

MUSINGS

Lessons from the past help shape civic minds

In this era of educational systems dominated by the pursuit of all things STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), this retired social studies teacher would like to buck the trend — stem the tide, if you will — and make the case for the expansion of social studies education.

So, why study social studies? It's not so you can do well at Trivia Night at the pub or impress your friends with your knowledge of arcane facts. We can Google that stuff.

The Spanish American philosopher George Santayana, in warning of the dire consequence of not knowing history, provided perhaps the strongest argument. We study history to learn from the past, which enables an educated citizenry, the lifeblood of a genuine

democracy, to repeat successes while avoiding pitfalls.

Students in social studies classes examine events, movements, ideas and people to uncover lessons that can be applied today and in the future.

Studying global history helps one navigate an increasingly interdependent world, and in a diverse nation like the United States, it will help us to understand and appreciate one another, leading to greater peace and harmony and less tension, animosity and turmoil. With greater understanding of other cultures, international relations will improve.

Studying civics provides students the opportunity to become familiar with the basic features of representative democracy and how to function effectively as citizens. When

■ **MUSINGS:** The mission of Newsday's editorial page is to provide reasoned, informed opinions on Long Island issues. On Mondays, readers now have a forum, Musings, to present their prose on politics and policy in a thoughtful and thought-provoking way. Email letters@newsday.com as text; subject: Musings.



NASA VIA AP

Global history helps people navigate an increasingly interdependent world.

informed citizens are at the helm, actively participating in our democracy, liberty is safeguarded. Conversely, if citizens are ill-informed, lack the requisite critical thinking skills to analyze information, do not

know how to engage with one another in a civil manner, or check out entirely by not bothering to stay informed or participate in the democratic process, the void will be filled by special interests, often narrowly defined and committed to pursuing policies that may not be for the greater good.

As Founding Father James Madison asserted in 1822, "Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own Governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives."

Social studies education not only equips students with essential knowledge of the past, but a skill set that will empower them as citizens of this nation and members of the global community.

— CAROLYN FAGGIONI, BELLMORE