

Sacrifice: Our Obligation To Each Other

On that fateful Tuesday, first responders rushed into the World Trade Center desperately trying to save those trapped inside. Those first responders rushed into a burning building not for themselves, but for their fellow Americans. Then when the American people adopted a completely new way of life to accommodate COVID-19, it was out of an obligation not only to themselves, but to their communities and neighbors. Throughout the life of our nation, we have come to realize that liberty goes hand in hand with sacrifice, and it is our selfless sacrifices that perpetuate the liberty we desire. Our American community asks that we participate in our democratic system. It also asks that we make individual sacrifices for our neighbors, big or small, even when our laws don't mandate it.

Time has shown us that our nation is not perfect, and nor is the world. The founding fathers knew this. It is why the Preamble to the Constitution includes both the phrases, "blessings of liberty" and "the general welfare" within its lines. We have been given a dual mandate to protect both those cherished phrases. When the Supreme Court decided *Schenck v US*, they articulated for the first time the idea of clear and present danger as it pertains to speech.¹ What it represented was the idea that in order to secure the long term blessings of liberty, even rights as cherished as free speech are not always absolute. The same idea can be related to privacy. Although it is protected under different parts of the Constitution, there is no explicit and absolute right to privacy. Today when Americans go through airport security, they go through metal

¹ "Schenck v. United States," *Oyez*, accessed April 14, 2021, <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1900-1940/249us47>.

detectors because they never want to see an event like 9/11 happen again. It is a restriction that American citizens have accepted in order to prevent another deadly attack. These are just some of the many ways we sacrifice to fulfill our responsibilities to each other. The Constitution is an ever evolving document that grants people the freedom they deserve, with the understanding that the freedom of the individual must be in balance with the freedom of society. It is incumbent upon every American to live up to this principle of balance.

It is in times of adversity that we begin to see the true importance of this balance. Throughout the history of our nation we have seen countless examples of hardship. During World War II and the Great Depression, “sacrificing certain items during the war became the norm.”² It was seen as not only a contribution, but a moral obligation. During the war and depression, the survival of the nation itself was at stake. It was a time where the very phrase, “general welfare” seemed to be in danger. Then in 1942, the government moved towards expanding the rationing system to include different food items, a decision that further increased the burden on everyday Americans.³ Most recently in 2020, as governors and mayors all across the country asked Americans to stay home, they did it for their neighbors. The constant between these historical examples is that in all of these cases, an unanticipated crisis made it difficult to secure the general welfare of the population. Action was taken because we risked failing our dual constitutional mandate. We as a society can find balance by exercising occasional moderation of our freedom in times of extreme adversity. We can ask ourselves if we are fulfilling our dual responsibility. If the answer is no, we need to participate in our democratic system to make the

² "Sacrificing for the Common Good: Rationing in WWII," *National Park Service*, last modified June 3, 2016, accessed April 14, 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/rationing-in-wwii.htm>.

³ "Rationing," *The National WWII Museum*, accessed April 14, 2021, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/rationing>.

proper change. History has shown that this balance between rights and responsibilities is not just a legal principle, but it is an American ideal. Americans have been tested through the years and they have come through. To make a sacrifice during adversity is perhaps even part of being an American.

On a fundamental level it comes down to the contributions that each individual makes for others. We will forever struggle with the question of how to satisfy both freedom and our responsibility to our peers. At the same time, our American community will always ask that we take this American principle of sacrifice and make it our own. Governor Abbott of Texas said it well when he announced the lifting of the Texas mask mandate. He said that the decision, “does not abandon safe practices that Texans have mastered over the past year. Instead, it is a reminder that each person has a role to play in their own personal safety and the safety of others.”⁴ It doesn’t matter if it is coming from a Republican or Democrat, but the principle outlined in those words is important. In order to create a more perfect union, Americans need to make responsible sacrifices *of their own volition*. Our American community asks that we exercise our responsibility to each other, especially when the government doesn’t force us to do so. That is our constitutional obligation. Our founding document is not only a framework for government, but it is also a framework for society. Our community asks that we vote, participate in civil discourse, and interact with others in order to live up to our dual mandate. To make a more perfect union it is up to each and every one of us to recognize when the general welfare of our neighbors is in danger; then we need to make the sacrifice.

⁴ Office of the Texas Governor, "Governor Abbott Lifts Mask Mandate, Opens Texas 100 Percent," news release, March 2, 2021, accessed April 14, 2021, <https://gov.texas.gov/news/post/governor-abbott-lifts-mask-mandate-opens-texas-100-percent>.

The words, *We The People*, were not written by accident. They were written to create a society where everyone is responsible for sustaining our Union. History shows us the American resolve and the willingness of our citizens to step up when asked. Americans have time and time again found the balance between our individual rights and our responsibility to our neighbors. It is up to every American to fight for freedom while also having the courage to sacrifice it in times of need. After all, this is the land of the free and the home of the brave.

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