

It's not what America can do for me, but what I can do for America

There are those who argue that this generation of youth is the most narcissistic yet, rivaling the similar claims of self-absorption attributed to the baby boomers. These criticisms are not without cause; websites which allow people to inform the world of their frivolous activities in a blatant display of vanity have exploded in popularity among the younger crowd, and horror stories of teens with inflated senses of entitlement occupy the news headlines time and again. Truth be told, this level of self-obsession does not stop with the youth, and it has infiltrated much of American society, including the world of politics.

The idea of informed democratic participation has given way to a self-interested special interest voting, where people vote or engage the system solely on those issues they find relevant to themselves, which is usually as simplistic as keeping their own taxes as low as possible. Empathy for others comes second to convenience for the self. This tendency towards selfish concern for one's own affairs may very well lead to what some modern political theorists have dubbed "soft despotism," where an ineffectual democratic government entrenches itself as the voters drift apart and are unable to unite to achieve any significant goal. Such a bureaucracy would end up greatly diminishing the freedoms we Americans are both guaranteed and responsible for protecting.

This problem takes root in the idea that the government is subservient to the individual; not the entire population, but the mere individual. People expect the government to change the nation for them, while the power to change this land rests in their own hands. This mindset is clearly demonstrated in the increased prevalence of lobbying the judicial system to settle political issues; doing so can easily cause a small group to have their way without generating popular support. The civil rights movement represents the opposite of this corrosive idea; though accomplished with the help of the courts, it started from the ground with its dedicated volunteers and worked its way up. The men and women who protested in favor of freedom made a huge impact on America, all because they stood up and made their voices heard.

The most valuable freedom we are granted by the Constitution is that of participation, and the most important way we can serve our nation is by taking the steps to make it a better place. We cannot idly resign ourselves to be spectators and vainly condemn the abuses of power committed by our elected leaders; action must be taken to oust those corrupt politicians and usher in ones who stay true to the founding ideals. Equally so, threats to the rights of Americans and even those abroad must be passionately defended by all citizens, who must stay informed and aware of the need for progress. America is a great land, but it is not a perfect land, not yet; we cannot simply ask the nation to do us right, but we can do right for it.