

Freedom and Individual Rights: A Gift and a Responsibility

As a Vietnamese immigrant whose parents left their beloved homeland in order to escape the aftermath of war and communism, I understand the importance of individual rights and freedom quite clearly. In fact, the vivid scar on my right foot reminds me every day the sacrifices and hardship my parents went through in order to bring us children to the land where liberty and individual rights are respected.

I remember my bitter reaction the first time I heard how I received the scar on my left foot. It happened the day before my family's emigration flight to America. I had jammed my foot into the wheel of my father's bike while it was still spinning. Then, a loud snap and a shrilling cry of pain instantly followed. Although my parents knew my foot was broken, they decided to not to take me to the hospital. Afraid that once the immigration officials found out about my broken foot, they would delay my family immigration process. Thus, my parents loosely bandaged my foot and hoped to get it treated once we have safely arrived to America.

The first time I listened to my mother recalling the events in this story, I looked up at her at her in disbelief. I just could not belief they would allow me to endure such pain for so long merely to catch a flight on time. However, as I grew older, I begun to realize how much my parents love me and how much it must have hurt them to see me pain. Had the flight to America did not meant so much to our family and had we not depleted our last resource to make the flight possible, they would not have made their little child go through such a painful process.

America, to them, was our last hope and the flight represented an open door to freedom and endless opportunities. Once the door is close, there was no knowing when it would open again. My parents did not wants my siblings and me to live another second in a land where freedom and

individuality are oppressed. Now that I have matured, I am glad they have decided to catch that flight on time.

Growing up in the United States, a nation with a history that emphasizes individual rights and freedom above all else, I have grown to understand and value these ideals even more. The greatest aspect I have learned about freedom is that it comes with a price. America's concepts of freedom to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are built upon a history of bloodshed.

About two hundred years ago, when the United States was still colonies to Great Britain, its people had to fight against Britain's rule in order to establish its independence. The American Revolution was fought in favor of Great Britain to win. However, America with its strong belief shocked the European nations when it won against Great Britain. It was the first group of European colonies to revolt and win. The United States' victory set a precedent for many other European colonies to follow. Thus, an era of revolution around the world began.

However, America was still far from a land of freedom and equality. African Americans and other minority groups were still being discriminated against. Thus, another war was fought, which tore the country apart. In the American Civil War, family members were pitted against each other and death rose to the hundreds of thousands. Nevertheless, the war was not fought in vain for it initiated the first step to freedom and civil rights for all. It constitutionally set many African American slaves free.

The attitude of white supremacy still existed after the war, however, and African Americans must start the civil rights movement, which lasted at least another century, in order to gain equalities and rights. A famous novel, Invisible Man, written by Ralph Ellison, depicts the discriminations African Americans must face during the 1950's. In the novel, the unnamed narrator encounters many internal and social conflicts and has to overcome each of them in order to find his true identity as an African

American. Ralph Ellison wrote this novel to illustrate how oppressing American society still was during the 1950's.

It is disturbing to think about how close the time the novel was set in to the present time. Only fifty years have passed. If we look closer into American society today, we can still see that inequalities and the oppression of rights still exist. However, America has come a long way since the days of the America Revolution. Our society has continued to morally advance because of the sacrifices that many figures of the past have made to this country.

Because of that, freedom has become a responsibility that we, who enjoy it, must uphold. Freedom is not a free gift; it was won for us by the heroes of the past. It is now our responsibilities to make sure that future generations may enjoy what we have today and to spread freedom farther to other nations where individual rights are being oppressed.