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12th Grade

The Power of We Creativity Contest

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“This land is my land, this land is your land” are the words I was raised to believe defined our country. I was taught that people came here searching for a new beginning, a better life, and the promise of liberty and justice for all. To me, **common good** means the pursuit of a better life in a welcoming society—one where people work together, look out for one another, and use their voices to protect shared values.

Today, that vision feels increasingly threatened. Families seeking safety and opportunity face persecution, and individuals are targeted for standing up for what they believe in. Hardworking people are afraid to leave their homes or send their children to school. For a long time, I felt unaffected by these realities. They seemed distant, happening to communities I had never been part of and places I had never known. It took me too long to realize that these issues are not distant at all—they affect all of us who believe in both the history and the future of our nation.

That realization became impossible to ignore one night as I sat scrolling through social media in the comfort of my home. I saw that a student from a neighboring high school had been taken by ICE. Same county. Same age. Same goals. The only difference between us was that he was not born in the same country I was. He had arrived here at the age of two, raised in the only home he has ever known. But what does that difference truly mean? He is still a kid, still a student, still someone pursuing an education in a country his parents fought to come to—the same country my ancestors once fought to enter.

My great-grandmother lived in this country illegally her entire life. She raised eight American citizens. Five went on to enlist in the military, one lost his life serving this country, one became a state trooper, and two became nurses. The difference between my family’s story and his is not values, work ethic, or love for this country—it is time. Seventy years later, we view one story as acceptable and the other as disposable. Yet both reflect the same pursuit of the American promise. That realization forced me to confront what the common good truly demands: empathy, fairness, and collective responsibility.

While our country feels deeply divided, these challenges have also pushed people from different backgrounds, cultures, and beliefs to come together for the common good. Across the nation and within local communities, citizens are engaging civically through peaceful protest, public dialogue, advocacy, and service to demand justice and accountability. Civic engagement is

not limited to voting every few years, it is listening, learning, organizing, and standing up when silence is easier.

Civic learning plays a crucial role in this process. Without it, frustration turns into fear or silence. With it, people gain the knowledge to understand how the government works, recognize their rights, and participate meaningfully in democracy. Civic education transforms anger into action and concern into service. In my own community, students are learning the power of civic participation by educating themselves, supporting one another, and taking a stand on issues that shape their lives and futures.

My generation is often labeled as unserious or immature, yet students across the country are proving otherwise. Through civic learning, service, and engagement, we are discovering how change happens and how our voices matter. When people come together to learn, participate, and stand up for one another, communities grow stronger. A thriving community is not built by agreement alone, but by participation, understanding, and a shared commitment to the common good.