

Chad Francour  
Why choose?

### Are You a Democrat or Republican; Why Choose?

I was listening to a NPR broadcast in The Hidden Brain titled, "E Pluribus Unum?" by Shankar Vedantam about the climate of American democracy. The year 2017 was tough. The news of climate change to our current political debacle. A person might see the unraveling of an informed democracy (Tyson). Many Americans are angry and that has led to sadness which in turn leads to fear that the United States is falling apart. After two centuries as a leader in democracy, many fear the ties that bind us together as a nation are starting to fray. The talk about recession, political corruption, and the riots from President Trump's decisions (Thrush & Haberman, 2017). If you feel our nation is at a breaking point this paper offer you some solace.

Historian David Moss wrote a book titled, Democracy-A Case Study with the thesis that intense political conflict has been present in history since the country was born. The disagreements are enough conflict to produce meaningful change and is a sign of our vitality. If we look at American democracy in the past; we see that it has been quite resilient and has generated remarkable progress. A person might judge his or her political success or failure on whether his or her side wins. Mr. Moss thinks in the long-term, the realm of success or failure is the wellness of democracy. Does conflict strengthen or weaken our bond with our fellow Americans?

If a person's choice of party is tearing this country apart, how can one be optimistic? In the United States, conflict has been productive (Moss, 2017). If we think about comparison conflict in the economic realm; we see innovations and new ideas. We see the same ability to adapt in the political sphere. We have two parties, different interest groups, and all sorts of persons trying to fight it out and in the end process we have good maybe even fantastic ideas. We can conclude, in a political market space, competition is needed.

If we take this idea a step further, we see that conflict can either be constructive or destructive to democracy. A constructive conflict is the process (e.g., inner workings) becomes as important as the end result. Individuals come together to redefine or strengthen the relationship for the greater good of the parties involved or country. A destructive conflict, however, often flows from a narrowly defined or rigid goals that most often produce negative results or only benefit a select few. If we focus on the conflict (e.g., Republican versus Democrat) we might negate the bigger picture which is to understand the different resolutions of a problem to better our country.

Looking back on American history, there were three moments where our political disagreements were so intense that one would think the country might implode (Moss, 2017). The first case was in the first few years after the founding of the nation. The founding fathers like Thomas Jefferson support's called John Adams hideous and hermaphroditical (Swint, 2008). Adams called Alexander Hamilton that bastard brat of a Scottish peddler (Mancini, 2013). There was deep disagreements on what it meant to be a country. George Washington was humiliated that our political distress had left the country looking, "ridiculous and contemptible." In other words, what Washington said was we founded this country but it is already falling apart. In today's time, we had Trump calling his opponent crooked Hillary and the Democratic Party saying Trump is unfit for office and even possibly insane.

We see our new nation declared its independence in 1776 (Declaration of Independence). The United States was thrilled that we finally declared our independence but things very quickly turned south. In the first few years after the Revolutionary war there were big problems. The nation was governed by the Articles of Confederation. The Articles of Confederation gave all the power to the states and at that time there was a federal government but it was extremely weak with no president and Supreme Court. The federal government just had Congress but it was very limited power. (E.g., Congress could spend money and borrow but it could not generate funds from taxation. The problem was not being able to

generate money but it had no spending power on things like the war and when money was borrowed it is unable to raise revenues. The federal government is soon in default and unable to pay its creditors. The creditors at that time have been the soldiers (U.S. Debt and Foreign Loans).

Then the states started to put tariffs on one another to generate money. The government thought the states would be a big free trade stone. Some economists say that decline was worse than than the Great Depression (Moss, 2017). One might wonder where we go from here with our nation.

As the states are fighting with one another and trying to figure out if we have a workable federal government then the states come up with a compromise of how to build the institution of present day modern federal government. One of the first debates, for example, center around how do we build Congress. The smaller states like Delaware and Connecticut wanted one vote per state while the larger ones like Virginia and Georgia wanted proportional representation based on the representation of voters. The states decided on an interesting compromise which is known as "The Great Compromise." The result of The Great Compromise was the House of Representatives which votes on proportional representation and the Senate which is to voters per state.

Too often when we hear of the word compromise we think we need to meet in the middle. When two parties meet in the middle that is one form of compromise and occurs often. Even more common in American democracy in dealing with recent times is taking the best of both worlds. In other words, you get the best of one ideas from one party and likewise from the other. As we see from the Great Compromise the smaller states got what they wanted and the larger states got what they wanted instead of meeting the middle a person got both.

The historical reference that modified Washington, also, resulted in model of government that has endured for more than two centuries. The conflict was painful but productive. Nearly 100 years later the US was tested once again with the election of Abraham Lincoln (Moss, 2017). It was a time when southern states wanted to succeed from the north. It was on the cusp of the Civil War. The result of the Civil War was the abolishment of slavery but it also can be seen as a destructive conflict (Moss, 2017). The Civil War in 1865 was the costliest and deadliest war ever fought on American soil. The results was 620,000 of 2.4 million soldiers killed, millions more injured and much of the South left in ruin (The History Channel, 2009). When we look at productive conflict we see that although the two sides disagree the viately on some issue or problem we do have something in common. We as Americans care deeply about our political system/democracy. The faith that serves similar to that of a glue that holds us together. What you see in the war of 1850s and leading up to the 1860s the war began is that glue is starting to break. This is the case for many Southerners who favor succession and more likely to favor the institution of slavery. In fact, the Southerners had been so committed to slavery even more than the nations democracy.

Lincoln wins the presidential election in November 1860. He receives a plurality of popular votes and majority of the electoral college. He opposes the expansion of slavery. He did not want to see it expanded. At that time Lincoln chose his battles strategically because many Southerners thought the only way to maintain slavery was to expand it to the north to maintain political balance between slave and free states. The South could not tolerate the US president would oppose the expansion of slavery. Although Lincoln was elected fair and square, the South, would not accept him as the leader of our country.

The South puts forth this entire way of life around the evils of slavery ahead of our democracy. When this happens everything hits the fan. Then the conflict is pushed into rancor and violence. Allowing one to realize our differences are a source of strength but also a source of weakness. Posing the question of do we, in today's, have something holding us together?

The answer in most of American history is yes. In other words, when talking about destructive and productive conflict is that when productive conflict happens when we say, "I believe strongly that I am right but I also want to concede the possibility that I do not have been the all knowing truth and maybe I should be open to suggestions or feedback. In productive conflict there is a chance that I could be wrong

in the future. This poses the question how far is our democracy willing to go to get what we as Americans need. For example, a family may quarrel about many things but if the members have love; the disagreements will only go so far until it is ripped apart making the life of the family apart. Again in the 20th century these bonds were tested of our country.

Another moment of crisis was when the political upheavals (e.g., the Vietnam War, KKK, and Martin Luther King Jr.) of the 1960s was leading the civil rights struggle by addressing deep partisan division is in our country (Moss, 2017). King finds progress in not reaching a consensus but rather reaching for conflict. He first targets Birmingham, Alabama. The group with King was facing tyranny of the majority as extreme as it comes. From facing Jim Crow laws that separated Blacks and whites in the South and intense dissention of black voters making a black minority is created that has been disenfranchised and has little to no political and economical power (Jim Crow Laws and Racial Segregation, Virginia Commonwealth University). What do we do to try and change the system?

At that time, many people thought we needed severe help. What was so brilliant about King and even before in the early 20th century the NAACP was thinking about ways to see change (History.com staff, 2009) . The end result was embracing democracy and revealing the hypocrisy in our nation. The hypocrisies were, "all men are created equal and equal protection under the law." Furthermore, were those principles highlighted (Martin Luther King Jr., 1963). The civil rights leaders figured out the hypocrisies can be seen as a positive and not just as a negative. In other words, if you can tease through all the rhetoric or maliky a person should realize the principles we hold dear to ourselves are being violated. That made people forcefully choose between right or wrong when we side with principal.

In essence, that was what Martin Luther King Jr. was trying to do in picking battles. He is going for conflict in some of the most challenging places in the South to protest. King chose Birmingham and Selma, Alabama to provoke conflict. They would protest peacefully but also knew that there was a chance to get hurt. There were some bad dudes (e.g., police and sheriff) on the other side that would take the smallest opportunity to cause harm to the protesters. What Martin Luther King Jr. realized was if you can make people in their living rooms the atrocities and brought it out into the light of day.

King uses children in Birmingham to march for equal rights. King knew at least by 63 he would not have had that turnout without the television (Moss, 2017). He was able to march or protest peacefully and the reactions came quickly and swiftly to provoke a response from the other side by provoking an unlikely response from the other side and put on display these hypocrisies. As a result, is this deep faith tied to our democracy.

There was, at that time, many who thought our democracy was so broken and faulty that there was no fixing it. In other words, Martin Luther King Jr. quote unquote wrapped himself in the flag (Vedantam, 2018). He wrapped himself in this idea of American democracy and made the conflict productive. He said we have these principles and I want to see if we can live by them. I think we need to remember American democracy is far from perfect but it is outstandingly resilient. It has generated enormous social and political progress, heck of a lot slower than we would like, but it is still progress.

Does one of these three events describes our current political state? Are we on a new chapter of our democracy or are we on the brink of divorce? Looking at our democracy (e.g., a birth certificate of Obama or impeaching Trump) are these conflicts just like business as usual or is this something different?

A person who is not as engage into the political realm might say "those Republicans or Democrats did this," I think it has to do with both. We are more partisan relative to the 20th century then in a long time. For example, in the 19th century we see strong divisions that led to the Civil War. In many other cases those divisions led to productive conflict (Moss, 2017). We can then summarize the question is there too much bantering in the government but a more intuitive statement is conflict can be a positive thing if it stays in the political sphere and produces productive ideas. Probably the best question should be what do we have in common with one another. It takes more cognitive energy to express hate than it is to love. (E.g., what separates America from other countries?) The United States is unique because we do not

have a common origin, religion and way of life but what we do have is diversity. A what we did have in the beginning of our democracy is a faith in the system a republican governance (Moss, 2017).

Benjamin Franklin may have been one of the greatest minds in our history took a saying from a gentleman's magazine he liked to describe our country, "E Pluribus Unum" is Latin for out of many one. He saw it as out of many states and persons is one nation. Furthermore our diversity gives great strengths for our country but will create that unity is our belief in democratic self-governance (Moss, 2017). What needs to change is if we disagree on something in our political system or when someone loses, can we expect it and are we going to be treated with some degree of respect. Thinking about losing or when winning with grace.

### References

- Morgan S., E. (1976). The Virginia Quarterly Review. Volume 52. Number 3.  
[http://www.vqrone.org/essay/george-washington-aloof-american](http://www.vqronline.org/essay/george-washington-aloof-american)
- Swint K. 2008. Mudslingers: The Twenty-Five Dirtiest Political Campaigns of All Time.  
<http://mentalfloss.com/article/12487/adams-vs-jefferson-birth-negative-campaigning-us>
- Thrush & Haberman. (2017). Trump Is Criticized for Not Calling Out White Supremacists.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/12/us/trump-charlottesville-protest-nationalist-riot.html>
- History.com Staff. (2009). A+E Networks. <http://www.history.com/topics/naacp>.
- Moss A, D. (2017). Democracy: A Case Study. Professor of Business Administration at Harvard business school.
- Tyson D, N. We Are Witnessing The 'Unraveling Of An Informed Democracy.'  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xIfc5Oo0hkc>
- U.S. Debt and Foreign Loans, 1775–1795. Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs. The United States Department of State. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1784-1800/loans>.
- Virginia Commonwealth University. Jim Crow Laws and Racial Segregation.  
<https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/eras/civil-war-reconstruction/jim-crow-laws-andracial-segregation/>.