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The case of #NeverAgainMSD: When proceduralist civics becomes public work by way of political emotion

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ABSTRACT

Civic culture is a term for how citizens actively live out, perform, and create public life through our habits, actions, words, and public work. A vital civic culture, with an engaged citizenry, is one of the measures of a healthy democratic republic. In this inquiry, we explore how civic education—holistically envisioned across disciplines and types of curriculum—might be imagined in light of civic cultural engagement and creation. We use the recent #NeverAgainMSD youth activism against gun violence as a single case study through which to examine what educators can learn from youth enacting citizenship in real time, contributing to a vital civic culture in an era when many lament youth apathy and disconnection from public life. We argue that much civics education ignores the worth of political emotion, and we describe both the important role of affect in civic culture and curricular possibilities for working with students around the intersections of affect, civic culture, and public work as citizens.

KEYWORDS

Citizenship education; civic culture; political emotion; public work

The conflict as it concerns the democracy to which our history commits us is *within* our own institutions and attitudes. It can be won only by extending the application of democratic methods, methods of consultation, persuasion, negotiation, communication, co-operative intelligence, in the task of making our own politics, industry, education, our culture generally, a servant and an evolving manifestation of democracy ideas. (Dewey, 1939, p. 175, emphasis in original)

Dewey focused on democracy's culture during the scourge of global totalitarian threats leading up to World War II. Our focus in this article, during a political era reminiscent of *Freedom and Culture's* publication year, is on the importance of a vital civic culture and its relationship to civic education. We explore how civic education—holistically envisioned across disciplines and types of curriculum—might be imagined in more material, more affectively informed, and more meaningful ways. This article uses the recent #NeveragainMSD youth activism against gun violence following a mass shooting at Marjory Stone Douglas High School (MSDHS) in Parkland, Florida, as a case study to examine what educators can learn from youth enacting citizenship in real time, contributing to a vital civic culture in an era when many lament youth apathy and disconnection from public life. We argue that much civics education ignores the worth of political emotion, and we describe both the important role of affect in civic culture and curricular possibilities for working with students around the intersections of affect, civic culture, and public work as citizens.

Civic culture is a term for how citizens actively live out, perform, and create public life through our habits, actions, words, and public works. Civic culture is

cultural patterns that shape the means or ends of civic action. When citizens solve problems together, some of what they say and do together is structured by widespread ways of speaking and ways of coordinating action—civic culture—that they are not making up from scratch. There is no culture that is fundamentally, absolutely, or necessarily “civic” or “not civic.” Civic culture refers to cultural forms that people are using in particular sites—whether real, textual, or virtual—to solve problems. (Lichterman, 2012, p. 213)

The culture of democracy has been of interest to political thinkers of various disciplines and eras. In their significant study, political scientists Almond and Verba (1963) examined the relationship between civic culture and democracy through a large-scale survey study focusing on five countries (United States, Mexico, Great Britain, Germany, and Italy). The context of the objects of this study have been greatly changed over the years, but some of its fundamental premises are still pertinent. Inter alia, the authors noted that the “democratic state offers the ordinary man the opportunity to take part in the political decision-making process as an influential citizen” (p. 4) and contended that civic participation is necessary for moving beyond the mechanism of democracy.

Almond and Verba’s study examined three main indicators of civic culture: “Cognitive orientation,” which refers to citizens’ familiarity and knowledge with political system; “Affective orientation,” denoting the public feeling upon the political system; and “evaluation orientation,” which refers to the capacity of people to evaluate political actions through the first two indicators (Almond & Verba, 1963, p. 4). The study showed a correlation between civic participation and the strength of democracy, a link that Deweyan writings on education, democracy, and public life make quite clearly. Civic culture’s cognitive, affective, and evaluative elements remind us that active citizenship is not an affair of knowing enough about government to participate in its chief passive ritual of voting, but is an affair of actively knowing through thinking, feeling, and evaluating the events and interactions constituting our public lives. Civic culture is formed of action instigated by a sense of ownership, of experiential involvement using the cognitive, affective, and evaluative elements through creative, productive work in civic and political life (Boyte, 2005).

Most formal citizenship education, taking place in social studies, history, and government courses in P–12 schooling, focuses primarily on only one aspect of civic culture’s three elements. Our schools primarily educate with the aim of shaping the cognitive aspects over the affective and evaluative elements. Citizenship education curriculum in schools—driven by testing mandates as well as rote teaching methods—tends toward the proceduralist and mechanical, and this general truth holds despite the heroic counterexamples, civic curriculum innovators, and exceptional teachers to the contrary. All too often schools and teachers tend to keep arduous questions and their accompanying affective dimensions out of the classroom, as if their role is to display a neutral, safe, and nonaffective presentation of the world (Hess, 2009). School boards mostly encourage and reward this neutrality, afraid for school curriculum to alienate taxpayers, particularly in a politically polarized era. The tidy curricular representation of politics and political engagement is increasingly irrelevant in light of today’s political environment.

Thomas (2014) argued that “a robust democracy [consists] of four foundations: active and deliberative public participation; freedom, justice, and equal opportunity; an educated and informed citizenry, and; effective government structures” (p. 1). Promoting active and deliberative public deliberation is necessary for moving beyond the mechanisms of government, which are based on procedures. Procedural democracy rests on the assumption that in pluralistic societies it is almost impossible to bring people to resolve social, political, and ethical disagreements. Thus, the majority rule provides a framework for making decisions about unresolved issues. Proceduralists do not claim that the decisions made by the majority are necessary right, but they claim that in light of the nature of polarized societies, procedural democracy is the fairest alternative. The danger of relying upon some sets of procedures to solve conflicting values is that by avoiding an open and vibrant discussion, the democratic procedures may infringe on the rights of underrepresented groups (such as immigrants, people of color, the LGBTQ community, and others), rather than protecting them. As Gutmann and Thompson (1998) claimed, “A majority vote alone cannot legitimate an outcome when the basic liberties or opportunities of an individual are at stake” (p. 30). Civic education relying upon neutral and passive characterizations of democracy and pedagogical practices promotes a weak civic culture. A healthy democracy requires a civic culture that is based on participation, as well as on educated, informed citizens who use cognitive, affective, and evaluative orientations.

Civic education practitioners and scholars have addressed these challenges in various ways; among them, recent work on civic action (Levinson, 2012) and deliberative classrooms (Hess, 2009; Hess & McAvoy, 2015) have rightfully gained much attention. Both of these reform ideas are seen as a way to push back against the polarization of U.S. political life, against civic apathy, and against inequitable preparation of students as citizens, thus enabling all students to become more engaged in civic life. We will argue that both these civic reforms are necessary but require further consideration (Wegwert, 2015). In particular, we contend that civic education is a field that has largely ignored the complexities and necessities of political emotion as a force in political and civic engagement. Our argument is derived from a case study, an exploration of political engagement by the #NeverAgainMSD high school activists, providing experiential means for exploring and deepening inquiry into education for engaged citizenship in the contemporary era.

As we will explain, both these civic education reforms, as they are enacted in schools, will improve the field but not help us attend to the affective domains of political life. Deliberation taps deeply into the cognitive and evaluative aspects of civic culture but usually does little to stir our “spiritedness,” and affective engagement with politics requires emotional investment, evaluative power, and active, embodied participation. Civic action comes closer, because it is a more embodied pedagogy that brings students into contact with genuine problems impacting their own local communities. However, the role of emotion and affect in political problem solving are not yet theorized or curricularized (Sheppard, Katz, & Grosland, 2015). The affective elements of civic culture have been better understood in recent decades by the renewed interest in political emotion by philosophers, cultural theorists, and other thinkers. According to Koziak (2000), “philosophers have gone from viewing the passions or emotions as universally wild, irrational, dangerous, subjective bodily phenomena that impair good practical and theoretical judgment, to posing emotions as rationale, cognitive, evaluative, and essential to good moral character and action” (p. 13). Agonist critiques of democracy, informed by critical and

poststructural democratic theories (Honig, 1993, 2017; Mouffe, 1999, 2000), provide a conceptual framework for fully engaging the possibilities of political emotion. Political emotion figures prominently in agonists' strong push for more effective participatory democratic forms, habits, and practices (Ruitenberg, 2009). Agonist thinking—a species of democratic theorizing emphasizing conflict and disagreement—helps build understanding of the worth of political emotion and its relationship to civic culture. Agonist thinkers argue that we must resist “conf[n] politics (conceptually and territorially) to the juridical, administrative, or regulative tasks of stabilizing moral and political subjects, building consensus, maintaining agreements, or consolidating communities and identities” (Honig, 1993, p. 2). However, school-based citizenship education is, even in its more innovative forms, typically an historic and ongoing project of stabilizing moral and political subjects, as well as building knowledge and skill for political consensus and agreements. Political emotion is usually viewed as an impediment to consensus and agreement rather than fulfilling a useful purpose in civic engagement.

The affective dimensions of an engaged civic life are examined here through a case study focusing on the Florida high school students who launched the #NeverAgainMSD movement to target gun control legislation in the months after a February 2018 school shooting responsible for 17 deaths. We have created a case portrait, based on English-language media texts produced about and by #NeverAgainMSD leaders from February to August 2018, describing some of the events, motivations, and educational experiences that helped bring them into the national spotlight. This case offers a sketch of how, in real time, students used all they had learned about enacting citizenship in the public sphere—or doing public work—by tapping into their digital tools, classroom learning across multiple disciplines, co-curricular learning, and aesthetic knowledge gained from arts-based experiences. These students engaged in civic life, in movement-building, and in lobbying using both the (often) passively delivered content knowledge of government and civics in powerful combination with their knowledge of organizing, political performance, and digital communication, channeled through their very potent political emotions. It is this combination of cognitive, affective, and evaluative domains, working from knowledge learned across the formal and nonformal curriculum of citizenship education as experienced by these teenagers, that creates optimal conditions for effective, full-bodied participation in civic culture.

In the first section we critically review two primary innovations in civic education theory and practice: civic action (Levinson, 2012) and deliberative classrooms (Hess, 2009; Hess & McAvoy, 2015). In the second section we will provide a succinct review of empirically engaged philosophy of education as our methodology in this article and explain its main principles. In the following sections we will discuss and analyze of the case study of #NeverAgainMSD. In the concluding section, we argue that creating more room for the education of emotions in everyday school life can provide students with more embodied, perceptive, and passionate ways to engage public action.

Innovations and limitations in United States civics education

In this section we highlight the theoretical and applied innovations that have characterized formal and informal civic learning in U.S. P-12 schooling in recent years. To combat the proceduralist bias in much civics education, both *action* and *deliberation* characterize 21st century innovations in this field (even as each draws from and

re-invents older conceptions of democratic citizenship). The impacts, as well as missing elements of these approaches, are highlighted here in anticipation of the case analysis which follows.

To improve the depth and rigor of the civic education provided by P-12 education, many of these innovations assume a wide conceptual political frame, reflective of the breadth of democratic life. This wide frame is well-captured by a Deweyan philosophy, anchoring the view of civic culture used in this analysis. Civic culture from a pragmatist view is distinct in a few ways. Unlike the work of Almond and Verba (1963), who measured individual psychological attitudes to judge cultural patterns, a pragmatist sense of civic culture is not the simple sum of individuals' views on political society or their engagement with it. Civic culture is both individual and social, a cultural phenomenon made by the thoughts and actions of many. The second distinction is that the pragmatist view is both active and integrative, mixing Almond and Verba's elements of cognition, affect, and evaluation into an embodied, experiential mix of talk, work, thinking, and feeling. The third distinction for the pragmatist view is that civics is not narrowly construed, in the traditional sense of civic as a domain of voluntarist organizational activity, as contrasted with the political, the largely statist institutional domain. Civic culture here is broadly defined as the widespread ways that people are communicating and making sense of their shared problem solving in free societies (Lichterman, 2012). With "a focus on action rather than institutions," this approach has a "cautious regard for actually existing forms of citizenship, eschewing easy celebrations of civic actors" (Lichterman, 2012, p. 212). Civic culture refers to the public shared patterns of symbolic and material work that construct what we can and cannot say, do and cannot do together as citizens.

Two primary innovations in civic education theory and practice, responding to calls for civic learning that invigorates and energizes civic culture, are examined briefly here: public work or civic action pedagogies (Levinson, 2012) and deliberative pedagogies (Hess & McAvoy, 2015). The innovation of public work and civic action has, of late, made a resurgence for experiential curriculum in the face of several decades of standardized, test-laden education policy. Much of the standardization and testing movement has left out civics subject areas, with some notable exceptions in the past decade (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2014). Testing and standardization trends have mostly caused these subjects' further marginalization in school-based formal curriculum. As Levinson (2012) noted, "Many educators and policy makers neglect civic learning because they believe it distracts from the 'real work' of schools: namely, teaching literacy and mathematics and eliminating the achievement gap in these areas" (p. 68). Levinson's work in "action civics" as a needed reform is a response to her labeling of the civic empowerment gap (i.e., the neglect of civic learning particularly in schools serving low-income, African-American, and Latinx communities). Action civics, "a student-centered, project-based approach to civics education that develops the individual skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary for 21st century democratic practice" (National Action Civics Collaborative, n.d.b) is a new formation of an old progressive idea in education. It is centered in youth voice and youth expertise and aims directly at both enhancing the experiential elements of civics as well as remedying the civic empowerment gap by focusing students' learning on problems and issues that matter in their own communities. Boyte (2011) conceptualized

this type of engagement as “public work,” based in “a normative, democratizing ideal of citizenship generalized from communal labors of making and tending the commons, with roots in diverse cultures” (p. 632). Initiatives such as Public Achievement are older examples of civic action pedagogy (Boyte & Finders, 2016).

A second civics education innovation has been deliberative pedagogies, a relative of discussion-based teaching that has been on the rise since the 1980s (Parker, 2014). As a key method employed to teach citizenship, its popularity among social studies curricularists is tied into the aim of civic education to make citizens who are more civil (often defined as less emotional), more able to reason with others across difference, to listen and build consensus with others. Hess (2009) has advocated using controversial issues to focus on these deliberative goals, to mitigate against the tendency of public school educators to swerve away from powerful yet heated topics of study and discussion. Hess (2009) argued that

the purposeful inclusion of controversial political issues in the school curriculum, done wisely and well, illustrates a core component of a functioning democratic community, while building the understandings, skills, and dispositions that young people need to live in and to improve such a community. (p. 5)

Hess’s work has done much to advance better classroom practices for educating citizens in this polarized era. Her work pushes back on the powerful myth that citizenship education must remain carefully “neutral” to be acceptable and effective in public schools. In her book with Paula McAvoy, they argued that classrooms must be political if they are to educate students for democratic life. By political they do not mean partisan, but rather they argue for curriculum and teaching which “helps students to develop their ability to deliberate political questions” (Hess & McAvoy, 2015, p. 4).

Deliberative discussions in classrooms will help students learn how to engage others who have different ideas and do so in produced, reasoned ways. These are, without a doubt, valuable capacities for citizens. Deliberation works through framing complex and controversial public problems into debateable questions oriented toward policy solutions. Deliberation works, in part, through removing more emotion-laden aspects of problems into frames that can invite calmer discussion, oriented usually toward consensus. Wegwert (2015) asserted that despite the best intentions to enliven classrooms through deliberative arguments and activities, deliberative pedagogies will miss the mark because they are too often inauthentic and cut off from real human experiences. Others have critiqued deliberation along these lines as well (Backer, 2017; Ruitenberg, 2009).

Civic action pedagogies offer some corrective for civics teaching that avoids “the realities of current power structures” (Wegwert, 2015, p. 1). Because these are project-based, experiential curricular efforts located in communities, students are able to make connections to problems they have experienced—public transportation problems in low-income communities in Chicago, for example—which better enables a more holistic engagement and, thus, better integrating cognitive, affective, and evaluative dimensions of civic participation (National Action Civics Collaborative, n.d.a). Yet civic action does not explicitly discuss, inquire into, or make use of political emotion per se, even though it is often a powerful dimension of how we come to recognize problems as public problems in need of resolution. Although it improves civics teaching insofar as it is embodied and engaged, it too is largely silent on the role or worth of emotion in civic life.

Agonist critiques of democracy provide resources for fully engaging the possibilities of political emotion. Informed by greater acknowledgment of the unequal power structures, hegemonic relations, and adversarial nature of political engagement that #NeverAgainMSD leaders encountered in their public work, Ruitenberg's (2009) notion of "educating political adversaries" (p. 275) is an important educational application of these agonist critiques. In particular, Ruitenberg explained two important ideas for agonistic democratic education: The distinction between politics and the political and the role of political emotion in democratic discussion and engagement. First, the realm of politics is distinct from the political; politics is comprised by "the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of 'the political'" (Mouffe, 2000, p. 15). Antagonism is inherent in human relations; in other words, "Political conflict is, for Mouffe, not a problem to be overcome, but rather a force to be channeled into political and democratic commitments" (Ruitenberg, 2009, p. 272). Following from this belief, the role of political emotion is foregrounded in agonist thinking. Ruitenberg argued on the import of educating emotions as a part of citizenship education; instead of eradicating the passions of politics and political conflict through a sole focus on liberal rationalist deliberation in classrooms, we should also be educating those passions.

Political emotion finds conceptual roots in Aristotle and in the Greek word *thumos*, translated alternately as spiritedness, heart, passion, and sometimes, anger (Koziak, 2000). Aristotle "identifies three aspects of an emotion—a thought or belief, a feeling of pain or pleasure, and a desire for some event, action, or situation" (Koziak, 2000, p. 16). In the *Rhetoric*, for example, he stated that anger is a "desire, accompanied by pain, for real or apparent revenge for a real or apparent slight affecting a man himself or one of his friends" (Aristotle, 1954, pp. 31–32). Scholars seeking to revive the worth and analysis of political emotion generally find that "emotions are indispensable to good ethical judgment and conduct" (Koziak, 2000, p. 16). Emotions are a form of moral perception, and they help motivate us to action.

Emotion, however, is not simply an individual experience. William James and John Dewey are among those pragmatist philosophers who have described the holistic experience of emotion, a "perspective on emotions as primarily situated in human relationships and inextricable from ethics" (Solomon, 2008, p. 192). Zembylas (2007), among a handful of researchers advocating more inquiry into the intersections of emotions, politics, and citizenship in education, identified three categories of conceptualizing emotions: as individual experience, as socioculturally constructed, and as interactive performances. From a poststructural philosophical perspective, emotions contain movement and connections to other people and things, as Ahmed (2014) pointed out:

We should note that the word "emotion" comes from the Latin, *emovere*, referring to "to move, to move out." Of course, emotions are not only about movement, they are also about attachments or about what connects us to this or that. (p. 11)

There is no emotion that is uniquely political, but "political emotion" can be thought of as the explicit connection between affect or feeling and political actions, events, or ideas. Political emotion, like any other emotional experience, is not separate from but connected to our reasoning and evaluative powers. Dewey (1934), in *Art as Experience*, discussed the

problems with the dualism of reason/emotion and how philosophy (and education) has falsely segregated these two powers. Ahmed (2014) added to this analysis of emotion, critically examining the hierarchies we assign to different emotions as well as moving beyond the individualist accounts of how political emotions operate: “Some emotions are ‘elevated’ as signs of cultivation, whilst others remain ‘lower’ as signs of weakness” (p. 3). Norms of civility, conveyed through the informal curriculum of schooling as well as the formal structures of deliberative pedagogies and civic action, sanction polite passion and vigorous debate but frown upon expressions of anger, particularly when expressed by people of color, the working class, or female-identified students.

In fact, anger is a primary emotion in the #NeverAgainMSD case. Aristotle conceptualized anger in social, political, and ethical terms, as “a distressed desire for conspicuous vengeance in return for a conspicuous and unjustifiable contempt/slight of one’s person or friends” (Solomon, 2008, p. 189). When anger is combined with judgment about the innocence of those harmed by the contempt or slight, we have indignation. Bradshaw (2008) stated that “indignation, not compassion or pity, is the chief catalyst for political reform. The victims of injustice do not want to be pitied; they want to be treated as the equals they are” (p. 182). The value of anger, and its cousin indignation, as a response to political events or policies, therefore, is crucial to explore as one aspect of how citizens engage in civic culture.

In sum, we have seen positive pedagogical innovations in 21st century citizenship education. Deliberative pedagogies and action civics each make important improvements in the status quo of formal P-12 civics curriculum. Beyond these innovations, in a few places we have seen civics education requirements tightened by legislatures or state education agencies. In one such push for enhanced civic literacy and political knowledge, it is notable that one of these states is Florida, where our research case study unfolds (iCivics, 2011). Beyond these innovative practices, and beyond the push for enhanced traditional practices in civics education, agonist democrats are trying to push the field to acknowledge and more comprehensively educate political emotion, including more difficult emotions such as anger and indignation, as an important factor in citizenship education. Our case study explores the agonist ideas of citizenship and how they could further inform citizenship education efforts. That exploration follows the explanation of the methodology used to explore these ideas: the philosophical case study.

Philosophical case study as method

Our inquiry is based in methodologies of empirically engaged philosophy of education. Philosophy of education is largely a conceptual field, exploring philosophical questions of meaning, purpose, morality and ethics, politics, and metaphysics as they relate to schools, educational contexts, and related issues. Empirically engaged philosophy refers to different ways in which scholars employ empirical data as a point of departure for philosophical inquiry. Empirically engaged philosophy includes different approaches: certain scholars rely upon social sciences to examine ethical questions of education; others attempt to utilize philosophy to analyze empirical data (Wilson & Santoro, 2015).

As pragmatists, we here use empirically engaged philosophy to understand some of the conflicting value aims in citizenship education and action in the United States. We bridge the spaces between theory and practice by using a single case study design (Yin, 2009) to

illuminate the tensions of conflicting values and aims in regards to citizenship education. Wortham (2015) rightly argued that “confronting the complexities of an actual case can ... be productive” for philosophers exploring conflicting values of practice (p. 126). Feinberg (2015) suggested that when integrating empirical research and philosophy, pragmatist scholars need to consider how the examined experience supports an ongoing growth and human flourishing. Golding (2015) stated that this approach is a type of

philosophical–empirical research that is at once philosophical and empirical. For example, we can go back and forth between philosophical arguments and empirical observations to find a reflective equilibrium between the philosophical and the empirical (Bufacchi, 2004). We form philosophical conclusions about issues such as classroom management, and then through empirical research we find a mismatch between our meanings and values and what we observe in the classroom, so we adjust our philosophical conclusions, and so on (p. 207).

Our study examines a performance of citizenship by high school students—an example of a civic cultural act or series of actions—in order to explore the relationship between citizenship actions and civic education aims and ideals. In so doing, we identify areas of “mismatch between our meanings and values and what we observe” (Golding, 2015, p. 207) through the case study. How citizenship is *enacted* by young people does not clearly match what we would expect the formal high school curriculum to produce. What does that mismatch look like, and what themes does it produce for further inquiry?

The case of citizenship enactments by MSDHS students is chosen both for its unique, extreme characteristics, but also for its revelatory power. Mass school shootings are, despite public perceptions to the contrary, quite rare (Kaste, 2018). The transformation of a mass school shooting event into a national political organization is even rarer, yet although the incident of a school shooting is uncommon, the MSDHS students themselves are ordinary high school students at a well-ranked and rated Florida public high school thrust into a wholly exceptional trauma whose aftermath they turned into political action. The political opportunities they found and made through their own public actions and work comprise the revelatory power of the case, found in its exceptionality. This case provides a look into a phenomenon that is rare but also well documented in public textual sources. To build a case narrative, we analyzed an archive of national media news stories; interviews of MSDHS activists; their social media statements or expressions, such as tweets and memes; and public appeals, essays, and websites created by or about the #NeverAgainMSD student leaders against gun violence. We also closely studied a memoir written by two MSDHS student leaders (Hogg & Hogg, 2018). Rather than employing line-by-line coding, we used descriptive and thematic analysis across multiple readings of these texts.

The case aids in understanding how the citizenship education pedagogical debates stand against a series of political enactments by high school students. As we see how the richness of enactments in civic culture contrasts with much of the typical formal curriculum, we can make better sense of these gaps in value, aim, and practice of citizenship learning. Lived experience will always be richer than the experiences teachers can produce through planned lessons within the limitations of schools, funding, and other resources; however, this case illustrates the depth of engagement and inquiry in this youth-led political engagement. The case reveals the affective, cognitive, and evaluative capacities these students tapped in real time through ongoing public work.

#NeverAgainMSD: The education of student leaders

David Hogg, in *#NeverAgain: A New Generation Draws the Line*, documents his motivation for writing a book about the events surrounding February 14, 2018:

Lauren and I are telling our story to show you how we grew up into people who felt like we had to do something and could do something. We definitely think that's valuable information, and we hope that seeing things through our eyes will give you ideas of your own. Because none of us can do this alone and we need you, basically. But we're all really different people. We don't even have the same opinions on gun control. The only thing we share completely is what Lauren said when she was getting started—we were all born after Columbine, we all grew up with Sandy Hook and terrorism and code-red active-shooter drills. We have all grown up conditioned to be afraid. *And we're all sick and tired of being afraid.* (Hogg & Hogg, 2018, p. 19, emphasis in original)

Lauren Hogg and older brother David, both students at MSDHS and present there on February 14, are among a group of activists who have become well known in the aftermath of the school shooting. The stories that are circulating of their preparation, motivation, and inspirations for their activism are diverse and multidimensional.

The first sentence quoted in the previous excerpt is telling. “We *had* to do something” refers to the students’ motivation. These students were changed by the horrific experience of a mass murder event enacted by a 19-year old former student, Nikolas Cruz. They experienced an emotional whirlwind of violence, terror, fear, and grief simultaneously. In the wake of processing this trauma, which was responsible for 17 deaths at their school, anger became a key motivational response for these leaders. Conscious of being a generation of students who call “active shooter drills” the norm, these students turned their terror into a political message: “we’re all sick and tired of being afraid.” The fear of terror is connected to the anger toward those adults who had created a society in which their fear was normalized, in their view, and turned into another school routine, a drill.

“We *could* do something” refers to the Hogg siblings’ sense that they had agency to act. The 20 or so high school students who gathered at junior Cameron Kasky’s house days after the MSDHS shooting had grown up in homes and schools that had prepared them for this moment. Their agency was fed and informed by the formal curriculum and the co-curricular opportunities offered at their suburban school, serving Parkland and parts of Coral Springs, Florida. MSDHS is a well-resourced public school with high graduation rates; it has exceptional co-curricular programs, challenging courses, and committed teachers.

These students had a diverse array of knowledge, capacities, and skills to use in becoming political actors; performance and communication capacities were notably among them. All of these students had a lifetime of growing up connected to, learning from, and producing content using digital media. Their capacity to provide leadership to a movement through traditional and social media has been well documented. Through their school and community, they gained other capacities that fed their activism. Cameron Kasky, for example, was active in MSDHS’s theater program, acting in the spring musical and planning to produce a one-act play and also rehearsing in a community theater production. The Hogg siblings took the TV Production class as an elective, as did Emma Gonzalez. According to reports, “Nearly all of the #NeverAgain organizers are active in the drama club, the school newspaper, or its TV station, WMSD-TV, where David Hogg serves as news director and Emma González is active in TV production” (Cullen, 2018, para. 14). The school system as a whole boasts of exemplar co-curricular opportunities for

students, including a system-wide debating and forensic program. Coincidentally, some of the students at Stoneman Douglas had been preparing for debates on the issue of gun control that year, which explains in part why they could speak to the issues from day one (Lithwick, 2018).

The high school boasts a challenging curriculum made available to many students. A report after the shooting noted that “About 327 students take AP government—that’s about 40% of the senior class. ... In the 2013 school year they had 19 AP college-level courses” (Rivas, 2018, para. 21). The Advanced Placement (AP) Government teacher, Jeff Foster, has nearly 20 years under his belt in that role and helped create the AP government curriculum for the entire Broward County Public Schools system. Several of the #NeverAgainMSD leaders were enrolled in AP Government during the February 14 mass shooting, and according to one report,

On the day of the shooting, Foster taught the AP Gov students about special interest groups, like the NAACP, American Medical Association, and the National Rifle Association. His lesson plan that day included a discussion about the Columbine and Sandy Hook school shootings, with emphasis on how every politician comes out afterward a tragedy to say the right thing about changing gun regulation. The students learned how the NRA goes to work as soon news reporters and the public move on to the next story. (Rivas, 2018, para. 11)

Their life and school experiences had also prepared some of these leaders to be reflective and conscious of their relative privilege. Even as they railed against the ways that politicians dismiss their views because of their age, they expressed understanding that their social class and racial and ethnic identities gave them power to speak and be heard in a way that other student activists against gun violence have not had. In one of the last chapters of the Hogg’s book, they directly address this issue, concluding that

We’re super glad people are listening to us, but we’re not the story. ... If people only listen when privileged white kids get killed—and even then, only when the number of dead kids is high enough to make the news—we’re never going to fix this problem. (Hogg & Hogg, 2018, p. 131)

The sense that they were one group among many working against gun violence enabled these activists to organize with many other groups and to create their presence on a large national stage. Their organizing and their progress was lightning fast and stunning in its scale. Only one week after the shooting incident, student leaders were visiting government and legislative officials in Tallahassee and Washington, DC, to protest “the National Rifle Association’s influence on legislators and demand a ban on assault weapons” (Torres, 2018, para. 26). Six days later, a group of student leaders was meeting with Paul Ryan, Speaker of the House of Representatives. Less than a week later, they were in a Twitter war with the National Rifle Association (NRA) and creating content to critique the organization’s power in shaping gun laws. The Florida legislature passed a gun control bill, the first in the state in 20 years, on March 7, three weeks to the day after the shooting at MSDHS. On March 14, there was a national walkout in high schools. On March 24, five weeks after the MSDHS shooting, these teens helped organize the National March for our Lives in Washington, DC, and cities around the United States, which involved approximately two million people (Fisher, 2018). Some of these students continue to be very visibly active on behalf of gun control candidates and causes.

Their activism in the days and weeks that followed the February 14 school shooting cannot be fully detailed here, but these broad outlines of their activism show three ways

that this case of civic engagement is noteworthy. The first is the immediacy of the students' public action, enabled by digital technologies (Kahne, Hodgin, & Eidman-Aadahl, 2016). These students lost no time in linking their tragedy with political issues and contexts; in the days after the shooting, students were talking with national news media about their criticisms of gun laws, political inaction, and school safety protocols. David Hogg was among those who shot video on his phone of the event itself, as he and a group of students were in hiding from the shooter, which would later go viral. One hour after the event, in reaction to a "thoughts and prayers" tweet by President Donald Trump directed to the victims and their families, survivor and activist Sarah Chadwick tweeted this response:

I don't want your condolences, you fucking piece of shit, my friends and teachers were shot. Multiple of my fellow classmates are dead. Do something instead of sending prayers. Prayers won't fix this. But gun control will prevent it from happening again. (DaSilva, 2018)

A second reason this case is noteworthy is because of the activists' use of Twitter and other forms of social media. As Chadwick's tweet illustrates, Twitter is an adept medium (to put it mildly) for expressions of rage, disgust, judgment, and indignation—directed to the very highest levels of government and elected officials. Students lost no time in using this tool to their organizing advantage.

A third reason this case is noteworthy is because of what it can reveal about social identities and civic engagement. Social class, as well as racial and ethnic identities have an impact on both civic education and student activism. Cultural commentators have pointed out that that Parkland is far from the first or only high school which has experienced a shooting, but as a high school located in a wealthy suburb in a well-resourced school district, Parkland's students are privileged by social class and many, though not all of the student activists, identify as White. Their position as students enrolled in an upper middle-class high school impacted both the quantity and quality of civic education they received and their ability to gain a national following for their movement.

All three of these aspects of the case foreshadow the themes of our analysis. We piece together, in the section that follows, how the activists' actions in the case connect to their civics learning as described in their narratives as presented in the texts we examined.

Analysis, in three themes

This case is a small portrait of a much larger enactment by high school students as civic actors in the political cultures of the contemporary United States context. As an empirical case meant to explore philosophical meanings of value and purpose in civics education, we must take care in interpreting its meanings. As a case study, it is not meant to prove anything through evidence that might be used to draw universal conclusions. It is meant to suggest the tensions surrounding political emotions, their absence from most formal civics education instruction, and what this can mean going forward.

There are benefits of bringing empirical lived realities into conversation with our philosophical aims and values related to democratic citizenship, but there are obvious limitations in using a case study in this way. It is certainly noteworthy that this case takes place in a state that enhanced and strengthened its civics education content and assessments through a Civics Education Act honoring the civic education passions of the

nation's first female Supreme Court Justice (Koo, 2011). The case neither proves nor disproves the efficacy of such legislation, although the correlation of Florida's push and the #NeverAgainMSD is likely more than coincidental. The case is also obviously not meant to suggest the generalizability of the precipitating event of a school shooting for the #NeverAgainMSD campaign. The case is not meant to insinuate that the purpose of civic learning in schools is to produce students who can lead national movements. Rather, we offer a way to examine a singular lived enactment within the realm of civic culture produced by high school students. This enactment suggests, we argue, that education might move beyond strict adherence to cognitive knowledge and civic literacies and into areas of teaching and learning that help expand and enliven those capacities. No formal curriculum can fully prepare us for, or begin to replicate the richness of a lived experience; however, the purpose of this case analysis is to measure the gaps between the formal civics curriculum and the realities of civic cultural work at the present moment under authentic political conditions. This analysis has three segments: the first highlights the patterns of disagreement and conflict that characterized the case; the second theme describes the patterns of emotional expression that were part of the civic enactments of the #NeverAgainMSD students; and the third theme describes the civic innovations at work in the case. All three themes point the way toward proposed changes in our orientation to civic education in public schools.

Civic culture as patterns of disagreement and conflict: Practicing disagreement

Lichterman (2012) noted that “civic culture refers to cultural forms that people are using in particular sites—whether real, textual, or virtual—to solve problems” (p. 213). Much virtual and real ink has been spilled over the political polarization of our contemporary political era, especially in the United States. We might bemoan that trend and rightfully attempt to work against it, with more deliberative practices infusing curriculum and government reforms, yet we must also prepare our students to enter the political arena as it now exists. Our civic culture is a terrain of conflict and disagreement, and Parkland students immediately engaged in this conflict openly and emotionally.

MSDHS prepared these students in diverse ways for the conflict they faced. Mr. Foster used discussion-oriented curriculum to engage students in the study of government. The district's debate programs encouraged students to develop habits of clear oral communication and argumentation. These school efforts were attempting to enable students to analyze and debate together in the very practical interest of building agreement over divisive public policy questions. Gun control is one of those key questions that quickly became, for #NeverAgainMSD leaders, *the* public policy issue of their lifetime, and very rapidly, the polarization on this topic was in full and vicious view. Formal skills of debate and reasoned argumentation, which have traditionally been hallmarks of good citizenship education in our nation's public schools, were indeed at play in the #NeverAgainMSD civic work.

Nevertheless, the tone set by MSDHS student activists' public statements and Twitter expressions (and the reactions against these, by those opposed to gun control), was wilder, more raw, and more angry than anything that happens in a debate society or a government class. Consider the statement made by the Hogg siblings: “we're sick and tired of being afraid” (Hogg & Hogg, 2018, p. 19). This world-weariness and disgust has

characterized the #NeverAgainMSD statements from the beginning of their activism, including their very first social media response to the president of the United States. These types of statements aim at expressing a generational anger at mass shootings in the United States and uniquely express a potent indignation that was a key strength in the activism led by #NeverAgainMSD.

In the early days after the shooting, the MSDHS activists did not step from away from but rather stepped into conflict, in television interviews with reporters, talk show guest spots, and particularly on social media. They were engaged in intense Twitter wars with NRA leaders and their supporters. Student leaders created memes and video content to circulate via social media to great effect, fueling their movement with their grief and anger. Two days after the shooting, Sarah Chadwick tweeted, “To the politicians saying this isn’t about guns, and that we shouldn’t be discussing this rn [right now]: We were literally being shot at while trying to gain an education. So this is about guns. You weren’t in the school while this was happening. We were, and we’re demanding change” (131,000 people “liked” this tweet, and Sarah has 325,000 followers on Twitter). In the #Whatif series of video interviews created by MSDHS student leaders, student survivors narrate their experiences in short clips. In the story of Sam Zief, posted on April 10 and viewed more than 157,000 times on Twitter as of September 2018, Sam tells the story of learning about his best friend’s death during the day of the shooting. The tweet, posted by @MarchforOurLives, reads: “#Whatif I could make you feel what it’s like to lose a best friend.” Survivor and #NeverAgainMSD activist Aalayah Eastmond (more than 6,000 followers on Twitter), expressed not grief but indignation with this June 11th tweet: “You can’t drive a rental car until the age of 25 in America. You can’t check into some hotels until the age of 21 or 25 in America, but in America you can purchase a semiautomatic rifle at 18. #ThisShouldNOTBeAmerica.”

All democratic theories must make sense of pluralism and conflicting viewpoints in decision making. Agonist views of democracy argue that conflict is not a flaw to be overcome but an essential feature of democratic life. Honig (1993) drew upon Arendt and Nietzsche to argue this point. Democratic majorities will always leave remainders; people who lie outside of the consensus and whose rights are never guaranteed. As a result, democracy requires keeping open spaces of contestability, which for agonist critics, *are* the spaces of politics. As Honig (1993) explained:

For Arendt, these spaces of worldly and contingent resistance to systematization are the spaces of politics. For her, we might say, “the will to a system is a lack of politics.” This formulation is consistent with her concerns about the displacement of politics in an age of modern bureaucracy, administrative politics and normalization, an age of system. The mark of true politics, for Arendt, is resistability and a perpetual openness to refounding it. (p. 116)

#NeverAgainMSD students challenged the ways we have normalized mass shootings in the United States. By openly snarling at the “Our thoughts and prayers are with you” auto-response of politicians and media personalities, they carved a space for resistance to the political context around guns and gun violence in the United States. By consistently stepping up into the conflicts regarding gun control in their own state, they signaled that they were not playing by the rules of submissive citizenship or bending to the will of elders. These were important moves that opened up further resistance on the part of many others, as evidenced by the March for our Lives and other collective efforts they were able to help organize.

How do we enable students to find and use the open spaces of political life to help engage serious problems about which there is little serious debate? One way that MSDHS civics teachers apparently achieved this goal was to teach quality courses that prepared students with political knowledge and engaging pedagogy. However, this knowledge is only the beginning. If conflict is one of our patterns of civic culture, practicing nonviolent yet passionate exchanges of disagreement is an important aspect of engaging democratic life. The MSDHS Debate team tradition gives important practice in dissent and disagreement. Where else in schools are students practicing conflict, especially in ways that might replicate or simulate conflict's genuine feeling and animating affective dimensions? Several scholars have offered arguments and ideas for making deliberation in classrooms more inclusive of the sometimes strong emotional structures students experience in controversial issue discussions (Backer, 2017; Lo, 2017). Making more room for emotion to fuel reasoning in our political conflicts is a way to better prepare students for civic cultural engagement as citizens.

Civic culture as patterns of vibrant emotional expression: Educating political feeling

Civic culture is constituted in patterns of action and expression for solving public problems, and it is formed, in part, by vocabularies and dramas that shape the stories we tell each other about who we are as a society (Lichterman, 2012). An example is the social justice arguments used during the Civil Rights Movement related to biblical images and ideas about justice and love. Civic culture is inclusive of vibrant emotional expressions and structures of feeling, as citizens use affective-informed thinking to narrate the kind of political and moral ideals we seek to follow in our laws or policies.

#NeverAgainMSD activists were very tuned in to the power of political feeling and its import for their political goals. The previously described #Whatif video campaign is a compelling collection of short narratives delivering the power of the students' feelings and experiences as mass shooting survivors. The tweets praising those teachers, coaches, and administrators who protected the students, sometimes with their lives, helped personalize the tragedy and remind us of its impact in the days after, when most of us move on with our lives to the next crisis-du-jour.

The student activists have not shied away from exploring and expressing the shared emotional impacts of the mass shooting incident. David Hogg has been particularly adept in framing the shooting with evocative political feeling. He has used the emotion of shame to great effect when discussing political leaders' accountability for such mass shootings. In May 2018, after a mass shooting at a high school in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Hogg tweeted, "Get ready for two weeks of media coverage of politicians acting like they give a shit when in reality they just want to boost their approval ratings before midterms."

Instead of evoking easy compassion or pity for the victims, expressions of shame helped keep the focus on their anger and their indignation at the status quo around gun violence. As Bradshaw (2008) noted, pity is not a catalyst of political reform. Yet,

those who are the objects of compassion and pity may respond with indignation, by pronouncing, "No, you do not know my predicament, no, I am not just like you; I want justice and recognition, not sentiment," but to become indignant is to assert oneself, to demand justice, and this requires agency, or at least the possibility of it. (p. 183)

Philosophers of education who have explored affect have underscored the need to educate emotions as culturally and political significant experiences that are not simply private but collaboratively felt and constructed (Boler, 1999; Ruitenber, 2009). The education of emotions can perhaps be enhanced through more creatively designed social studies, history, or civics classrooms, but it is our view that this enhancement is ideally pursued through our P–12 schools’ humanities educational offerings, both in the formal curriculum as well as the co-curriculum. The reading of literature, the pursuit of theater arts, music programs, and strong arts integration across the curriculum provide tremendous potential for the education of emotion. MSDHS, as well as the surrounding community in which it is located, offers a rich curriculum in these domains. The school district’s drama program was a shared activity of some of the #NeverAgainMSD activists. The role of the school district’s quality offerings, both inside and outside the classroom, has led a few commentators to argue for the impact of this kind of education in an era where legislators increasingly have devalued it. As Lithwick (2018) wrote:

Despite the gradual erosion of the arts and physical education in America’s public schools, the students of Stoneman Douglas have been the beneficiaries of the kind of 1950s-style public education that has all but vanished in America and that is being dismantled with great deliberation as funding for things like the arts, civics, and enrichment are zeroed out. In no small part because the school is more affluent than its counterparts across the country ... these kids have managed to score the kind of extracurricular education we’ve been eviscerating for decades in the United States. These kids aren’t prodigiously gifted. They’ve just had the gift of the kind of education we no longer value. (para. 4)

Humanities and the arts, typically not discussed when we think of civics education in schools, enable students to wander through different worlds, and worldviews, as they explore and develop their own political understandings. Humanities and arts offerings can help students explore the humanity of various types of different people across the globe, and across the street, preparing them to engage in deeply felt disagreement with those they can imagine as flesh-and-blood others (Nussbaum, 1997). Increasingly, only in our wealthier school districts do rich offerings in these areas survive the pressures of high-stakes testing and diminishment of funding for public education outside of STEM areas. The humanities and arts are critical to a well-rounded civic education that creates conditions for cognitive, affective, and evaluative dimensions of civic cultural work.

Civic culture as innovation: Learning through creation and communication

Too much civic education has to do with helping the young carry on and preserve the traditions they will inherit rather than the creation of new traditions and new ways of moving forward. Yet civic culture, consisting of the patterns of acting and communicating we use to solve problems together in public life, is active and creative, changing and moving, like culture itself. Moving from more passive to more active approaches to educating citizens is already contained in deliberative classroom pedagogy as well as action civics and we see even further need for this shift in the #NeverAgainMSD case study. Honig (2017) draws from Hannah Arendt’s (1998) description of the *vita activa*, the life of deeds and words engaged in doing something, as a condition of democracy. Boyte’s (2011) conception of public work traces some similar Arendtian roots as he positions citizens as co-creators of the world: “The concept of public work, expressing civic agency,

or the capacity of diverse citizens to build a democratic way of life, embodies this shift [from passive to active]. It posits citizens as co-creators of the world, not simply deliberators and decision-makers about the world” (p. 630). Innovation and co-creation are not separate from affective domains and political emotion but are products of affective inspirations.

In an article titled, “Inside the Secret Meme Lab Designed to Propel #NeverAgain beyond the March,” a March 2018 *Vanity Fair* reporter profiled the activist organization that the students and some of their MSDHS alumni/supporters have built (Cullen, 2018). In the month since the school shooting, MSDHS students were “pumping out clever, shareable content on Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat, and prepping a YouTube launch” (Cullen, 2018, para. 2). Planning short videos, such as the #Whatif remembrances discussed previously, the students and their alumni supporters funneled emotion and political strategizing into the creation of new cultural texts and expressions reflective of their own themes, emotional ranges, and perspectives. These cultural productions—everything from memes to a march on the nation’s capital, for example—took a familiar form, but at an unimaginable scale for a group of young organizers, and the MSDHS students have sought to sustain people’s attention through more captivating digital texts of all types (Kahne et al., 2016). They have now not only created memes and Internet content, but they are telling their story and doing their work through books and other formats, too. Their goal was to captivate the American public’s attention so that they could not look away and would not forget the tragedy so as to allow this type of violence to continue unabated.

Again, the formal and co-curricular education these students received at MSDHS gets due credit, as do the digital cultures in which many youths are living. Some of the students had taken or were taking a TV production class, and some were working on journalism projects through their own school newspaper or as teen reporters for the local newspaper. Much commented on by cultural observers is that these young activists are immersed in social media as a way of adolescent life, thus they are well prepared to use the technical skills of producing content toward venues that would welcome their sarcasm, irreverence, and outspoken refusals to tolerate adult hypocrisy.

Conclusion

The case study of #NeverAgainMSD, as with many other incidents of mass shootings in the past two decades, has been rooted in tragic circumstances. What is interesting in this case is how MSDHS students translated the horrifying experience into a social response. In light of recurrent concerns regarding the decline of civic engagement, and the technical, procedural characteristics of so much formal civics education, the activism of these students exemplifies the power of youth activism as well as the importance of providing young people with the knowledge, skills, and conditions to effectively and affectively engage in public life. In the analysis of this case we suggested that the role of emotion in political problem solving has not been carefully examined nor taken into consideration as an integral element of civics curriculum. The three themes of our analysis have elucidated how emotions such as indignation serve as a catalyst for political action. As pointed out in an interview with Emma Gonzalez: “Harnessing sorrow and rage into activism, the Parkland survivors galvanized a movement, giving voice to a young generation that could help shape culture and history” (Eller, 2018, para. 6).

We argue that the students who have led this movement demonstrate a kind of agency, which was cultivated through the formal curriculum as well as the co-curricular opportunities in the school and fed through the surge in participatory democratic practices in the United States during this time (Kahne et al., 2016). The diverse curriculum at MSDHS (such as the Debate Team) helped students to perceive disagreement as inextricable from civic culture. As such, these students realized that in light of gun craziness, it was necessary to “do something” (Hogg & Hogg, 2018, p. 19), regardless of the public controversy that was entailed by their activities. This case clearly shows how MSDHS students realized the importance of emotions as part of their campaign. In other words, the students realized that civic action requires them to be attuned to public feelings, which are essential for creating a vibrant discussion based on diverse (and sometimes opposite) dispositions. We contend that the MSDHS students’ agency is likely related to the unique nature of the school, which attempts to engage students with everyday issues through high-quality government classes, co-curricular opportunities for communication such as debate, and humanities and the arts. Although we acknowledge the importance of civics education, advancing a meaningful understanding of the *political* requires educators to enable students to explore their worldviews through different disciplines as well as in diverse settings, which will challenge the longstanding dualism of reason and emotion. The arts, for example, invite us to pay attention to details and develop abstract thinking, which are vital for appreciating different perspectives. The arts also allow us to live with a degree of ambiguity. Although ambivalence and ambiguity are scarcely encouraged in civics education, they are important for questioning one’s own dispositions (Eisner, 2002). Creating more room for the education of emotions in everyday school life can provide students with more embodied, perceptive, and passionate ways to engage public action. MSDHS students show how political emotion can play an important role in creating new ways to communicate with other citizens and power brokers through creative, innovative means.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that developing political emotions is important in the context of deliberation, action, and other more traditional pedagogies. The experience of the affective in political life, and how it should inform participation and creation in civic culture, is part of a continuum of civic learning in school. In addition, political emotions are distinct from one another; besides anger and indignation, there is shame, joy, hatred, and pity, and not all political emotions contribute positively to public work. Worth exploring with students is how less-desirable political emotions function in politics; emotions such as fear are powerful forces in civic and political life. Hate, for example, plays a role in targeting groups, dividing societies to “us” and “them,” and fostering violence. In addition to exploring the range of political emotions and their uses and abuses, the limits of political emotion’s use and power must be addressed and acknowledged. Such questions could include: When do political emotions bring clarity, force, or weight to a political agenda or action, and when do they hamper political efforts? Do we need a disastrous event to evoke political action, or can we better cultivate a sense of collective action in everyday life? How can political emotions be used to manipulate citizens unfairly? These questions could provide great starting points for high school students. With these final caveats provided as a caution and limitation to our arguments here, we argue that having citizens who are well rounded and can translate their emotions into political action is vital, and that a healthy civic culture in a democratic public requires all three dimensions of civic culture—the cognitive, the affective, and the evaluative. Thus,

the inclusion of the affective, and the education of political emotions across the curriculum, is critical for advancing the capacities our students will need to contribute to and create civic culture into the future of their communities, nations, and the world.

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