

Preserving Democracy Teaching Guide

Jen Giovannitti, President of the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation
Bridging the Divide Between Rural and Urban America

Interview Summary

One of our polarized country's most pronounced challenges is the growing divide between rural and urban America. It is a gap that includes significant variations in economic opportunities and what can be debilitating disparities in critical modern infrastructure, such as access to high-speed internet. It is a gap that also includes sometimes stark social and political differences. Understanding and effectively addressing this divide is essential for the wellbeing of our democracy.

Jen Giovannitti is the President of the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation, a place-based funder dedicated to rural communities. It generally invests two-thirds of its grant dollars in West Virginia and one-third in Southwestern Pennsylvania.

Prior to joining the Benedum Foundation, Ms. Giovannitti led community-based initiatives for the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, working both regionally and nationally on issues facing low-income communities and advancing strategies for community investment. Earlier in her career, she lived in West Virginia for 11 years and led a succession of important economic development initiatives.

Video Topics

- (7:23) Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation: History and Mission
- (10:28) Benefits of Living in Rural Areas
- (18:49) Overcoming the Challenges Faced by Rural Communities
- (28:54) Strategies to Support Rural Areas
- (34:16) Infrastructure Needs of WV and SWPA
- (41:22) Fostering Opportunities in Rural Areas
- (45:07) Bridging the Rural/Urban Divide
- (50:10) Providing Opportunities in Rural Communities

Potential Uses

- Post a Preserving Democracy series video on Canvas and ask students to respond to a discussion question about the video, as well as comment on 1-2 of their classmates' posts.
- Show a clip of the video during class to enrich learning, emphasize a point, and/or contextualize a topic.
- Create a resource folder on Canvas that includes Preserving Democracy series videos, accompanied by "learn and do more" documents, as well as other links to support student

growth related to current events.

- ❑ Incorporate a Preserving Democracy series video into pre-class readings for a live discussion using or adapting the questions below.

Suggested Written Reflection Questions

- ❑ Jen Giovannitti discussed some of the benefits of growing up and or living in rural areas. Where did you grow up? What are the benefits and limitations of your home community?
- ❑ What benefits do you think there are to living in rural America? How do you think community differs in rural and urban areas?
- ❑ What do you think Michael Benedum meant when he said there is a “competitive disadvantage for rural communities”?
- ❑ What did you find interesting in the interview? What is something that you disagreed with?

Suggested Classroom Discussion Questions

- ❑ How can we address bias and disparities in philanthropic dollars to bridge the wealth gap between rural and urban areas and enhance opportunities for rural communities?
- ❑ How can technology help and hinder the growth of rural America?
- ❑ The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the issue of broadband access in rural communities. What other disparities between rural and urban areas has the pandemic underscored and even exacerbated?

Related Reading

- ❑ Read the Center for American Progress’ reports, *The Path to Rural Resilience in America* and *Adversity and Assets: Identifying Rural Opportunities*.
- ❑ Visit the United States Census Bureau’s *interactive website* to learn about the definition of rural.
- ❑ Check out Brookings’ article *The ‘rural-urban divide’ furthers myths about race and poverty—concealing effective policy solutions*.
- ❑ Understand Biden’s *The American Jobs Plan*.
- ❑ Read the New York Time’s article *West Virginia Has Everyone’s Attention. What Does It Really Need?*

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