

The Character of
**AMERICAN
DEMOCRACY**

Preserving Our Past, Protecting Our Future



JILL LONG THOMPSON

SIX



THE AMERICAN'S CHARACTER

A community is democratic only when the humblest and weakest person can enjoy the highest civil, economic, and social rights that the biggest and most powerful possess.

A. PHILIP RANDOLPH¹

THESE WORDS OF A. PHILIP Randolph are very poignant for me. Just as my upbringing was influenced by the World War II and Korean War veterans who lived in my home community, it was also influenced by the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War. I was an adolescent and teenager in the 1960s, and many of the stories covered on the nightly newscasts during that era were quite disturbing. It was as confusing as it was horrifying to watch news footage of young men and women being beaten and jailed for peacefully protesting racial segregation and of young soldiers fighting in a far-off war run by politicians whose words and motives we questioned.

I looked up to those young men and women as I had looked up to the veterans from my parents' generation, but there were two significant differences. These activists and soldiers were just a few years ahead of me in age, and I was watching them in real time. That experience greatly impacted my developing view of the United States and the world.

My parents and teachers taught me that living in a democracy meant we could trust our government to be open and fair and that we all shared equal rights. But what I saw on the evening news told me something different. How appalling it was to watch what was happening in my country. What

kind of person would beat up another citizen for peacefully defending the rights that are promised to us all? Even more fundamentally, why would some Americans want to deny these rights to other Americans? This awful behavior made no sense to me.

At that time, I was not yet familiar with the many Jim Crow laws that were established in the South during the century following the Civil War and ratification of the Thirteenth and Fifteenth Amendments.² Learning of these statutes and ordinances, whose explicit purpose was to separate the races and to deny rights to those who were born with a darker skin color, was enormously disillusioning. And how distressing it is to realize that some Americans support such policies even now.

Coming of age when the nation was deeply divided over our involvement in the Vietnam War also greatly impacted my perceptions of America, its leadership, and its people. I very much wanted to believe that our political leaders were telling us the truth and that the anti-war protesters were wrong. But by the time I had completed my freshman year of college, critical content of the Pentagon Papers was being leaked to the press, confirming the very criticisms the protesters were raising regarding our involvement in the war. We learned that administrations from President Harry S. Truman to President Lyndon B. Johnson had knowingly deceived us on our engagement in Vietnam.³

The Pentagon Papers' revelations were awful, in and of themselves. But we also knew that countless returning soldiers were being mistreated. After arriving home, many of our veterans had difficulty finding employment, and our nation was not providing the services they needed to integrate back into a healthy and normal civilian life.⁴

Those young men and women who served during the Vietnam War and who fought for civil rights here at home were courageous Americans. They believed in the principles of democracy and were willing to risk their own lives to improve and protect the lives of others. These Americans trusted in something they deemed bigger than themselves—a free society that protects the rights of individuals. Their actions demonstrated a belief and commitment to the words written in our Declaration of Independence and Constitution. They epitomized American character.

They were young and should have been able to place their trust in our leaders. Instead, they found themselves fighting forces that were the

antithesis of American character. The country we had been taught to love and respect was not doing right by them.

Growing up in the United States at that time had its challenges and difficulties, but the overall experience was also enlightening and instructive. It was then that I began to understand what it means to live in a democratic society and I also began to identify a connection between ethics and democracy.

Watching our nation's leaders, I could see that many were making decisions they believed to be the most politically expedient. Elected officials may have been calling the shots, but they were doing what they thought was desired by and acceptable to the voters who put them in public office. It is a fact that there was great unrest at that time, and many of us were skeptical of the direction in which our leaders were taking us. It is also a fact that many in our country agreed with the policy to escalate our involvement in the Vietnam War, and many also supported the enforcement of laws that segregated us.

During those formative years, I began to understand how our leaders' actions reflected the beliefs and values of the people who had voted them into office. The workings of democracy came into focus for me as I realized that our nation is only as great as the choices and actions of the citizenry. It is not just our leaders who determine how good and strong we will be as a society. Ultimately, it is all of us—we the people—who make that determination.

Civil rights and labor leader A. Philip Randolph was right when he very eloquently stated that democracy exists only when the weakest among us enjoy the same civil, economic, and social rights as the most powerful among us. I would also add that democracy can succeed merely to the extent the citizenry upholds the responsibilities that are integral to self-governance. It is not enough for leaders to understand and lead ethical lives; we all must do so.

If we believe in our country and want it to succeed, then we have a duty to protect the tenets of democracy. We must be relentless in our commitment to defend and strengthen the democratic principles that protect these basic rights that A. Philip Randolph and many others dedicated their lives to protecting. We have a duty to accept these responsibilities, not just

for ourselves but also for our fellow men and women, and for the republic itself.

Understanding our civic responsibility is central to the individual American's character.

THE PEOPLE'S ETHICS

Abraham Lincoln said, "Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power."⁵ In democracy, power lies with the people, and I think it could be effectively argued that many people who are dissatisfied with our country's political leadership do not fully appreciate their own power and responsibility in making the democratic process work. For any person who possesses the good fortune to hold citizenship in the United States of America, his or her character is regularly tested by the power our country gives us as citizens.

Self-governance demands a solemn commitment on the part of its people. We all have a role to play in safeguarding and strengthening our country's character, and if we are not discerning in how we use this power, we are ducking our responsibility. When we shirk our responsibilities as members of a democratic society, we are also undermining our rights and freedoms.

Living in a democracy means being a caretaker of democracy. The success of our country is determined by us, and we are all charged with the responsibility of making and keeping it strong. We have an obligation to protect the individual rights and freedoms bestowed upon us and our fellow citizens.

The equation is unambiguous: the character we have as a nation is the sum of the character we have as individuals. Democracy is a shared responsibility, and we must look inward to ourselves, as well as outward to our leaders and fellow citizens, to make it work. We must all commit to using this democratic power in a consistently responsible way. Each of us has the obligation to understand the role we play,: one of dedication to a life of purpose, integrity, honor, and personal accountability.

It is not just unethical political leaders who have the power to undercut and even destroy a democratic society. The citizenry has extraordinary power, and we have the same obligation as public officials to be ethical, to

live our lives with character, and to take seriously our responsibilities of civic engagement. We are all in this together.

Every day in our country, we see people abusing the power of democracy and capitalism, and in the process, they are chipping away at our republic and oftentimes our economy. But we also see countless examples of people using these powers of democracy and capitalism in ways that epitomize integrity and character, and they strengthen our society.

The phrase *abuse of power* is quite regularly used to describe political leaders exploiting their public positions to benefit themselves and their cronies. This term is not typically invoked to describe actions of the citizenry, but in fact, individual citizens regularly abuse the democratic power they are given. For a democracy to survive, the citizenry, as well as the leadership, must demonstrate patriotism and responsibility in their own individual actions.

The lifeblood of a strong and enduring democratic society is a citizenry of good character.

PATRIOTISM AND CHARACTER

I believe that most Americans, irrespective of political affiliation, are sincere and genuine in their aspirations to be loyal and patriotic citizens. No one person or political party has a monopoly on patriotism or good policy ideas. Individuals with opposing ideologies can be equally loyal to our country, even as they disagree and argue over broad policy direction or specific policy details.

But true patriotism demands more than aspirations and loyalty. It also requires an understanding of ethics and the integral role we all have in upholding our individual duties as members of a democratic society. The privileges that come with a participatory government bring with them an obligation on the part of every person to make choices that are consistent with the values of our democracy. The benefits of living in a democratic society demand an earnestness of effort pertaining to the matters of governing.

While it is common practice for organizations to adopt formal codes of ethics, it is not common for individuals to do so. Given the significant role that citizens play in running a democracy, I believe a strong argument can

be made for encouraging Americans to adopt a thoughtful, well-based personal code of ethics. While we each have the right to our own individual values and beliefs, we collectively share the responsibility of making democracy work, and that demands a serious commitment by all of us.

Patriotic Americans understand that we must commit ourselves every day to making decisions that reflect the values embodied in our Constitution. From my years in public service and higher education, including the advancing and teaching of professional ethics, I have come to believe that the widely accepted pillars of character are integral to who we are and whom we aspire to be as a nation. It is not mere coincidence that the principles of democracy are consistent with these pillars.

The values of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship form the foundation of this great experiment we call the United States of America. They are also the essence of American patriotism and should be included in the foundation of our individual codes of ethics.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness demands transparency from our political leaders, and that means we must require the president and vice president to be held to the same standards of accountability as other employees of the federal government. The law that allows the holders of these two offices to be exempted from 18 U.S.C., Section 208 must be changed. This criminal statute should be amended to require that the president and vice president be disqualified from participating in any official governmental matter in which they have a personal financial interest that conflicts with their conscientious performance of duty.

More broadly, we must also demand honesty from political leaders. Our national character and the role we play on the world stage demand that we be a nation of people, both leaders and citizenry, who are trusted. It is difficult for us to be a world leader or to be taken seriously when a president tells, on average, fifteen untruths a day. Such behavior not only erodes our character; it also undermines our strength. As an example, when our president made an obviously false statement while addressing the United Nations on September 25, 2018, the audience responded by laughing.⁶ When world leaders ridicule our president, it means that we have

lost respect and standing as a nation. A country that does not have the trust and respect of its allies loses its effectiveness on the international stage.

We know that it is not uncommon for public officials to misrepresent the truth. Even public officials who have the highest integrity will occasionally misstate a fact. Most certainly, every one of us can all recall both Democrats and Republicans making questionable or erroneous statements, some more frequently than others.

The blame for any public official's mendacity does not rest solely on his or her shoulders, however, because the person who sits in elective office serves at the pleasure of the voters. Those who support untrustworthy candidates and public officials share the responsibility for all the untruths and the damage they cause.

The act of deliberately telling a lie is a microethical violation, but it has broad and long-term macroethical consequences that threaten democracy. When a public official intentionally misleads the citizenry about government policy, that person muddies the discussion and debate, interfering with the public's ability to be accurately and adequately informed.

These untruths not only mislead the American public; they also lead us to adopt laws and policies that are not in the best interest of our country and its people. A good illustration is the deception during the debate and passage of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017. It was sold to the public using the argument that tax cuts would generate enough economic growth to cover the revenue losses incurred due to the cuts. But the tax law changes led to an increased deficit in 2019. Even more worrisome, projections show that by 2027, the combination of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 and the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 will increase our total debt by \$2.4 trillion.⁷ Good decision-making depends on an honest analysis of facts.

I also believe that dishonesty weakens us as a nation because when political leaders lack candor, the public loses trust in the government and in our democratic process. Trust is critical to the successful running of a democracy. We must demand truthfulness from our leaders, not just because we should hold them to a high ethical standard but also because anything less undermines our strength. Integrity is more than an ethical concept or a characteristic of a virtuous person; it is critical to the very survival of a democratic society.

The person who does not stand up to political leaders who lie is an accomplice in their deceit. Not only are accomplices in deceit no worthier of our trust than the perpetrator of the deception, but they also share in the responsibility for damage caused by that deceit. Accepting the lies of political leaders is the antithesis of patriotism.

True patriots are truthful and demand truth from their leaders.

Respect

One of the most insidious forms of disrespect is voter suppression. While often framed by advocates as necessary to prevent fraud in the election process, many restrictive election laws have been enacted for the purposes of limiting legitimate voter participation and shaping the electorate to match their political ideology.⁸ Such actions undermine the rights of fellow citizens and, therefore, the principles of democracy.

Voter suppression can be found in a variety of forms, including but not limited to complicated voter registration requirements, aggressive voter purging from the voting rolls, unreasonable voter identification requirements, limited early voting opportunities, and reduced polling locations. We must demand that Congress and state legislatures address these practices that undercut citizens' rights and the democratic process.

I was two weeks shy of turning nineteen on July 1, 1971, when the Twenty-Sixth Amendment granting eighteen-year-olds the right to vote was ratified. This amendment had special meaning for my generation because so many young people between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one served in the armed forces and were willing to give their lives for our country, but were without the right to vote. The Senate report accompanying the amendment explained that most people of this age had completed high school, were mature enough to vote, and had the responsibilities of adulthood.⁹

The late Honorable Birch Bayh, my US senator at that time, authored the amendment, and his leadership on this issue reflected respect for young Americans. He also authored Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibiting discrimination based on sex in any federally funded education program or activity. I have always seen this provision as a confirmation of the meaningful role women play in society when given the

opportunity to participate and compete. The late senator's work exemplified respect.

Most of my life has been spent living in politically and socially conservative communities. As a Democrat serving in the US House of Representatives, I represented one of the most Republican congressional districts in the country. Many constituents told me that they supported me because they believed I listened to others who held viewpoints different from my own and I worked in a nonpartisan way to best serve the interests of my district.

It has long been my belief that most policy issues are complex and many-sided; the best ideas come from heterogeneous groups comprised of individuals who embrace varying ideologies and opinions. We make better decisions when we understand others' experiences and perspectives and when we respect the merits of opposing points of view. It is important to recognize that not one of us has all the answers. We can learn from others with whom we disagree, and respect for others creates value.

Disagreement, debate, and discussion can be very useful to the democratic process; they can help us look more broadly and deeply as we seek solutions for addressing our challenges. We must never confuse disagreement and debate with stubborn antagonism, however. A mulish unwillingness to compromise on matters of public policy, in most circumstances, is not patriotic. While one should never yield in ways that violate or sacrifice the democratic principles encompassed in our Constitution, government by the people demands cooperation and compromise.

The United States is currently experiencing political divisions as deep as I have seen in my lifetime. Far too many of our people are unwilling to listen to opposing points of view or seek common areas of agreement. There are people in both major parties, as well as in smaller political parties and movements, who embody such obstinacy. While we have a right for our voices to be heard and incorporated into policy-making, none of us has a right to insist that "my way is the right way and no other way will do."

In a democracy, government is by "the people," not "by the person," and none of us should expect to have the power of a dictator or an autocrat.

Since no one person is a nation, no one person gets his or her own individual representative, senator, or president. By design, we share public

officials with the rest of the population, and it is undemocratic for any one of us to expect or demand an elected official to be perfectly aligned with our own individual beliefs. Reasonableness is a necessary component of successful democratic governance.

If we want our democracy to survive, then we must accept and even embrace the value of compromise. We must recognize that people who come from different backgrounds and experiences have different perspectives. Research shows that diversity improves performance, including the quality of decision-making.¹⁰

As stated in earlier chapters, research conducted by Jim Collins revealed a common thread among the leadership of corporations whose financial performance was “great” versus “good.” While it is common for fictional corporate leaders in books, movies, and on television to be portrayed as ethically challenged, bigger-than-life celebrity types, Mr. Collins’s research found that a very different personality type led the most successful companies.

These highly effective corporate leaders were modest, avoided public adulation, and were never boastful, but they had strong determination and professional will. They worked very hard to accomplish tasks, and they motivated workers with standards that inspired rather than with personal charisma. Their ambition was for the company rather than for themselves, and they committed their and the organization’s efforts to long-term greatness for the company. When there were failures and setbacks, the Level 5 leaders shouldered the responsibility, but when there were successes, they gave others the credit.¹¹ They were respectful of others.

During my years in public office, I found that the most effective political leaders who had long-term success were respectful of others, including those with whom they disagreed. Our founding fathers understood the important role mutual respect plays in the democratic process. The First Amendment to the Constitution reflects the value America places on the right to hold one’s own beliefs and speak one’s own mind.

I believe that one of the factors contributing to the deep political divisions in our country is a callous disrespect among individuals and groups holding differing ideologies and opinions. When we are civil in our own actions and words, we simultaneously demonstrate an appreciation for

and commitment to a democratic process that depends on reasonable and reasoned discourse.

I also believe that the democratic process works better when discourse is civil rather than uncivil. S. Chris Edmonds defines civility as “a collection of positive behaviors that produce feelings of respect, dignity, and trust.”¹²

Research in this area has found that civility enhances the performance of individuals, teams, and even entire organizations. In her book *Mastering Civility*, Christine Porath of Georgetown University writes, “Although civil behaviors entail treating others well, they must also reflect an underlying desire to show respect. It’s not just treating someone well because you want something from them or because you’re trying to serve your organization’s interests. Civil behaviors are performed as a way of simply affirming norms of mutual respect and decency.”¹³

Not only should the citizenry show respect for others whose opinions and beliefs are different from their own, but they should also demand respect from their public officials. Disrespectful behavior should not be tolerated, because it has a negative impact on the democratic process. Descriptions of people as “low class slob,” “pathetic,” “dopey,” dummy,” or a “clown” make it more difficult for us to work together to find common ground in addressing our challenges.¹⁴ Calling other nations “shithole countries” and referring to immigrants as “rapists” weaken our international standing.

True patriots do not try to silence those with whom they disagree but instead work to protect the rights of everyone. In doing so, they are showing respect for democratic values and the democratic process.

Responsibility

Combining a democratically run government and a capitalistic economic structure creates great potential for a society’s long-term success because it provides individuals the freedom and opportunity to pursue their dreams and realize their potential. Government of and by the people means that individual persons are entrusted with power. The long-term success of a democratic society depends on a dedicated and principled citizenry, as well as on strong and ethical leadership. As citizens in a democracy, we have a

duty to be informed, reflective, and ethical on matters of leadership selection, civic engagement, public policy, and the democratic process.

Patriotism requires the same. We clearly have our work cut out for us in this area, as reflected in an August 2018 interview conducted by Sarah McCammon of National Public Radio. While covering a political event in southern Indiana, she asked one of my fellow Hoosiers about the investigation of Russian involvement in the 2016 presidential election. The gentleman being interviewed responded, “I personally think it’s a lot of white noise. I didn’t vote for chief Boy Scout. I voted for someone to run my country and to be the leader of the free world and to do what I think is important. Do I care about all this other little peripheral stuff? Means absolutely nothing to me and a whole lot of people just like me.”¹⁵

I have heard others express similar sentiment, and I believe it reflects a lack of understanding of the responsibility we have to elect leaders who will uphold the principles of democratic governance. To a patriotic American, these ethics and legal matters are not “little peripheral stuff.” While the candor reflected in the interviewee’s response may be refreshing, the content reflects a serious misunderstanding of the role integrity plays in democracy. United States intelligence has confirmed Russian interference in the 2016 electoral process, which means that the process was contaminated.

It is unpatriotic to ignore or to lessen the gravity of foreign intervention in our elections. Additionally, patriotism demands that we all take responsibility for holding our leaders accountable for running their campaigns and carrying out their official responsibilities with integrity.

Policy positions are not the only matters of importance to the successful running of a country. While it is not likely that we will ever see a perfect person running for office, a candidate’s ethical standards matter. Upholding democratic principles, including an uncorrupted election process, is crucial to the democratic process.

At the very least, we should all read the US Constitution and understand the issues so that we can build a base of knowledge regarding our nation’s democratic values and structure. The three branches of our government work independently, each with different authorities, and they serve as a check against concentration of power. They exist to protect and defend our people and our country.

For example, we each must understand the difference between questioning a judicial decision and undermining the judicial process. As expressed so well by the Brennan Center for Justice at the New York University School of Law, the president, to the detriment of our country and its democratic values,

has displayed a troubling pattern of attacking judges and the courts for rulings he disagrees with—a pattern that began during his presidential campaign (and even before), and has continued into his presidency. This threatens our entire system of government. The courts are bulwarks of our Constitution and laws, and they depend on the public to respect their judgments and on officials to obey and enforce their decisions. Fear of personal attacks, public backlash, or enforcement failures should not color judicial decision-making, and public officials have a responsibility to respect courts and judicial decisions. Separation of powers is not a threat to democracy; it is the essence of democracy.¹⁶

This is an ethics issue that has long-term negative consequences for our democracy, and we must demand more from our leaders and ourselves. As we the people have the power of democracy, we must not tolerate such behavior from anyone, but especially not from those who hold the highest and most powerful positions in government. It is our patriotic duty.

We also have the responsibility to develop information literacy. All too often, people spread untruths not because they are dishonest but because they have not made the effort to validate what they have heard or read. A good example is the way some members of the public impact the political process by using social media to deliberately disseminate untruths in ways that benefit their candidates or ideology. We have the right of free speech, but it is a right that should be exercised responsibly.

When I see news stories of how social media platforms, such as Facebook or Twitter, are used to spread false information, I am reminded of a game I first played many years ago as a member of a church youth group. At one of our regular Sunday evening meetings, our youth leader introduced us to the game of telephone. We arranged our chairs in a circle,

and a fellow member of our youth group was instructed to whisper a message to the person sitting adjacent to him or her. This action was repeated successively around the circle until the message reached the last person in our group. Anyone who has ever engaged in this exercise knows the process as well as the predictable result. That evening, we played several rounds of telephone, and not once did the kid at the end of the whisper chain hear something whose meaning was even close to the original message.

We were all highly amused and entertained. But the exercise also taught us a very important lesson about the ease with which one may spread falsehoods that can be harmful to others. We were reminded that truth has value. And we were taught that before we speak, we must make an honest effort to validate the accuracy of our message. This is a moral and religious value, but it is central to democratic governance. Democracy depends on honest decision-making. If we want our nation to survive and thrive, we must seek the truth and speak the truth.

If we genuinely believe that free speech plays an important role in democracy and if we recognize the importance of truth in policy-making, we will commit ourselves to fact-driven decision-making. Democracy depends on truth, but unfortunately, there are many among us who have not made that commitment. And the problem is not limited only to those who hold positions of power in our government. Far too many of our citizenry place their own interests above truth and, therefore, our country. The challenges we face are great.

In a study on the dissemination of truth and lies, it was found that lies spread more quickly and broadly than truth. Specifically, researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology used a data set to track the speed and breadth of the dissemination of factual and false information through Twitter. They found that “Falsehood diffused significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth in all categories of information, and the effects were more pronounced for false political news” than for false news about other topics.¹⁷ It is not clear why people are more likely to share falsehoods than facts. It may be that fabrications tend to be more unique and interesting than truths. But there is no legitimate excuse for anyone to forward information that has not been verified, especially if it has the potential to weaken the democratic process.

Equally disconcerting is behavior that reflects an ostensible indifference to or unawareness of the fundamentals of democracy. For example, continuous denigration of news as “fake” is not merely disingenuous and self-serving. While it is quite appropriate to raise legitimate concerns about news reporting that is not accurate or balanced, assaulting a free and independent press for political gain is nothing less than an attempt to destroy a pillar of our democracy. The free dissemination of information, unabridged by the government, is the lifeblood of a democratic state; therefore, we must recognize unfounded and self-serving attacks on the media as attacks on our democracy.

True patriots value the responsibility inherent in the democratic process as much as, if not more than, their own ideology.

Fairness

A core tenet of democracy is fair distribution of power among the people. Fairness in elections is critical to this principle. We must reform our campaign finance system to include a match for small donations and to temper the power of Super PACS. And we must take the drawing of congressional maps out of the hands of the politicians and put it into the hands of nonpolitical, independent commissions.

We must also stand up to those who want to weaken organized labor; we must strike down right-to-work and other laws that undermine fairness in the workplace. Even though there is widespread agreement on the value of the fairness principle, throughout our history, the citizenry and leadership have been regularly called upon to defend it. President Lincoln’s Gettysburg address exemplified leadership at its best, as he confronted the forces that threatened this principle as well as our very existence as a free and democratic nation.

At the dedication of the National Cemetery at Gettysburg, on November 19, 1863, President Lincoln very simply and eloquently reconfirmed this value of American democracy. In his two-minute address, he reminded the country of the need to hold together the union as we recognized the debt of gratitude owed to the more than 3,500 Union soldiers killed in the battle that many believe was the turning point in the Civil War.¹⁸

His closing words provide a poignant reminder of American values:

It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they have, thus far, so nobly carried on. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they here gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation shall have a new birth of freedom; and that this government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.¹⁹

It could not be clearer. Upholding the democratic value of fairness, including respect for the right of everyone to be heard and to participate and to have the opportunity to pursue their individual potential, is an act of patriotism.

To illustrate the difference between those who serve with character and those who do not, we can contrast these words of President Lincoln with the words of Congressman Steve King of Iowa. When describing the children of immigrants who have illegally entered our country, King said, “For everyone who’s a valedictorian, there’s another 100 out there that weigh 130 pounds and they’ve got calves the size of cantaloupes because they’re hauling 75 pounds of marijuana across the desert.”²⁰

In an interview with the *New York Times*, Congressman King was quoted as asking, “White nationalist, white supremacist, Western civilization—how did that language become offensive?” Within days of the publication of that interview, the House Republican Conference stripped him of his committee assignments, and the full House adopted a resolution rejecting the words *white supremacy* and *white nationalism* as “hateful expressions of intolerance that are contradictory to the values that define the people of the United States.”²¹

Racism has no place in the individual American’s character, and it is unpatriotic to tolerate such bigotry from our leaders. Research not only tells us there are no correlations between genetics and intelligence; it also tells us that we are all much more genetically similar than dissimilar. Consensus in the biological and social sciences tells us that differences in skin color reflect environmental differences and that race is a social construct rather than a biological attribute.²²

With population growth, advances in technology, increased diversity, and globalization, we are likely to find it more challenging to protect the right to fairness. The magnitude and rate of these changes clearly create changes in our environment, and that change can be uncomfortable and challenging for us.

In 1972 when I cast my first vote in a presidential election, the total population of the United States was about 209 million people, of which 87 percent were white, 11 percent were black, and less than 1 percent were Hispanic or Latino.²³ By 2018, our population had grown by more than 50 percent to a little more than 327 million people, of which 60.7 percent were white, 13.4 percent were black, and 18.1 percent were Hispanic or Latino.²⁴ During this same time period, we have seen a significant growth in international business relationships. According to the World Bank, the total value of world merchandise exports (priced in current US dollars) in 1960 was \$122.988 billion and had grown to \$17.846 trillion by 2017.²⁵

It can be difficult to adjust to all the changes occurring in our communities and country. Losing our comfort zone can make us feel threatened.

Research findings indicate that increased ethnic and racial diversity can result in loss of trust in a community. More specifically, “because increasing racial diversity in majority White neighborhoods, states, and nations implies a smaller White population share, Whites may perceive these demographic changes as threatening to their status, and these changes may lead to negative racial attitudes and behavior.” But over time and with sustained contact, racially diverse populations develop positive feelings and relationships toward one another.²⁶

For democracy to work, we must open our minds and recognize that none of us has all the answers. And we must work together to find areas of agreement in how we solve our nation’s challenges. Policy-making is a shared responsibility, and compromise has merit. While we should never negotiate away our nation’s democratic principles, the democratic process requires us to make concessions. No matter how strongly I personally feel about something, it is not reasonable for me to expect my US representative or senator to always do what I want. Nor should I expect that of the entire Congress or the president.

True patriots understand that fairness of process and outcome take precedent over our individual wants.

Caring

Tolerance is more than a virtue; it is central to who we are as a people. Our founding fathers made clear that democracy provides us a space where everyone, regardless of similarities or difference, has worth. In democracy, we value individuals and their rights. The very concept of self-governance depends on a citizenry that cares about one another and is willing to fight for their rights.

Caring is central to who we are today and what we will become tomorrow. I believe that acts of compassion for others provide us the potential to be our greatest. I also believe that caring about others who come from backgrounds different than our own provides an opportunity for all of us to become stronger and better as a people. While it may be easier for us to relate to those we view as similar to ourselves, we all benefit when our compassion extends across ethnic, racial, gender, economic, geographic, and other lines.

In remarks delivered at a Presidential Medal of Freedom presentation ceremony at the end of his second term, President Ronald Reagan made clear his belief that America's strength comes from diversity. He said,

We lead the world because, unique among nations, we draw our people—our strength—from every country and corner of the world. And by doing so we continuously renew and enrich our nation. While other countries cling to the stale past, here in America we breathe life into dreams. We create the future, and the world follows us into tomorrow. Thanks to each wave of new arrivals to this land of opportunity, we're a nation forever young, forever bursting with energy and new ideas, and always on the cutting edge, always leading the world to the next frontier. This quality is vital to our future as a nation. If we ever closed the door to new Americans, our leadership in the world would soon be lost.²⁷

Not everyone agrees with me about the value of diversity. But virtually everyone agrees that diversity and globalization are a reality and that the world's population has always been diverse and on the move. According to the National Geographic's Genographic Project, human migration can be traced at least as far back as sixty thousand to seventy thousand years ago.²⁸ Additionally, African and European migration to the Americas dates back centuries.

There is a great deal of potential for us as a heterogeneous population. We know, for example, that workplace diversity improves performance. For example, a 2015 McKinsey report on 366 companies found that "those in the top quartile for ethnic and racial diversity in management were 35% more likely to have financial returns above the industry mean, and those in the top quartile for gender diversity were 15% more likely to have returns above the industry mean."²⁹

Although I believe that diversity and globalization create opportunities, I also recognize that they create challenges. And these challenges must be taken seriously. In many ways, life is easier when our environment is familiar and simple and small. As we break down barriers between foreign populations and distant locations, our personal world becomes more complex. Thriving in a more complex environment requires us to be more educated and informed, and that requires real work.

We must hold ourselves and our leaders to a standard that recognizes democracy works only when we care about others. We the people should not tolerate the actions of an elected official describing fellow humans as "infesting our country" or as "animals." These words are not just insensitive; they are incompatible with democratic values. Anyone who would use such demeaning words demonstrates a lack of understanding of the democratic principles of equality of opportunity to participate fully in our society. In a democracy, we must care about one another, because we are all a part of something much bigger than ourselves as individuals.

True patriots understand that democracy depends on us caring about and valuing one another.

Citizenship

There should be no question that we must all hold ourselves individually responsible for good citizenship. In a 2018 survey, the Pew Research Center found that a strong majority of the American public believes the following actions are very or somewhat important to good citizenship: always following the law (96%), respecting the opinions of those who disagree (92%), paying all the taxes one owes (92%), voting in elections (91%), volunteering to help others (90%), and following what happens in government and politics (90%).³⁰

Public employees are beholden to us, and if they violate the principles of democracy, it is our job to make sure they are held accountable. But as private citizens living in a democracy, we are also beholden to our country and its people. And we have a duty to hold ourselves accountable. Just as we expect public employees to uphold the law, to be responsible, and to have integrity, we must expect the same of ourselves.

The very principles of self-governance and open markets can make it difficult for us to see the corresponding responsibilities we the citizenry have that are necessary for preserving and protecting these institutions. We may come to value individualism to the exclusion of what it takes to defend the democracy that defends individualism.

I believe that many of the ills we are experiencing today, as well as many from our past, are the result of a failure to make the connection between the rights we have as individuals and the responsibility we have to be good citizens.

In an essay titled “Creating the Good Society,” Claire Andre and Manuel Velasquez write of this problem. They argue that the ideal of the autonomous individual depends on a more complex understanding of the interdependence of individualism and the public good. It is a “sense of common purpose and public spirit crucial to the guidance of institutions in a democracy that is absent from our society today. A ruthless individualism, expressed primarily through a market mentality, has invaded every sphere of our lives, undermining those institutions ... that have traditionally functioned as foci of collective purposes, history and culture. This lack of common purpose or lack of concern for the common good bodes ill for a people claiming to be a democracy.”³¹

While globalization and new technologies connect us in ways that create new opportunities, they also can make us feel less personally

connected to community. And they increase the complexity of our decision-making, which makes the task of democratic governance more challenging because the task of informing ourselves on relevant public policy issues requires us to gather and comprehend more information. It is increasingly difficult to write and adopt effective public policy because there are so many more variables at play; therefore, voters must make more effort to be informed on the issues.

When choosing our leaders, we must elect people who not only share our political ideology but who also understand and respect the very important role community plays in keeping our democracy strong. Of equal importance, we must continuously evaluate our own individual political ideology in the context of American character and the principles of democracy.

A democratic government is a partnership of the people. Understanding America's character helps us to understand the attributes that are important to the individual American's character. For democracy to flourish, the citizenry must understand the values encompassed by this form of self-governance. And we must all be committed to upholding those shared values. Even though we regularly disagree with one another on many issues, we implicitly agree to accept and share these broader values.

In their book *How Democracies Die*, Harvard professors Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt write that we cannot merely depend on the good character of our leaders; we need norms or shared codes of conduct that are "accepted, respected, and enforced."³² Norms can be informal, but they can also be formalized into formal codes of ethics or public laws. We can each have an individual code of behavior, but we are also bound by the values of American democracy. More than any other form of government, democracy demands a high-level commitment to good behavior and accountability from the citizenry. Without good citizenship, we cannot be our best democracy.

True patriots hold not just their leaders but also themselves to the highest standards of citizenship.

Like physical pillars that are crucial to the support of a material structure, the pillars of character are crucial to democracy. Fairness of process, trustworthiness of the people and leadership, respect and caring for others who share our world, taking responsibility for ourselves and our

country, and making our best effort to be good citizens—these are the very things that keep our democracy from crumbling. I believe that at this critical time in our nation's history, we must all rededicate ourselves to these underlying values that make democracy work and make America great.