

What does it mean to be an American?

By: Shannon Graf

On September eleventh, 2001, American history was forever altered. The World Trade Center was hit, but America was not. The Pentagon was hit, but America was not. Because America is not about buildings or military centers, America is not even about a place. America is an ideal.

“They may take our lives, but they will never take our freedom!”

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Over 200 years ago, our Founding Fathers shook off the chains of tyranny from Great Britain, and with the Declaration of Independence, the United States of America was born: “When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one People to dissolve the Political bands which have connected them with another...We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable right, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

The men who founded our great Nation further ensured our freedoms by signing the Constitution and including a preamble that states, “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common Defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity...”

Dwight D. Eisenhower said, “History does not long entrust the care of freedom to the weak or the timid.” And in the words of Andrew Jackson, “One man with courage is a majority.”

“Freedom is fragile and must be protected. To sacrifice it, even as a temporary measure, is to betray it.” Everett Hale declared, “I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. What I can do I should do, and with the help of God, I will do.”

Benjamin Franklin proclaimed, “They that give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.” While Patrick Henry exclaimed, “Give me liberty or give me death!”

We are a strong people, a resilient people, the blood of our forefathers runs in our veins and cries out to us to uphold the truth. It is a truth worth fighting for, worth dying for...they did.”

You see, “Every man dies, but not every man truly lives!”

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“Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These acts shatter steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve. America was targeted by the attack because we are the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world!” President George W. Bush, September eleventh, 2001.

On November nineteenth, 1863, Abraham Lincoln delivered his great *Gettysburg Address*. And even though those words may have been penned nearly 200 years ago, they still remain relevant today because...

“Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation: conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war. . .testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated. . . can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war.

We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate. . .we cannot consecrate. . . we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.

It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us. . .that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion. . . that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain. . . that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom. . . and that government of the people. . .by the people. . .for the people. . . shall not perish from the earth." What does it mean to be an American?