

Democracy Matters 2

Lesson Three: Beware the one-party state.

For democracy to work, for the voice of the people to be heard, and to have any hope of being able to hold the powerful to account, there must exist meaningful choice. This means that, no matter how put off we might feel by those on the other side of the political aisle, we all have a vested interest in having at least two healthy, fully functional political parties.

In a one-party state, there are no meaningful checks on power, there are no means by which to amplify the voice and will of the people, and there are no independent institutions sufficiently empowered to prevent the government from running roughshod over the people. Whatever problems might ail us as a nation, a one-party state is not the answer.

So support the multi-party system and defend the rules of democratically conducted elections. Recognize that negotiation and compromise are vital functions of government. Appreciate that, although negotiation slows things down, it also ensures that more peoples' interests are taken into account in the resulting legislation. Vote in local and state elections. And, particularly in those cycles where you don't like your choices, consider running for office yourself—it's a democracy, after all, which means that you can!

Lesson Four: Take responsibility for the face of the world.

Notice the signs of hate you encounter in the world. Do not allow yourself to get used to them. In the politics of the everyday, our words and gestures (and their absence) matter very much. In surveying your community, recognize that what might seem like a gesture of belonging and pride to some might equally be felt as a mark of exclusion by others.

If you're in a position to take down the signs of hate that you encounter, do this and, in so doing, set an example for others. Always remember that the

future is not yet written, which means the small choices we make today really will serve as a kind of vote toward the kind of future we want to have tomorrow. When we allow signs of hate to take root in our neighborhoods, we are allowing certain possibilities to take hold. Think hard about what kind of future you want. Make sure it is one that includes your fellow Americans and that your actions reflect this commitment.

(Adapted from Snyder, Timothy. *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*. Vintage Digital, 2017.)