

SONOMA VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL ESSAYS

“What Does it Mean to YOU to be an American Citizen”

The Sonoma Valley Republican Women Federated would like to dedicate this collection of essays to Mr. Dave Donnelley, Economics teacher at Sonoma Valley High School, Sonoma, California.



Mr. Donnelley has been an outstanding example of conservative values and has been a force behind this scholarship program. We appreciate his dedication and encouragement to all the students.

We quote Mr. Donnelley, “Achieving a goal, successfully, often depends on the amount of effort you are willing to put into it. All these students are HONORED students.”

We sincerely hope you will enjoy reading these wonderful essays.

Sonoma Valley Republican Women



2010 SVRWF SCHOLARSHIP AWARD ESSAY CONTEST

TOPIC: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO BE A U.S. CITIZEN

Written by Elizabeth Lawlor-Johnson

Winner

We began as a country of defiance. Tired of being repressed under the tyrannical rule of Great Britain, we became the first to defy this great empire. We were the first to win our Independence. Under the careful leadership of George Washington we became the father to the greatest nation on earth. At that time, a room was filled with the greatest minds that time has yet to be blessed with, and their product was the Declaration of Independence, which was followed by the United States Constitution. It (the constitution) began with the phrase “We the people of the United States of America...” With these words the world was changed forever. The United States of America is a country of unique individuals, based upon free enterprise and the right of every person to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Yet, we are a single unit united in our patriotism, E Pluribus Unum, which is Latin for “Out of many, one.” Originally suggesting that out of many peoples, races, religions and ancestries has emerged a single people and nation.

Today as members of this great nation, it is our obligation to uphold the principles of freedom, equality, and individual commerce. Every citizen is gifted with these “inalienable rights,” and the only obligation they have to their country is to pay taxes, uphold the law, and vote. To be a U.S. citizen it is important to uphold these commitments, and be a contributing member of society.

We are privileged to live in this great country. Many citizens have recognized this, and demonstrated their loyalty and love of country by laying down their lives to protect it. Abraham Lincoln saw the United States principles threatened, and defended them with his life. Similar to the soldiers of both World Wars, Korean War, and the Vietnam War. It is the obligation of all current U.S. Citizens to uphold these lives that were sacrificed in the name of freedom and the United States.

So, what does it mean to be a U.S. citizen? To me, it means that I am fortunate to live in a country in which I have the right to make my own way in life. I have a choice in what I want to do with my future. I love United States History and American Government, and I plan to uphold them by becoming a practicing lawyer. I am a United States citizen the day I begin to vote and pay taxes, and emerge as an educated and contributing member of society.

2010 SVRWF SCHOLARSHIP AWARD ESSAY CONTEST

TOPIC: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO BE A U.S. CITIZEN

Written by Zachary Adams

Winner

Being a U.S. citizen means living a free, peaceful, and loving life. Having spent much time outside of the U.S. border (places such as Mexico and the poverty stricken communities of El Salvador), I have seen life without individual rights, and it is not a pretty scene. It always gives me a strong sense of appreciation to return to American soil, to the blessed and free nation. The lessons I have learned from being an American citizen have molded me to be the man I am today.

Equality has always been an extremely important aspect of America's birth. Veterans have sacrificed their lives so that further generations can enjoy this great gift. It is important that we continue to incorporate equality in our laws; no discrimination, no prejudice. Our forefathers fought for equality among all people regardless of their background. The Sons of Liberty was a just organization that fought so that people could be treated the same regardless of their blood relatives and royalty. Time in and time out the nation has fought for and stood for equality, so we as citizens should support equality acts fervently.

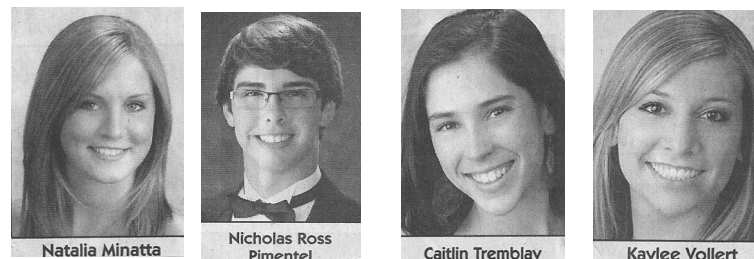
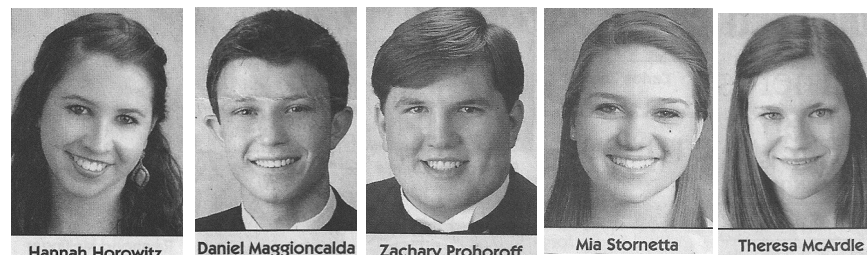
Bravery. In every good tale we have learned, there is a prominent character relished with passion, gusto, and bravery. Early Americans have taught the youth to fight for their rights with whatever resources they have to protect the work that has been accomplished. Just as Captain Ahab did in Moby Dick, we are expected to become engulfed with our challenges and go after them bravely and full heartedly. The youth are faced with the trials of their times, and are tested by the growing adversaries they face. Standing up for oneself has never been easy, but neither has maintaining America's status. In both situations, bravery is an essential quality to be synthesized with the values needed to accomplish a goal. What we are to learn in this situation is to put country before self, for that is the duty of an American citizen.

Patriotism is something that I myself have always been proud to show off. At an early age, comments against America would upset me. In middle school, when kids "know everything" many young teens would spit out things they heard from their parents. These things were not always positive towards the heart of America. I felt as if they were dishonoring my country, my home. My grandfather would inform me to respect the country regardless of what others would say to put it down. That lesson has stuck with me throughout my teen years. "Respect America, because we are lucky to be here", he would say. I am exceedingly grateful for that lesson of patriotism. Not only will that lesson continue to help me, but I will place that same seed of knowledge into my children's hearts one day as we continue to live in this desirable land.

2011 Winners

(pages 5-12)

Hannah Horowitz, Daniel Maggioncalda,
Zack Prohoroff, Mia Stornetta, Theresa McArdle,
Natalia Minatta, Nicholas Pimentel,
Caitlin Tremblay, Kaylee Vollert



2010 Winners

(pages 14-19)

Lauren Fisher, Samantha Bonbright,
David DeSmet, Zachary Adams, Kirsten Aguilar,
Elizabeth Lawlor-Johnson

2011 Winners

(pages 5-12)

1st Place	Hannah Horowitz	\$1000
2nd Place	Daniel Maggioncalda	\$500
	Zack Prohoroff	\$500
	Mia Stornetta	\$500
3rd Place	Theresa McArdle	\$300
	Natalia Minatta	\$300
	Nicholas Pimentel	\$300
	Caitlin Tremblay	\$300
	Kaylee Vollert	\$300

S14 – Friday, June 3, 2011 – Supplement to the Sonoma Index-Tribune



CECE DAHL, Tina Wolfenden and Willi Vaugh presented the Sonoma Valley Republican Women Federated Scholarships to Hanna Horowitz, Mia Stornetta, Daniel Maggioncalda and Zach Prohoroff.



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2010 SVRWF SCHOLARSHIP AWARD ESSAY CONTEST

TOPIC: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO BE A U.S. CITIZEN

Written by Kirsten Aguilar

Winner

America is a country made up of dreams turned to concrete, of dreams turned to buildings, to business, to education. It is a country built from sweat, from unfamiliarity, from risks. To be a U.S. citizen, one must be an individual. One must be able to navigate the swift and ever-changing current of culture – a culture that is mixed and matched, chopped up and rearranged and sewn into the quilt we call America. In America, we are not defined by the color of our skin or our primary language or the amount of money we have in our bank accounts. We are defined by our lives and what we make of them.

To be a U.S. citizen is to find a name for oneself. It doesn't have to be bold and bright in big flashing letters on Times Square in New York. Your name could be mother or teacher or traveler. As long as you yourself know who you are, as long as you yourself know your worth, you've made a name for yourself.

To be a U.S. citizen is to open your eyes and your ears and your heart to the suffering of others and make it your mission, your plan to help at least a little. In America, we are all united by one thing and that is freedom. We hold it within ourselves; it is in our blood; it is in the way we speak and the way we walk, the way we set out on a journey to solidify our dreams whether they be dreams of fame or wealth or creativity.

To be a U.S. citizen is to understand the idea of possibility. Anything is possible with hard work and with education. Faith in possibility is what put a man on the moon. It is what built up cities and what started the small businesses that sustain the small towns as well as the businesses that were once small and have grown.

To be a U.S. citizen is to choose. It is to bring individuality to the masses. It is to believe in justice as well as yourself. It is to create tradition as well as shun tradition. It is to live and to love and to breathe, to find value in each person who is trying to make it – because we all are. We all are trying to find our way in this infinite world where we are one in six billion. The idea that each person can find their niche in society is what allures so many to this country. The idea that you can start with nothing and with your ideas, with your integrity, with your endurance, become something great is what calls to those who are oppressed and hindered by circumstance beyond their control in their original country. To be a U.S. citizen is to understand that America is a mixing pot of culture and people and ideas. To be a U.S. citizen is to tolerate and accept.

2010 SVRWF SCHOLARSHIP AWARD ESSAY CONTEST

TOPIC: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO BE A U.S. CITIZEN

Written by David DeSmet

3rd Place

Every year, new statistics arrive indicating the progress of 'economic mobility' in the United States. When they arrived last year, I first read the statistics in the article of a liberal pundit – he was dismayed that of those in the lowest quintile, 'only' 6% were able to move up to the highest quintile. To him, it was an injustice. To me, it was a sign of hope – that means more than one out of every twenty of the poorest children in America will reach the pinnacle of American society (in terms of income) and a large majority will move up to the top 60 percent. I mean no disrespect to the author, but this was, in my mind, a complete misinterpretation of the data – this was no disgrace, but America's promise.

Although we did not invent democracy, the United States was still a revolutionary experiment when founded in 1776; an experiment based upon principle rather than class, ideology rather than theology or pedigree, unity rather than division. This simple idea was that all citizens are equal – and thus, success is achieved through merit and hard work, rather than any innate, happen-stance condition. This was and is pervasive throughout our culture. The best pioneer was the hardest-working, the successful company is the well-led, and the candidate elected will be the best one. Rather than restrict a population to the status quo, the dreamers and leaders compete, even if they don't have an ounce of 'blue blood'.

But what does this mean to me? What I have come to appreciate, even in this modern day and age, is the unique privilege of living in a meritocracy. I fear taking things for granted – even the most common occurrence of my day, turning on a computer and browsing the web, can be deprived. (It is no coincidence that the Internet was birthed as an American venture: it is in itself a meritocratic institution, where the most far-flung ideas are brought into the limelight.) Furthermore, I value staying informed. It was not lost on me when Google withdrew from Chinese markets, in protest of China's actions to limit the right to free speech. It is a real horror story – a sixth of the world's population, cut off from the truth. So when I as an American citizen have the right not only to browse the Internet but read the latest editorial in Newsweek, run to my town's central plaza and voice my pointed criticisms, I do not underestimate the cost of these simple freedoms. Not only that, but there is no limitation to where I can go – the only thing keeping me from the top of that corporate ladder or that university chair is not some law, but my own performance, and this freedom is completely and utterly American.

2011 SVRWF SCHOLARSHIP AWARD ESSAY CONTEST

TOPIC: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO BE A U.S. CITIZEN

Written by Hannah R. Horowitz

1st Place

Being a citizen of the United States of America means I have a voice and am able to use it to shape my future. Furthermore, as a woman I do not have to worry that my constitutional rights to vote, work, and own property will be revoked. I have been born into a time when equal opportunities for women are standard, and women's opinions and views are greatly valued. Many people, both female and male, worked long and hard to earn women the right to fully participate in government and politics, and I am forever grateful to those who put everything on the line not only for civil rights as well. My mind is valued over my body, and countless doors are open to me. My voice is not subdued by choruses of arrogance and sexism. As a citizen of the U.S., not only am I heard; I have the potential to bring about change.

In light of the dramatic changes currently taking place throughout the Middle East as oppressed peoples struggle to bring about democratic reforms, I feel especially proud and lucky to have been born in a country where monarchy and dictatorship are inconceivable. I appreciate the fact that government officials are elected by the people and that, theoretically, our leaders have the people's interest at heart. I see Tunisian, Egyptian, Libyan and other men and women on T.V. and, although they may look and speak differently than I do, I know that in their hearts they want the things I enjoy on a daily basis. They want a voice. They want to examine what is wrong with their country and propose solutions. They want to stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves. They want opportunities. They want a better future for their children.

I look at my hands and know they stand for something larger than I do; they stand for people all over the world who wish to experience what U.S. citizenship really means. For hundreds of years, people have immigrated to America leaving behind everything they've ever known in order to come to this beacon of opportunity, this melting pot of cultures and oasis of freedom. We are a nation of immigrants. Those who came before us laid the foundation for this unique society, and as citizens, each and every one of us is responsible for adding our own efforts to the ongoing project of building a truly great nation. As citizens, we all have the chance to make a difference by extending a helping hand not only to those residing within our own borders, but also to our allies throughout the world.

I am a female citizen of the United States of America, and I know that I matter. I hope to merit the title of "citizen", just as I hope that my choices and actions will secure the foundation of freedom upon which my country rests.

2011 SVRWF SCHOLARSHIP AWARD ESSAY CONTEST

TOPIC: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO BE A U.S. CITIZEN

Written by Daniel Maggioncalda

2nd Place

“For everyone to whom much is given, of him shall much be required.”

- Luke 12:48

Throughout the days and years that pass in relative peace, the people of the United States often take their enviable safety for granted. There are horrors that plague the landscapes of nations abroad, those of war, destruction, and death.

My knowledge of the Middle East began the same as with many members of my generation, with a pair of burning steel towers. In the months to follow, images of bombs decimating cities in far off deserts would flood the television screen. Coffins began to filter back across our borders, each cocooned in an American flag. Living on the West Coast of California set me worlds apart from the sand and shrapnel of the war in Iraq. It wasn't until the summer of 2010 that I would comprehend the true nature of the conflict through the experience of a first hand witness.

That morning, I took my seat on a plane to Washington State between my sister and a younger man who appeared to be of Egyptian descent. The two of us delved into a discussion over education, deliberating the sanctity of books and our rights to a free press. He mentioned in passing that such things were not a part of his experience growing up. “Literature was censored by my Government.” He paused, sending my confusion. “I am originally from Iraq,” he continued. “Being Christian and Kurdish, as you know, made life tenuous.” I didn't know, and the man could tell. He shook my hand. “My name is Muayed Istifo.”

Muayed explained his adolescence under the regime of Saddam Hussein. He recalled a day when he followed his father, a member of the Iraqi military, to the voting booth. A banner above them read “Vote for Saddam, or else.” Two armed men bracketed each booth. That day, Muayed's father prepared his family for defection. Muayed, followed by his four younger brothers, headed north to the Turkish border, a small convoy traversing mountainous terrain fearing capture and torture and death. After nearly two weeks, they reached freedom along the Tigris River.

Muayed and his family settled in Canada, which is why our paths would cross. His experiences helped to put my American life into perspective. My opportunities in an uncensored education, the liberty to pick up and ready what I choose, to vote for whom I wish, and to do so without fear of retribution struck me in that moment. To me, the beauty of being an American lies in our ability to spread the wealth of freedom to places in the world where it does not exist. Through our military, the proudest and most powerful in the world, our goal is not the victory of might, but the manifestation of right. Not at peace at the expense of freedom, but peace as a result of it. As long as there is oppression and tyranny in either hemisphere of the globe, our nation will fight so that men like Muayed and his family will never have to make such decisions again.

2010 SVRWF SCHOLARSHIP AWARD ESSAY CONTEST

TOPIC: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO BE A U.S. CITIZEN

Written by Samantha Bonbright

2nd Place

For me, being an American citizen means freedom and security. It means upholding the legacy that our founding fathers put in place. Holding our head high in times of doubt and finding our individual American dream in a land of infinite possibility.

Americans are fortunate to have a government that not only looks out for its own people, but the well-being of the entire world. America never turns away from crisis and are always the first to help in any situation, whether it is on our home turf or outside of the country.

Being a U.S. citizen lets us choose our own government officials and vote on laws that will impact our lives. Unlike most countries, American citizens have a huge say in how they are governed. I think that most American citizens take these opportunities for granted because we have so many freedoms. We can speak freely about any topic we choose and are free to live out our lives as desired.

America has consistently bound together as a nation during hard times and concurred difficulty. We never falter and we have a keen way of staying strong and positive, even if our political views differ.

Personally, I am grateful I live in a country where I can attend college and fulfill my dreams.

It pains me to know that there are less fortunate countries with unstable governments, where kids are forced to grow up fast and support their families without any chance of going to school. Not only do Americans have many pathways to school but we also get financial help so we can achieve our goals without any restrictions.

Being an American makes it possible to strive for the best and achieve all that you can be.

For the future, I hope that other countries can lead by our example and follow in our footsteps.

2010 SVRWF SCHOLARSHIP AWARD ESSAY CONTEST

TOPIC: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO BE A U.S. CITIZEN

Written by Lauren Fisher

1st Place

I have never really thought in depth about what it means to be a U.S. citizen until this essay. There is an irony to be found here because what means the most to me about my citizenship is the reason I have not thought much about it. I was born with natural rights that have given me the freedom to choose my path in life. We live in a country that not only allows, but promotes free speech, freedom of religion and freedom of the press, just to name a few. We are protected from illegal search and prosecution, and our government cannot deprive us of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. These freedoms have allowed me the opportunity to chart my own course and not to worry about persecution. Frankly, these freedoms can easily be taken for granted, which is why I have not contemplated my citizenship until now.

As I continue to think about the liberties we are entitled to from birth, I realize that as a woman I have opportunities to thrive and prosper in whatever area I choose. Equality is not found in every country, and I am so grateful it can be found here. I plan on becoming an elementary school teacher, a wife, a mother and an active member of my community. I am in the process of changing religions, and I can do this of my own free will. I can have a voice in my community and government, and I can determine how loud that voice will be.

Another advantage we have in this country is the ability we have in this country is the ability to work hard at our career and to affect our financial wealth. The entrepreneurial spirit is rewarded in the United States, which fosters creativity and innovation. As I graduate high school and transition in adulthood, I am very optimistic about what lies ahead. This might not be the case if I lived in another country. I have high aspirations for my future, and that's what being a U.S. citizen means to me.....hope and an opportunity to achieve my dreams!

2011 SVRWF SCHOLARSHIP AWARD ESSAY CONTEST

TOPIC: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO BE A U.S. CITIZEN

Written by Zach Prohoroff

2nd Place

To be a United States citizen means to have power and yet responsibility. The United States government has granted us a lot of power. Giving us many opportunities to make it big using the free enterprise system, or giving us freedom as human as well as the tools necessary to become a successful citizen. But there is also a lot of responsibility that comes with it. We, as citizens, do not get a free ride to success without giving back. And we are able to give back in a plethora of methods, whether it be via community service or paying taxes or being a consumer. To be a U.S. citizen is a full time duty that comes with rewards and some of those rewards and some of those rewards include giving back.

First off, I would like to talk about the power that is granted each and every citizen. We have the opportunity to be a success, whereas in other countries one would not have the same opportunities. One of the many opportunities is the free enterprise system in the U.S. It allows anyone who has a dream of starting a business, make their dream come true. If someone wants to start a business for something outrageous, there are no restrictions as to what you can do. On that note no one can put you down for any type of dream you have. If you want to do or be something, there is no central power that says you cannot. But before you can be successful, the government gives us the tools to be successful, we get to go to school every day of the week and learn and dream to be successful. Whereas if you were to go to other countries you might not have the same opportunities to go to school and learn. The U.S. government gives us power, the power to learn, the power to be successful, the power to dream.

The reason that we are able to be successful is because of the community in the U.S. The community is giving back to us because once upon a time they were helped. So with the power of opportunity comes the responsibility of giving back. And as a U.S. Citizen there are a magnitude of ways that you can give back. Some citizens take careers in teaching where they help educate the future of America, so that one day they may live the dream. Others take advantage of the free enterprise system and create businesses to help supply the citizens with the tools they need to be successful.. While others take careers in protection and help protect the citizens of America. Anyway you look at it, one day we will all have to give back to the community because once upon a time they helped lift us on their shoulders.

Power with responsibility, that should be the motto of every U.S. citizen. The United States is able to give us the power because of our responsibility to give back. It is an endless chain that it the beauty of being a U.S. citizen.

2011 SVRWF SCHOLARSHIP AWARD ESSAY CONTEST

TOPIC: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO BE A U.S. CITIZEN

Written by Mia Stornetta

2nd Place

As I was reading the newspaper this morning, I realized that I am more than just proud to be an American citizen, but I am thankful to be an American citizen. The United States is a unique country because of all of the different ethnicities that comprise our population. The many cultures that have come together, have resulted in our country being one of the most respected and powerful nations in the world. What is a word that comes to my mind when I think of being a United States citizen? Freedom. My ancestors immigrated to the United States several generations ago to live freely; free of religious burdens, free of unjust governments, and the freedom of opportunity. I am here today to carry on the tradition of freedom. Just as the National Anthem proclaims, the land of the free, the United States fulfills its word and has been protecting freedom since 1776. Along with freedom being the motto of the United States comes opportunities, this is another reason why so many people have immigrated to this country. American people are given the gift of opportunity, the opportunity to succeed and to make a difference. This is what sets the United States apart from other countries and why I am proud to be an American.

In the United States, equal opportunity is offered to all who pursue it. I am so grateful that as a female, I have the ability to receive an education. The United States teaches not only men, but everyone a self-reliant source by giving each of us the opportunity for an education. As Abraham Lincoln once said, "Upon the subject of education, not presuming to dictate any plan or system respecting it, I can only say that I view it as the most important subject which we as a people can be engaged in." Most people would agree that education is the most important quality that a person can hold. In the United States, an education is recognized to be an important asset in helping one become successful, happy, and a contributor to society.

Finally, I am grateful for our civil rights and freedom of speech that allows information and news to move freely in our society. I am thankful that we live in democracy where we have a voice in our government. Democracy is important because we not only live between the lines of the United States of America, but we are a part of the United States of America. Being a United States citizen not only makes me proud of the country in which I live, but it is of my highest honor to be a citizen of such an accomplished country.

2010 Winners

(pages 14-19)

1st Place	Lauren Fisher	\$1000
2nd Place	Samantha Bonbright	\$500
3rd Place	David DeSmet	\$400
Award	Zachary Adams	\$200
Award	Kirsten Aguilar	\$200
Award	Elizabeth Lawlor-Johnson	\$200

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2011 SVRWF SCHOLARSHIP AWARD ESSAY CONTEST

TOPIC: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO BE A U.S. CITIZEN

Written by Kaylee Vollert

3rd Place

Being a U.S. citizen to me means having freedom. This includes freedom of speech, religion and numerous luxuries that many other countries do not have. This means that I can marry who I want to and have the opportunity to get an education to sustain my own life. This means being able to express myself through art or literature or clothing. This means that I can make what I want of my own life and not have anyone make those choices for me.

The United States is one of the leading countries in the world. Millions of people would love to have the life we live here. Often citizens take for granted their everyday lifestyles. So many individuals look past things as simple as being able to wear your hair down or get clean water from the sink. The American lifestyle is considerably greater than most of the world and we are so unbelievably lucky to have the democracy system to give us a voice in how the country is run. Opportunity lies in the hands of every citizen and it is up to them to create what they want with it.

Personally, I am so grateful for everything I have been blessed with. We often have to remind ourselves of everything extra we have that so many impoverished people or countries must live without. I know the opportunities that I have been given drive me to help others that are not as fortunate. The greatest thing that U.S. history has taught me is to stand up for what you believe in no matter what the consequence. By doing so, leaders not only in the U.S., but also in the rest of the world, have paved the way for individual rights and freedom. People look to the United States for inspiration for individual rights. Revelations, such as the Egyptian uproar, have occurred because younger generations realize they should have the same freedoms we have and not be controlled by a dictator.

So what does it mean to be a U.S. citizen? To me it is not just paperwork or a piece of property; it is a blessing. Of course this country is far from perfect but every country has its flaws. I am proud to say that I am a U.S. citizen because of how unified and compassionate this nation truly is. I know I will continue to grow as a strong, independent woman because of the opportunities the United States have given me.

2011 SVRWF SCHOLARSHIP AWARD ESSAY CONTEST

TOPIC: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO BE A U.S. CITIZEN

Written by Theresa McArdle

3rd Place

Freedom is something people are willing to fight for, kill for and die for. This intangible idea has attracted millions to the United States; people have forced themselves to leave their pasts for an indefinite future. I believe that being an American citizen means that you are able to be free religiously, ideally, and physically regardless of race, religion, or personal background.

Throughout history, America has been called “the land of opportunity”. People are able to create positive futures for themselves despite what their past may have been. Hard work and perseverance are building blocks that people have used to build the lives they had once only dreamed of. There are opportunities in all areas of life that are attainable to people of all walks of life.

Compromise and ideological freedom are two necessary aspects that have led to the success of the United States. All people in all countries are allowed to think freely, but not all people share the ability to express their ideas. American citizens are allowed to criticize and discuss the decisions made by people in power. This makes it so that people can openly agree and disagree with the choices made, and they can make their opinions known. People do not have to fear the wrath of the government or power; people’s freedom of speech allows them to speak openly without the fear of repercussion. Citizens are allowed to make changes to policies. The wealthiest and poorest similarly vote for what they believe in as they bridge the economic gap simply by making their same voices heard and hoping for similar changes. Compromise is vital to the success of the United States as it locates a medium between two different ideas. I find this to be of much importance because compromise pleases opposing viewpoints on the same ideas.

This freedom is something we must not take for granted. We must recognize the turmoil that other people face with both corrupt government and leaders. With the knowledge of what freedom feels like, I believe that others should feel this freedom regardless of what family they were born into or what country they are being raised in. As American citizens, it is our civil duty to not only protect our rights, but fight for the rights of others.

2011 SVRWF SCHOLARSHIP AWARD ESSAY CONTEST

TOPIC: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO BE A U.S. CITIZEN

Written by Nicholas Pimentel

3rd Place

When people talk about what it means to be a U.S. Citizen, three powerful words inevitably come up. These words are pride, opportunity and freedom. I associate my U.S. Citizenship not with a sense of pride, for I have accomplished nothing—I was born here, and I can't say that I immediately think of freedom or opportunity either. I am well aware that my freedoms are often suspended for purposes of safety and order, and I agree with these suspensions. Though opportunity is present in this country, it is more of a theoretical ideal. The word "potential" would more accurately fit the concept that the word "opportunity" is meant to convey. Although these words unfortunately can't adequately define U.S. Citizenship, I have a word that expresses no less fondness for my land of birth. To me, being a U.S. Citizen means stability.

By stability, I mean "peace of mind," which is highly coveted—especially today. As a U.S. Citizen, I can go about my life and pursue the ever famous "American Dream" without worrying about a dramatic regime change or drastic imposition of new and unjust law. It is important to recognize that humans will forever find an excuse to worry; however, because I live in this country, I have the luxury of concerning myself with far more trivial matters than safety.

In history, there is the well known correlation between a surplus of food and an increase in creativity and production of art from a population. This can easily be explained by the custody of free time. This is very much applicable to my experience as a U.S. Citizen. Without the addition of stress of survival crippling my progress as a human, I can allow myself to focus on more worthwhile endeavors. This is a gift that I never take for granted.

The United States is mighty and has many qualities to be appreciated. We are one of the wealthiest nations on earth and have the strongest military on earth. We have the greatest social equity and the most firmly established set of rights. And though we should be proud of all these achievements, there is nothing more precious that a country can provide to its citizens than the stability of their lives. It is for this reason, that I am beyond content with my status as a U.S. Citizen.

2011 SVRWF SCHOLARSHIP AWARD ESSAY CONTEST

TOPIC: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO BE A U.S. CITIZEN

Written by Caitlin Tremblay

3rd Place

Hard Decisions: The Obligations of an American Citizen

Just as government has three distinct branches—judicial, executive, and legislative—so do Americans have three distinct obligations as citizens: to think, act, and compromise within the boundaries of the law. The American public is not a cohesive group. It is a complex, multifaceted collection of people with various, and often opposing views. Even those who agree in principle lead very different lifestyles. Yet, to live in the United States is a silent agreement to abide by laws and, if one disagrees, to petition the government. This is the key point. America espouses lofty ideals, rights and freedoms for all, but these promises must be validated with actions. Action means awareness. Action means education. Action means change. I don't believe that wearing a flag pin makes someone a better American. I believe patriotism should be measured in the efforts people make to improve their community and society as a whole.

A key component of the American way is democracy, which allows for individual freedoms. However, more freedom necessitates more responsibility. Democracy depends on having solid information to make educated decisions. As Jon F. Kennedy once said, "A nation that is afraid to let its people judge the truth and falsehood in an open market is a nation that is afraid of its people." In a country that moves on the decisions of its people, free trade of information is essential, a principle applicable to economics as well as politics. Capitalism means being an aware consumer, communicating with business through business, or the lack thereof.

Citizens have a civic responsibility to question and disagree, but still be open to new ideas. I believe that being an American citizen means having opinions. It means respecting that others have opinions as well. As the nation's political and financial divisions become more defined, understanding and acceptance of divergent ideas is deteriorating. Radicalisms is destroying people's incentives to communicate. Certainly, as Americans we have the right to be obstinate, obtuse, or indifferent. We have the right to live in gated communities, in fear of each other, and turn a blind eye to any interests but our own. But to *have* the right does not make it right. Avoiding a problem or choice will only delay its resolution and hasten disaster.

The U.S. is currently entrenched in an economic quagmire of elephantine proportions. This is the time for hard decisions to be made. This is the time for politicians to compromise and for citizens to make sacrifices, to reach out with compassion. The best thing Americans can do is rise out of the crisis — the worst thing Americans can do is submerge in indifference. This nation rose out of the fervor of its founders, but it may drown in the apathy of its inhabitants.

Now is the moment of decision.