

Section 1

YOUNG AMERICAN SCHOLARS

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INTRODUCTORY WORD

February 24, 2022. Everything changed.

A nation at peace was brutally invaded by a powerful and historic enemy. Since that time the nation of Ukraine has fought valiantly to preserve its independence and democratic way of life. The people of Ukraine have provided a model of courage, determination, and resilience. While their lives have changed dramatically in ways they could not have envisioned prior to the invasion, they continue to live their lives as best they can. Their young go to school, study and hope for a peace where they can use their knowledge and skills to rebuild their nation.

The war has not stopped the work between the Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University and Seton Hall University. This electronic journal is part of that work. Once again students from both institutions have shared their views and opinions in the articles that appear in this edition.

In this 7th issue, the writers from Seton Hall have provided a focus on the concept of democracy. The United States recently commemorated over 250 years since declaring independence. While that milestone is worth celebrating, there are sources for concern. The compromises that led to the Constitution emerged in the framework of popular sovereignty, of democracy. The fragility of the competing views and beliefs were evident in Benjamin Franklin's warning that maintaining the republic would be difficult. That difficulty is evident now.

In recent years, there have been considerable public warnings about threats to democracy. From both the political left and the political right public dialogue, official and private, has become divisive. Distrust, of institutions and individuals, seems widespread. Discussion, engagement and consideration of alternative perspectives are not widely evident in the public sphere, nor often in communities, neighborhoods, even families. Democratic institutions and societies are difficult to maintain.

The concept of democracy swept across time and continents and challenged old order power relationships. The idea that people should have a say in how they are governed saw nations reject monarchies and autocratic systems. Inspired by themes of equality under the law, of liberty, and of justice for all, millions across the globe protested, fought and died for the opportunities

democracy promised. However, democratic impulses are facing significant challenges across the world.

The writers from Seton Hall University provide a range of diverse views and topics that examine the past, the present, and the future of the democratic impulse. Their articles provide thoughtful explorations of threats to democracy.

Sage E. Blodgett examines three countries and analyses the level of threat to their democratic systems. Ghana, The United States and Hungary provide intriguing insights into the stresses each are experiencing. Sage provides a review of the Weimar Republic for some historic context.

Shane N. Holden analyses the conflict between democratic ideals and reality in the U.S. The selective application of liberty and equality are examined from personal experiences with structural inequality.

Hasini Muddapu cites young people as a powerful force for the defense of democracy. Democracy is described as a living and evolving concept, and this piece highlights the ways in which young Ukrainians harness technology and confront misinformation.

Julia Kaluzna reflects on the ‘American dream’ that hard work and determination will bring about success. Continual engagement is required, and freedom is an on-going process facing significant tensions.

Decentralized digital citizen-led transparency in Ukraine is the focus of the essay by **Avery J. Kachmarsky**. Civil society has pushed for reforms and accountability, demonstrating the resilience of democratic governance during a time of conflict and disinformation.

Neve V. Walker shares the brutal reality of Russian sexual violence as a systematic and strategically deployed weapon in Ukraine. These crimes against humanity, with men and women as victims, are analyzed as having consistent patterns aimed at degrading and psychologically destroying victims.

Luc Escobar-Rivera reviews the historical memory of the Spanish Civil War with a focus on trauma, repression and moral responsibility. Examining three films, this essay challenges the culture of forgetting, and the necessity of resistance and remembrance.

Dean Sati presents the struggle for freedom in Syria, providing an Arab American perspective on the use of power and language. Assumptions and the Western interpretations of events are reported to have helped erase democratic aspirations in Syria, complicit in the brutal repression of the Assad regime.

Emma Escobar-Rivera provides an examination of African American identity and recognition with attention to Spain, France and the United States. Historical memory requires an examination of Atlantic histories, colonial alliances, slavery and the politics of memory.

How can threats to democracy be addressed? Examining the past, interrogating assumptions in the present, and thoughtfully proposing ideas and actions for the future are all

essential. Respectfully listening to different perspectives and clearly communicating with others are all critical skills. As many of the pieces in this journal demonstrate and propose, careful use of digital tools can counter disinformation and provide for consideration of alternative thoughts and actions. Action is the key, and action includes actively listening, seeking to confirm information and a willingness to seek new information. Action can be private and personal, as well as social and public.

The essays from Seton Hall University appear to meet the challenge. Historic, and current, they provide what this journal was originally designed to do – to provide a voice for young scholars.