

## E Pluribus Unum The Bradley Project on America's National Identity

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### Continuing the Conversation

Thanks to all who have submitted what America means to you. We have posted a sampling. Answers include name and hometown when provided.

Freedom of association, creativity, entrepreneurship, religion, opportunity  
Dave Wheeler  
Seattle, WA

What does it mean to be an American?: Being an American brings to mind our founding fathers and their fight for our freedom from foreign domination. Thank God for them. It is our responsibility that the values of our country are honored by all who come to our country. We honor all of our citizens who have fought in all of our wars to preserve our freedoms. We are UNLIKE any other country on the face of the earth. BE PROUD TO BE AN AMERICAN.

Elsie Armbright  
Peoria, IL

That you are a human being who lives in a free society, one that you should be grateful for and respect.  
Kathryn S. Payne  
Kennewick, WA

When I said the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States in school, I felt proud. I cried. I was six years old in 1945. We were so proud of our nation to fight for what we believed in. We knew where we came from. Our parents made sure that we knew where we came from. We heard stories about our grand parents about coming to America for better futures for their children.

Diana Morales  
Peoria, AZ

To be free to worship, speak freely, exercise the right to vote; to be a 'beacon of hope to others struggling for freedom and justice for all.

L. Gonsler  
Hubbard Lake, MI

Using the freedom that was fought for by our forefathers at each and every opportunity.

Tom Esposito  
Cambridge, NY

Understanding that the tool we use, shovel or pen, does not define our being. We are actually free to be.

Michael Kosemund  
Shawnee, OK

Being an American is being committed to peace, justice, and opportunity for all. It also means having pride in that those things are attainable and available to all our citizens. However, as a politically liberal American, I find it very hard to express my patriotism when the cheap, jingoistic variety seems to suspect my loyalty. That if I don't support spreading American influence through the barrel of a rifle I'm not an American, something I can't imagine myself or my liberal American friends ever saying about conservative America. What's driving this country apart is disrespect. Please, a little more respect and a little less anger will go a long way to making patriotism popular again for everyone. This lefty loves his country.

John L.  
Los Angeles, CA

The freedom to have a dream and work to achieve it. The freedom to speak the truth without fear.

Angie  
Waldorf, MD

I live in the greatest country this world has ever seen and enjoy all the freedoms that most people in the world do not have.

James Cersosimo  
New Port Richey, FL

To identify with our history as a nation. To believe our nation was born with God's design guiding our forefathers and their struggle to bring these United States to birth.

Leora M. Coffman (61 Years old)  
Deming, NM

Responsibility to defend that freedom. Tolerant of others. One for all and all for one.

W. A. Skoog  
Kerrville, TX

Being American means being blessed to have been born into the country that the world has looked to for many decades as an example of what's good in the world. Being an American means being able to come and go as I want to, to do things that I want to do, to be whatever it is that I want to be, without a government telling me what I can and cannot do.

Greg  
Chester, VA

I am a veteran of WWII, I fought to protect our nation's principles of freedom and justice. We, as Americans, able, disabled and minorities, have more opportunity to succeed socially, religiously and economically under our Constitution than any country in the world.

Don Carroll  
Eagle Point, OR

To me it means I am free. Free from tyranny, free from unlawful representation, and free to set the example for the rest of the world that wishes to live under a democratic set of ideals.

Robert  
Philadelphia, PA

To cherish our founding fathers' ideals, thoughts, and historical contributions that shaped our Constitution, to help us understand what it means and how to preserve "our spirit to survive" as an American nation. Without History, we will never find the American spirit. Today, it is not, 'Those who do not heed History are condemned to repeat it.' If you listen close, it has become, 'Those who do not heed History are condemned to make up their own.' Goodbye America or Wake up America.

William Overton  
Melrose, FL

In means family. To me, to be an American means that there exists a sense of unification. Something bigger that we all can hold on to and believe in together. It embodies all that consider themselves Americans, and unites everybody. But this is only if they themselves believe in that sense of oneness. If they don't, you might as well be a tourist in another country. But if they do, there is that feeling that there is still good in others and if need be, I will defend others rights with my life as I would hope that they would do for mine

Darin Thomas  
Hines, OR

Individuality. Liberty/Personal Freedom. We the People being our own government. Respect for that. Honor for those who have died to help protect and preserve that.

Allen  
Cincinnati, OH

My grandfather immigrated to this country from Austria-Hungary at the age of 12. He would visit us every Sunday for dinner, and he and my dad would watch the ballgames. At every game, they would say the

Pledge of Allegiance and sing the Star Spangled Banner. My grandfather would stand up in our living room with his hand on his chest so proudly and then signal us to follow, not that he really had to. When I got older and started to travel, I asked my grandfather if he would like to go back to his homeland and he said no; "not to go back to that poverty and enslavement," "America is my home and the greatest nation in the world." I am much older now, but I still vividly remember those Sundays. My grandfather to me was a great American who really loved this country. He spent his retirement traveling on buses all over the United States.

Cathy  
Central Islip, NY

In my heart it means I enjoy the ideals and privileges embodied in the Constitution and its amendments, particularly the Bill of Rights! In my head it means I am afraid the leadership of our country has forgotten these ideals and is leading our nation not for the "Pluribus" but for the "Unum." This is not the America I want.

Richard Krider  
Marietta, GA

The foresight of Jefferson, Franklin, Washington and so many others who cared enough to create such a wonderful country--my America. Being able to achieve any dream I or my children and their children have and the right to speak out without fear.

Carole Dosch  
Raleigh, NC

Use to be honor, freedom, trust and pride in the values of this country. Now I am almost embarrassed.

Vickie  
Omaha, NE

The right to speak with and associate with anyone we choose to without fear of government interference.

Douglas E. Pierce  
Tallahassee, FL

To be an American means it is possible to be raised by a single mother with three little daughters and be happy. To be an American was to be raised by a proud strong American woman, who never graduated from high school that raised three strong American women who are all college graduates. To be an American is to remember all the brave people who came before us; the ones who left their homes, families, and native soil to go into the wild unknown. Those men, women, and children who watched as the land they were born in and all they knew faded away, turned around, and stared into the abyss and did this not for riches or promises of happiness, but for an abstract idea. An idea of a place that would not care where or what they came from but would allow them the opportunity to become, to just be. To be an American means that a family can contain your Mexican cousin, your black cousins, and the white cousins all at the same family reunion and everyone is happy to see you, the Irish Jew, who married into the rainbow.

Rheachel Smith  
Manchester, TN

Simply put, it is not what, but who I am.

James Smith  
Redwood City, CA

To feel safe when I walk into a voting booth and know that I will not be pressured or threatened to vote for someone I do not believe in.

C.L. Stern

I am a teacher, having taught Kindergarten through 4th grade for 34 years. I retired two days ago, but am passionately interested in continuing to advocate for creating high powered curriculum and teaching strategies in working with diverse students. I believe that I can best answer what it means to me to be an American by sharing my philosophy on teaching history. I am thankful that I live in a country that I am allowed to express my educational beliefs and that I am allowed to teach in a way that allows me to blend the art and science of teaching in ways that allow me to utilize my gifts in ways that powerfully impact my students. Marcy Vancil, Illinois History Teacher of the Year, 2006

Add Comments: Philosophy of Teaching American History (Marcy Vancil) History is the critical component in

the education of all people. History shows us what it means to be human and helps to inform us so that we can make better decisions, creating visions of the future. Although we can never fully understand what happened in the past, even young children can use tools of the historian (analyze primary sources, study artifacts/reproductions and read historical fiction) as they try to discover what happened. As children grapple with what happened in the past, they organize, represent and interpret information while developing critical thinking skills. These skills enhance their abilities to remember, reason and solve problems. I provide experiences that allow young children to play the role of historian, imagine life in the past and develop a love of the stories of people's lives. I continue to expand my strategies using primary sources, artifacts, projects, historical fiction, visits to historical sites, and first per

Marcy Vancil  
Urbana, IL

It means the privilege and honor of being born in the country and culture that offers the best of the finest in life, the grasp of helping hands, the chance to learn and grow and progress from the first stepping stone to the top of the mountain, to experience and realize more in my lifetime than I ever dreamed of as a child or thought possible as an adult. There's honey in the rock.

Woody McBreairty  
West Hollywood, CA

To live under the freedom and laws that bind us together as one by living the legacy our founding fathers gave us under the Constitution and the preamble so as to guide us in the republic's future, and have we the people heard to hold these truths that we the people believe in. NOT TO CHANGE THEM, BUT TO LIVE BY THEM.

Lorraine Martinez  
Kapolei, HI

To me, being an American means standing up for the Constitution as it was intended. Being a nation that not only helps itself, but also helps other nations via positive means.

G. Theodore Catherine  
Washington, DC

I am an American. I am a member of one of the greatest nations in the world. I am part of something bigger than any one person, an idea that people can be trusted with their freedom and can bear the responsibility of the rights secured by our forefathers and by our servicemen. That government of the people, by the people, and for the people is more than just an idea in a philosophy class. That tolerance can overcome hate. That character and soul are greater than looks. That hard work and opportunity are greater than birthright. That diversity creates strength. That any obstacle can be overcome. And that the future is always brighter than the past. I am an American.

Ryan McDonald  
My dad is in the military, I don't claim a home "town," I claim a nation.

To be free. To enjoy liberty and democracy. To be able to elect government officials. To wake up each morning and know that the Constitution that our forefathers drafted will still be there to guide us. It is the separation of powers that govern our land which few countries enjoy. To be an American is to be Blessed!

Pierre Zado  
Turlock, CA

I have inherited a culture of liberty, equality, and limited government defined in our Constitution. I value the concepts our culture includes and recognize my duty to restore and perpetuate them.

Fritz Mehtens  
Irvine, CA

Being an American is about being a better man or woman, it's about racial and religious tolerance, to be an American is to be tolerant of others, it's about being free and letting others be free. To be American is to be free without oppression. To be American is to be able to practice your religious beliefs without being prosecuted by the government, the ability to speak and argue politics without being thrown in jail. Americans don't identify themselves as a race, or choose a national religion. In Modern America we are brought together by economics, paying taxes, social services; what all modern Americans have in common is money, trade, economics. To be an American is to be a working man and woman, top of the economic ladder or the bottom, a working human being is something that is and very well should be respected. Our

national identity is the common man and woman. It was the common man and woman who gave their lives for liberty and freedom!  
Sean Paul Domingo  
Henderson, NV

To be an American means to believe in our constitution! Pledging allegiance to the Stars & Stripes! Wanting sovereignty and security! Respecting our military! Knowing our history and enjoying our culture! Freedom!!  
Hope  
Los Angeles, CA

The right and opportunity to achieve greatness, whether I originate from a low-income family or not.  
Ifeoma Ozoma  
Raleigh, NC

I have the right to Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.  
Victoria Morgan  
Las Vegas, NV

It means community, not nationalism. We form tight knit communities based on region, city, state, religion, culture, and ethnicity. Nationalism doesn't exist. It is a falsity and is imaginary.  
Brent  
Cedar Falls, IA

Arrogantly ignorant!  
Blaine Patterson  
Kansas City, KS

My Irish and German ancestors had to leave their native lands due to religious persecution and war. America was the only country to welcome these people and to give them a path to a better life. I am very proud of the United States of America and hope we never forget that which has made us the envy of the world. Our Constitution and Declaration of Independence, as well as the Bill of Rights, are unique in this world. My family and I are blessed to live in a country that allows us so many freedoms. Freedoms that we so often take for granted. This is the greatest nation on earth, and we need to tell our children about it and to be proud of our national heritage.  
James Cunningham  
Edgewater, MD

An American is a person that knows that he is free and respects the freedom of others. It means that you live in a country with many different ethnic, religious and idealistic backgrounds but we are united under one common set of laws that protect us all equally. It means being willing to do what is right even when it is unpopular.  
Everett Hayes  
Suffolk, VA

Being an American these days means living in the corporate globalized market region geographically designated as the United States.  
James  
Duluth, MN

Opportunity, freedom and laws. Anyone has the opportunity to come to America and seek a better life and live in a free society, but it must be done lawfully.  
Christopher K Horne  
High Point, NC

Being an American to me means so very much. As an American who's been Naturalized, it means I have the freedom of opportunity to be and do what GOD has enabled me to be and do. It means that I have the responsibility, no...make that the obligation, to stand up for, fight for, and if necessary die for the GOD given basic rights of the people at home and across the globe. It means that there are times when sacrificing for the greater good, of America, is an expectation. It means that differences (racial, religious, cultural) are

unimportant as it relates to what is best for America as a whole. Being an American means having an undeniable pride and assurance that I am a part of the greatest Nation to ever exist.  
Gerhard Fischer  
Long Branch, NJ

Free to speak and worship how we wish, save it infringes not on another's right to do the same.  
Mark  
San Jose, CA

I am a free individual in a big society full of other free individuals. We are equals in a community that, diverse as it may be, is under one flag.  
Blair Reeves  
Harrisonburg, VA

The privilege to have been born and raised in the greatest free nation on this planet. It shames me to see how the leaders of her treat her so badly, like she is their personal toy. Shame on them for doing that, and shame on us Americans for letting them.  
Tina  
Fishertown, PA

To be a true American you must first read and understand what our forefathers have not only presented before us but the tragedies that they went through to do such. Once you have a full understanding of liberties, then you must learn the history from that point to the present. This would include all the history to include the good, bad, and ugly times that developed our great country. After all of that is understood, then you must take an oath to stand up for Lady Liberty and your fellow man and do what is right. America was developed on a mindset of a proud and strong minded people; this being said we should keep that in mind and stand firm in our beliefs. We as a people should be proud to fight for our land of freedom and give our sons and daughters to the fight. Keep in mind, freedom, my friends, is in no matter free. I myself have served this great country and look forward to the day that my sons wear their uniform with the same pride that I have in America.  
(Ret) Sgt Ken Arvin  
Farmersville, KY

Pride in knowing that this nation has twice saved the world from tyranny and oppression because our founding fathers made this the greatest of ALL nations with the drafting of the single most important document in modern history: The U.S. Constitution. May we once again lead the world to peace and let no government or politician tarnish these tenets!  
James M Glover  
Jeannette, PA

It means a commitment to sustaining and protecting the rights established in the Bill of Rights; encouraging an appreciation of the virtues of democracy--while acknowledging its fragility--and the costs associated with maintaining it. It also means a commitment to education as the most important vehicle for sustaining the democratic institutions we often take as givens and the special responsibility we bear for ensuring their health and responsiveness to the commonwealth.  
Robert D. Farwell  
Mystic, CT

Being a citizen of America means having the power to determine the course of your own life, unfettered by arbitrary factors such as class or race. With that freedom comes the responsibility to thoughtfully participate in the governing of that country.  
Mrs. Mina Milburn  
Fort Worth, TX

I believe it means we have opportunities and freedom as independent people, and a national sense of being "American," something that is distinguishable throughout the world.  
Erin  
Corpus Christi, TX

Being an American means equality, freedom and opportunity. These words are all used frequently, however, what is the meaning. Equality is everyone is equal in the eyes of God, they have opportunities to excel and the freedom to be successful. Our country offers those who may be "deprived" in certain areas to overcome and excel. Those who are unable to achieve success without assistance are and should continue to be provided for. There should be no color, age or religious barriers, advantages or disadvantages.

Arlene Callaghan  
Brighton, MI

I am free to live my life in a country that cares about me allowing me to grow to my fullest potential. America allows me to be the person God wants me to be.

Lillian A. Campbell  
Astoria, NY

To be treated with less concern and respect than any anyone from anywhere else on the planet Earth by the American government.

R. Poutra  
Houston, TX

It means to be free to pursue what we want in this life, to be assured of all our rights to do so, and to respect all of the struggles that came before so that we can appreciate where we are now.

M. Lane  
New York, NY

To enjoy equal rights, celebrate our diversity, and learn to coexist peacefully. (Idealistically speaking)

Annie Femino  
Lehigh Acres, FL

To be FREE, united, and one nation!

Dr. Forrest Leone  
New York, NY

It means that I have the freedom to worship, work and express my opinion as I please.

Robert Grafton  
Souderton, PA

It means to me... that I "belong" and that I'm proud to be a part of the greatest social experiment ever attempted. As people from all over the world, we've succeeded in the experiment of becoming one nation with freedom and liberty as the basis of our existence. It never happened before! We all have the opportunity, NOT the "right" to live a good life and be what we want to be.

Ann Thaxter  
Fresno, CA.

To me it means that I can live my life freely without being under a dictatorship, communist, etc., government and I have the potential to live my life to its fullest.

Bob

To have the ability to wake each morning safe and secure. The peace of mind in knowing that I can be all that I can be, to borrow a phrase. To go to the store and buy anything I want, to get an ice cream cone. I just love being an American and I thank God for it.

Jerry DeBoever  
Ferndale, MI

The freedom to be as we were designed by our Great Architect. To be an American is to be what we are meant to be from our very essence.

Michael Bellows  
Linden, MI