

## Is Dogmatic Thinking in Line With Democracy?

The significance of birthright citizenship is an incredible privilege we, as Americans, take for granted. No European or Asian country grants this right so, inherently, it means being an American is not based on belonging to any particular racial, ethnic, or religious group. We are fortunate to have a national identity without a specific heritage required to belong. This also means America was designed, constitutionally, as a tribe transcending nation.

A seismic shift has occurred during the last few elections to break down our social fabric and identity of mutual respect. As our "free press" are now essentially all editorial in reporting, we as the consumer, have lost access to contact with objective information. Critical thinking as humans depends upon processing truth and reason. When all "facts" we obtain are filtered through a lens and presented second-hand, from a view reflecting the reporter's belief, it becomes impossible to exercise a sense of compassion or understanding of perspectives other than our own. "How can you even think that is ok?" "Why would anyone believe that?" are common refrains we utter. Watch the Netflix documentary "The Social Dilemma" and you will rapidly understand we are victims of our own searches and are continually fed information the search algorithms are designed to give us, based on what we want to read. Our news, our searches, even our very definitions are all filtered in such a way that we live in an echo chamber of the opinion we already believe. We are unable to view facts in a non-biased and credibly reported manner to allow us to form our own intelligently determined and reasoned conclusions. Media has seen to this. We simply cannot be trusted to make up our own minds.

Media heightening of our differences has highlighted a chasm among every identity we could wish to claim. Every single human wants to feel a sense of belonging but in doing so, we have allowed current cultural trends and the media to pit us against one another by claiming our tribe through unchallenged dogma of belief. Loneliness and a lack of connection leads to bonding to group ideals and identity based on claiming that dogma. It also creates a danger to free thinking and critical evaluation. This mentality permits us to claim our group's superiority and rail against our opposition, rather than listen to understand them through dialogue. It leads to division, strife, hatred, and seething. We see enemies everywhere. Do you defend free speech? Then you are defending the dehumanization of fringe peoples. Property rights? That is just white supremacy. You oppose Critical Race Theory and banning Dr. Seuss? Then you are a bigot and racist who must be doxed and punished. There is no middle ground in identity group think when it is based on dogmatic segregation.

The problem with dogmatic and group identity is that America is a multicultural nation. We are complex and non-binary. There are not only two answers: right and wrong. We do not have an ethnic or religious identity as a country or predetermined molds we must fit into. Our identity is based on the rights guaranteed to all of our citizens within the Constitution. It is the very definition of intolerant and legalistic to determine for everyone that they should believe and who should or should not be outed and punished for not adhering to your tribe's beliefs. What a unique and wonderful nation we live in that allows us to embrace multiculturalism, differences of opinion, a national identity and remain united by our Constitution, regardless of ideological disagreements.

As you walk the walk of an Aggie, remember we are united, despite our different views, by our nation's constitution. One of our core values is respect. Respect should not be reserved only be for those with whom we wholly agree. When your fellow student on campus, colleague at work, or professor in class expresses an opinion different than yours and it rubs against the ideology of what your chosen group believes, instead of seeking to vilify that stance and the person expressing it, take a moment. Consider what it would be like to listen to learn where someone is coming from and why they think what they do, rather than assigning a motivation to them and forming an argument solely to convince them why they are wrong. Without agreeing, humans can respect one another without ideological conformity. That is the very basis of what our nation is founded upon.

Proud Aggie