

R-e-s-p-e-c-t

BelleDonna Root

November 3rd, 2016

for Heartbeat

The first day of Kindergarten I remember being taught to hold my hand on my heart every morning while we recited the pledge of allegiance. Facing our bodies with our eyes all locked on the flag, I began to question "why?". "Why did we have to stop what we were doing and stand up and say the pledge? Why were the people in fancy uniforms saluting?" The young child I was began to ponder these questions every morning, but as I grew older I began to understand what it meant. I began realizing how much loss had been indebted to the little plastic flag hanging in my Teacher's classroom. Over time, my heart had begun to feel the hurt and the sacrifices not only service members gave for the flag, but the sacrifices their families gave as well. We put our hands over our hearts and in salute to show respect for the losses indebted to the flag and giving our word that we the American people will conduct ourselves to be a compassionate, justified, freethinking society who not only appreciates and respects the modern sacrifices made day by day, but to our country's past sacrifices too.

Our debt is paid to many. Our debt is paid to the 116,516 soldiers who lost their lives in WWI. To the 405,399 American soldiers we lost in WWII. To the 58,209 brothers, fathers, husbands, friends and sons who never came home from Vietnam. To the 2,356 men and women who sacrificed their lives in Afghanistan, and to the 4,497 American patriots who died serving their country in Iraq. Our Debt is not only owed to those we have lost in the service, but to those we lost on days like 9/11. We also owe those who died for being who they were: Americans. The only way to pay back this debt, is with respect.

As a country, we have conducted ourselves to stand by our word in both good and bad times. We succeeded by winning in the Space race, we created opportunities for equal rights, and we came together to express art and music at Woodstock Music Festival in 1969. At the same time these happy events were occurring, the Vietnam war protests were happening in Washington D.C, the Stonewall Riot had taken place in the heart of New York City, and the Willard Hall takeover had happened. All of which were very dark times in our country's past. But, without the bad we cannot conduct ourselves to better the future and we cannot earn respect without giving it first.

Our past defines the progress and changes our future will endure. It also gave us the knowledge we needed to learn to better ourselves for the future. The past allows us to learn how to be compassionate, freethinking and justified people from events where we previously lacked those characteristics- such as with discrimination and war. We can now begin to understand the true meaning of what it means to be an American. We also learned that even if we have our own way of thinking, it is important to show our respect to those that came before us.

An example of this can be found in a young veteran by the name of James Marshall Hendrix . August 18th 1969 marked the day of the Woodstock Music Festival, an event in which 400,000 Rock-N-Roll driven Americans gathered to express their rights as Americans. It was here, Hendrix expressed his impression of the Star-Spangled Banner. As the sound carried for miles over the dairy farm, every person in the crowd can be seen standing while the entire four-minute performance played on. His interpretation and expression of patriotism was viewed by others at the time as “unorthodox” to which he remarked “... It was beautiful.” Jimi Hendrix was an American who mixed what he was passionate about with what he believed was right, and in turn doing so, shared his own “unorthodox” interpretation of patriotism with thousands of other patriotic Americans. Later, when Hendrix was interviewed on television, the host asked “Why did you play it?” Hendrix simply replied “I’m an American, so I played it.” So, when someone asks me why I stand and put my hand over my heart when the National anthem plays or I recite the pledge, I simply smile and reply “I’m an American. So, I do it.”