasons and one of them is the quality of education, in particular, teaching history which is payed less attention than other subjects (Hoover, 2021).

After the Capitol attack the "American Historical Association" made a statement that this had not happened since 1814 when British people robbed and burnt "People's House" (American Historical Association, 2021). The rioters were holding the Confederate Battle Flag which is a symbol of a splinter nation (Blakemore, 2021) and expresses violence. The people who attacked the Capitol were described as "Great Patriots", "American Patriots" but they were neither (American Historical Association, 2021).

The problems of teaching history are mentioned in the roadmap - there were some federal

education reforms such as “No Child Left Behind” (2002), the “Race to the Top” (2009) but they neglected history. During the last three decades all levels of the government supported strengthening the education of history but state legislatures and departments of education mandated to teach some topics. The result is that generations have not received high-quality knowledge in history (Educating for American Democracy, 2021:4). The roadmap mentions what constitutional democracy needs - “Reflective Patriotisms” as Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in “Democracy in America”. “Reflective Patriotism” was feature of American people and Tocqueville asked a question: „How is it that in the United States, where the inhabitants arrived yesterday on the soil that they occupy, where they brought neither customs, nor memories; where they meet for the first time without knowing each other; where, to put it in a word, the instinct for native land can hardly exist; how is it that each person is involved in the affairs of his town, of his district, and of the entire State as his very own? Because each person, in his sphere, takes an active part in the government of society” (Tocqueville, 2001, p. 103).

What role has education of history in building patriotism in the United States nowadays? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to know what American students are taught in different states. Departments of education of each state and the District of Columbia mandate to teach Social Studies therefore curriculums are different from each other. Some of them are very brief and vague (Donadze, 2022, p.1). But there are states, for example, Massachusetts which focuses on building patriotism. According to “Massachusetts History and Social Studies Framework”, 1st grade students are taught to identify national symbols of the United States such as flag, the bald eagle, the White House, the Statue of Liberty. Also, they are taught words, mottoes, phrases associated with the United States, e.g. „E Pluribus

Unum“, the melodies and lyrics of patriotic songs such as “God Bless America” and “The Star-Spangled Banner”, etc. Students should be able to explain the meaning of each unifying symbol, phrase or song (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018, p. 34). 8th grade students are taught what role individuals have in maintaining a healthy democracy, what responsibilities American citizens have and fundamental values of civic life such as patriotism (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018, p. 107). Besides, in Massachusetts high school students study an elective subject which is “United States Government and Politics”. Students should do a research, analyze, present orally, in writing or through a multimedia presentation how the principles of U.S. democracy such as patriotism is embodied in founding documents (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018, p. 164).

Besides the curriculum of Massachusetts Department of Education there is the “Center for the Teaching of History” in “Massachusetts Historical Society” which provides plans of lessons, activities and teaching methods of history. The lessons include building patriotism as well. One of the lessons’ topic is the Civil War. Students are given several sources which are related to it but before examining the documents students should answer several questions and discuss topics. This activity is called Warm-up Discussion. The students should answer the following questions - what might have motivated men and women to participate in the Civil War? How might Northern motivations differ from Southern motivations? Answers could include ideas such as patriotism. Besides, students should write an essay to explain why they chose to join the war as a soldier, nurse, etc. (Center for the Teaching of History, 2021, p. 1)

Students are provided a primary source such as the recruits’ document - Union General Nathaniel P. Banks cavalry recruited people.

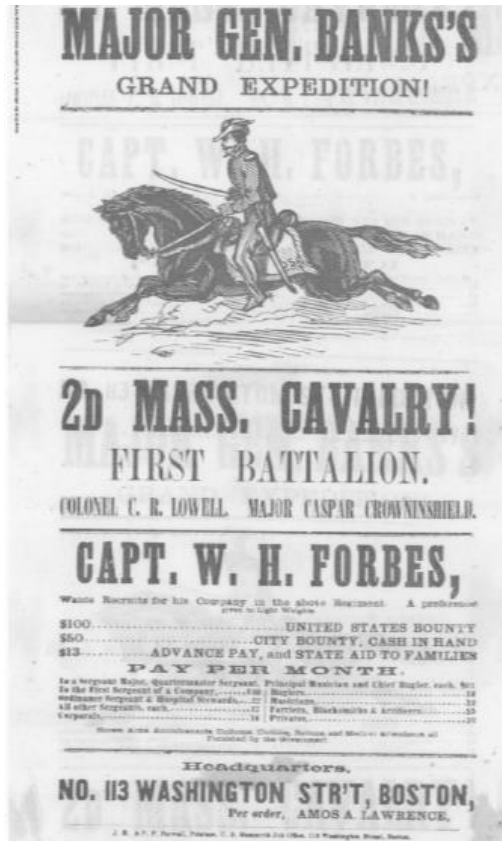


Figure 1 (Major General Banks's Grand Expedition! - 1862)

The poster is accompanied by a description which states that the young men enlisted in the war possessed a sense of adventure and unquestioning patriotism. After examining the source students should answer the following questions - investigate the men listed on the poster (Nathaniel Banks, C. R. Lowell, Caspar Crowninshield, W.H. Forbes). Who were they? Why might their names have been prominently displayed in a recruiting document? How do your friends and family influence the choices you make every day? Would your friends' decision to participate in the Civil War have impacted you to take action? (Center for the Teaching of History, 2021, pp. 7-8)

Another topic is the Revolution of the United States, the title of the lesson is "Abigail's War: The American Revolution through the Eyes of Abigail Adams". Students are given primary sources such as a letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams and a letter

from William Prescott to John Adams. Before analyzing the letters, students should read the information about the Bunker Hill Battle which took place on June 17, 1775 near Bunker Hill. William Prescott who fought as a patriot, described the Battle of Bunker Hill in his letter. Abigail Adams who watched the battle from her house, described it in the letter too. Students are given an assignment - "Put Yourself in Abigail's Shoes..." Students should analyze both letters and write one to two-page journal entry and state their opinions about the battle as Massachusetts residents and describe their experience at the Battle of Bunker Hill. In order to write it, they are asked the following questions: what do you think about the provided information? Are you proud of the patriot soldiers? As a patriot, how do you feel about the battle? (Massachusetts Historical Society, 2012, pp. 17-25). Thus, the assignments show

that the focus is not on memorizing facts, but on analyzing them and expressing personal attitudes.

The feeling of patriotism was strengthened by 9/11 attack. After the tragedy the “Nebraska Department of Education” approved a patriotism bill that defined the content of the “Nebraska Social Studies Standard” which aims to instill love of the country, teach the deeds of American heroes, teach patriotic songs, memorize “Star Spangle Banner” and reverence the flag (Westheimer, 2006:608-609). Teaching method is historical analysis and interpretation, for example, 1st grade students are asked to describe historical figures and talk about their contributions such as Abraham Lincoln. Also, students identify the national symbols, in order to study important events; they visit museums (Nebraska Department of Education, 2019, p. 11). The patriotic symbols are taught through civic education too in Nebraska, for example, 2nd grade students study about songs, actions, holidays which reflect democratic traditions. Besides, students are taught that good citizens have some responsibilities such as voting, obeying laws, involving in decision-making process ((Nebraska Department of Education, 2019, p. 12).

According to this standard, the “Nebraska Department of Education” created two optional recourses. The first recourse is “Social Studies Standards Instructional Tool – SIT” which is an electronic table that contains educational sources accompanied by assignments (Nebraska Department of Education, 2022). 8th grade students are taught patriotic symbols, songs and activities in terms of historical, social and cultural context. For example, students are provided a video about war of 1812. In this video the Battle of Bladensburg, the burning of the White House and the Battle of Fort McHenry are described. These events inspired Francis Scott Key (American lawyer) to write the U.S. national anthem – “The Star-Spangled Banner” (Nebraska Department of Education, 2019, p. 7).

One of the sources provides as well information about Veterans Day, interviews with

veterans and speeches of American presidents about patriots and patriotism (Veterans Day, 2020). After learning the provided information, students are asked to prepare one of the following projects:

1. Write a 300–400-word essay and ask the following questions: What does veteran mean to me? What is patriotism? Why should we celebrate Veterans Day? What is the history of this day? Do a research on one of the veterans while he was serving. Interview the veteran about the time he served;
2. Create a video with your classmate that honors veterans (use wevideo.com);
3. Create a piece of art that honors veterans;
4. Write a song or a poem for veterans (you can use wevideo.com) (Veterans Day, 2020).

Building patriotism is mentioned in the Social Studies Standard of Nebraska from secondary to high school.

As for the “Social Studies Framework” of New-York, 1st grade students are taught historical events, figures and symbols that are important to American cultural identity. For example, students listen to stories about historical figures and identify the significance of these people. Besides, students learn about national holidays and explain when and why they are celebrated. Students learn general meaning of patriotic songs (New York State Education Department, 2017, p. 23). Students are taught how a good citizen should be - behaving honestly, helping others, obeying rules and laws, participating in the activities of the group or community and make positive contributions, etc. (New York State Education Department, 2017, p. 24).

Thus, patriotism does not only express respect for the symbols of the country but the example that are given show that students are taught to protect and love their country. According to the Social Science Curriculum of Massachusetts patriotism is one of the values of democracy. However, the word patriotism is not mentioned in the curriculums of Connecticut, Delaware, Main, Maryland, South Carolina, Washington, West Virginia, etc. In some states building

patriotism is a part of the curriculum, but it is taught through civic education. Nevada's Social Studies curriculum does not mention teaching symbols of the United States, students are taught only symbols, mottoes and slogans of Nevada (Nevada Department of Education, 2018, p. 18).

According to my survey building patriotism and teaching history should be more accentuated attention. Some scholars mention that the only force that can save democracy is having educated citizens (Flaherty, 2021). The roadmap aims to help students to understand their roles as civic participants, to become engaged citizens, it also aims to build civic honesty, patriotism; help students to explain the philosophical foundations of American constitutional democracy, etc. (Educating for American Democracy, 2021:19). According to the plan, state, territories and the District of Columbia should adopt and develop curriculums. The Federal Government should create a data for history and civics which will be regularly updated. Besides, the roadmap requires professional development of teachers (Educating for American Democracy, 2021, pp. 20-23).

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Conclusion

As I have mentioned Social Studies Standards are vague in most cases but there are some states which teach history and build values properly, for example, Massachusetts. The constitution does not permit the Federal Government to make standards for every state and there is no national standard but the "National Endowment for the Humanities" can make a plan for states (Donadze, 2022, p. 7). The roadmap is not a curriculum but it is a call for national and state leaders to act. Curriculums of different states should be in alignment with the "Education for Democracy Roadmap" (Educating for American Democracy, 2021, p. 7).

The goals which are imposed by the roadmap should be achieved by 2030. Besides, The Capitol attack should be a part of curriculums because, in my opinion, this event will teach students what patriotism is not.

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