

## Gerrit Dangermond, KS – 2022

The concept of unity is one which can follow any number of paths politically and has been used as a contentious tool. Unity in and of itself is not good nor bad but could be declared either if proper or improper direction is applied. Unity is merely a supplement to an already functional or dysfunctional society.

Without proper guidance, a society whose only ethic is that which is based on unity is not destined to succeed nor doomed to fail. It is the way which a government goes about using unity as a tool, as well as the way which the populous perceives this unity which defines its destiny. As an example, take Nazi Germany, a society which was united under a banner of hate. This is an example of unity being molded and manipulated by the government and media to fit a purpose or narrative. As a secondary example, take the United States, a country with one of its main purposes being to "form a more perfect union". Regardless of political party identification, speakers and delegates alike were more than comfortable with using this phrase, which shows that there is a national unity surrounding the improvement of our nation.

What is the difference? Unity within the U.S. is merely predicated on the aforementioned idea of improvement, not inherently bound to it. Thus, this ambiguousness leaves room for interpretation, allowing many avenues to be taken in pursuit of a more perfect union. I had a teacher explain to me once what he called "the three truths." "These truths," he explained, "are political, personal, and scientific. Firstly, the political truth is what is told by the people who surround you. Next is personal, which is your own interpretation of a narrative. Lastly is scientific, which is the legitimate, actual truth." A political truth is particularly good at influencing the personal truths of many, thus uniting them. But a scientific truth can be just as uniting, and bears the same capabilities as political truths, in addition to validity. What does all of this have to do with the USSYP? A recurring theme which I, as well as my fellow delegates noticed was the constant reiteration of the necessity of unity and bipartisanship within the U.S. This message, I thought, and still think, was immensely gripping when looked at through the lens of the three truths, mostly because the U.S. is an immensely divided country today. Like many things, there is a balance which must be kept in-check between unity and contrarianism. Partisan division is not a healthy thing for any nation, but ideas which are outside-the-box and new can be insightful and impactful.

The USSYP provided a unique opportunity for current high-school students to hear from and speak to civil servants, volunteers, military mentors, generals, and ambassadors. As mentioned before, it was a common theme to hear about unity from my peers and mentors, but the idea in my mind was not fully developed until I reflected upon my time in the program while travelling in Rome less than a week later. Surrounded by the ancient remains of a monarchy turned-republic turned-dictatorship, I found myself questioning the true meaning of unity in this context. It could not mean complete agreement of a specific idea, because that would be unrealistic within the United States; sharing differing ideas makes us stronger. No, instead it was implied that it meant the willingness to offer the olive branch to the beholder of the other side of an idea, to put down petty disputes stop the partisan rhetoric, and instead engage the person presenting it in an intelligent discussion.

Ultimately, my experience with the USSYP was one of awe. The program was well balanced, well-paced, and organized. I was slightly overwhelmed by the caliber of individuals with whom delegates were able to speak. It was an incredible, life-changing experience to hear from such intelligent and distinguished individuals. Prior to this incredible opportunity, I thought I wanted to become a social science teacher at the high-school level. It is this goal which I will continue to pursue in my academics, hoping to spread the lessons I have learned from the incredible people involved in the program to my future students. I was thoroughly impressed by the program in its entirety, and, as can be seen by the previous three paragraphs, very much enjoyed the general theme of unity and bipartisanship, one of the most contentious issues of our time.