



America Will Persevere!

ERIN MCCASLIN

Each year, the Betty Baker Jernigan Endowed Scholarship Fund offers a \$1000 award to the winner of an essay contest open to qualifying continuing and incoming USAO students. The contest asks students to write 300-500 words addressing the question, “How is America doing – politically, socially, economically?” *The Drover Review* also offers to publish winning submissions.

The winner of the 2021 Jernigan Award is Erin McCaslin, who argues that the current era of polarization and crisis has also yielded a quintessentially American resurgence of activism, innovation, and community—evidence that the nation can weather the storm.

America has long been held as a “city upon the hill,” a nation to which other countries look. We lead the world with top economies, strong military forces, and a powerful government. However, many people argue that our time as “a beacon of hope” is over. Political polarization, the COVID pandemic, and sometimes violent social movements have caused many Americans to lose faith in the United States. However, in spite of these events, I feel America is strong and will persevere.

Political polarization can be seen everywhere: the news, social media, and especially in our homes and places of work. Although disagreements about our presidents and the political parties have divided some, such debate does have a positive side. People are talking about the issues and they want their voices heard. They are having discussions about important matters like healthcare, the economy, climate change, race, the Supreme Court, and so much more. No more apathy: people are voting in record-breaking numbers.

The COVID pandemic is another challenge our country is facing. Over 500,000 people have died; unemployment is at its highest; and people are forced to isolate themselves from their loved ones. But even amid a pandemic, Americans have stepped up. Science and technology have become essential to our physical and mental health. Researchers are working tirelessly trying to find a cure and vaccine for the virus. We've discovered new ways to communicate using Zoom, Google Meets, and FB Portal. High school and college students are taking courses online. The USDA Farmers to Family program is helping put food on the table of all Americans. Everyone is working together to make the best of a desperate situation.

The last few years have also been marked by social movements such as Black Lives Matter and the Me Too Movement. Although I don't agree with the violence of the riots, I understand the message they are trying to send: "We want our voices heard." People are standing up for what they believe in. They are uniting with others to make a difference. That is what our country was built on.

"How is America doing?" you ask. America is doing exactly how it's always done; it perseveres. Whether we're facing political differences, the pandemic, or social movements, the American people will meet the challenges head on and look for ways to make things better. That is America. It's who we are. ► ►