

**2025 Voice of Democracy First Place Winner**  
**Tri Vu**  
**Central High School**  
**Manchester, New Hampshire**

My family moved to America 12 years ago, seeking the very ideals of freedom and opportunity that this country was built upon. We arrived without knowing the language or understanding much about the culture of America. It was a daunting journey, but my parents made the difficult decision to leave behind their comfortable, though limited, lives in Vietnam—sacrificing established careers, a familiar community, and family ties in order to give my brother and I the chance to thrive in ways they never could under the restrictive conditions of a Communist regime. Their decision was not simply about improving our lives, but also about creating a future compatible with the freedom, justice, and opportunity that America stands for.

Their decision was motivated by a desire for freedom—freedom from a repressive regime in which individual rights were denied and corruption was not only common but established. Social mobility was restricted by uncontrollable factors, and connections and bribes frequently took precedence over individual merit. My father, in particular, would often share stories of working within this broken system. As an architect and engineer, he was forced to comply with unethical government mandates, such as using substandard materials for road construction so that government officials could pocket the excess funds. This disregard for the well-being of the people served as a constant reminder of the corrupted system we left behind. In coming to America, we left those compromises behind, seeking instead a land where fairness, justice, and opportunity—the very cornerstones of democracy—were protected.

For my father, voting in the United States became one of the most powerful symbols of this new life. Having spent years under a regime where his voice meant nothing, the simple act of casting a ballot in a democratic election became the ultimate expression of personal freedom. Even in the face of challenges including long work hours, remote work locations, and long lines on election days, he was pleased and grateful for every opportunity he had to cast a ballot. This was his way of paying tribute to the nation that had accepted him not just as an immigrant but also as a full-fledged citizen with rights and obligations.

Voting, despite its seeming simplicity, represents the idea that our country's founders had, a government by the people and for the people, in which every voice, no matter how tiny, matters. The country our founding fathers envisioned was one in which people could practice their own religions, express themselves freely, and have an active role in determining the course of their country. Due to the success of this method, our family decided to utilize the idea of "government for the people" in our everyday choices. For example, in order to make sure that every family member's opinion is heard and taken into consideration when making important decisions like purchasing a car or establishing financial plans, we employ democratic methods—voting and group decision-making. With this approach, we are able to achieve a balance between justice and practicality, which is similar to the democratic foundation upon which our country is built.

America is not without its shortcomings, of course. Social unrest, structural inequality, and political polarization are only a few of the many difficulties it faces. Nevertheless, despite these problems, the fundamental ideas that make up our country—freedom of speech, the

freedom of the press, the right to assemble, and due process—remain unwavering and serve as the cornerstone for advancement. In many ways, the imperfections of America today only underscore the importance of the democratic processes that allow citizens to address and improve these shortcomings. For my family, the freedoms we now enjoy are a powerful contrast to the limitations we left behind. The journey we've taken from a country where our voices were stifled to one where we are empowered to speak, vote, and participate is living proof that America still upholds the ideals set forth by its founders.

In conclusion, America's core values of democracy, freedom, and opportunity remain true even if the country has evolved significantly since its founding. Based on my family's experience, I can state with confidence that America still embodies the ideals of our founding fathers: a nation where everyone has the opportunity to follow their ambitions within a system that protects their rights, regardless of background.