

时评

Democracy, Voting, and the Individual

By Edward "Buck" Shomo



Edward "Buck" Shomo, Esq. Immigration Attorney

The United States has a form of government that is known as a 'democratic republic.' These two words find their origins in the very roots of Western civilization, and it may be a surprise to many that the tree that grew from those roots appeared dead for over a thousand years. The country was founded with the idea of equality and an equal voice for all, something we still work to achieve.

"Democracy" comes from the ancient Greek language, 'demos,' meaning 'the people' and 'kratia,' meaning 'rule or power.' Greece is a large peninsula, with many smaller peninsulas pushing into the sea, and nearby islands surrounding it. It is mountainous, and much of its wealth in ancient times, thousands of years ago, came from the ships that moved between the cities in the bays made by the peninsulas, and on the islands. This geography caused what are known as 'city-states' to develop- wealthy, sophisticated, but with very little territory. Their wealth came from trade and the intelligence of their people. Among these Greek city-states, there were ruling classes made up of citizens, and the rest of the people were slaves. The idea developed among the ruling classes that instead of a king or other single ruler making decisions for everyone, the citizens should all debate policies, and

vote about the matters affecting the city. This 'people power' was known in their language as 'demokratia,' from which we get our idea and word, 'democracy.' In fact, if a person was thought to have too much influence, the citizens could vote to make him leave the city for a time. They put their votes on broken pieces of clay pots, 'ostraka' in the Greek language. This is where the English word 'ostracize' comes from- when the group ignores and expels a person because of his actions.

After centuries ruling themselves by democracy, the Greek city-states were eventually taken over and made part of the expanding Roman territories. The Romans once had a king, and the men who killed the king and replaced him with Greek style democracy were considered heroes. But Rome was too big for all the citizens to vote on every subject- there was just too much to study and consider, and too much territory for all the citizens to be able to understand and make informed decisions. So the Romans invented a kind of democracy in which certain elected officials would be chosen by the citizens to represent their interests. In the language of the Romans, Latin, this type of government was known as a 'res publica,' meaning 'a matter of the public.' The Roman Republic, using the democratic republic form of government, lasted for centuries, expanding the territory controlled by the Romans, who offered Roman citizenship, a voice in the democracy, to many of the people that they conquered. It was only when the Roman Republic over expanded and became too dependent on slavery that the democracy failed, and although the Roman Empire had elections that looked like democracy, one Emperor made all the real decisions, and he answered to no one, and so democracy slowly died.

When the Roman Empire finally fell, Europe broke into thousands of small kingdoms. At this point, kings claimed their right to make all decisions from two sources: military power and God. For over a thousand years, European kings, emperors, and other royal leaders all made decisions, ignoring the wishes of the people, because they claimed that God put them in power. Anyone who disagreed would be going against God (and probably find himself at the wrong end of a sword). After the Crusades, the Christian European wars with the Muslim Near East, old Greek and Roman books, long lost in Europe, but preserved by Arab scholars, found their way back to European readers, who once again read about democracy and republican government. This helped start the period known as the Enlightenment - the light of reason shining onto the intellectual darkness that Europe

had lived with for all those centuries. The men who fought England to start the United States embraced the ideas of the Enlightenment, including the idea that men should rule themselves in a democracy, with each person having a voice in the matters of the public, and not a king or emperor. When they wrote the Constitution of the United States, they gave new life to the old tree of democracy which had seemed to be dead for a thousand years. As a republic, it was hoped that the men (and later, women) elected to represent people in government would follow the example of George Washington, serving without putting his own needs or the needs and desires of the most powerful before those of the people who had elected him.

Although government in the modern United States may not live up to the ideas written in the Constitution, Americans are raised to believe that each and every person has an equal voice in the matters of the public. Tens of thousands have died fighting for this idea, first in wars against the English kings, and later against other Americans who thought that full citizenship should only belong to a limited few. The idea of American democracy was written in the Declaration of Independence, the document created to inform the king of England that the American colonists no longer believed in one person having power over all. The Declaration stated, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable (cannot be sold, given or taken away) Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just (fair) powers from the consent of the governed." This idea, that governments, and other organizations, are formed by individuals who have an equal voice in how much power and how the power of the government or organization may be used, is the foundation of the American nation and culture. We may have failed many, many people, from the enslaved to Native Americans to women and immigrants, in including them in this idea, but this notion of equality and equal voice remain a goal for us all. It is the inheritance of each person born in the United States, and for many immigrants to this country, like a breath of fresh air.



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我在国内的业务需要经常出入美国。多次来往美国后,看到美国的生活环境优良,大学水平高,社会风气好,很想让我的儿子来美国上大学。国内有许多留学陪读公司,只要交一笔可观的费用,他们就负责代办所有留学的申请手续。可是最后一关美国领事馆的签证面谈,还是要学生本人亲自去。虽然目前留学生签证面谈的通过率已经比以往提高,可是仍然有不少学生在领事馆签证时被拒绝。

学生签证通过与否似乎没有任何客观的标准。一些条件类似的学生,有的通过,有人签了好几次依然没有成功。坊间的流言纷纷,众口云云,有人说这样做可以保证通过,又有人说那样做可以顺利过关,拿到学生签证。我们不知道何去何从,请问申请留学生签证到底有什么诀窍?

黄亦川律师回答:

来美国留学从申请大学到领事馆签证,手续非常繁琐。难怪国内从事留学申请的代办公司,如雨后春笋一般,放眼皆是,其中良莠不齐也是可以预见的。经济条件过关的读者,没有时间自己来处理申请学校的手续,聘请代办公司也是无可厚非。要注意的是,学校最好是先由自己选好。学校的优劣与其所在地都非常重要。怕冷的学生,不要糊里糊涂的被代办公司申请到寒冷的美国北方。怕热的学生,也要尽量避免美国南方各州。这些都是需要自己下功夫考虑好的事项。选定学校后,再委托申请代办公司处理申请的工作细节。

签证面谈时,最重要的是要提供足够且详细的财力来源,证明自己或家人有充分的经济条件来资助留学所需要的全部经费。经费来源要简单透明,银行存款当然最好,可是如果拿在签证前几天才存入的款项,来作为自己学费的来源证明,那就是自取其辱了。也准备好说明自己在中国的家庭状况,强调自己只是去美国留学,学成后有足够的家庭牵挂按时回国,不会赖在美国不走。

当然每一位签证官都是独立作业。他们获得完全的授权来最终决定是否发给签证,说这些外交官掌握着留学申请学生的命运都不为过。面谈时学生能做的不外乎资料完整,条理分明,要什么文件立马能够找出来。要记得签证官给每一位学生面谈的时间很短,他们不会有耐心让你在一大堆杂乱无章的文件里翻找东西的。个人方面,要仪容端庄,服装整齐朴素,珠宝首饰项链名表等奢侈品,就暂时先放在家里。面谈时态度大方,不卑不亢,过度谦虚礼貌反而会会引起反感。虽然现在的美国签证官都受过中文训练,可是他们的中文能力还是有限,能够用英文与对方交流,绝对是有利无弊的。

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杂谈

杨绛先生去世

北京时间5月25日凌晨,杨绛先生在北京协和医院病逝,享年105岁。

杨绛,1911年7月17日生于北京,本名杨季康,江苏无锡人,中国著名的作家,戏剧家、翻译家,钱钟书夫人。杨绛通晓英语、法语和西班牙语,由她翻译的《唐·吉珂德》被公认为最优秀的翻译佳作,到2014年已累计发行70多万册;她早年创作的剧本《称心如意》,被搬上舞台长达六十多年,2014年还在公演;杨绛93岁出版散文随笔《我们仨》,风靡海内外,再版达一百多万册,96岁出版哲理散文集《走到人生边上》,102岁出版250万字的《杨绛文集》八卷。

与钱钟书先生的情缘

1932年春天,杨绛考入清华大学并与钱钟书相识。钱钟书曾在诗里追忆他见到杨绛的第一眼:“颇眼容光忆见初,蔷薇新瓣浸醍醐。不知陋洗儿时面,曾取红花和雪无。”第一次见面,钱钟书就说:“我没有订婚。”“我也没有男朋友。”杨绛回答。世纪佳缘由此展开。

钱钟书是清华著名的才子,书生气,

而杨绛也是名门闺秀。1935年,杨绛与钱钟书成婚,不久一同出国留学,无论在牛津或是巴黎,都留下了他们相亲相爱的足迹。其间,杨绛与钱钟书爱情的结晶——女儿钱瑗降临。抗日战争爆发后,杨绛与丈夫选择了回国,辗转任教北大、清华等高校,同时从事文学研究。

“绝无仅有地结合了各不相容的三者:妻子、情人、朋友。”这是钱钟书曾写给杨绛的“赠语”。

人生哲理,字字珠玑

历经世界及中国最动荡的岁月,杨绛先生留给世人许多宝贵的财富。她的人生名言,成为几代人的座右铭。例如:

- 1、你的问题主要在于读书不多而想得太多。
- 2、如要锻炼一个能做大事的人,必定要叫他吃苦受累,百不称心,才能养成坚忍的性格。一个人经过不同程度的锻炼,就获得不同程度的修养,不同程度的效益。好比香料,捣得愈碎,磨得愈细,香得愈浓烈。
- 3、有些人之所以不断成长,就绝对是有一种坚持下去的力量。好读书,肯下功夫,不仅读,还做笔记。人要成长,必有原因,背后的努力与积累一定数倍于普通人。所以,关键还在于自己。
- 4、在这物欲横流的人世间,人生一世实



杨绛先生

在是够苦。你存心做一个与世无争的老实人吧,人家就利用你欺侮你。你稍有才德品貌,人家就嫉妒你排挤你。你大度退让,人家就侵犯你损害你。你要不与人争,就得与世无求,同时还要维持实力准备斗争。你要和别人和平共处,就先得和他们周旋,还得准备随时吃亏。

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