

Athena Lin, Age 16

A famous historical writer known as Thomas Paine, wrote a book called "Rights of Man". He argued that although the people of America are all very different, they all come together in a "cordial union". Paine's argument holds true to a moderate extent now, definitely much more so than in 1791, which was when this book was written. The time period of this book was right after the American revolution, so America had not had the experience and involvement in as many foreign affairs as it has now, and America also did not have the vast amount of multicultural immigrants as it does now.

Following World War I in 1917, America saw a large demographic change within itself due to internal migration. This internal migration sparked high tensions and racism in America. For example, the Great Migration in 1917, when thousands of Black Americans migrated from the South to the North due to a large number of job openings after the US military draft. This sudden demographic change prompted violence from those that felt threatened, such as in the Red Summer of 1919, where Black Americans were attacked because of white supremacist terrorism. Even in the years that followed, racism and discrimination never settled because the issue had only been suppressed and avoided, creating a huge roadblock in American society. Martin Luther King addressed this issue in his "Letter to Birmingham Jail", after wrongfully being thrown in jail for peaceful protest. By fighting for equal rights, Martin Luther King proved that there was much needed to improve equality in American society. In these past time periods in American history, it can be argued that Thomas Paine's argument did not hold true. These tensions sparked heinous acts of violence and injustice, reflecting that the differences between the citizens of America had created a divide, rather than a union.

Now, in the present day, the situation is significantly better than in 1917. Finally, bringing more acknowledgement and efforts in following the ideals of life, liberty, and justice, in which this nation was founded upon, has allowed many people to become more open-minded to other cultures than 100 years ago. By being open minded, we have more of a chance to learn other cultures and perspectives and to use our differences as a tool to build something even stronger. This cultural exchange is the definition of an ideal America, as America is frequently referred to as the "American melting pot", with thousands of cultures meshed into something unique to our society. I have had the firsthand exposure of the immersive experience of sharing and learning other cultures. I tutor a student in Mandarin, and I frequently teach her about Chinese culture. In turn, she has taught me about Mexican culture. During Chinese New Year, I taught her about the traditional holiday foods, and through the cultural exchange of food, we had used our similarities and differences in our cultures to come to a "cordial union". Many American national holidays have also been created to not only celebrate and embrace other cultures, but to also address past issues and bring awareness to the injustices in the past. Cesar Chavez day is a very recent example. Proclaimed in 2014, Cesar Chavez day was a day to commemorate the civil rights work of the Hispanic leader, Cesar Chavez. Farm

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workers in the past had been exploited for their labor and had little positions of power to change the face of labor, but Cesar Chavez fought strongly for workers' rights, especially Hispanic workers rights, and for social justice. By acknowledging Cesar Chavez's impact and importance to the Hispanic community, it brings awareness to both cultural communities and the communities that were built and strengthened upon fighting injustices.

Unfortunately, even today, it can still be seen on recent news stories about the discrimination some people still face due to cultural differences. For example, in 2020, Breonna Taylor was an African American woman who had been shot and killed because of racist accusations. In 2021, an Asian woman who had been standing next to a subway track waiting for her ride home had been pushed intentionally in front of the train and killed. These instances of violence show that there is still an improvement needed in order to make Paine's argument completely true. But even in the darkest of clouds, there is still a silver lining. These cases of violent hate had sparked a need for justice in many people, and these prompted many Americans to come together to bring awareness to these issues. For example, the Black Lives Matter movement gathered many people in a fight for justice for many Black Americans who had been victims of police brutality. These movements brought many of the vastly different people of America come together as a "cordial union" to fight for a common cause.

Thomas Paine's argument that America is unified because of different people and different cultures holds true to a moderate extent, but because of many cases of violence and hate crimes, there is still an improvement to be made to American society. The national holidays that commemorate prominent figures who fought for equality are a step forward to a more educated America, but it does not make up for the discrimination in the past. In order to truly live in an ideal American society, we must individually understand and educate ourselves on these topics to fight for a truly unified America.