



Letter to Fellows

On Solidarity

March 2025

Dear Rowland Fellows,

I hope this letter finds you and your family doing okay.

When the Trump administration betrayed Ukraine and turned on our NATO allies this past week, it signaled a radical departure that will surely hurt our country in the end. In the same way, the trade war that Trump has started against our neighbors and trading partners Canada and Mexico will prove to be self-defeating.

I never thought I would live to see such a weird turn of events in my country. It's certainly not the idea of the United States that I grew up with, and not the one I learned in school, for sure. So I've been wondering lately what we're supposed to say to our young people when they ask us if Canada is our friend, if the Europeans are our allies, or if Ukraine was the aggressor when it was invaded by Russia in 2014, and again in 2022.

Even without fancy historical comparisons, I think we can tell even our youngest students that, just like individual people, countries can choose to cooperate with each other, or to simply go it alone. The first approach is about **solidarity** and reciprocity, where countries treat each other with mutual respect and look to cooperate on areas of common interest. The second approach is a little like the schoolyard bully who threatens you and steals your lunch money. Over the past few centuries, we've learned that me-first, might-makes-right

foreign policy leads to a lot of fear, instability, and eventually, wars and genocidal colonisation.

So when our students and our children ask us about current events, and if *America First!* is a good idea, it's probably a good opportunity to explain that many Americans are proud of our country because we've tried (most of the time) to be a force for good in the world and to support democracy, not dictators. And when we've acted in solidarity with other countries to fight famine, disease, and natural disasters, it's helped us too. Similarly, our federal government brings help to individual states when they need help with flooding and fires, or even roads, bridges, and schools. We do the same thing in Vermont when we help out people in the next valley over, or when we help the less fortunate in our local communities. Those are all examples of solidarity, and when it happens, things feel a little less scary, and, well, a little more solid.

[The Vermont IRIS Standards](#) that were mandated by Act 1 of 2019 and published in 2023, emphasize the concept of *transformative solidarity*. In some ways, this is a very complex idea, but at its simplest, it basically means that all freedom struggles are connected, and that until we are all free, none of us is. I'll just say that again for emphasis—*until all of us are free, none of us is free*. I think our students can benefit from exploring this idea more deeply, and hopefully even practice it in school. It could be a good way to unlearn some limiting worldviews, from scarcity mentality to The Great Man Theory of History.

Only time will tell if the arc of history bends towards justice, or if democracy was just a short-lived break from several millennia of chiefs, warlords, kings, and emperors. In the meantime, I'm going to look for ways to fight for this democracy, in solidarity with my neighbors, colleagues, and fellow citizens.

Take care and see you soon,

Mike

P.S. [Please don't use this link!](#) With sadness and trepidation, **Kathy Cadwell (RF16)** shared this federal government form with me that I had to see to believe. It's a U.S. Department of Education online form inviting teachers, parents, students, and others to denounce teachers for "divisive ideologies and indoctrination" and "illegal discriminatory practices at institutions of learning" (i.e. "DEI"). I'm not old enough to have lived through McCarthyism or Stalinism, but when the government is asking the public to denounce teachers to the authorities, it's not a good sign.

P.P.S If you're concerned about a creeping fatalism about AI and are wondering, *where's our agency in all of this?*, [this recent episode of Baratunde Thurston's *Life with Machines*](#) is for you.

P.P.P.S. If you see "message clipped" at the bottom of this newsletter, please click through! Depending on how many photos we have, Gmail will sometimes truncate this newsletter.

Rowland Foundation Updates

The 14th Annual Rowland Conference

How to Citizen: Engaging Students in Democracy



Baratunde Thurston's [How to Citizen](#) framework invites us to rethink what citizenship should be in our day and age. A prolific writer, comedian, and podcaster, Baratunde is the author of the New York Times bestseller *How to Be Black* and the host of the podcast [Life with Machines](#), focused on the social impacts of AI. He previously wrote for The Daily Show and The Onion and hosted the PBS series [America Outdoors with Baratunde Thurston](#).

We are thrilled that Baratunde will be our keynote speaker for the **14th Annual Rowland Conference, Thursday, October 30, 2025**. Stay tuned for Super Early Bird pre-registration to open on April 4th for Rowland Foundation affiliates only.

In the meantime, feel free to propose a workshop and/or [share our call for proposals](#) with anyone you know who could provide a great conference workshop connecting to this year's theme.

Celebrations



Beverly McCarthy (RF24) & Melissa Bushey (RF24) recently visited the [Whitney Plantation](#) outside New Orleans, [The Legacy Museum](#): From Enslavement to Incarceration, and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery. They also spent three days learning to quilt in the Gee's Bend style with Loretta Pettway Bennett and Marlene Bennett Jones, both accomplished [Gee's Bend](#) quilters who share their stories through conversations and also visually in their quilts. Melissa's quilt is titled "Resilience" and Beverly's "Hope & Joy" (left).



As a Senior Associate at Great Schools Partnership, **Rowland Foundation Trustee Erica Wallstrom (RF14)** has been leading professional learning on restorative practices—where she recently ran into **Carrie Gilman (RF23)**, also a practitioner of RP, and also rocking her Rowland Foundation branded merchandise.

Gratitude



Jean Berthiaume (RF09) & Jeanie Phillips (RF14), seen here with Jeanie's husband Michael Eppolito, have been enjoying winter and joyfully making some fresh tracks.



Mike Martin (RF09) is grateful for the life of his great uncle Richard Hamilton who just passed away at the age of 102. While he was fighting fascism in Europe, Richard's B-17 Flying Fortress was shot down over Germany and he narrowly survived the ordeal. Raised by a single mom on a Marlboro farm in very humble conditions, Richard was loved and admired for his decency, hard work, and commitment to serving his local community.

Courtesy Posts



Great Schools Partnership is looking for equity-minded educators to join the **Integrated Curriculum workshop days on March 21st and May 9th**. Together we will develop curriculum that will meet the culturally responsive vision of the new Education Quality Standards. [Use this link to apply](#) today! If you have any questions, please direct them to **Emily Gilmore Hurwitz (RF17)**: egilmore@greatschoolspartnership.org