



Ronald Reagan

CENTER ON CIVILITY
AND DEMOCRACY

Spring 2026 Newsletter



► A MESSAGE FROM FRED RYAN

The Foundation of Self-Government

Two hundred and fifty years ago this July, a group of men signed their names to a document that would become the foundation of a new kind of nation, built on the consent of free citizens. They disagreed, often fiercely, about what that nation should look like, but channeled their disagreement into a foundation of government that has withstood multiple world wars, crises, and two and a half centuries of change.

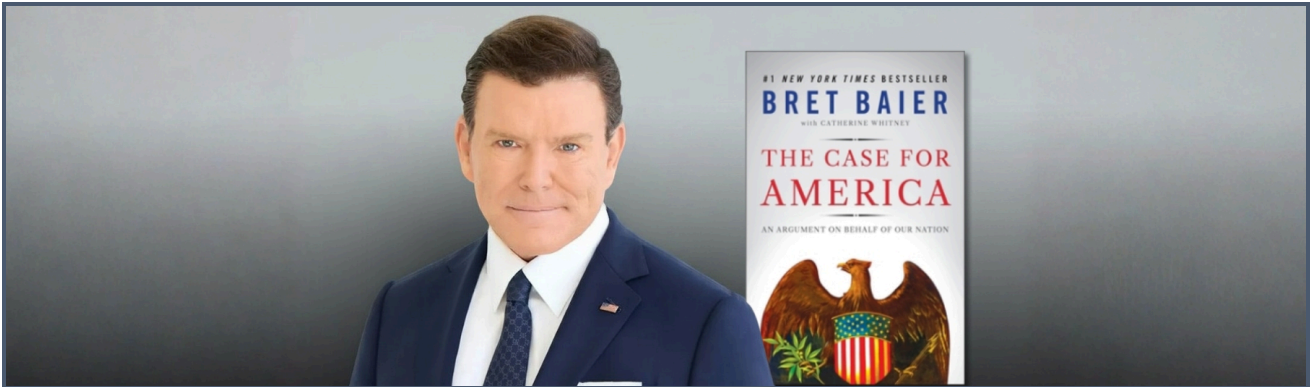
That foundation was tested from the very beginning. The Declaration of Independence nearly collapsed before it was signed, before agreement was finally reached. A decade later, the Constitutional Convention came even closer to failure. Delegates arrived representing states with competing economies, rival interests and fundamentally different visions of how power should be distributed. At several points, the convention nearly disbanded entirely. What held it together was the willingness of men who deeply disagreed to remain at the table, to listen, to yield on some things in order to advance the common good.

Like the Founders, President Reagan understood what it took to bolster and continue adding to that foundation. Speaking on our country's 200th anniversary, he reminded Americans that whether future generations would inherit liberty "will depend on what we do here." The character of everyday Americans determines whether that inheritance is passed on or squandered.

As with the success of the Declaration and Constitution, the success of the American experiment today depends on our willingness to disagree well and treat others with respect. That willingness has a name: civility. Civility is the foundation on which self-government stands.

As [*The Civility Handbook* \(get your free copy \[here\]\(#\)\)](#)—the Center on Civility and Democracy's new practical guide to civil discourse in American life—puts it, civility is not a passive virtue or a personality trait that some have and others don't. It's an active process, "a habit that can be adopted and nourished, but sometimes forgotten. It is like learning to shoot a free throw in basketball or play the piano."

Anyone can learn the habits of civility, but they take practice and only stay sharp if they’re reinforced day after day. That’s precisely what [The Civility Handbook](#) is for. Written as a guide for everyday Americans navigating disagreement in all arenas of life—around the dinner table, on campus, at work, online—it draws on great American stories to show what civility looks like in practice. We hope it will be a resource you return to and share widely.



► GUEST CONTRIBUTOR BRET BAIER

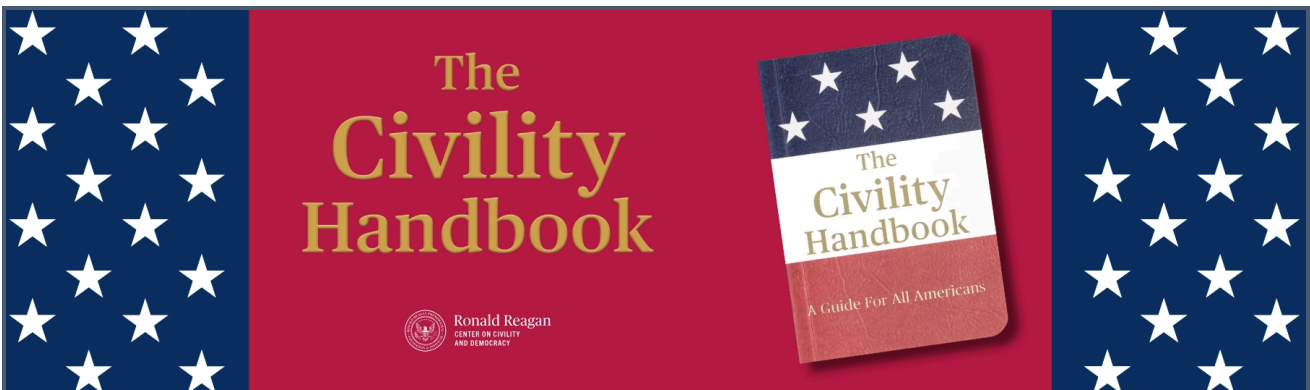
Bridging the Divide at 250

When I set out to write *The Case for America*, I hoped to find core truths about who we are as a people on our 250th anniversary and how we can bridge our divides.

Today, we often hear that we live in an age of perpetual conflict. But history offers perspective. From the founding chapters of our nation to the present day, unanimity has never been as important as character. In fact, dissent has always been a common feature of the American way. The freedom to disagree is one of the things that distinguishes us as a democracy.

In 1776, when the Continental Congress met in Philadelphia to discuss seeking independence from the British, the sessions were heated. John Adams lamented that “every important step was opposed, and carried by bare majorities, which obliged me to be almost constantly engaged in debate.”

[READ BRET’S FULL COLUMN HERE](#)



► INTRODUCING THE CIVILITY HANDBOOK (*Over 10,000 ordered in its first week*)

America faces a deepening divide that threatens our shared foundations. Where we once emphasized our common values and aspirations, many Americans now define themselves primarily by opposition to their fellow citizens. This polarization plays out daily across social media, news coverage, and political discourse, making it increasingly difficult to have

constructive dialogue or pursue solutions that benefit the whole nation.

The Civility Handbook is the culmination of months of research, drafting and engagement with educators, civic leaders, students and everyday Americans to deliver a practical, nonpartisan resource to help everyday Americans engage one another with greater civility. Published during the celebration of America's 250th birthday, it calls Americans to remember the traditions of civility and civic virtue that have led to our greatness and reinvigorate those values in their own daily lives.

[Order Your Free Copy or Explore the Digital Version Here ►](#)

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If you have ideas related to this newsletter, please share them with us. [EMAIL US](#)



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Reagan National Civility Survey 2026:

Civility and Sportsmanship

► **REAGAN NATIONAL CIVILITY SURVEY 2026: CIVILITY AND SPORTSMANSHIP**

The Center on Civility and Democracy’s newest national survey explores the relationship between sportsmanship and civic life. Americans overwhelmingly believe that respect for opponents, playing by the rules, and demonstrating grace in victory and defeat are important values not only in sports, but in society more broadly.

The findings suggest that sports remain one of the most powerful civic classrooms in America and offer a hopeful model for restoring healthier norms in public life.

[Explore the Findings Here ►](#)

REAGAN CIVILITY AND DEMOCRACY FORUM 2026

“Let Us Act Together”

July 28, 2026



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► **MARK YOUR CALENDAR**

July 27–28 — The Inaugural Reagan Civility and Democracy Forum

We are excited to announce that the Center on Civility and Democracy will be adding its own signature event to the Reagan Foundation calendar!

At a moment when division defines much of public life, the *Reagan Civility and Democracy Forum* offers something different: a place where serious discussion and pluralism is not

avoided—but elevated. The Forum will bring together students, young professionals and national leaders to remind and retrain ourselves how to debate and disagree yet still work together to strengthen our democratic republic.

The Reagan Civility and Democracy Forum is made possible by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, we are working together to build the next generation of civic leaders.

[Stay Tuned For Updates And How To Watch ►](#)

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Promoting Constructive Solutions to Restore
and Renew American Democracy.



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