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An Embarrassing Second Amendment: A Proud Daughter Belatedly (1) Recognizes and (2) Celebrates Her Father's Influence on Her Life and Work.

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An Embarrassing Second Amendment: A Proud Daughter Belatedly (1) Recognizes and (2) Celebrates Her Father's Influence on Her Life and Work.

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I have been my father's unwitting—and often recalcitrant—student since the day I was born, I suppose, although I confess I can't remember that far back. Until the wonderfully moving lifetime achievement panel at APSA, I have been most aware of our intellectual divergences. His fascination with the constitution, for example, always perplexed me; why would one spend so much time studying a single, historically instantiated and deeply flawed document as opposed to engaging in normative theory to figure out what is truly right and just? I gladly studied philosophy in college and earned a doctorate in political theory, but I steadfastly refused to follow my father, sister, or many close friends to law school. I was far too impatient with the particularities of both legal and constitutional doctrine. No subjugation to the peccadilloes and idiocies of the Founders or legislators for me! Little did I realize, of course, how transparently my father must have influenced my supposedly independent views. I grew up skeptical of the constitution, the laws, and the courts not *despite* my father the law professor, but *because* of my father the political scientist, editor of *Constitutional Stupidities*, and future author of *Our Undemocratic Constitution*. So much for youthful rebellion.

In the same clueless spirit, I have also thought myself to be relatively indifferent to the practical implications for civic education of hard-wired structures of government or state constitutions, two of my father's more recent enthusiasms. I was a public school teacher for eight years, and I taught eighth grade civics in particular for two of those years. As a teacher of mostly low-income students of color growing up in politically and economically marginalized communities, I believed strongly that my responsibility as a civics teacher was to enable my students to seize and use political power. My goal was to empower young people by teaching them how to use civic and political levers to improve their lives and enact more just public policies. Because this kind of work is often intensely local and personal, I was skeptical about the value of teaching students the strengths and weaknesses of state and federal political structures. Given a short period of time with kids, I preferred to help them select a problem that matters to them and identify the public policy tools they may use to address their concern. I didn't want to take that time to explain why Montanans are outrageously over-represented in the Senate, say, or why and how the Constitution has been virtually amended hundreds of times despite its merely 27 official amendments.

Again, however, I was brought up short in listening to my father's friends and colleagues summarize and interpret his life's work during the APSA panel. I realized that I was hearing an account of a career that illuminates the importance of politics and in particular of power in areas that are not typically recognized to be avenues for (dis)empowerment. In illuminating how supposedly abstract and principled theories of interpretation are fundamentally political tools for reshaping government and hence people's lives, and similarly in illuminating how apparently neutral institutional structures profoundly shape who can access and use political power, my father has revealed the importance of politics and power in ways that I can only hope to emulate. His work reveals how theory has been used

to mask politics. It also uses theory to illuminate politics—and even to create a new kind of politics. My father’s work interweaves theoretical and political analyses of religion, interpretation, identity, deep structure, and memory, helping to create both new theories and new possibilities for political relationships and political action in the process. Although this has been embarrassingly unconscious thus far, I now realize that my own work both as a teacher and as a scholar of civic education is in many ways a pale model of his own, and at its best may constitute an attempt to extend his insights into the realm of K-12 schooling. I have had the niggling thought for the past couple of years that my father and I should try to coauthor a paper on what it would mean and look like to teach a middle or high school civics course that focused on comparative structures of government—i.e., that privileges neither constitutional nor bicameral democracy, and that focuses not only on international comparisons but yes, even on state comparisons. It may be time to convert this pesky intuition into a joint writing project.

Finally, I thought that I diverged from my father in being perennially unsure of the value of devoting one’s life to scholarship, at least if one is not John Rawls or John Stuart Mill. My father takes enormous pleasure in reading (ditto for me), writing (as painful and slow for me as it is flowing for him), schmoozing (lots of fun, I agree), and living in a world of ideas (such a self-indulgence that I find it morally suspect). For many years, I suspected it was impossible to live a life as an academic that was also fully attentive to the human condition. This partly accounts for my spending close to a decade as a public school teacher rather than as a professor. But again, I realize that I must credit him with providing a model that has helped draw me back into the academy, and that in particular demonstrates the potential for marrying a deeply intellectual and richly personal life in a way that enhances both enormously. I will be lucky indeed if 40 years from now, I have the range of friends, colleagues, collaborators, and intellectual thought-partners that my father has assembled and nurtured over the years. Thank you to the Law and Courts section for helping me to realize that in ways both intellectual and personal, I have been attempting to emulate my father, Sanford Levinson, for many years—and that nothing could make me prouder.