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## My Responsibility to America

As a child, we are often hidden from the world. We appreciate the fact that we rarely hear about the bad things in life. I was this way as well, for as long as I can remember. The thought of conflict was just a figment of my imagination. Growing up, it didn't seem to affect me or anyone that I knew to any measurable extent.

In 1789, our US Constitution was ratified, and in 1791, our first ten amendments as well. The fundamentals of our nation established hundreds of years ago called for all of us to pay our taxes, and by 1920 for every citizen to vote. However, in this nation, with its complex issues, our responsibilities as citizens go much further than this.

One winter day, my legion baseball team and I took a trip to a local veterans hospital, to hand out gifts to our veterans during the holiday season. Most of these particular veterans served in Cold War proxy wars of Vietnam and Korea. We walked around, from one beige painted room to the next, and I heard many stories of lost friends and lost families; all things I would have considered terrible in my own life. It dawned on me I didn't know a thing about these conflicts these veterans had fought in. Not a battle, not a date.

I wonder how much different that day would have gone if I had known just a little bit about our nation's history. I wonder how much more thoughtful my responses would've been when that Vietnam veteran had been telling me about the fall of Saigon; but at the time, I had no idea what he meant. I had no idea what his fellow marines had died for in that war. I had no idea where Vietnam even was. That day, those men looked to us, the youth, as people to open up to and talk to, and to try and better understand why they had gone through what they went through; and we stared back with blank faces. Looking back, that was unacceptable. Twenty two servicemen a day are said to be taking their own lives for PTSD; and most of us could not even tell you why.

We live in a complex world, with complex issues, and as an American, it is my duty to understand the world we live in to the best of my ability. I realized that day at that hospital, and every day thereafter, that my responsibility to America was not to crave the ignorance, but to combat it. I understand that ignorance is bliss to many of the people in this great nation. It's often much easier to hide from the truth than to face it. However, we are all "E pluribus unum"; out of many, one. In order to live up to this motto, we must all understand as much as we can about this country. No matter our ethnicity, our childhood, or our past, we must all do our best to form opinions based on facts and research. It is not always our opinions that divide us; rather, it is often the harsh biases we create.

With this, our nation was based on diversity; diversity of ideas, of religion, and values. Our country's fight is not solely against religion, bias, guns, or gender. In 1620, Pilgrims came to America in search of religious freedom. In the 1980s, Reagan stated, "Gorbachev, tear down this wall," to help those unlike each other to coexist once again, as they once had. Unfortunately, these diversities scare us. My responsibility to America is to do my best to embrace our differences. To invite those who are not like the majority, instead of turning them away. We spent years as a country struggling, and Lincoln's words, "our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal," should not be ignored. We have arguably continued to forget this fact, and it is my responsibility, as well as those who grow up with me, to keep this message alive. It is my responsibility to put aside the miniscule distinctions between me and others. As Martin Luther King Jr. once said, we must all truly judge people not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.

My responsibility to America will help me make sensible decisions about the words I chose, the actions I take, and help me cleanse myself of my prejudices as best as I can, as we all should. We all must understand the world we live, and understand that diversity helps us grow, and should never be feared. We must educate ourselves on our history to better understand those who saw it happen, and better understand the lessons of the past, to apply them to our lives today. John F. Kennedy was right. With this nation's struggles, it is time for all of us to ask what we can do for our country; because we are out of many, one; and we must act so every day.