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## Columnist says U.S. values divided

Washington Post Columnist E.J. Dionne Jr. addresses tension between liberty, community

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Tiffany Lou

Posted: Thursday, February 21, 2013 12:00 am | Updated: 12:24 am, Thu Feb 21, 2013.

By Megan Morreale / Staff Writer | 1 comment

Americans today struggle to balance the dichotomy of two cultural values: their love of individuality and liberty and their quest to work for the betterment of the community.

In light of his new book, "Our Divided Political Heart," E.J. Dionne Jr., a columnist at The Washington Post, spoke at the Douglass Campus Center last night about how Americans confuse themselves politically because of this divide.

"You can't put too much emphasis on one side or the other," he said. "We need to remember how our liberty depends on our defense of others' liberty, our participation and our concern for our community."

E.J. Dionne Jr., a Washington Post columnist, discusses the need for Americans to unite to focus on community issues yesterday at the Douglass Campus Center. The event was hosted by the Eagleton Institute of Politics.

Dionne quoted the Bruce Springsteen hit "We Take Care of Our Own," saying its lyrics express exactly what the country needs to do to improve.

"Wherever this flag is flown, we take care of our own," he said.

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Dionne said the country needs to stand together and make the community's problems their own.

"When politics goes well, we can know a good in common that we cannot know alone," he said.

This emphasis on community is especially important, considering the tension that exists today in America, he said.

"In a democratic republic, government is not the realm of them, it's the realm of us," he said. "It's us because we change the government, we protest the government, and we make things work better in our government."

Dionne emphasized the importance of participation in a system that relies on the feedback of its citizens.

"A country that hates politics will not long thrive as a democracy," he said.

Focusing on the modern issues in Washington, D.C., Dionne said the leaders of the country should look for inspiration from the Founding Fathers.

"We are one nation conceived in argument," he said. "We do ourselves and our Fathers a service to not remember them as a unique or sainted group that received the constitution as tablets from heaven. They were politicians, people trying to solve problems."

Dionne said the nation's capital and conservatives need to remember the compromises the Founding Fathers made to cultivate this country.

"What we have today is a conservatism that has entirely forgotten this balance," he said. "They have forgotten about community."

He called for the rise of a new crop of compassionate conservatives, who will bring back the message of community into their political agendas.

Conservatives should remember that every citizen has something to give back to the community because they are all Americans, Dionne said.

"We engage in politics because it's fun," he said. "We shape our own communities and we have an obligation. Even the poorest Americans had parents who helped them get to where they are today. We all have an obligation to give back to our nation."

But Bridgette Bjorlo, a School of Arts and Sciences junior, said Dionne's message was incomplete.

"I thought what he said was pretty accurate," Bjorlo said. "I felt that most of what he said was biased, and he should have focused more on how to make the tension in our society a positive and how to fix it."

Dionne's speech was a part of the Eagleton Institute of Politics' Louis J. Gambaccini Civic Engagement Series, which honors Gambaccini, a pioneer in creating New Jersey Transit, for his public service, values and vision.

"These speeches are designed to address a cause of better citizenship and leadership," said Ruth Mandel, Eagleton director. "We wanted to celebrate [Gambaccini's] life with a theme that is dear to him."

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