

Honorable Mention

11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> Grade

22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Student Essay Contest | Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum

### Building a Just Society: The Path to Nonviolence and Democracy

A non-violent, democratic society has become a beacon of hope in a world marred by conflict and oppression. It is a place where citizens can freely express their opinions and ideas, without fear of reprisal or violence. It is a society built upon the foundation of democracy, where the rule of law reigns supreme, individual rights are protected, and conflicts are resolved peacefully.

History has shown us that the struggle for a non-violent, democratic society has been a constant battle throughout the ages. From ancient civilizations to modern times, societies have grappled with the question of creating a just and peaceful society where all citizens are treated with dignity and respect. The benefits of such a society are numerous and undeniable. When individuals are free to express themselves, new ideas and innovation flourish, leading to progress and development. Democracy ensures that the will of the people is upheld and that the government is held accountable. A society where the rule of law prevails, offers stability and security, creating a peaceful environment where citizens can live and work without fear.

Yet, in recent times, the ideals of nonviolence and democracy have come under threat. The Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 – carried out by terrorists of our land – serves as a stark reminder of the devastating consequences of extremism and the erosion of trust in government and institutions. Extremism and domestic terrorism have reared their ugly heads, poisoning the minds of some with hateful rhetoric, painting the government as the enemy, and eroding trust in our institutions and the rule of law. And, alarmingly, some question the very values that underpin our society.

To counter these challenges, we must come together as a society and defend the principles of nonviolence and democracy. We must build a consensus around these ideals, educating ourselves and others about the importance of these values and their benefits. We must also take a strong stance against extremism and violence, using the full force of the law to stamp out these plagues.

However, simply reacting is not enough. We must also proactively work to create a society of the means that we find so important. This means addressing the underlying social, economic, and political factors fueling extremism and violence. It means investing in education, providing opportunities, and reducing poverty and inequality. It also means fostering a sense of community and belonging, creating a society where individuals feel connected and valued.

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The path to a non-violent, democratic society is not an easy one. It requires a deep commitment to these ideals and a willingness to work together, despite our differences. It requires us to be vigilant, courageous, and to be hopeful. In a non-violent, democratic society, we can truly thrive and our collective future can be one of peace and prosperity.

As we embark on this journey, let us be guided by the words of Hemmer, "The prognosis is grim. But you're right about that as a starting point." It's important to note that this is a long-term project, that requires perseverance and dedication. It may take time, but with a commitment to these ideals and a willingness to work together, we can create the society that we all desire. A society where every individual is free to live and express themselves without fear, where conflicts are resolved peacefully, where democracy is upheld and where the rule of law prevails.