

The Citizen's Role

George Jean Nathan once said, "Bad officials are elected by good citizens who do not vote." I must admit I was puzzled when I first read this quote. How is it that someone could so bluntly denounce such an honorable form of government whose power is solely derived from the people? As a student, I had always been taught that a democratic government was the most admirable and just form of ruling known to man. I came to understand, however, that George Jean Nathan was criticizing a government that could only function at its best when the people are knowledgeable and have a full understanding of the issues.

As citizens of a democratic nation, we have an enormous amount of power. We have the responsibility of informing ourselves on the issues and voting for the candidates we believe will promote the most progress. The nation's development depends on our understanding of politics and economics at the national and international level. In a nation such as America where citizens are showered with so many rights, one must let go of ignorance and embrace every source of unbiased information possible to make sure important decisions are logically made.

Unfortunately, we live in a world where the citizens of democratic countries are ridiculously uninformed. We live in a world where citizens choose a path of ignorance when fountains of information are readily available to them. We live in a world where people vote for candidates they know absolutely nothing about. When creating the United States Constitution, the founding fathers feared the uneducated masses, and so they created a democracy with limitations. We justly weakened those provisions in the name of a more equal democracy, however we are left with what the founding fathers originally feared. It, therefore, saddens me to conclude that Mr. Nathan was absolutely correct in his description of a democracy.

We must not give up however. Conscious voting cannot afford to continue being limited to one class of people. Information must spread if we are to maintain the democratic ideals the founding fathers so desperately believed in. The knowledgeable must fight this wave of ignorance and encourage others to inform themselves so that one day democracy reaches its full potential. James Madison put it best when he stated, “Knowledge will forever govern ignorance; and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.”