



Volume 1, Issue 8, August

Democracy Chronicles

From our

President Luis Sanchez

Our first Democracy Summit was held on Monday, July 13, and while it brought some real disappointments, it also offered meaningful highlights worth acknowledging. The most visible setback was the unexpected absence of our featured keynote speaker, Congressman Ro Khanna, who was momentarily detained by settlers in Israel. Attendance was lower than hoped, and attrition increased once it became clear that our keynote speaker could not join us. We will learn from these challenges and do better next year—and each year thereafter.

But I also want to recognize the successes of this inaugural gathering. There were many moments worth celebrating, including:

1. **California Assemblyman Patrick Ahrens** delivered an engaging and earnest keynote address on very short notice, stepping in seamlessly for Congressman Khanna.

2. We hosted an **excellent panel of workshop facilitators** for the breakout sessions on the five pillars of civic education.
3. Nearly all **Board members took active roles** in planning, promoting, overseeing, and facilitating the Summit—demonstrating the joy and power that a small, dedicated team can bring to a shared and worthy purpose.

Our Board Secretary Teresa Vega sent out a survey to all Summit attendees, and the results are impressively positive despite the setbacks noted above. This was our first step—however small—in a long and important journey, and I am deeply grateful to each of you who attended, presented, or otherwise helped us take that step.

Lately, I've been reading about how Germany rebuilt its civic culture after World War II. Children who grew up under the fascist ethos of Hitler's reign had to **re-learn what it means to be a decent human being in a democratic society**. American youth today, who have witnessed a political culture that too often rewards lying, cruelty, and graft, must also re-learn the ground rules of a functional democracy. There was a time when schools and colleges placed a premium on **character education**, but over time it was dismissed as a relic of religious instruction. In doing so, I believe we **threw out the baby with the bathwater**.

For a constitutional democracy to thrive, its citizens must practice—and insist upon—basic standards of decency and integrity from their elected representatives, whether those representatives are liberal or conservative. I will expand on the idea of teaching **civic ethics** in next month's issue of *The Democracy Chronicles*.

August 26, 1920 — 19th Amendment Certified and adopted Guaranteeing Women the Right to Vote

The struggle for the 19th Amendment was a decades-long campaign by women's suffragists who argued that a democracy based on "consent of the governed" could not





Recent protest movements across the United States illustrate an important lesson about civic engagement: large demonstrations can capture public attention, but lasting democratic change depends on more than mass mobilization.

The **No Kings** movement, which emerged in 2025, organized large, peaceful demonstrations centered on concerns about constitutional governance. Built largely through social media networks such as [50501](#) and [Indivisible](#), the movement emphasized nonviolence, de-

escalation, and opposition to property destruction. Its success demonstrated the power of digital platforms to rapidly mobilize citizens around shared constitutional values.

By contrast, the **ICE Out** movement focused more heavily on local organizing, mutual aid, and direct community support. Rather than relying primarily on mass rallies, participants built neighborhood networks, partnered with community organizations, and coordinated practical assistance for affected families. While smaller in scale, these efforts fostered strong personal relationships and civic trust.

Together, these movements highlight two complementary dimensions of democratic participation. Broad public demonstrations can amplify concerns and encourage civic awareness, while sustained local engagement builds the relationships and institutions necessary for long-term democratic resilience.

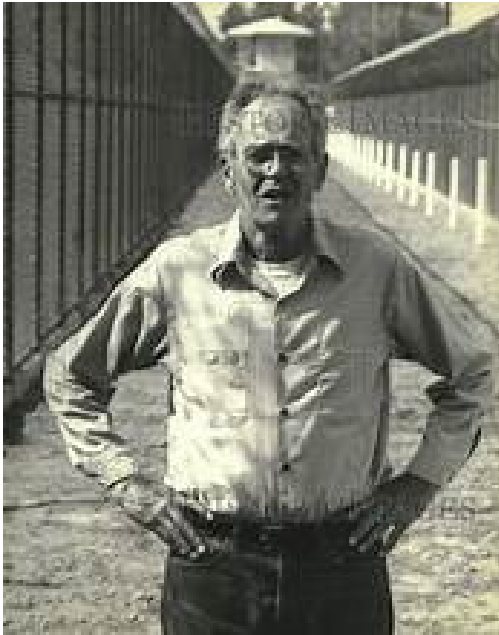
History reinforces this lesson. The Civil Rights Movement succeeded not only because of nationally recognized events such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Birmingham Campaign, but because thousands of ordinary citizens sustained months of organizing, fundraising, transportation networks, and mutual support. Public demonstrations captured the nation's attention, but local communities supplied the commitment that made change possible.

Research also suggests that while social media can inspire civic participation, it cannot substitute for face-to-face relationships. Online networks often mobilize quickly, but the trust required to sustain democratic institutions is most often built through neighborhoods, civic organizations, schools, faith communities, and volunteer associations.

As Americans celebrate the nation's 250th anniversary, this lesson deserves renewed attention. Democracy is strengthened not only when citizens exercise their constitutional rights to speak, assemble, and petition, but also when they invest in their local communities, engage in civil discourse, and work together to solve common problems. Lasting self-government depends on both an engaged public and the strong civic relationships that hold a free society together.

Excerpted from, "**What Resistance Looks Like: Lessons from No Kings and Minneapolis**" by *Benjamin L. McKean*, July 16, 2026, The Kettering Foundation (<https://kettering.org/what-resistance-looks->

Sometimes Singular Acts of Courage Sustain Hope



Clarence Earl Gideon was a drifter with little formal education who was arrested in Florida in 1961 for allegedly breaking into a pool hall. Too poor to hire a lawyer, he asked the judge to appoint one. His request was denied because, at the time, Florida only provided court-appointed attorneys in capital cases. Forced to defend himself, Gideon was convicted and

sentenced to five years in prison.

From his prison cell, Gideon wrote a simple handwritten petition to the U.S. Supreme Court, arguing that his constitutional rights had been violated. In **1963**, the Court unanimously agreed in **Gideon v.**

Wainwright, holding that the **Sixth Amendment guarantees the right to counsel for anyone charged with a serious crime who cannot afford an attorney**. The Court ruled that this right is so fundamental to a fair trial that states are constitutionally required to provide legal representation to indigent defendants.

Represented by a lawyer at his new trial, Gideon was acquitted.

Clarence Gideon was not wealthy, powerful, or politically connected. Yet his determination to stand up for a principle of justice transformed the American legal system. His courage led to the creation and expansion of public defender systems across the nation and ensured that the promise of "equal justice under law" would not depend on a person's ability to pay. More than sixty years later, *Gideon v. Wainwright* remains one of the most important Supreme Court decisions in American history, a lasting reminder that one ordinary citizen can change the course of justice for millions.

Citation: U.S. Supreme Court, *Gideon v. Wainwright*, 372 U.S. 335 (1963). For background: Anthony Lewis, *Gideon's Trumpet* (Random House, 1964).

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white passenger on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Her arrest sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a 381-day campaign in which thousands of African Americans refused to ride the city's buses.

Parks' quiet act of courage became a turning point in the American civil rights movement. The boycott, led in part by a young **Martin Luther King Jr.**, ended when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that segregation on public buses was unconstitutional.

Rosa Parks demonstrated that a single person, acting with conviction and dignity, could challenge an unjust system and inspire millions to seek change through peaceful protest. Her courage helped launch the modern civil rights movement, accelerated the fight against racial segregation, and left a lasting legacy that reshaped American society and advanced the nation's commitment to equality and justice for all.

Citation: U.S. Supreme Court, *Browder v. Gayle*, 352 U.S. 903 (1956), ending bus segregation. For background: Rosa Parks with Jim Haskins, *Rosa Parks: My Story* (Dial Books, 1992).

This July was the 9th anniversary of John McCain's singular act of political courage when he cast one of the most consequential votes of his career opposing his own party's effort to repeal the Affordable Care Act without a replacement plan. Returning to the Senate shortly after being diagnosed with brain cancer, McCain walked to the front of the chamber and gave a dramatic thumbs-down vote, ending the repeal effort.

McCain explained that he believed Congress should return to regular order—working across party lines, holding hearings, and debating legislation openly rather than rushing through a deeply divisive bill. His vote preserved the Affordable Care Act and underscored his long-held belief that elected officials should place the nation's interests above partisan loyalty.

Whether one agreed with his position or not, McCain's decision

became a defining example of political courage. It demonstrated that a single vote, cast according to conscience, can alter the course of public policy and reinforce the principle that democratic institutions are strongest when leaders are willing to act independently in service of the country.

Clarence Gideon, Rosa Parks, and John McCain each stood alone at a decisive moment. Gideon demanded justice, Parks demanded equality, and McCain defended constitutional principle. Their stories teach that the strength of a republic ultimately rests on the moral courage of individuals willing to risk comfort, reputation, or freedom in service of something greater than themselves. **Citation:** U.S. Senate Roll Call Vote 179, 115th Congress, July 28, 2017 ("Motion to Proceed" on ACA repeal). For background: Congressional Record, Senate Debate, July 2017.

Upcoming Civic Education & Professional Development Events

1. Introduction to Bill of Rights [BRI] (Grades 6–12)

August 4, 2026 | Online

A free introduction to the Bill of Rights Institute's civics and history resources for educators.

Registration: [Bill of Rights Institute Events Calendar](#)

2. Introduction to BRI Jr. (Grades K–5)

August 11, 2026 | Online

Designed for elementary educators interested in civics instruction.

Registration: [BRI Events Calendar](#)

3. Bringing Constitution Day to

4. Constitution Day Live 2026 September 17, 2026 | Online

A nationwide virtual celebration featuring videos, classroom activities, quizzes, and Constitution Day lessons.

Learn more: [Constitution Day Live 2026](#)

5. Inquiry in the Age of AI: Using BRI to Ground Student Thinking

September 15, 2026 | Online

Professional development on teaching critical thinking and civic reasoning in the age of AI.

Registration: [BRI Events Calendar](#)

Life: Engaging Resources for Your Classroom

September 14, 2026 | Online

Practical ideas and ready-to-use classroom resources for Constitution Day.

Registration: [BRI Events Calendar](#)

6. Bill of Rights Institute Educator eLearning

Self-paced professional development modules covering topics such as Socratic pedagogy, teaching logic and reasoning, constitutional history, and civics. Participants earn digital badges.

Access courses: [BRI Educator eLearning](#)

Some Humor



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