

RAPPS: Religion, Assembly, Press, Petition, Speech

Recently, my social studies teacher asked the class, "Can anyone tell me what a social contract is?" We all stared blankly at one another, looking to see if anyone was brave enough to share their assumption with the class. No one answered. We all sat there waiting for an explanation.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary - A social contract is an actual or hypothetical agreement among the members of an organized society or between a community and its ruler that defines and limits the rights and duties of each.

Or as my teacher explained to the class, "We all have a social contract, right now it is between me as a teacher and all the students in this class. It is two-sided - I am the teacher, so I teach you guys about new things you do not know yet, and in return, you are quiet, respectful, and listen to what I tell you. But what if I just came into class everyday unprepared and said, "Well I don't have anything planned for today; so, I guess we'll just make it up as we go." In that scenario, I as the teacher would be breaking my part of the social contract in this class. Now as the student body, there is one thing you could do about it - you could demand a new teacher. It is that simple. If the social contract is broken, or if one side fails to uphold their part of the agreement you could rebel and demand change. Likewise, if you fail to complete homework, assessments, participate in class etc., it will affect your grades, or you will face consequences for your actions."

That explanation made much sense. And to take it further, I realized that much like the social contract I have in my class, we as citizens have a social contract with our government as our constitution implies "Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

If our government does not keep its part in the social contract, we as people can use our first amendment rights (RAPPS) to do something about it. Likewise, if we as the governed do not do our part and abide by the rule of law, then we will face consequences by our judicial system.

The downfall of the great roman empire was caused by government corruption, economic corruption, the rise of Julius Caesar, and citizen rebellion. Athens, the world's first democracy, eventually met its demise, due to many wars, defeats, and political turmoil.

That is why our founding fathers were very careful in the making of our government, not to repeat the mistakes of these past civilizations. So today we have a press that holds our government accountable by reporting the good, bad, and the ugly. We, as citizens, can speak freely about controversial issues and we can write petitions and gather signatures and give them to state representatives to see if grievances can be addressed at a state or federal level.

In our history we can see that RAPPS – the first amendment to our constitution laid the bedrock foundation for important amendments in the future – milestones in our nation such as abolition of slavery, the women's right to vote were a result of the citizens understanding of their rights and standing up for it. We have come a long way since our nation was founded nearly 247 years ago.

Our nation's past is far from perfect. The constitution is a set of ideals and rules put together by imperfect people, who stated this in the first line of the constitution "We the people of the United States, *in order to form a more perfect union.*" So, we strive daily, as citizens of this great country to form a more perfect union using the freedom of RAPPS – the freedom of Religion, Assembly, Press, Petition and Speech as outlined in our first amendment. This is our social contract, and I don't know about you, but as a citizen of this generation, I am going to do my very best to uphold my part of the contract.