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Democracy Chronicles

From our President

Luis Sanchez

I'm sometimes asked how the Madison–Lincoln Initiative got its name. *Madison*, of course, honors James Madison, fourth U.S. president and principal architect of the Constitution. *Lincoln* guided the nation through civil war and toward the abolition of slavery, culminating in the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments. If we were ever to add one more icon, it would likely be Harriet Tubman or Sojourner Truth—both

champions of abolition and women’s rights, though neither lived to see the 19th Amendment ratified.

This lineage traces the evolving promise of American democracy. The founders’ declaration that “all men are created equal” excluded both enslaved people and women, yet the ideals of liberty and justice proved too powerful to remain confined. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. reminded us, *“The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”*

Still, history’s progress is never guaranteed. A century ago, Hitler and his allies sought to impose their brutal ideology on the world. Today, as the last veterans of World War II pass from living memory, we again witness the rise of authoritarianism, nativism, sexism, and racism.

For this reason, the Madison–Lincoln Initiative calls for a bold renewal of civic education in America. Our democracy—and the freedoms it promises—cannot rely solely on institutional safeguards. We must educate and empower future generations to defend this experiment in self-government actively and courageously. Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth risked their lives for a better version of America. Should we do any less?



Feature Story

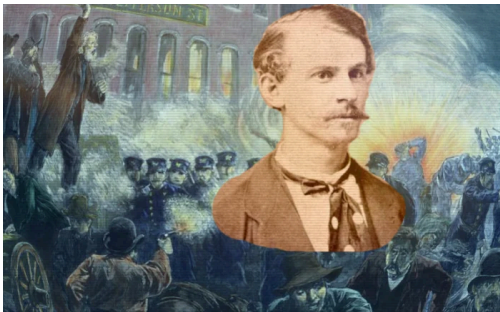
May Moments: When Spring Air Stirred Civic Courage

Maybe it’s something in the spring air—something that refreshes us, sharpens our senses, and gets our blood moving more freely—but history offers several “May Moments” that have carried profound

consequences for *we the people* and our long march toward greater civil liberties. Each also underscores the growing necessity of understanding our civic responsibilities. Ironically, all three occurred on **May 4th**, and each marks an anniversary this year.

Haymarket: Voices Silenced, Lessons Enduring (1886)

On May 4, 1886, thousands gathered in Chicago's Haymarket Square to protest violent police actions against striking workers. August Spies opened the rally, followed by Albert Parsons, both urging peaceful reform. As Samuel Fielden spoke, police advanced to disperse the crowd; a bomb exploded, triggering chaos. Although none of the labor leaders was proven to have thrown the device, Spies, Parsons, Adolph Fischer, and George Engel were executed the following year. Their trial became a global symbol of injustice, reminding us how fragile civil liberties can be—and how essential it is to defend them with vigilance and courage.



The May Fourth Movement: China's Democratic Awakening

On May 4, 1919, thousands of Chinese students marched in Beijing to protest foreign domination and a weak national government. Their call for "Mr. Science and Mr. Democracy" ignited a cultural and political transformation that challenged feudal traditions and demanded citizen participation in public life. The movement inspired new journals, civic associations, and a generation of thinkers who argued that national strength required educated, engaged citizens with recognized rights. Though China's political path diverged over the century, the May Fourth Movement endures as a landmark moment when young people insisted that modernization must include civic voice, accountability, and democratic aspiration.



The May 4th Tragedy at Kent State University (1970)

On May 4, 1970, Kent State University became the site of one of the most searing moments in modern American history. Four days earlier, President Nixon had announced the expansion of the Vietnam War into Cambodia, sparking nationwide protests. At Kent State, demonstrations

escalated after the Ohio governor deployed the National Guard to campus. That Monday, as students gathered on the Commons for a scheduled antiwar rally, Guardsmen advanced with rifles loaded. Within thirteen seconds, they fired sixty-seven shots into a crowd of unarmed students. Four young people—Allison Krause, Jeffrey Miller, Sandra Scheuer, and William Schroeder—were killed; nine others were wounded.

The political consequences were immediate and profound. Millions of students across the country went on strike, shutting down hundreds of colleges and high schools. Public trust in government, already strained by the war, eroded further as investigations failed to produce accountability. The tragedy deepened generational divides and forced a reckoning over the limits of dissent, the militarization of domestic policing, and the rights of citizens to protest government actions. Kent State endures as a stark reminder that democracy requires not only institutions but a commitment to protect the voices—and the lives—of those who challenge power.

Postscript

There is one little-known fact about that terrible day that bears reflection. As the National Guardsmen were mustered on the morning of May 4th—many of them young men from the communities surrounding Kent, familiar with the campus as “home” territory—the cadre began issuing live ammunition. At least one soldier refused to accept it.

Instantly he was met with a withering barrage of denunciations from a non-commissioned officer who called him a traitor, a coward, and worse. Threatened physically and warned he would pay dearly for refusing a lawful order, the young man stood silently and continued to resist. His insubordination, he was told, would be handled later. For the moment, the sergeant sent him—and a few other hesitant men—to “guard” the armored personnel carrier at the campus gate, well out of the way and left to stew in their supposed shame.

This May 4th marks the 56th anniversary of the bloodshed that followed. And every day since 1970, that man and the others who exercised quiet courage have never regretted their decision. In Chinese

philosophy, there is the concept of **wu wei** (无为)—“non-action,” or “doing nothing.” Sometimes doing nothing becomes the most powerful act of all.



ALLISON B. KRAUSE

WILLIAM K. SCHROEDER



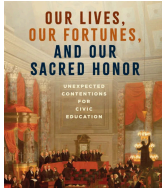
JEFFREY G. MILLER



SANDRA L. SCHEUER

In the Near Future

Major National and Local Civic Education Events in May 2026



4th National Summit on Civic Education May 18–19, 2026 | Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

One of the most significant national civic education gatherings of the year. Hosted by the Jack Miller Center and connected with the America250 movement.

Theme: **“Words that Changed the World: America at 250”**

Focuses on how the United States Declaration of Independence should be taught to the next generation as the nation approaches the



Law Day 2026 May 1, 2026 | Nationwide

Law Day is observed annually to celebrate the rule of law, constitutional liberty, and civic responsibility. Sponsored nationally by the American Bar Association.

Schools, courts, bar associations, and civic groups often hold Constitution-themed educational programs.

250th anniversary
in July 2026.

Includes
educators,
scholars, funders,
and civic leaders.



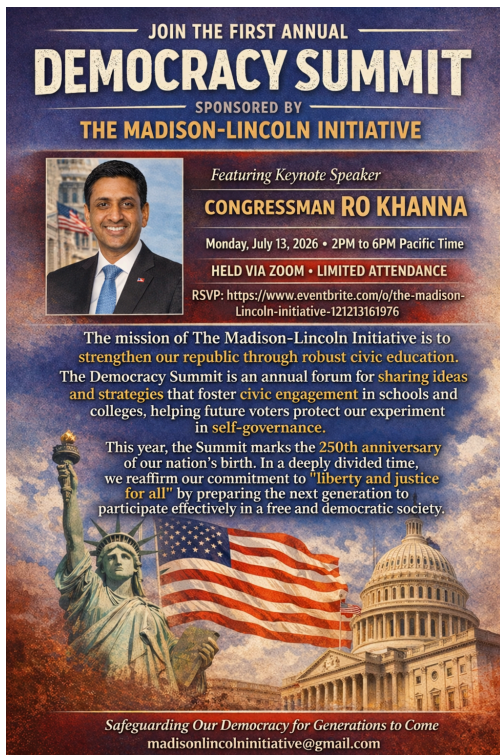
National Teacher Recognition with Civics Teaching May 4-8, 2026

Many
organizations
highlight
exceptional
history/governme
nt/civics
educators during
this week.



Memorial Day and Civic Service

Memorial Day
reminds us that
the freedoms we
live inside today
were shaped by
the courage and
sacrifice of those
who never made it
home. It
also offers an
opportunity to
discuss
citizenship,
sacrifice, national
memory, and civic
obligation.



Democracy at a Crossroads: A Summit for Our 250th Year

In celebration of our nation's 250th anniversary as a self-governing republic, the Madison-Lincoln Initiative will host a virtual Democracy Summit on July 13 from 2:00 to 6:00 p.m. PST. The featured speaker will be Congressman Ro Khanna, and attendance is free. To register for tickets, [click here](#):

<https://www.eventbrite.com/o/the-madison-lincoln-initiative-121213161976>.
([eventbrite.com](#) in Bing)

The Principles of Peaceful Dissent

This quiz explores the principles and historical context of peaceful dissent within a democratic society. Understanding the mechanics of dissent is vital for maintaining a healthy democracy. The answer key appears below.

1. Which term describes the active, professed refusal of a citizen to obey certain laws, demands, or commands of a government without resorting to physical violence?

A. Insurrection B. Anarchy C. Sedition D. Civil Disobedience

2. In the United States, which constitutional amendment primarily protects the right to peaceful assembly and the petitioning of the government for a redress of grievances?

A. First Amendment B. Tenth Amendment C. Fourth Amendment D. Second Amendment

3. What is the primary strategic goal of nonviolent “direct action” as popularized during the American Civil Rights Movement?

- A. To maintain the status quo through quiet negotiation
- B. To cause economic collapse
- C. To create a crisis that forces a community to confront an issue
- D. To overthrow the federal government

4. Which of the following is considered a hallmark of peaceful dissent as opposed to other forms of political conflict?

- A. The destruction of public property to gain attention
- B. Using masks to avoid identification by authorities
- C. Accepting the legal consequences of one’s actions
- D. Retaliating physically if attacked by counter-protesters

5. How does peaceful dissent function as a “safety valve” in a democratic society?

- A. It allows the government to identify and arrest all dissidents
- B. It provides a legal outlet for frustration that might otherwise turn to violence
- C. It ensures that the majority opinion is always the only one heard
- D. It eliminates the need for any formal elections

A Little Humor



Your Help is needed

Volunteer with MLI, join the Council of Civic

Donate to support our work



With a Little Help From Our Friends

Your support strengthens civics

Champions, or
nominate a
teacher.

education across
California. Every
contribution
makes a
difference.

Answer Key: 1. D, 2. A, 3. C, 4. C, 5. B.

Madison-Lincoln Initiative

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