

"Freedom: A Right or a Responsibility?"
250th Independence Day Kids Writing Competition Submission
By Roy D. Jones

As our nation passes its 250th anniversary, I think back to the first time I laid eyes upon Mount Rushmore. There, I learned profound truths about the rights and responsibilities I have inherited as an American citizen. I was six years old and there was a thick fog obscuring the mountain. From the viewing platform, I strained my eyes searching the greyness. Then the mist parted, and the 60-foot heads appeared suddenly from the granite rock face... Washington first, and then his countrymen. It only lasted a moment before the fog gathered and cloaked the mountain again, but that was enough. The sight was seared into my brain, together with the sense of awe and reverence that swelled within my 6-year-old heart.

Sculptor Gutzon Borglum named his masterpiece, "Shrine of Democracy." He selected each of these former presidents to represent a different aspect of the American vision that they had championed during their lifetimes. Washington personifies rebirth, Jefferson - growth, Lincoln - preservation, and Theodore Roosevelt symbolizes development.

General Washington heroically led our Continental Army and later became our 1st president. He represents our rebirth from 13 scattered colonies into an independent and united country. One of his greatest acts as president was to not seek re-election after two terms in office. His example of the peaceful transfer of power ensures the rebirth of our nation in what has been called a "bloodless revolution" of a new administration at least every eight years.

Jefferson was our third president. Because he oversaw the Louisiana Purchase, he was included to symbolize this period of rapid American growth.

Lincoln is next, chronologically. He, came to the helm of a country being ripped in half by the question of slavery. The civil war was our crucible of fire, where our fate was tested but

ultimately preserved through the bravery and sacrifices of our military. Lincoln spoke often of the preservation of our nation as his most sacred duty.

Lastly, “Teddy” Roosevelt was our 26th president. Known for breaking up corporate monopolies, Roosevelt stimulated the economy through competition, ingenuity, and innovation. His granite bust represents development.

Each of these Presidents had ideas and lived experiences that they brought forth and laid as an offering to the true shrine of democracy – not a physical rock carving but the living, beating heart of America. The common thread in each of their visions for the future was to leave the nation better off than when they had started. With each passing generation, our forefathers have advanced the cause of freedom and expanded upon the protections granted in our Bill of Rights. They have passed down to their children a nation that is more just, more equal, and more full of promise and opportunity than the country they inherited.

What a glorious legacy! But what obligations and responsibilities do we, as beneficiaries and American citizens, carry? What duty belongs to a six-year-old boy staring in wild eyed wonder at Borglum’s “Shrine of Democracy.” Another great president, John F. Kennedy, famously answered this question. He declared, “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country!” This principle provides a roadmap for how to contribute to our shared national project. It applies equally to all, whether you are six or sixty-six. In considering what I can contribute to my country, I have found it helpful to break it up into three categories: remember the lessons of the past, work hard in the present, and look to leave a better nation for future generations.

I can contribute by remembering the lessons of the past. The United States has a rich history full of great patriots who together forged a new democracy. I volunteer for my county’s historical society and we have a museum with fascinating exhibits of pioneer life. The stories of our pioneer

forefathers inspire me and help to bring the American dream to life. If those that came before us built so much from relatively little, then imagine what we can achieve.

I can contribute by working hard in the present. The present moment is a razor's edge between what has gone before and what is yet to come. It is up to us to build the bridge that connects the two. My current work volunteering for the historical society has taught me many lessons. I know that our ancestors tamed the wilderness through sweat and tears. I likewise will work hard through community service, the pursuit of an education, and helping in my family to support and strengthen my community.

I can contribute by seeking to leave a better nation for future generations. As I look through our history, I am amazed at the wonderful progress that we have made. Now is the time to build even further upon this foundation for the sake of those that will come after us.

As a six-year-old boy on a foggy morning at the base of Mount Rushmore, a spark ignited inside of me. I learned something of both the privilege and the responsibility of this great legacy. The gleaming torch of liberty is now being passed to my generation. It is up to us, to safeguard the gains of the last 250 years and expand upon them, where we can. This is our inheritance. This is our birth rite. This is our covenant and sacred duty.