# Chapter 6

## Political Culture and Socialization

### Preamble

Americans have strong positive feelings about the country's flag. Government leaders and candidates giving speeches often are flanked by the Stars and Stripes; flags appear in ceremonies honoring police officers, firefighters, and military personnel; and American embassies, military bases, and ships abroad are depicted with flags flying. The flag is displayed prominently in television, print, and online advertisements for many different products; car showrooms are draped with flags; clothing manufacturers present models wearing the latest fashions against American flag backdrops; and flags appear in ads for food, furniture, toys, and electronic gadgets.

Immediately following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, there was a huge increase in the sale and display of the American flag. Nowhere was the trend more apparent than on television news broadcasts: news anchors wore American-flag lapel pins, and background visuals featured themes such as "America Fights Back," wrapped in the flag's color scheme of red, white, and blue.



*Prior to a football game in September 2010, cadets from the US Air Force Academy unfurl a large American flag in Falcon Stadium to commemorate the people who lost their lives in the 9/11 terrorist attacks.*

The United States flag is the core icon of American political culture. Media representations associate the flag with the two dominant values of the American creed: democracy and capitalism. News media connect the flag with aspects of democratic political culture, including elections, institutions, and national pride. People have more positive reactions to politicians when they appear with the American flag. Advertisements send the message that to "buy American," and thereby support the free-market economic system, is to be patriotic.

People gain an understanding and acceptance of the political culture of their nation through a process called political socialization. The term "political socialization" refers to the process by which people learn their roles as citizens and develop an understanding of government and politics. This chapter explores the ways in which knowledge about politics; the attitudes about government, political processes, and leaders; and citizens' political behavior—all of which are elements of American political culture—are passed on from generation to generation.

# 6.1 Political Culture

> ### LEARNING OBJECTIVES
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> After reading this section, you should be able to answer the following questions:
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> 1. What is a nation's political culture, and why is it important?
> 2. What are the characteristics of American political culture?
> 3. What are the values and beliefs that are most ingrained in American citizens?
> 4. What constitutes a political subculture, and why are subcultures important?

This section defines political culture and identifies the core qualities that distinguish American political culture, including the country's traditions, folklore, and heroes. The values that Americans embrace, such as individualism and egalitarianism, will be examined as they relate to cultural ideals.

## What Is Political Culture?

**Political culture**[1] can be thought of as a nation's political personality. It encompasses the deep-rooted, well-established political traits that are characteristic of a society. Political culture takes into account the attitudes, values, and beliefs that people in a society have about the political system, including standard assumptions about the way that government works. As political scientist W. Lance Bennett notes, the components of political culture can be difficult to analyze. "They are rather like the lenses in a pair of glasses: they are not the things we see when we look at the world; they are the things we see with."W. Lance Bennett, *Public Opinion in American Politics* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 368. Political culture helps build community and facilitate communication because people share an understanding of how and why political events, actions, and experiences occur in their country.

Political culture includes formal rules as well as customs and traditions, sometimes referred to as "habits of the heart," that are passed on generationally. People agree to abide by certain formal rules, such as the country's constitution and codified laws. They also live by unstated rules: for example, the willingness in the United States to accept the outcomes of elections without resorting to violence. Political

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1. Collective ideologies, values, beliefs, norms, assumptions, and patterns of behavior that characterize a particular country.

culture sets the boundaries of acceptable political behavior in a society.Daniel J. Elazar, *The American Mosaic* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994).

While the civic culture in the United States has remained relatively stable over time, shifts have occurred as a result of transforming experiences, such as war, economic crises, and other societal upheavals, that have reshaped attitudes and beliefs.Ronald Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990). Key events, such as the Civil War, World War I, World War II, the Great Depression, the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, and the terrorist attacks of 9/11 have influenced the political worldviews of American citizens, especially young people, whose political values and attitudes are less well established.

## American Political Culture

Political culture consists of a variety of different elements. Some aspects of culture are abstract, such as political beliefs and values. Other elements are visible and readily identifiable, such as rituals, traditions, symbols, folklore, and heroes. These aspects of political culture can generate feelings of national pride that form a bond between people and their country. Political culture is not monolithic. It consists of diverse subcultures based on group characteristics such as race, ethnicity, and social circumstances, including living in a particular place or in a certain part of the country. We will now examine these aspects of political culture in the American context.

### Beliefs

**Beliefs**[2] are ideas that are considered to be true by a society. Founders of the American republic endorsed both equality, most notably in the Declaration of Independence, and liberty, most prominently in the Constitution. These political theories have become incorporated into the political culture of the United States in the central beliefs of egalitarianism and individualism.

**Egalitarianism**[3] is the doctrine emphasizing the natural equality of humans, or at least the absence of a preexisting superiority of one set of humans above another. This core American belief is found in the preamble to the Declaration of Independence, which states that "all men are created equal" and that people are endowed with the unalienable rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Americans endorse the intrinsic equal worth of all people. Survey data consistently indicate that between 80 percent and 90 percent of Americans believe that it is essential to treat all people equally, regardless of race or ethnic background.James Davison Hunter and Carl Bowman, *The State of Disunion* (Charlottesville, VA: In

2. Ideas that are considered to be true by a society.

3. Doctrine emphasizing the natural equality of people in society.

Media Res Educational Foundation, 1996); Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, *Values Survey* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, March 2009).

The principle of **individualism**[4] stresses the centrality and dignity of individual people. It privileges free action and people's ability to take the initiative in making their own lives as well as those of others more prosperous and satisfying. In keeping with the Constitution's preoccupation with liberty, Americans feel that children should be taught to believe that individuals can better themselves through self-reliance, hard work, and perseverance.James Davison Hunter and Carl Bowman, *The State of Disunion* (Charlottesville, VA: In Media Res Educational Foundation, 1996).

The beliefs of egalitarianism and individualism are in tension with one another. For Americans today, this contradiction tends to be resolved by an expectation of **equality of opportunity**[5], the belief that each individual has the same chance to get ahead in society. Americans tend to feel that most people who want to get ahead can make it if they're willing to work hard.Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, *Retro-Politics: The Political Typology* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, November 11, 1999). Americans are more likely to promote equal political rights, such as the Voting Rights Act's stipulation of equal participation for all qualified voters, than economic equality, which would redistribute income from the wealthy to the poor.Richard W. Wilson, "American Political Culture in Comparative Perspective," *Political Psychology*, 18, no. 2 (1997): 483–502.

**Values**

Beliefs form the foundation for **values**[6], which represent a society's shared convictions about what is just and good. Americans claim to be committed to the core values of individualism and egalitarianism. Yet there is sometimes a significant disconnect between what Americans are willing to uphold in principle and how they behave in practice. People may say that they support the Constitutional right to free speech but then balk when they are confronted with a political extremist or a racist speaking in public.

Core American political values are vested in what is often called the **American creed**[7]. The creed, which was composed by New York State Commissioner of Education Henry Sterling Chapin in 1918, refers to the belief that the United States is a government "by the people, for the people, whose just powers are derived from the consent of the governed." The nation consists of sovereign states united as "a perfect Union" based on "the principles of freedom, equality, justice, and humanity." **American exceptionalism**[8] is the view that America's exceptional development as a nation has contributed to its special place is the world. It is the conviction that the country's vast frontier offered boundless and equal

4. Principle emphasizing the centrality and dignity of the individual and her or his capacity for free action.

5. The right of each individual to the same chance to get ahead in society.

6. A society's shared convictions about what is just and good.

7. Belief in the United States "as a Government of the people, by the people, for the people, who powers are derived from the consent of the governed."

8. Conviction that America's vast frontier offered boundless opportunities for individuals to achieve their goals.

opportunities for individuals to achieve their goals. Americans feel strongly that their nation is destined to serve as an example to other countries.James Davison Hunter and Carl Bowman, *The State of Disunion* (Charlottesville, VA: In Media Res Educational Foundation, 1996). They believe that the political and economic systems that have evolved in this country are perfectly suited in principle to permit both individualism and egalitarianism.

Consequently, the American creed also includes **patriotism**[9]: the love of one's country and respect for its symbols and principles. The events of 9/11 ignited Americans' patriotic values, resulting in many public displays of support for the country, its democratic form of government, and authority figures in public-service jobs, such as police and firefighters. The press has scrutinized politicians for actions that are perceived to indicate a lack of patriotism, and the perception that a political leader is not patriotic can generate controversy. In the 2008 presidential election, a minor media frenzy developed over Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama's "patriotism problem." The news media debated the significance of Obama's not wearing a flag lapel pin on the campaign trail and his failure to place his hand over his heart during the playing of the national anthem.

## Video Clip

*Barack Obama's Patriotism*

(click to see video)

*A steak fry in Iowa during the 2008 Democratic presidential primary sparked a debate over candidate Barack Obama's patriotism. Obama, standing with opponents Bill Richardson and Hillary Clinton, failed to place his hand over his heart during the playing of the national anthem. In the background is Ruth Harkin, wife of Senator Tom Harkin, who hosted the event.*

Another core American value is **political tolerance**[10], the willingness to allow groups with whom one disagrees to exercise their constitutionally guaranteed freedoms, such as free speech. While many people strongly support the ideal of tolerance, they often are unwilling to extend political freedoms to groups they dislike. People acknowledge the constitutional right of racist groups, such as skinheads, to demonstrate in public, but will go to great lengths to prevent them from doing so.John L. Sullivan, James Piereson, and George E. Marcus, *Political Tolerance and American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

Democratic political values are among the cornerstones of the American creed. Americans believe in the **rule of law**[11]: the idea that government is based on a body of law, agreed on by the governed, that is applied equally and justly. The

9. Love of one's country and respect for its symbols and principles.

10. Willingness to allow groups with whom one disagrees fundamentally to exercise their constitutionally guaranteed freedoms.

11. The premise that government is based on a body of law, agreed on by the governed, this is applied equally and justly.

Constitution is the foundation for the rule of law. The creed also encompasses the public's high degree of respect for the American system of government and the structure of its political institutions.

**Capitalist economic values**[12] are embraced by the American creed. Capitalist economic systems emphasize the need for a free-enterprise system that allows for open business competition, private ownership of property, and limited government intervention in business affairs. Underlying these capitalist values is the belief that, through hard work and perseverance, anyone can be financially successful.Herbert McClosky and John Zaller, *The American Ethos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

*Figure 6.1*



*Tea Party supporters from across the country staged a "March on Washington" to demonstrate their opposition to government spending and to show their patriotism.*

*Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:9.12_tea_party_in_DC.jpg.*

12. Values that emphasize the need for a free-enterprise system, open business competition, private ownership of property, and limited government intervention in business affairs.

The primacy of individualism may undercut the status quo in politics and economics. The emphasis on the lone, powerful person implies a distrust of

collective action and of power structures such as big government, big business, or big labor. The public is leery of having too much power concentrated in the hands of a few large companies. The emergence of the Tea Party, a visible grassroots conservative movement that gained momentum during the 2010 midterm elections, illustrates how some Americans become mobilized in opposition to the "tax and spend" policies of big government.Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, *Views of Business and Regulation Remain Unchanged* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, February 21, 2001). While the Tea Party shunned the mainstream media because of their view that the press had a liberal bias, they received tremendous coverage of their rallies and conventions, as well as their candidates. Tea Party candidates relied heavily on social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, to get their anti–big government message out to the public.

### Rituals, Traditions, and Symbols

Rituals, traditions, and symbols are highly visible aspects of political culture, and they are important characteristics of a nation's identity. **Rituals**[13], such as singing the national anthem at sporting events and saluting the flag before the start of a school day, are ceremonial acts that are performed by the people of a nation. Some rituals have important symbolic and substantive purposes: Election Night follows a standard script that ends with the vanquished candidate congratulating the opponent on a well-fought battle and urging support and unity behind the victor. Whether they have supported a winning or losing candidate, voters feel better about the outcome as a result of this ritual.Benjamin Ginsberg and Herbert Weissberg, "Elections and the Mobilization of Popular Support," *American Journal of Political Science* 22, no.1 (1978): 31–55. The State of the Union address that the president makes to Congress every January is a ritual that, in the modern era, has become an opportunity for the president to set his policy agenda, to report on his administration's accomplishments, and to establish public trust. A more recent addition to the ritual is the practice of having representatives from the president's party and the opposition give formal, televised reactions to the address.

Political **traditions**[14] are customs and festivities that are passed on from generation to generation, such as celebrating America's founding on the Fourth of July with parades, picnics, and fireworks. **Symbols**[15] are objects or emblems that stand for a nation. The flag is perhaps the most significant national symbol, especially as it can take on enhanced meaning when a country experiences difficult times. The bald eagle was officially adopted as the country's emblem in 1787, as it is considered a symbol of America's "supreme power and authority."

*Figure 6.2*



13. Ceremonial acts performed by the people of a nation.

14. Customs and festivities passed on from generation to generation.

15. Objects or emblems that represent a nation.

Figure 6.3

President Barack Obama gives the 2010 State of the Union address. The ritual calls for the president to be flanked by the Speaker of the House of Representatives (Nancy Pelosi) and the vice president (Joe Biden). Members of Congress and distinguished guests fill the House gallery.

Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2010_State_of_the_Union.jpg.



The Statue of Liberty stands in New York Harbor, an 1844 gift from France that is a symbol welcoming people from foreign lands to America's shores.

Source: Photo courtesy of Severin St. Martin, http://www.flickr.com/photos/severinstmartin/55840746/.

### Folklore

Political **folklore**[16], the legends and stories that are shared by a nation, constitutes another element of culture. Individualism and egalitarianism are central themes in American folklore that are used to reinforce the country's values. The "rags-to-riches" narratives of novelists—the late-nineteenth-century writer Horatio Alger being the quintessential example—celebrate the possibilities of advancement through hard work.

Much American folklore has grown up around the early presidents and figures from the American Revolution. This folklore creates an image of men, and occasionally women, of character and strength. Most folklore contains elements of truth, but these stories are usually greatly exaggerated.

The first American president, George Washington, is the subject of folklore that has been passed on to school children for more than two hundred years. Young children learn about Washington's impeccable honesty and, thereby, the importance of telling the truth, from the legend of the cherry tree. When asked by his father if he had chopped down a cherry tree with his new hatchet, Washington confessed to committing the deed by replying, "Father, I cannot tell a lie." This event never happened and was fabricated by biographer Parson Mason Weems in the late 1700s.George Washington's Mount Vernon, "Is it true that George Washington chopped down a cherry tree when he was a boy?," accessed February 3, 2011, http://www.mountvernon.org/knowledge/index.cfm/fuseaction/view/KnowledgeID/21. Legend also has it that, as a boy, Washington threw a silver dollar across the Potomac River, a story meant to illustrate his tremendous physical strength. In fact, Washington was not a gifted athlete, and silver dollars did not exist when he was a youth. The origin of this folklore is an episode related by his step-grandson, who wrote that Washington had once thrown a piece of slate across a very narrow portion of the Rappahannock River in Virginia.George Washington's Mount Vernon, "Did George Washington really throw a silver dollar across the Potomac River?," accessed February 3, 2011, http://www.mountvernon.org/knowledge/index.cfm/fuseaction/view/KnowledgeID/20.

*Figure 6.4*



*There are many folktales about young George Washington, including that he chopped down a cherry tree and threw a silver dollar across the Potomac River. These stories were popularized by engravings like this one by John C. Mccabe depicting Washington working as a land surveyor.*

*Source: Photo courtesy of the National Park Service Historical Handbook Series No. 26, frontispiece, http://commons.wikimedia.org/*

16. Legends and stories shared by a nation.

**Heroes**

**Heroes**[17] embody the human characteristics most prized by a country. A nation's political culture is in part defined by its heroes who, in theory, embody the best of what that country has to offer. Traditionally, heroes are people who are admired for their strength of character, beneficence, courage, and leadership. People also can achieve hero status because of other factors, such as celebrity status, athletic excellence, and wealth.

*wiki/ File:Young_George_Washington.jpg.*

Shifts in the people whom a nation identifies as heroes reflect changes in cultural values. Prior to the twentieth century, political figures were preeminent among American heroes. These included patriotic leaders, such as American-flag designer Betsy Ross; prominent presidents, such as Abraham Lincoln; and military leaders, such as Civil War General Stonewall Jackson, a leader of the Confederate army. People learned about these leaders from biographies, which provided information about the valiant actions and patriotic attitudes that contributed to their success.

Today American heroes are more likely to come from the ranks of prominent entertainment, sports, and business figures than from the world of politics. Popular culture became a powerful mechanism for elevating people to hero status beginning around the 1920s. As mass media, especially motion pictures, radio, and television, became an important part of American life, entertainment and sports personalities who received a great deal of publicity became heroes to many people who were awed by their celebrity.Fred I. Greenstein, *Children and Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969).

In the 1990s, business leaders, such as Microsoft's Bill Gates and General Electric's Jack Welch, were considered to be heroes by some Americans who sought to achieve material success. The tenure of business leaders as American heroes was short-lived, however, as media reports of the lavish lifestyles and widespread criminal misconduct of some corporation heads led people to become disillusioned. The incarceration of Wall Street investment advisor Bernard Madoff made international headlines as he was alleged to have defrauded investors of billions of dollars.Sandra Yin, "Shifting Careers," *American Demographics*, 23, no. 12 (December 2001): 39–40.

Sports figures feature prominently among American heroes, especially during their prime. Cyclist Lance Armstrong is a hero to many Americans because of his unmatched accomplishment of winning seven consecutive Tour de France titles after beating cancer. However, heroes can face opposition from those who seek to discredit them: Armstrong, for example, has been accused of doping to win races, although he has never failed a drug test.

17. People who, in theory, embody the best of what a country has to offer and thereby define a nation's political culture.

NBA basketball player Michael Jordan epitomizes the modern-day American hero. Jordan's hero status is vested in his ability to bridge the world of sports and business with unmatched success. The media promoted Jordan's hero image intensively, and he was marketed commercially by Nike, who produced his "Air Jordans" shoes.Pat Walters, "Michael Jordan: The New American Hero" (Charlottesville VA: The Crossroads Project, 1997). His unauthorized 1999 film biography is titled *Michael Jordan: An American Hero*, and it focuses on how Jordan triumphed over obstacles, such as racial prejudice and personal insecurities, to become a role model on and off the basketball court. Young filmgoers watched Michael Jordan help Bugs Bunny defeat evil aliens in *Space Jam*. In the film *Like Mike*, pint-sized rapper Lil' Bow Wow plays an orphan who finds a pair of Michael Jordan's basketball shoes and is magically transformed into an NBA star. Lil' Bow Wow's story has a happy ending because he works hard and plays by the rules.
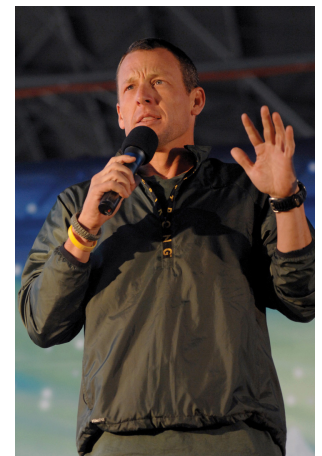
The 9/11 terrorist attacks prompted Americans to make heroes of ordinary people who performed in extraordinary ways in the face of adversity. Firefighters and police officers who gave their lives, recovered victims, and protected people from further threats were honored in numerous ceremonies. Also treated as heroes were the passengers of Flight 93 who attempted to overtake the terrorists who had hijacked their plane, which was believed to be headed for a target in Washington, DC. The plane crashed in a Pennsylvania field.

*Figure 6.5*



*Cyclist Lance Armstrong is considered by many to be an American hero because of his athletic accomplishments and his fight against cancer. He also has been the subject of unrelenting media reports that attempt to deflate his hero status.*

*Source:*
*http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lance_Armstrong_Aviano.jpg.*

## Subcultures

Political **subcultures**[18] are distinct groups, associated with particular beliefs, values, and behavior patterns, that exist within the overall framework of the larger culture. They can develop around groups with distinct interests, such as those based on age, sex, race, ethnicity, social class, religion, and sexual preference. Subcultures also can be geographically based. Political scientist Daniel Elazar identified regional political subcultures, rooted in American immigrant settlement patterns, that influenced the way that government was constituted and practiced in different locations across the nation. The moral political subculture, which is

18. Distinct groups associated with particular beliefs, values, and behavior patterns and existing within the overall framework of the larger political culture.

present in New England and the Midwest, promotes the common good over individual values. The individual political subculture, which is evident in the middle Atlantic states and the West, is more concerned with private enterprise than societal interests. The traditional political subculture, which is found in the South, reflects a hierarchical societal structure in which social and familial ties are central to holding political power.Daniel J. Elazar, *American Federalism: A View From the States,* 2nd ed. (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1972). Political subcultures can also form around social and artistic groups and their associated lifestyles, such as the heavy metal and hip-hop music subcultures.

## Media Frames

The Hip-Hop Subculture

A cohort of black Americans has been labeled the hip-hop generation by scholars and social observers. The hip-hop generation is a subculture of generation X (people born between 1965 and 1984) that identifies strongly with hip-hop music as a unifying force. Its heroes come from the ranks of prominent music artists, including Grandmaster Flash, Chuck D, Run DMC, Ice Cube, Sister Souljah, Nikki D, and Queen Latifah. While a small number of people who identify with this subculture advocate extreme politics, including violence against political leaders, the vast majority are peaceful, law-abiding citizens.Bakari Kitwana, *The Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2002).

The hip-hop subculture emerged in the early 1970s in New York City. Hip-hop music began with party-oriented themes, but by 1982 it was focusing heavily on political issues. Unlike the preceding civil rights generation—a black subculture of baby boomers (people born immediately after World War II) that concentrated on achieving equal rights—the hip-hop subculture does not have an overarching political agenda. The messages passed on to the subculture by the music are highly varied and often contradictory. Some lyrics express frustration about the poverty, lack of educational and employment opportunities, and high crime rates that plague segments of the black community. Other songs provide public service messages, such as those included on the *Stop the Violence* album featuring Public Enemy and MC Lyte, and Salt-N-Pepa's "Let's Talk about AIDS." Music associated with the gangsta rap genre, which was the product of gang culture and street wars in South Central Los Angeles, promotes violence, especially against women and authority figures, such as the police. It is from these lyrics that the mass media derive their most prominent frames when they cover the hip-hop subculture.Manning Marable, "The Politics of Hip-Hop," *The Urban Think Tank*, 2 (2002). http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45a/594.html.

Media coverage of the hip-hop subculture focuses heavily on negative events and issues, while ignoring the socially constructive messages of many musicians. The subculture receives most of its media attention in response to the murder of prominent artists, such as Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G., or the arrest of musicians for violating the law, usually for a weapons- or drug-

related charge. A prominent news frame is how violence in the music's lyrics translates into real-life violence. As hip-hop music became more popular with suburban white youth in the 1990s, the news media stepped up its warnings about the dangers of this subculture.

Media reports of the hip-hop subculture also coincide with the release of successful albums. Since 1998, hip-hop and rap have been the top-selling record formats. The dominant news frame is that the hip-hop subculture promotes selfish materialist values. This is illustrated by news reports about the cars, homes, jewelry, and other commodities purchased by successful musicians and their promoters.Autumn Lewis, "Vilification of Black Youth Culture by the Media" (master's thesis, Georgetown University, 2003).



*Media coverage of hip-hop tends to downplay the positive aspects of the subculture.*

*Source:*
*http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Snoop_Dogg_Hawaii.jpg.*

Although the definition of political culture emphasizes unifying, collective understandings, in reality, cultures are multidimensional and often in conflict. When subcultural groups compete for societal resources, such as access to government funding for programs that will benefit them, cultural cleavages and

clashes can result. As we will see in the section on multiculturalism, conflict between competing subcultures is an ever-present fact of American life.

## Multiculturalism

One of the hallmarks of American culture is its racial and ethnic diversity. In the early twentieth century, the playwright Israel Zangwill coined the phrase "**melting pot**[19]" to describe how immigrants from many different backgrounds came together in the United States. The melting pot metaphor assumed that over time the distinct habits, customs, and traditions associated with particular groups would disappear as people assimilated into the larger culture. A uniquely American culture would emerge that accommodated some elements of diverse immigrant cultures in a new context.Lawrence H. Fuchs, *The American Kaleidoscope*. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1990). For example, American holiday celebrations incorporate traditions from other nations. Many common American words originate from other languages. Still, the melting pot concept fails to recognize that immigrant groups do not entirely abandon their distinct identities. Racial and ethnic groups maintain many of their basic characteristics, but at the same time, their cultural orientations change through marriage and interactions with others in society.

Over the past decade, there has been a trend toward greater acceptance of America's cultural diversity. **Multiculturalism**[20] celebrates the unique cultural heritage of racial and ethnic groups, some of whom seek to preserve their native languages and lifestyles. The United States is home to many people who were born in foreign countries and still maintain the cultural practices of their homelands.

Multiculturalism has been embraced by many Americans, and it has been promoted formally by institutions. Elementary and secondary schools have adopted curricula to foster understanding of cultural diversity by exposing students to the customs and traditions of racial and ethnic groups. As a result, young people today are more tolerant of diversity in society than any prior generation has been. Government agencies advocate tolerance for diversity by sponsoring Hispanic and Asian American/Pacific Islander heritage weeks. The US Postal Service has introduced stamps depicting prominent Americans from diverse backgrounds.

19. Metaphor used to describe how immigrants from many different backgrounds come together in the United States and that assumes that the distinct habits, customs, and traditions of particular groups disappear as their members assimilate into the larger culture.

20. An appreciation of the unique cultural heritage of racial and ethnic groups in the United States, some of whom seek to preserve their native languages and lifestyles.

*Figure 6.6*



*Americans celebrate their multicultural heritage by maintaining traditions associated with their homelands.*

*Source:* http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:US_Navy_061121-N-6159N-001_USS_John_F
._Kennedy_%28CV_67%29_Command_Master_Chief,_Carl_L._Dassance_pounds_on_a_ceremonial
_drum_during_the_Native_American_and_Alaskan_Heritage_celebration.jpg.

Despite these trends, America's multiculturalism has been a source of societal tension. Support for the melting pot assumptions about racial and ethnic assimilation still exists.James Davidson Hunter and Carl Bowman, *The State of Disunion* (Charlottesville, VA: In Media Res Education Foundation, 1996). Some Americans believe that too much effort and expense is directed at maintaining separate racial and ethnic practices, such as bilingual education. Conflict can arise when people feel that society has gone too far in accommodating multiculturalism in areas such as employment programs that encourage hiring people from varied racial and ethnic backgrounds.Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, *Retro-Politics: The Political Typology* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, November 11, 1999).

## Enduring Images

The 9/11 Firefighters' Statue

On 9/11 Thomas E. Franklin, a photographer for Bergen County, New Jersey's *Record*, photographed three firefighters, Billy Eisengrein, George Johnson, and Dan McWilliams, raising a flag amid the smoldering rubble of the World Trade Center. Labeled by the press "the photo seen 'round the world," his image came to symbolize the strength, resilience, and heroism of Americans in the face of a direct attack on their homeland.

Developer Bruce Ratner commissioned a nineteen-foot-tall, $180,000 bronze statue based on the photograph to stand in front of the New York City Fire Department (FDNY) headquarters in Brooklyn. When the statue prototype was unveiled, it revealed that the faces of two of the three white firefighters who had originally raised the flag had been replaced with those of black and Hispanic firefighters. Ratner and the artist who designed the statue claimed that the modification of the original image represented an effort to promote America's multicultural heritage and tolerance for diversity. The change had been authorized by the FDNY leadership.Rod Dreher, "The Bravest Speak," *National Review Online*, January 16, 2002.

The modification of the famous photo raised the issue of whether it is valid to alter historical fact in order to promote a cultural value. A heated controversy broke out over the statue. Supporters of the change believed that the statue was designed to honor all firefighters, and that representing their diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds was warranted. Black and Hispanic firefighters were among the 343 who had lost their lives at the World Trade Center. Kevin James of the Vulcan Society, which represents black firefighters, defended the decision by stating, "The symbolism is far more important than representing the actual people. I think the artistic expression of diversity would supersede any concern over factual correctness.""Ground Zero Statue Criticized for 'Political Correctness,'" *CNN*, January 12, 2002, http//www.cnn.com.

Opponents claimed that since the statue was not meant to be a tribute to firefighters, but rather a depiction of an actual event, the representation needed to be historically accurate. They drew a parallel to the famous 1945 Associated Press photograph of six Marines raising the flag on Iwo Jima during World War II and the historically precise memorial that was erected in

Arlington, Virginia. Opponents also felt that it was wrong to politicize the statue by making it part of a dialogue on race. The proposed statue promoted an image of diversity within the FDNY that did not mirror reality. Of the FDNY's 11,495 firefighters, 2.7 percent are black and 3.2 percent are Latino, percentages well below the percentage these groups represent in the overall population.

Some people suggested a compromise—two statues. They proposed that the statue based on the Franklin photo should reflect historical reality; a second statue, celebrating multiculturalism, should be erected in front of another FDNY station and include depictions of rescue workers of diverse backgrounds at the World Trade Center site. Plans for any type of statue were abandoned as a result of the controversy.



*The iconic photograph of 9/11 firefighters raising a flag near the rubble of the World Trade Center plaza is immortalized in a US postage stamp. Thomas Franklin, the veteran reporter who took the photo, said that the image reminded him of the famous Associated Press image of Marines raising the American flag on Iwo Jima during World War II.*

*Source: Used with permission from Getty Images.*

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

Political culture is defined by the ideologies, values, beliefs, norms, customs, traditions, and heroes characteristic of a nation. People living in a particular political culture share views about the nature and operation of government. Political culture changes over time in response to dramatic events, such as war, economic collapse, or radical technological developments. The core American values of democracy and capitalism are vested in the American creed. American exceptionalism is the idea that the country has a special place in the world because of the circumstances surrounding its founding and the settling of a vast frontier.

Rituals, traditions, and symbols bond people to their culture and can stimulate national pride. Folklore consists of stories about a nation's leaders and heroes; often embellished, these stories highlight the character traits that are desirable in a nation's citizens. Heroes are important for defining a nation's political culture.

America has numerous subcultures based on geographic region; demographic, personal, and social characteristics; religious affiliation, and artistic inclinations. America's unique multicultural heritage is vested in the various racial and ethnic groups who have settled in the country, but conflicts can arise when subgroups compete for societal resources.

## EXERCISES

1. What do you think the American flag represents? Would it bother you to see someone burn an American flag? Why or why not?
2. What distinction does the text make between beliefs and values? Are there things that you believe in principle should be done that you might be uncomfortable with in practice? What are they?
3. Do you agree that America is uniquely suited to foster freedom and equality? Why or why not?
4. What characteristics make you think of someone as particularly American? Does race or cultural background play a role in whether you think of a person as American?

# 6.2 Political Socialization

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this section, you should be able to answer the following questions:

1. How do people develop an understanding of their political culture?
2. What is political socialization, and why is it important?
3. What constitutes a political generation?

This section will define what is meant by political socialization and detail how the process of political socialization occurs in the United States. It will outline the stages of political learning across an individual's life course. The agents that are responsible for political socialization, such as the family and the media, and the types of information and orientations they convey will be discussed. Group differences in political socialization will be examined. Finally, the section will address the ways that political generations develop through the political socialization process.

## What Is Political Socialization?

People are inducted into the political culture of their nation through the political socialization process.Fred I. Greenstein, *Children and Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969). Most often older members of society teach younger members the rules and norms of political life. However, young people can and do actively promote their own political learning, and they can influence adults' political behavior as well.Michael McDevitt and Steven Chaffee, "From Top-Down to Trickle-Up Influence: Revisiting the Assumptions about the Family in Political Socialization," *Political Communication*, November 2002, 281–301.

Political scientists Gabriel Almond and James Coleman once observed that we "do not inherit our political behavior, attitudes, values, and knowledge through our genes."Gabriel A. Almond and James S. Coleman, eds., *The Politics of the Developing Areas* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), 27. Instead, we come to understand our role and to "fit in" to our political culture through the political learning process.Pamela Johnston Conover, "Political Socialization: Where's the Politics?" in *Political Science: Looking to the Future, Volume III, Political Behavior,* ed. William Crotty (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 125–152.

**Political learning**[21] is a broad concept that encompasses both the active and passive and the formal and informal ways in which people mature politically.Carole L. Hahn, *Becoming Political* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998). Individuals develop a **political self**[22], a sense of personal identification with the political world. Developing a political self begins when children start to feel that they are part of a political community. They acquire the knowledge, beliefs, and values that help them comprehend government and politics.Richard E. Dawson and Kenneth Prewitt, *Political Socialization* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1969). The sense of being an American, which includes feeling that one belongs to a unique nation in which people share a belief in democratic ideals, is conveyed through the political learning process.

**Political socialization**[23] is a particular type of political learning whereby people develop the attitudes, values, beliefs, opinions, and behaviors that are conducive to becoming good citizens in their country. Socialization is largely a one-way process through which young people gain an understanding of the political world through their interaction with adults and the media. The process is represented by the following model:Fred I. Greenstein, *Children and Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969).

who (subjects) → learns what (political values, beliefs, attitudes, behaviors) → from whom (agents) → under what circumstances → with what effects.

**Agents of socialization**[24], which include parents, teachers, and the mass media, convey orientations to subjects, who are mostly passive. For example, parents who take an active role in politics and vote in every election often influence their children to do the same. Young people who see television coverage of their peers volunteering in the community may take cues from these depictions and engage in community service themselves. The circumstances under which political socialization can take place are almost limitless. Young people can be socialized to politics through dinner conversations with family members, watching television and movies, participating in a Facebook group, or texting with friends. The effects of these experiences are highly variable, as people can accept, reject, or ignore political messages.

People develop attitudes toward the political system through the socialization process. **Political legitimacy**[25] is a belief in the integrity of the political system and processes, such as elections. People who believe strongly in the legitimacy of the political system have confidence that political institutions will be responsive to the wants and needs of citizens and that abuses of governmental power will be held in check. If political leaders engage in questionable behavior, there are mechanisms to hold them accountable. The presidential impeachment process and congressional ethics hearings are two such mechanisms.

21. Active and passive, formal and informal ways in which people mature politically.

22. Sense of personal identification with the political world, which includes belonging to a community and knowledge of the shared beliefs and values of the members of that community.

23. Process through which people develop the attitudes, values, beliefs, and opinions conducive to becoming good citizens in their country.

24. Individuals and institutions, including family, school, peer group, and mass media, responsible for imparting political orientations through the socialization process.

25. Having faith in the integrity of the political system and processes.

**Political efficacy**[26] refers to individuals' perceptions about whether or not they can influence the political process. People who have a strong sense of political efficacy feel that they have the skills and resources to participate effectively in politics and that the government will be responsive to their efforts. Those who believe in the legitimacy of the political system and are highly efficacious are more likely to participate in politics and to take strong stands on public-policy issues.Stephen C. Craig, *Malevolent Leaders* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1993). Citizens who were frustrated about the poor state of the economy and who felt they could influence the political process identified with the Tea Party in the 2010 election and worked to elect candidates who promised to deal with their concerns.

Much political socialization in the United States passes on norms, customs, beliefs, and values supportive of democracy from one generation to the next. Americans are taught to respect the democratic and capitalist values imbedded in the American creed. Young people are socialized to respect authorities, such as parents, teachers, police officers, and fire fighters, and to obey laws.

The goal of this type of socialization is deliberately intended to ensure that the democratic political system survives even in times of political stress, such as economic crisis or war.Jack Dennis, David Easton, and Sylvia Easton, *Children in the Political System* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969). One indicator of a stable political system is that elections take place regularly following established procedures and that people recognize the outcomes as legitimate.Jack Dennis, David Easton, and Sylvia Easton, *Children in the Political System* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969). Most Americans quickly accepted George W. Bush as president when the 2000 election deadlock ended with the Supreme Court decision that stopped the recounting of disputed votes in Florida. The country did not experience violent protests after the decision was announced, but instead moved on with politics as usual.Pamela Johnston Conover, "Political Socialization: Where's the Politics?" in *Political Science: Looking to the Future, Volume III, Political Behavior,* ed. William Crotty (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 125–152.

## Video Clip

*2000 Presidential Election Bush vs. Gore*

(click to see video)

*This citizen-produced video shows peaceful protestors outside of the Supreme Court as the case of Bush v. Gore was being considered to decide the outcome of the 2000 presidential election.*

26. Individuals' feeling that they can or cannot personally influence government and politics.

Some scholars argue that political socialization is akin to **indoctrination**[27], as it forces people to conform to the status quo and inhibits freedom and creativity.Charles E. Lindblom, "Another Sate of Mind," in *Discipline and History,* ed. James Farr and Raymond Seidelman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 327–43. However, socialization is not always aimed at supporting democratic political orientations or institutions. Some groups socialize their members to values and attitudes that are wildly at odds with the status quo. The Latin Kings, one of the largest and oldest street gangs in the United States, has its own constitution and formal governing structure. Leaders socialize members to follow gang rules that emphasize an "all for one" mentality; this includes strict internal discipline that calls for physical assault against or death to members who violate the rules. It also calls for violent retribution against rival gang members for actions such as trafficking drugs in the Kings's territory. The Kings have their own sign language, symbols (a five-point crown and tear drop), colors (black and gold), and holidays (January 6, "King's Holy Day") that bond members to the gang.Felix Padilla, *The Gang as American Enterprise* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

## Political Socialization over the Life Course

Political learning begins early in childhood and continues over a person's lifetime. The development of a political self begins when children realize that they belong to a particular town and eventually that they are Americans. Awareness of politics as a distinct realm of experience begins to develop in the preschool years.Jack Dennis, David Easton, and Sylvia Easton, *Children in the Political System* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969).

Younger children tend to personalize government. The first political objects recognized by children are the president of the United States and the police officer. Children tend to idealize political figures, although young people today have a less positive view of political actors than in the past. This trend is partially a result of the media's preoccupations with personal scandals surrounding politicians.

Young people often have warm feelings toward the political system. Children can develop patriotic values through school rituals, such as singing the "Star Spangled Banner" at the start of each day. As children mature, they become increasingly sophisticated in their perceptions about their place in the political world and their potential for involvement: they learn to relate abstract concepts that they read about in textbooks like this one to real-world actions, and they start to associate the requirements of democracy and majority rule with the need to vote when they reach the age of twenty-one.

27. Process of instructing people to conform to particular doctrines, principles, and ideologies.

People are the most politically impressionable during the period from their midteens through their midtwenties, when their views are not set and they are open to new experiences. College allows students to encounter people with diverse views and provides opportunities for political engagement.Richard G. Niemi and Mary A. Hepburn, "The Rebirth of Political Socialization," *Perspectives on Political Science*, 24 (1995): 7–16. Young people may join a cause because it hits close to home. After the media publicized the case of a student who committed suicide after his roommate allegedly posted highly personal videos of him on the Internet, students around the country became involved in antibullying initiatives.Virginia Sapiro, *The Political Integration of Women* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983).

*Young people who participate in community service projects can develop a long-term commitment to volunteering and political participation.*

*© Thinkstock*

Significant events in adults' lives can radically alter their political perspectives, especially as they take on new roles, such as worker, spouse, parent, homeowner, and retiree.Janie S. Steckenrider and Neal E. Cutler, "Aging and Adult Political Socialization," in *Political Learning in Adulthood,* ed. Roberta S. Sigel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 56–88. This type of transition is illustrated by 1960s student protestors against the Vietnam War. Protestors held views different from their peers; they were less trusting of government officials but more efficacious in that they believed they could change the political system. However, the political views of some of the most strident activists changed after they entered the job market and started families. Some became government officials, lawyers, and business executives—the very types of people they had opposed when they were younger.Paul Lyons, *Class of '66* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

*Figure 6.8*



*Student activists in the 1960s protested against US involvement in the Vietnam War. Some activists developed more favorable attitudes toward government as they matured, had families, and became homeowners.*

*Source: Photo courtesy of UW Digital Collectionshttp://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/ File:Student_Vietnam_War_protesters.JPG.*

Even people who have been politically inactive their entire lives can become motivated to participate as senior citizens. They may find themselves in need of health care and other benefits, and they have more time for involvement. Organizations such as the Gray Panthers provide a pathway for senior citizens to get involved in politics.Anne Daugherty Miles, "A Multidimensional Approach to Distinguishing between the Most and Least Politically Engaged Senior Citizens, Using Socialization and Participation Variables" (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 1997).

## Agents of Political Socialization

People develop their political values, beliefs, and orientations through interactions with agents of socialization. Agents include parents, teachers, friends, coworkers, military colleagues, church associates, club members, sports-team competitors, and media.Richard E. Dawson and Kenneth Prewitt, *Political Socialization* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969). The political socialization process in the United States is mostly haphazard, informal, and random. There is no standard set of practices for parents or teachers to follow when passing on the rites of politics to future generations. Instead, vague ideals—such as the textbook concept of the "model citizen," who keeps politically informed, votes, and obeys the law—serve as unofficial guides for socializing agencies.Kenneth P. Langton, *Political Socialization* (New York: Oxford, 1969); Michael P. Riccards, *The Making of American Citizenry* (New York: Chandler Press, 1973).

Agents can convey knowledge and understanding of the political world and explain how it works. They can influence people's attitudes about political actors and institutions. They also can show people how to get involved in politics and community work. No single agent is responsible for an individual's entire political learning experience. That experience is the culmination of interactions with a variety of agents. Parents and teachers may work together to encourage students to take part in service learning projects. Agents also may come into conflict and provide vastly different messages.

We focus here on four agents that are important to the socialization process—the family, the school, the peer group, and the media. There are reasons why each of these agents is considered influential for political socialization; there are also factors that limit their effectiveness.

### Family

Over forty years ago, pioneering political-socialization researcher Herbert Hyman proclaimed that "foremost among agencies of socialization into politics is the family."Herbert Hyman, *Political Socialization* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1959), 69. Hyman had good reason for making this assumption. The family has the primary responsibility for nurturing individuals and meeting basic needs, such as food and shelter, during their formative years. A hierarchical power structure exists within many families that stresses parental authority and obedience to the rules that parents establish. The strong emotional relationships that exist between family members may compel children to adopt behaviors and attitudes that will please their parents or, conversely, to rebel against them.

Parents can teach their children about government institutions, political leaders, and current issues, but this rarely happens. They can influence the development of political values and ideas, such as respect for political symbols or belief in a particular cause. The family as an agent of political socialization is most successful in passing on basic political identities, especially an affiliation with the Republican or Democratic Parties and liberal or conservative ideological leanings.Jack Dennis and Diana Owen, "The Partisanship Puzzle: Identification and Attitudes of Generation X," in *After the Boom,* ed. Stephen C. Craig and Stephen Earl Bennet (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 43–62.

Children can learn by example when parents act as role models. Young people who observe their parents reading the newspaper and following political news on television may adopt the habit of keeping informed. Adolescents who accompany parents when they attend public meetings, circulate petitions, or engage in other political activities stand a better chance of becoming politically engaged adults.Richard M. Merelman, *Making Something of Ourselves* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). Children can sometimes socialize their parents to become active in politics; participants in the Kids Voting USA program have encouraged their parents to discuss campaign issues and take them to the polls on Election Day.

The home environment can either support or discourage young people's involvement in political affairs. Children whose parents discuss politics frequently and encourage the expression of strong opinions, even if it means challenging others, are likely to become politically active adults. Young people raised in this type of family will often initiate political discussion and encourage parents to become involved. Alternatively, young people from homes where political conversations are rare, and airing controversial viewpoints is discouraged, tend to abstain from politics as adults.M. N. Saphir and Steven H. Chaffee, "Adolescents' Contribution to Family Communication Patterns," *Human Communication Research* 28, no. 1 (2002): 86–108. Politics was a central focus of family life for the Kennedys, a family that has produced generations of activists, including President John F. Kennedy and Senator Ted Kennedy.

There are limitations on the effectiveness of the family as an agent of political learning and socialization. Most families are not like the Kennedys. For many families, politics is not a priority, as they are more concerned with issues related to day-to-day life. Few parents serve as political role models for their children. Many activities, such as voting or attending town meetings, take place outside of the home.Richard M. Merelman, "The Family and Political Socialization: Toward a Theory of Exchange," *Journal of Politics*, 42:461–86.

### School

Some scholars consider the school, rather than the family, to be the most influential agent of political socialization.Robert Hess and Judith Torney, *The Development of Political Attitudes in Children* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967). Schools can stimulate political learning through formal classroom instruction via civics and history classes, the enactment of ceremonies and rituals such as the flag salute, and extracurricular activities such as student government. Respect for authorities is emphasized, as teachers have the ability to reward and punish students through grades.

*Figure 6.9*



*Members of the Kennedy family have been prominently involved in politics for over a century, illustrating how the desire to participate in politics is passed on generationally.*

*Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/ File:John_F._Kennedy_Inaugural _Ball,_20_January_1961.jpg.*

The most important task of schools as agents of political socialization is the passing on of knowledge about the fundamentals of American government, such as constitutional principles and their implications for citizens' engagement in politics. Students who master these fundamentals feel competent to participate politically. They are likely to develop the habit of following politics in the media and to become active in community affairs.Norman H. Nie, Jane Junn, and Kenneth Stehlik-Barry, *Education and Democratic Citizenship in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

28. Longitudinal study of women who attended Bennington College during the Great Depression of the 1930s and were politically socialized by their teachers and student colleagues.

The college classroom can be an environment for socializing young people to politics. Faculty and student exchanges can form, reinforce, or change evaluations of politics and government. A famous study of women students who attended **Bennington College**[28] during the Great Depression of the 1930s illustrates how the college experience can create long-lasting political attitudes. The Bennington women came predominantly from wealthy families with conservative values. The faculty consisted of political progressives who supported the New Deal and other social programs. About one-third of the Bennington women adopted the progressive ideals of their teachers. Many of these women remained active in

politics their entire lives. A number became leaders of the women's rights movement.Duane F. Alwin, Ronald L. Cohen, and Theodore M. Newcomb, *Political Attitudes Over the Life Span* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

*Figure 6.10*



*Women at Bennington College in the 1930s became active in community affairs as a result of their political socialization in college.*

*Source: Courtesy of Bennington College. Left photo by C.G. Scofield. Right photo by Rotzel.*

While schools have great potential as agents of political socialization, they are not always successful in teaching even basic facts about government to students. Schools devote far less time to civics and history than to other subjects that are considered to be basic skills, such as reading and math. The average amount of classroom time spent on civics-related topics is less than forty-five minutes per week nationwide, although this figure varies widely based on the school. Students whose exposure to civics is exclusively through lectures and readings generally memorize facts about government for tests but do not remember them or make connections to real-world politics. The most effective civic education programs engage students in activities that prepare them for the real world of politics, such as mock elections and legislative hearings.Richard G. Niemi and Jane Junn, *Civic Education* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

### Peer Group

Peers (a group of people who are linked by common interests, equal social position, and similar age) can be influential in the political socialization process. Young people desire approval and are likely to adopt the attitudes, viewpoints, and behavior patterns of groups to which they belong. Unlike the family and school, which are structured hierarchically with adults exercising authority, the peer group

provides a forum for youth to interact with people who are at similar levels of maturity. Peers provide role models for people who are trying to fit in or become popular in a social setting.Lawrence J. Walker, Karl H. Hennig, and Tobias Krettenauer, "Parent and Peer Contexts for Children's Moral Reasoning Development," *Child Development* 71, no. 4 (August 2000): 1033–48.

Peer-group influence begins when children reach school age and spend less time at home. Middle-childhood (elementary school) friendships are largely segregated by sex and age, as groups of boys and girls will engage in social activities such as eating together in the lunchroom or going to the mall. Such interactions reinforce sex-role distinctions, including those with political relevance, such as the perception that males are more suited to hold positions of authority. Peer relationships change later in childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood, when groups are more often based on athletic, social, academic, and job-related interests and abilities.Judith Rich Harris, "Where Is the Child's Environment? A Group Socialization Theory of Development," *Psychological Review* 102, no. 3 (1995): 458–89.

The pressure to conform to group norms can have a powerful impact on young people's political development if group members are engaged in activities directly related to politics, such as student government or working on a candidate's campaign. Young people even will change their political viewpoints to conform to those held by the most vocal members of their peer group rather than face being ostracized. Still, individuals often gravitate toward groups that hold beliefs and values similar to their own in order to minimize conflict and reinforce their personal views.Eric L. Dey, "Undergraduate Political Attitudes," *Journal of Higher Education*, 68 (1997): 398–413. As in the case of families, the influence of peer groups is mitigated by the fact that politics is not a high priority for most of them.

**Media**

As early as the 1930s, political scientist Charles Merriam observed that radio and film had tremendous power to educate: "Millions of persons are reached daily through these agencies, and are profoundly influenced by the material and interpretations presented in impressive form, incessantly, and in moments when they are open to suggestion."Charles Edward Merriam, *The Making of Citizens* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), 160–61. The capacity of mass media to socialize people to politics has grown massively as the number of media outlets has increased and as new technologies allow for more interactive media experiences. Most people's political experiences occur vicariously through the media because they do not have personal access to government or politicians.

Since the advent of television, mass media have become prominent socialization agents. Young people's exposure to mass media has increased markedly since the 1960s. Studies indicate that the typical American aged two to eighteen spends almost forty hours a week consuming mass media, which is roughly the equivalent of holding a full-time job. In one-third of homes, the television is on all day. Young people's mass-media experiences often occur in isolation. They spend much of their time watching television, using a computer or cell phone, playing video games, or listening to music alone. Personal contact with family members, teachers, and friends has declined. More than 60 percent of people under the age of twenty have televisions in their bedrooms, which are multimedia sanctuaries.Kaiser Family Foundation, *The Media Family* (Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation, 2006).

The use of more personalized forms of media, such as text messaging and participation in social networking sites, has expanded exponentially in recent years. Young people using these forms of media have greater control over their own political socialization: they can choose to follow politics through a Facebook group that consists largely of close friends and associates with similar viewpoints, or they may decide to avoid political material altogether. Young people, even those who have not reached voting age, can become involved in election campaigns by using social media to contribute their own commentary and videos online.

Media are rich sources of information about government, politics, and current affairs. People learn about politics through news presented on television, in newspapers and magazines, on radio programs, on Internet websites, and through social media. The press provides insights into the workings of government by showcasing political leaders in action, such as gavel-to-gavel coverage of Congress on C-SPAN. People can witness politicians in action, including on the campaign trail, through videos posted on YouTube and on online news sites such as CNN and MSNBC. Entertainment media, including television comedies and dramas, music, film, and video games also contain much political content. Television programs such as *The West Wing* and *Law and Order* offer viewers accounts of how government functions that, although fictionalized, can appear realistic. Media also establish linkages between leaders, institutions, and citizens. In contrast to typing and mailing a letter, it is easier than ever for people to contact leaders directly using e-mail and Facebook.

Some factors work against the media as agents of political socialization. Media are first and foremost profit-driven entities that are not mandated to be civic educators; they balance their public service imperative against the desire to make money. Moreover, unlike teachers, journalists do not have formal training in how to educate citizens about government and politics; as a result, the news often can be more sensational than informative.

## Group Differences

Political learning and socialization experiences can differ vastly for people depending on the groups with which they associate, such as those based on gender and racial and ethnic background. Certain groups are socialized to a more active role in politics, while others are marginalized. Wealthier people may have more resources for participating in politics, such as money and connections, than poorer people.

There are significant differences in the way that males and females are socialized to politics. Historically, men have occupied a more central position in American political culture than women. This tradition was institutionalized at the time of the founding, when women did not receive the right to vote in the Constitution. While strides have been made over the past century to achieve political equality between the sexes, differences in sex-role socialization still exist. Traits associated with political leadership, such as being powerful and showing authority, are more often associated with males than females. Girls have fewer opportunities to observe women taking political action, especially as few females hold the highly visible positions, such as member of Congress and cabinet secretary, that are covered by mass media. This is starting to change as women such as Madeleine Albright and now Hillary Clinton attract media attention in their roles as secretary of state or as Nancy Pelosi did as Speaker of the House of Representatives. Sarah Palin gained national attention as Republican John McCain's vice presidential running mate in 2008, and she has become a visible and outspoken political figure in her own right. Despite these developments, women are still are socialized to supporting political roles, such as volunteering in political campaigns, rather than leading roles, such as holding higher-level elected office. The result is that fewer women than men seek careers in public office beyond the local level. Virginia Sapiro, *Women in American Society* (New York: Mayfair Publishing, 2002).

*Figure 6.11*



*Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is one of an increasing number of women who has achieved a highly visible political leadership role.*

*Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/ wiki/ File:Secretary_of_State_Hillary_ Rodham_Clinton.jpg.*

29. Group of individuals similar in age who share a general set of socialization experiences that leads to the development of shared political orientations that distinguish them from other age cohorts.

## Political Generations

A **political generation**[29] is a group of individuals, similar in age, who share a general set of political socialization experiences leading to the development of shared political orientations that distinguish them from other age groups in society.

People of a similar age tend to be exposed to shared historical, social, and political stimuli. A shared generational outlook develops when an age group experiences a decisive political event in its **impressionable years**[30]—the period from late adolescence to early adulthood when people approach or attain voting age—and begins to think more seriously about politics. At the same time, younger people have less clearly defined political beliefs, which makes them more likely to be influenced by key societal events.Michael X. Delli Carpini, *Stability and Change in American Politics* (New York: New York University Press, 1986).

The idea of American political generations dates back to the founding fathers. Thomas Jefferson believed that new generations would emerge in response to changing social and political conditions and that this would, in turn, influence public policy. Today people can be described as being part of the Depression Era/GI generation, the silent generation, the baby boom generation, generation X, and the millennial generation/generation Y. Depression Era/GIs, born between 1900 and 1924, were heavily influenced by World War I and the Great Depression. They tend to trust government to solve programs because they perceived that Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal programs helped the country recover from the Depression. The silent generation, born between 1922 and 1945, experienced World War II and the 1950s during their impressionable years. Like their predecessors, they believe that government can get things done, but they are less trusting of leaders. The Vietnam War and the civil rights and women's rights movements left lasting impressions on the baby boomers, who were born between 1943 and 1960. The largest of the generations, this cohort protested against the government establishment in its youth and still distrusts government. Generation Xers, born between 1965 and 1980, came of age during a period without a major war or economic hardship. The seminal events they relate to are the explosion of the Challenger spacecraft and the Iran-Contra hearings. This generation developed a reputation for lacking both knowledge and interest in politics.William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations* (New York: William Morrow, 1992). The political development of the millennials, those born between 1981 and 2000, is influenced by the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and its aftermath, as well as by the rise of digital technologies. This generation is more multicultural and has more tolerance for racial and ethnic difference than older cohorts. Sociologists William Strauss and Neil Howe have identified an emerging cohort born after 2000, which they label the homeland generation. This generation is influenced by omnipresent technology, the war on terror, and parents who seek to protect them from societal ills.William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Millennials Rising* (New York: Random House, 2000).

30. Period from late adolescence to early adulthood when people begin to think more seriously about politics and can take part in meaningful ways, such as by voting.

Conflicts between generations have existed for centuries. Thomas Jefferson observed significant differences in the political worldviews of younger and older people in the early days of the republic. Younger government leaders were more willing to adapt to changing conditions and to experiment with new ideas than

older officials.Daniel J. Elazar, *The Generational Rhythm of American Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University, Center for the Study of Federalism, 1976). Today generation Xers and the millennials have been portrayed as self-interested and lacking social responsibility by their elders from the baby boom generation. Generational conflicts of different periods have been depicted in landmark films including the 1950s-era *Rebel without a Cause* and the 1960s-era *Easy Rider*. Generation X has been portrayed in films such as *Slacker*, *The Breakfast Club*, and *Reality Bites*. Movies about the millennial generation include *Easy A* and *The Social Network*.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

Political socialization is the process by which people learn about their government and acquire the beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors associated with good citizenship. The political socialization process in the United States stresses the teaching of democratic and capitalist values. Agents, including parents, teachers, friends, coworkers, church associates, club members, sports teams, mass media, and popular culture, pass on political orientations.

Political socialization differs over the life course. Young children develop a basic sense of identification with a country. College students can form opinions based on their experiences working for a cause. Older people can become active because they see a need to influence public policy that will affect their lives. There are subgroup differences in political socialization. Certain groups, such citizens with higher levels of education and income, are socialized to take an active part in politics, while others are marginalized.

Political generations consist of individuals similar in age who develop a unique worldview as a result of living through particular political experiences. These key events include war and economic depression.

## EXERCISES

1. Do you believe you have the power to make an impact on the political process?
2. What is the first political event you were aware of? What did you think about what was going on? Who influenced how you thought about it?
3. How do members of your political generation feel about the government? How do your attitudes differ from those of your parents?

# 6.3 Political Culture and Socialization in the Information Age

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**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

After reading this section, you should be able to answer the following questions:

1. How do people's interactions with media contribute to their political socialization?
2. How do media depict political socialization in the news and on entertainment channels?

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New media are becoming important agents of political socialization because they host a great deal of political content and require the active engagement of users. Both news media and entertainment media provide depictions that influence political socialization, such as models of government leaders and citizen action.

## Media Interactions

People's interactions with media are increasingly important to the process of political socialization. The explosion in communication technologies has resulted in people communicating less via face-to-face interactions with family members and peers and more through technological intermediaries, such as the Internet, cell phones, and personal digital devices. Even teachers find it increasingly difficult to compete with the communications technologies that command their students' attention.

The Internet is a potentially powerful agent of political socialization because of the vast amount of political information available online and the fact that people actively engage with online platforms. Not only do people get information about government from news sites and blogs, they can post responses to stories and debate others through discussion forums. They also can use online media to actively take part in political processes, such as election campaigns.

Young people, in particular, use the Internet to learn about and participate in politics, although older people are going online for politics at an increasing rate. Evidence suggests that young people are developing their political identities online as they learn about the differences between candidates and political parties and acquire information about issues and political events. They use social media to

create collaborative online communities that organize for political causes, lobby government, and campaign for candidates. All of these activities contribute to the socialization of engaged citizens.

## Media Depictions

Depictions of socialization and learning experiences abound in media. News and entertainment media are especially powerful as they provide depictions that embody the beliefs and values that make up American political culture. Core American values are crucial elements of a "good story," as they resonate with the public. Both egalitarianism and individualism are celebrated in stories in which lone, ordinary people are able to defeat powerful economic and political forces aligned against them.

### News Media

News media provide frequent depictions of political role models, including government leaders and citizens who are actively involved in community affairs. Politicians are often portrayed negatively, which can cause people to distrust leaders and lose faith in government. A prominent media frame portrays political leaders as constantly at odds and unable to reach civil agreement or compromise. This media frame is reinforced during elections when candidates attack their opponents unrelentingly in their stump speeches and ads.

### Entertainment Media

Entertainment media provide depictions of core American values central to the political socialization process. Individualism is portrayed frequently in television dramas and comedies that tell stories of average citizens taking on the political and economic systems. Politicians can use entertainment media to convey an image of themselves embodying American values. Former Alaska governor Sarah Palin has cultivated an image of rugged individualism and self-reliance. She reinforced this image through the reality television program *Sarah Palin's Alaska*.

Depictions can take the form of fictional dramas, such as *Friday Night Lights*' portrayal of family life and the politics of sports in rural Texas, and sitcoms, or the offbeat view of parent-child relationships shown in *Modern Family*. Reality television programs such as *Kate Plus 8* and *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* offer insights into family socialization that can invite commentary and criticism from viewers.

Children's literature and movies feature many stoic, individualist characters. The classic film *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) has been called a tale of self-reliance. Dorothy,

dropped from Kansas into Oz by a tornado, is advised that, to be able to return home, she should go to the Emerald City and appeal to the superior power, the Wizard of Oz. On the way there, she meets up with a Scarecrow desiring a brain, a Tin Man in search of a heart, and a Cowardly Lion in need of courage. The four meet a fearsome Wizard who orders them to bring back the broom of the Wicked Witch of the West. After a series of adventures, they return victorious to the Emerald City, only to find that the Wizard is nothing but a small man behind a curtain who has created an illusion of the "great and powerful Oz." It turns out, he explains, that he was merely a lost itinerant balloonist who, upon descending from the clouds, was declared a Wizard by the credulous people. Dorothy and her friends learn that they each had the power they sought all along.

Teachers seeking to instill democratic and character values in their students have capitalized on the popularity of Harry Potter, the protagonist wizard in J. K. Rowling's popular books. Harry has become a hero to children (and adults) who have read about his exploits. He embodies values of individualism and bravery tempered with humility. Young people can relate to Harry because in the world of the Muggles (those without magical powers), he is average and imperfect. Even among the wizards, he is not the smartest or the most talented. Yet he is able to handle extraordinary situations with bravery and skill. Harry's heroism provides a civics lesson for readers because it illustrates the balance between the democratic values of individualism and egalitarianism. While Harry realizes that his magic powers give him the ability to distinguish himself, he chooses to include others—Hermione Granger, Ron and Ginny Weasley, and Neville Longbottom—as he fights against evil. Further, Harry does not seek public recognition for his acts of heroism.Jeffrey A. Becker, "Heroism and the Political Morality of Democracy in Harry Potter," paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, MA, August 29–September 1, 2002.

MTV's series *The Real World*, which first aired in 1991, provides an intriguing look at the socialization experiences of groups of twentysomething strangers who live together for a year. The program provides insights into the effects of peers on the development of the housemates' attitudes and behaviors. In the course of learning to adapt to new surroundings, live as a group, and find jobs, cast members deal with political issues. The San Francisco season attracted national media attention because it featured the house members grappling with the issue of HIV/AIDS when roommate Pedro, who worked as an AIDS educator and counselor, tested positive for the disease. Depictions related to subgroup relations and multiculturalism abound on *The Real World*. Cast members come from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, which is a source of tension in the house. Almost every season involves a black male who stereotypically is alienated and confrontational. Most of the time, this character is shown talking about the societal injustices he suffers and

picking fights with other house members. These confrontations force cast members to take sides and voice their opinions about race.

## Media Consequences

Parents and educators express concerns that socialization of young people via mass media contributes to a citizenry that is alienated from politics and distrusts government. Many of the media messages young people receive about politics are negative. They spend little time discussing these messages with other people or discovering the ways in which they can actively engage the political world. Alternatively, young people today are exposed to much more political media content than any prior generation. This exposure can contribute to greater awareness of government and opportunities for civic action. Digital communication technologies offer people increased opportunities for taking part in politics via media, such as posting to a blog or participating in a "**tweetup**[31]," using the microblogging platform Twitter to inform people about a political event taking place online or offline.

### Scandal Coverage

The influence of mass media on children's attitudes toward leaders and government has become more negative over time, as media messages focus more on personal scandals and institutional dysfunction. For the most part, young children's initial views of politics tend to be positive. Studies conducted in the 1960s showed that children idealized the president. They considered him a **benevolent leader**[32], someone who did good things for the country and would help a child personally. Even during the Watergate scandal of the 1970s, which involved a break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters and a cover-up by President Richard Nixon, children held strong, positive feelings about the office of the president. Children learned about President Nixon's impeachment primarily from their parents and teachers, and not from the mass media. Media accounts focused on the political aspects of the Nixon impeachment, which went over the heads of most children. Many parents felt it was important to instill positive views of government in their children during this period of political upheaval.

31. An online or offline meeting organized via the microblogging platform Twitter.

32. A concept in which young children consider the president to be a personal friend who will do good things for the nation.

The situation was much different in the 1990s when children learned about President Bill Clinton's involvement with White House intern Monica Lewinsky, predominantly from nonstop, graphic television coverage that focused on Clinton's personal life. Young children became disillusioned with President Clinton because they felt he had not told the truth. For the first time, children's views of the sitting president, as well as their opinions about the institution of the presidency, were significantly more negative than those of their parents. Fewer children aspired to become president when they grew up.Diana Owen and Jack Dennis, "Kids and the

Presidency: Assessing Clinton's Legacy," *The Public Perspective* 10, no. 3 (April–May 1999): 41–44.

## Hollywood and Washington

The **Payne Fund studies**[33] of motion pictures and youth, conducted between 1929 and 1933, provide early evidence that film can be a powerful agent of socialization. The studies found that people developed attitudes toward racial and ethnic groups, war, and crime based on their exposure to popular films. Audience members who saw the controversial film *Birth of a Nation* believed that blacks in the post–Civil War era were uncivilized and dangerous. Children who watched their favorite movie stars, such as James Cagney and Humphrey Bogart, playing criminals on screen imitated their behavior patterns by acting up in school.Garth Jowett, Ian C. Jarvic, and Kathy H. Fuller, *Children and the Movies* (New York: Cambridge, 1996).

Recognizing that film has the power to impart political messages to the public, officials in Washington have forged connections with the filmmaking community in Hollywood. The Hollywood-Washington connection dates back to the 1930s when President Herbert Hoover befriended MGM mogul Louis B. Mayer, whose studio produced many of the most popular films of the era. President Franklin D. Roosevelt realized that films could influence public perceptions of the Great Depression and the United States' involvement in World War II. Roosevelt encouraged filmmakers to make movies with optimistic messages that would generate support for government action. The defeatist ending of director John Ford's Oscar-winning film *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), based on the John Steinbeck novel, was changed to depict the Joad family persevering despite terrible hardship, due to their inner strength. In addition to prowar documentaries such as Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* series, Roosevelt requested that studio heads make popular films in support of the war effort. Films such as *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* depicted Germany as a nation out to destroy the American Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Anti-German messages were delivered in popular series films such as *Tarzan Triumphs* (1943), in which Tarzan and Cheetah fight Nazis who parachute into their jungle paradise.Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War* (New York: Free Press, 1987).

*Figure 6.12*



*Early research indicated that film could be an influential agent of political socialization. Negative attitudes toward African Americans were transmitted to audiences through the film Birth of a Nation.*

*Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/ wiki/File:Birth-of-a-nation-klan- and-black-man.jpg.*

33. Research conducted between 1929 and 1933 that demonstrated the influence of movies on young people's attitudes about racial groups, war, and crime.

Immediately following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, representatives of Hollywood's major studios, television networks, trade organizations, and the creative community met with senior White House officials to discuss how the entertainment community could help in the war against terror by emphasizing that the 9/11 attacks were an affront to civilization."Hollywood Considers Role in War Effort," *CNN*, November 12, 2001, http://www.cnn.com. Hollywood sought to define its political role while at the same time protecting its future at the box office. The first inclination was to feature comedy and fantasy fare that would be uplifting and noncontroversial. Films featuring terrorist themes—such as the Jennifer Lopez vehicle *Tick Tock*, which is about terrorists planting bombs in Los Angeles shopping malls, and *Nose Bleed*, a Jackie Chan movie about a window washer who discovers a plan to blow up the World Trade Center—were shelved. Images of the Twin Towers were removed from films set for release, such as *Spiderman.* However, video rentals of films featuring dramatic action and terrorist plots increased by 30 percent in the months directly following the attacks, which gave Hollywood an indication that the public would be receptive to more violent offerings."Commercial Response to September 11," *NewsHour Online,* October 24, 2001, http://www.pbs.org/newshour. War films with a patriotic theme, such as *Behind Enemy Lines* and *The Last Castle*, proved to be highly popular, and coincidentally, reinforced the messages suggested by the White House delegation.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

Mass media have become compelling agencies of political learning, as young people spend a tremendous amount of time being exposed to television, the Internet, video games, and other media rather than interacting with other people. Media messages about politics are often negative, which may lead young people to become alienated from the political process. Young people, in particular, may learn a good deal about politics from entertainment and popular media.

## EXERCISES

1. Are there any fictional characters who seem heroic to you? What qualities make him or her seem heroic?
2. Where do you get most of your news about politics? Do you think that where you get your news might affect your views about politics? In what ways?

## Civic Education

Young people often have difficulty seeing the relevance of civic education to their immediate lives. Programs tend to emphasize future participation such as voting in presidential elections, which is an activity that students cannot engage in until they reach the age of eighteen. However, innovative curriculum projects can stimulate students' interest in elections through meaningful campaign-related activities.

Kids Voting USA is a program initiated in 1988 that allows grade school teachers to use a curriculum designed around an election campaign. Students become involved by researching issues and preparing position papers, constructing informational websites, writing articles for newspapers, and serving as reporters on local television stations. On Election Day, children accompany parents to the polls and cast ballots in a special election. Children who participate are often motivated to turn out at elections when they reach voting age. In addition, children's participation in Kids Voting USA stimulates parents' interest in the campaign and voter turnout. Young people initiate discussions at home that are associated with their school projects. This enthusiasm for elections continues for some families after the program's completion, especially among families of lower socioeconomic status who previously had little incentive for participating in politics.Michael McDevitt and Steven H. Chaffee, "Second-Chance Political Socialization: 'Trickle-Up' Effects of Children on Parents," in *Engaging the Public,* ed. Thomas J. Johnson, Carol E. Hays, and Scott P. Hays (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 57–66.

# 6.4 Recommended Reading

Calavita, Marco. *Apprehending Politics*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005. Looks at how the news media influences the political beliefs and behavior of generation X.

Campbell, David E. *Why We Vote*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006. Examines the ways in which schools and communities socialize young people to politics.

Craig, Steven C., and Stephen Earl Bennet, eds. *After the Boom*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997. Explores the socializing experiences and political orientations of generation X, people born between 1960 and 1980.

Delli Carpini, Michael X. *Stability and Change in American Politics*. New York: New York University Press, 1986. A study of the baby boom generation using a political socialization framework.

Elazar, Daniel J. *The American Mosaic*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994. Examines the geographical underpinnings of American political culture across generations.

Hunter, James Davison. *Culture Wars*. New York: Basic Books, 1991. Discusses how subgroups based on religious differences disagree on fundamental issues of American national identity.

Johnson, Thomas J., Carol E. Hays, and Scott P. Hays. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998. A collection of articles discussing how the mass media can contribute to the political socialization process and foster the development of democratic values and participation.

Kitwana, Bakari. *The Hip-Hop Generation*. New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2002. Discusses the socialization experiences of young black Americans who find their political voice in hip-hop music.

McClosky, Herbert, and John Zaller. *The American Ethos*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984. Examines the nature of Americans' commitment to democratic and capitalist values.

Niemi, Richard G., and Jane Junn. *Civic Education.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998. Explores how schools succeed and fail in teaching civics.

Schmermund, Kathleen. *Charles Gibson vs. Jon Stewart.* New York: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010. Compares political socialization of young people via traditional and fake news media.

Strauss, William, and Neil Howe. *Generations.* New York: William Morrow and Company, 1992. Provides an overview of American generations since the founding of America.

White, John Kenneth. *The Values Divide.* New York: Chatham House Publishers, 2003. An account of how changes in the demographic, racial, and ethnic makeup of the United States that have occurred since the 1950s have resulted in a fundamental shift in cultural values.

Youniss, James, and Miranda Yates. *Community Service and Social Responsibility in Youth.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997. A study of high school community service programs and how they work to promote future civic participation.

# 6.5 Recommended Viewing

*42: Forty Two Up* (1999). The sixth and final installment of Michael Apted's unprecedented documentary film chronicling the lives of fourteen British men and women in seven-year intervals. The subjects represent a cross-section of British society, and their life stories depict a variety of socialization experiences and political orientations. This series of documentaries, beginning with *Seven Up*, is the only film depiction of socialization over the life course.

*American Family* (2002). A PBS dramatic series that examines the everyday lives of members of an extended Latino family.

*American History X* (1998). An examination of two brothers who are drawn into a neo-Nazi skinhead gang. The film examines family socialization as the initial source of one brother's racism, which is reinforced in prison and in a gang.

*An American Family* (1973), *American Family Revisited* (1983), *Lance Loud!: A Death in an American Family* (2003). A television documentary series capturing the life and times of the Loud family; the series was one of the first forays into "reality TV" and became controversial as the family dealt publicly with many difficult life situations, including issues of sexual orientation and divorce.

*The Breakfast Club* (1985). This film explores diverse socialization experiences in the home, school, and peer group of several high school students forced to do detention together in the school library.

*Dead End* (1937). An examination of the problems, including cultural conflicts, faced by New York City residents as they live through their impressionable years during the Great Depression.

*Easy Rider* (1969). This portrayal of two young societal dropouts who ride motorcycles across the American southwest depicts various scenes of the late 1960s counterculture.

*Rebel without a Cause* (1955). James Dean portrays a troubled and misunderstood middle-class 1950s-era youth in this classic depiction of generational conflict.

*River's Edge* (1987). A dark portrayal of 1980s youth culture based on a true story of friends who do not report the murder of a woman in their group by her boyfriend. The film deals with issues, such as family socialization in homes with absentee parents and peer-group influence. It was selected as the "Film That Mattered" for the 1980s by the LA International Film Festival.

*Slacker* (1991). This documentary-style film of twentysomethings living on the edge of society in Austin, Texas, contributed to the image of 1990s youth culture as aimless and bored.