

# *What Does it Mean to be an American?*

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Every morning, I wake up to the sound of my alarm, which I set myself for whatever time I choose. After hitting snooze a few times, I step out of bed and walk into my bathroom to brush my teeth and shower, using as much clean water as I desire. I then proceed to my room to continue getting ready, where I dress myself in the garments that I feel best express my opinions, style, and personality. Once my preparation is complete, I am ready to get into my car and drive.

Every aspect of my life revolves around being an American. In my life, being an American means having choices. God intended humans to have free will and the United States honors that wish. I am granted the freedom to choose what time I wake each morning. We have immediate, abundant, clean water in America, and there is no regulating how much I can use. I am not required to cover my face before I step outside; in fact, I can dress however I like. All these choices, all these freedoms, are something found only in America. No other country allows its citizens to live as independently as the United States.

Every day, I drive ten minutes from my house to my school. For students who cannot drive, the government provides free transportation. I receive a government-funded education that is costless to my family. School begins at approximately eight o'clock in the morning and dismisses at exactly two forty-five in the afternoon, every Monday through Friday. Before classes start, the school offers breakfast for its students. At midday, students are offered lunch. If any student is unable to afford the costs of breakfast and lunch, our government covers the costs, insuring each student two free meals each day. I am educated on core subjects such as reading, English, and math, but I also attend classes of a more complex nature, such as psychology,

sociology, chemistry, and foreign language. Excluding the required core classes, I choose which classes I attend each year.

After high school, my mother attended college only for a brief amount of time, where she earned no certificate or degree. Conversely, my father attended a university and earned two Master's degrees. Yet, unlike in other countries, my parents' successes do not determine my future. I decide if I attend college. I decide which institution, I decide what classes I take and I decide my major. In other countries, citizens' futures are determined for them by the government. In this country, we choose.

I do not live in fear of the American government, but in appreciation and awe. This nation is experiencing a transition of executive power. The transition occurs not because of a government overthrow or the death of a dynasty, but simply because of national policy and regulation. The current President's time in office has expired, and for the first time in United States history, the people of this country chose a minority to replace him. We will be witness to possibly the most controversial executive transition in history, and yet this transition is always completely peacefully.

As Jimmy Carter once said, "America did not invent human rights. In a very real sense, human rights invented America." I awake each morning and lay my head to rest each night with the satisfaction of knowing my life is what I choose to make of it. Who I am is solely up to me. Knowing that my future is truly in my own hands, I feel an immeasurable amount of love for this country. Appreciating and acting on our right to choose: that is the defining quality of an American.