

1st Place

11th – 12th Grade

22nd Annual Student Essay Contest | Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum

The Importance of Nonviolence

America is not a nonviolent democratic society. While there are relatively peaceful periods, political violence appears quite often in many different forms. Frankly, a completely nonviolent democratic society will be almost completely impossible to achieve. There will always be groups who will be aggressive. The most we can do is work to lessen the violence into a place where it is very rare and mild. The first step we should take to move in this direction is to understand why this peacefulness is desirable.

So, why is a nonviolent democratic society important? Well, the benefits that come with this type of society are immense. One is that everyone will be able to express themselves without fearing harm for doing so. Obviously, there should be repercussions for some viewpoints, but we should never resort to violence because it will typically just cause people to become further set in their ways. By having no violence, many people will not be thrown into the cycle of hate that often leads to polarization and deeply biased viewpoints. This will hopefully lead to the creation of more moderate policies which are accepted by a larger number of people and do a better job of including the wants and needs of everyone.

Of course, a nonviolent society will be a struggle to maintain, but our current society is only becoming more polarized and violent. This is expedited by the use of violent language which is so common today. The language used by our politicians, media, and influencers causes radicalism and division which leads to violence. By using strategies such as “Us vs. Them” among other violent rhetoric, a person may have some personal gain and increased influence, but in the end, only hurts the well-being of America as a whole. Another challenge that America faces is small sects of larger groups carrying out violence. This happens on both sides of the political spectrum. One example is the BLM riots that occurred. While many BLM protests were very peaceful demonstrations, a right necessary for democracy, there were a few times when smaller groups caused mayhem and large amounts of damage. This caused hate from those opposed to the movement and worked to discredit its message. From the other side of the political aisle, the clearest example would be the events of January 6th, 2021. While a majority of Trump supporters are not violent, it only takes a small group of a few thousand to storm the Capitol. These actions caused hate toward Trump supporters and caused a loss of trust among the other American people. Both of these occurred because of mistrust in the government. During the BLM riots,

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people saw the judiciary system as corrupt. On Jan 6th, Republicans saw the election system as corrupt in favor of the Democrats. Mistrust in the government can easily turn to violence.

So how does America solve these problems? We need to use more pacifistic language. There also needs to be a movement from every side that encourages unity for the betterment of America as a whole. Something else that would help would be looking at political debate in a new light, trying to understand other people and create the best viewpoint possible instead of just trying to win arguments. In regards to large groups with small violent cells, the bigger majority must ostracize the violent ones and quickly separate themselves before they can gain power. An increase in transparency from the government would also be a step in the right direction.

Truthfully, I do not see the task of creating a more peaceful America as being an easy one. Sadly, we are extremely split and divided by political beliefs, race, gender, etc. America is currently in a very polarized state and only seems to be becoming more so. Even after acknowledging this, it does not mean we should give up hope for ever accomplishing nonviolence. Sure, it may take immense amounts of effort from everyone, but the result will be extremely beneficial to the success of America. As Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." Whatever we do, we must do with love. Love for our country, love for our fellow citizens, love for the society we enjoy. Only then will we conquer our challenges.