

Promoting the vision that all men are created equal and are entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

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JACK MILLER CENTER For Teaching America's Founding Principles and History

Educating for Freedom

Alberto R. Coll

Alberto R. Coll is the Vincent de Paul Professor of Law and Director of Global Engagement at DePaul University's College of Law. He is a JMC faculty partner and has contributed significantly to our K-12 efforts through the Founding Civics Initiative and the American Civics and History Initiative.



ow do we educate our students for freedom?

After all, many of them arrive in college today believing that the United States is systematically oppressive, hopelessly unjust, and that there is not much worth celebrating or defending about our country (or so they have been taught along the way).

So, I often start my class by asking them a simple question: "out of the world's twenty largest countries, in which country would you rather live?"

I pick the world's twenty largest countries because size matters. The larger a society's size, the more complex will be its social, economic, and political problems, and the greater the difficulty of maintaining freedom and representative government in the midst of sharp political differences and quarrelling factions and interest groups—something which Alexander Hamilton wrote about quite extensively in *The Federalist Papers*.

In descending order of size, the world's twenty largest countries are:

- China (1,410,539,758)	- Brazil (217,240,060)	- Ethiopia (113,656,596)	- Turkey (83,047,706)
- India (1,389,637,446)	- Bangladesh (165,650,475)	- Congo (108,407,721)	- Thailand (69,648,117)
- the United States (337,341,954)	- Russia (142,021,981)	- Egypt (107,770,524)	
- Indonesia (277,329,163)	- Mexico (129,150,971)	- Vietnam (103,808,319)	
- Pakistan (242,923,845)	- Japan (124,214,766)	- Iran (86,758,304)	
- Nigeria (225,082,083)	- the Philippines (114,597,229)	- Germany (84,316,622)	

Moreover, each country's character as a free society must be judged, not by reference to some abstract ideal standard, but by reference to societies that *actually* exist in today's world. This is not a trivial point. The most horrible atrocities committed in the last century, numbering in the *hundreds of millions of victims*, were carried out by people enamored of some beautiful future vision of perfection.



THE RECENT DEVELOPMENT OF FREE SOCIETIES

he United States' size as a society of 337 million people is particularly challenging. Its mere existence and continuing resilience as a functioning democratic republic are nothing short of remarkable, a testament to its Constitution, its legal and political institutions, and its founding principles.

In the stretch of some 5,000 years of recorded human history, societies in which large numbers of individuals are free and enjoy a vast array of personal freedoms are incredibly rare. In fact, with the qualified, and fleeting, exception of classical Athens, free societies are a recent phenomenon going back only a couple of centuries, not coincidentally since the founding of the United States.

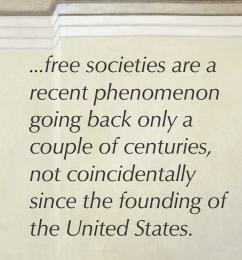
Instead of setting forth some kind of "beautiful vision", the American Founders, whether in *The Federalist Papers* or the Constitution, devised some highly practical, one could even say prosaic, "nuts-and-bolts" mechanisms and institutions for representative government under the assumption that human beings are highly flawed and are likely to remain that way, and in the context of the societies that actually existed at the end of the eighteenth century.

For many students, it is truly transformative to realize that politics and public policy are not simply an intellectual exercise involving abstract notions of how things ought to be. Creating and maintaining a free society composed of universally and deeply flawed human beings is incredibly difficult, and always will be so. Responsible politics and public policy require acknowledging constraints, and the reality of human nature and political things *as they are*.

How Does America Stack Up?

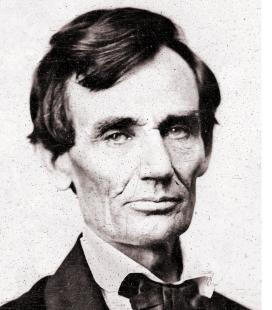
Returning to our list of the twenty largest nations, only two societies other than the United States stand out as contemporary versions of the ordered liberty and economic prosperity so praised by our Founders: Germany and Japan. Perhaps not surprisingly, they are also the two great defeated powers from the Second World War that set out to build a different political system than they previously had. There are problems, however, with these two countries.

With one of the world's most restrictive immigration policies, Japan would be unlikely to allow an American student to enter as a permanent resident.









As for Germany, it only has 25% of the United States' population – size matters – and its economic prosperity is partly a function of its character as a classic "free rider" in the West's security system. With only 1.4% of its GDP devoted to defense—as opposed to the United States' 3.3%—the German people's tax burden would be even more suffocating than it already is if they had to bear the full costs of their security in today's dangerous world. A majority of Germany's nuclear and conventional deterrence and security costs are paid for by the United States via the American nuclear arsenal, the United States' outsize role in the NATO alliance, and the U.S. Navy's role in maintaining the world's sea lanes free and open for Germany's vast and highly profitable global export machine.

AMERICA'S UNIQUE CHARACTER OF FREEDOM

nce most students take a close look at that list of the world's twenty largest countries, and ask themselves where they would rather live, they begin to understand that the United States

may not be as oppressive or unjust as they thought or were led to believe.

...there is plenty of space for thinking about constructive change and reform... And yet there is room also for a robust patriotism which acknowledges that love of country can be a proper sentiment and moral posture as a prelude to responsible political thought and

They start to understand that the study and practice of politics is hard work, that human beings and their political systems are inherently flawed, and that comparative assessments of our society against societies as they really are, as opposed to some abstract standard of justice, is necessary for serious political thinking.

Within that recognition, there is plenty of space for thinking about constructive change and reform. Indeed, the United States has been undergoing constructive change and reform since the very first decade of its founding, painful as that change sometimes has been. And yet there is room also for a robust patriotism which acknowledges that love of

action.

country can be a proper sentiment and moral stance as a prelude to responsible political thought and action.

Although this conclusion will still be hard to accept for some students, it is one easily accepted by those forty-five million Americans born outside the United States (over 13% of our population) who now live in our midst. The vast majority of them came to the United States because of its character as a free society, in search of the economic and political freedom missing in their countries of birth.

They, too, had to make a practical comparative assessment, and concluded that the United States is a free society of which they wanted to be a part.

THE FOUNDERS' VIEW TO CIVIC VIRTUE

ow do we educate students for political participation in a free society? And what are the traits—or civic virtues—our young people need to sustain it?

Our Founders referred to the necessary characteristics of a free self-governing people as civic virtue. Defined by habits of intellect and good character, the three especially prized by our Founders were: *prudence*, *deliberation*, and *moderation*.

These virtues or "habits", once widely acknowledged as foundational to individual and civic virtue, are hardly found in our contemporary public discourse.

Nor do we find them in today's college curriculum, much of which is heavily weighted towards "strategies for social justice", "allyship with the oppressed", and "reimagining transformation". Much of the current campus ethos prizes maximalism, "good vs. evil" thinking, demands for immediate change, and disdain or outright intolerance towards dissenting viewpoints. The harsh and unrelenting polarization affecting our broader society has infected our colleges and universities. Intellectual opponents and adversaries are quickly branded as tools of the oppressors or oppressors themselves, and intellectual disagreements quickly become equated with moral deficiency and guilt.

So, how can these virtues combat such deficits in our society?



WORKING AROUND THE IMPERFECT

The Founders, as well as the classical thinkers influential to the Founders, such as Aristotle and Cicero, considered *prudence* the highest political virtue. It is the capacity to calculate the means appropriate to achieve good ends.

While philosophers and college professors might focus their energies on "theoretical wisdom"—how things ought to be—the statesman and the politician, those persons entrusted with *responsibility for the safety of the state and society*, need to cultivate and exercise "practical wisdom" because they face the problem of achieving "the good" in an invariably imperfect context of multiple constraints, trade-offs, and competing goods or "ends".

Idealism and good intentions are never enough. In fact, plenty of evil and disorder has been wrought on the world by well-intentioned people whose idealistic schemes proved to be unworkable or downright calamitous. Prudence requires a recognition of the inherent limits to political action, the role of unforeseen consequences, and the complexity of translating political goals into good results.

DEALING WITH UNAVOIDABLE DIFFERENCES

In close relation to prudence and a healthy political life is *deliberation*. It is the capacity to think through, argue about, and thoughtfully consider particular choices and actions. One of the reasons the Founders created a Senate was to have a smaller political body more suitable for deliberation than the much larger House of Representatives.



Deliberation presupposes that major political decisions such as going to war, raising taxes, and adopting any policies that affect the safety and well-being of millions, require the careful consideration of the views of many.

For centuries, it was well understood that republican government required the cultivation among society and within our universities of the practice of rhetoric and debate as key instruments of deliberation. Educating for freedom requires educating for deliberation. Students must be familiar with public speaking and debate as instruments through which citizens in a free society, passionately yet peacefully, argue about vital political issues.

Sadly, in both high schools and universities, rhetoric and debate have largely disappeared from the curriculum. Universities today rarely, if ever, feature debates between opposing viewpoints on the major controversies of the day. When a student or prominent professor on campus espouses a controversial view, no one on the opposite side challenges them to a debate. Instead, petitions are circulated among faculty and students expressing "anger" or "hurt" at the views expressed, and demanding that the campus authorities discipline or terminate the offender.

Throughout our society, the decline of rhetoric and debate, and the replacement of deliberation by the exaltation of emotionality and the "therapeutic mode" are causing great damage to our ability to coexist peacefully and in freedom with one another in the midst of our unavoidable differences.

SACRIFICING FOR THE COMMON GOOD

oderation. It comes up numerous times in the writings of Hamilton, Madison, Adams, and others as a key counterbalance to the inherent human tendencies of factionalism and strife. In a rambunctious, sprawling, highly heterogeneous democracy of 337 million people, moderation is essential to our survival as a free society. For classical thinkers such as Aristotle, the human urge for honor and prominence meant that any political system would contain intense competition for power. To avoid perpetual strife and make the political system work, however, all participants must moderate their ambitions and maximalist objectives.

Moreover, among the average human beings making up a legislative assembly, not one person will have all the answers to problems facing the country. Moderation means the capacity to consider others' interests and perspectives with a view to deciding what is best for the whole. Again sadly, for many people today, moderation does not even count as a virtue, but as an obstacle to progress, "liberation", and the triumph of one's righteous cause.



Educating for freedom requires educating for deliberation.



If we are to live up to the government established by our Founders, we must cultivate not only these qualities of prudence, deliberation, and moderation, but a full understanding of our role in this unique free society that many around the world have made great sacrifices to enjoy.

How Education Can Preserve Freedom

he first challenge that educators face today is helping many of our skeptical students to realize that our society is free and worth preserving and defending. An equally formidable challenge is helping them become aware of those habits and ways of thinking—comprising what we might call civic virtue—through which we can structure our participation in our free society to strengthen and improve it.

Keeping in mind that there will always be political differences, we must cultivate not only these qualities of prudence, deliberation, and moderation, but a full understanding of America's unique place in the world and our role in this free society that many around the globe have made great sacrifices to enjoy.

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About the American Civics and History Initiative

JMC partner professors around the country, including Professor Coll, have contributed their time and knowledge to improving K-12 civic education through the American Civics and History Initiative.

Formed in 2020 by the Ashbrook Center, the Bill of Rights Institute, and the Jack Miller Center, the initiative helps social studies teachers make their classrooms a place for serious and engaging conversation about the meaning and history of America's fundamental principles.

Expanding through a state-by-state model, the initiative provides social studies teachers with expert teaching resources and rich, content-based programs focused on the central texts, ideas, and debates that have shaped the course of American history and civics.

When teachers introduce students to primary texts and make them approachable, it builds a commitment to civic understanding and a stronger foundation for upholding our democratic republic.

The initiative was launched successfully in Florida and we are expanding this statewide model to Wisconsin, Texas, and Virginia next. Additional states will be introduced as we gain regional support.

K-12 teachers are on the front lines of our society educating the next generation of American citizens. In the course of his or her career, one teacher reaches thousands of students.

We aim to empower educators in cultivating generations of students who understand the principles and history of America and have the habits of thoughtful reflection necessary to be self-governing citizens.





For Teaching America's Founding Principles & History

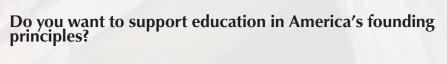
About the Jack Miller Center

The Jack Miller Center is a nationwide network of political scholars, historians, and civics teachers who seek to pass along the meaning of America to the next generation.

We have three strategies to pursue this mission:

- (1) build and sustain a community of scholars in the fields of American political thought and history;
- (2) restore the teaching of American citizenship in K-12 schools that centers on the country's history, the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and other foundational texts in the American tradition; and
- (3) partner with organizations and philanthropists to advance civic education that is grounded in America's founding principles and history.

We are building a movement of educators and citizens to advance the principles of equality, liberty, and opportunity that lie at the heart of the American political tradition.



A gift to the Jack Miller Center will help ensure students across our nation—our future politicians, judges, business leaders, and teachers—understand our nation's founding principles and the rights and responsibilities of effective citizenship.

Your donation can be made by mail, or online at gojmc.org/educate. As a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) public foundation, all donations are tax-deductible.

If you have a question about donations or planned gifts, you may reach Kirby Voss, Director of Development Strategy, at (484) 436-4201 or kvoss@gojmc.org.

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To learn more about our college-level or K-12 programs around the country, please visit our website or give us a call!

www.jackmillercenter.org Main office: (484) 436-2060

The battle for the soul of our nation will be won or lost in our classrooms.™

–Jack Miller

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The future of our nation depends on having knowledgeable and committed citizens like you. I hope you will join us in ensuring every student has access to an education worthy of free citizens.

Jack

Jack Miller Chairman of the Board

