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Truth Can Save Democracy

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By
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As part of a national effort, to mourn the anniversary of the insurrection that took place on January 6, 2021, another national effort occurred on January 6, 2022. Here in Omaha and in over 230 cities vigils occurred with a focus towards a “call to action,” a very important day of remembrance and call for action, directed towards an affirmation of Democracy. In Omaha, a vigil was hosted by the College of St. Mary. I had the honor of being one of three speakers. The other speakers included Heather Engdahl, of Civic Nebraska, and Jo Giles of the Women’s Fund of Omaha.

I offer my comments from that vigil, as a guardrail, to provide a historical context of the events that led up to and concluded with the January 6 insurrection. As an African American, who will be 80 years old this year, I have lived to witness America and its worst and lowest points, complete with its efforts to adjust itself towards improvement:

- To adjust itself **from** slavery to amendments to its constitution, i.e., the 13th, 14th, and 15th Constitutional Amendments, to a period of reconstruction and development, for African Americans and people of color
- To adjust itself from the post Reconstruction Period of Jim Crowism to an undeniable movement to right wrongs, aka The Civil Rights Movement
- To adjust itself from racism, sexism, and aggressive voter impediments with Federal legislation and Supreme court rulings

Each adjustments attempted was followed by a steady creep backwards to past inequities. The 1965 Voting Rights Act was progress but unraveled in 2013 and now so ineffective by constant political and legal attacks on its virtues, that there is a need to completely restore it assets. We are faced with the need for major adjustments. White Supremacy, renewed racism, sexism, hate, and once again, new attempts to restrict, and alter, the simple democratic process of voting and even the transfer of power. January 6, 2021, demands a new and rigorous adjustment. Afterall, the entire January 6th saga was based on untruths. An alarming number of Americans still believe the lies.

It is my contention is that any new adjustment must not just come from Federal legislation, i.e., the John Lewis Voting Rights Act but from a change in our communities, rural and urban, Democrat and Republicans. There must be a recognition of the reduced value of truth and its impact on Democracy. George Floyd’s death and January 6th should be a clarion call, to our nation, (and here in Omaha), that we the people must take the lead by demanding the change now. Collectively, demand for truth. History has taught us that legislation alone will fall short of real change. With truth comes healing; with healing comes adjustments to our thinking, and with more inadept thoughtfulness, positive actions, and behaviors will follow. Adjustments need to be made or the lessons of George Floyd and January 6th will be lost, and Democracy will continue to be symbolic.

Over the course of my life, and before, the idea of true Democracy for all, has been mostly symbolic. When I grew up as an African American youth, I was redlined; that was not Democracy. I went to segregated schools; that was not Democracy. When I was old enough to vote it was before the 1965 Voting Rights Act was passed. I have lived to endure hate and racism in many forms including the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Medgar Evers, the church bombing in Birmingham killing 4 innocent black young teenage girls. In my beloved North Omaha, an innocent 14-year-old teenage black girl named Vivian Strong, was fatally shot in the back of the head by a policeman. Does any of this sound like Democracy?? Yet there is a renewed effort by some to prohibit teaching this part of history to our children, to intentionally avoid telling the truth.

Recent, aggressive attempts, to legislate voter restrictions, coupled with mass misinformation, all amount to the undermining Democracy. And now, January 6, 2021. We have lost our way to the truth. So, I say now, *Truth can save Democracy.*

I suggest that each one of us become activist for truth., we will fight any attempt at misinformation, refuse to be bystanders or participants in hate, racism, and division, be advocates of equity and equality for all, dismiss any attempt to restrict voting and above all, stand up for truth, stand up for Democracy, pray for Democracy. After all, our children are watching us. Teach them the truth.