

values is another; and the pernicious consequence of such ideas is that two-thirds of our college students—the future leaders of America—would refuse to serve in the military [or] in a foreign country during the war on terrorism.

From what does this reluctance to defend America—morally and intellectually—arise? I would argue that it stems from a lack of education about America or, in some cases, a historically incorrect education about America, which is even worse. Education ought not be defined narrowly as the accumulation of knowledge; it also entails preparing a future generation of citizens. Education, by its nature, includes civic education. That is why, as the Greek philosopher Plato put it, the fundamental task of any regime is the education of the young. A nation cannot survive if its young are not intellectually and morally prepared to defend it.

What should children be taught about America? They should be taught the truth about it. If we are a nation that was created by a political vision of equality and liberty, our story is the story of the struggle to realize that vision, those ideals. We have had our failures—some of them shameful—but never once have we lost sight of our moral ideals, which is why we have been able to transcend the stains on our record, foremost among them that of slavery. Who else among the world's nations could enter such a claim?

Our country is something to be proud of, something to celebrate. We should not shrink from saying so. A careful and close reading of our history demonstrates that we have provided more freedom to more people than any other nation in the history of mankind; that we have provided a greater degree of equality to more people than any other nation in the history of mankind; that we have created more prosperity and spread it more widely than any other nation in the history of mankind; that we have brought more peace and justice to the world than any other nation in the history of mankind; and that our open, tolerant, prosperous society is the marvel—and the envy—of the ages.

This is demonstrably true within our own borders. Outside those borders, we have been a beacon of freedom and opportunity to people throughout the world since the day of our creation. When people around the globe demonstrate in support of freedom and liberty, they do so with American icons and documents. I will never forget—we should never forget—how the brave Chinese students in Tiananmen Square faced off with tanks, armed with only a papier-mâché Statue of Liberty and a copy of the Declaration of Independence. Pernicious ideas have pernicious consequences, but good and noble ideas can have good and noble consequences, too.

The noble ideas of America have led to noble consequences and noble actions on our part. For example, in the 20th century alone, as one British columnist pointed out, Americans “saved Europe from

barbarism in two world wars. . . . [and] rebuilt the continent from ashes. They confronted and peacefully defeated Soviet Communism, the most murderous system ever devised by man. . . . America, primarily, ejected Iraq from Kuwait and . . . stopped the slaughter in the Balkans while the Europeans dithered.” This list could be extended tenfold and it would still be incomplete.

Put simply, America is the place people run to when, in hope or hopelessness, they are running from somewhere else. I have devised a simple test to illustrate this, the gates test, as I call it. If a nation were to have entirely free and unfettered, unchecked and unpatrolled borders, would people come in or go out? If the U.S. unpatrolled borders, there would be streams of people trying to enter the country. Even with border patrols and immigration policies, there are people trying to get in. Many of those people—both today and in decades past—have risked life and limb to flee repressive regimes like Cuba, China, and the Soviet Union to enjoy the freedoms and opportunities unique to America.

That these freedoms and opportunities are unique to America is not merely a conservative position. Listen to what former Senator (D.-N.Y.) and Ambassador to the United Nations Daniel Patrick Moynihan has to say on the matter. “Am I embarrassed to speak for a less than perfect democracy? Not one bit. Find me a better one. Do I suppose there are societies which are free of sin? No, I don’t. Do I think ours is, on balance, incomparably the most hopeful set of human relations the world has? Yes, I do.”

It is starting from this bedrock understanding that an education in patriotism should proceed, for “what is taught will not be forgotten, and what is forgotten cannot be defended,” as the American Council of Trustees and Alumni has put it. The job of educators—not just teachers, but parents and politicians as well—in our time is to make sure that these truths are not forgotten, that children learn that their great nation is, as Pres. Abraham Lincoln said, the last best hope of Earth.

There is much that can be taught to our children about Sept. 11. On that bloody day, we saw the face and felt the hand of evil, but we saw something else—heroism, courage, and honor.

We saw the firemen who rushed into the burning infernos of the World Trade Center as so many men and women were rushing out. We heard the audiotapes of the struggle on Flight 93, where men and women who expected nothing more than a normal cross-country flight came together to overpower the terrorists and keep that plane from being used as a missile. Today, we see the ongoing bravery of the men and women in our armed forces, risking their lives around the world to protect America and all that she stands for. Children will learn from that.