

PROFILES IN CITIZENSHIP: HOW TO KEEP THE REPUBLIC



MAXX/Landov

Bill Maher

Bill Maher has made a career out of mocking the emperor's anatomy, while most of us are still oohing and aahing over the splendor of his new clothes. As the controversial host of HBO's *Real Time With Bill Maher* (and before that, of Comedy Central's *Politically Incorrect*), Maher has not shied away from making statements that might shock or offend audiences. Usually the First Amendment saves his bacon. We spoke with Maher on May 9, 2005. Here's some of what he had to say.

On patriotism:

[I]t means being loyal to your country above other countries.

And I am. . . . [But] it has to be put in context and also it has to be put side by side with a greater humanity. . . . Americans who say, "This is the greatest country in the world," without having any clue what goes on in any other countries, are just pulling it out of nowhere. There are many things that I'm proud of in this country. I'm proud of how my parents and other people stopped fascism and communism. I'm certainly proud of what we started in 1776. It was a new dawn of freedom and liberty in the world. But I'm not proud of slavery. I'm not proud of the genocide of the Indians. I'm not proud of much of what goes on today. So I still believe in the promise of America, but most of America looks at itself through rose-colored glasses. And that's not healthy.

On keeping the republic:

Take it upon [yourself] to learn the basics. . . . [K]ids need . . . to learn history. Because kids say to me all the time when I say something from history: "How should I know about that? I wasn't born." Oh, really? So nothing happened before you were born? . . . Kids need to learn history so they can put themselves in the proper place, which is of great insignificance. . . . The problem with kids today is not too little self-esteem, it's too much. And history, I think, learning a big picture, is very important in that.