

Civic-Literacy: What does a constitutional democratic republic require of its schools?

The main role of our public schools is to prepare students for self-government and the insight needed to elect enlightened leaders.

“[C]hildren must ever be cherished, for they are the only hope and promise of my people: with them stands the destiny of democracy in America.” ~ Paul Robeson 1898-1976 actor, singer, activist

Literacy and numeracy are each fundamental for participation in our Indianapolis community, but so is [Civic Literacy](#). The knowledge and capacity of citizens to make sense of their democratic society must start in their public schools.

Our public schools are also crucibles of self-discovery, personal development, and self-actualization.

After this, our public schools have an economic purpose—to prepare students for careers and employment. But creating workers is secondary to public education’s civic responsibility.

Consequently, our public schools are democracy’s laboratory and finishing school. Here students can learn to appreciate and practice the sense of self-determination needed for self-government as a means to create avenues for peaceful change.

Since the democratic way of life is built upon opportunities to learn what it is about and practice how it might be led, this is what our democracy requires of its schools.

“True democracy doesn’t use education to move the worker-citizen from unskilled to skilled. Instead, it relies on education to position every citizen to govern. This project of democratic education can be carried out only by educators with the critical commitment to act on behalf of freedom and social justice that serve as a model for their students to discover their own personal power, social transformative potential, and most of all their spirit of hope.” ~ from the ideas of Antonia Darder (1997)

Media Literacy is a part of civic literacy: Reading the word and the world

[Media literacy](#) is

- digital citizenship
- understanding that social media culture has replaced the dominance of print culture—the computer has replaced the printing press (think: Gutenberg and the Bible)
- a critical understanding of the world
- a way to teach, not a subject to be taught

Media literacy is the ability to identify different types of media and understand the messages being sent. Children and youth take in a huge amount of information from a wide array of sources, far beyond the traditional media (TV, radio, newspapers, and magazines). Such media are:

- | | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| • text messages | • poetry | • music/songs |
| • memes | • photographs | • architecture |
| • viral videos | • plays | • paintings |
| • social media | • movies | • tagging/murals |
| • video games | • dance | • fashion |
| • music videos | • comic books | • cuisines |
| • advertising | • graphic novels | |
| • radio/TV commercials | • political ads and | |
| • sculptures/statues | campaign speeches | |

**But all media shares one thing: someone created it. And it was created for a reason.
Understanding that reason is the basis of media literacy**

African American children and youth are easily susceptible to being manipulated by media which takes money out of their pockets and purses and exploits their beliefs, personalities, identities, and communities. [This is why media literacy is so important.](#)

Reading the world is civics education

"Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world." ~ Paulo Freire

Learning how to read is fundamental for students. For Black American students "reading the world" is also basic. When students are reading their world, they are talking and thinking about their daily experiences more critically. This includes classroom and school experiences. They study natures of their neighborhood and community. They watch these environments change, and try to understand what the changes mean. They question why these changes happen, asking *Cui bono?* who benefits? Review: <http://civiceducator.org/read-the-word-or-read-the-world>.

Civic Literacy and Neo-liberalism: Making local Black students politically aware

Since it seeks to transfer the control of economic factors from the Black public sector and democratic public ownership to the private sector, it is vital Indy's Black American youth understand neo-liberalism.

The "gig economy" (Uber), privatization/outsourcing, gentrification, de-regulation, the wealth gap, charters, or union busting all are examples of the effects of neo-liberalism.

In neo-liberalism there is no public good. There is no sense of Ubuntu. It stresses individualism, meritocracy, and the competitiveness typified by the market as the way to live, as well as a way to judge/value yourself and society.

- The pros and cons of neo-liberalism--video
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t41rFqVpB1I>
- Lester Spence *Knocking the Hustle* on the limitations of Jay Z's economics--video
[The neo-liberal turn in Black politics](#)
- *How the "free market" has devastated black communities*--TED Talk Video
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDJormxhmVI>
- On Neo-liberalism's Effect on Black Politics *Detroit Today*, Jul 6, 2016
<https://wdet.org/posts/2016/07/06/83418-the-intersection-lester-spence-on-neoliberalisms-effect-on-black-politics/>
- "How Bill Cosby, Obama and Mega-Preachers Sold Economic Snake Oil to Black America"
<https://caribreport.com/2018/05/05/how-bill-cosby-obama-and-mega-preachers-sold-economic-snake-oil-to-black-america-must-read/>

Limitations of democracy

This recommendation is not blind to the limitations of democracy in general and—and specifically for African Americans in Indiana where the Republican Party has hegemonic control of the legislature with super-majorities in both houses. Thus, there are limitations to "the majority rules" nature of democracy.

"Democracy [is] paradigm for systems of control and genocide." ~ Mari Evans, *Clarity as Concept*

“For African Americans, democracy is a form of colonialism. In many situations, they will never have a majority.” ~ paraphrased from Mari Evans, *Clarity as Concept*

“Democracy is 2 wolves and a sheep deciding what to have for lunch.” ~ Ben Franklin

Proposed Action Item

AACI will seek funding to print and distribute copies of “Civic Literacy.” In collaboration with

- Indianapolis NAACP (<https://www.indynaacp.org>)
- Indianapolis Urban League (<https://www.indplsul.org>)
- IUPUI’s Center for Civic Literacy (<https://civicliteracy.iupui.edu>)
- Indiana League of Women Voters (<https://www.lwv.org>)
- Indiana Citizen (<https://onemorevoice.com/indiana-citizen>)

Community Study Circles will be formed to unpack the commentary around this question: *What does a multi-racial, multi-ethnic constitutional democratic republic require of IPS and Mayor Hogsett’s charters?*

The outcomes of the discussions will be formalized and shared with the wider public for further discussion and school policy recommendations. A committee will form whose role is to codify the concept of Civic Literacy, introducing it into the legislative process with the goal of proving a means to make each student civically literate--prepared for life in a constitutional democratic republic.

AACI must appreciate the positive outcomes when students becoming civically literate through Civic Literacy courses in schools and democratic practices in their classrooms, schools, and communities. See more in the “Education for Career, College and Citizenship” recommendation.