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Democracy Chronicles

From our President

Recently, Teresa and I went to hear author and activist Loretta Ross speak at Cuesta College. Her most recent book, *Calling In: How to Start Making Change with Those You'd Rather Cancel*, argues powerfully for "calling in" rather than "calling out" those who disagree with us. In both her writing and her talk, Ross makes the case that, in a time when our nation often feels divided into opposing tribes with competing worldviews, building bridges can be a wiser strategy than deepening the divide through public shaming. As she reminded the audience, yesterday's adversaries can sometimes become tomorrow's allies.

I've been reflecting on her message ever since, but the idea that has stayed with me most vividly was her reminder that, as dark as this moment in American politics may feel, there is a silver lining: **this is our**

generation's "lunch counter moment." She was referring, of course, to the courage of civil rights activists in the 1950s and 1960s who challenged segregation by sitting side-by-side at "Whites Only" lunch counters in the Deep South. That simple act of defiance — like Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat — sparked a movement that police dogs and fire hoses could not extinguish. It ignited a wave of protest, conscience, and change that reshaped the nation.

Ross's point is that **this is our moment** to stand up for what earlier generations fought and sacrificed for: a nation governed by laws rather than by force, an ongoing experiment in self-rule, a democracy committed to "liberty and justice for all." Many of us assumed these ideals were secure, and in that complacency, we overlooked how vulnerable they can be. But we are awake now, and it is an honor to be called to the work of safeguarding our children's future.

We each have a role to play in strengthening democracy today, and we also have a responsibility to prepare the next generation. That means teaching young people how fragile democratic institutions can be — and how to protect them from those who would undermine them. This is why we at the Madison–Lincoln Initiative advocate for a bold reimagining of civic education and why we work to foster meaningful democratic engagement in schools and colleges.

Let freedom ring.

When 8 Million Voices Fill the Streets: The Power of Collective Action

On **March 28, 2026**, history unfolded in streets, parks, and city squares across the nation. From major urban centers to small towns, *over eight million people* came together for the **No Kings March**, an unprecedented display of public engagement. With gatherings in **all 50 states** and multiple international cities, the day became a remarkable demonstration of *what collective civic action can look like*.



Events ranged from massive rallies in cities like **New York, Boston, and Minneapolis–St. Paul**, drawing hundreds of thousands, to smaller community gatherings in towns and rural areas where thousands showed up. In **San Diego County alone**, nearly 100,000 participants filled multiple sites, demonstrating how a national “day of action” can ripple across regions.

The march was striking not just in size but in its *diversity of participants*: students, workers,

families, activists, and everyday citizens all stood side by side. It was a moment when Americans of all backgrounds voiced their shared concern — publicly, visibly, and peacefully.

Such mass demonstrations do more than fill streets. They create **visibility for shared values**, spark **community-building**, and can inspire sustained civic engagement beyond the event itself. The collective energy of millions moving together sends a clear message: public sentiment, when expressed at scale, cannot be ignored.

From a civic perspective, the No Kings March illustrates a fundamental principle of democracy: that **individual voices, amplified together, can shape the public conversation**. While no march alone dictates outcomes, the gathering of eight million people shows just how powerful and unifying mass civic action can be — a reminder that participation is a force that stretches beyond politics, geography, and individual differences.

Feature Story



Of Guns and Butter: Defend Our Nonprofits

Nonprofits are **the backbone of American communities**. They feed the hungry, teach our children, heal the sick, and strengthen democracy — often filling gaps that government and markets leave behind.

In **California alone**, over [109,000 nonprofits](#) employ 1.7 million people and contribute roughly 15% of the state's economic output¹. Yet these vital organizations have been **attacked, dismissed, and weakened by budget cuts and funding freezes**. A third of nonprofits serving communities lost government support in early 2025², and congressional projections show **\$81 billion in reduced resources over the next decade**³.

The impacts are real and urgent: organizations report shrinking budgets while **demand for services is rising**, from food and housing to mental health and disaster relief⁴. **This squeeze is compounded by a federal budget environment where the ever-higher costs of war and national security place further pressure on domestic spending**, squeezing already lean budgets and risking deeper cuts to the sectors that strengthen communities from within⁵.

We must be clear and unflinching: **nonprofits are not optional extras**. They are not fringe players. They are **indispensable guardians of the public good** — and when they are weakened, we all suffer.

At the Madison–Lincoln Initiative, we recognize the urgency of defending a sector that fosters hope, resilience, opportunity, and civic trust. **Civic engagement and democratic self-rule now call upon each of us to step forward**: to volunteer, to support, and to lend our time and energy to struggling nonprofits in any way we can. The future of our

communities depends not only on advocacy and policy but on active participation and service from engaged citizens.

We stand ready to support those who build, sustain, and lead these vital institutions — because a society that erodes its civil sector erodes its future.

Footnotes

1. California Senate District 5. *McNerney Introduces Bill to Boost CA Nonprofits*. sd05.senate.ca.gov ↵
2. The Philanthropy Roundtable. *A Third of U.S. Nonprofits Lost Government Funding in Early 2025*. philanthropy.com ↵
3. California Senate. *Joint Select Nonprofit Sector Committee Hearing Report, 2025*. senate.ca.gov ↵
4. Almanac News. *Local Nonprofits Strained by Funding Cuts and Shifts in Federal Policy, March 2026*. almanacnews.com ↵
5. Open federal budget reports & analysis of national spending priorities, 2026. ↵

Spring Into Action: Your April Civic Calendar



Practice Environmental Citizenship

Earth Day brings together families, youth, local government, and community groups for hands-on sustainability learning. It's one of the most accessible ways



Know Your Rights, Strengthen Your Voice

Weekly Housing Rights Center office hours help residents understand tenant protections, discrimination laws, and how to navigate public systems. Knowing

to practice
stewardship and
civic
responsibility.

**Event: Ventura
Earth Day 2026
April 18, 2026 —
11:00 AM** Plaza
Park, Ventura

Details:
<https://allevents.in/ventura/ventura-earth-day-2026/10000912357094827>
(allevents.in in
Bing)

your rights is a
core act of
everyday
citizenship — and
a powerful way to
support
neighbors.

**Recurring event:
Housing Rights
Center — Public
Office Hours**
Weekly through
April

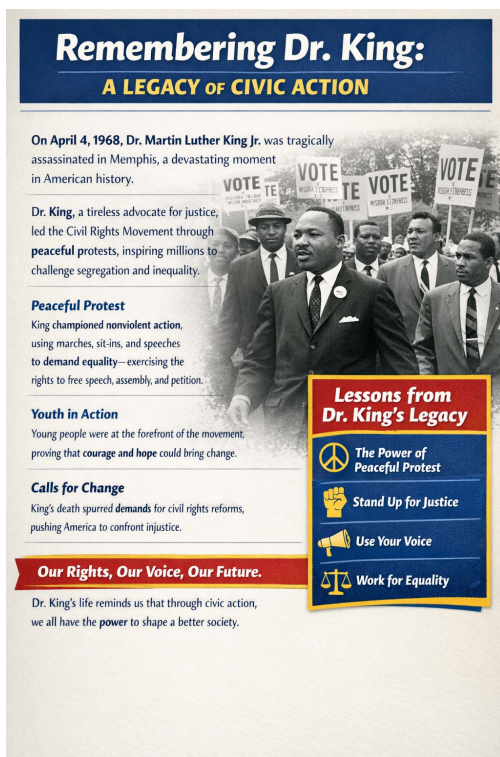
Information:
<https://www.cityofventura.ca.gov/Calendar.aspx?EID=11345>
(cityofventura.ca.gov in Bing)

From 1968 to Today: MLK's Lessons on the Power of Citizens

On **April 4, 1968**, the nation was stunned by the assassination of **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.**, the moral voice of the civil rights movement. Even in tragedy, his life offers powerful lessons in **civic engagement**.

Dr. King showed the power of **organized, peaceful action** to challenge injustice. From the Montgomery Bus Boycott to the March on Washington, he proved that citizens could confront entrenched systems while staying true to democratic principles. His leadership also demonstrated how **constitutional rights—speech, assembly, petition—can be exercised responsibly** to effect real change.

Young people played a crucial role in Dr. King's movement, taking part in sit-ins, voter drives, and marches. Their courage reminds us that



youth are essential participants in democracy, shaping the future through active engagement.

The national response to his assassination tested **civic institutions**. Widespread unrest prompted urgent action, including the passage of the **Civil Rights Act of 1968**, showing how government can respond to citizens' calls for justice.

Dr. King's legacy teaches that democracy is not inherited—it is practiced. Through informed,

peaceful, and morally guided engagement, every citizen can help shape a more just society.

Music for Civic Engagement: Songs That Inspire Democracy and Humanity

In keeping with the trend of using **artistic creativity to inspire civic education**, we present a curated set of songs — some whimsical, others serious — that show how people can **voice support for democracy, community, and shared humanity**. Music raises awareness, fosters dialogue, and energizes action.

Whimsical & Thoughtful

Songs that use humor or playful storytelling to highlight civic issues like voting, community, and social responsibility:

1. ["We Didn't Start the Fire"](#) – Billy Joel
2. ["Political Science"](#) – Randy Newman
3. ["Everyday People"](#) – Sly & The Family Stone
4. ["Get Up, Stand Up"](#) – Bob Marley & The Wailers
5. ["Waiting on the World to Change"](#) – John Mayer

Deadly Serious

Songs confronting injustice, inequality, and threats to democracy:

6. ["Fortunate Son"](#) – Creedence Clearwater Revival

7. ["A Change Is Gonna Come"](#) – Sam Cooke

8. ["Fight the Power"](#) – Public Enemy

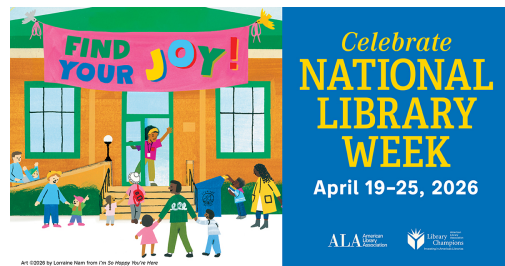
9. ["Redemption Song"](#) – Bob Marley

10. ["The Times They Are A-Changin'"](#) – Bob Dylan

These songs remind us that **artistic expression and civic responsibility are intertwined**. Listening, sharing, and reflecting strengthens civic culture and shows ways to act with **integrity, courage, and creativity**.

🎵 **Tip for educators and activists:** Integrate these songs into **workshops, discussion circles, or classroom activities** to spark conversation, critical thinking, and real-world action.





 **Saturday, April 20, 2026**
 **10:00 AM – 12:30 PM**
 **Ventura County Government Center — Atlantic Conference Room**

Ventura County educators, community advocates, and emerging civic leaders are invited to join a special workshop focused on strengthening local leadership capacity. This session will explore practical strategies for community engagement,

National Library Week: Strengthen Media Literacy and Lucidity

National Library Week is more than a celebration of books—it's an opportunity to cultivate **Media Literacy and Lucidity**, one of the Five Pillars of Civic Education. Libraries provide access to reliable information, diverse viewpoints, and critical research tools, helping community members navigate the flood of news, social media, and online content with discernment. By visiting a

collaborative problem-solving, and fostering inclusive participation in civic life. Participants will have the opportunity to connect with local officials, youth organizers, and nonprofit partners committed to building a stronger, more responsive Ventura County.

Whether you're new to civic work or looking to deepen your impact, this event offers tools, insights, and connections to help develop confident and effective local leadership.

library, attending programs, or exploring curated resources, participants practice the skills of evaluating sources, separating fact from opinion, and thinking clearly—essential tools for informed and responsible civic participation. Engaging with your local library during this week reinforces the civic habit of approaching information thoughtfully, sharpening both awareness and judgment.

Media Literacy & Lucidity Quiz

Test your clarity, discernment, and civic-savvy reading skills.

1. When evaluating a headline, what is the FIRST clarity check you should make?

- A. Whether it matches your political views
- B. Whether the headline accurately reflects the article's main claim
- C. Whether the author seems like a nice person
- D. Whether the headline is exciting or dramatic

2. A piece of information is *lucid* when it...

- A. Uses complex jargon to sound authoritative
- B. Is emotionally charged and memorable
- C. Is presented clearly, transparently, and without misleading omissions
- D. Has gone viral on social media

3. What is the most reliable way to verify an image shared online?

- A. See how many likes it has
- B. Use reverse-image search to check its origin

- C. Trust it if the caption seems plausible
- D. Assume it's AI-generated

4. Which of the following is a hallmark of an *opinion* presented as *fact*?

- A. It cites multiple sources with differing perspectives
- B. It uses hedging language ("may," "could")
- C. It presents a claim with absolute certainty but without verifiable evidence
- D. It acknowledges uncertainty

5. When confronted with conflicting reports on the same event, a media-literate reader should...

- A. Choose the version that feels most familiar
- B. Assume one side must be lying
- C. Compare multiple reputable sources and look for consistent, verifiable details
- D. Ignore the story altogether

April 2026 Civic Education Events

California Events

- ***Integrated Action Civics Workshop*** (UC Davis CHSSP) — **April 14, 4–5:30 PM (Zoom)**
Training educators to embed meaningful civic-action projects throughout the curriculum.
- ***High School Voter Education Weeks*** — **April 13–24**
Statewide voter-prep initiative encouraging

General U.S. Civic-Engagement Events

- ***Citizen Forum on Article V*** — **April 11, Ferris State University**
Public, cross-partisan discussion on constitutional amendments and citizen participation.
- ***School Board Meetings (Multiple Districts)*** — **Throughout April**
Local governance in action.

registration/preregistration among students ages 16–17.

• ***Ventura County Civic Expo*** —
April (Date TBA)

Showcase of student civic-engagement projects, public-service proposals, and youth-led research. Hosted by the Ventura County Office of Education.

Public meetings scheduled across numerous districts (Madison, Calhoun, Greene, Jersey, Macoupin counties). Perfect opportunities for community members to observe decision-making and practice civic participation.

Volunteer with MLI

Join the Council of Civic Champions, or nominate a teacher

Support our work

Your support strengthens civics education across California. Every contribution makes a difference.

Answer Key:

1. **B** – Whether the headline accurately reflects the article’s main claim
2. **C** – Clear, transparent, not misleading
3. **B** – Reverse-image search
4. **C** – Certainty without evidence
5. **C** – Compare reputable sources and look for consistent details

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