

3rd Place

11th – 12th Grade

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

A Fearless Generation

In today's political climate, the threat of domestic terrorism and violence is a major concern. As noted by historian Nicole Hemmer, violent rhetoric and anti-government sentiment can fuel a politics of violence, leading to acts of terror and violence. This reality hit close to home for me when a close friend experienced a school shooting at Michigan State. She described the horror of being barricaded in a dorm room for four hours, shaking, crying, and praying for her safety. It is clear that we need to build a consensus for a non-violent, democratic society.

The benefits of such a society are clear. A non-violent society ensures safety and security for all citizens, creating an environment where individuals can pursue their goals and aspirations without fear of harm. A democratic society ensures that all voices are heard and considered, leading to policies that are inclusive and representative of the people's needs and desires. It also promotes accountability, transparency, and respect for the rule of law, ensuring that individuals are not above the law and that justice is served impartially.

However, building such a society is not without its challenges. As Hemmer points out, there is a lack of consensus on fundamental issues such as democracy, opposition to extremism, and fascism. To overcome these challenges, we need to start by making a case for why we want these things. We need to educate and inform individuals about the benefits of a non-violent, democratic society and why it is worth fighting for.

Moreover, we need to actively combat the sources of violent rhetoric and extremist ideologies. This requires a multi-pronged approach, including education, media literacy, and community engagement. It also requires the participation of civil society in defending our institutions and the rule of law. We need to come together as a society to denounce violence and extremism and promote values that unite us as a community.

In addition, we need to address the root causes of violence and extremism. This includes addressing social and economic inequalities, investing in education and job training, and promoting social inclusion. By addressing the underlying causes of violence, we can prevent it from taking root and spreading in our communities.

Finally, building a non-violent, democratic society is a generational project that requires sustained effort and commitment. We need to invest in the next generation and equip them with the

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skills and knowledge to build a better future. We need to inspire them to be active citizens who engage in their communities and defend the values that make our society great.

In conclusion, the challenges to building a non-violent, democratic society are significant, but they are not insurmountable. We need to start by making a case for why we want these things, actively combating the sources of violent rhetoric and extremist ideologies, addressing the root causes of violence, and investing in the next generation. The next generation should not live in fear. It is up to us to create a safer, more inclusive, and more just society for all.