

PROFILES IN CITIZENSHIP: HOW TO KEEP THE REPUBLIC



© Melissa Ann Pinney

Nate Silver

Nate Silver is a very smart guy. The young statistician wasn't long out of college when he developed the PECOTA (Player Empirical Comparison and Optimization Test Algorithm) system—a model for predicting the performance of baseball players. By 2008 Silver had given up *Baseball Prospectus* and was concentrating his mathematical prowess on elections, making uncanny mathematically sound predictions about winners and losers on his blog, which he called fivethirtyeight.com (after the total number of votes in the Electoral College). We spoke with Silver in July 2010. Here's some of what he had to say.

On patriotism:

You probably have some family members who have their flaws and idiosyncrasies and probably a few distant relatives who are even fairly screwed-up people, but you still love them, anyway. I think that's what

patriotism is really, saying, "Look, this is where I was born, or I migrated to the United States, this is where my loyalty is. . . ." You don't have a choice, it doesn't matter how unhappy you are, you know? It's your family, and you are stuck with it.

On keeping the republic:

People just have to be willing to put in the work. It's a big, complicated world now, and as many people that there are, there are more things to be done. Don't underestimate your ability to come up with an idea that nobody else has. It happens all the time. Quit being a consumer and be a producer. Start your own blog, start your own political organization. Have fun with it—there is nothing wrong with that at all.