

DEMOCRACY UNDER SIEGE

JOHN F. TINKER FOUNDATION ESSAY CONTEST

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“Democracy is the government of the people, by the people, for the people.” This quote was made by President Abraham Lincoln during the Gettysburg Address on November 19, 1863. During one of America’s darkest hours, President Lincoln sought the importance of democracy as a tool to bring people together as this domestic dispute raged on between the north and south. Through the forefront of the Civil War, World Wars, and Civil Rights movements, America’s democracy has held firm and changed for the better. However, as of recently there have been threats made from within that have put American democracy on the brink of collapse. How do we as a nation come together and understand the vital importance of government for the people? In order to understand why this is so important and how we can save democracy, we must examine how democracy was introduced, what the alternative is to democracy, and how we can save democracy for future generations.

In 1788, once the United States won its independence from Great Britain in the American Revolution, the constitution established a Federal democratic republic (Stromberg, 2011). It is democratic because the people govern themselves and it is a republic because people decide the government’s power through elections. From this point on, elections were decided by the American people and gave people a voice. However, American democracy wasn’t always perfect. Women weren’t allowed to vote until 1920 with the passing of the 19th amendment and black people weren't officially given the right to vote until 1965 with the passing of the voting rights act (National Archives, 2022). We understand how democracy was introduced, but now we need to understand the alternative to democracy and why this alternative is dangerous.

Over a year ago, American democracy was brought to its knees. A mob of angry rioters stormed the United States Capital in an effort to stop the counting of electoral votes for President Elect Joe Biden. After three long hours, the capital was secured and congress finished and certified the election for Joe Biden. However, the significance of this moment was severe. This was the first time in American history that the United States did not have a peaceful transferral of power. As Americans, we have been taught for years that authoritarianism was a thing of the past, however, democracy is fragile and costly. For hundreds of years now, America has fought the good fight and been a beacon for democracy around the

world. The real question is, how do we solve this and how do we protect democracy now and in the future?

When looking at the future of American democracy and the republic itself, the situation looks grim. However, there is hope in what we; as American citizens can do. It is important not to stay silent. The form of peaceful protest can go a long way in ensuring that yourself and other people's vote matters. Next, it is important to stay connected at the local level. Whether it's just talking to your family or talking in a group of people, staying connected with others is crucial in helping to ensure democracy stays strong. Listening to one another is important as well. Despite your political beliefs it is important to listen to people on other sides of the aisle and disagree. Hurling insults or denying anything being brought forth isn't constructive and just causes more divide. That's why it's so important to have constructive criticism between one another. And lastly it is very important to speak to others about the importance of who they elect.

Whoever reads this might have a different viewpoint than I do. However, I did not write this essay just to appease one side. I wrote this to engage with people on both sides and especially people who might have disagreed with this in the past. The importance of protecting American democracy is massive. It is so very important that future generations live in a society that is free and fair. Truth matters. It is important that Americans believe in truth over lies and love over hate in the years to come.