

3<sup>rd</sup> Place

9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> Grade

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

### Democratic Change

One of the most constantly occurring phenomena in the world is change. Change happens whether you want it to or not, for better or for worse. However, with a democracy that encourages non-violence, change can remain largely positive, as something we can all look forward to. Democracy is a societal structure that provides safety, freedom, and meaningful representation for all its citizens. Non-violence in such a society, or any society in fact, is crucial to the progression of ideas and expression. When people feel safe and unthreatened, they are more likely to contribute their ideas and opinions. Expression by individuals of different cultures allows for diversity, and in turn, by encouraging diversity, a more creative civilization is born. In this way, all people, regardless of gender, religion, or caste, can strive for positive change in a society that recognizes the inherent value of each of its citizens.

Though there are so many benefits to a non-violent democratic society, there are just as many obstacles in the way. One of the biggest challenges we face is discrimination embedded in the very foundations of our society. Systemic inequality and prejudice manifest through the suppression of certain views or identities, an unwillingness to listen or consider opposing points of view. These closed minded-attitudes are revealed by Nicole Hammer in an excerpt from the Washington Post: “You are going to be a political prisoner. You’re going to be silenced. You’re going to be jailed.” When the same people get told this over, and over, and over again, simply for trying to contribute to the same society that they live in, frustration and anger is stored and bottled up. These pent-up emotions are often released in dangerous demonstrations of physical violence, ones like Oklahoma City, a devastating bombing which killed 168 innocent people. Of course, no one wishes for these things to happen. But not wanting is not enough. By being passive in trying to suppress acts of terrorism, we are setting ourselves up for “another Oklahoma City,” as Hammer bluntly asserts.

Tackling such a widespread obstacle as ingrained prejudice requires an active movement for reform. To combat these issues, it is essential to create inclusive spaces where different perspectives can be discussed without judgment. For example, in public areas like schools, we can establish discussion centers regarding societal improvement. These concepts that are brought up can then be used to better schools and other societal institutions. By fostering a sense of community and making everyone feel heard, society will have taken the first step to achieving a non-violent democracy.

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The path to creating a safe democracy for everyone is not one that is paved and direct. It may be a twisted road with rocks and tree branches at every step. But even so, we must push forward in the struggle for advancement as a society. As a team, we can work together to create a world that invites the voice of all its citizens to inspire democratic change in the best way they can.