

The dissent of the governed a meditation on law, religion, and loyalty / Stephen L. Carter

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Abstrak

The Dissent of the Governed is a diagnosis of what ails the body politic - the unwillingness of people in power to hear disagreement unless forced to - and a prescription for a new process of response. Carter examines the divided American political character on dissent, with special reference to religion, identifying it in unexpected places, with an eye toward amending it before it destroys our democracy. At the heart of this work is a rereading of the Declaration of Independence that puts dissent, not consent, at the center of the question of the legitimacy of democratic government. Carter warns that our liberal constitutional ethos - the tendency to assume that the nation must everywhere be morally the same - pressures citizens to be other than themselves when being themselves would lead to disobedience. This tendency, he argues, is particularly hard on religious citizens whose notion of community may be quite different from that of the sovereign majority of citizens. With reference to a number of cases, Carter shows that disobedience is sometimes necessary to the heartbeat of our democracy - and that the distinction between challenging accepted norms and challenging the sovereign itself, a distinction crucial to the Declaration of Independence, must be kept alive if we are to progress and prosper as a nation.