

## Voice of Democracy Speech

In response to "Where do we go from here?":

America was founded simply because a group of human beings wanted to be free, and they weren't. The Sons of Liberty threw the tea into the harbor because they couldn't stand the fact that we were living under a system of "Taxation without representation." Susan B. Anthony paved the way for women to prosper in the United States through equal opportunity. MLK marched through Washington, D.C., and inspired countless leaders to protest and actively take steps towards achieving civil rights. Since the birth of our nation, countless outside threats have attempted to undermine our liberties we worked so hard to obtain, but it's during those tough times that Americans have used their patriotic determination to bind together and fight for the general welfare of our people.

It's a privilege to live in one of the freest places in the world, yet many take this privilege for granted. My generation was never alive to experience active threats to the liberties that our veterans fought mercilessly against, and we've never been subjected to harsher constraints.

We grow comfortable in the safety net that is our freedom and forget that *freedom is fragile*. As we've seen through the tyranny that led to the creation of this country itself, freedom is hard to obtain but easily lost.

It's concerning to see the way threats to our nation's livelihood are beginning to come from within.

During President Abraham Lincoln's 1838 Lyceum address, he essentially hypothesized that America could never be destroyed from the outside; rather, if we ever lost our freedoms, it would be caused by internally destroying it ourselves.

The apparent lack of patriotism among the younger generation today makes me think that America is approaching its demise. We can't blame it on our kids, though, because it's not their fault.

Every single day, we have access to information we don't fully understand. Provoking emotions of fury and outrage through baseless claims meddle with the peace our men and women have fought so hard to preserve.

It is possible that we look for the easy way out and just do what people tell us, but in doing so, mainstream media drives a wedge between us even further. Young adults are looking for guidance, but it's difficult when the adults of our country are constantly at each other's throats.

It's natural, even, for adolescents to do what they're told. The 24-hour news cycle allows for the mass indoctrination of anti-American partisan ideology that our youth is absorbing under the false cloak of advocacy.

Our youth have been led astray by people with volatile intentions who have forgotten what drove the initial Framers to write our constitution. Though they didn't create this unpatriotic culture, our children will be left trying to fix it if the proper steps aren't taken.

This needs to end before we go beyond the point of no return.

Even more so, new technologies have altered the way we as Americans interact with one another, and the divide has caused something patriots post 9/11 could've never seen coming.

Phone screens are now used as shields that prevent us from directly knowing the impact our words have on people. This, paired with the masks that have become commonplace due to the pandemic, stops the warm tension-breaking smiles that used to remind us of our fellow neighbor's emotions and our common desire for humanity.

Radical ideas expressed through social media interactions lead to increasingly disproportionate censorship, cancel culture, and aggressive, echo-chamber-like discussions -

so where do we go from here?

It all starts with our youth.

Critical thinking seems to have evaporated from our society today, which is why my young eyes have perceived such a divide. I've noticed that many are unable to appreciate one another despite our personal opinions because we have been programmed with what to think, not how to think. Individuality has to be instilled in the core of our people again.

While we may not always agree with what someone has to say, we should nevertheless defend their right to say it until the end. We need to teach communication of their views and opinions while encouraging the pursuit of respecting thy fellow neighbor.

Anger towards someone who thinks differently than us needs to be replaced with gratitude; we live in a place that not only allows us to think for ourselves but protects us from the government taking that right away. Our differences have morphed into controversy when our variation is what makes America the wonderful, diverse, and unique place we *get* to call home.

Moving forwards starts with each citizen learning how to take accountability and ownership, or

else generations to come will only inherit the trait of villainizing fellow Americans for their views and values.

A strong, united country needs to have a respectful populus who possess the common sense and compassion required for our country to not only function but to thrive. My generation can't be remembered only as the Tide Pod eaters and bathroom destroyers. I wish to live in a nation full of Americans who practice proper manners and respect, value the power of their voice, and understand the significance of their rights. We, the youth of America, can't wait for others to clean up the mess for us; we must take action and be the change we want to see.