

Teaching about the Rise of Hate Groups, Neo-Fascism, the Alt-Right, and the Threat to Freedom and Democracy in the United States

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When I first wrote the title of this column, it included the following words: “And Why All Social Studies Professionals Must Teach about and Encourage Our Students to Resist It and Believe in and Work for a Nation Where Everyone Is ‘Created Equal’ and Has ‘Unalienable Rights’ Including ‘Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.’” Obviously, that was too long; but I wanted to say it loud and clear. Please re-read the two parts of the title together to yourself before moving on.

I was born in 1939, was a child during World War II, a teenager in the Nifty Fifties, finished college and taught and coached in high school in the Tumultuous 70s, had a great career at Indiana University, and a wonderful retirement. Today, I have never felt as concerned, worried, even frightened about the future of the United States as a beacon for democracy, human rights, and individual rights of freedom and economic opportunity.

And, I must tell you: I think that you and I—and our colleagues in K-12 classrooms, college-level teacher educators, textbook developers, and anyone working in and with civics, history, and social science education—have a tremendous responsibility for teaching in classrooms, providing leadership, developing mate-

rials, and doing whatever we can to bring the United States back from this precipice of losing all that our nation has achieved and stands for.

There are some topics in citizenship and U.S. history education where we cannot and should not be objective. Yes, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson kept slaves—but slavery was and is wrong. Women weren’t allowed to own property or to vote—but we were able to correct that. And, today, we social studies teachers should not be objective on issues of hate groups, white supremacists, religious persecution, or groups intent on taking away civil rights. We should tell our students that these groups and these feelings damage and could destroy our democracy and our civil rights.

I have spent more time on my introduction than usual. But I wanted you to know how a fun-loving, former retirement bartender, who loves life, feels about what I see, hear, and read about issues that are linked to the growth and activities of alt-right groups. Please do what you can in your position and in your life to help social studies and citizenship education preserve the America we love.

Some of the Internet sites listed are a bit different than usual. The first is primarily for teachers and supervisors. It’s an article from *Atlantic* magazine, about two high school teachers in Brookline, Mass., who were teaching about hate and alt-right groups back in April of this year, months before the Charlottesville demonstrations and riot. I strongly encourage you to read it. It gives a history of alt right/hate/racist groups in recent years. This article is one that I wish all Americans could read.

Another website is an Australian government site. Australia has clearly been more concerned about bridging racial/

ethnic divides and reducing and (hopefully) ending discrimination. The link I provide gives you activities and lesson plans that can easily be adapted to U.S. schools.

I was pleased to see a site description that really looked great and then I noticed that NCSS had officially endorsed its goals and materials. It's the Advocates for Human Rights, which works to preserve and enhance human rights on an international basis, including rights of refugees and immigrants, women, ethnic and religious minorities, and children and other marginalized communities. The NCSS leadership made a good decision.

Here are sites that will provide materials, lesson plans, and, hopefully, encouragement for you and all my social studies/citizenship colleagues to help save U.S. democracy and freedom.

Atlantic Magazine: The Alt Right Curriculum

www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/04/the-alt-right-curriculum/521745/

I'm sure you can go on the Atlantic website and simply type in "The Alt Right Curriculum" and not have to type in the lengthy URL. I've already described the article, so go for it.

KQED Radio and TV

<https://www2.kqed.org/education/>

This San Francisco-based PBS/NPR station is doing a great favor for teachers and students with the part of their website labeled "Education," with subtitles such as "For Educators," "For Your Students," and "Subject Areas." Go to "News and Civics" and you can find resources and high school and middle school lesson plans on a wide variety of topics. They have some very well conceived and useful lesson plans and related information.

Australian Human Rights Commission

www.humanrights.gov.au/education/human-rights-school-classroom

This is the best page to take a look at

lesson plans and activities for students on the general topic of human rights. It does not limit itself to Australia, but argues that human rights should be available worldwide. This site, if you explore it, will lead you to think that the United States might be better served by a national department of education rather than 50+ separate ones with different standards, curriculum guidelines, and even the grade levels when certain courses are taught.

Teaching Tolerance

www.tolerance.org/

The primary focus for Teaching Tolerance is "Educating for a Diverse Democracy." They have a wonderful array of Classroom Resources including lesson plans, which are very well-designed and aimed at a variety of grade levels, teaching strategies, and some excellent "film kits," which are free for K-12 schools, schools of education, public libraries, or houses of worship.

The Advocates for Human Rights

www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/for_educators

This organization asserts that it is at the forefront of the world's human rights movement. It has also been awarded an endorsement from NCSS. On their home page, click on "Educators: Teach Your Students" and you'll find a large number of lesson plans and other resources for all grade levels. You can search by topic or grade level. I like the "worldwide" focus of this group. There's a lesson on immigration issues with a human rights focus. There are Free Toolkits to help teach human rights issues in the United States, including fact sheets and quizzes.

Bill of Rights Institute

www.billofrightsinstitute.org/

The Bill of Rights Institute says their goal is "to help the next generation understand the freedom and opportunity the Constitution offers." They have some great lesson plans and links to documents from the past and as up-to-date

as news stories about contemporary events. There's a free digital course for teachers on history, government, and economics through Tufts University. But I was impressed with the resources on many important topics in the civics/history curriculum, including one on Civil Disobedience.

There are other websites that I would recommend you check out, including the Anti-Defamation League (www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/) and another Australian one, Racism NoWay (www.racismnoway.com.au/teaching-resources/anti-racism-activities/). However, you can find these and others by doing some searching on your own. The ones I've described will certainly help you prepare some lessons and activities that will support the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights within the U.S. Constitution and our preservation of American democracy and freedom. As I ended another column a few issues ago: "It's our job! Let's do it! 🇺🇸"

C. FREDERICK RISINGER (risinger@indiana.edu) is retired from the School of Education at Indiana University. He welcomes input and suggestions for both column topics and websites that would be helpful for teachers. He believes that social studies/citizenship teachers need to work together to help all Americans realize how important social studies is to this nation.