

A Good Place to Start: Human Rights

What, if anything, do citizens need to do for democracy to work? This year we all watched the President of the United States become one of the biggest threats to democracy with blatant corruption, lying and fear-mongering in the middle of a pandemic, and inciting unprecedented violence from his cult-like followers. It was clear to me more than ever that our democracy was not only a flawed system, but one that had encouraged the rich to become richer while minorities and less fortunate were not only cast aside by the government, but blamed for their problems. In order to balance out the scales and enable a participatory democracy where people are heard equally, it's necessary for citizens to have education, equal rights, and shared values. Once a nation's citizens have these, it becomes paramount that they use these rights to overcome discriminations and collaborate for social justice so democracy works for all rather than some.

Growing up a minority in 99% White communities has led me to clearly see not only the discrimination and inequality that has become systematic in our country, but also the ability of those with privilege to base all democratic actions on the economy alone. Even though it's been 153 years since the 14th amendment was ratified, we still see voter suppression especially in minority communities with gerrymandering and restrictive laws against convict votes. The importance of basic humans rights such as education, healthcare, and cultural freedom are key in fighting the effects of hundreds of years of discrimination against anyone other than cis-White males who owned land. "The Declaration of Sentiments" and Hughes both offered the perspectives of minorities living in America, a perspective of anger and the reality of life lived by those without representation or rights. It's ironic that America was born out of that same

anger, yet the leaders of our new nation were quick to impose the same suffering on others. When over half the population doesn't have access to the right to not be property or education, we aren't living in a "land of the free," nor will we have a successful democracy.

After the basic human rights citizens *should* have, now what to do with them? Many of the authors we've read throughout class have emphasized the importance of defining values as a nation and going forth to protect and instill them. While I believe that the economy is vital to the success of our country, it is by far not the be-all and end-all of our nation like many conservative thinkers such as Goldwater and those behind "The Sharon Statement" believe. Capitalism is great and all, sure. However, is it not more important to have regulations so that the mega-corporations that already have excess to huge amounts of power over both the government and public aren't monopolizing and taking advantage of their workers? Is it not more important for essential workers to have access to free healthcare and a livable wage than a billionaire CEO getting another tax break? One of the reasons why I continue to have faith in America is the ability of its citizens to care for and uplift one another. While it's important to make your own way in the world and be able to provide for yourself, it's just as important that all people in our country have the ability to do so, and that our government encourages equity. While America is known for its individualism, the "Port Huron Statement" emphasizes that individualism is not that anyone can do whatever they want, but that each individual has the potential for greatness and meaningful passions. This distinction is key in redefining our culture's attitude toward uplifting our own citizens and working collaboratively to solve the problems of our nation.

Democracy is not perfect, nor is any government system in the world. However, I believe that we can work to make this nation a better place to live for everyone, I believe that we can commit ourselves towards equality, and I believe that our country can make democracy work.