

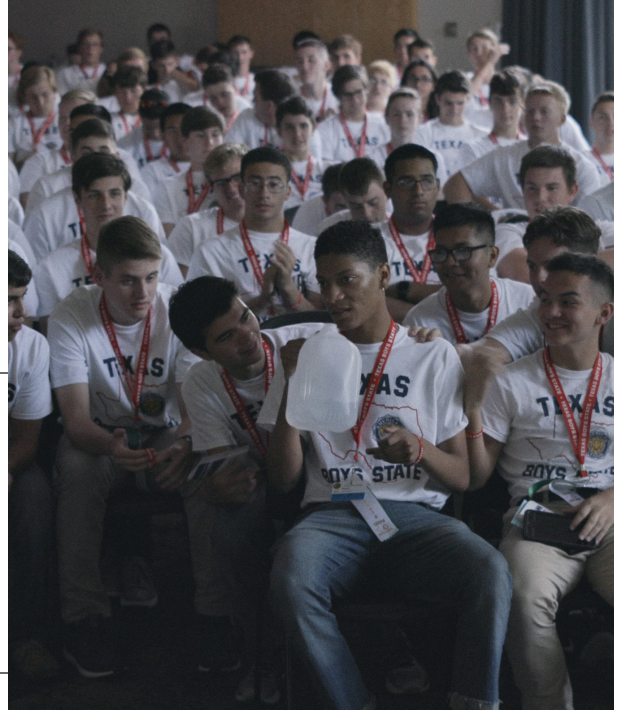
An Apple Original Film

★ BOYS STATE ★

Film Discussion Guide



INTRODUCTION



BOYS STATE FILMMAKERS Jesse Moss and Amanda McBaine closely track the escalating tensions that arise within a particularly riveting gubernatorial race, training their cameras on unforgettable teenagers like Ben, a Reagan-loving arch-conservative who brims with confidence despite personal setbacks, and Steven, a progressive minded child of Mexican immigrants who stands by his convictions amidst the sea of red. In the process, they have created a complex portrait of contemporary American masculinity, a microcosm of our often-dispiriting national political divisions that nevertheless manages to plant seeds of hope. ★★★

CENTRAL CHARACTERS



STEVEN GARZA comes from Houston, Texas. He is the child of Mexican immigrants and attended a public high school. As he says in the film, his mother was undocumented for a time. She is now a legal resident of the United States. Inspired by Bernie Sanders' campaign in 2016 (when he was fourteen), Steven volunteered on political campaigns in Texas, and became a leader of Texas Student Democrats. "Politics is my passion," says Steven. His leadership role model is Napoleon Bonaparte. A student of Napoleon's life and military campaigns, he invokes him frequently. An underdog challenger, whose background and political views place him squarely outside the mainstream at Boys State, Steven rises brilliantly by calling the Boys to their highest ideals. Steven is now a student at the University of Texas at Austin.



ROBERT MACDOUGALL is from Austin, Texas. Robert served as a United States Senate Page in Washington D.C. the summer before Boys State. He graduated in 2019 from St. Andrew's Episcopal School where he served as Student Body Vice President, having been elected in 2018, a month prior to filming Boys State. Robert was also the co-captain of his high school football team during his senior year. He is currently a Cadet enrolled at the United States Military Academy at West Point, fulfilling a dream he has had since a young age. He is expected to graduate from West Point in 2023 as an Army Officer with the rank of Second Lieutenant. Robert is an active student and follower of U.S. politics and U.S. history. He believes that all young men and women should find a way to serve their country following graduation from high school or college, knowing the definition of service can vary from person to person. Robert also has a strong interest in the business world, having worked as an intern on the trading floor of the New York Stock Exchange. At Boys State, Robert competes for the Nationalist Party nomination for Governor with the motto, "Go big or go home."



BEN FEINSTEIN grew up in San Antonio with his mom Karen, a doctor, and his step-dad. Ben is a double-amputee, the result of a bacterial meningitis infection contracted when he was two years old. “It’s my normal,” he says. A Ronald Reagan doll on his bookshelf is a testament to his political precocity and somewhat conservative views. Ben is a self-professed politics junkie and experienced in debate and model UN. Ben’s disability prevents him from serving in the military, so he has set his sights on intelligence work with the CIA or the FBI. His ambition extends to Boys State, where he arrives intending to run for Governor. Circumstances force him to question himself and quickly recalibrate his ambitions. Late in our story he makes a brilliant but controversial tactical decision that influences the outcome of the election. Ben is now a student at Southern Methodist University.



RENÉ OTERO is an outsider, to Texas and to Boys State. A recent transplant from Chicago, he finds himself one of a handful of African American statesmen among a largely white and politically conservative group. René is a captivating orator who grabs the attention of the Nationalist Party with a galvanizing speech, but he must struggle to hold onto power by uniting a politically divided party and fending off an impeachment threat. “I’m gonna keep my job if it’s the last thing I do,” he declares. His success and alliance with underdog Steven Garza puts him and his party on a collision course with Ben Feinstein and the Federalist party. René is currently a student at the University of Texas at Austin.

The battle between win-at-all costs and principled campaigning plays out in the film as it does in our current political landscape. But the young men’s interactions also demonstrate how in the face of “business as usual” politics, solidarity and common ground can still be achieved. ★★★

GUIDE FORMAT & DISCUSSION THEMES

This guide has been designed to facilitate high level discussions about the *Boys State* Documentary. This discussion guide has been divided into nine (9) reoccurring themes from the documentary:

Democracy	01
Civil Engagement	02
Civil Discourse	03
Empathy	04
Character Vs. Personality	05
Hope, Fear, and Determination	06
Honoring Those Who Came Before	07
Race & Politics	08
Gender, Masculinity, & Identity	09

Under each theme, the following materials have been provided:

- Historic Quote
- Summary
- Quote from Documentary
- Discussion Questions

DEMOCRACY★ 01



"Democracy... arises out of the notion that those who are equal in any respect are equal in all respects; because men are equally free, they claim to be absolutely equal."

★ ARISTOTLE ★

"Everybody can be great, because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve... You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love."

★ MARTIN LUTHER KING JR ★

DEMOCRACY, as defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary, is a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation

usually involving periodically held free elections. A democracy is a government by the people; the rule of the majority. The United States is a representative democracy, which means that our government is elected by citizens; these elected officials then represent the citizens' ideas and concerns in government.

Boys State and its alumni have helped shape American democracy. Alumni have served as presidents (Bill Clinton), vice presidents (Dick Cheney), senators (Cory Booker), Supreme Court Justices (Samuel Alito) and governors (Charlie Crist). In the film, the young men who aspire to be leaders must decide what values they should embrace and promote in a representative democracy: inclusivity, diversity, integrity, freedom of thought and speech, and whether leading through unity and compassion can win elections.

Participation in the electoral process is a right, and one not to be taken lightly. One of the most important

rights of American citizens is the right to vote. Originally, under the Constitution only white male citizens over the age of 21 were eligible to vote. Today, citizens over the age of 18 cannot be denied the right to vote, regardless of race, religion, sex, disability, or sexual orientation. Much of the strength of the country weighs on citizens' enthusiasm to participate in the political process, which is something that the young men in Boys State understand. They understand the importance of voting as fundamental to a healthy democracy because it represents the voice of the people, whatever the outcome.

"...who we elect matters, how we elect matters."

★ TEACHER ★

"I wanted to know what was on your minds and ask you what issues mattered to you. I did not want to run a campaign to represent y'all if I didn't know who I was going to represent. I did not want y'all to sign a bad check with my petition."

★ STEVEN ★

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS 01

1. What is your personal definition of democracy? What do you believe the role of government is or should be?
2. Voting is a fundamental right in our democracy and the attendees at Boys State understand this. How would you describe this responsibility to someone who says they never vote because it doesn't make any difference?
3. How does the film Boys State highlight some of the pitfalls of democracy? Where do we see the voting process undermined by its participants? Where do we see moments of democratic ingenuity?
4. What would happen in a society where the citizens no longer exercise their power to hold their leaders accountable to the country's values?
5. The history of voting in this country is fraught. Voting rights have not been equally extended to all citizens. Voter suppression is an ongoing topic of discussion in our current political climate. What is voter suppression? In what ways do we see political candidates or entities leverage voter suppression to disenfranchise communities of color and other marginalized groups? How do we ensure fair elections?



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

02

"Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes."

★THOMAS EHRLICH★

EARLY IN *BOYS STATE*, a counselor tells the students, "Giving a darn is the most powerful weapon we have." If this is true, then apathy might well be one of the greatest threats to the well-being of our country and our communities. Boys State—both the event and the film about it—exist, in part, to encourage attendees and viewers to "give a darn."

Few times in our country's history have required so much civic engagement from compassionate, thoughtful citizens. Thankfully, there are many resources, opportunities, and avenues through which to engage on a civic level. Too young to vote? Campaign for your favorite candidate. Advocate for a cause you care about. Feeling disconnected from people who share your values and opinions? Connect with like-minded peers online for encouragement and education. Feeling helpless to shape the course of politics at a national or state level? Volunteer for your neighborhood or city council, write policies ... or run for local election!

Put simply, civic engagement is good for both the society and the individual. The more people are engaged in working for the betterment of our communities, the greater the likelihood of healthy, vibrant communities. Civic engagement—whether volunteer-

ing for a charity or non-profit or a more political-ly-oriented organization—will also strengthen you as a person. You will likely grow in compassion and empathy, and gain a wealth of perspective that will help you more effectively navigate life’s challenges when they come your way.

“The most dangerous weapon we have in the fight to maintain our democracy is us being willing to give a darn and fight for it.”

★ COUNSELOR ★

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

02

1. In the film *Boys State*, we see a lot of participants who are civically engaged but are not necessarily running for elected office. In your own words, how you would define civic engagement?
2. What are the barriers to civic engagement for you? How can you overcome them? Who can help?
3. Do you consider civic engagement a privilege or a responsibility?
4. Who do you admire for the work they do in your community? What have you learned from them?



CIVIL DISCOURSE★

03

"We are not afraid to entrust the American people with unpleasant facts, foreign ideas, alien philosophies, and competitive values. For a nation that is afraid to let its people judge the truth and falsehood in an open market is a nation that is afraid of its people."

★ JOHN F. KENNEDY ★

HOW DO WE DISAGREE WITHOUT BEING DIS-AGREEABLE? This seems to be one of the greatest challenges facing people of all ages today.

The internet and social media have opened up new opportunities for connections between individuals around the globe. We can share ideas and experiences and learn about diverse cultures more quickly and intimately than ever before. But we also know

the other side to this hyper-connected existence. We can silo ourselves in echo chambers of our own making, surrounding ourselves with people that only share our worldview. We can hide behind digital anonymity and attack or ridicule those that share different opinions or beliefs or those who identify differently than we do. We see this on display in the film, for instance, when members of both political parties use social media to attack their opponents.

Boys State is an increasingly rare opportunity for students to have extensive, sustained "face time" with one another in real time. The intense week together thrusts them into closed environments with tasks (debate, elections, campaign speeches) that require deep interpersonal communication. Such interactions require patience, hospitality, and wisdom. Civil discourse recognizes that we all won't agree on everything, and, when disagreements persist, compromise must be the goal.

Boys State challenges viewers to think about how we communicate and interact with people who think or act or vote differently than we do.

"I want to be civil and represent a whole working body. And we're going to take the example of a plane body. It has two wings, a left one and a right one, we are not going to pick one, we are going to stay in the middle because we are not an intolerable party, we're one that is palatable to all ... Because we are the only party that is worth voting for because it's this party that is going to represent every individual."

★ RENÉ ★

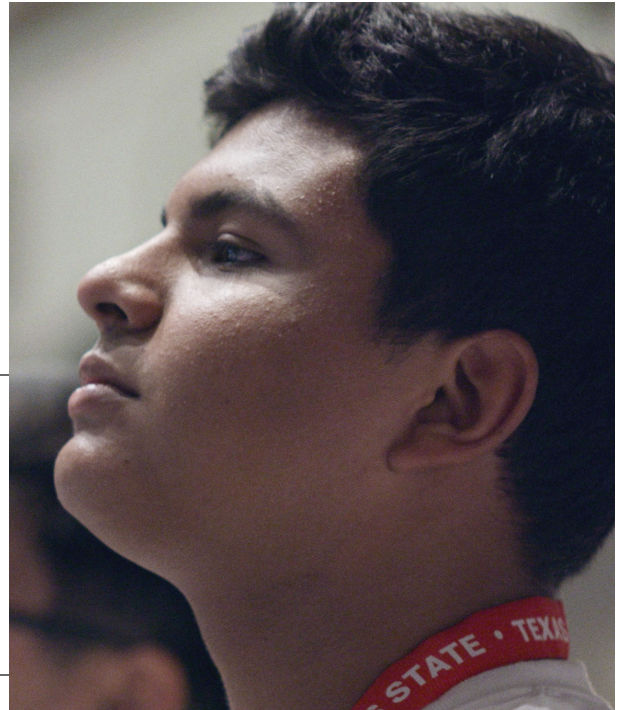
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

03

1. Identify a time in your life when you had an intense disagreement with another person. How were you able to come to a resolution or agreement?
2. In the beginning of the film, a teacher says that our increasingly internet-based society has gotten in the way of our ability to have sustained dialogue. Do you agree? How does social media get in the way of and/or facilitate civil discourse in the film?
3. Can you think of any examples where people have compromised and accepted situations they might not fully agree with for the common good?
4. Think about your community. Where do you see compromise serving the common good?
5. How can you help encourage civil discourse in your own community, family, or online groups?

EMPATHY★

04



"You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, who had ever been alive."

★ JAMES BALDWIN ★

A KEY INGREDIENT of successful civic engagement and civil discourse is empathy, our ability to understand and share another's feelings. Experiences like Boys State can allow us to interact with or witness exchanges between people from different walks of life. What we do end up doing with those experiences—whether we use them to strengthen our own capacity for empathy—is up to us.

In *Boys State*, we see two different opportunities for and approaches to empathy. In different ways, both Ben and Steven have endured challenging upbringings. Ben is a double-amputee, which makes getting around the Boys State campus more difficult for him than for some of his fellow Boys Staters. He uses humor, frankness and honesty to explain his disability to other participants who might be uncomfortable asking questions or acknowledging his difference. In doing so, he offers them an opportunity to grow in their empathy and through his grace and straightforwardness he also serves as a great advocate for himself. Steven is a Latino male in a sea of white faces. He speaks of the sacrifices that his parents made for him, and the fact that his mother was previously undocumented. In the film, Steven understands the power of empathy and uses it to gain political allies. When he embarks on securing signatures, he is able to do so by going out and talking to the other boys, listening to their concerns, and finding common ground with them.

Empathy is key to healing the divides between us.

"Texas is a perfect example of America—a melting pot of cultures and people. Boys State provides a chance to learn from each other and hear from the opposite side without screaming and yelling at each other on a Facebook post."

★ STEVEN ★

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

04

1. What does it look like to show empathy for another person? Describe a time when you showed or could have shown empathy for someone.
2. What are some barriers to empathy that you have seen? How can individuals overcome those barriers to become more empathetic and compassionate people?
3. If you were leading a group, which would be more important—listening to and being interested in the members of the group, being able to speak to their concerns, or winning by whatever it takes? Why?
4. What leaders have you known who have led with empathy? And what leaders have you known who think that empathy is “weak” and that victory is all that matters? What are some of the things these leaders have done that put them in these categories for you?

CHARACTER VS. PERSONALITY★

05



"We learned about honesty and integrity—that the truth matters... that you don't take shortcuts or play by your own set of rules... and success doesn't count unless you earn it fair and square."

★MICHELLE OBAMA★

IN TODAY'S HYPER-CONNECTED CULTURE, image is everything. Many of us work diligently to put our best digital foot forward. We strive to make a good first impression over and over again. But do we pay enough attention to our character, to the values, beliefs, and practices that shape who we truly are?

In *Boys State*, we see a contrast between character and personality. While reality is certainly more complex, we can look at the differences between Steven and Robert's gubernatorial campaigns. Robert

recognizes the power of personality. He is boisterous, personable, and exudes charisma – strong qualities in a candidate. Supporters naturally flock to him. He is able to secure 30 signatures for his candidacy almost immediately. He also privately discloses that while campaigning against abortion, he is pro-choice.

Steven, on the other hand, walks a different path. There is a quieter dignity in his politicking. He wants to learn from others before putting himself out there. He does not run away from who he is to win an election. Robert, on the other hand, hides his true beliefs to improve his chances of winning.

When Steven is confronted by Robert with something that may be unpopular among the voters—that he led a March For Our Lives protest against gun violence—Steven speaks openly and honestly about why he did this and what the March For Our Lives was really

about. His honesty won him strong support from many, but it also could have cost him votes and ultimately the candidacy.

When Robert was about to begin his speech, he mispronounced Steven's last name. He could have apologized once and moved on, but instead he apologized twice to Steven, making sure that he, and the Nationalists party members, understood that he was genuinely sorry. Steven accepts his apology graciously. Both young men demonstrated integrity and respect.

"No matter what happens tonight,
win or lose, I will defy failure."

★ STEVEN ★

"I have no regrets on [my] decisions at all,
both on like a moral level and on a political level,
because politically it worked."

★ BEN ★

"I like to think I've done all I can to uplift the candidates, but maybe those dirty tricks and accusations were very effective. Maybe if I had barn-stormed the other party, maybe if I had debased them, maybe we could have been successful. I don't hate [Ben], I never will, I think he is a fantastic politician, but I don't think a fantastic politician is a compliment either."

★ RENÉ ★

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

05

1. Who inspires you to be better? How would you describe their character? How would you describe their personality?
2. Does truth matter in politics? And how much does it really matter if telling the truth about yourself may mean you lose support and may not achieve a goal?
3. Should politicians suppress their own views to mirror their constituents' views?
4. René says, "I think [Ben] is a fantastic politician. But a fantastic politician isn't a compliment." What does René mean by this? Do you agree?
5. At the end of the film, how do Steven and Robert each feel about the election and their own actions?
6. How do the young men (Steven, René, Robert, and Ben) tackle the issue of personal integrity in their campaigns?
7. What are the qualities that make you trust a politician?
8. How important is integrity versus other political skill sets?
9. Can you think of a time in the past when a politician compromised on an agenda they wanted in order to advance the larger cause?
10. What is something you would never compromise on to reach your goals?

HOPE, FEAR, & DETERMINATION ★

06



"We must accept finite disappointment,
but never lose infinite hope."

★ MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. ★

"Never give in. Never give in.
Never, never, never, never—in nothing, great or
small, large or petty—never give in, except
to convictions of honor and good sense."

★ WINSTON CHURCHILL ★

TOWARDS THE END OF *BOYS STATE*, Steven says, "It is easier to give up than to keep fighting." Steven is a model of determination. He fights to the eleventh hour for his signatures for his candidacy for governor. He is a tireless listener and seems to leave no colleague forgotten in his quest to hear them out

to better shape his platform. When an obstacle is thrown in his path – criticism for leading the March For Our Lives protest – he addresses it directly in his speech, does not waiver from his position, and keeps going forward with his platform. And René could have easily been discouraged and given up when members of his party tried to have him impeached. Instead, he becomes more determined and, in the end, is victorious in keeping his position.

We often have to struggle to find the energy and inspiration to work for good when it can feel like we are bombarded with reasons to stop and give up or when we are faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles. We can use these obstacles to convince ourselves that we are insignificant and incapable, or we can use them to become more determined. As Steven says, "We shouldn't be inspired by fear, we should be inspired by hope."

Those two feelings are constantly at war in us. To which will we give in: fear or hope? Fear is a powerful tool to drive people. It is a preferred instrument behind so much of our news and politics. A perceived enemy and the collective fear of it is an effective organizing tool. It can be far more difficult to inspire potential followers with hope.

To be sure, there is cause for concern when we look at the world around us. There is much that can cause us to be afraid—violence, sickness, economic insecurity, lack of opportunity, and the list seems to go on and on. Where will we find hope?

A good place to start is with Steven and other teenagers like him. Steven is making the most of his experiences, using them to feed his drive to make his community and his country a better place for all. Recent movements for social justice and equality are driven by people of all ages, but members of younger generations are leading the way. This rise in global awareness and civic activism, paired with advancements in technology and communication, has the potential to drive social progress in ways that we have yet to see, if, as Steven reminds us, we do so in the best interest of everyone and not just ourselves.

"We shouldn't be inspired by fear, we should be inspired by hope. And it comes down to just knowing what you believe that you are doing is in the best interest of everybody and not just yourself."

★ STEVEN ★

"Perceived bias is a very powerful issue, especially to conservatives. Something Trump did very well is to say, 'Hey the system is rigged against us and they are working to keep us down.'"

★ BEN ★

"Hey, I did things,
I made mistakes, they have consequences.
All actions do."

★ ROBERT ★

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

06

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using hope in politics? What are the advantages and disadvantages of using fear in politics?
2. When thinking about American politics, what causes you fear and what gives you hope?
3. Think of a leader who has used fear as a motivating factor. Of what did they make people afraid? What kind of policies did they advocate? Think of a leader who has used hope as a motivating factor. For what did they make people hopeful? What kind of policies did they advocate?
4. Which leader or leaders do you most admire? Can you think of any obstacles or losses they faced along the way? How did they handle them?
5. When has a challenge or obstacle discouraged you from doing what you wanted to do? What steps could you take to meet that obstacle today and keep going toward your goal?

HONORING THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE ★



"Our children should learn the general framework of their government and then they should know where they come in contact with the government, where it touches their daily lives and where their influence is exerted on the government. It must not be a distant thing, someone else's business but they must see how every cog in the wheel of democracy is important and bears its share of responsibility for the smooth running of the entire machine."

★ELEANOR ROOSEVELT★

THERE IS A DEBATE in the beginning of the film regarding the possibility of secession. Should a party's platform include seceding from the United States and the formation of a separate government? In one of his campaign speeches, Steven dismisses this idea

as profoundly disrespectful to the soldiers who came before them, the men and women who fought and died for the *United States*.

This idea of honoring those who came before us, only briefly reflected in the documentary, is worth expanding upon. As Americans, many of us are quick to honor members of the military and our veterans, and rightfully so. But *Boys State* also gives us room to think about other ways in which people have served our country. Consider the countless individuals that worked and marched for civil and human rights, the faith leaders, community organizers, social workers, medical professionals, civil servants, educators, and the list goes on and on. Some of them may have enjoyed some level of popularity for their efforts. More likely, the majority of them worked quietly and tirelessly behind the scenes. All of these individuals deserve our respect and praise too.

As Steven reminds us, we can't be where we are without the love and support of our family and friends. We see this in his tearful call with his mother after his loss. She expresses her pride in him, and he shares his gratitude for her, all while his friends congratulate and celebrate him for a race well run.

"We have the opportunity to do something great. Are we going to make headlines for the wrong reasons? Are we going to dishonor the legionnaires who consider us to be the best that Texas has to offer? Or will we show the world what patriots are made of?"

★ STEVEN ★

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

07

1. Who are some heroes who have worked to bring democracy and freedom to the oppressed? How can you honor what they have done in your actions today?
2. Who are your personal heroes? What actions or traits make them heroic?
3. Name an individual or group that we probably won't see recognized in our history books but you believe deserves recognition. Why do you believe they should be recognized and remembered? What lessons can we learn from them? Why do you think they are not more widely known?
4. What is the legacy you are trying to leave for those who come behind you?



RACE & POLITICS★ 08

"We have become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different dreams."

★ JIMMY CARTER ★

ONE OF THE FIRST SCENES we witness of the young men at Boys State, is centered around a debate over George Orwell and Aldous Huxley. Orwell feared governments that would withhold information from the people, and that the people would come to love their oppression. By contrast, Huxley feared those who would give us so much information that we would be reduced to passivity and egotism. This debate underscores the journey of these young men vying for power; some approaching the race with the honest idealism of their political

heroes, and others employing the shock and awe tactics of modern political strategy. As their counselor tells them at the beginning of the film, "who we elect matters, how we elect matters, and the most dangerous weapon as we fight for democracy is us being able to give a darn and fight for it." It is for these reasons that we must take a step back and look at the broader threads that run through *Boys State*, in particular, the ways that race and politics in the youth program act as a prism through which to view our modern political landscape.

The mostly homogeneous white conservative makeup of the program presents a sudden challenge to young men like Steven and René, who must learn how to navigate this unique environment and win the favor of their peers for their elections. To do so, they often deploy code switching—the process of shifting between different linguistic codes depending on

social context—in conversation to navigate the space and win the favor of their peers. We often witness code switching in politicians who have to maneuver in communities that vary in culture and, often, language. Inclusion requires a degree of sacrifice on their part. When Steven has to clarify and defend his position on a woman's right to choose or when René must continuously prove his competence in his position as chairman, it is evident that there are racial variables at play, including a lack of racial representation and inclusion that isolates and pressures the candidates of color.

Boys State, while obviously all male, is also largely white. We rarely see counselors of color (though there are several American Legion veterans seen who are Black) advising the young men. Perhaps unsurprisingly, outside of René and Steven, few men of color make it into the running for the larger offices the young men are pursuing. Of the six largest offices that were in contention in the film, all were won by white men.

This is reflective of the current situation in our national government which is overwhelmingly white and male. This correlation matters because the challenges facing minority candidates, both overt and nuanced, are laid bare in the film. The racial tensions that are danced around in the film offer a snapshot of the current climate. As Robert admits in an interview:

"People say things are so polarized now. We were just as polarized in the 1800s. But then we were debating slavery. Then there was the Civil War.... That's somewhat of a problem..."

"I am originally from Chicago, I was in a bubble, you know, everybody looked the same, everybody had the same ideas, everybody was mad at the same person. And then I moved out here and it just feels super isolating, at the same time, empowering... because it's like, I can be a delegate for Black people here."

★ RENÉ ★

"They want to impeach me, it's just a little different for somebody that looks like me. So I guess my way of doing it is just going to be palatable and congenial to what the body wants."

★ RENÉ ★

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

08

1. How do the racial identities and personal experiences of each of the boys (Steven, René, Robert, and Ben) influence how they develop their platforms, decide on issues, and incorporate beliefs into their candidate speeches?
2. In predominantly white spaces, people of color are more likely to be confronted with their racial identity and how others identify them as opposed to being in control of how they want to identify themselves. How does this play out in the film for René and Steven?
3. There are moments of overt racism against René in the film. How do we see racism used as a tactic in the film? How do we see racist campaign tactics deployed in our current American and global political moment?
4. Does racial identity factor into how you participate in politics? What political issues might compel different groups to engage differently in the democratic process?
5. How important is it that our elected officials reflect the racial demographics of the communities they represent? What is the benefit of having more diverse representation in our political leadership?
6. The citizenship process doesn't undo an individual's identity as an immigrant. How might immigration status impact engagement in the political process? What role might language barriers play? How can we improve the democratic process to be more inclusive of the immigrant experience?

GENDER, MASCULINITY, & IDENTITY★ 09



"Manliness consists not in bluff, bravado, or loneliness. It consists in daring to do the right, and facing consequences, whether it is in matters social, political or other. It consists in deeds not words."

★ MAHATMA GANDHI ★

EARLY ON, when the young men are declaring their candidacies, we hear from an especially vocal young man named Barrett who says, "I believe our society is stronger when everyone is disciplined yet dangerous. Our masculinity shall not be infringed. If you want the big guns, vote for Barrett." This view is so widely shared that he is met with rousing applause. As Robert explains:

"I took the view that if they were all being loud and crazy, that's what they wanted to be and if I played to that they'd love it. But thinking about it now, I think they actually, on the inside, wanted to be serious and I didn't think about that as a possibility."

While Boys State is all male, the film displays different styles of masculinity. For instance, when we later hear from Steven that not only did he organize a chapter of the March For Our Lives protests, but that he wants universal background checks because he has witnessed gun violence in his friend's and neighboring communities, we see a degree of empathy from the young men in the audience thanks to Steven's storytelling abilities and lived experiences. Steven is, paradoxically, inspired by both Bernie Sanders and Napoleon. To quote Steven:

"The best leaders lead from the front and with passion. Soldiers will not follow a general that does not care

about casualties and sends them in wave after wave not caring about loss of life. They care about people who inspire them, who motivate them, who care about them. That's who I wanted to be here at Boys State."

Boys State challenges viewers to think about how men interact with one another and how masculinity shapes those interactions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

09

1. There are many examples of masculinity being used to create bonds and agreement in each party. How do the young men (Steven, René, Robert, and Ben) use masculinity to create bonds with each other?
2. What role does masculinity play in the film and in our current political landscape?
3. How can young men be taught to be leaders without displays of toxic masculinity?
4. How does gender shape political views and the political process?

QUOTE-BASED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which quote below best describes the ideas embraced and espoused by each of the four subjects of the film?
2. Which of the quotes below would be included in a speech by each of the four subjects of the film and why?

"All government, indeed, every human benefit and enjoyment, every virtue, and every prudent act, is founded on compromise and barter."

★ **EDMUND BURKE** ★

"We are not afraid to entrust the American people with unpleasant facts, foreign ideas, alien philosophies, and competitive values. For a nation that is afraid to let its people judge the truth and falsehood in an open market is a nation that is afraid of its people."

★ **JOHN F. KENNEDY** ★

"The great social justice changes in our country have happened when people came together, organized, and took direct action. It is this right that sustains and nurtures our democracy today. The civil rights movement, the labor movement, the women's movement, and the equality movement for our LGBT brothers and sisters are all manifestations of these rights."

★ **DOLORES HUERTA** ★

"To conform to the principles, morals, and manners of our citizens to our republican forms of government, it is absolutely necessary that knowledge of every kind, should be disseminated through every part of the United States."

★ **BENJAMIN RUSH** ★

"Prejudice is a burden which confuses the past, threatens the future, and renders the present inaccessible."

★ **MAYA ANGELOU** ★

"[Political parties] are likely, in the course of time and things, to become potent engines, by which cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people and to usurp for themselves the reins of government, destroying afterwards the very engines which have lifted them to unjust dominion."

★ **GEORGE WASHINGTON** ★

"We have become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different dreams."

★ **JIMMY CARTER** ★

"Our children should learn the general framework of their government and then they should know where they come in contact with the government, where it touches their daily lives and where their influence is exerted on the government. It must not be a distant thing, someone else's business but they must see how every cog in the wheel of a democracy is important and bears its share of responsibility for the smooth running of the entire machine."

★ **ELEANOR ROOSEVELT** ★

"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

★ **JAMES BALDWIN** ★

"There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must take it because conscience tells him it is right."

★ **MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.** ★

"Surely anyone who has ever been elected to public office understands that one commodity above all others, namely the trust and confidence of the people, is fundamental in maintaining a free and open political system."

★ **HUBERT H. HUMPHREY** ★

"A change is brought about because ordinary people do extraordinary things."

★ **BARACK OBAMA** ★

"Words like 'freedom,' 'justice,' 'democracy' are not common concepts; on the contrary they are rare. People are not born knowing what these are. It takes enormous and, above all, individual effort to arrive at the respect for other people that these words imply."

★ **JAMES BALDWIN** ★

"We are bound by ideals that teach us what it means to be citizens. Every child must be taught these principles. Every citizen must uphold them. And every immigrant, by embracing these ideals, makes our country more, not less, American...I ask you to be citizens: citizens, not spectators; citizens, not subjects; responsible citizens, building communities of service and a nation of character."

★ **GEORGE W. BUSH** ★

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

★ **MARGARET MEAD** ★

INFO

American Legion

The American Legion was chartered and incorporated by Congress in 1919 as a patriotic veterans' organization devoted to mutual helpfulness. It is the nation's largest wartime veterans service organization, committed to mentoring youth and sponsorship of wholesome programs in our communities, advocating patriotism and honor, promoting strong national security, and continued devotion to our fellow service members and veterans.

Hundreds of local American Legion programs and activities strengthen the nation one community at a time. American Legion Baseball is one of the nation's most successful amateur athletic programs, educating young people about the importance of sportsmanship, citizenship and fitness. The Operation Comfort Warriors program supports recovering wounded warriors and their families, providing them with "comfort items" and the kind of support that makes a hospital feel a little bit more like home. The Legion also raises millions of dollars in donations at the local, state and national levels to help veterans and their families during times of need and to provide college scholarship opportunities.

The American Legion is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization with great political influence perpetuated by its grass-roots involvement in the legislation process from local districts to Capitol Hill. Legionnaires' sense of obligation to community, state and nation drives an honest advocacy for veterans in Washington. The Legion stands behind the issues most important to the nation's veterans community, backed by resolutions passed by volunteer leadership.

www.legion.org/mission

Boys State

American Legion Boys State is among the most respected and selective educational programs of government instruction for U.S. high school students. A participatory program in which students become part of the operation of local, county and state government, Boys State was founded in 1935 to counter the socialism-inspired Young Pioneer Camps. The program was the idea of two Illinois Legionnaires, Hayes Kennedy and Harold Card, who organized the first Boys State at the Illinois State Fairgrounds in Springfield.

American Legion Auxiliary sponsors a separate but similar program for young women called Girls State.

At Boys State, participants learn the rights, privileges and responsibilities of franchised citizens. The training is objective and centers on the structure of city, county and state governments. Operated by students elected to various offices, Boys State activities include legislative sessions, court proceedings, law-enforcement presentations, assemblies, bands, choruses and recreational programs.

Legion posts select high school juniors to attend the program. In most cases, individual expenses are paid by a sponsoring post, a local business or another community-based organization.

Boys State programs currently exist in all Legion departments in the United States except Hawaii. As separate corporations, Boys State programs vary in content and method of procedure, but each adheres to the same basic concept: teaching government from the township to the state level.

www.legion.org/boysnation/about

Girls State

The American Legion Auxiliary's marquee Girls State program, first presented in 1937, is one of the most respected and coveted experiential learning programs presented in the United States.

The program epitomizes the ALA's mission to honor those who have brought us our freedom through our enduring commitment to develop young women as future leaders grounded in patriotism and Americanism. The young women become knowledgeable of the democratic process and how our republic form of government works at the state and national levels.

Each summer, approximately 16,000 young women participate in weeklong ALA Girls State programs across the nation. Every American Legion Auxiliary Girls State program operates with the same patriotic values through a nonpartisan curriculum where students assume the roles of government leaders, campaigning in mock parties (often called "Federalists" and "Nationalists") to become mayors and county and state officials of their ALA Girls State. The program is a weeklong immersive learning experience, often held on a college campus where girls live in "cities" within a dormitory-like setting. The learning, experience, memories, and friendships last a lifetime.

www.alaforveterans.org/ala-girls-state/

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