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Six Seconds

Six seconds from the moment they saw the tank at the gates to the moment it exploded in front of them. Six seconds was all the time that Corporal Jonathan Yale and Lance Corporal Jordan Haerter had to live. These two Marines were from separate battalions and entirely separate worlds, yet the Marine bond of brotherhood erased all differences. Upon a battalion switch they were assigned to guard a Ramadi, Iraq outpost housing 150 military personnel. Eyewitness accounts by allied Iraqi police reported that while the Iraqis fired and ran, just as any normal man might to save his own life, those Marines stood their ground. Firing into the truck, they killed the terrorist who was driving. One Iraqi testified that in this moment he realized Americans were different. There is something fundamentally unique about Americans which has been there from the beginning and which the Founders tried to preserve in the country's laws and documents. Because America had a widely varying demographic of people, a unifying factor was necessary in order for the American experiment to succeed. What could possibly unite all of these people? Our Founders answered with the Declaration of Independence. The rights and freedoms this document defined would eventually be protected by law under the Constitution and expounded upon by the Bill of Rights. Americans' uncommonness is due to our unique form of citizenship defined by these documents. Citizenship is the reason our first amendment rights enable us to influence the laws of our country. We can better understand this by exploring the uniqueness of American citizenship and how this guards our first amendment rights.

The idea of citizenship is extremely rare both historically and currently in a multiracial society. Perhaps we don't quite understand exactly how much, though. The early Roman empire was multiracial but was only united under the brute force of the Roman legions. The Ottoman

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Empire, too, was multiracial but depended on an autocratic coercive system. The Soviet Union had many races and ethnicities as well but depended entirely on the violent intimidation of the Communists to make people Soviets first and local ethnic groups second. India and Brazil are attempting representative governments as well, but continue on in strife and warfare over religion and ethnicity. The U.S. is a successful multiracial country because people are not coerced into being Americans but are instead united by the founding documents rather than by ethnicity or race. As Victor Davis Hanson declared in a Hillsdale College online course, we live under the belief that “race is incidental, not essential to who we are.”

“The right of peaceable assembly is a right cognate to those of free speech and free press and is equally fundamental. . . . [It] is one that cannot be denied without violating those fundamental principles of liberty and justice which lie at the base of all civil and political institutions....” These words from *De Jonge v. State of Oregon* adequately express the thought behind the first amendment which recognizes the need for a protection of certain rights. There are five rights of American citizens that are outlined in the first amendment: Religion, assembly, press, petition, and speech. Our founders had a wealth of experience and knowledge regarding the abuse of each one of these rights. Religion was a constantly abused right throughout history and was the very reason for the pilgrims’ passage to America. Tyrannical governments in Ancient Rome and Nazi Germany banned assemblies, religious or otherwise, that were not government sanctioned. The rights of the press, speech, and petition have been censored for ages in all countries. Because the Founders understood this, they recognized the need for a greater protection of rights in the United States. The uniqueness of American citizenship allows for this people to affect change by exercising these rights. Just as the above mentioned marines kept

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watch for danger, we too can be vigilant against the attacks on our rights. Just as Yale and Haerter held their ground, protecting those under their care, we can stand our constitutional ground and protect our freedom. Just as these men did not think twice about defending their fellow men, we can defend those around us by living a life of virtue and protecting the dignity and rights of our fellow men. We have something so unique, but we can lose it as easily as any other country if we do not use our rare citizenship to impact the workings of our country.

It is vital that we maintain our rights. Recognizing that the foundation of our country depends on our careful guardianship, we must strive to live with patriotic diligence. Recall the Marines from the beginning. If you reviewed the camera footage of their six seconds of bravery, this is what you would see: At six seconds left, the men separately realize what is happening. At five seconds, they raise their guns and start to shoot into the truck. At four seconds, the Iraqi police begin to shoot, and at three seconds, they run away from the truck. Some even run past the two Marines standing their ground. In the last two seconds, the Marines' guns fire non-stop and shatter the windshield of the truck. They do not once turn, shift weight, or step back. The footage clearly shows the bravery of these two men in the six seconds they spent protecting their comrades before the truck explodes, the footage goes black, and these men go to their God. Yale and Haerter were not forced to do this. They were not coerced. They were free Americans. They are an example to each of us, an example that calls us to, at the very least, the quiet exercise of citizenship, whose duties protect our uniqueness as a country and our rights as a people. We are Americans, and our Constitution and its amendments protect our ability to effect political change. We must protect our country by using our first amendment rights even if we have more than six seconds to decide how.