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YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SADLY IGNORANT ABOUT THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

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What does it really mean to be an American? Does it really matter, to cite one point, whether an American knows the significance of important national holidays? For example, Labor Day or Independence Day? It would seem that an American should know American history, should know his or her rights and responsibilities as a citizen. An American should know how the United States government differs from any other government in the world. However, according to these standards, the majority of so-called Americans probably do not qualify as true Americans. These thoughts began coming to me earlier this summer. While listening to the radio on the Fourth of July, I heard an interviewer asking random people if they knew why Americans were celebrating on that day. Of the people that I heard, not one was able to give the correct answer. This situation is dire because true, active Americans ensure that the United States remains the way our founding fathers intended. In other words, Americans make the United States government American.

So, how are we to remain a strong nation based on freedom, justice and equality before the law? As different as their own ideal forms of government may have been, many of the great thinkers throughout the ages, such as Plato, Marx and Rousseau, have agreed on the best method of enforcing and maintaining a strong government.

Plato and Marx both believed in indoctrinating or educating youth in order to create a strong, unified society. They both recognized that children are like clay and they must be formed before they have "hardened" or become set in their ways as adults. Although Plato was setting up a republic and Marx a communist society, both philosophers believed the education of youth was very important and should begin when children are still very young. Both philosophers knew the only way to achieve their desired society was to make sure there was an ongoing supply of people who believed in their government's principles.

Thus, by educating the youth, they could create generation after generation of little patriots for their government.

Although our government is very different from Plato's idealistic republic or Marx's communist regime, we can still learn from them by educating our youth in order to strengthen and sustain the American form of government. Americans should not be afraid to teach their children that the American form of government is the best form of government. This is evident by the vast number of immigrants who continue to flow into the United States each year. One way that the United States can become a stronger and more unified nation is to require that all high school students read -- and learn the meaning of -- the U.S. Constitution.

Thus, American youth would have a clear understanding of their rights and duties as citizens. Consequently, the youth would also come to have a better understanding of what it really means to be an American.

If Americans know their rights and duties, they are more likely to become politically active. Instead of living in oblivion, they will voice their opinions if their representatives are not upholding the Constitution. They will be more likely to treasure and guard their freedom instead of taking it for granted. They might even become interested enough to know why Americans celebrate Independence Day.

By the way, on Independence Day, we celebrate the adoption in Philadelphia by the Continental Congress -- on July 4, 1776 -- of the Declaration of Independence from England. Labor Day began in 1894 in response to pressure from the labor movement to recognize the contributions workers have made to the strength, prosperity and well-being of our country.

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