

JUNTO

What is the role of
the community?

What is the role of
the entrepreneur?

What is the role of
the government?

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN
YOUNG LEADERS

BILL OF RIGHTS
INSTITUTE

July 2024



In 1727, Benjamin Franklin gathered a group of friends to form a club of mutual improvement entitled “Junto.” The name is derived from the Spanish to Join, as the forum united a group of intellectually and professionally diverse individuals to discuss “Morals, Politics, or Natural Philosophy.” The friends met at a local tavern on Friday nights, later compiling their respective book collections to form one of the colonies’ first lending libraries. Franklin was 21 at the club’s formation.





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NOTE FROM US



Welcome to our zine, a collaborative effort born from the Bill of Rights Institute Student Fellowship. Within these pages, you'll find a mosaic of voices from young minds grappling with the complexities of our society and political landscape.

Our mission is twofold: to foster nuanced civil dialogue that embraces diverse perspectives, and to provide a platform for outspoken youth in politics. From niche policy issues to philosophical dilemmas in political theory, our contributors have poured their thoughts, creativity, and passion into pieces that challenge, inform, and inspire.

As you flip through these pages, you'll encounter reflections on civic engagement, explorations of public health concerns, and commentary on the impact of our increasingly digital world. We invite you to engage deeply with these ideas, whether you find yourself nodding in agreement or questioning assumptions.

To our contributors: your willingness to tackle difficult subjects and share your unique perspectives has made this project what it is. Thank you for your dedication to fostering meaningful dialogue.

We hope this zine serves as a catalyst for conversation and reflection, reminding us all that change often begins with awareness and open discussion. As young leaders, we believe in the power of civic education and engagement to shape a better future.

Happy reading,

THE ZINE TEAM

INTRO

BY HARRY DING

Civic engagement is the lifeblood of our democracy. Without passionate activists, responsible citizens, and engaged members in our nation, progress grinds to a halt. In the dynamic state of our union with several stakeholders in our society, issue advocacy centered around a key policy is a vital tool to call for change. It empowers us to actively contribute to the collaborative decision-making process of governance and bring attention to critical societal issues. It bridges the oftentimes daunting gap between the public and policymakers, promoting transparency. It ensures that the diverse voices that define America are heard, fulfilling our founding fathers' constitutional promise to construct a nation ruled "of the people, by the people." As a result, when we form coalitions and mobilize communities to act on a specific issue, we demonstrate leadership in a free society, fostering a culture of citizenship.

Driving while under the influence is one of the nation's most prevalent causes of death. Annually, over 11,000 people die in drunk-driving crashes, translating to one crash every 39 minutes. It disproportionately impacts younger generations – in 2021, age groups ranging from 21–24 and 25–34 had the highest percentages of alcohol-impaired drivers involved in fatal crashes, at 27% each. And in young drivers, ranging from just 15–20, 17% of those who died in car accidents had elevated blood alcohol concentrations. The impact extends beyond just the loss of life, with many people involved suffering serious injuries that result in long-term physical and emotional trauma and economic costs due to expenses related to medical care, legal proceedings, and lost productivity. Despite stringent laws and widespread campaigns against, the persistence of driving under the influence highlights the need for continued advocacy for preventative policies and programs.

The following artworks are reflections into the impacts of driving under the influence, as well as statement pieces for outreach and awareness. Narratives that cause us to pay attention – that resonate with our own stories and emotions – are the same ones that compel us to act. By portraying the dangers of driving under the influence, we conjure a vision where strategic policies can prevent these scenarios. We offer these works to shape the narrative around drug prevention policies, underscoring the importance of active engagement in the issues that threaten our generation. Art is activism – and, in our free society, activism is power.

DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE: A CRITICAL ISSUE



BY AISIRI PRASAD
U DRINK, U DRIVE, U LOSE.





Driving under the influence of substances that impair cognitive and motor functions is a major public safety issue in the US. While alcohol's impact is well-known, marijuana's effects on driving are equally concerning. As marijuana becomes more widely accepted, understanding its dangers, particularly its hallucinogenic effects, is crucial for road safety.

THC, marijuana's active compound, impairs reaction times, decision-making, and coordination—essential for safe driving. High doses can cause hallucinations, leading to drivers perceiving nonexistent obstacles and making risky maneuvers. These altered perceptions and disorientation significantly increase the risk of accidents.

In my artwork, I aim to depict the contrast between life before and after using marijuana, highlighting the hallucinations that may occur. On the left, I illustrate a person in a state of normalcy, while on the right, I show the same person experiencing hallucinations, symbolized by marijuana leaves, mushrooms, and the vibrant colors often associated with hallucinations in our generation.



BY MAYA DOMBROSKIE
UNBOTTLED

You may be familiar with the Snickers slogan, “You’re not you while you’re hungry.” The catchy campaign reminds consumers to stay well fed to avoid hangry outbursts. Well, if being hungry leads to anger, being high leads to death. 31% of drivers involved in fatal car accidents were driving under the influence of marijuana or other toxins. So before you get behind a wheel while impaired by marijuana or any dangerous substance, please remember, “You’re not you while you’re high.”

JAMES CONSTAN



The use of recreational marijuana has many side effects, including difficulty thinking, problem-solving, and understanding. In addition, it causes a delayed reaction time, a loss of visual perceptual skills, hallucinations, and decreased coordination. Choosing to drive while impaired becomes incredibly dangerous as a result of these side effects. My piece illustrates the confusion and hallucinations that an impaired driver may face and the threat this poses to road safety.

BY JEANNA SMATHERS
ALL SIGNS SAY NO!

EDUCATION AND LITERACY: FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIETY



MYTH OF THE GOLDEN TICKET

"Myth of The Golden Ticket" challenges our perceptions of education as a universal key to success. Is education truly the guaranteed path to prosperity it's often portrayed to be, or are there complexities and barriers we must acknowledge in our pursuit of knowledge and opportunity? This piece invites us to reflect on the realities of educational access and the true nature of the American Dream in today's society.

BY NAOMI OBASA





Education: Literacy in America

BY DYLAN CLARKE

“Education is a better safeguard of liberty than a standing army.”

-Edward Everett

Today in the United States, over 130,000,000 adults read below a sixth-grade level, according to the World Literacy Foundation. That statistic, in addition to the fact that 36 million adults lack the necessary literacy skills to sustain employment and 70% of low-income children cannot read at a basic level, shows that literacy has become a major issue for our society, ranging from our children to our workforce. While programs and funding are in place to improve the state of literacy education, they currently lack the depth and focus needed to resolve this issue. More funding and increased individual attention are needed to improve literacy education and programs in public schools so that children can have the resources needed to succeed in the future.

For literacy to no longer be a necessary policy focus of our government, there needs to be evidence that more people of all ages are learning how to read, in addition to strengthened comprehension and writing skills. If these measures are increased, a more enhanced society that can communicate effectively will be created. As of today, there are still up to half of adults in the United States who cannot read at a high enough level to maintain employment. Without half of the potential workforce being able to work, there are great benefits including career and income growth that are being lost out on. In addition, with strong literacy skills, people are better able to follow directions and be more effective workers. Aside from career benefits, health outcomes, enhanced civic participation, increased innovation, and a reduction of poverty can all result from the programs that increase and maintain literacy for all ages.

There are roles that both society and the government can play in rectifying this issue. As a society, we can encourage reading daily from an early age. Even a time as small as ten minutes a day can improve literacy and allow children to develop their literacy skills and learn how to read. Parents can also make a habit of taking their children to the local public library and pick out a book that they enjoy. All too often, children are required to read books for school and they don't take the time needed to find books to read for leisure, and local libraries frequently have enjoyable events going on that entertain them while being educated. The government can provide funds specifically to education programs and states can provide detailed ways for states to utilize the funding that they receive. Improving this issue takes a team effort by both the government and society, and if both entities work together, many good things will happen.



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Even though solutions are being tried today, they lack the depth and sustained focus to be successful in the long run. There have been efforts to allot more money to improve adult education, which has failed because they solely throw money at the problem without having a framework to solve the problem. Developmentally, when the money is given to education programs and public schools, the teachers lack the proper education and training to effectively teach people how to read. Literacy is vital to our nation because of the improved comprehension skills, critical thinking development, vocabulary and grammar expansion, participation in discussions, and access to global information it provides.



THE NEED FOR CIVICS



BY LILLY VALLADARES-MACIAS

As society continues to innovate technologically the need for a society that is both engaged and educated civically is absolutely imperative. When I say educated civically, I mean citizens who have the ethics, critical thinking skills, and historical knowledge to participate meaningfully in civic life and make informed decisions that create a more just society. Not only do our current and future generations need to be prepared to both face the technical battles that will come with the new technology of our future, but to also understand the ethics behind them and how to make conscious and educated decisions when interacting with tech. Civics education has and will continue to be vital in ensuring the preservation of American culture and values as we progress as a society both technologically and socially. While civics education is absolutely necessary, it often falls short in both accessibility of education and in educating people on vital parts of our history, particularly as it pertains to minorities and people of color.

Civics education exposes people to different mindsets and perspectives from their own and prepares us to live and engage in a society that is a diverse blend of many views and cultures. Civics education also helps fight against systematic inequalities and injustices. Even still, there are inadequacies in the accessibility and quality of civics education. Not only are low-income students of color 4-6 times less likely to achieve proficiency on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in civics, but they are less likely to have access to adequate civics education in the first place. Without access to a quality education and accurate understanding of their rights, marginalized communities cannot fully fight against injustice and the systems fighting against them. Civics education is vital in the fight for justice. Without being properly educated on our history, rights, ethics, and morals, how can we truly engage civically in our society? At a time when funding for civics education is being drastically cut, our students need civics education now more than ever.



With the push for STEM in schools, what happens to our civics and humanities programs? Can we not have students strongly educated in both the sciences, and civics? Why must we prioritize one over the other? Schools are often faced with difficult budget cuts, and when it comes down to it schools are going to choose STEM over the arts and humanities, civics education included, and why wouldn't they, with all of the pressures from school boards and committees to produce prepared students for an AI world.

The need for quality civics education that is accessible to all is clear. Our society cannot properly progress without citizens who are engaged, ethical, and informed. Civics education plays a vital role in fighting injustice, preparing students to make moral decisions, and creating involved citizens.



In an age where funding for civics programs is declining, we must unite to prioritize and revitalize civics education. The sciences and humanities should not be pitted against each other; our students deserve a well-rounded education that prepares them for civic life as much as professional life. Access to civics education can help break cycles of inequality. Let us come together to ensure all students, regardless of background, have access to civics programs that accurately portray our nation's diverse history and systems. With quality civics education, we can work towards a more just society where all backgrounds are represented and all voices are heard. So I urge you — do not let civics education fall by the wayside. Join me in advocating for civics programs that empower all students to shape a better future.



*A proposal to
elevate education
for the digital age*

Cultivating *Kentucky*

BY ARIEL FADER





Connectivity today has reached an unprecedented high. 95% of Kentucky students have internet access at home, meaning technology is more accessible than ever (“Technology Use, Availability Continues to Rise in Kentucky Schools, according to New KDE Report”). During the pandemic, students were exposed to the Internet out of necessity and without proper preparation. Recent innovations render even those with prior training vulnerable to virtual bots and mining AI. With advancements being made each day, it’s crucial that our youth are prepared to safely and effectively navigate the ever-expanding digital world. We can ensure this through updating curriculums, creating consistent requirements, and sharing professional opportunities.

First, this bill would update digital literacy curriculums to cover recent advances in large language models. Students must understand the implications of using these platforms as a quick fix. With 48% admitting to relying on ChatGPT on assessments and 53% using it for essays, it’s clear that many aren’t aware of how learning and privacy is compromised (Westfall). Much of what is generated isn’t accurate as a study investigating the frequency of LLM “hallucinations” found that out of 178 references cited in a query, 69 lacked DOI verification and 28 didn’t exist (Emsley).

Additionally, LLMs can omit or add details to skew opinions, especially regarding politics, which reaffirms biases and is particularly harmful for youth (Baum and Villasenor). Moreover, ChatGPT tracks cookies, stores browsing activity data from other websites, and uploads without needing consent (Burgess). To maintain academic integrity and avoid privacy invasions, students must be taught the consequences before engaging.

Next, this bill would establish consistent classes. Many Kentucky students can go their entire high school career without taking a single technology class. Take Boone County, where eighth-graders can take a digital literacy class to fulfill their high school CTE credit (Kentucky School Report Card). Although providing flexibility for different students’ needs is important, it’s more important to ensure they learn necessary skills. This bill requires students to take at least one technology class in elementary, middle, and high school. By increasing frequency, students can consistently develop skills that are important to properly using technology in their personal lives and in professional settings.

Schools ought to prepare students for future opportunities which prompts the need for more career exploration in curriculums. With more cross-

career exploration in curriculums. With more cross-applications between technology and other sectors, technical knowledge is invaluable - especially for opportunities in Kentucky like AppHarvest which harnesses AI for sustainable farming. Yet, more technology talent is needed with 28,104 technology job postings in 2020 and only 637 computer science degrees awarded in 2019 (Hawke). Consistent STEM education is key to growing local talent to fill the deficit (Vahidy). This bill would require schools to cover technology career opportunities, as current academic standards only cover learning and application ("Kentucky Academic Standards for Technology Kindergarten through Grade 12"). To develop more innovative systems in-state, technology education must be highlighted.

Technological innovation doesn't wait. This bill would empower Kentucky's youth to control their online presence by understanding advancements, strengthening learning, and broadening paths. It's essential to support exploration while also increasing awareness of usage implications to effectively protect youth. The number of children in Kentucky going online is only growing; it is time to take action now.



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**“Technical knowledge
is invaluable.”**



**“Technological innovation
doesn't wait.”**

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DEMOCRACY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

*a self-debating anthology of essays addressing
democracy and its nuances*

Democracy:

A PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

BY ESHAAM BHATTAD

“...A NATION-STATE'S MAIN POSITION OF POWER SHOULD BE ENABLING THE RIGHTS AND ABILITIES OF ITS PEOPLE, PROMOTING EQUALITY AND EGALITARIANISM TO THE BEST OF THEIR ABILITIES.”

For hundreds of contemporaries throughout history, egalitarian philosophy has been a sought-after model for the government but an unattainable model based on the rationality of human behavior. But throughout hundreds of systems of order, democracy driven under a state-based leadership, in theory, has effectively promoted the main ideals of an equal process and, in reality, has become a world-class model to follow to achieve those main points of egalitarianism. But the acceleration within the rationale of the government being a hidden figure or an authoritarian presence within the modern world has exacerbated events of human rights abuses and promoted injustice against humanity. Instead, the state's role under a democratic process should be to distance itself from another form of control, specifically oligarchical or authoritarian rules, even promoting a weakened version of socialism, which supports political power in the hands of the people, as opposed to royalty or irrational actors. Ultimately, a nation-state's main position of power should be enabling the rights and abilities of its people, promoting equality and egalitarianism to the best of their abilities. This is to state that capitalist ideas should be recognized as not advantageous to providing true equality under a state's role. It is understandable if it disables other franchises, such as an authoritarian rule. However, under capitalist ideals, the creation of wealth distinctions becomes profoundly existent, which undermines the ultimate role of the state in promoting complete equality and eliminating barriers to entry for the people under its domain.





Sincerely, the mark of a state's role under democracy rests under the central question of what the rights of an individual are under the rule and what the state can do not to bolster its own power but to promote its people. John Locke argues that when a person consents to creating a political society, they necessarily agree to the use of majority rule in deciding how the political society will be organized. This majority opinion, however, should not impede on the self-autonomy championed by Western ethical contemporaries (Locke, Kant, Gerald Dworkin, John Stuart Mill). Immanuel Kant famously claimed that to be autonomous, an agent must be governed by her noumenal self, that is, the self as it is conceived as a member of the transcendent realm of pure reason, and not the self as a member of the phenomenal realm, in which it is subjected to external causes according to Kant's dualist metaphysics. The realm of pure reason in the case of citizenship, in conjunction with state control, is the ability to rationally control the majority's wishes without impeding the autonomy and self-control of the minority. But the contrast is the phenomenal realm, which Locke characterizes as the complete assurance of destroying a functioning society, clouding logistical consistent ideology with emotional, irrational conclusions. Further,

democratic rule must continue to promote the interest of the good, promoting the shared equality of rights, privileges and power to the citizens of the society, without promoting classism, racism, or wealth inequality. As further continued by Kant, these arise when irrational actors are introduced to the equation of purely logical circumstance, clouding a state's ability to govern and creating an unequal power distribution purely based on foolish sentimentality.

But quintessentially, there's the responsibility of the state to preserve the rights and liberties of the citizens, or else it would violate personhood as a whole. To do this, there's a unique dichotomy of listening to the masses but equally protecting the minority, which undercuts the root definition of democracy. So the question delves deeper into how the state should democratically resolve polarized issues. To understand this, it's important to recognize that the minority shouldn't be dangerously affected by radical changes under a democracy but rather should continue to be benefitted.

Democracy is two wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for lunch. Liberty is a well-armed lamb contesting the vote.

-Benjamin Franklin

THE *Democratic* STATE

BY TALAN SHAH-CROW

What role does the state play under democracy? Are they simply a conglomerate of people who merely answer to the entire government, or do they serve a bigger purpose? This question is very interesting in the idea that these states, as seen in the US and countries of long before (such as Ancient Greece), serve a purpose. Of course, they answer to whoever is at the top of the democracy, but at the same time, these governors and other state legislatures do things that benefit or, in my cases, take away from their state. And this shines the light on the first idea of how much power the government should have in America without the rights of the people being infringed. To understand this idea, we must look at the macro and micro perspectives.

In its essence, the United States is a machine. This machine, which powers the people at the top, has an interesting feature. When thought about, the top can only function with the bottom of the machine, which in this example will be the states. This means that a power split comes in; one goes to the people within the state, and one split goes to those at the top. Without the bottom, the top isn't able to function as it properly should, of course, within a democracy.

At the same time, one must acknowledge the top as they set forth the boundaries within the United States. Each one has its place of power, which has to be perfectly balanced between the two: the people of the states and the top people of the government, such as those in the executive, judicial, and legislative sectors of a country's government. Just like in *What Type of Despotism Democratic Nations Have to Fear* by Alexis de Tocqueville states, "Our contemporaries are incessantly tormented by two hostile passions: they feel the need to be led and the desire to remain free." This directly implies how the balance of power between states and the country's government works.

The state is there to represent people with senators and representatives who are like an in-between for the people and the nation. Now, of course, people of a state want to remain free, but of course, they also feel a need to be led as citizens. The state allows for such a balance to happen, ensuring citizens have power and are also being led at the same time. Without the state in a democracy, people would have a harder time communicating with the country itself as they don't have that representation that states give them. This also allows for a fair divide of power within a democracy, as a democracy without states and likewise representation would be almost comparable to a dictatorship in a sense, but with more steps. This shows that it's necessary sometimes under a democracy to have states.

Now, of course, if we're looking at a smaller scale, representation would be a lot easier due to the size of the population. But worldwide, many countries have adopted things similar to states. In Russia, there are oblasts, districts in Tokyo, counties in Ireland, etc. And with these things in place, it allows citizens to engage in civil activities and actually have a say in their democracy versus having nothing.

Now, of course, there are some limits to the state. Just because people lead, of course, doesn't mean that they always do. People want to know what to do, and having that balance of power is extremely important. The state shouldn't abuse its power to represent its citizens and people; thus, it shouldn't try to control the entirety of the democracy directly. This goes back to the idea of having a fair and equal democracy where the representation of both citizens and the country is met equally. But for the state to work with the country, the citizens of each state must step up.

For without any say, a state isn't really a state and is more of a fictitious entity which exists to only those that think of it, but don't say anything of it. And of course without citizens using their civil voices, the states cannot tell the country what to do, but instead the country is forced to take control of essentially every aspect of life even though they may not want to. States thrive off of citizens, and with thriving states come a thriving country and a thriving country, a thriving democracy. By taking step-by-step action, the power of citizens, states, and countries is put together to create a democracy. Now, of course, such can take a lot of work to obtain. Citizens must first be able to speak up, which is already hard enough.

Being in the United States even, sometimes citizens have a hard time using their civil voices to express their desires, thoughts, etc. of the democracy they live with. And while state senators can try their best to lead their state and state representatives can appeal to those about issues such as in their counties and the like, the true power of democracy lies in the citizens who allow the state to do what needs to be done. With no state having a grasp of power, this power vacuum is greatly widened between the citizens and the country. The idea of a state is something that represents citizens who come together as a single state to voice their concerns.



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**BECAUSE A DEMOCRACY ISN'T A
DEMOCRACY WITHOUT A VOICE. A
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On Compromise and Conviction

By Peter Kennedy



In an increasingly divided, polarized nation, American voters frequently throw around one word to describe the type of leaders they want. That word is “bipartisan.”

According to a 2017 Gallup poll, 54 percent of Americans increasingly want our country’s leadership in Washington D.C. to ditch partisan politics in favor of bipartisan compromise to “get things done.” More specifically, 62 percent of Democrats and 44 percent of Republicans favor compromise over partisanship. These figures trump the measly 18 percent of participants who answered that politicians should stick to their beliefs and principles (Newport). However, there’s one major problem with this. While we Americans overwhelmingly preach a hope for more “bipartisanship” in politics to get problems solved and work done, we do not want our representatives to compromise on the actual issues that we care most about - often the very ones at the source of our divisions.

None of us should be surprised by this. According to a report from the Pew Research Center, the mainstream left and right have spread further apart in decades, and the effects of these shifts are increasingly visible. The U.S. Congress (as well as many state legislatures) is passing record-low numbers of bills into law each year and is increasingly unable to pass annual budgets on time. Routine hearings, meetings, and press conferences at the federal, state, and local levels have become coarse, belligerent, personal, and even violent. This plague has even seeped into the media ecosystem as independent, unbiased reporting has become ever-so-difficult

to find. This all helps to explain the most startling fact of all: that Americans' faith in government— and the country's most important institutions— are at record lows.

Bundle all of this together and you see the bigger picture: Americans are tired, fed-up, anguished, and ready for change. Ready for something new, that is.

The question is though, what is this change so many crave? And what will each of us be willing to give up to ensure we move closer to this so-called "more perfect union."

In an effort to prescribe to the American people the disease that seemingly rots away at our country's shared sense of optimism, patriotism, and love for democracy, we must examine our country's state of affairs.

Today, everyday Americans seemingly divided by race, income, geography, and ideology are united by struggle: feeling the effects of economic despair, crumbling infrastructure, fleeting job and educational opportunities, recurring environmental disasters, and institutional discrimination. Yet, even as these problems pose clear threats to our nation, partisan shenanigans, machiavellian political brinkmanship, backroom corruption, and out-of-touch elitism flourish in the halls of power. Combine these two situations, and Americans left and right gradually lose faith in the institutions and public servants sworn to protect them and their best interests. And as these pains surface, they often boil over in vivid, violent, memorable ways— whether it be during the January 6 Attack on the U.S. Capitol or with the riots following the brutal police killing of George Floyd at the hands of police officers.

Yet these vivid, painful images explain only half the problem. These events are the memorable images that will go on to decorate the pages of America's future history textbooks; however, they are only the most extreme, physical manifestations of the problem. If the underbelly of the American political conscience is thoroughly examined, however, an increasingly troublesome sense of doubt, worry, skepticism, and distrust would be revealed. Yet these vivid, painful images explain only half the problem. These events are the

memorable images that will go on to decorate the pages of America's future history textbooks; however, they are only the most extreme, physical manifestations of the problem. If the underbelly of the American political conscience is thoroughly examined, however, an increasingly troublesome sense of doubt, worry, skepticism, and distrust would be revealed.

However, circling back to bipartisanship and compromise, I believe that these words— 'bipartisanship' and 'compromise' have become somewhat of a misnomer. There seems to be a common understanding that if something is bipartisan— whether it be a bill, ideology, or solution— that it is therefore the best solution. Just because those in power come to agreement on an issue, that does not mean the solution is what's best for Americans nor the right thing to do. While it is often tempting to see any form of compromise as a success for our country in today's day and age, we must remember that compromise is only as good as its tradeoffs. When policymakers and those in power work across the aisle, there must be a shared sense of civility, dedication to country, and commitment to law, democracy, and the Constitution.

In our nation's adolescence, a series of compromises between Federalists and Anti-Federalists allowed the United States to become the democratic nation it is today. At the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia during summer 1787, Anti-Federalist objections to the document's ratification were settled with Madison's drafting of the Bill of Rights. Subsequently, the Bill of Rights' inclusion in the United States Constitution cleared its ratification by the states. Federalists and Anti-Federalists also negotiated the Connecticut Compromise at the Constitutional Convention to create Congress' bicameral legislature, balancing interests about the relative autonomy of states with proportionate representation based on population. Even after the Constitutional Convention, the spirit of bipartisanship and compromise continued to be an important part of American political history.

In more recent decades, the spirit of compromise and bipartisanship has not been lost.

President Richard's Nixon, a Republican, was the first President to embrace the traditionally left-wing environmental movement as he created the Environmental Protection Agency

(EPA) and signed into law the Clean Air Act (1970), Clean Water Act (1972), and Endangered Species Act (1973). In the 1990s, Republican President George H.W. Bush signed into law the famously progressive Americans With Disabilities Act (1990) and instituted tax increases. Later in the 1990s, Democratic President Bill Clinton continued the bipartisan tradition of governance as he famously embraced fiscal conservatism with his efforts to balance the federal budget deficit, promote free trade with the ratification of NAFTA (1993), institute welfare reform with the Personal Responsibility And Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (1996), and to deregulate finance with the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act (1999).

However, looking beyond the great accomplishments that key compromises have delivered for the United States and its citizens, it is important to recognize the shortcomings of compromise. As these agreements always come with trade-offs for both sides: someone always ends up with the short end of the stick. With that, the ideals of freedom, equality, and democracy are often never perfectly upheld. And, more often than not, those who receive this short end of the stick are often the poor, marginalized, and powerless.

For much of early American history, the figurative “short end of the stick” in compromise was dealt to the enslaved, Black Americans. As early as the 1787 Constitutional Convention, agreements such as the Three-Fifths Compromise sought to hand Southern slave owners more political power without freedom or fair representation for Black Americans. Later in 1820, the Missouri Compromise allowed the South to continue its expansion of slavery as Americans moved west. Prior to the Civil War, The Compromise of 1850 and Kansas-Nebraska Act, two major ‘compromises’ continued to uphold the institution of slavery and further divide the nation: as if placing a flimsy, temporary bandage onto the nation’s wound. Finally, following the Civil War and the era of Radical Republican rule during Reconstruction, the Compromise of 1877 served to hand Republican Rutherford B. Hayes the presidency, in exchange for an end to Reconstruction and withdrawal of the Union Army occupying the South. This would later allow for the Democratic Party’s takeover in the South and the institution of Jim Crow laws to continue suppressing the constitutional rights of Black Americans for another hundred years. Thus, it is evident the ideals of bipartisanship and spirit of

compromise often fail to deliver— particularly for marginalized Americans.

This begs the question— is compromise and bipartisanship really what America needs?

Well, yes, and no.

With the understanding that “bipartisanship” and “compromise” have produced both positive and negative results for the state of our union, let us circle back to this debate: when is it time to embrace the spirit of compromise and bipartisanship, and when is the time to stick to one’s principles and refuse to settle?

For starters, in times of emergency and crisis a nation must stand together as one. Wars, civil unrest, pandemics, terrorist attacks, cyber threats, and natural disasters are a time in which politicians must ignore the party designations and ideological differences that divide them. A community, state, and nation in crisis does not have time for partisan gamesmanship. During these times, constituents depend on their leaders to deliver results and work across the aisle to be pragmatic in providing relief, mitigating risks, and containing the fallout of a crisis. It’s also worth noting that in these situations, so-called “bipartisanship” and “compromise” are not what’s necessary. It’s nonpartisanship. Crises are never a partisan issue and must be dealt with ignoring ideological differences altogether.

Perhaps the epitome of the nonpartisan spirit during a crisis were the actions of Senator Stephen Douglass (D-Illinois) in the lead-up to and after the outbreak of the American Civil War. Following the Southern states’ decision to secede following Lincoln’s election and the later attack on Fort Sumter in South Carolina, Douglass firmly backed his former political rival. Despite their heated debates in the infamous lead-up to the 1858 Illinois Senate election and despite his defeat in the 1860 Presidential election, Douglass continued to back Lincoln’s decisions as president, even amidst pushback from the Democrats. On his deathbed in June 1861, Douglass would state, “Every man must be for the United States or against it. There can be no neutrals in this war; only patriots and traitors.”

Now that we have made the important distinction between bipartisanship and nonpartisanship, let us explore the times in

which bipartisanship (i.e., working with the other side) is appropriate in politics.

Bipartisanship must ultimately be used as a tool for effective governance. In the rare event that one party has majorities in both houses of Congress and simultaneously controls the presidency, bipartisanship is necessary to solve the nation's problems. Whether it be related to foreign policy, immigration, education, infrastructure, national security, appropriations, or any other part of American government, those on both sides of the aisle must work together to find solutions that solve the problems, deliver services to their constituents, and keep in mind the opinions and needs of others on the opposite side of the aisle and in other regions of the country.

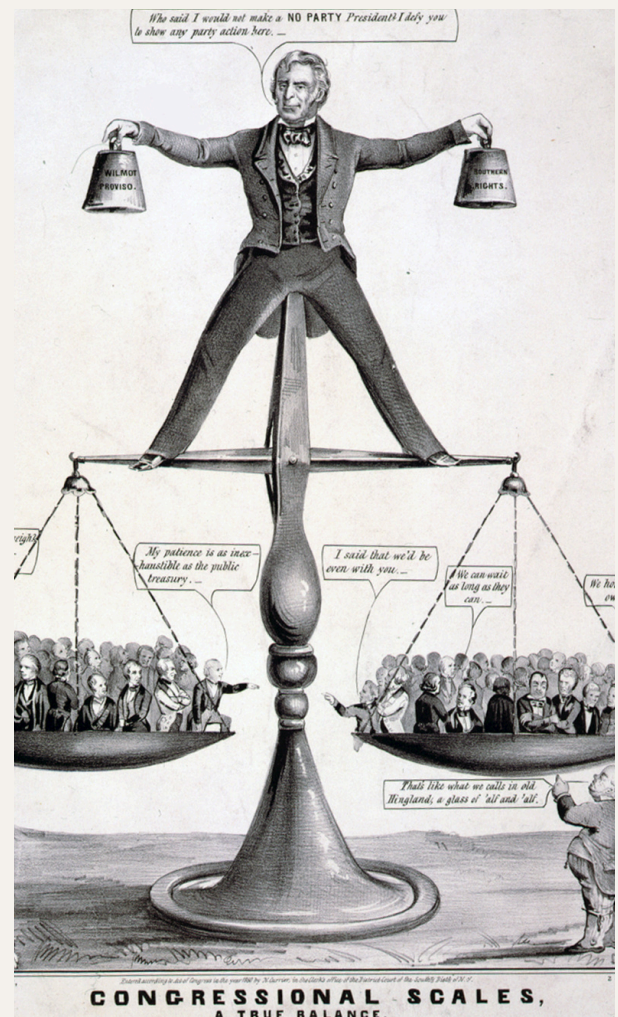
And despite the negative sentiment in this country, there have been numerous successful bipartisan laws passed in recent years. Laws including the CHIPS and Science Act (2022), Inflation Reduction Act (2022), and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (2021), just to name a few, have brought both sides together and delivered wins for America's economy and global competitiveness.

However, when it comes to defending the rights of citizens—specifically those outlined in the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights—and defending this country's democratic institutions, a statesman can never go wrong in sticking to their principles, remaining firm, and refusing to compromise unless the citizens' rights are upheld. Sworn to protect and defend the U.S., the Constitution and the American people, lawmakers (as well as members of the executive and judicial branches) should never bow to the guise of "bipartisanship" or "compromise," particularly when the rights of citizens, separation of powers, and fate of democracy is on the line. As voters in this country, we depend on our representatives to act as metaphorical guardrails against the power of the executive branch/federal bureaucracy and as overseers of the mighty, unelected judicial branch.

Throughout American history we have seen countless statesmen rise up and boldly take up controversial, potentially career-ending opinions—often dubbed "radical" by opponents—as they stand up for Constitutional rights and democracy.

Perhaps the best modern example of sticking to one's morals, beliefs, and convictions (in recent years) involves the Republican Senators standing against their party during the impeachment proceedings of President Trump. In 2020, Senator Mitt Romney of Utah risked political excommunication from the Republican Party as he voted to remove President Trump from office over the controversial phone call with Ukrainian President Zelenskyy. Later in 2021, during Trump's second impeachment trial following the January 6 Capitol Attack, Romney voted again to remove President Trump from office, this time accompanied by Senator Richard Burr (NC), Lisa Murkowski (AK), Bill Cassidy (LA), Susan Collins (ME), Ben Sasse (NE), and Pat Toomey (PA).

When all is said and done, bipartisanship, nonpartisanship, compromise, and conviction all hold valuable places in our country. At times we need our leaders to stand together to accomplish what our country needs; however, in other circumstances, leaders must rise up to defend the Constitution, human dignity, and the democratic institutions this country cherishes.



Bridging Ideals and Realities:

THE PHILOSOPHY AND RHETORIC OF AMERICAN CIVIL ENGAGEMENT

By Anthony Kim



Introduction

The fabric of American society is woven with the threads of diverse perspectives and resilient aspirations, championed through its commitment to democracy and civic involvement. This intricate tapestry is continuously shaped by the nation's foundational texts, pivotal presidential rhetoric, enduring philosophical debates, and literary works that examine and challenge the nation's civic identity. Delving into these sources provides a richer understanding of how American ideals have evolved and continue to influence contemporary civic engagement.

Foundational Texts: Articulating American Ideals

At the core of America's ideological framework are the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. These documents not only articulate the nation's foundational values and governance structures but also reflect the philosophical currents of their time, serving as a beacon for the democratic aspirations of future generations. The Declaration of Independence boldly proclaims that "all men are created equal," endowed by their Creator with "unalienable Rights," such as "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." These words, deeply influenced by John Locke's philosophy of natural rights, not only signify a moral vision for the new nation emphasizing individual liberty and equality before the law but also marked a dramatic ideological shift from the divine right of kings prevalent in the 18th century. This proclamation was revolutionary, setting a standard for future democracies and providing a philosophical grounding for the abolitionist and civil rights movements. It challenged the existing social and

political order and set the stage for various interpretations of its ideals, often conflicting, that would unfold in American history, from the Civil War to the struggle for civil rights in the 1960s. Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* offers a profound foreign perspective on these foundational ideals, providing keen insights into the strengths and potential pitfalls of American democracy. Observing that "The health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of functions performed by private citizens," Tocqueville emphasized the importance of civic virtue and the potential dangers of individualism turning into selfish isolation. His reflections suggest a nuanced view of democracy, where the liberty espoused by the Declaration could also lead to a lack of communal bonds, potentially undermining the democratic fabric.

The Constitution further refines the ideals expressed in the Declaration, establishing a system of government designed to balance power and protect individual freedoms. Its preamble aims to "form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty." These objectives encapsulate the philosophical principles of Montesquieu's advocacy for separation of powers, designed to prevent tyranny and promote a harmonious civil society. The *Federalist Papers*, particularly those penned by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, delve deeper into these principles, arguing for a robust federal structure capable of addressing the diverse needs of a growing nation. Madison's assertion in *Federalist No. 51*, "If men were angels, no government would be necessary," underscores the pragmatic need for a structured government to manage human imperfections and ensure justice.

Henry David Thoreau's essay "Civil Disobedience" presents a critical perspective on these documents by challenging the government's moral authority and advocating for individual conscience and resistance to unjust laws. His declaration, "That government is best which governs least," not only criticizes the failures in realizing the ideals of the Declaration and Constitution but also inspires numerous social movements. This tension between legal structures and moral imperatives, as highlighted by Thoreau, emphasizes the ongoing struggle to interpret and live up to the revolutionary ideals set forth in America's foundational documents.

Presidential Rhetoric: Defining Moments in Civic Identity

Presidential and influential rhetoric have often redefined national values and motivated civic action, serving as keystones in the arch of American democratic ideals and collective identity.

Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, delivered during one of America's most tumultuous periods—the Civil War—reimagined the conflict as not merely a battle to preserve the Union but as a profound struggle for human equality. By declaring that the government is "of the people, by the people, for the people," Lincoln underscored the democratic principle of popular sovereignty and collective responsibility. This rhetoric did not just elevate the war's purpose; it framed it as a critical test of the nation's commitment to its founding principles. Lincoln's address at Gettysburg thereby set a precedent for future leaders to invoke moral clarity and idealism during times of crisis, significantly reframing the Civil War as a renewal of the nation's dedication to the ideals of liberty and equality embedded in the Declaration of Independence.

Complementing Lincoln's ideals, Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Self-Reliance" propagates the virtues of individual initiative and personal responsibility within the framework of transcendentalist philosophy. Emerson encourages Americans to trust their inner moral compass and actively contribute to the common good, famously stating, "Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist." This sentiment resonates deeply with Lincoln's emphasis on civic engagement, suggesting that the strength of democracy lies not only in collective action but also in individual moral courage and autonomy. Emerson's focus on self-trust and individualism reinforces the democratic ideal that each person has a vital role to play in shaping society, intertwining personal integrity with national progress.

In the modern era, John F. Kennedy's inaugural address serves as a pivotal rallying cry for personal responsibility and public service. His challenge, "ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country," not only inspired a generation but also crystallized the ethos of civic republicanism. Kennedy's speech, delivered at the height of the Cold War, emphasized the need for unity and vigilance against the encroachment of authoritarianism,

urging Americans to transcend passive citizenship in favor of active democratic engagement. This call to action resonated profoundly, reflecting the contemporary challenges of his time and reinforcing the necessity for a collective effort to uphold and advance democratic principles.

Similarly, Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech and his "Letter from Birmingham Jail" are foundational texts that redefine national values around justice, equality, and nonviolent resistance. King's assertion that "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" draws upon a rich tapestry of both American democratic traditions and global human rights ethos, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all people and the moral imperative to oppose injustice. King's eloquent advocacy for civil rights and his steadfast commitment to nonviolence are deeply rooted in the American tradition of dissent and echo the global movements for human rights, illustrating how individual actions are pivotal in the broader context of societal transformation.

Philosophical Dimensions: Ethical and Theoretical Underpinnings

The philosophical currents that permeate American political thought encompass a spectrum from idealistic visions of justice to the pragmatic realities of governance. Each philosophy offers a unique lens through which to view the complexities of society and the role of government.

John Rawls' theory of "justice as fairness" represents a foundational shift in modern ethical and political philosophy. His concept, primarily articulated in his seminal work, *A Theory of Justice*, argues for societal structures that ensure equality of opportunity and respect for individual rights. Through his thought experiment of the original position and the veil of ignorance, Rawls posits that individuals, if stripped of all knowledge of their personal identities and social statuses, would choose rules that are fair and impartial to all. He famously stated, "Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought." This theory not only challenges us to design institutions as if we were unaware of our own position in society but also promotes policies that aim to balance inequalities, such as progressive taxation and affirmative action. Rawls' influence is profoundly felt in contemporary debates on welfare, healthcare, and educational equity, advocating for systems that level the playing field and ensure that everyone has the same basic liberties and

opportunities.

In stark contrast, Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* offers a more cynical view of human nature, suggesting that it is inherently selfish. His advocacy for a strong sovereign, as detailed in *Leviathan*, is predicated on the necessity of maintaining order and security. Hobbes wrote, "The condition of man... is a condition of war of everyone against everyone," emphasizing the constant state of conflict that arises from human desires and fears. His vision of a powerful state to prevent chaos contrasts sharply with democratic ideals that favor individual liberty and collective decision-making. The influence of Hobbes' thought can be seen in the support for strong central authority during crises, whether in the form of stringent laws or decisive executive action, illustrating the ongoing tension between liberty and security in democratic societies.

George Orwell's 1984 and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* offer stark literary explorations of the consequences of unchecked governmental power and the erosion of individual freedoms. Orwell's portrayal of a society under constant surveillance, where "Big Brother is watching you," warns of the dangers of totalitarianism. Similarly, Huxley's vision of a society pacified by pleasure rather than oppressed by fear critiques the subtle forms of control that can dominate a populace. These dystopian narratives highlight the fragile balance between security and freedom and serve as cautionary tales against the potential for governmental overreach.

Conversely, Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* presents a counter-narrative that celebrates individual achievement and criticizes the overreach of government intervention. Rand's philosophy of Objectivism, emphasizing personal responsibility and the pursuit of one's own happiness, aligns with Rawls' emphasis on individual rights but diverges sharply on the role of the state. Her assertion, "The question isn't who is going to let me; it's who is going to stop me," champions the entrepreneurial spirit and the power of individual creativity. Rand's work poses important questions about the role of government in regulating economic and personal freedoms and has been influential in discussions surrounding free-market capitalism and regulatory policies.

Contemporary Civic Engagement: Bridging Ideals and Realities

As the American narrative continues to unfold, the engagement between its founding ideals and

contemporary realities grows increasingly complex. The dynamic interplay between historical values and modern exigencies is particularly evident in the realm of civic education and political participation. These elements are crucial for bridging the gap, ensuring that the principles enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution remain vibrant and relevant in addressing today's challenges.

Movements such as Black Lives Matter and climate activism exemplify how contemporary issues echo the nation's foundational calls for justice and equity. Black Lives Matter, for instance, challenges citizens and leaders alike to confront and rectify the ongoing issues of racial injustice and police brutality, directly invoking the Declaration's assertion of all individuals' rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Similarly, climate activism addresses the imperative of "securing the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity," urging current generations to steward environmental resources responsibly to ensure a sustainable future.

The contemporary landscape of civic engagement is also vividly reflected in recent literary works, which provide nuanced insights into the struggles and hopes of modern America. Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me*, structured as a heartfelt letter to his son, delves into the personal and systemic realities of racial injustice in America. Coates' poignant reflections, such as "In America, it is traditional to destroy the black body—it is heritage," urge a profound and urgent dialogue about systemic changes. This narrative serves not only as a call to action but also as a critical examination of how far America has yet to go to fulfill its foundational promises of equality and justice.

In contrast, Rebecca Solnit's *Hope in the Dark* offers a more optimistic perspective on activism and the potential for societal change. Her essays argue for the power of hope as a transformative force, stating, "Hope is not a lottery ticket you can sit on the sofa and clutch, feeling lucky. It is an ax you break down doors with in an emergency." Solnit's work encourages activists to believe in the possibility of change even when it seems invisible, emphasizing the importance of sustained, collective action and the significant impact of individual voices in shaping the future.

Moreover, the increasing polarization in

American politics underscores the pressing need for a renewed emphasis on civic education. Initiatives that promote a deep understanding of the nation's founding documents, encourage critical thinking, and foster active participation in the democratic process are more essential than ever. Programs aimed at encouraging voter registration, community involvement, and robust public discourse play critical roles in cultivating a more engaged and informed citizenry. These efforts help individuals navigate the complexities of modern governance and ensure alignment with the nation's core principles, thus enhancing the capacity of democracy to evolve and respond effectively to new challenges.

Conclusion

The philosophy and rhetoric of American civic engagement reflect a dynamic interplay between lofty ideals and the practicalities of governance. By revisiting the nation's foundational texts, reflecting on defining moments in presidential rhetoric, and engaging with enduring philosophical debates and literary reflections, Americans can continue to strive towards a more just and equitable society. As the nation faces new challenges, the principles articulated by its founders and echoed by its leaders and authors remain vital guides, urging each generation to contribute to the ongoing project of democracy. As King eloquently put it, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." By deepening our understanding of these foundational elements, we can better appreciate the complexities and responsibilities of civic engagement in a democratic society.



Citizenship vs. Personhood: What's the Difference?

BY PATRICK DUGAN

Posed by Aristotle in his renowned fourth-century book, *Politics*, the question regarding citizenship's relationship with personhood is highly contested in civic education. Can one differentiate a good citizen from a good person, and vice versa? What are real-life examples of a good person failing to uphold their civic duty? To answer said questions, one must first examine Aristotle's definition of good: "virtuous." Aristotle frequently references the concept of virtue, or behavior reflective of a high moral standard, in *Politics*. When discussing civic virtue (the indicator of a good citizen), this "high moral standard" is determined by the structure of government (or its "constitution," in Aristotle's words). By way of explanation, the civic virtues of self-governance, justice, moderation, and vigilance are reflective of American political institutions, if not explicitly mentioned in the founding documents and early political writings. However, the concept of "virtue" in scenarios unrelated to civil society is much more unclear, especially considering contrasting moral philosophies—what is the guiding standard, if not the nature of government? Ultimately, I contend that a good citizen in the United States fulfills their baseline civic responsibilities and is avidly, honestly engaged with the democratic process. Moreover, a good person is innately virtuous, leading a life of moral excellence—for others—regardless of their civic duties.



Scholarly interpretations of Aristotle's *Politics* and his conception of citizenship generally differ across the board. Some contend that Aristotle didn't sufficiently differentiate the two in *Politics*; that the two are inseparable; that in a republic, the virtues of citizenship and personhood are intertwined due to the social nature of humans. Others contend that citizenship is circumstantial. Published in the Cambridge University Press, David Keyt's "The Good Man and the Upright Citizen" asserts that citizenship is relative to the city in which one resides, whereas personhood is absolute. In an ideal city, everyone is both a good person and a good citizen. However, pragmatically speaking, there are "limits of political obligation." In other words, there are instances where the necessary action of a good citizen deviates from that of a good person. I agree with this latter notion, though I believe one must define the characteristics of a good person and a good citizen before entertaining philosophical dilemmas. First, two elements dictate a "good" citizen: fulfilled responsibilities and honest, active engagement. In the United States, citizens have objective responsibilities: attending jury duty, paying taxes, and abiding by the draft are a few examples. However, civic engagement is the differentiating factor between a good citizen and an average citizen who fulfills their baseline responsibilities. Whether by educating oneself on political candidates, involving oneself in community initiatives, or upholding one's beliefs (while also exhibiting respect towards opposing viewpoints), a good citizen avidly interacts with the democratic process. However, this involvement must be an honest perpetuation of the populace's needs and the constitution's virtues. Consequently, many may ask: can a good citizen vote for a candidate whom others consider a poor choice? The answer to this question is circumstantial. A good citizen has the right to vote for any candidate, given that their vote is well-informed and rooted in civic virtue. However, if their vote is solely motivated by personal advancement, consciously disregarding virtues such as justice and goodwill, then the citizen isn't "good." Furthermore, since a good citizen is "avidly" involved in the democratic process, as previously mentioned, they can't refrain from participation. In other words, a good citizen always votes. Even if it means electing the lesser of two evils, or voting for an unpopular third-party candidate, they utilize accessible civic resources. A good citizen recognizes their equally shared responsibility to shape American institutions, resisting the urge to let others' votes make up for their inaction. If every partially unsatisfied citizen maintained the mentality that their vote was simply "one out of a million," elections would have drastically different results—results inconsistent with the populace's needs.

While a good citizen is characterized by their civic actions, a good person is characterized by their general intentions. A good citizen can be a bad person, by societal moral standards. Someone who is politically engaged is still capable of being rude to others, simply put. A good person attempts to be altruistic by finding opportunities to support close acquaintances such as friends and family. Similarly, if someone disregards their civic responsibilities, they're not a bad person. This mindset would exclude the third of Americans who didn't vote in the 2020 election from being considered "good" people, which is just unreasonable. Some people prioritize other aspects of their lives over politics, or they may focus on bettering society through other means. While the argument can be made that civil society is inseparable from personhood, I further that a cornerstone of our democracy is the supremacy of free will; the Founding Fathers deliberately made it so that voting is a choice, not a requirement. Subjecting one's free will to the needs of civil society, albeit a fundamental element of America's socio-political fabric, would diminish the value of the free democratic process.

With this philosophical dilemma, many nuanced scenarios can't be generalized into a concrete answer. A good citizen respects the law; a good person actively resists law-induced oppression (as Thoreau would contend). A good citizen attends community gatherings; a good person may stay home, prioritizing the needs of their immediate family. We can't draw exactly from Aristotle, either, as he limited citizenship to military-trained males in *Politics*. Thus, we must make our educated definitions and try to fulfill the criteria. Try to be good citizens. Try to be good people.





The Failures of American Democracy

BY MAYA HASTINGS

In Article III, Section I of the United States Constitution the Supreme Court is defined as the judicial power of the land. The now nine Justices on the Supreme Court survive life terms and are expected to uphold the truth of the Constitution. In the 1803 case of *Marbury v. Madison*, the power of judicial review was officially established. The power was hinted at for the judicial branch long before this case with Hamilton's *Federalist 78*, in which he decided the judicial branches needed the ability to review the acts of Congress and their constitutionality. The Warren Court has the most famous Supreme Court cases having passed influential laws relating to civil rights and civil liberties. Even during the 1950s, this power was questioned. Now, this power is highly contested.

A representative democracy is meant to make the complications of politics and government simple for the everyday person. However, has this been effective? James Madison claimed in *Federalist n.10* that a small representative government would protect the growing country from tyranny. For a time, James Madison was correct. Times have greatly changed since the times of James Madison. Corruption comes less from royal status or land owned but from the power of money, fame, gifts, etc. The time of King George III and high taxes are long over and the time of private texts or emails and mass corruption within all branches of government have come to the surface. What the founding fathers failed to address was how their small America would grow into a country full of immigrants, differing opinions, billionaires, etc. How can a government be truly "representative" without isolating the minority? Or even the majority?

The United Nations admits that the weakest points of democracy are “weak institutions and poor governance” which they promise to dedicate time and money to help fix. However, when it comes to the less noticeable corruption in highly developed nations, they go untreated and widely ignored. This corruption has led America to be a nation widely controlled by greed, status, and criminal action. America is known as the country where anyone can succeed, however, statistically the best way to succeed in the economy is to exploit those below in rank. Take the STAG and WGA as one example of a loss of the “homegrown” economy America used to be known for. The government chooses often to let unions strike rather than write legislation to better working conditions. In current times, the Supreme Court of the United States has begun to expose cracks of corruption or bias in its rulings. More often than not the current Roberts court falls along party lines rather than the writings of the case and the debate that ensued. The case of Citizens United v. FEC confirmed the legality of the doctrine of “more money, more power” in politics, rendering politics a game of money. No longer are the politicians meant to represent the people the most qualified people for the position, but the person with the most money and financial backing. To make the issue worse, the Supreme Court has also decided companies can act as people in the election cycle minus voting, giving individual corporations more power than the people in most modern elections. Many people in this country no longer trust the election cycle either. The January 6th Insurrection emphasized this issue and allowed the country to see what a distrust of elections and a noncivil passing of power could cause, even in America. The “Beacon of Democracy” continues to fail and observing the strongest and wealthiest democracy in the world fail in many aspects leads to a dark future.

Personally, I believe in the United States. I want the best for my country and want nothing more than to fix these blaring issues in order for democracy to return to the country truly “ruled by the people”. However, the politicians of today would rather ignore the greed and corruption of the government as long as it benefits their career or their personal political party. The partisanship of America hides the blaring issues in our democracy by creating an enemy, someone to point to and blame when something or someone fails. Blaming a party or politician instead of observing the series of continuous failures of our representative democracy will just stunt the growth of America and likely lead to an eventual downfall. While we have yet to see the fall of the Consitution of the United States, America has come rather close to having one man ruin our trust in our current system. The Constitution was made to be changed and edited every few generations, and with the change towards money, corruption, and partisanship, it may be time for some changes.



Democratizing Democracy:

SAFEGUARDING AMERICA'S MOST FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT

By Vageesh Ramaswamy



The right to vote, just as conscientious and moral as it displays, has been widely regarded as one of the most essential rights in our American democracy. On the heels of separation from an oppressive monarchy ruled by a distant king in 1776, the founding fathers envisioned a society where everyone could have a say in the governance of their country. Once limited to the elites (white, male land-owners,) now, in the present day, everyone has a say in the governance of our great nation. This fundamental right ensures that the government remains accountable—not just to its constituents—but also to the democratic process and ideals we grew out of. Breaking apart from an oppressive monarchy ruled by a distant king, the founding fathers envisioned a society where every citizen could have a say in the governance of their country. This fundamental right ensures that the government remains accountable to the people and that every citizen's voice is heard in the democratic process.

History has established America as a representative democracy, distinct from direct democracy in its inclusion of layers between us—the constituents—and enacted policies. Now, while this system has shielded against the tyranny of the majority on numerous occasions, it has contributed to perpetuating deep-rooted issues now piercing society's fabric. Divisions among neighbors, communities, and states complicate focus, drowning out diverse voices. In a society where differing opinions are met with polarization instead of dialogue, communication suffers—a critical detriment to democratic cohesion. Representative democracy ideally serves as a mediator, balancing individual empowerment with effective governance. However, elected representatives often fail to fulfill

their duties, catering selectively to demographics rather than serving the broader public interest. As Brutus No. 1 of the Anti-Federalist Papers opined, the challenge lies in achieving a representative body that accurately reflects and serves the people without becoming cumbersome or subject to the pitfalls of excessive democracy.

Voting is not just a civic duty—it is the cornerstone of a functioning democracy. It empowers citizens to shape government policies, elect leaders who represent their interests, and hold those leaders accountable for their actions. Your vote is not just a mark on a ballot; it is a powerful tool that can influence the direction of our nation. Yet, it is disheartening that many Americans do not exercise this right. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, voter turnout in the 2020 presidential election was about 66.8%, the highest in over a century, yet still indicating that a significant portion of the population did not participate. Furthermore, youth voter turnout, while improving, remains lower than that of older demographics. In the 2020 election, around 51.4% of eligible voters aged 18-29 cast their ballots, compared to 74.5% of those aged 65 and older.

But why is this the case? Why are millions of Americans—one of the most influential demographics in the current and future electorate—not exercising their (arguably) most important constitutional duty?

There are several factors that contribute to what many political scientists refer to as voter apathy. Following recent political events in the past few years (the election of President Donald Trump, SCOTUS rulings rolling back civil liberties, and misaligned values with present political candidates in both parties), American youth's trust in our institutions has eroded—sharply. An IPSOS poll of more than 8,000 Americans found that people between 18 and 34 are less likely to believe in our political system. When asked why, the most common answers were that younger people weren't more likely than older people to say they didn't vote because they think the system is too broken to be fixed by voting, or because all the candidates are the same, or because they don't believe in voting.

However, the lack of voting isn't just limited to the individual—our institutions play an increasingly significant role in regulating voting rights, especially today. Whether legislative, executive,

or judicial, our government's ability to decide anything and everything related to voting—who, what, where, and how—is monumental when looking at voter turnout. Take a look at gerrymandering, where states redraw electoral districts to favor a particular party, thereby diluting the power of the people. Following the 2020 census, several states, including Texas and Ohio, have been involved in contentious redistricting battles. In 2022, a federal court ruled that Alabama's redistricting plan likely violated the Voting Rights Act by diluting the influence of Black voters, prompting a court-ordered redrawing of the map. Alabama, a state with a majority-black population, had one of the lowest voter turnouts in the 2022 election, at a record-low 38.5%. Gerrymandering, unequivocally, is one of the most simple and effective ways used by state legislatures to control, subjugate, and suppress voting rights—particularly among majority-minority communities—by taking away their right to a voice in our democracy. There are a plethora of other suppressive techniques used to limit individual democratic authority, from Georgia's 2021 landmark voter-ID laws (which have been criticized for restricting the rights of low-income and minority individuals from voting) to Wisconsin's aggressive voter roll purging (which has been challenged in courts for disenfranchising thousands of eligible voters), institutional barriers are of paramount importance in determining who shows up at the ballot box on election day.

The right to vote is the bedrock of our democracy—one that must be fiercely protected and continually strengthened. As we navigate a world filled with political polarization, hyperpartisanship, and increasingly prevalent digital citizenship, we must remain vigilant against efforts to undermine this fundamental right. Whether it's through civic education programs that promote the importance of democratic citizenship or voter registration efforts that support people's most basic rights, we can ensure that this right remains vibrant for years to come.

Every person has a voice in our democracy; that voice must have equal and unrestricted access to this fundamental right. Ultimately, the strength of our democracy lies in the collective power of the voices that rise to defend it.

DEMYSTIFYING *Diversity*

BY ANGELA HUMMINGBIRD

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) has been making headlines these past few years and, daresay, has become a bit of a hot political topic. Let's clear up some of the sentiment surrounding DEI policies in the workplace and redefine (as in remind us of, not revolutionize) diversity.

What is DEI? Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion can refer to the philosophy behind strategic workforce planning that improves the representation of varying demographics in the workplace. More simply put, DEI encompasses a variety of policies, actions, and strategies that make a workplace more accessible and foster a culture of belonging. DEI can involve the hiring process, trainings employees can elect to take, general workplace well-being, evaluations, and beyond. It is not a stone tablet of strict guidelines all companies have to take; it is an umbrella term for all of the various things a company might do to use inclusion and accessibility as a way to improve their outcomes.

Texas is one of the states that recently implemented bans on DEI initiatives in the higher education sector. The largest way this manifested itself was in the elimination of jobs surrounding community engagement and DEI in university systems.

Thinking beyond Texas's DEI ban and higher ed, DEI is broader than many of us think it is. Since DEI is deeply rooted in institutional success, it cannot just be banned in government work and the private sector. DEI is foundational to effective recruitment, for example. In non-HR terms, imagine yourself in the role of a recruiter. Your job is to analyze the ways your company advertises and find methods to make sure you are getting the word out to as many qualified people as possible. You might advertise at

community college career fairs and put out flyers at a community center in addition to posting on LinkedIn and Indeed, because there are a lot of different people with a lot of different needs. You are breaking down systemic obstacles that prevent some qualified people from applying for jobs. Recruitment is, in the deepest sense, DEI.

DEI is not a bad thing! A lot of companies without a formal pledge to advancing DEI or who don't have jobs specifically dedicated to it are already doing it internally. Everyone who applies for a job applies for different reasons, comes from different backgrounds, and has different needs. Changing the way you approach internal policies (such as providing optional training opportunities on mitigating bias, combatting harassment and discrimination, and how to develop a growth mindset) and external engagement (such as hosting community events, if it falls in your business's scope) falls under that wide DEI umbrella of actions a company can take to achieve its goals. DEI is nuanced and can be leveraged in a multitude of ways to make effective progress, especially in a world as diverse as ours.

And so, the next time you see DEI pop up in the news, analyze it through a critical lens. Ask yourself how DEI fits into the context in which it is presented and look for areas of complexity that may not be reflected in a headline or short article. Think about why DEI is important to the topic at hand and look beyond the buzzwords. Maybe even identify some of the ways you see DEI being implemented in your own life and recognize that a lot of these complex concepts really might not be as intimidating as they seem.

SHADOWS OF THOSE WHO DEPART

BY ANTHONY KIM

In Ishmael by the sea,
the summer festival begins with a cacophony of bells
a celebration that paints the city in vibrant hues
red-roofed houses and painted walls stand witness
to processions of old and young, in robes of mauve and gray 5
the sound of gongs and tambourines fills the air
children's laughter merges with the songs of swallows
the people dance through the streets
towards the Green Fields where horses
adorned with streamers of silver, gold, and green 10
prance with unbridled excitement, the city
a mosaic of joy and color, under a sky
so clear that distant mountains stand as guardians
the air alive with music and the scent of the sea
yet in this tapestry of happiness, hidden beneath the surface 15
lies a truth, unspoken
in a dark room
with a locked door
a child sits
alone 20
forgotten
the foundation upon which this city's joy is built
a paradox of
beauty
and sorrow 25
the people of Ishmael know yet choose not to see
the happiness they cherish comes at a cost
too cruel, some, upon learning this truth
leave in silent protest
walking away from the only home they've known 30
into the unknown
a journey that starts in the heart of the city
and ends in the depths of their own conscience
Ishmael, a story of contrasts
where the brightest joy casts the darkest shadow 35
and the price of happiness
is etched in the silence of a forsaken child.

The Art of Compromising to an Extent

By Patrick Dugan



The United States is founded upon compromises. Ranging from the Connecticut Compromise, which proposed the Constitution's outlining of a bicameral legislature, to the Compromise of 1790, which moved the capital from New York to DC in exchange for the federal assumption of state debts, today's institutions are the result of settlement. However, the accommodation of opposing viewpoints has often delayed progress, producing concessions that have infringed upon inalienable rights: the Three-Fifths Compromise, the Compromise of 1820, and the Compromise of 1850 are overt examples. Therein lies the question: when should citizens accommodate opposing viewpoints? Is there a difference between the responsibilities of citizens, whose compromises remain ideological, and representatives, whose compromises produce policy with tangible consequences?

One must first answer the latter question, as it contextualizes the nuances of this dilemma. Ultimately, it's unproductive to make a distinction between politicians and citizens. Congress' divisive reliance on slim majorities to pass legislation is indicative of the United States' larger political climate. Lamented by Thomas Friedman's "Compromise: Not a 4-Letter Word," American media tends to drastically emphasize losses—rather than noteworthy gains—when reporting on legislative compromises. Additionally, a 2018 Pew Research study concluded that "roughly half of Americans say they prefer politicians who stick to their positions (53%), while fewer say they like those who make compromises with people they disagree with (44%)." This disparity has only grown in recent years. Hence, Congress's polarization is partly rooted in polarized constituents, not the representatives themselves. We elected them, after all.

Free will and intellectual pluralism are integral elements of America's political culture; thus, compromise is never obligatory. However, it should always be promoted, as inalienable rights are somewhat subjective, especially considering hot-topic issues such as abortion. In a two-party system, legislative success is dependent on compromise. Concession by both parties—to achieve incremental progress—ensures that legislation satisfies more people (and occurs at a consistent rate). As opposed to blindly supporting the objectives of their political party, citizens should first identify their own fundamental principles regarding political issues such as gun control, abortion, immigration, national defense, energy, climate change, and social welfare. For what issues do they understand the perspectives of opposing viewpoints? With the issue of gun control, for example, many can agree that certain regulations are necessary.

Acknowledging this has allowed lawmakers to compromise on the degree of said regulation, such as with the “commonsense” Bipartisan Safer Communities Act of 2022. This landmark legislative package allocated funds to enhance “red flag laws,” create the first federal law against gun trafficking and straw purchasing, and enhance background checks for firearms buyers under 21 years old. Most Americans agree that a universal ban on guns is excessive. Most Americans also agree that “extreme risk” individuals shouldn't own a semi-automatic weapon. Finding common ground, as demonstrated by these issues, propels change. Moreover, citizens should consider issues that they deem more pertinent than other issues: a Democrat shouldn't reject private housing initiatives solely because of their party's base, nor should a Republican reject the idea of climate change because of their party's base. Principled views are better justified by research and personal experience.

Considering the root of Congress' polarization and the efficacy of legislative compromise, we must tackle unrelenting polarization from the bottom up. By valuing diverse perspectives, engaging in respectful civic discourse, and researching issues from reputable websites, Americans can gradually shift politics from two-sided to pluralistic; from discordant to unifying.



To Compromise

BY MADELINE GAGE

In September of 2016 Hillary Clinton stood over a podium bearing the banner “stronger together” and declared that “you could put half of Trump’s supporters into a basket of deplorables.” (1) While she clarified after this statement that she was referring to the bigoted portion of Donald Trump’s supporters, her statement still did not resonate well with many across the political spectrum. Clinton’s intention to condemn the bigoted portion of Donald Trump’s supporters was executed extremely poorly. Rather than get across the message of emphasizing Trump’s use of fear and prejudice as a political tool, Clinton revealed her bias against poor, white Americans who make up Trump’s “tea-party.”

Poor, rural, and ignored could all easily describe most of Trump’s “basket of deplorables.” One major issue both rural and poor communities face is unequal access to education. In fact, while 41% of urban adults have a college degree, only 28% of rural adults do (4). While the fact that Democrats are usually more educated than Republicans remains a point made to shut down the right when engaging in politics, the difference in education level really means that Republicans have less access to higher paying jobs. Rural low income people do care about the world around them. It was not a simple disinterest in politics.

Hilary Clinton’s generalization and overestimation of bigotry is telling of her views on rural citizens. Low-income white Americans, especially those from rural areas, are stereotyped to be



closed-minded and unintelligent. In reality, they care just as much as everyone else, but often don't have the time or resources to put their political feelings into action. This leads rural poor voters to be underrepresented. Political leaders who claim to support poor Americans and care about the struggles of the working class must recognize that these stereotypes of rural people negatively impact both groups. Instead of perpetuating these stereotypes, political leaders should fight them, and, in the words of Hilary Clinton, strive to "build bridges not walls."

Hillary Clinton's commentary on Trump's political base may have pushed "teacup" voters to go to the polls (2), an unexpected demographic of voters that changed the course of the election. Clinton's anti-poor and anti-rural sentiment is not unique in politics. Her 'basket of deplorables' comment reflected years of hypocrisy within the Democratic Party: caring about the poor yet mocking low education and certain lifestyles. While the outrage against the far-right and specifically Donald Trump's bigotry is understandable, there are members of his political following who have reason to support him. Especially in the case of rural Americans, Trump spoke to a portion of Americans not normally acknowledged and gave them a voice. While this reason is not enough to excuse subscribing to far-right ideology and bigotry, it does explain it.

Clinton's "basket of deplorables" comment not only negatively affected her campaign, but more importantly perpetuated harmful stereotypes. Clinton's response to the bigotry on the right was to blame an already disadvantaged group. Political leaders have a long history of insulting not only their opponent, but the citizens who support their opponent. This response only further divides the two main political ideologies.



MEET THE ZINE TEAM



PATRICK DUGAN

Patrick Dugan is an incoming freshman at Columbia University from Chicago. Executive ambassador of the ActivateGenZ project, national fellow with the Bill of Rights Institute, and state-recognized debater, Patrick aims to further his civic engagement on many fronts. Patrick is hopeful that “Junto” will inspire other young leaders to contemplate their role in civil society and strive to become better citizens.



ANGELA HUMMINGBIRD

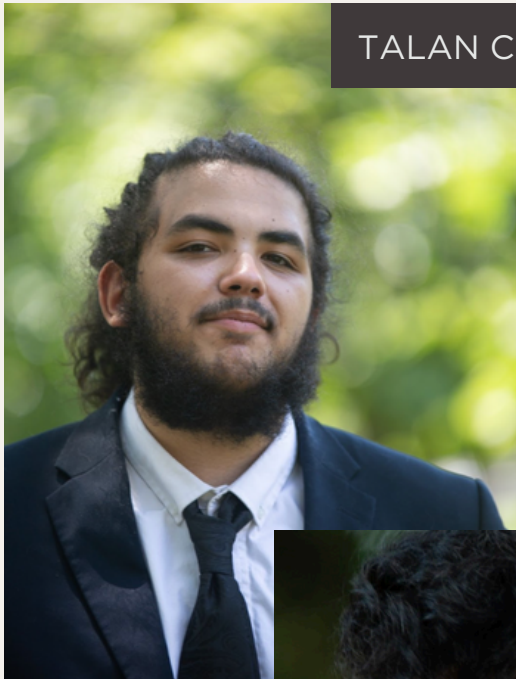
Angela Hummingbird is an incoming freshman at Columbia University from New Mexico. She has experience in public administration and has published on Indigenous art and racial solidarity. Angela is optimistic about the Zine’s potential to inspire youth in the political sphere.



LILLY VALLADARES-MACIAS

Lilly Valladares-Macias is an incoming freshman at UC Davis from Central California. She has previously contributed to community health initiatives, campaigns, and marketing and media projects. Lilly hopes the Zine will foster dialogue on societal connections and civic engagement in our digital age.

ZINE TEAM



TALAN CROW-SHAH

Harry Ding is an incoming freshman at Harvard University from Charleston, South Carolina. He is the national political director for the High School Democrats of America. Harry views the Zine as a form of activism to energize readers to action.



ESHAAM BHATTAD

Eshaam Bhattad is a rising senior from Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois, with a deep passion for the intersection between government and politics, as well as representation and education. Writing for his school paper, ranking nationally as a debater, and serving on the Illinois State Board of Education, Eshaam views the Zine as a conglomeration of diverse ideas that showcase the unification and power of youth advocacy.

OUR CONTRIBUTORS



ANTHONY KIM

Anthony Kim is a senior at The Bronx High School of Science from Queens, New York City. He is the founder of several nonprofit organizations dedicated to helping immigrant families and supporting youth. Anthony aims to inspire fellow future leaders to reflect on their civic roles through the Zine.



AISIRI PRASAD

Aisiri Prasad is a senior at Linganore High School in Frederick, Maryland. She is a leader in multiple honor societies and a National Fellow at the Bill of Rights Institute. Aisiri is passionate about inspiring civic engagement through art and technology.



JEANNA SMATHERS

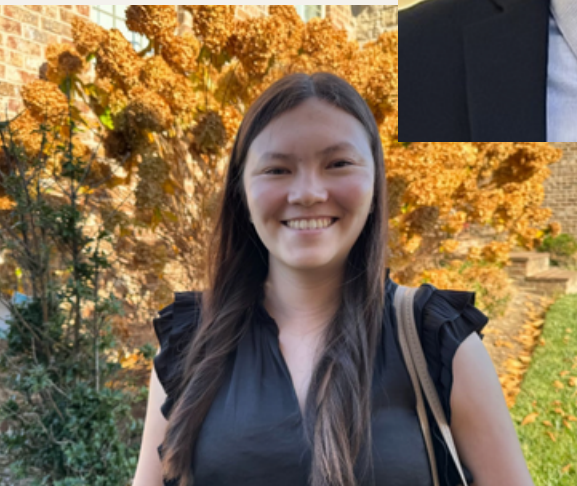
Jeanna Smathers is an incoming freshman at Southwest Baptist University in Missouri, studying education and psychology. She is active in civic engagement and community service. Jeanna hopes the Zine will encourage youth to recognize and protect their rights.

CORRESPONDENCE



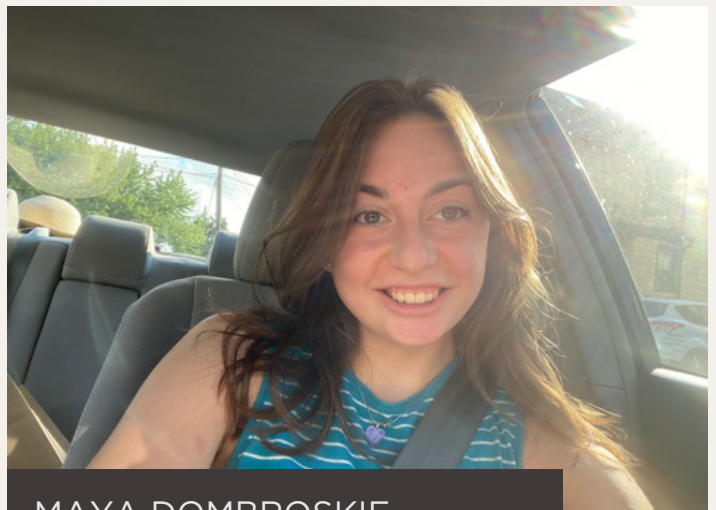
PETER KENNEDY

Peter Kennedy is a rising senior at B. Reed Henderson High School in West Chester, Pennsylvania. He is the founder of Students in Civics and serves as School Board Representative. Peter hopes the Zine will foster crucial conversations about civil society and American democracy.



DYLAN CLARKE

Dylan Clarke is a student advocate for educational equity from Kentucky. She initiated a Battle of the Books program and has participated in various leadership programs. Dylan is excited to contribute to the Bill of Rights Student Fellowship through the Zine.



MAYA DOMBROSKIE

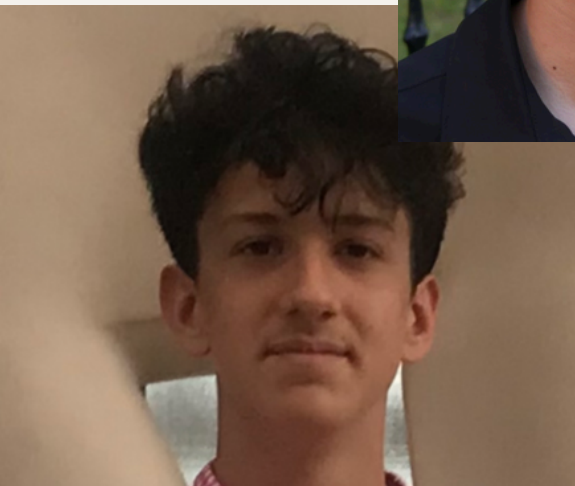
Maya Dombroskie is a senior at State College Area High School in Pennsylvania. She is a state-recognized debater and community leader. Maya aims to strengthen citizen-government relationships through the Zine.

CORRESPONDENCE



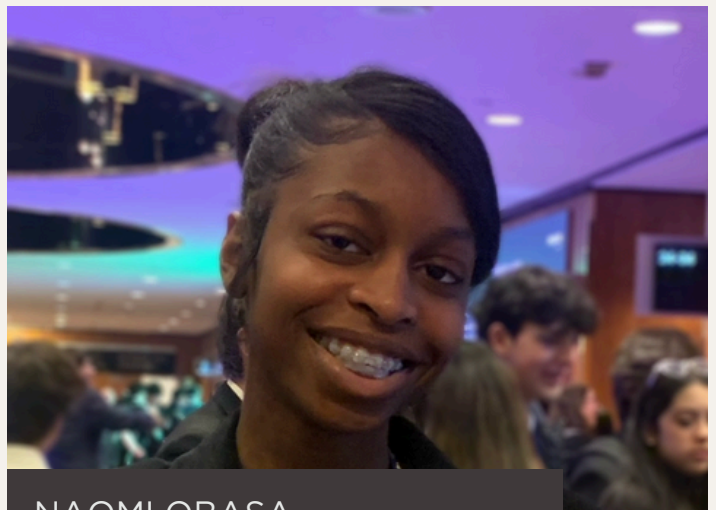
HARRY DING

Harry Ding is an incoming freshman at Harvard University from Charleston, South Carolina. He is the national political director for the High School Democrats of America. Harry views the Zine as a form of activism to energize readers to action.



JAMES CONSTAN

James Constan is a senior at Buckingham Browne & Nichols School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He is the president of the Sports Analytics Club and writes SAT help articles. James contributes "You're not you when you're high" to highlight the dangers of impaired driving.



NAOMI OBASA

Naomi Obasa is a senior at Bay Shore High School from Long Island, New York. She is an internationally competing Model UN delegate and Voter Engagement Intern. Naomi hopes the Zine fosters dialogues about civic responsibility and national progress.

CONTRIBUTORS



ARIEL

Ariel Fader is an incoming freshman at the University of Pennsylvania and is dedicated to creating change in her community. She is an avid speech and debate competitor who also started The SpeakOut Campaign to amplify public speaking and civic engagement opportunities for youth. She also works with various STEM organizations such as serving as National Treasurer for the Technology Student Association. Additionally, she enjoys playing piano and ice skating. Ariel hopes that her articles encourage others to find additional ways to become more involved within their communities.



KIARA

Kiara Sunil Singh is an incoming freshman at Smith College from Salt Lake City, Utah. She is an active member of her community, serving on her city's Youth Council. Kiara hopes the Zine inspires youth involvement in civic education and community engagement.

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“ —

Without continual
growth and progress,
such words as
improvement,
achievement, and
success have no
meaning.

— ”

