



Coming Together for A Common Good

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Presidents Scholarship Competition Essay
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“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

– Preamble to the United States Constitution

Our country is divided and stalled by a deep partisan, cynical divide at a time when the need to come together could not be higher.

Senator Lindsay Graham (R-SC) once told former President Trump, “America is an idea, not a race.” That idea is a set of concepts based on our Constitution, our system of democracy and its tenets, as well as our belief in the American Dream – the notion that regardless of where you come from, you can realize anything in life, you can go anywhere and become all that your abilities and hard work allow.

The worldwide COVID 19 pandemic and lockdowns, illegal immigration, and racial divides have dominated the news over the past 12 months. All have become battle cries for both sides of the political divide. That divide is the biggest issue we face today as a nation.

Even though social and cultural divisions are reason for concern today, we must remember that as a country we have come together and prospered greatly following the great tragedies our country has faced. Throughout our history, “We the people,” have come together as one and overcome the things that tested us as a union.

Following the Civil War, which saw more than 600,000 killed, Reconstruction did not live up to its promise of helping the 4 million blacks born into slavery in the southern U.S. break those bonds. We saw the birth and rise of hate groups such as the KKK, which we still see today. But we came together as a country passing the 14th and 15th Amendments of the Constitution. The former granted “citizenship to all persons born or naturalized in the United States,” including slaves, the latter gave citizens the right to vote regardless of race or previous condition of servitude. Women, however, could not vote until the passage of the 19th Amendment, 50 years and thousands of demonstrations later.

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Some 80 years after the Civil War, the U.S. found itself embroiled in World War II, fighting on both sides of the globe just as we were coming out of the Great Depression. An economic boom followed, seeing the American economy grow by nearly 40 percent.

Nearly 100 years after the Civil War, the Vietnam War caused widespread division across the country as thousands marched in protest for much of the 1960s and early 1970s. During the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, nearly 30,000 police and National Guard were called in to stop a riot, known as the “Battle of Michigan Avenue,” which was seen live on television, and sparked an outcry for large-scale change in American society.

Today, we have seen and heard that outcry again for social change, brought to light by disturbing smartphone videos of police shootings of unarmed African Americans, widely broadcast on social media and television, constant reminders of racism born of slavery and civil rights issues that have plagued the United States for generations.

These divisions have led to finger pointing by both sides of the political spectrum, each arguing loudly that their side is in the right, and they are the only ones who can fix race relations. However, we must not forget the national progress we have made after each of these great challenges, especially over the past half-century. For example, the Civil Rights act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin, has helped expand rights for women and the LGBTQ community. As an indicator, look to interracial and same-sex marriage, which at one point in our history were illegal, and which are now widely – though not universally – acceptable, and both are legal.

There is no argument that our major political parties – Republicans and Democrats – are split along deep ideological lines as deeply as at any time in our history and seem to be moving further from the center daily. The first Gulf War in the early 1990s, 9/11 and the ensuing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have continued the deepening divide along party lines.

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Both social media and cable news have made these divisions worse, bringing to the forefront and intensifying those divisions as biased reporting have become the norm rather than the exception. It seems no matter the issue, there are always loud voices from both sides either for or against it. How many have seen something posted on social media and taken it as gospel, but never checked to see if it was correct — or even real?

Take for instance the COVID 19 vaccine. Many say it was rushed, some say it was not tested and the side effects are unknown. Others loudly argue it is needed and everyone must get the vaccine. Social media is full of “experts” about the vaccine. Some argued that anyone who gets a vaccine is a guinea pig since none of the various medicines were approved by the FDA. Others argued it is the only way to stop the spread and return life to what it was before the pandemic.

Has the distribution and the delivery of the vaccine as a whole gone flawlessly? The simple answer is no. My father went to two different sites before he was able to get the Johnson and Johnson vaccine recently. He learned of the vaccines via a social media post and an email from the school district where he coaches. Did it matter to him or anyone else in line at 7 a.m. how the vaccine was delivered or who made what deals to fast track the vaccine to help return life to normal? Did it matter what race, ethnic background or the color of the skin of the person next to them in line?

No, it did not. Each came together for the common good as we have throughout our history.

This to me is where we stand today in the United States. We are at a crossroad, where centuries-old divisions have come back to haunt us, new ones have been born, and we must find the solutions.

By coming back together as we have after facing crises though our history, we have proven time and time again that we are a strong, resilient people. Which raises the question: how do we come back together?

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That is the biggest hurdle we face, coming together not only as a “We the people,” but as a country. Shortly after 9/11, we put down our differences to rebuild and overcome the worst terrorist attack against the U.S. in our history. We must find that cohesiveness again.

Personally, many of my friends and I have stayed away from many forms of social media. We all seemed to be living with our smartphones attached to our hands, so we made a change. What started as a once-a-week thing has turned into me deleting some apps altogether. We are learning not to get our news and information exclusively from social media or one TV network, newspaper, website, or any single source, but to read all sides of an argument.

To move forward as a nation, we need to get back to our roots as a society. I have found that a good way to do this is through volunteer work. Much like after tragedies in the past, people could volunteer to help others move forward and get through the hardships. Volunteering at my local soccer club where I help coach 6- and 7-year-olds, I see people from different backgrounds coming together to meet a common goal – to help the children get better as players and to have fun. We could take this mentality of teamwork and working with each other, and make the progress necessary to move past the difficulties that all Americans have been facing.

Through doing these simple things that each of us can do will bring us back to that “perfect Union,” our forefathers wrote about when our country was born.