

2nd Place

11th – 12th Grade

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

A Non-Violent, Democratic America: A Desirable but Arduous Trek

A non-violent, democratic society is a society that we Americans should strive to achieve. In an ideal non-violent, democratic society, I can walk outside without the fear that I will be violently attacked for any reason, especially for being Asian-American. In an ideal non-violent, democratic society, I can speak my beliefs without fear of suppression. In an ideal non-violent, democratic society, everyone, regardless of race or belief, can live in harmony and not fear violent repercussions over disagreements.

Unfortunately, this perfect idea of a nonviolent, democratic America is seemingly impossible to achieve. The current political state of America is extremely polarized; day by day, people are becoming more attached to their beliefs. A main cause of this phenomenon has been media output in the past years. With the rise of platforms like TikTok and Instagram, many people, including politicians, have large platforms that have a sizable influence on citizens. While these platforms can be used for educational and entertainment purposes, political propaganda and misinformation can be and has been spread, which can result in a growing hatred towards specific people or political groups that may be based on exaggerated or false information. An example of propaganda spread was the labeling of COVID-19 as the “Chinese Virus.” This label resulted in hate crimes against not only Chinese citizens, but against other Asian-American groups as well. The violence against Asian-Americans reached an all-time high amidst COVID-19, resulting in movements such as “Stop Asian Hate” in response to the unjust violence against innocent people.

Similarly, social media has also been a factor in the growing distrust of the federal government. As Nicole Hemmer stated, “there’s so much rhetoric about the federal government being out to get you.” Ever since Richard Nixon’s Watergate scandal, distrust of the federal government has been a common motif in the American political atmosphere. However, social media has caused this distrust to balloon exponentially. A prime example of this is the misinformation spread around COVID-19. When the vaccine was initially distributed, a rumor that the federal government was implementing tracking chips into the vaccines was spread on social media. Despite the fact that this was proven to be false, many citizens believed this rumor and chose to refuse the vaccine and distrust the government over a false claim.

With a greater distrust of the government and a greater trust in social media, it has become irrelevant as to which party takes the White House or Congress. There will always be extremists and

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influencers who seek to portray the opposite ideology in the most false, dehumanizing ways possible, which has been and will continue to be one of the bases for violence in the United States.

Despite the inevitable extremist ideology on the ends of the political spectrum, there is hope for America. America is built on the foundation of diversity, and understanding differences is the first step in creating a non-violent, democratic society. In history, steps have been taken to reach such a state; figures who have peacefully fought for this include Martin Luther King Jr. and Ida B. Wells. There will never be a world where everyone agrees on everything, but advocating for and personally incorporating mature, non-violent ways of disagreeing (such as respectful debates and arguments) is something that everyone can do. Additionally, it is important to check claims made on the news, as misinformation exists. With great power comes great responsibility, and with free speech comes the need for conducting research and fact checking claims made. While a perfect non-violent society is impossible, we can take these small steps to ensure a healthier and safer society for future generations to come.