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The Wounds of Freedom

“And beneath the starry flag,
We shall breathe the air again
of the free land in our own beloved home...
Yes, we’ll rally ‘round the flag boys,
We’ll rally once again...”

George Frederick Root wrote these lyrics as an encouraging march song during the Civil War. This song talks about all the soldiers gathering, “... ‘round the flag... again,” to win the war for the Union. These times were rough—not just because of the financial cost of the war, but also because of the human toll the war took on families by tearing them apart. Freedom has cost America a tremendous amount since its inception, but these costs have been necessary to preserve the country Americans know and love today. History has shown that no matter how a country tries to secure freedom, it is never free.

This idea lies at the foundation of our country’s beginning. The fact that the founding fathers staked their lives on the pursuit of freedom from the British crown is evidence of the great cost that freedom entails. A long war followed, with many overwhelming hardships not even George Washington could have predicted. One of the war’s hardest battles was Valley Forge. The brutality of the cold snow was unforgiving, and the casualties (over 2,000 men) were staggering. Despite the nearly insurmountable conditions of war, these troops fought on because they were living for something larger than themselves: freedom.

Fifty years ago, the Civil Rights Movement was further proof of what freedom costs. Rosa Parks was willing to be put in jail to protest discrimination against her and her people for the color of their skin, and many others – most notably, Martin Luther King, Jr. – died in the noble pursuit of equal rights for black people. For them, freedom not only meant having First Amendment rights, but also being able to ride in any place on the bus in the morning and being able to vote, among other things. To these long-suffering citizens, the road to freedom has been slow and painful, filled with sacrifice. Now that we have an African-American president, it shows that their quest for freedom has triumphed.

Mary Church Terrell, an activist in lecturing about the recognition of African Americans and women, said, “It’s my country. I have a perfect right to love it and I will...My African ancestors suffered and died for it as slaves and they have fought, bled, and died for it as soldiers in every war which it has waged” (Fradin 50). Mollie (Mary’s nickname) was proud of her ancestors’ efforts for freedom and for her country. Are contemporary Americans filled with this same sense of pride as well as gratitude for the blood and tears shed by ancestors in the name of peace and liberty? Or do the majority of Americans take it for granted? Or worse, do the majority of Americans even care about the subject? If not, this surely is the beginning of the path toward losing freedom.

Freedom, it turns out, is anything but free. Of course, those things worth something have a cost. Whether it is a dollar that was dropped in the donations box, a vigilant prayer, or a son who fought to keep America free, freedom demands contribution from every citizen so it can survive the ages of a country.

Works Cited

Bartlett, John. Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations. Boston, Little Brown and Company, 1995.
Fradin, Dennis Brindell, and Judith Bloom Fradin. Fight On. Clarion Books: New York, 2003.