



LAW DAY 2023 CONTEST WINNERS

TOP ROW: LEFT TO RIGHT

FIRST PLACE PHOTOGRAPHY

“Poor Hands” by Luis Angel Gomez
Carver High School (Houston Bar Association)

FIRST PLACE POSTER 3RD-5TH GRADE

“My Drawing About Civics, Civility, and Collaboration” by Rena Wu
Robert B. Sewell Elementary (Dallas Bar Association)

MIDDLE ROW: LEFT TO RIGHT

FIRST PLACE POSTER KINDERGARTEN-2ND GRADE

“Law Day 65th Anniversary” by Dominique McNeely
J.P. Starks Elementary School (Dallas Bar Association)

FIRST PLACE POSTER 9TH-12TH GRADE

“Celebrating Democracy” by Jordyn Torres
Young Women’s Leadership Academy (Bexar County Women’s Bar Association)

BOTTOM ROW

FIRST PLACE POSTER 6TH-8TH GRADE

“Assembly Democracy” by Claire Montizaan
Willow Wood Jr. High School (Houston Bar Association)

Discourse Drives Democracy

WRITTEN BY NICHOLAS NGUYEN

The foundation of America is built with bricks of collaboration and civics. In the diversity of thought and speech that encouraged discourse, America's partisan democracy flourished as it broke glass ceilings in every century. However, in recent years of unconditional political polarization, societal progress has become paralyzed with parties' intent on fighting each other more than the issues at hand. Through the pursuit of collaboration between parties, American democracy returns to its roots of civility embedded in the Constitution and fosters an environment for healthy discourse.

America is founded on partisanship. Although modern politics suggests recency in the polarity between parties, partisanship has existed since the creation of the nation. James Madison, dubbed as the "Father of the Constitution," wrote in his "Speech on the Right to Suffrage" that "no free Country has ever been without parties, which are a natural offspring of Freedom." Understanding that parties were an inevitable and integral part of politics that should be embraced instead of discouraged, Madison wrote the Constitution as a platform to explore the complexities that arise through partisanship discourse. Parts of the Constitution, such as the First Amendment, ensure that individuals from any party can express their opinions to contribute to the public discourse surrounding any subject. However, this contribution is only constructive to society if its ideas are respected by the parties opposing it.

Every topic in contemporary United States society is a source of division. While this diversity in thought presumably enables inclusive policymaking, the aggressive polarization between parties has stripped discourse of its substance, turning every conversation into "Democrats vs. Republicans" instead of an analysis of strengths and weaknesses. Through respectful collaboration instead of unconditional opposition, the differences between parties will become a tool for progress instead of a hindrance to it. By pursuing civility and the courtesies of organized debate, American politics will return to the Founding Fathers' vision of a society grown through forums of discussion.

While some argue that partisan collaboration is an idealistic dream, history has proven the success of the collaboration between parties in several distinct eras. In the 1900s, numerous Republican senators surpassed their political alignment by voting alongside the Democratic senators and passing the Civil Rights Act to prohibit discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and nationality. In the 1800s, President Abraham Lincoln, a Republican, filled his cabinet with both Democrats and Republicans, gathering talented individuals of diverse backgrounds. Through collaboration with his multi-party cabinet, Lincoln left one of the biggest marks on American history by winning the Civil War. Finally, the Great Compromise in the 1700s supported both small and large state parties, laying the foundation for the bipartisanship ideals of collaboration that were embedded in the Constitution written shortly after.

The American people are rapidly drifting apart. However, by pursuing collaboration between parties and civil discourse, the wound laid upon American politics will have an opportunity to heal; returning to the roots of America's Constitution, our society will flourish in a sea of diverse ideas and inclusive policymaking. **TBJ**

Notes

1. James Madison. Note to His Speech on the Right of Suffrage (1821). Available at press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch16s26.html.

Nicholas Nguyen, of Michael E. DeBakey High School for Health Care Professions, represented the Houston Bar Association in the Law Day editorial contest, which explored the theme of "The Cornerstones of Democracy: Civics, Civility, and Collaboration." To see the full list of contest winners, go to texasbar.com/lawday.

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