

RONALD  REAGAN
CENTER ON CIVILITY AND DEMOCRACY

Summer 2025 Newsletter



► A MESSAGE FROM FRED RYAN

Political Violence is an Attack on America's Founding Principles

The increasing acts of political violence in the United States, most recently the political assassinations of Turning Point USA founder and president Charlie Kirk and Minnesota House of Representatives Speaker Emerita Melissa Hortman, are shocking examples of the dangers posed by political extremism and violence. These acts are not random - they are driven by hatred and designed to silence voices and sow fear. They are an attack not only on individuals, but on America's civic culture itself.

As President Reagan reminded us: "Democrats and Republicans alike must be resolute in disassociating ourselves from any group or individual...whose arguments are supported only by intimidation or threats of violence. We must, and will, continue our unified rejection of such elements of hate in our political life, for while there are many issues which divide us, it is fundamental principles such as this which will always draw us together."

During his presidency, Ronald Reagan showed us how to resist extremism, reminding us that democratic self-government is "never more than one generation away from extinction," and that the most meaningful words in the Constitution are "We the People". And while he fought to advance conservative principles, he was committed above all to preserving the system the Framers designed — a government created to protect individual liberties and maintain unity in the face of disagreement. Time and time again, President Reagan carved out space for independent judgment, dialogue and civic friendship across political differences.

To promote these principles in public life, the Ronald Reagan Center on Civility and Democracy (CCD) launched our Informed Patriotism Series which reminds Americans of the common bonds that unite us as one people. This week, we welcomed Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett to the Reagan Library where she gave an eloquent defense of civility as a core American principle, watch her inspiring words [here](#).

On July 18th, we proudly hosted acclaimed documentarian Ken Burns for a conversation on his forthcoming documentary, "The American Revolution," which captures the powerful story of our nation's birth and the timeless lessons it offers today.

As a guest contributor to this newsletter, Ken's essay is a thoughtful reflection on how Americans throughout history have come together despite their differences.



► GUEST CONTRIBUTOR KEN BURNS

The Words That Hold Us Together

History reminds us of an essential fact of human nature: people have always faced division. But this need not preclude the possibility of national and political unity. The genius of the American Founding was to build a country around a new vision of human equality and dignity – first in speech, then gradually in reality. In my upcoming documentary, “The American Revolution,” 10 years in the making, my co-creators and I attempt to tell this story in all its heroic and complex glory.

The Revolutionary period was one of fierce division. Towns, regions and even families were split between Patriots and Loyalists. And such quarrels were not unique to this period. Consider the Civil or Vietnam wars. There has always been conflict. But even amidst these trials, the words and spirit of the Declaration of Independence have always united us.

It was this spirit – genuinely new in human history – that the Revolution first introduced. We're the only country held together not by a common language, religion or geography, but by words. And to these words we must return.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

When we study these words, we see the newness they represent and are called to reinvest in those things we share in common. The founders asked us to be more than subjects, to be citizens with both rights and responsibilities. A subject is passive; a citizen is active.

[SEE KEN'S FULL COLUMN](#)



► **DEMOCRACY CHECK-UP: AMERICANS ARE WORRIED**

More than half of Americans (52%) say our democracy is weaker today than in the past. Only a quarter think it's stronger.

[Dive Into the Findings ►](#)

That's why we're doubling down on our mission to promote civil discourse, common ground, and informed patriotism. We believe that understanding America's past 250 years is exactly the guide we need to chart a path to a stronger future.



► **MARK YOUR CALENDAR**

💡 **Sept 18 – Let's Find Common Ground Podcast**

Join Fred Ryan and veteran democratic political strategist Bob Shrum for a spirited, but civil 😊, conversation about President Reagan's example of civility, how we make it popular again and what the outlook is on civility as we approach America's 250th.

[Listen Here ►](#)

👤🏠 **Sept 18 – Reagan Institute Summit on Education (RISE)**

Join Secretary of Education Linda McMahon, Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt, US Senator Tim Kaine and dozens of other leaders in education and policy reimagining education for America's future.

[Join the Conversation ►](#)



► **RECENT HIGHLIGHTS**

🔗 ***A Conversation with Amy Coney Barrett***

See Justice Barrett as she starts her nationwide book tour at the Reagan Library. Get a behind the scenes look at her life, her deliberative process and her vision.

[Watch the Conversation ►](#)

Ken Burns: The American Revolution

An exclusive conversation with Ken Burns, Sarah Botstein, and historian Christopher Brown on the making of *The American Revolution*, the next great American historical documentary.

[Watch the Conversation ▶](#)

Op-Ed Alert - "Teach Them to Disagree: Why civility belongs in every classroom"

Public education in the United States used to cultivate citizens who could read, reason, vote and make informed decisions, what's gone wrong? In *the 74*, we detail where we went wrong and how we get our civic culture back through the classroom.

[Read It Now ▶](#)

Op-Ed Alert - "What President Reagan Taught Me About Civility"

Aren't people wonderful? Or are they? In *The Dispatch*, Fred Ryan calls out the rising violence in our politics and calls on all of us to follow President Reagan's unshakeable belief in the goodness of our fellow man.

[Read It Now ▶](#)

Reagan Debate Series National Championship

We paid for the microphones, but the students brought the wit. See some of the best young debaters in action with \$50,000 in scholarships on the line.

[Watch The 2025 Championship ▶](#)

A Common Ground Forum with Governor Lujan-Grisham and Governor Cox

What does Civility really mean? Is it a bygone notion? Or, worse yet a sign of weakness in American politics today? Or, is it how we move America forward? Come watch and decide for yourself as Governors discuss.

[Watch And Decide For Yourself ▶](#)



▶ FEATURED ORGANIZATIONS

"We Americans are not bound together as a nation—a people—by ties of blood or soil.

What unites us—what makes us "out of many, one"—is our shared commitment to principles we believe to be essential to the full flourishing of human beings..."

– Professor Robert P. George

The James Madison Program, Princeton University: A Princeton University program that promotes teaching and scholarship in and is dedicated to exploring enduring questions of American constitutional law and Western political thought.

[Visit Website ▶](#)

The Bill of Rights Institute: An educational nonprofit that seeks an America where we more perfectly realize the promise of liberty and equality expressed in the Declaration of

Independence.

[Visit Website ▶](#)

iCivics: Founded in 2009 by Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, iCivics develops and disseminates innovative edu-video games that teach a high-quality civic curriculum in order to engage young people at their level in a fun way.

[Visit Website ▶](#)

Builders Movement: An organization whose mission is to equip citizens to overcome toxic polarization and solve our toughest problems together. The Builders Movement roots itself in their 4Cs of daily life: curiosity, compassion, courage, and creativity.

[Visit Website ▶](#)

Braver Angels: A national grassroots, non-profit organization that seeks to depolarize American politics by transforming our attitudes towards each other.

[Visit Website ▶](#)

If you have ideas related to this newsletter, please share them with us.

[EMAIL US](#)



▶ TOP READING PICKS

“The success of a multi-member court rides on the ability to disagree respectfully, the success of a democratic society does too.”

– Justice Amy Coney Barrett

📖 **Listening to the Law: Reflections on the Court and Constitution:** With the warmth and clarity that made her a popular law professor, Justice Barrett brings to life the making of the Constitution and explains her approach to interpreting its text.

[Get the Book ▶](#)

📖 **When We Forget Our History, We Risk Our Future:** Writing in the *National Review*, journalist John Fund explains that the current negative trends and incivility in American civic life can be directly attributed to the lack of civic education in America today.

[Read Article ▶](#)

📖 **We Hold These Truths, America at 250:** An initiative led by the American Enterprise Institute, edited by civic thought-leaders Yuval Levin, Adam J. White and John Yoo, aimed at reintroducing Americans to the unique value of their national inheritance.

[Check Out The Resources ▶](#)



► BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND

🕒 Tool for the Moment: The Civility Compass

A simple guide to bringing civility into daily life. Try it with your friends, your workplace, or your community.

[Chart Your Course Now ►](#)

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Promoting Constructive Solutions to Restore
and Renew American Democracy.

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