

Voting in the United States: A Right and a Responsibility

As each November before my eighteenth birthday passes, the crisp auburn leaves on the sidewalk cement remind me that once again, America is listening as we, the people, speak her future. She opens her book and hands all Americans the pen, and slowly, the pages fill as people across the United States write their ballots in the cooling autumn air. More than ever, my mom, my dad, my older sister, and all Americans throughout the country and the world are shareholders in our nation's fate, each presented with one of democracy's most incredible opportunities—the vote.

As protected under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, the freedom of speech, or freedom of expression, affirms that all Americans be able to voice their opinion without restriction by the law. This founding principle, fundamental to the American democracy, is preserved when U.S. citizens are provided their right to vote. When we act on this right, we empower ourselves to declare our ideas for the future of the United States and be heard. The marketplace of ideas, as coined by Justice William O. Douglas in the Supreme Court case *United States v. Rumely*, values a domain of free and open speech as a catalyst for the truth. My vote counts because it is one of my most basic freedoms as an American citizen which our democracy is built upon. It counts because my expression, along with the votes of hundreds of millions of other Americans who are free to speak their mind, will ultimately lead to a truer, better tomorrow.

Not only is voting the right, it is also the responsibility of all Americans. Our democracy, one of the first of its kind, has been sustained by its people for over two centuries, punctuated by almost sixty presidential elections. In the Declaration of Independence, founding father Thomas Jefferson conveyed a vision for the governing of the United States. In addressing the injustices of oppressive British rule he proclaimed, "Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed." Representative government—a government for the people, of the people, and by the people—thrives when informed and active citizens assume their civic duty and vote as a realization of what Jefferson has laid out in the Declaration. My vote, every vote, is important. The engagement and dedication of all Americans uphold and ensure the success of the American democracy and protect its integrity as a governing body.

Every autumn, America grants each of her citizens the chance vote once more. As we speak freely through our ballots, she listens to every voice and conceives her new or unaltered fate. Her democracy is honored as she turns her pages and lets all Americans pen her next chapter. The November election hands each citizen the opportunity to engage in their rights and fulfill their democratic duty. My vote; the vote of my mom, my dad, and my sister; the vote of every American, matters. Our votes are a promise to other American citizens and America to preserve our rights and forever uphold her democracy.