

Celebrating the Inauguration

Learning First Alliance

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The inauguration of a President is for America's educators about much more than politics and partisanship.

Whether our candidate won or lost, we celebrate the inauguration because it demonstrates, once again, that America, for all its upheavals, all its divisions, still remains true to the principle on which it was founded; namely, that governments derive their just power from the consent of the governed as expressed by votes in elections.

The consent of the governed—it is difficult to grasp today the impact those five words packed in 1776. They were so powerful, so unsettling, in fact, they could get you killed. For centuries, it had been drummed into people's heads that God had empowered the king to rule over us. The consent of the governed overturned the divine right of kings.

The people know best what is best for them. The great 18th Century thinkers, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau, proposed this revolutionary concept. And Thomas Jefferson read Locke and Rousseau, and he wrote the consent of the governed into our Declaration of Independence.

Even in today's modern world, however, we still see leaders refuse to give up power, because they think they know best, or because absolute power corrupts absolutely.

From their very beginning in America, public schools taught not only the three R's, but also the consent of the governed. Why? Because our most insightful thinkers, such as Horace Mann, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Frederick Douglass, understood that the

human instinct to yield to a seemingly all-powerful, all-knowing leader was so deeply engrained, we had to learn how to trust ourselves.

In addition, people realized in the early 19th Century that the idea of the consent of the governed would help bind together our increasingly diverse and rapidly expanding nation. There is tremendous power in a shared idea when that idea connects with people's hopes and aspirations for a better life.

Hence, America's public educators taught America's children about the consent of the governed. We taught democracy. We modeled democracy through student government elections and mock Presidential elections. Day-in and day-out, we labor to put the "Unum" in *E Pluribus Unum*—Out of Many, One.

And for our students what better example of the consent of the governed can there be than the peaceful transfer of power at our Presidential Inauguration. On this day, we can be proud that we trust each other to choose a leader.