

One of the civic values most central to being an American is self reliance. It truly is what sets the American people apart from the rest of the world. While the citizens of other countries may be hard working and dedicated, Americans, as a whole, are in a different class altogether. The idea that you may change your fortunes from what they have been previously and take your life into your own hands is a concept completely foreign to citizens of other countries. It is the driving idea behind capitalism and the American Dream. It is the reason that millions of immigrants have come to the U.S. and thousands still come every year. In every other country in the world, the people expect the government to give them what they need, but in the United States, the people, as a whole, hold fast to their independence from the bureaucracy.

A person who embodies the idea of self reliance would be Andrew Carnegie, the great steel king and philanthropist, who worked his way up from near-poverty to become one of the richest men to ever live. Coming to America at the age of 13 with his insolvent parents, he took a job making less than two dollars a week. He could have taken his fate, and lived a poor man his whole life and blamed his lack of wealth on his misfortune, his status at birth, or his environment. There are thousands of people, who are born into conditions very similar to Andrew Carnegie, who do just that thing. But many native born Americans and American immigrants decide that they will change their lot in life, and, relying on themselves instead of the government, change their position in life. This is what the American Dream is.

The Declaration of Independence, while it may not seem connected to self reliance, is innately related to this idea. When it became apparent to the Americans that King George was

a tyrant and an oppressor, they decided that instead of accepting their conditions and bearing their burden they must be take upon themselves to change their position and rebel against his authority. The idea of self reliance, while not necessarily manifesting itself in those terms, is noticeable in the wording of the Declaration: "That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these [is] ...the pursuit of happiness." In the words of the Founding Fathers, all men are given the right to pursue happiness in a manner that they choose, but they are not necessarily entitled to happiness. Every society and people before us, from the Romans to the present-day European countries, expects the man in the capitol to make their lives better and to keep them in good health. In America, however, the average person is allowed to live life as they see fit.

As Americans, it is very important that this mantle of independence is carried on by the current generation and generations to come. So the question must be asked: how can an American citizen continue to be self reliant in this current age, where welfare is a given in most countries and has even been phased into the U.S.? The simplest answer is for Americans to continue to forge their own destinies instead of letting themselves be controlled by politicians and carried by popular opinion. On a personal level, this means that I must continually educate myself so that instead of being a mindless pawn, I will be able to make intelligent decisions that keep America prosperous and myself independent from whatever other people try to make me think.

As an American and a patriot, I believe that the most important civic values are self reliance and independence. These principles are what have kept America strong, and will

continue to keep America prosperous in the coming years. If Americans collectively lose sight of what these ideas mean, then America will fall into decline. Though there are some larger-than-life examples, most Americans exhibit these traits every day, as they go about their business. In my own life, I will try to forge my own path in life instead of taking the easy path. This is what it means to truly be an American.