**Our American Heritage and Our Responsibility for Preserving It**

*Focus Question: How are our freedoms and responsibilities as good citizens changing?*

As American citizens, we carry the responsibility for preserving the history, heritage, and customs of our nation. The passing of time brings change, and much has changed since the American colonies first asserted their independence from Great Britain. The customs and values of United States citizens today are very different from those of our ancestors. The duties of the American citizen have evolved over the decades, and the freedoms and responsibilities that accompany United States citizenship are still changing.

When the democracy of the United States was first established, only white men could vote. Over time, African Americans were granted the right to vote, and, eventually, women were granted this right as well. It has become the responsibility of every American citizen to vote. When African Americans and women earned the right to vote, they were eager to exercise their new privilege and let their opinions count. Today, many Americans do not go to the polls on election day. American citizens need to embrace the democratic government of our country by voting in every election.

An ever-growing population has led to vast urbanization in the United States. Many American people have never seen the corn fields, tobacco farms, or beef cattle that were so important to our ancestors. It is becoming the duty of American citizens to make themselves aware of the effects of urbanization on our country. As the population continues to grow, houses are being built all over the United States. In the late 1800’s, many people moved out west because there was a lot of unsettled land available. Today, there is hardly any unsettled land in the United States. It is important for American
citizens to appreciate the existence of farmland, and to slow the process of urbanization before there is no open land left.

While technology and new inventions have greatly improved the lives of Americans over the last couple of years, they have also posed threats to our environment. Industrial pollution and pollution caused by automobiles are directly effecting the environment by depleting the ozone layer. It has become the duty of the American citizen to realize the effects of their everyday lives on the environment, and to take action to preserve and protect the environment.

Cell phones, laptop computers and televisions have become helpful to Americans in numerous ways, but these advances in technology have also taken a negative effect on our nation. Distracted by technology, people are becoming less appreciative of the beauty of our country and the opportunities which are present in the United States. As American citizens, we should instill into the next generation the importance of nature, hard work, and pride in one’s country. The future of the United States lies in the hands of the youth. In order to preserve the American history, culture, and way of life, this generation of American citizens must take on the responsibility of passing on American values to the next generation.

Some responsibilities of the American citizen, such as loyalty to the United States and pride in the American way of life, have remained since the birth of our nation. Due to urbanization, pollution, and advances in technology, I feel that responsibilities of the American citizen have broadened to include land preservation, proper treatment of the environment, and preservation of American heritage by influencing the next generation of American citizens.