Have we forgotten Civic Education?
Two centuries after Jefferson, social studies are lacking at public schools.

BY MARSHALL CRODDY

universal public education too costly and unnecessary, but it did authorize the creation of a university and appointed a commission made up of 24 prominent Virginians, including Jefferson, to propose a location for it. The commission's members included two former presidents (Jefferson and James Madison) and then-President James Monroe. Jefferson spent the summer of 1818 promoting his vision for the university and for education in general.

To escape the sultry heat of the summer in central Virginia, the commission convened in the town of Rockfish Gap in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Jefferson came prepared and quickly persuaded the commission to site the new university in Charlottesville, near his home in Monticello, where he could keep an eye on its development. Before the commission adjourned, Jefferson agreed to write up its findings. This was soon published as the "Rockfish Gap Report."

In the report, Jefferson again proposed a system of publicly funded elementary education that would ensure that all citizens knew their rights and their duties to community and country. He wanted students of higher education to be well-versed in political theory, have a strong knowledge of law and government and have the skills to reason and debate the issues. Among other things, he wanted quality history and civic education.

Jefferson's university was built, but the Virginia Legislature again ignored the recommendations for a universal education and curriculum. Only later was a system of public education put into place around the country.

So how is Jefferson's vision for a sound history and civic education doing today? In California, we have a comprehensive, history-driven social studies framework and standards for all grade levels. Every high school student must take three years of social studies, including a U.S. government course, to graduate. On the surface, things look good.

But in truth, social studies is no longer a priority in schools and has not been for some time. Most recently, because of the national No Child Left Behind mandates and the school accountability system, language arts, math and science are emphasized. Resources for history/social science in terms of professional development, materials and even instructional time are scarce.

This is particularly true at low-scoring elementary schools serving underrepresented student populations, where instructional time for social studies has been greatly diminished. A cruel irony, really: those least empowered and most in need of the knowledge and skills of effective citizenship and advocacy are the least likely to be exposed to them.

Recent studies demonstrate that our nation and state are paying a price for this neglect. The California Survey of Civic
Constitutional Rights Foundation: www.crf-usa.org

About CRF from its website:
Constitutional Rights Foundation (CRF) is a non-profit, non-partisan, community-based organization dedicated to educating America's young people about the importance of civic participation in a democratic society. Under the guidance of a Board of Directors chosen from the worlds of law, business, government, education, the media, and the community, CRF develops, produces, and distributes programs and materials to teachers, students, and public-minded citizens all across the nation.

The CRF mission statement:
Constitutional Rights Foundation seeks to instill in our nation's youth a deeper understanding of citizenship through values expressed in our Constitution and its Bill of Rights and to educate young people to become active and responsible participants in our society. CRF is dedicated to assuring our country's future by investing in our youth today.

Services provided by CRF:
- technical assistance and training for teachers
- coordination of civic participation projects in schools and communities
- organization of student conferences and competitions
- publications in law and government, and civic participation

The three-pronged activity schedule of CRF:
- programs
- publications
- online lessons

Programs. It currently sponsors 21 programs, many which are well known to those in education. Some of the familiar ones are: Mock Trial Program; Lawyer in the Classroom; Summer Law Institute; and History Day in California (part of the National History Day program).

Publications. Its publications focus on the following areas:
- Law and Government programs and materials focusing on how groups and individuals interact with the issues, institutions, people and processes that shape our laws and government.
- Civic Participation programs and materials that bring to life the rights and responsibilities of active citizenship by challenging young people to explore their community and plan and implement projects that address community needs.

Publications are categorized by topic and grade level with the majority appropriate for high school classes.

Online lessons. Online lessons are available free of charge to educators. They include historical background and case histories for students to analyze and apply to current social issues. Its most recent lesson development is entitled "Current Issues of Immigration" and focuses on:
- History of Immigration Through the 1850s
- History of Immigration From 1850 to the
- Issues of Illegal Immigration
- Federal Policy and Immigration
- Current Proposals on Illegal Immigration
- Options for Affecting Public

For more information, go to: www.crf-usa.org/information.

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Editor's note* Mr. Croddy's comments first appeared in the July 2, 2006 issue of the Los Angeles Times. They have been reprinted here with permission from the author.