



Patriotism and Education Revisited:

Selected Responses to The April 2006 Special Section

A Reader Comments

Not the Military I Know

By Charles T. Christine

WILLIAM Ayers sees a different military from the one I saw during 36 years of active and reserve service. I found his article (“Hearts and Minds: Military Recruitment and the High School Battlefield,” April) to be unfair to the military in general and to military recruiters in particular.

In his article Ayers consistently reminded us of the horrors of war. No argument about that. But the U.S. military does not declare wars. With the consent of the Congress, our President orders our military into war.

Ayers ought not to confuse a neces-

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sary defense establishment with the fact of war. During the 1970s, the Strategic Air Command displayed the slogan “Peace Is Our Profession.” This was no fatuous claim. From 1950 to 1990, our military preparedness prevented the Soviet Union from beginning a war with the nations of Western Europe and possibly even the United States.

Ayers used the examples of six severely wounded and understandably bitter veterans to show how impressionable teenagers are charmed into the dangerous business of war. Impressionable teenagers are also somehow attracted to the dangerous businesses of coal mining, construction, electroplating, farming, firefighting, and police work. There is also a certain amount of risk involved in teaching in inner-city schools. We can’t all be professors of education.

Ayers’ allusion to military basic training was right on. This initiation to the military does appeal to some individuals’ aggressive tendencies and desire to belong. Of course, the same could be said about being on most high school sports teams or belonging to any organization, from the Junior Honor Society to Phi Delta Kappa. So what?

Speaking of basic training, the camaraderie it created has lasted my own basic training cadre for over 50 years. Each year, more than 300 of us meet to renew our friendship and recall our debt to the military. Our quarterly journal has printed hundreds of well-written stories by men who were totally hostile to the educational program presented in high school but who responded enthusiastically to the education and vocational training they received in the military. Many went on to college and to satisfying careers. Many used the skills learned in the military to find satisfying civilian jobs. Many appreciated the military life and remained for 20, 30, or more years.

Now, young men and women, like my basic training compatriots who disliked their traditional high schools, find a more relevant program in JROTC. JROTC does not replace English, math, science, history, or any other high school offerings. The JROTC instructors with whom I am familiar successfully encourage pupils to work hard at their high school pursuits and to be involved with the school. The instructors strive to imbue pupils with the self-discipline that was the subject of the Duck-

worth/Seligman study reported by Gerald Bracey in the March 2006 Research column.

Yet Ayers claims that JROTC diverts money from more worthwhile school programs. Let us recognize that school boards must compete to gain a voluntary JROTC program. The Pentagon doesn't decide for local districts. Local school boards, city councils, and state and federal governments make deliberative decisions as to what will be spent on schools and where. Ayers may not like the decisions, but I prefer this procedure to having professors of education make such decisions.

Ayers' hostility to military recruiters is insulting. One of my many assignments during my military service was recruiting. Why should it be a surprise that we target schools where pupils have little or no opportunity or desire to attend college immediately after high school? I recall giving a presentation to parents at one of Philadelphia's most prestigious high schools. I faced 45 parents on a back-to-school night and began my presentation with my usual caveat that entering the military at age 18 was not a path to a career in law or medicine and that anyone with this notion was in the wrong place. Everyone left. I found more receptive audiences in less affluent schools.

Middle school counselors and administrators requested my annual schoolwide lectures. During one of these assemblies, resplendent with military ribbons and insignia of rank, I recounted a typical experience at a local high school. I told the students that I had talked with some 18-year-olds that morning who aspired to fly U.S. Army helicopters. I said that I had asked the high-schoolers what their present math and science courses were. Most replied that they had not done math or science since grade

9. I told them that, to achieve their goal of flying for the military, they would need to go back to grade 9 and start over. I reminded the eighth-graders that grade 12 is too late to start getting serious about school.

Some recruiters lie. Some medical doctors, college professors, politicians, bartenders, and plumbers lie. Fortunately, most do not. It is my experience that anyone in the military who is caught lying is punished more severely than those in other businesses. Our military academies maintain an honor system almost unknown anywhere else. I can assure readers that everything I did in the military was too important for untruth. Especially recruiting.

Yes, the military recruits people from families with limited resources, limited educations, and limited opportunities. Many of these young adults live in the sections of our large cities that are beset by poverty and filled with hardship and danger. My experience with the teenagers and young adults from such families has demonstrated to me that the military is the most successful antipoverty program available in the U.S. These young soldiers formed military families with the financial resources, housing and medical support, child care, education, and social services that enabled them to move into the middle class and beyond. Yes, the price was hardship and danger during combat deployments, but for most, the outcome was well worth the price. For my recruits, it was a tradeoff they made to escape the constant hardship and danger of Philadelphia.

"The military culture seeps in at all levels and has a corrosive impact on education itself," Ayers writes. His concept of the military culture is indicative of one who has little or no contact with the real military. Robert Kaplan of the *Atlantic* asserts that

our best hope for protecting the U.S. against radical Muslims is the well-educated sergeants and captains on the ground in distant places.¹ These soldiers, who are knowledgeable about language, culture, philosophy, and history (both foreign and American), successfully make the case for peaceful coexistence with the U.S. and the democratic ideal. Soldiers with a more practical bent learn about state-of-the-art computers, communications, and mechanical skills that equip them for advancement in or out of the military. The dichotomy between education and training is a fuzzy one, long unresolved by curriculum theorists. The military culture is no more "corrosive" of liberal education than is any other corporate endeavor, including college.

Ayers refers to desertion in the military as a "crisis." But this is simply false. A desertion rate of 4,739 soldiers out of a total force of 2.2 million is far from a "crisis." Desertion in the military is far less common as a percentage than is desertion from the U.S. high school (i.e., dropping out). Most estimates place the dropout rate in our high schools at between 20% and 25%. A military desertion rate of .02 percent is a testimony to the dedication of our military personnel. By comparison, it does appear that attending high school is less appealing than facing roadside bombs.

We need a military. There is an ancient admonition, "Let him who desires peace, prepare for war." This is not an empty thought. There have always been and will always be nations that further their own interests by dominating their weaker neighbors. We need a military to discourage ambitious states from trying to dominate us.

1. Robert Kaplan, "Global Security," lecture to

The Author Responds

Toward a Fuller Humanity

By William Ayers

ALL human beings, and most markedly adolescents, need a nurturing environment and a place to belong in order to thrive. There's overwhelming evidence that adolescents do much better on several important measures when they are allowed to participate in smaller, more intimate learning communities.

An important part of the evidence is simply to notice what the most privileged people in our society provide for their kids — schools with a focus and a clear mission, small classes, lots of special programs. And of course there are the countless studies that not only affirm the value of smaller learning communities but show further that kids who are poor or from traditionally oppressed groups benefit most in these settings.

None of this leads logically to the conclusion — expressed by Charles Christine in his call for “relevance” in high school programs and a culture that fosters “camaraderie” — that we ought to support JROTC in urban schools. We could, as well, support breaking big schools into smaller, themed academies, or we could advocate for a generously fund-

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ed program of clubs and teams in which all would participate, or we could develop an intense and engaging community apprenticeship/internship/mentoring program. Or a lot else. Why JROTC, and why only JROTC?

According to the military, the goal of JROTC is “to create favorable attitudes and impressions toward the services and toward careers in the Armed Forces.” This, then, requires that we accept and warrant the role of our military in our lives and the world. And here I return to my original argument: militarizing the schools is bad for teachers and terrible for kids, it undermines meaningful and robust education, and it distorts our democratic values and the possibility of building a culture of democracy. While JROTC sells itself as a promoter of “character” and “discipline,” the means to those imagined ends involve fear, intimidation, shame, and unquestioning obedience. The “camaraderie” Christine alludes to can be a product of the basest, most vile bonding rituals, as history has taught us over and over again.

Christine's letter is built on the idea that the U.S. military is a beneficent force in the world. He cites the Strategic Air Command motto “Peace Is Our Profession” as accurate and says, without any irony whatsoever, that “there have always been and will always be nations that further their own interests by dominating their weaker neighbors.” From my perspective — based on boatloads of evidence — that sentence perfectly describes U.S. foreign policy from its inception until today.

The courageous journalist I. F. Stone had a simple rule of thumb that guided all of his efforts as a reporter, and he urged his colleagues to keep this at the center of their consciousness. Remember, Stone said,

that all governments lie. The old Soviet Union, of course, and China, but also Algeria, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Dominica, Egypt, France, the Gambia — the entire alphabet of nations lies. And in spite of our hopes and aspirations and mystifications, the U.S. is no exception. In fact, the U.S. — near the bottom of the alphabet — is near the top of the list of liars. Perhaps it's U.S. military power or economic reach, perhaps it's the sense of self-importance and destiny, but whatever the reason, our government lies to us and to the world from morning until night.

A brief history lesson should at least allow us to proceed as skeptics.

- President Polk cast Mexico as the aggressor in 1846, saying it had “shed American blood upon the American soil” — a lie — and proceeded to seize half of that nation “in self-defense.”

- President McKinley said in 1898 that the U.S. had a moral obligation to “liberate” the Cubans from Spain and later to “civilize” the Filipinos — all lies — as he conquered new territory and murdered many thousands of patriots, resisters, and ordinary people.

- President Wilson prodded the country into World War I to “make the world safe for democracy” — a lie — as he joined the frenzy to divide the Earth and its resources and markets among the old and emerging imperial powers.

- President Truman claimed that Hiroshima was a “military target” — a lie — and that dropping nuclear bombs on Japan saved “a million American lives” — an invention of monstrous proportions.

- President Kennedy lied about the extent of U.S. entanglement in Vietnam, President Johnson lied about the Gulf of Tonkin, and President Nixon lied about expanding the war

into neutral Cambodia.

The list goes on and on. President Reagan lied about Grenada; President George H. W. Bush, about Panama and Iraq; President Clinton, about the Sudan. It never ends.

Today we are witnessing in public and political life a steady barrage of lying as justification for war, invasion, repression, torture, occupation, and constant surveillance. We are sold a terrifying scenario of risk, as well as a romanticized version of our beneficent mission in the world. Educators must ask ourselves if we are helping our students look critically at these and other received truths steadily raining down upon them. Are they able to separate fact from fancy? Can they interrogate whatever nonsense is given to them? Can they identify arguments and sort through conflicting claims and various sources of information in a steady, thoughtful, and engaged way? Must they obediently conform to all they're told? Can they talk back?

With our students, we must learn to ask the essential questions again

and again and then find ways to live within the answers we receive. Who are we in the world? How did we get here? What can we know? What do we have the right to imagine and expect? Where are we going? Who makes the decisions? Who's left out? Who decides? Who benefits? Who suffers? What are the alternatives? In many ways, these kinds of questions are themselves the answers.

The great American historian Howard Zinn argues that we should "Put Away the Flags":

We would do well to renounce nationalism and all its symbols: its flags, its pledges of allegiance, its anthems, its insistence in song that God must single out America to be blessed.

Is not nationalism — that devotion to a flag, an anthem, a boundary so fierce it engenders mass murder — one of the great evils of our time, along with racism, along with religious hatred?

Patriotism is perhaps the single concept in greatest need of intense scrutiny and questioning in our coun-

try today. After all, we live in a time of empire resurrected and unapologetic, of war without borders and seemingly without end, of greed enthroned, of a rapidly widening gulf between rich and poor, of elusive and seemingly intractable barriers to racial justice, and of patriotism rehearsed and paraded. Meanwhile, the basic questions of who we are and where we are elude us. When the National Geographic Society recently surveyed U.S. young adults, huge percentages couldn't find Iraq, Israel/Palestine, or even Great Britain on a world map. An astonishing 10% couldn't find the U.S. I blame the schools, the media, the misinformation culture. Perhaps we really don't know where we are in the world, and perhaps we harbor a deep sense that it doesn't matter much. We're here, after all, and we matter most; everyone else must pay attention to us because we count. But our attention to them — those masses of others who don't count as much — is pointless.

This enforced ignorance is part of the logic of patriotism, which is of a piece with the logic of nationalism: anyone who by chance was thrust onto this small specific patch of Earth is to consider himself or herself superior to all those unfortunates who were thrust onto some other patch. This beatified place is imagined to be qualitatively unparalleled, so different from all other places that it's as if a high wall shuts it off from the rest of the world. And walls as metaphors are reinforced with barbed wire erected in East Germany, Israel, and now on the southern border of the U.S. Here, inside the walls, a chosen people live blessed lives that are nobler, greater, deeper, wiser, and more beneficent than the lives led by any other human beings anywhere else.

This is the constant conceit of patriotism, the narcissistic and arrogant stance. The result is that we are willing to fight, kill, and die — or at least to send the children of the laboring classes to do the killing and dying — in a patriotic fever for real estate before reason.

Samuel Johnson called patriotism “the last refuge of a scoundrel,” and Bertrand Russell said it was “the willingness to kill and be killed for trivial reasons.” Patriotism is justification for murder. And Malcolm X advised that no one become “so blind with patriotism that you can’t face reality. . . . Wrong is wrong, no matter who does it or says it.” Howard Zinn describes the typically disingenuous justification for war:

As our armies were committing massacres in the Philippines (at least 600,000 Filipinos died in a few years of conflict), Elihu Root, our secretary of war, was saying: “The American soldier is different from all other soldiers of all other countries since the world began. He is the advance guard of liberty and justice, of law and order, and of peace and happiness.”

We see in Iraq that our soldiers are *not* different. They have — perhaps against their better nature — killed thousands of Iraqi civilians. And some soldiers have shown themselves capable of brutality and torture. Yet they, too, are victims of our government’s lies.

Could patriotism possibly be a universal value? Is it specific? Should all people in the world at all times be patriotic? What if some specific country or government is a disaster? Should Germans have been patriotic during the Third Reich? How about Rwandans of any tribe during the genocide? How about Israelis or Americans today? Is America always

a force for good?

From my perspective, there is no fit between patriotism and humanism. The nation-state has been at bottom always an engine for war and repression. Sometimes — as in our own country — a wobbly and outdated concept of a single national identity lords it over the true variety, diversity, and pluralism of human life. We need to realize that a single inflamed identity is always a deprivation, and we must explore this contradiction in our teaching. How is it that the rational and humane people in Sarajevo of 1992 were transformed into the ruthless Serbs and fierce Croatians of 1993? Violence, of course, creates identity, just as identity creates violence. This is the violence of identity, nationalism, and patriotism. This is the “camaraderie” of murder.

Inflamed identities are morally backward, dangerous, destructive, and descriptively wrong. As Amartya Sen writes in *Identity and Violence*, while “a Hutu laborer from Kigali may be pressured to see himself only as a Hutu and incited to kill Tutsis . . . he is not only a Hutu, but also a Kigalian, a Rwandan, an African, a laborer, and a human being.”

Walt Whitman — his crazy exuberance, his limitless faith in possibility, and his joy and love and ecstasy spilling out of him in all directions — instructs us in “Song of Myself” to see ourselves whole and to reject any one-sided, pumped-up identity:

I celebrate, and sing myself . . .
I am an acme of things accomplished,
I am an encloser of things to be . . .
Do I contradict myself? Very well then
I contradict myself.
(I am large. I contain multitudes.)

Each of us contains multitudes, so we can choose to emphasize iden-

tities we share with others. Circumstances will necessarily constrain our choices, but we must note that identity is not destiny. Still we can choose, and still we must.

While we hear people say all the time, “My country right or wrong,” it’s weird to say, “My sister, drunk or sober.” If my sister is wrong, I have an obligation to criticize her, to correct her. If she persists and does great harm, I’m obliged to stop her. No less for my country.

It seems plausible to love your family, your neighbors and friends, and the land itself and to simultaneously oppose the actions of the state, the government, the military. It’s essential, here and now, to draw a bright line between the American people and the U.S. state. After all, there’s no such thing as a single, unified narrative of America. America as a spiritual concept floating above state power, government apparatus, law, or military might is simply a myth. But it is this disembodied spirit we’re instructed to love, even as the state rambles on, leaving wreckage in its wake.

All cultures and societies, of course, teach about themselves, and all cultures tend to assert their supremacy over others. Societies often construct their identities against some imagined *other*: the Greeks had their barbarians; the American settlers had the Indians. We study our traditions, great works, and language, and they move us toward reverence. And, according to Howard Zinn, national spirit might be temporarily benign in a soccer match, say, or in a country “lacking both in military power and a hunger for expansion.” But no culture or society exists in isolation, and our nation is so huge and so militarized that “what might have been harmless pride becomes an arrogant nationalism dangerous to oth-

ers and to ourselves.”

Because the study of one's own tradition is taken for granted, we must — as teachers and students — look outside ourselves, at others, in search of our fuller humanity. A militarized classroom, a military culture, stands as an obstacle. That's why we should kick the military out of our schools. ■

A Reader Comments

Maybe the Kids Do Get It?

By James P. McLallen

READE with great interest all the articles on patriotism and education in the April 2006 *Kappan*. If I may identify a theme that runs through them: “authoritarian” patriotism is bad; “democratic” patriotism is good. Put another way, “blind” patriotism is bad; “constructive” patriotism is good.

Who would speak or write in favor of “authoritarian” or “blind” patriotism? Within a few paragraphs, the writers have skillfully tilted their readers toward their point of view. But, darn it, even the research on California high school seniors doesn't match up with what is desired. These darn kids just don't get it: we need to be much more open, accepting, peaceful, and nurturing to the rest of the world; we need to be just like Canada!

Well, maybe the kids *do get it* after all. Maybe they understand that

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we face an enemy today that is dedicated to our annihilation. Maybe kids know that, if our enemies don't have the means yet to inflict even worse injuries on us than they did on September 11, they certainly don't lack the will. Maybe the kids also get it that the words expressed by some of our elected leaders and some unelected spokespersons that argue against the war on terror show up on Arab television the following day and provide powerful motivation for the throwbacks to the seventh century to continue the fight. Our kids understand instantaneous communication, and maybe they don't want to say something that will be used against our military forces.

Maybe our kids do believe that such demeaned acts as reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and hanging a U.S. flag in a prominent place are small gestures on their part to show their support for brothers, sisters, fathers, and mothers who are taking up arms against a determined foe.

Are our kids acting as a result of “authoritarian” influences? Or “blind” obedience? Are they falling into “us versus them” thinking? Have they all been robotically programmed to march mindlessly to the tune of the government?

I have spent 30 years working in our public schools, and my experience suggests that students today are just as thoughtful and capable of critical thinking as students were 40 years ago. But today, even if I conceded that the current federal Administration was attempting to limit dissent, there are new and alternative sources of information offering the widest array of opinion in history.

And with all this information available, those darned students still seem to lean more toward what most of the *Kappan* authors would identify as “negative” patriotism. Don't these

kids see that the U.S. is *not* the best country? Don't they understand that we're really just a bunch of “imperialists” who want to rape the rest of the world? Don't they believe that the world's troubles are of our making? No, they don't. And bless them for it.

Our young men and women continue to enlist in the military for noble reasons. Of course, there are some incentives thrown in, but colleges and corporations do the same thing when they seek to hire the best. The military is a career choice, and on career days, it should be just as available to students as colleges and universities. Moreover, I don't believe that any young person who joins the military today does so without knowing that he or she is likely to go in harm's way. These young people are not helpless pawns manipulated by cynical inducements. Our young people are going into the service with their eyes wide open. In March 2006, all four active duty branches of the armed forces exceeded their recruiting goals. Re-enlistments across all the services are at an all-time high — and this after many have served one or more tours in Afghanistan or Iraq.

Can all these young enlistees and veteran soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines be dominated and controlled by “authoritarian” patriotism? I don't think so. Anyone who has spent time in a barracks soon learns that there are a multitude of opinions about the military (many unprintable). However, the men and women in the services put aside their views in dedication to a higher purpose. In my opinion, this is selfless behavior.

My response to the April issue's special section is that patriotism is already being taught. The canned “patriotic” lessons sent out by the federal government never reach the classrooms in the schools where I work.

I think most educators at the building level would view them as both simplistic and clumsy. However, I do believe patriotism is taught by veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, through family opinion, on soldiers' blogs, through Internet reports, and in the traditional media. Patriotism is diverse, noisy, and opinionated, and it certainly is too big and important a topic to "teach" in school. Most important, by the time young people get to their junior and senior years in high school, they have sorted it out. That's why we might appreciate the results of the California student survey rather than fall into despair over them. ■

A Reader Comments

On Patriotism And Respect For Those Who Serve

By James Porter

WHEN I read the articles on patriotism and education in the April 2006 *Kappan*, I was looking for an article by a veteran that discussed teaching patriotism. I didn't see one. Most of us who have served in our nation's armed forces have done so and then moved on to build a life in the civilian sector. Some of us even became

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teachers. As one of those, I feel compelled to comment about patriotism in my association's magazine.

For most veterans, the years spent in uniformed service resulted in mu-

America will suffer greatly if we come to believe that we are too sophisticated or that our culture has matured to the point that our country and its democratic values no longer need to be protected by committed patriots.

tual benefit to our country and ourselves. I couldn't have seen the world, learned to fly, commanded a squadron, earned two master's degrees, and met the people I have met had I done anything else. Most of us are proud of our service and feel sincerely that we protected those we loved, helped preserve our democratic ideals, and helped advance our national interests. We made sacrifices and served in the tradition of all those brave men and women we learn about in our history books. We served under the same flag as those who in decades past preserved our freedom for ourselves and our children. America will suffer greatly if we come to believe that we are too sophisticated or that our culture has matured to the point that our country and its democratic values no longer need to be protected by committed patriots. There are still those in the world who would do us harm, and each morning's paper confirms that.

When my Navy career was over, I wanted to teach in a high school. I had no idea where I would fit in. I didn't know if I wanted to teach history or math or become an administrator. I decided to start with naval science so I could learn from inside the walls of public education just where I would be best suited to make a dif-

ference in the lives of students. I wanted to teach civics, to coach, and to mentor kids at a critical point in their growing up. After the two years I gave myself to make the choice, I decided

that, as a naval science instructor, I had the best chance to do what I wanted to do in education.

At our school, naval science instructors teach three classes a day in a rotating block schedule, just like all the other full-time teachers. We are part of the fabric of the campus. We participate in presenting the colors at all assemblies and at football games. We also serve on the principal's advisory board and on the scholarship committee. When the bell rings at the end of the school day, the rest of our day starts. We coach the drill team, the academic team, the air rifle team, and the orienteering team. Our after-school program begins in August before the school year starts and doesn't end until graduation. On weekends, there are instructional field trips, community service, and trips for team competitions.

My class is a civics class. We learn about naval history, military customs and courtesies, respect for legally constituted authority, and respect for ourselves. We learn ethics, pride in wearing a uniform, and pride in being a part of something bigger than ourselves. We learn how to march, how to read a map, and how to navigate. The kids also get a first taste of real responsibility, public speaking, and community service. And all the while

they are pursuing academic excellence and learning self-discipline.

When my NJROTC students are seniors, they have a number of experiences designed to help them decide what to do after high school. Most go to college or enter the business world. But some enlist in the armed services, and they do so with their eyes open. They understand their Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery scores and what they qualify them to do. They know the physical requirements of armed service. They know what questions to ask a recruiter, and they have some experience in military ways and the confidence to survive boot camp. NJROTC cadets have reasonable expectations of what military life is like.

Today, America has the world's strongest military, staffed by the best-educated soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, and coast guardsmen. The advanced technology and sophisticated command and control structure demand highly skilled and highly trained personnel. These people come from all over America. They are our sons and daughters. All have been initially trained by a drill instructor, whose time-tested methods are guaranteed to build trust, discipline, and teamwork. Lives depend on correct reactions, and many are alive today because of what they learned from their drill instructor.

I do not think we need to fear the military recruiter. He is a salesman and a provider of information, speaking to kids of the television age. These kids have been listening critically to televised sales pitches since birth. They can compare programs, understand concepts, and use their knowledge to decide if they want to join an all-volunteer service. In fact, the more they know, the better the choices they will make. The military recruiter is not a monster preying on young peo-

ple. He is required to be honest, respectful, and above board. If he is not, he is brought up on charges.

The military service is not for everyone. Some people feel comfortable with rules and discipline; others do not. Some are attracted to the comparatively Spartan lifestyle, where caring about protecting your country is held in higher regard than the size of your paycheck or how many books and articles you have published. There are lots of ways to be patriotic in America, and serving in the armed forces is by no means the only way. We should not, however, denigrate or demean the men and women who make this choice by suggesting that they are suckers. They have willingly given up some of their rights and freedoms for the sake of military discipline and to form our last line of defense.

Some say that the armed services are made up of too many poor and minority Americans, suggesting that they bear a disproportionate burden. The fact is that the color of America's face is changing. It is becoming darker, and the services are in the vanguard of social change in our nation. Ask anyone where members of minority groups can find training that will lead them to an honorable place in American society and earn the money to attend college, and you will surely hear in response the armed services.

It is painful for all of us when people are hurt in the service of our country. Our hearts grow heavy when some of them die. But when we as a nation fail to see the need to make these sacrifices, then we will begin to lose the way of life that others have bled and died to attain and protect. We can argue the rightness or wrongness of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, but those in uniform did not make decisions about engaging in those wars. Our elected civilian leaders command our soldiers, and if you want

change, exercise your democratic rights. Those who serve in our armed forces are our patriots today. They deserve our loyalty and respect. And that includes drill instructors and recruiters. **K**

The Author Responds

Diverse, Noisy Democracy

By Joel Westheimer

I have received a great many letters, e-mails, and even phone calls from readers expressing their views about last April's *Kappan* special section on Patriotism and Education. They have come from schoolteachers, veterans, professors, parents, embassy workers, politicians, and — in one case — a 12-year-old girl. I am heartened that the issue sparked precisely the kind of discussion and debate about patriotism and schools that has been sorely lacking. Spurred on by the diverse viewpoints of the *Kappan* readership, I want to use this opportunity to respond to two assertions: first, that “committed patriots” — as one reader calls them — are those who either serve in the military or at the very least do not openly criticize government policies; and second, that

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school-based programs like ROTC and JROTC are a positive educational force for promoting camaraderie, discipline, civic unity, and loyalty. Although I do not agree with many of the arguments posed by respondents to the April section, I welcome open debate about what schools should teach students about patriotism. The exchanges presented in this issue represent just such an open dialogue.

First, respondent James McLallen claims that the articles in the April *Kappan* set up a straw-man argument. For example, he argues that, in "Politics and Patriotism in Education," I push the reader to accept that "authoritarian patriotism" is bad and that "democratic patriotism" is good. McLallen asks, rhetorically, "Who would speak or write in favor of authoritarian . . . patriotism?" I wish the answer to McLallen's query were a resounding: Nobody! Certainly not any American!

But we only need to read a few lines down in his own commentary to see who would be in favor of authoritarian patriotism: McLallen himself. Reading the results of the California surveys in the article by Joe Kahne and Ellen Middaugh, he is shocked that they are concerned to find students who think it is unpatriotic to criticize the government. "Maybe the kids *do get it*," he writes, "Maybe they understand that we face an enemy today that is dedicated to our annihilation, . . . that the words expressed by some of our elected leaders and some unelected spokespersons that argue against the war on terror show up on Arab television the following day." He would prefer that American leaders and American citizens say nothing negative, lest our enemies get the better of us. This sounds an awful lot like former White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer's admonition to all Americans that "they

need to watch what they say, watch what they do." McLallen does acknowledge that there are a multitude of opinions out there about issues like the war in Iraq, and he seems to approve of the idea that students (and even soldiers) should think critically. But apparently he would prefer if they not express their thoughts out loud.

Many New Yorkers who had lost family members, colleagues, and friends expressed their heartfelt belief that national grieving should take place immediately, but that foreign policy decisions should emerge from reasoned deliberation.

It is impossible to overstate this point: the idea that citizens shouldn't publicly criticize the government is at the epicenter of virtually every aspiring fascist nation in the history of the world. It is authoritarian patriotism at its finest: if you criticize us, you are supporting the enemy, the authoritarian patriots say. As I write these words, Vice President Dick Cheney is being roundly criticized for proclaiming that Ned Lamont's victory in Connecticut's Democratic primary would embolden the "al Qaeda types." Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) rightly called Cheney's comments "an attack not just on Democrats, but on democracy itself."

The April *Kappan* contained a spectrum of political viewpoints on patriotism, but there is no doubt I argued for a form of patriotism that embodies dissent over unquestioned loyalty to the government. Here's why. On the morning of September 11, 2001, I stood with my wife and daughter on a street corner 18 city blocks away from the World Trade Center and watched as the second plane hit the South Tower and, soon after, as both buildings collapsed into the impossibly dense financial district streets

below. Every week for months following that day, thousands of New Yorkers gathered in Union Square and Times Square and marched up Fifth Avenue, Sixth Avenue, and Broadway to warn against hasty military acts of vengeance. It was in these weekly gatherings and marches in Union Square that many New Yorkers who had lost

family members, colleagues, and friends expressed their heartfelt belief that national grieving should take place immediately, but that foreign policy decisions should emerge from reasoned deliberation and debate and not from rushed emotions or political grandstanding. These weekly outpourings, which grew at times to the tens of thousands, were summarily ignored by all mainstream media outlets. And certainly in the classrooms of Dubuque, Kansas City, Chicago, and Indianapolis.

Even the massive protests against the Iraq war that immediately preceded the Republican National Convention in New York City in August 2004 were strangely ignored or downplayed by most media outlets. I know of many who reported the eerie sensation of marching alongside tens of thousands up Sixth Avenue (the Avenue of the Americas!) beneath the enormous live-screen TV for Fox News. Above the throngs, Fox News steadily broadcast a video loop of workers inside Madison Square Garden unfolding empty chairs in preparation for the following day's convention. There was no mention of the tens of thousands of protesters walk-

ing literally outside of Fox's New York headquarters virtually the entire day. I welcome hearty debate, which is at the center of the American Constitution, and I take issue with arguments that would strip such debate from our nation's classrooms.

Any democratic society must respect dissent, especially when it's unpopular and when the issue being debated is of such monumental consequence. Perhaps McLallen fails to realize what is at stake in the issues about which he would like schools to stifle all debate. Here's a reminder for all of us. More than 2,600 U.S. soldiers have been killed in a war in Iraq that virtually everyone agrees was fought on the faulty premise that Iraq maintained weapons of mass destruction. Estimates of Iraqi civilian deaths exceed 100,000 (that is, more civilians are killed per month than died in the September 11 attack on America). U.S. taxpayers have spent more than \$300 billion on this war — at a rate of \$195 million per day. What does this mean? For every day's expenditure on the war, we could hire 4,000 new teachers and pay their salaries for a year or enroll 27,000 children in Head Start. For *one week's* spending on the war, we could hire the teachers or pay Head Start for seven years! Alas, there are still those who wish we wouldn't debate these issues and who think students shouldn't be told that intelligent adults who love America disagree on whether we should preemptively invade a foreign land. It is for them that the articles in the *Kappan* seemed especially important. Dissent is the hallmark of a democratic society.

Second, given the lively and rancorous tone of some of the commentaries, readers may be surprised that most of the authors who wrote about patriotism and education in last April's *Kappan* and each of the respon-

dents agree on something: kids today (and adults too) are lacking meaningful experiences in the community. Many advocates of inculcating patriotism in American youths want students to know that they are part of something bigger than themselves, a larger civic enterprise. Young people are too often deprived of a sense of responsibility, community involvement, and collective enterprises that are worthwhile.

James Porter notes that the naval science class he now teaches is in many respects a civics class. Besides learning military customs, respect for authority, pride in wearing a uniform, and so on, students in Porter's classes learn the satisfaction of "being part of something bigger" than themselves. Men and women in the armed forces learn to hold service "in higher regard than the size of your paycheck or how many books and articles you have published." Another reader has written to me about people's "innate need to belong." I have no doubt that much of this is true. Military training is a powerful bonding experience, and soldiers and officers no doubt learn that working with others toward collective goals can be far more satisfying than wiling away the hours in front of the newest Xbox game. We are all concerned that students learn to look beyond their iPods and gain civic pride in working together to make the world a better place. ROTC and JROTC, the respondents claim, help to stem the alienation youths and young adults experience in our hyper-individualist and materialist society. Patriotism is an antidote to individualism.

These readers are certainly not the first to recognize the powerful influence military training can have on youths. In his now-classic essay, philosopher William James wrote about the need for a "Moral Equivalent of

War" to bring citizens together in common purpose. He saw that nations needed ways to sustain some degree of political unity and civic virtue in times of peace as well as war. He even knew that what we now call "self-esteem" depended on such service:

All the qualities of a man acquire dignity when he knows that the service of the collectivity that owns him needs him. If proud of the collectivity, his own pride rises in proportion. No collectivity is like an army for nourishing such pride.

But James, whose work inspired the late Kurt Hahn to found the Outward Bound schools, called himself a member of the "anti-military party." He wanted more productive, more constructive, and more enriching experiences to take the place of militaristic ones in shaping young people's hearts and minds. Both James and Hahn recognized that there is as much glory, excitement, and camaraderie in building and repairing bridges as there is in blowing them up. The advocates of military service for advancing civic unity will recognize many of the qualities that Hahn sought to include in any educational program: "an undefeatable spirit," "tenacity in pursuit," "readiness for sensible self-denial." But the centerpiece of Hahn's educational aspirations was this: "above all, compassion."

Training children to fight is not the only way to build a sense of purpose or civic pride. What has always puzzled me is why many men and women who have had powerful experiences of friendship and community in the military and spend much of the rest of their lives trying to recapture the meaning invested in these experiences are often so loath to adopt social policies that would create just such an environment in everyday civilian life — and especially in schools.

Where is the patriotism that advocates for more just laws? Where are the demands that citizens meet their patriotic duties in a nation that includes the poor, the elderly, the sick? Those who fight against racial discrimination or work to build housing are, in my opinion, patriots: they fight for what they believe will make their country stronger. Why not teach those heroic patriotic lessons to our children? Why not give children experiences of community and collective work and common purpose that these efforts for the public good provide?

One exceedingly narrow version of patriotism has dominated discourse in the United States, especially when it comes to schools: the no-questions-asked kind. There are innumerable sources from which to find represented arguments for the kind of patriotic allegiance to government that borders on what I called “authoritarian patriotism.” In fact, there is little need to rehearse the arguments that follow this position because the perspective is so well represented. “Wanted-dead-or-alive” patriotic bravado has pervaded newspapers, television, and classrooms throughout the country.

The *Kappan* special section introduced readers to a broad spectrum of thinkers and writers and included visions of the patriotic citizen that welcome debate and recognize the need for dissent in a democracy. Perhaps readers already familiar with these perspectives were also able to find a detailed articulation of patriotism’s immense complexity. For those readers more inclined to assert the need to teach children pride and loyal adherence to the United States without distraction or confusion from dissenting accounts, my hope is that they were both engaged and challenged.

I couldn’t agree more with Mc-Lallen when he writes that patriot-

ism is “diverse, noisy, and opinionated.” Let’s keep it that way. ❧

A Reader Comments

Resources For Educating A Strong Democracy

By Dave Lehman

FIRST, I want to compliment the *Kappan* on its tremendous April 2006 issue with its focus on “Patriotism and Education.” As the founding principal/teacher of a public middle school and high school in Ithaca, New York, dedicated to “educating global citizens for the 21st century” and to running a democratically governed school, I thought I would offer the following list of resources for those interested in engaging more deeply in democratic education and in educating young people for their role in a strong democracy.

1. Forum for Education and Democracy (www.forumforeducation.org). The dozen “conveners of the forum” include Ted Sizer, Linda Darling-Hammond, John Goodlad, Deborah Meier, and Pedro Noguera. The initial mission is to make significant changes to the Elementary and Sec-

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ondary Education Act (also known by the Bush Administration as the No Child Left Behind Act). To this end, the conveners wrote an excellent little paperback, *Many Children Left Behind: How the No Child Left Behind Act Is Damaging Our Children and Our Schools*. They are now in the process of putting out a “national call to action: truly leaving no child behind.”

2. Small Planet Institute (www.smallplanetinstitute.org and www.democracysedge.org). Some readers will remember Frances Moore Lappé and Paul Du Bois, who published *The Quickening of America: Rebuilding Our Nation, Remaking Our Lives* in 1994 and established the Center for Living Democracy (1990-2000). Ms. Lappé’s latest book is *Democracy’s Edge: Choosing to Save our Country by Bringing Democracy to Life* (Jossey-Bass, 2005), and her new organization is the Small Planet Institute. The book contains an extensive list of all kinds of resources — “Entry Points for Living Democracy.” These resources could be helpful to teachers, and the following quotation from her introductory chapter should give a sense of the focus of the book: “The heart of democracy, I finally came to understand, is voice — the capacity of citizens to have a say in those critical choices shaping their lives and their future.”

3. First Amendment Schools (www.firstamendmentcenter.org — click on “First Amendment Schools”). This is a relatively new organization (begun in 2001) with a network of member and affiliate schools. ASCD has provided small grants to five schools for the 2006-07 school year “to transform how schools model and teach the rights and responsibilities of citizenship that form civic life in our democracy.” Even though future funding for such grants is un-

certain, “affiliate schools” can still receive copies of the latest resources and materials on First Amendment issues in schools, including *The First Amendment in Schools* and *Finding Common Ground: A Guide to Religious Liberty in Public Schools*, and a subscription to a weekly electronic newsletter, *First Amendment Schools*, which features stories from network schools, legal updates, and other First Amendment resources.

4. League of Small Democratic Schools (<http://depts.washington.edu/cedren/CER.htm>) — click on “Programs”). This organization was formed in the fall of 2004 by University of Washington Professor Dick Clark as an outgrowth of the Center for Educational Renewal. The application process to join the network is relatively straightforward, although it requires a “partner agency.” Fourteen schools joined initially, and members correspond, share resources, and address common issues and concerns.

5. League of Professional Schools (www.coe.uga.edu/lps). The League was begun a number of years ago by Carl Glickman of the University of Georgia. Membership is limited to Georgia schools, but a number of interesting items are available on the group’s website, which teachers in

every state may find useful.

6. Alternative Education Resource Organization (www.educationrevolution.org). Primarily the work of Jerry Mintz of Roslyn Heights, New York, AERO produces *Education Revolution: The Magazine of Alternative Education*. Founded in 1989 (originally called *AERO-Gramme*), it has the mission of “building the critical mass” for the education revolution by providing resources that “support self-determination in learning and the natural genius in everyone.” The magazine regularly includes the latest news and communications regarding the broad spectrum of educational alternatives: public alternatives, independent and private alternatives, home education, international alternatives, and more.

7. CivWorld: Citizen’s Campaign for Democracy (www.civworld.org). With a mission to “increase the awareness of our interdependence and create a new vision of what it means to be a global citizen in this interdependent world,” CivWorld is part of the Democracy Collaborative (www.democracycollaborative.org). Both are spearheaded by Benjamin Barber of the University of Maryland. CivWorld has been sponsoring the international “Interdependence Day” for the past four years.

8. Democracy Schools. Begun at Wilson College in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, in 2003, Democracy Schools are a collaborative effort of the Center for Democracy and the Constitution (www.constitution411.org) and the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (www.celdf.org). Democracy Schools are designed to teach individuals and communities how to reclaim their rights to democratic self-governance, and, in particular, how to use creative legal strategies to help establish local democratic control over cor-

porations. Visit the websites for a schedule of times and places for upcoming Democracy Schools.

9. Reclaim Democracy (www.reclaimdemocracy.org). This advocacy organization is dedicated to “restoring democratic authority over corporations, reviving grassroots democracy, and revoking the power of money and corporations to control government and civic society.” It provides a number of organizing strategies, resources, activities, and publications, including a series of “primers” on issues of democracy.

10. Democracy & Education (www.lclark.edu/org/journal). This journal is sponsored by the Graduate School of Education and Counseling, Lewis & Clark College, Portland, Oregon. It is dedicated to providing information and resources “for all participants in the educational process — teachers, administrators, parents, and students — who believe that democratic school change must come from those at the heart of education.”

11. International Democratic Education Conference (www.idec2006.org). This annual international conference of a loosely affiliated network of democratic schools throughout the world has been meeting since 1993. “Democratic schools” are defined as those that share most, if not all, of the following characteristics: “shared decision-making among the students and staff, a learner-centered approach in which students choose their daily activities, equality among staff and students, and the use of the greater community as an extension of the classroom.”

I hope *Kappan* readers find this list of resources useful as they pursue the goals of providing our students with an education suitable for citizens of a democracy. **K**

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