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A JUNIOR ESSAY

What I Owe My Country

We are indebted to the thousands of Americans living before us who have formed and maintained by their own thought, sweat, and blood, a government dedicated to the well-being of each individual.

Our homes, religious life, education, free press, and economy are all part of our heritage. Because we have not experienced a struggle for rights, we have little of the philosophy or patriotism that sparked early armies through the Revolutionary War. It is our duty to learn the history of our heritage. Perhaps we would not have had any "turn-coats" after the Korean War if these men had had a concrete understanding of our great American heritage.

In maintaining our heritage we owe many things. The most important is to exercise the unique right to vote. I say "unique" because few other countries have this privilege. When I am entitled to vote, I will inform myself about the candidates and their platforms and vote at all elections. I will use my best influence to see that principled and capable men are elected to office. America is one of the few countries that is "bossed by the ballot."

One of the most important aspects of American life is the law, and respect for the law. There is no plausible reason why one should break a law set up for his own welfare. As Abraham Lincoln said, "let reverence for the laws be breathed by every American mother to her babe" and "let it become the political religion of the nation."

Important to every American is the right of trial by jury. Some consider serving on a jury as a duty, but I would rather call it insurance. That is what it actually is. I would consider serving on a jury as insuring my rights and yours.

One thing that might seem unrelated to this subject is an understanding attitude in the payment of taxes. Many people squirm when the government strikes at their pocketbooks. Paying taxes is just chipping in to provide for the needs and protection that all of us need, but not one of us could afford alone.

Each one of us should support our system of free education. A nation is no better than its schools. I believe it is my duty as a future voter to work for better schools, and contribute time and thought for their betterment.

Of great help to our country would be an enthusiastic attitude toward the good things in our free press and our free enterprise. The press with its varying opinions forms the background for free choice and intelligent voting. Free enterprise provides the economic sustenance that makes our nation so vital.

Working for peace is a continual debt we owe our country. Peace is the great dream of all mankind. However, we all must accept our responsibilities in times of war. We should look upon military duty as earning the citizenship rights we have always enjoyed.

In foreign relations, our country is deeply affected by the reputation and actions of individual citizens. Americans are considered notoriously discourteous and boisterous as world travelers. It would take little effort to overcome this misconception created by a thoughtless few. I, personally, owe it to my country to be a good ambassador, and reflect the best of American life and ideals.

To sum it all up, we owe an intelligent appreciation for our heritage, and the dedication of our thought and energy to maintain this heritage. Each generation must accept this responsibility.

Jim Nagel