

## 2017 PSR/Sacramento Essay Contest Submission

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The link between democracy and education is strong; it is a fabric woven together that supports the foundation of this country. And perhaps more importantly, the interconnection of education and democracy serves as a lifeline, a glimpse of a hopeful future, to oppressed peoples internationally. Education both inspires and protects democracy, and as Franklin Delano Roosevelt said, "Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education."

Education is the primary way in which people can advance their status in any nation, and learn to advocate on their own behalf. Historically, we can see the importance of education in all major social movements in the United States, and their effects on democracy. Now education is an arsenal for social and political change globally, as marginalized groups seek knowledge and their own human rights. Democracy is reliant on well-informed citizens, and dictates only the freedoms of its many people; without education and awareness of issues, citizens are helpless in the face of autocracy and bigotry.

The 19th and 20th century set the stage for some of the most recognizable social movements in US history. Beginning with the 13th amendment to the constitution in 1865, the 19th amendment in 1920, and the enforcement of the 15th amendment with the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the social movements working towards equality in the eyes of government and society achieved legislation that broadened democracy and gave the diversity of the nation a chance to speak for themselves. For various historically marginalized and oppressed groups, such as women, racial minorities, the LGBTQ community, and immigrants, the basis of the initial movement is rooted in education. Education inspires political and cultural change in society and empowers the voiceless members of our communities.

Today, education is the first line of attack for combating injustice and intolerance globally. Specifically, equal education for girls and women is key to advancing women's roles internationally. There is no doubt that advancing education of girls in impoverished communities leads to improvements in the health, economy, and overall quality of life for all members. However, over half of the 58 million children out of school globally are girls, and in many regions, women and girls are threatened, abused, and killed for trying to go to school. Yet these girls persist, even in societies where they are devalued and degraded, because it is known that education is crucial to positive changes in their status, and ultimately, in their communities.

Democracy is reliant on educated, informed citizens who know their rights and respect the human rights of all others. Education is no longer a privilege or a box that can be checked off. It is a vital part of a functioning egalitarian society, and it is a human right. As those in a place of privilege, with readily available access to education, we must defend those who have not been given the tools to defend themselves and broaden our society by accepting all.