

"What are the greatest attributes of our Democracy?"

We've all heard the characterization of the ugly American. We're loud. We're too direct. We want the comforts of home: ice, air conditioning, and good water pressure. We drape ourselves in patriotism (sometimes literally) and tout our military and economic prowess. Wait a minute, these are hallmarks of our democracy? Yes.

The traits that we're derided for are our greatest attributes. We're stereotyped because we value individualism and encourage the free expression of ideas. We know excellence and we want our high standards met. By contrast, in much of the world, the interests of the group are paramount. Maintaining order comes at the expense of individual expression. Keep quiet and keep your opinions to yourself. We can't and we won't. Thomas Jefferson declared that the opinions of the people are the basis of our government. So, we the people, in our uncouth white sneakers and our baseball hats voraciously speak our minds. We are sometimes critical and we are often loud, but our greatest distinction is that we believe in our system of government.

We have faith despite the incomprehensible amount of negative information we are bombarded with daily, a cacophony of hate and derision. It all just noise and noise is loud. Just like we are. It unpleasant. It causes disturbances, but we don't want it to stop. At another time in our history, when similar headlines touted combative ugly rhetoric, James Buchanan said, I like the noise of democracy. That noise is the cornerstone of our democracy. It free speech and a free press. It democracy at work. Today's skirmishes are minor compared to what Lincoln ineffective predecessor faced, but we overcame those tumultuous times. History is cyclical. Challenges come and we overcome.

Today, the words America and democracy are synonymous. We cannot separate our country from our government: they were born as one, indivisible. The words that gave birth to our nation come from the world two most important works of political philosophy, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. They are unrivaled in influence and scope. Internationally, they're often copied but never equaled. Domestically, they're often cited, but never criticized. When people in other places seek liberty and want to create something better they look to our Declaration and Constitution. Here, it doesn't matter what party someone is from or what position they

promote. They couch their arguments in the ideals laid out in these two hallowed documents. This is our common ground. Republican, Democrat, Independent, Progressive, Liberal, Conservative, it doesn't matter. We all believe in the Declaration, the Constitution, and the government they forged.

If you want to know what someone believes look at what they do. The idiom is true: people vote with their feet. People don't flee from the United States they flood in. Nine hundred fifty thousand international students come here each year to attend our universities. Four million immigrants a year risk their lives to line up at our gates. Agitated Americans make booming announcements about leaving the country if this politician is elected or that policy is passed. It just noise. No one ever leaves. Why do the majority of the world billionaires choose to live here instead of some tax haven? Because they, like everyone else, believe in our quality of life and the security, predictability, and safety that our system of government ensures.

Our Constitution guarantees that we always have the same government and a peaceful transition of power. We don't have to worry about military coups or warlords. Unlike in some countries, our armed forces don't get entangled in our government. Our stalwart soldiers have always adhered to John Adams adage that we have a government of laws, not of men. They are loyal to the offices, not the people that hold them. They uphold the institutions of our nation and defend our Constitution because they believe. And I believe like Thomas Jefferson, "Malo periculosam, libertatem quam quietam servitutem." (I prefer the tumult of liberty to the quiet of servitude.) Like Benjamin Franklin, Ubi libertas, ibi patria. (Where liberty dwells there is my country.) A country where we may not behave perfectly. We can be loud, disagreeable, and divided. It would be easier and quieter if some authoritative figure told us what to do, but that what we fought against almost two hundred fifty years ago. Now just like then, we are united by an ideology. We are indivisible because we embrace the rule of law and the system of government created in our Constitution and the virtues in our Declaration. The rest is just noise and that noise is the song of democracy and us enduring.