

ANN WITHORN WON AN AWARD FOR THIS

AMERICANISM--WHAT IT MEANS TO ME AND HOW I CAN FURTHER ITS AIMS

Americanism is a complex thing which doesn't lend itself well to definition. It is not a new idea nor did it develop suddenly. Americanism is not even totally American; many customs and ideas from other countries have gone into what we call Americanism. We might say that Americanism is a composite of almost all the ideas, philosophies, cultures, and teachings of the Western world. Yet Americanism is unique; other countries with almost the same background don't quite have what we have. The one thing which makes what we call Americanism, which sets it apart from other cultures and other "isms," is a deep sense of responsibility to do what is right.

This responsibility, or duty, to do what we feel is right and to strive for the best for America is, to me, the cornerstone of what we call Americanism. All of the other ingredients which make up Americanism--justice, equality, freedom, individualism, respect for law--are a result of this inherent obligation to always do what we feel is right.

To me this responsibility to right explains why we have not lost or drastically changed our ideals in this rapidly changing world. What is right never changes, only how we go about achieving it.

Most assuredly we are only striving for right--we certainly can't claim to have reached it. There is still inequality, injustice, intolerance, prejudice and many other situations which are certainly not "right." But we are still trying to perform our duty to do what is right; we are still idealists in a cynical world. Americans still

dream of the real, not merely the mouthed, equality of all men; they still believe that any individual, even in this complex world, can achieve anything he strives for; Americans still demand that a man, no matter how dispicable his crime, be given justice through due process of law. The most amazing thing is that Americans have come closer to achieving these high-flown goals than anyone else in the world.

Some would say that Americanism has lost that old spark--that others have taken over the ideals we claim as our own. These mistaken would say that Americans no longer feel that it is their duty to do what is right in our mad materialistic world. To these people I would show our system of courts, where everyone receives equality before the law; I would show them our public school system, where we try to educate all our people, not just a select few; and finally I would show them the sons and daughters of immigrants who are now doctors, lawyers, and anything else they wished to become. Maybe it is a little harder today to see Americanism at work, but the old ideal is there all the same.

The only way to keep Americanism alive is to continue striving for what is right. Often this task is left to the young--the old "know better." This must not be. I personally should insist that all Americans work for what they believe is right and, of course, set a good example myself. Truth about conditions will jar people out of complacency. Americans, no matter what age, cannot become reconciled to conditions

which are wrong. I am not advocating wild criticism of all present conditions. Many, if not most, of the situations in America today are fulfilling the American standard of right. But we must forever work at improving those which are not. America must continually be advancing, and it is up to me, along with every other American citizen, to see that she does.

For if Americans ever lose our sense of responsibility to ^{what} we think is right, Americanism will become just another word for some future historian to use in describing the "Golden Age of America."

ANN WITHORN - WON AN AWARD

For THIS