

Using Examples of Inhumanity to Teach Responsible Citizenship

Evanston's Civic Education Program asks students to consider human responsibility with their hearts as well as with their minds.

HARRY J. ROSS WITH
JULIUS R. YASHON

At a time when many high school students are vandalizing, thieving, and even attacking their peers and teachers, when the apostles of "self" and "looking out for #1" are lionized by society, and John Kenneth Galbraith (1980) feels it necessary to plead at Berkeley for a revival of the "social ethic"—even now it is impossible to mention the need for "citizenship education" to intelligent people outside of the education establishment without their cringing and changing the subject. Why?

One explanation is that those of

Harry J. Ross is former Director of a Title IV-C Project on Genocides, Intercultural Conflicts, and Individual Action, and is currently a fellow at the Center for Urban Affairs, Northwestern University; Julius R. Yashon is Project Coordinator of Evanston Township High School, Evanston, Illinois.

us who received our "citizenship education" before the last decade were not "educated"—that is, "led forth" or "cultivated mentally or morally" (*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*)—so much as "trained," "dragged" or "formed by bending, pruning, and so on." We did not study the *rights* of citizenship; rather we were trained in the *duties*, and any rights of which we were informed were quickly transformed into duties: we had better vote when we came of age—or else! These duties struck us as absurd because they were presented in a vacuum: nobody told us how the government actually worked, but only what the formal processes were, processes which had no connection with our daily lives. We continued to salute the flag and hate Communism without having the least idea of the purposes of these attitudes and actions, merely because it was our duty.

Today, when the ideal of public duty has gone out of fashion, the main evidence of students' exposure to citizenship education—whether conducted in school or out—is their cry for "Students' rights!" The idea of "students' rights" makes no more sense to them and has no more history than the Pledge of Allegiance had for us; these students have merely moved from a poorly understood patriotism, with at least some sense of public responsibility, to a vague individualism which eschews all civic duty.

Recent writings on citizenship resemble the textbooks of the 1930s and 1940s in that they still accept citizenship as a pure good which need not be defined, explained, or questioned. "Citizenship" thus comes to stand for whatever the teachers and curriculum advisors want to teach. What none of the curriculums ever discuss, however, is the meaning and history of "citizenship" with all its attendant ambiguity: Were the Nazis convicted at Nuremberg good German citizens? How about the Americans who confined the Japanese to internment camps during World War II? Will American men be better citizens if they register for a possible draft, if they resist, or if they flee the country? Students who are taught to ignore these questions in high school, or who are given pat answers that refuse to deal with the moral complexity of these problems, will probably continue to ignore them after high school—even as these issues change their lives.

Last year we decided to write new units in civic education to insert into United States and world history courses, partly as a result of the lack of courses which examined citizenship as a dynamic and ambiguous concept, and partly as a response to the expressed desires of our community for just such lessons. Evanston Township High School is located in a suburb just north of Chicago that is gradually becoming more "urban" and less "suburban." Responses to two student questionnaires indicated that the four most desired educational aims for the school were: (1) the development of understanding of human relations, (2) preparation for responsible citizenship, (3) preparation for a changing world, and (4) the development of moral and ethical behavior. Now it seems clear that a

dogmatic type of citizenship training, which associates good citizenship with such specific activities as saluting the flag, serving in the armed forces, or voting, can only make a person more dogmatic, if it has any effects at all. Only a real citizenship education, which includes constant questioning of assumptions and preconceived values, and not just skills training, can prepare a student to adjust to "a changing world" and to develop on his/her own—rather than merely accept—a framework for moral and ethical behavior.

Any undogmatic discussion of citizenship must begin by trying to define "citizen." According to *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1980, a "citizen" is "A member of a state, a native or naturalized person who owes allegiance to a government, and is entitled to protection from it." One objection to much "citizenship"

phrases that must be fleshed out in citizenship education classes: a citizen is "entitled to protection" and "owes allegiance." The first of these phrases seems far too limited. One generally thinks of a citizen's rights as including: (1) rights connected with the principle of equality, (2) the democratic right to participate in the creation of a law, (3) individual and intellectual liberties, and (4) the defendant's rights, which include both the presumption of innocence and the right not to be charged in light of retroactive legislation (Aron, 1974). All of these rights must be studied individually to discover how each emerged historically and found its way into the American Constitution and the 1789 *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*; each also suggests problems for discussion. Should "equality" refer to equality of opportunity or equality of results?

cit-i-zen \ 'sit-ə-zən \ n [ME *citizein*, fr. AF *citezein*, alter. of OF *citeien*, fr. *cité* city] **1** : an inhabitant of a city or town; *esp* : one entitled to the rights and privileges of a freeman **2** : a member of a state **a** : a native or naturalized person who owes allegiance to a government and is entitled to protection from it **3** : a civilian as distinguished from a specialized servant of the state

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education becomes evident immediately: citizenship not only brings together people in a network of rights and responsibilities; it also separates natives of different "states" and irretrievably "alienates" refugees who have lost their citizenship rights altogether. Thus the limitations of the concept for many years allowed citizenship training to become patriotic propaganda exercises. In order to escape the provincialism involved in approaching all questions from the point of view of whether it is good for America, then, we decided to refer to our units as "human rights and responsibilities" classes, and not as "citizenship" lessons. This allows us to look at citizenship comparatively and historically to determine how successfully human rights have fared under modern citizenship in different countries, in comparison with how they fared in ancient Greece and Rome and under feudalism, and thus to decide whether we want to move towards a more global citizenship or towards a more communal or tribal citizenship in some ways perhaps closer to feudalism.

Returning to our definition of "citizenship," we confront two other

Does "democracy" imply participation through representatives who are independent once elected, or through delegates who must vote on each issue as their constituents ask them to vote—or does it imply direct participation through referendums? (Dahrendorf, 1974).

The problems posed when we examine the second phrase, "owes allegiance," seem even greater. Michael Walzer (1974) divides citizenship duties into five categories: (1) loyalty, (2) defense of the country, (3) obedience of the law and "a decorum which is commonly called civility," (4) tolerance of other citizens, and (5) active participation in public life. Given the fact that many citizens and students disregard and even flout some of these duties every day, is it not preferable that we know and be able to justify our positions and perhaps decide that we are wrong? On the other hand, classes might decide that certain of these duties are no longer or never were necessary to the proper performance of citizenship, or that one or another of these duties may be abridged at certain times for special reasons. What is important, however, is that

each student question undogmatically and attempt to define the proper rights and duties of a citizen in today's world.

Cox and Massialas (1966) remark that "It is questionable that good citizenship, whether viewed narrowly or broadly, can be achieved when most of what is known about man's behavior in this century is relegated to a secondary role in the curriculum of the schools." We support this assertion, but we would change "this century" to "the history of humankind." Our concern that the most conspicuous failures of citizen action be presented to the students along with the publicized triumphs represents our desire to analyze citizenship clearly and objectively, for as Hannah Arendt (1973) makes clear,

We can no longer afford to take that which was good in the past and simply call it our heritage, to discard the bad and simply think of it as a dead load which by itself time will bury in oblivion. The subterranean stream of Western history has finally come to the surface and usurped the dignity of our tradition. This is the reality in which we live. And this is why all efforts to escape from the grimness of the present into nostalgia for a still intact past, or into the anticipated oblivion of a better future, are vain.

Evanston's new civic education units all deal with examples of inhumanity, and encourage the student to analyze such concepts as scapegoating, prejudice, and propaganda. The theory behind teaching these topics is that if a student develops a conceptual framework for understanding antisocial behavior, she or he will be partially immunized from exhibiting that behavior. The following units are being taught in world history courses:

—*The Law and Justice* unit stresses the pressures of society on the individual and examines how authority has been legitimated over recorded history.

—*The Crusades* unit discusses the cultural conflicts which occurred when the Christians encountered the more sophisticated Muslims. The use of propaganda by Urban II is also carefully analyzed.

—*The Commercial Revolution* examines economic and cultural documents by Europeans and Africans

over the last four centuries to determine the importance of the slave trade as the source of the future industrialization of Europe.

—*The Holocaust* is an exploration of difficult moral decisions that Europeans, especially Jews, had to make during the Nazi onslaught.

United States history contains these items:

—*Native Americans and Europeans* analyzes the problems of stereotyping and intercultural conflict within the context of Native American writings on European-Americans' and whites' views of the Indians.

—*The Intolerant Puritans* looks at idealism as a cause for bigotry and violence. The unit concludes by having the students compare the Ayatollah Khomeini with the early Puritan leadership.

—*American Intolerance to Americans* contains six lessons—on such topics as The Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, and the Japanese Internment Camps during World War II—which will be taught at various times during the year. The common thread in these lessons is the denial of full citizenship by those in power to their fellow Americans.

—*The Refugee Problem* deals with this twentieth century phenomenon and with what the American response was, is, and should be.

In a study conducted in the early 1970s in California high schools, Richard Remy (1972) cited four frequent complaints about civics courses: (1) they are "naive" and "romanticized," with an "undue focus on legal and institutional aspects of government" and not enough discussion of "political behavior"; (2) they are preoccupied with American society; (3) most courses fail to provide students with the skills of social science inquiry and the ability to analyze political decisions and values; and (4) they fail to help students "participate effectively and democratically in politics." Partly because these problems seem so endemic to courses exclusively concerned with civics, we have decided to insert our units into United States and world history courses instead of teaching them as separate courses. In this situation, the students can con-

stantly compare theory to practice and apply their political inquiry and analytical skills to current and historical political situations.

Only 2 percent of the students Remy surveyed liked courses that "centered on a single textbook"; the greatest percentage of students wanted "separate units which could be used as a single course or separate episodes." Separate units are not necessarily worthy alternatives, however, for they are often written by the same people who write the textbooks. We believe that even poor readers can learn to analyze primary source documents with help from the teacher. Our units thus concentrate on such materials as statutes, Indian treaties, sermons, speeches, Platonic dialogues, and even the play *Antigone*. We also present the work of noted scholars like Dana Carleton Munro on the Crusades, Alvin Josephy on American Indians, and W.E.B. Du Bois on the slave trade. Unlike most textbook authors, these people have spent most of their lives researching special areas and do not try to hide their opinions; it is exciting and fruitful to argue with their ideas.

We use several methods in the lesson plans to ensure that students participate mentally and emotionally in analyzing human rights, and citizenship responsibilities. One method is to require papers and oral reports on such topics as "Night and Fog," the "Holocaust" television drama, Sophocles' and Plato's ideas of justice, or an interview with a recently arrived refugee. A second method, and one that has already been piloted very successfully, is to use Edwin Fenton's format for civic moral dilemmas to discuss stories about how particular people might have acted during the periods we are studying. One such story describes the crew of a slave ship in the mid-nineteenth century deciding if they should mutiny. In addition, we use full-scale simulations, including one in which the students play the parts of members of a Jewish ghetto and its *Judenrat*, faced with horribly difficult decisions as to whether to appease the Nazis or to revolt and face certain death.

The purpose of all of the moral dilemmas, simulations, papers, and discussions is to open up the students' minds about human rights and responsibilities—to stop them from

prejudging situations and from relying only on authorities, traditional solutions, or "intuition." For this reason, we are using the Rokeach Dogmatism Scale (1960) as one measure of each student's change; this tests "the extent to which the person can receive, evaluate, and act on relevant information received from the outside on its own intrinsic merits." We feel this test will most accurately reflect the extent of a student's ability to make independent value decisions within a wide range of current and historical situations.

While it was possible at one time to believe that teaching people to become good citizens by training them to obey the law was sufficient, it has now become clear that what is called "good citizenship" is really chauvinism, stereotyping, and a perverted idealism; that "good citizens" have often been unwilling or unable to take a stand against some of the worst atrocities of the modern age. A characteristic response to this ambiguity, which "citizenship values" now reflect, has been to continue to espouse the glories of citizenship while defining citizenship in vaguer and more neutral ways, instead of conducting a thorough reexamination of the term

and the ideology that gives it meaning. The courses we have developed look clearly at the theory and practice of citizenship in the context of intercultural conflicts and atrocities that have occurred throughout history—and in light of the attempt to define the nature of our responsibilities as human beings. Perhaps our ideal is not so far from Galbraith's (1980) "social ethic": "the will, in an increasingly interdependent world, to be as concerned with what one must do jointly with others, to have as much pride in this achievement, as one has in what one does for one's self."

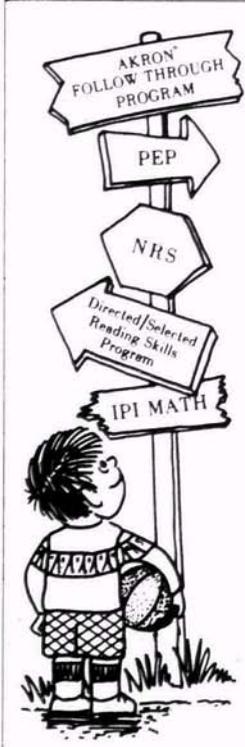
Whatever attitude students reach on the nature of human responsibility, however, they must not merely delve into the question impersonally without being forced to relate issues to their own lives.

Rather they must learn to identify with the dilemmas of others, to understand events not just with their minds, but with their hearts. We believe this kind of identification—fostered in conjunction with discussions of citizenship and human responsibility in light of "the full range of human behavior"—can lead students and us to a better understanding of our rights

and responsibilities both as citizens and as human beings.

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