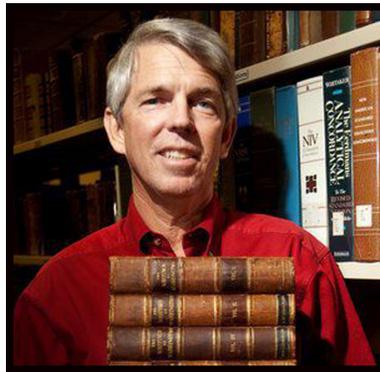




Civic Ignorance - Could you pass the immigration test to become an American citizen?



*By Historian David Barton
Guest Columnist*

Many stories have already been written about CNN anchor Chris Cuomo’s embarrassing historical gaff when he told a judge: “Our rights do not come from God, your honor, and you know that. They come from man.” Of course, American governing documents state exactly the opposite.

But what has not been adequately covered is why [Cuomo might make such a statement](#). I, for one, am not particularly surprised by it – and I don’t say that because of his liberal pedigree as the son of former New York Governor Mario Cuomo, the brother of current Governor Andrew Cuomo, or because he graduated from Yale. Rather, I say that because he is 44 years old, and therefore graduated from American schools in the past three decades. After all, according to recent studies:

- Two-thirds of Americans cannot identify the [three branches of government](#) (legislative, executive, judicial), three-fourths do not know what the [Judiciary Branch does](#), and eight in ten cannot name even one of the [federal government’s powers](#).
- Seven in ten do not know that the [Constitution is the supreme law of the land](#).
- Eight in ten cannot name even two of the [rights listed in the Declaration](#), and forty-four percent are unable to [define the Bill of Rights](#).

- Only 1 in 1000 can name the [five freedoms protected by the First Amendment](#) (speech, religion, press, assembly, and petition).

We actually pay a lot to get these [abysmal results](#) – \$12,000 per year per student, or well over \$140,000 in their twelve years of public education.

No wonder states like [Arizona and North Dakota](#) recently enacted laws requiring that students pass the nation’s 100-question immigration test in order to graduate. And why not? Shouldn’t native-born [Americans know at least as much](#) about America as our foreign immigrants are required to know?

Reflecting the same concern, other states have passed laws establishing annual [Celebrate Freedom Week](#), during which public school students study the Declaration, Constitution, and Bill of Rights; and those in grades 3 through 12 learn and recite the specific section of the Declaration of which Cuomo was apparently unaware:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

Unless we take decisive action regarding civic education, growing numbers of Americans will make the same mistake Cuomo did – or worse yet, we may reach a time when we no longer recognize that what he said was a mistake.

Incidentally, in case there is any confusion about the intent behind the Declaration of Independence’s unambiguous language that our inalienable rights come from God, consider the words of those who created our government.

[John Dickinson](#), a signer of the Constitution, defined an inalienable right as one “which God gave to you and which no inferior power has a right to take away.” [He further explained](#) that human governments . . . “could not give the rights essential to happiness...We claim them from a higher Source – from the King of kings, and Lord of all the earth. They are not annexed to us by parchments and seals. They are created in us by the decrees of Providence, which establish the laws of our nature. They are born with us; exist with us; and cannot be taken from us by any human power, without taking our lives.”

[John Adams](#) said that inalienable rights are “. . .antecedent to all earthly government; rights that cannot be repealed or restrained by human laws; rights derived from the Great Legislator of the Universe.”

[Alexander Hamilton](#) explained that inalienable rights “. . .are not to be rummaged for among old parchments or musty records. They are written, as with a sunbeam, in the whole volume of human nature by the hand of the Divinity itself and can never be erased or obscured by mortal power.”

[Samuel Adams](#) avowed that: “They are imprinted by the finger of God on the heart of man.”

And according to [Thomas Jefferson](#): “Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis: a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God? – that they are not to be violated but with His wrath?”

Understanding this, [John Jay](#), an author of the *Federalist Papers* and the original Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, therefore wisely urged: “I . . . recommend a general and public return of praise and thanksgiving to Him from Whose goodness these blessings descend. The most effectual means of securing the continuance of our civil and religious liberties is always to remember with reverence and gratitude the Source from which they flow.”

The Founding Fathers were clear about our rights coming from God, but Cuomo chose the opposite position.

"If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be. If we are to guard against ignorance and remain free, it is the responsibility of every American to be informed." - [Thomas Jefferson](#)

David Barton, founder of Wallbuilders, is the author of numerous best-selling books, is an expert in historical and constitutional issues. He serves as a consultant to state and federal legislators, has participated in several cases at the Supreme Court, is involved in the development of the History/Social Studies standards for states such as Texas and California, and has helped produce history textbooks now used in schools across the nation. Barton addresses well over 400 groups each year. His work has merited numerous national and international [awards](#). Read more [wallbuilders.com](#)

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