

Democracy Matters 10

Lesson Nineteen: Be a patriot.

Set a good example of what America means for the generations who will come after you. They will need it.

What is patriotism? It means loving one's country enough to want it to live up to its ideals, which in turn means asking us to be our best selves. A patriot is someone who pays attention to and is concerned with the real world because this is the only place where his/her country can be loved and sustained. A patriot holds values that are universal and uses these standards to judge the nation. A patriot is loyal and always wishes the country well while, at the same time, wishing it would do better.

A nationalist will look at political tragedies happening abroad and will say: that could never happen here. This is the first step toward disaster. A patriot, observing the same circumstances, will say: that could happen here, but we won't let it.

Lesson Twenty: Be as courageous as you can.

It is easier to talk about freedom than it is to actually live as a free person. Moreover, the temptation to let someone else talk about and enact freedom for oneself is very strong. But, at the end of the day, no one's freedom is ever guaranteed. Life in a democracy is not for the faint of heart, but it is far better than the alternatives and its principles are worth defending.

(Adapted from Snyder, Timothy. *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*. Vintage Digital, 2017.)