

The 2016 Presidential election has been one of the most tumultuous in the history of our Republic. The divisions between our political parties and special interests are seemingly insurmountable, but this is not the first time there's been a profound chasm separating factions within America.

Step back into the 1770's and you will see a great divide within the thirteen colonies. On one side were the Loyalists. Often appointed to their jobs by the King, or with business connections in England, they did not support the cause of independence. On the other side were the Patriots, who were upset with high taxes and other controversial laws, including the Stamp Act, Townshend Act, and Intolerable Acts, that were passed without colonist representation in Parliament. It was because of this and other perceived injustices that they wanted to form their own country.

As this divide between the colonists widened, there were more protests and acts of rebellion, like the Boston Tea Party, Virginian Resolution, and various boycotts. After years of suffering the acts of a government that didn't represent its people, the Patriots organized the first Continental Congress in 1774 and in 1775 the first battle of the American Revolutionary War was waged at Lexington and Concord.

The Revolutionary War would last until 1783. At the beginning it had seemed nearly impossible that the Patriots would win, but through invaluable foreign alliances and the pure nationalism that drove our founding fathers and their soldiers not to give up on themselves or liberty, the Patriots were victorious and the United States of America was born.

After the war, the leaders of the new government, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, and others were faced with the difficult task of uniting a still divided nation. These strong leaders held positive views about the promise of America and made inclusiveness and unity their goal. The Bill of Rights was one compromise they created that won over some of the Loyalists. The Federalist Papers and the promise of checks and balances in the new government were other devices used to build a lasting democracy for all Americans.

In the following years, there was scarcely an aspect of American life that wasn't touched by the revolution. Although it would be many years later, the provocative ideas our Founding fathers wrote into the Declaration of Independence of how "all men are created equal" and our right to "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness", would pave the way for the abolitionist and women's rights movements. Even outside of our country, our fight for independence inspired revolts in Haiti, Ireland, Poland, the Netherlands, and throughout the Spanish Empire. Despite the initial violence and division of the Revolutionary War, in the end it created a stronger and more unified country and had positive, inspiring effects on its citizens and the rest of the world.

Now, fast forward to today and you will see conditions that are essentially the same as the ones our founding fathers were facing two hundred years ago when they revolted against England. Currently, there is mass dissatisfaction with the government shown by a NBC News poll which reported that only 16% of people had either a great deal or quite a bit of confidence in the federal government.

While we are on the cusp of a potential social revolution whose beginnings mirror the American Revolution's, the similarities end there. The American Revolution inspired people, led to positive social change and even inspired other countries to fight for their own liberty. It had leaders whose goals were unity and inclusiveness and who compromised to achieve them. But today's revolution is different, it is driving people further apart and spreading hatred and negativity.

Much of the negativity has been centered around the 2016 presidential election. Or, more specifically, the tone of the candidates and their campaigns, and, recently, the results.

Minority groups are one of the victims of the negativity this election has spread. There have been reports of Muslim women having their headscarves pulled off in New York, Louisiana, and Los Angeles. At rallies leading up to the election, minorities were verbally and physically assaulted. Even in schools, Hispanic children are the subject of increased bullying over their race.

After the results of the election were announced, thousands of protesters stormed the streets. But even these protests have been full of violence. Amid the signs reading “Love Trumps Hate” is the broken glass of car windows smashed during protests, the remains of dumpsters and newsstands set on fire, and offensive graffiti. California protesters threw rocks and bottles at police, and in Oregon, a man was even shot during a protest. Hundreds of post-election protesters have been arrested for vandalism and other crimes. Protesters are becoming embodiments of the ideas they are protesting.

We, as Americans, have a choice. We can continue down the path we are on, or we can honor the vision of our Founding Fathers and choose to stop the spread of violence and hatred. The key is to go back to the foundation upon which our country was built upon, and it all starts with our Constitution and Bill of Rights.

We need a President and Congress that are, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, “of the people, by the people, and for the people”. We need a government that represents all Americans, not just a select few, so our citizens feel like their best interests are always being represented. We need more people to vote, to have their voices heard.

But what we are doing now is not the way to achieve this. These violent, hateful, and dividing protests are not what our Founding Fathers envisioned when they created the right to free speech and the right to assemble. This is not a call to stop protesting, because political activism is critical in a thriving democracy, but instead to use our protests to inspire others, to spread a positive message, and to share our views in a constructive rather than destructive way. Like in Martin Luther King Jr.’s civil rights movement: we need peaceful protests which inspire change.

That isn’t to say that we should forget the wrongs we have suffered, it doesn’t mean we should tolerate future injustices quietly, but it does mean we should embrace the unifying nationalism that drove our founding fathers to bridge the divide between the Patriots and Loyalists to create the country we have today.

It is not too late to turn the tides of this modern day revolution. Because Democrat, Republican, or third party- we are all still Americans and no election is more important than that.