

Before the act of domestic terrorism against our nation's Capitol, I didn't fully understand patriotism. Before our nation was shaken to its core by those who claimed to fight *for* it, I didn't understand how I could have pride in a union that wasn't united. Before Poet Laurette Amanda Gorman's voice floated across America, bringing power, honesty, and a path forward like a refreshing breeze, I wasn't a patriot. Without reading *Saving Dr. Warren... A True Patriot*, I'd never have been able to see the full extent of patriotism all around me. Before, I was going to follow Steve O'Dell's example in writing a generic essay, spouting praise upon those who serve our country -- but without meaning, without *believing* my words. Now, I believe. Now, I see that though our nation is broken and divided, we're in the process of healing, relying on the three qualities that have bound America together throughout our tumultuous, flawed, and majestic history. First, audacity, which birthed our nation during the revolution. Second, cooperation, depicted vividly in the actions of Americans during WW2 that allowed a victory for justice. Third, resilience, portrayed in the aftermath of the 9/11 attack which paved the road to move forward and heal. These qualities define American patriotism and must light the way as we conquer the problems facing us.

Our country was born from a spark of complete audacity. In 1776, there were roughly 26,250 inexperienced militiamen and sailors total in the American army facing 60,000 professionally trained killers in the British army -- not to mention their impressive naval power. The fact that a group of plucky farmers had the ridiculous notion they could take on the most dominant global superpower known to man at the time, laid the foundation for American patriotism. I'd still be subject to a monarchy if not for their actions. A lesser-known hero of the time was Dr. Joseph Warren, an early and undying believer in the cause, who fought not for honor or remembrance, but for the pure purpose of liberty. For an officer to go into battle to help their fallen men was unheard of—officers were considered more valuable than mere soldiers. But Warren remained dedicated to democracy until the very end. As conveyed in *Saving Dr. Warren... A True Patriot*, page 236, Warren speaks, “ ‘More than anyone in this room, I am responsible for sending the men to the hill.’ ... ‘When the British cannons fire tomorrow, I intend to be with the men I have sent.’ ” His actions are the definition of patriotic audacity.

Over a century later, American patriotism remained strong in the form of cooperation during World War 2. Citizens worked together and did without certain comforts so that the army could be successful. For instance, a “Victory Speed Limit” of 35mph maximum was imposed, to conserve the fuel that was needed for tanks and aircraft weaponry. In addition, citizens were encouraged to avoid taking long showers and using too much heat in their houses. Blackouts were initiated and food was rationed. Every citizen was proud to play their part for their country, a pinnacle of American patriotism.

After 9/11, America's resilience paved a path forward. * President Bush, addressing the public, was quoted as saying, “The American people have got to go about their business. We cannot let the terrorists achieve the objective of frightening our nation to the point where we don't conduct business... their intention was to frighten our government so... that somehow we would cower in the face of their threats and not respond.” And that's exactly what America did -- we conducted business. We moved past it, without ever forgetting. Lee Warren, the flagman, encourages students to remember 9/11 through his essay contest, as mentioned in the book. Page 10 explains, “Lee Warren started this contest after 9-11 to

help our schools and community heal.” By keeping the memory of 9/11 alive, we keep the memories of those firefighters, the victims, the families who’d lost so much, alive. As a New Yorker, thinking about those selfless human beings, rushing into the towers even though they were aware of the danger, fills me with gratitude and pride for my city. I also think about those who stood by their neighbors of Muslim descent even when the government didn’t. America rebounded from the evil of terrorism in stubborn resilience, as we are doing now.

Throughout our history, we have had to be audacious, cooperative, and resilient: these are the logs that sustain our neverending flames of patriotism -- from the spark of a revolution to now, patriotism is the hearth that keeps America warm with life. Our trailblazers stoke this fire. For a better America tomorrow, today, Amanda Gorman’s words stoke this fire, today, our essential workers’ relentless strain for our country stoke this fire, our first black female vice president stokes this fire, today, each and every person who believes America can and will be more, stokes this fire. Braving our ongoing crises, from systemic racism and the climate crisis, to COVID-19 and more, *you* can stoke this fire. You *must*. Because the United States of America will stand united, just as it has through tragedy after tragedy, success after success.

That’s what makes us America.