



IN SOLIDARITY

Season 4, Episode 2: Embracing power and education for civic health

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>> This is In Solidarity, a podcast where we draw connections between power, place, and health, and discuss how our lives, our fates, are all interconnected. Here are your hosts, Ericka Burroughs-Girardi and Beth Silver.

>> Hi there and welcome to In Solidarity, a podcast from County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, a national program of the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. I'm Beth Silver here we my cohost, Ericka Burroughs-Girardi, for the second of three episodes in our series on civic education.

>> Hi Beth. You've likely heard the statistics before. Test scores for social studies and civics courses are falling. There's less emphasis on teaching about our system of government. Many states don't require civic education in high schools, and those that do, only require a single semester. Get research shows that to have strong civic health and healthy communities, we must invest in civic education, history, and government, and we need to provide young people with the skills to think critically and to take informed actions to effect change.

>> Exactly, Erika. In this second episode of our three-part series, we're tackling civic education and young people's involvement in civic life, where we're at as a country, what we can do to improve it, and how it's linked to civic health and to our overall health. Civic health being the degree to which people can participate in their communities and in government and the overall wellbeing of those communities. It really is fascinating what we see in thriving communities, the places that make it easy to vote, that support policies and structures that encourage everyone to be involved. The people who live in these places tend to be healthier and to live longer. There's a paradox before us. Young people know less about history and government than ever before, and yet, they're voting at rates higher than the generations before them when they were the same age.

>> We know from research, Beth, that depending on where they live, the quality of civic education varies greatly. At the same time, we're seeing proposals to cut education funding and restrictions placed on what schools can teach. That's why I'm so excited to hear from our guest for this episode on why we should value civics education in this country. Our guest is Eric Liu. He's a self-described civic evangelist and the CEO of Citizen University, an organization that promotes powerful citizenship and civic education. So much to get into with them.



[Music]

>> Welcome Eric. So glad you could join us on in solidarity. You have an array of titles and accomplishments, among them CEO of Citizen University, executive director of the Aspen Institute program on citizenship and American identity, author of *You're More Powerful Than You Think*, *A Citizen's Guide To Making Change Happen*, and most recently, *Become America*, *Civic Sermons on Love, Responsibility, and Democracy*. You served in the Clinton Administration, advised the Obama Administration, the list goes on, but in every description, you always include that you are the son of immigrants. Can you share with us how being the son of Chinese immigrants has shaped you, your sense of responsibility, and your work in civic health?

>> Well, Beth, thank you for having me here today and, yeah, I appreciate that question. Being a child of immigrants is foundational to my sense of not only myself but what I'm doing here, and I think, you know, my parents were born in China during a time of war and revolution and civil war there, and they came to the U.S. in the late '50s and met here. And I grew up outside of Poughkeepsie, New York, in the Hudson Valley. I grew up with this ethos that was namely unspoken, didn't usually get verbalized, that, you know, look around, like this is great, and all you did was have the dumb luck to be born here. [laughter] That it was my parents who had done the heavy lifting of making the choice to come here but that even beyond my parents, it was the society that they had entered into, that I had been born into, where I got to inherit, you know, many, many generations of hard choices, sacrifices, and investments in a future that made it possible for me to actually grow up with a sense that lots of things were possible. And so, that unspoken ethos of, you know, all you had to do was dumb luck to be born here came with a corollary, which was make it worth it, you know, be useful. And I think that was, that part was spoken more explicitly, that the point of being, of growing up American was not to just look out for yourself but to be useful to community and country and to try to make some positive contribution there. And so that really did shape my ethos, even long before I knew what specifically I might want to do for work or anything like that. It was always kind of oriented that way toward, you know, be useful. But that also, you know, that civic health is not only peace and prosperity and stability and security, but civic health is trust. Civic health is a sense of belonging, and civic health actually begins with the opportunity to live a life where even when you are faced with physical health challenges, you know, what people think of primary as health, that you can still find a way to in fact be useful to community. Again, there was nothing self-made about us. We were made by a community. Our opportunities were made by being in a context. And that's not some community statement of, you know, left wing, totalitarian group think. That is just a statement that's as old as, you know, the deeply American idea that rugged individualism never got a barn raised. [laughter] And so you can have grit and rugged individualism, and my parents were rugged and had grit, but they didn't do anything alone, and I grew up recognizing that I, therefore, have a responsibility to pass on that same kind of those and world view any way that I can.

>> Wow. You cofounded Citizen University, a national organization based in Seattle. First, what does the word citizen in Citizen University mean to you? And can you tell us more about what Citizen University does?

>> Yeah, absolutely. So our work as an organization is to try to foster a culture with powerful, responsible citizenship in the United States, and pretty much every word in that sentence I just said has meaning, but



particularly the word that you highlighted, which is citizen. When we talk about citizen and Citizen University, or what it means to practice citizenship, we're speaking in the broad, kind of ethical sense of being a member of the body, a contributor to community. We're not speaking narrowly about legal documentation status, you know, whether you have a United States passport. That is important in its own right in different context, but we mean the deeper sense in which people mean, when people say that's a good citizen. Or you should live like a citizen. They mean it in this deeper ethical sense of do you show up for others? Do you contribute? Do you, you know, think about service in addition to or even before self? And again, do you take responsibility, and do you recognize that rights, which are a thing we cherish in American life, come bundled with responsibilities? And that ethos, which is not left or right, there are parts of it that resonate with an orientation toward justice that is resonant on the left right now, because what it means to live like a citizen is to make sure that everybody gets a chance to, has a fair show to really live to their fullest potential. But it can resonate with the right as well in the see that responsibility taking means that you don't look to yourself only. You look to others, but also you recognize that others mean our families, our associations, our faith organizations, our neighborhood groups, our community organizations, and it doesn't have to mean government as the first solver of first resort law or problems, right. And I think that notion of citizenship is what we're trying to cultivate here, and when we -- in our work at Citizen University, we have this conception of citizenship that is boiled down into a simple equation that power plus character equals citizenship, that to live like a citizen in a way that I'm describing here requires both halves of that equation, requires in the first place understanding power, being fluent in and literate in power, by which I mean do you understand who decides things, and do you understand how you could insert yourself into decision making in your community? And that can be informal things like a city council or a school board, but it can be in informal things, like, who decided that it's okay for people just to blow the leaves on their lawn, into the middle of the road for some else to have to deal with. That's not a matter of legislation. That's just social norms, right. Who decided that it's okay just to size somebody up by the color of their cap or the tattoos they have or whatever their T-shirt may say, and then just say, oh, I know what you're about. Like get out of my face. I don't want to engage with someone like you. That's is a matter of understanding power not only as a matter of governmental decision making, but our power to change norms, our power to define and to change the definition of what's okay and what's normal in a community life and what's healthy in a community life. And that notion of power, of understanding how people organize, how money is deployed, how social norms are activated, how frankly force and violence come into play, to intimidate people, how inherited narratives of who is in the circle and who is out of the circle, who belongs and who doesn't belong shapes our ideas of power. All of that is stuff that you have to get a, not just a passing acquaintance with but actually dive into if you want to actually claim your citizenship. And a lot of people on the left and the right are allergic to talking about power, because it sounds like that's the bad thing that people do to us, that power hungry people have been rigging the game against us. And I hate power. I hate talk of power. I want to obliterate that. But that is kind of a naïve idea. We all have power, and we are constantly either practicing it or giving it away. And when we kind of willfully become ignorant about who decides things in our community, we're just squandering and giving away our power, and we're actively choosing to wear a kick me sign on our backs to say, I'm a chump, please take advantage of me. Right. And so, citizenship requires in the first place that grounding and power, and we teach that at Citizen University. We teach power. We try to democratize in everyday ways rooted in community, for young people and people of all generations. Here's who decides stuff in our community. Here's how things happen. Here's who runs your town, and here's how you can change that. But then we couple that



literacy and power the second half of the equation, which is super important, because if all you do is get really skillful at manipulating and being able to move people and ideas and money and media and social norms to get things that you want to get, but you have no moral compass, then you're just really becoming a really skilled sociopath. Okay. And that's what we have too much of right now in public life. And so the characteristic side of this equation is not about what people often talk about when they talk about character. It's not just about individual virtue. We're not talking about perseverance and diligence and hard work and grit. Grit is the word du jour in this field, and again, like I said earlier, I'm all for grit. Most about listening to this conversation is tuning in and aware of things because they've got some measure of grit, and they're trying to figure out how do I get better. How do I make my community healthier, stronger, more inclusive, more resilient. But when we talk about characteristic at Citizen University, we mean character in the collective. How do we actually cultivate in people an orientation that sees themselves as, again, members of a body, not severable but responsible to, woven into a web of relationship and obligation and where it's not just a burden but a gift to build bonds of trust and affection with the people around you. And that's civic love. You may not like the person who is your neighbor, but learning how to love them as your neighbor in a civic sense, recognizing that they're human; I'm not going to dehumanize them. They're complicated; I'm not going to oversimplify them. And they're people with a world view that might be able to help solve a problem, so I'm not going to dismiss them. And if we could just learn, relearn those habits as a matter of characteristic, we'd go a long way toward actually addressing what's broken and unhealthy in civic life right now.

>> Eric, I wanted to back up just a little bit on power, and you talked a lot about sort of our individual or our human capacity for power and to make change. What about the structural and systems changes that need to take place to harness power?

>> Yeah. This is the topic of one of my books that you named earlier called *You're More Powerful Than You Think: The Citizen's Guide to Making Change Happen*. And what I lay out in that book and in our teachings at Citizen University is understanding how power works is like understanding physics or fire, right. You can understand how physics or fire works at a scale of an individual unit, an individual flame, an individual, you know, a piece of equipment, but the same principles are applicable at much larger scale in a fractal way, right. You understand how fire is deployed at a level of an HVAC system or a weapons system. You understand how physics is deployed to construct a great dam or a great irrigation system or to blow one up or deconstruct one, right. And I give both those building and destroying examples to remind us that power, like physics and fire, just is. It is a neutral thing, and that, again, is why coupling it with a grounding civic character matters. But I think a lot of the resistance that people have to talking about power is because they're scared of the ways in which it can be put to negative use, either interpersonally, as you're saying, or structurally. And it's true, that our history as a country is a history of power being deployed at scale in structural ways that take the form of dispossession of native communities from their lands, enslavement of Africans, exclusion of Chinese from the territory, preventing women from having a vote for the first couple centuries of the nation's existence. You know, power and law and policy have been deployed in structural ways throughout our history, you know, the history of Wisconsin politics, the history of the ways in which the power of money and capital and Wall Street, to squeeze and grind down farmers and to kind of impose, you know, standards of rootless capital as against rooted agrarian life. You know, that happens at scale and structural ways, and it's important to understand the structures, the policies, the ways in which democracy was deployed or abused to elect



and embed people who made those kinds of decisions. And it's important to recognize that all those same dynamics play out at smaller scales. They play out in the scale of your family. They play out in the scale of your school community. They play out in the scale of your neighborhood, right. And so, we don't have to all jump to, you know, let's solve the giant structural issues that plague the entire society in one bite. I think learning how to practice, you know, the line that all politics is local is true, and all citizenship is local as well. What it means to practice power is practice. How do you practice? You get better at something by practicing, and you don't practice by being a spectator commenting on your social media feeds about presidential candidates. You know, it's good to be informed, I guess, about presidential candidates, but you actually practice citizenship not by being a spectator but by being a participant and not only at the national level but where you live. And I think at that scale, these questions of power and character play out in a way that hopefully are grounded, again, in humanity. I mean there's a lot the poison of national politics that is trickling down to local politics nowadays and the fights that you see about schools and libraries and curriculum and book banning and the rest, but it's still the case, even on some of these hot issues, that oftentimes, even when you're divided across some of these issues, that you know this person, that your kids go to school together, that you have served on a community board together, that you've been through hard times together, that you've helped each other through a loss or a tragedy or something. And I think practicing power where there's still a relational basis for trust is the most important thing we can do together right now.

>> You've also talked about the American agreement, the creative liberty, equality, and self-government that unites us. You've said this creed requires us to ask questions. How do you use questions to engage young people in civic life, and what questions do you think they should be asking?

>> That's a great question. I think even the phrase that I love, which I love, American creed, is something that young people, it just bounces right off them, right. And there's a variety of reasons for that. You know, this generation, having grown up both in a more globalized environment, in a digital networked environment, but also having grown up, let's be honest, at the tail end of 50 plus years in which this country has underinvested in or disinvested in civic education and civic learning and in a set of habits of asking questions and out of those questions stitching together some common narrative of what it means to be American, this younger rising generation have very little attachment to America as such. And I don't say that in a way to kind of scold them. Actually, if I'm scolding anybody, it's scolding the adults in their lives, that we have done a poor job of asking the question of what does it mean to be American. And again, I know the reasons why. A lot of the conversation in prior generations about what it meant to be American was a very narrow, constricted conversation about what it means to be American is learn how to act, look, sound like a white Anglo-Saxon Christian male. Like that's an American, that's a default setting. You want to be American? Newcomer, you want to be an American? Lady, you want to be an American? Immigrant? Try to act like that, and that's changed. That's changed demographically. That's changed culturally. That's changed politically. And some of the pushback against that, which was necessarily, went too far to say, we want to toss out all together this idea of American, which was so narrow and unwelcoming to people like us. And we just want to claim our own particular sub-identity, or we want to claim a global identity. Or we just don't want to talk about this stuff at all. And I think that's going too far. I think we do need, in a country as diverse and centrifugal as ours, we're a country that if left to itself will fly apart, and you realize how fragile it is that the only thing we have actually magnetically to hold us together is a bunch of words and ideas, some of which were written 240 years



ago, that add up to the American creed. And so, words like of the people, by the people, for the people, words like all men or people are created equal. Words like life, liberty, pursuit of happiness are words that actually we are called to keep on animating and reanimating. And this is the pivot point that I think is super important with young people. Everything they care about right now, climate change, racial justice, the lack of economic opportunity, the kind of dread and doom of a future foreclosed, all of these fears, concerns, hopes, and dreams can find expression through some of the words that I just used. What it means, in fact, to reckon with racial inequity is, in fact, to pursue liberty and justice for all and to claim that and to recognize that throughout this country's history, the only times that we have moved the dial on closing the gap between our creed and our actual deeds, between our aspirations and our actual institutions, has been when people who had every reason to quit on this country decided to claim it. And when people who had every reason to be cynical about words like equality, freedom, equal protection of the laws said, you know what? I'm going to hold this country to those words, and I'm going to push this country to live up to those words. And that's what abolition was. And that's what women's suffrage was. That's what the Civil Rights Movement was and desegregation was, and that's what any justice movement has been about, right. And so, I think for young people right now, resituating themselves in that context that we've inherited here is really important. But then on the other side, it's also recognizing to the core of your question that the American creed is not some set of doctrines that you are meant to memorize and spout and regurgitate back. It's not a politically correct, here's the way to be American. What it means to be American is to forever contest what it means to be American. Like the whole point -- America is an argument. America is not an answer. America is forever an argument between, for instance, liberty and equality, right. We use those words like mom and apple pie. Like I love them both. They're great. But if you stop for ten seconds and think about it, liberty and equality are always perpetually intentioned with one another. And we all felt that during the pandemic, right.

>> Right.

>> People who really wanted liberty, not to be told what to do, not to be told to get vaccinated or wear a mask, were coming right up against ways in which their choices were creating or accelerating a public health crisis that was worsening inequality, that was making it hard for people who could not avoid going to work, who had to go into public space unprotected were risking their lives and their health, right. And so liberty and equality are constantly in tension. The two parts of our national motto, pluribus and unum, diversity and unity are constantly in tension, right. So the kinds of questions we try to ask young people in our work at Citizen University are how do you settle these tensions? How do you navigate the balance between liberty and equality? What does it mean to you to claim this creed. Not to say, yeah, America, freedom. I'm awesome. We're great. We're number one. But to actually ask, what does it mean to actually live up to equal protection of the laws? What are you willing to spend, to pay, to be encumbered by, to sacrifice in order to deliver on that promise for other people? Right. And how much are you willing to learn and listen from people who you don't like their world view? There's a very low commitment, frankly, among young people today to the principles of the First Amendment, and you see that on campuses. And young people have been accustomed to, and again, this is not to blame them. It is to blame the adults in their lives and the institutions that have formed them. We have created little bubbles where young people do not have to be discomfited from views that differ from their own or that might trouble them. And the whole spectrum of trigger warnings and the rest have created a generation of people who don't want to hear it. And I don't want to hear it is actually, in my view, a very un-America



world view. The point of living in this country is you kind of have to hear it. You don't have to like it, and in fact, you can mobilize against it, and you can marshal your thoughts and resources and ideas to say why it is wrong or even an abomination. But we got to hear it, and I think the questions that we try to ask young people are what are you doing to expose yourself to things that you don't think you want to hear. And p.s. everything I'm saying for young people is, of course, things that we grownups need to be remembering and practicing as well.

>> Yes. I appreciated your piece, Eric, in *The Atlantic* in 2016, just after Trump won the Presidency. You said the antidote to those who were disappointed with the state of politics in this country was simply start a club. You were getting at the need for collective purpose. What does this mean, especially for young people?

>> Well, there's so much pain that is the pain of not belonging, the pain of not having a place to be seen, the pain of feeling like you haven't lived up to an idea of what you're supposed to be, the pain of I'm not living the American dream, and I'm ashamed, because I'm supposed to. What's wrong with me? I can't pull myself up by my bootstraps. My bootstraps are broken. I'm ashamed. I have nobody to admit this to. That pain all across the board. White America, Black America, Asian America, it's everywhere, young and old American. But even short of the opioid crisis, loneliness kills. It kills in heart disease. It kills in proclivity to communicable diseases and flu and COVID and the rest. So that's why the surgeon general is talking about it, but we at Citizen University think about this because we think that health and civic health are completely entwined, that the cure for both what ails the body and what ails the body politic is joining with others, is association, is being an irregular group with people, ideally, people that you can learn something from, right. And this doesn't have to be a political or civic group. It doesn't have to be around a cause. It can be a gardening club. It can be a farmers group. It can be a book club. It can be a fly-fishing club. Whatever it is, but some thing that brings you together and builds habits of association. When we think that democracy is just elections, we're in trouble, because what we're letting happen is the rest of the topsoil of the garden of democracy getting dried up and blowing away. And the rest of that topsoil is do you have the habit of joining up with people who are unlike you, who you might not know, and learning how to do stuff together? Do you have the habit of figuring out with a group that is unlike you how to find a common agenda, common routines, common rituals, common habits. And again, I'm not saying political groups. Every rotary club does this. Every bible study group does this. Right. And I think having a club ends up being great not only for your physical health, that's proven, people who join and have associations and friends in groups like this live longer and live healthier, but it then makes our politics, it makes our democracy more resilient. We become less exploitable. We become less susceptible to viruses of conspiracy thinking, viruses that say, you know what? All your problems are because of this person or that group, these people who did you harm, and you can blame it all on them, because we know you feel lonely and scared, and so here's a scapegoat. And by the way, joining a big rally or joining a big march is fine. It's good, but that's not what I'm talking about, right. I'm actually talking about a regular ritual joining of a human scale group of people where you are in relationship and doing a third thing that's not just about you or me. Building, learning, creating, whatever you're doing. And so yeah, that's why I said after 2016, and it's why I'll say today, coming up on the 2024 election, one of the best things we can do right now is to join a club and rebuild that layer of associational life that is the lifeblood of an actual democracy.



>> On the matter of civic education, you've written that civic education in this country has been neglected and underfunded. We also know students' civic experiences vary across the country, but even in those classrooms where civics is still being taught, you say they're missing a key element, power, which we've talked about, or as you say, a systematic understanding of how to get what they want. Why is power so important in the civic education part of this conversation?

>> Well, I mean I think, as I said earlier, we define citizenship as power plus character, and so civics, which is the teaching of how to live like a citizen, how to be a member of a community, how to, and not just in the abstract, but how to be a member of this American community, and then from that, of your Green Bay community, of your Milwaukee community, of your, you know, whatever community, is to understand both parts of that equation. You know, the young people we work with, who are in our youth programs, they are high school, generally rising sophomores and juniors in high school. That's who participates in our youth -- we have a youth collaboratory program that is coupled with the national civic collaboratory I described early in which every year a cohort of young people, a couple of dozen, actually now four dozen young people from around the country every year get selected to spend an arc of a year together learning about power, learning about civic character but putting those learnings into practice where they develop their own youth power project in their community or on their school campus. And, well, how do you change the rules about school lunch or school breakfast? How do you change how bus service comes or doesn't come to your part of town? How do you change the fact that your neighborhood is a food desert and there's no good, healthy food options where you live. Like how do you get people in your very divided community to talk to each other across religious lines or racial lines or whatever it might be? And so, young people come up with the ideas for the thing they'd like to address, and then our job at Citizen University is to expose them to ideas, tools, examples, role models from the past, and role models from right now in a national collaboratory, people who are doing this work as adults at a national level expose the youth to them in a way where they can learn and make the practice better, right. And I think that practice of power in that way is literally that. Like you got to practice power, just like you got to practice tackling in football and playing in the band or the orchestra or practicing your lines in a theater rehearsal. Like you don't just wake up one day and find that you're great at this and you don't need to do any work on it. And we accept that in sports and in the arts and in, you know, other domains, and we should accept that as well in our role as democratic, participants in democratic life, that it takes practice to understand power. And a lot of the students we work with from around the country, they have high, earnest, idealistic aspirations for the kinds of projects they want to do, and then pretty quickly they realize, oh, I have no idea how to answer the core question of all civic life and civic power, which is who decides. I have no idea who decides on bus service. I have no idea who decides on why small businesses who want to create a grocery find it hard as a matter of zoning to afford to start a business in my part of town. I have no idea who decided that my part of the community was once redlined and still has low property values. Who decides property values? I have no idea who decides property values, right. And so they have to kind of pull the thread and unravel this whole thing of like, oh, wow. Everything you see around you, when you take a walk around your block, is the external deposit and result of a whole sequence of generational decisions that were made before you about the allocation of power. And now you have to question them, and not just take them for granted. That's what it means to live like a citizen, right. And that's the kind of stuff, to put it in context, that they don't teach -- like we do a bad job of teaching that, but we're at least -- you're allowed to teach it here, but in China, where my parents are from, you're not allowed to teach this stuff. You're not allowed to teach young people how to



question the power allocation in your community. You're not allowed to ask, wait, who decides, and why is it that I'm being told that I have to swallow whole this jingoistic nationalistic curriculum that says China is the best, and all other countries are evil? Who decides in China that they're going to just completely wipe out of the history books any mention of the cultural revolution or the great famines, you know, of the earlier eras of communist rule? You don't get to even ask the question about asking the question in a lot of other countries. We have that luxury here, and we are wasting it every day, right. And I think that's a -- I'm trying to motivate young people to say don't waste that. Don't be a chump. Don't let people take advantage of you. You have the opportunity and therefore the responsibility to start getting fluent in this stuff so that you can actually be all that you can be here.

>> You've written that teaching civics while avoiding the subject of power is like teaching physics while avoiding thermodynamics. It's bland and demotivating. How do you teach about civic power when we're at such a polarized point in American life? Some teachers in schools are afraid to even broach political discussions.

>> Yeah, I get that, and I have very, you know, I feel their pain. I get the fear, the walk on eggshells that many classroom teachers all across the United States right now feel about, you know, do I want to go there? Do I want to open up this topic? Do I want to even use this phrase that might get me, might earn me a tweet storm or a mention on Fox News or some other cable network that will mobilize an army of people who will come after me in some way. I get that. That's real, and that's dangerous right now. And it can't only be on the teachers to weather that. School administrators have to show some courage and be the kind of blockers for them, the shield. Parents have to take some responsibility. I mean a log of this great backlash right now that's leading to some of these book bans is kind of the rabid overcorrection of a perhaps valid thing, which is that too many parents across the left and the right have gotten too checked out from what their kids were actually learning in school. And that's a reality. And so for some parents of more rightward-learning cultural and political views, when they discovered how much was being taught about gender identities and racial equity and so forth, they're like, whoa, whoa, wait a minute. Like I'm not sure I agree with all that. And as a parent, you have the right to say, whoa, whoa, whoa, I'm not sure I agree with that. And you further have the right to do what they're doing, which is to organize with other parents and try to mobilize and change the composition of school boards. Like everything they're doing is exactly, actually, what Americans who are practicing democracy should learn how to do. But if you are discomfited by any of that, you should counter-organize, and you should counter-mobilize, and you should counter -- and there's a word for organizing and counter-organizing and counter-counter organizing. And that word is politics in a democracy. Right. And so like we do have to get comfortable with that in general and take more responsibility for that, but also give each other some more grace for that. You know, not every teacher who is teaching something that you're not sure you agree with is out to completely like brainwash or groom your kids towards something evil, right. That your job as a parent is to make sure your child is ready for the world in its complexity and messiness and pain. And if you just think you can bubble up your kid and shrink wrap them into some kind of, you know, they're not going to be exposed to anything that I don't like, you're not doing them any long-term service. So that's from the parent's perspective. But I think from a teacher's perspective to your question, I think the way to teach some of this stuff in a way that doesn't just automatically willfully step on some of these political landmines is, again, to teach the question, to teach the argument. So if you want to talk about the history of slavery in the United States, the fights that have been going on about the 1619 project, for instance,



right, if I were teaching American history right now in a middle school or a high school, I would say, okay, I want you to read two things. I want you to read this excerpt from the 1776 project, which was a curriculum created by more conservative scholars coming out of Hillsdale College, and then I want you to read these excerpts from the 1619 project, which was created by Nikole Hannah-Jones and other collaborators at the New York Times to provide a very strong counter-narrative that puts slavery at the center of both American history and the kind of continuing inequities in American life. And then as a teacher I would say to kids, like, I want you to look for what they have in common, because it turns out I'm one of the few, you know, civic nerds who's read both those things, from beginning to end. And yes, there are deep, profound differences, huge differences in orientation between them, but there are surprising amounts of overlap and surprising amounts of overlap in the way which you can contest the question of what does it mean to actually show up and take responsibility for liberty and whose liberty and at liberty to do what to whom and so on and so forth. And asking the question and exposing kids to the fact that there is an argument right now, and maybe your parents are involved in this argument right now, and certainly, it's all over the media, and politicians are talking about this. It behooves you to understand what they're arguing about and to understand all sides of this argument, right. And the goal for the teacher is to create kids who are toughminded, clear thinkers with an open heart. That's the approach that we've got to take.

>> Wow. Well, I really appreciate your time, Eric. Thank you so very much.

>> Thank you so much for the work you're doing, and I hope that we can just keep on connecting these dots and these ways that, again, lead people to questions rather than to certitudes.

[Music]

>> So interesting to hear Eric's take on civic health, what it means to be a citizen, and how we can create great citizens by teaching about civics and power. I appreciated how he talked about the American creed and that it is our duty to question everything we've inherited in this democracy.

>> It's the perfect time, when people are young, to be talking about and questioning civic power. We know from the research and from what we offer in our own what works for health database of strategies that teaching students in K through 12 the skills, knowledge, and behavior needed to participate in a democracy makes a difference.

>> Exactly Ericka. I also appreciated what Eric said about our interdependence, which is, of course, a central theme on In Solidarity and that culture precedes structure, that we have an interdependent chain of obligation, as he put it. It started before us. It will continue to go on long after us. That word, obligation, is such a central part of what he talked about, his obligation to this country, our obligation to civic health.

>> And let's not forget that civic health supports our opportunities to engage in our communities and have a say in decisions that will improve or harm our health. Beth, I'm looking forward to our final episode to round out this series. We'll hear how young people are getting involved and shaping their futures and their community's health. I will be interviewing Olivia Cody, an advocate and activist from



North Carolina, who has been leading efforts to make change and to help young people have say in the decisions that impact them today and into the future. Until then, I'm Ericka.

>> And I'm Beth.

>> And we're In Solidarity, connecting power, place, and health.

[Music]

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[Music]