The central question for this book is whether schools should attempt to cultivate patriotism, and if so why, how, and with what conception of patriotism in mind. The promotion of patriotism has figured prominently in the history of public schooling in the United States, always with the idea that patriotism is both an inherently admirable attribute and an essential motivational basis for good citizenship. It has been assumed, in short, that patriotism is a virtue in its own right and that it is a foundational aspect of civic virtue more generally. Assumptions have also been made concerning the capacity of schools to inspire patriotism and the educational means by which virtues in general, and patriotism in particular, can be cultivated. Different conceptions of these educational means have been advanced in connection with competing visions of civic virtue and patriotism, so assumptions about which varieties of civic virtue and patriotism are most admirable or desirable have also shaped educational practices.

In order to assess these assumptions and answer the questions that concern us, we must consider the nature of virtue and consult research findings in motivational psychology that can help us understand what sustains civic responsibility. We must ask whether there is a genuinely virtuous form of patriotism and, if so, what relationship it may have to an educationally responsible form of civic education.

In order to define an educationally responsible form of civic education we will begin by framing and defending an understanding of what defines responsible education generally. On that basis we will then derive a general account of responsible civic education. These accounts of education in general and civic education in particular will incorporate views on the nature of virtue and the nature and acquisition of virtuous motivation. We will argue on the basis of these views that there surely is a virtuous form of patriotism,
and we will argue that an inclusive and enabling just school community may contribute to its development in some valuable ways. Saying that there is a virtuous form of patriotism does not imply that patriotism is a virtue, however. We will argue that civic virtue is what schools should aim to cultivate, and that civic education should be organized around three components of it, namely, civic intelligence, civic friendship, and civic competence. We show how each of these can be motivationally significant in sustaining civic responsibility. We also hold that appropriate responsiveness to a country’s value is the motivational core of civic virtue with respect to a country, and that virtuous patriotism is responsiveness of this kind involving commitments of membership permitted by obligations of universal morality and global justice.

An important aspect of our view of virtuous patriotism is that it would be compatible with civic responsibility in all the spheres of civic life in which cooperation is desirable, from the local to the global. The importance of global cooperation and perceived tensions between global cooperation and patriotism lead us to finish with an account of global civic education.

There has been a resurgence of interest in patriotic education in recent years, but we are not aware of any book that adopts the kind of methodically foundational approach that we do. We are even more certain that no previous work on this topic brings history and philosophy into direct conversation to ensure that the ethical analysis of what is educationally appropriate is informed by a strong and ethically attuned understanding of what schools have done in the name of patriotism. The philosophical and historical aspects of this work are both much different from what they would have been without the other.

Our project is strongly anchored in the practices of patriotic education in the United States and the debates surrounding those practices, but much of what we have to say should be of interest to readers everywhere. This should be the case given the generality of the questions we pose and the wide applicability of our approach to answering them. It is also likely that the United States has not been alone in adopting the kinds of pedagogical practices it has and that our nuanced assessment of these practices will resonate in significant ways with many national traditions. Finally, whatever one’s national traditions, it should also be clear that international cooperation is an urgent necessity and one we must learn to harmonize with devotion to the countries we call our own. Our closing chapter on global civic education speaks to the common interests we all share, wherever we live.

This book is the product of a seven-year collaboration between a philosopher (Curren) and a historian (Dorn). We began with open minds about the conclusions we would reach, hoping but not knowing that we could
bridge the differences between our two disciplines, learn from each other, and reach agreement on a common thesis. We ask readers to engage this work with similarly open minds, knowing that it is because the topic of this book is important that we have made every effort to understand it and articulate a responsible view of what we owe our children and each other. We do not write as partisans.

As scholars, our work is judged primarily by the scholarly standards of our respective fields, where careers are made and destroyed by strength of evidence, soundness of reasoning, validity of constructs, tireless investigation, theoretical insight, good judgment, and exquisite attention to detail. So we must hope that colleagues in our respective fields of study will approve the work we have done. This is a short book by design and written for a wide audience, so scholars and any others with an eye for scholarly rigor may need to consult the related works we cite to be satisfied that this book advances a scholarly understanding of patriotic education in important ways. Readers with scholarly interests in patriotism and civic education should also understand that this book is neither a comprehensive investigation of patriotism nor a comprehensive investigation of civic education; it confines itself to the intersection of these topics and refers only very selectively to the rich and wide-ranging philosophical literature on patriotism.¹

Writing for a wide audience, we have written not only as scholars but also as citizens of our own country and the world. We have done so in the interest of a more informed, reasoned, and mutually respectful public conversation—one that is sensitive enough to evidence and the value of what is at stake in our collective existence to have some chance of seriously addressing and solving the problems we face.

Theresa May, who became Britain’s prime minister in the wake of the June 2016 Brexit vote, famously remarked that “if you believe you are a citizen of the world, you’re a citizen of nowhere. You don’t understand what citizenship means.”² We agree wholeheartedly with the sentiment that identification with “international elites” at the expense of “fellow citizens down the road” is incompatible with civic responsibility, but the position we take in this book is in other respects sharply at odds with May’s assertion.³ The fates of ordinary people across the world are simply too interconnected, interdependent, and imperiled for us to have much chance of preserving the conditions of a desirable future for any of us if we do not master an art of global civic cooperation compatible with justice for everyone closer to home. The families whose children cannot find work in rural England and America can no more be ignored than the climate refugees made destitute by water scarcity and encroachment of deserts.⁴
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