

— VIRGINIA BEACH —
Republican Women's Club

2026 Winning Essay by Reese

Receiving \$2,000 from VBRWC towards Virginia Tech tuition.

"What the flag of the United States of America means to me."

If they stayed in Vietnam, I would not exist right now. In 1976 my grandparents, aunts, uncle, and mother escaped Vietnam by boat to come to the United States. My grandfather, ong ngoai, was captain of the southern Vietnamese army, and my grandmother, ba ngoai, worked for the United States army. When the northern communist took over they had to leave otherwise my family would have ended up in a concentration camp or my mom, aunts, and uncle would be orphans. The American Flag is a representation of their hard work to become US citizens and pursue their American dream.

When I see the flag of the United States I think of the determination and bravery they took to make it here safely. My family should have come back here with the United States Army. However, families were being separated and my grandparents did not want to risk my aunts and uncle not being together. They took the harder route: going by boat. Where their risk greatly increased. Their boat was searched by the Northern Vietnamese multiple times. They made it to a refugee camp in Thailand where they threw food on the ground like dogs to feed them. My family still pushed through and kept strong because they knew once they came to America their lives would be forever changed for the better. I believe their American dream fully came true when every single one of them got a college education and are hard working Americans.

I work twice as hard to make my family proud because I knew they came here for me and my future. I will be forever grateful for the education, friends, family I would have never had if they never came to the U.S.A. When I see the flag of the United States of America my heart fills with pride and joy that my family worked hard to give me the opportunity to live my life in any way I desire. I choose to work hard for my family and make them proud.

I carry their legacy through my education. I do not work for myself as much as I work for my family. My family who worked for my very existence. Just as the United States of America took my family with open arms and gave them a chance for greatness. I feel their greatness shining on me and I plan to strive for them just as they strive for me, so when I see the flag of the United States I see the grit and bravery of my family and my future.

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2023 Winning Essay by Peyton
Receiving \$2,000 from VBRWC towards Messiah University.

"What the flag of the United States of America means to me."

The notes of the music start and all else stops. The flag is raised to the sound of the Star Spangled Banner. Cars have stopped. Pedestrians like my father and I have stopped in our tracks and turned to the flag. I place my hand over my heart and he in uniform stiffens to attention holding his hand to the edge of his hat. This moment of solemn appreciation and reflection on the legacy of those who have dedicated their lives to the creation and protection of this nation is one I believe far too few people experience. These beautiful moments have played a valuable role in shaping who I am and kindling my love for this country.

Every time my family pulled into a new duty station, whether it was in Texas, California, New Jersey, or Virginia, I saw the American flag and it immediately felt like home. After so many years of moving and having to start over again and again, the consistent reminder of seeing the American flag brought hope during difficult times in my life.

As a Jamaican-American, the American flag has always held a special importance in my life and family. My father's family saw the stars and stripes as the American Dream. Through hard work, commitment, and resilience my father became a citizen and rose through the ranks to Navy Captain, not only living out his own American Dream but also enabling me to do the same. Watching my father live out these values instilled within me a strong work ethic and fueled my desire to pursue higher education.

Because of the patriots who believed in and fought for the American flag, I am free to pursue my own American Dream. The flag reminds me of what a blessing and privilege it is to be an American. The United States of America is a nation like no other and we should honor and protect the ideals of freedom and liberty on which it was founded. Not only would we build a better future, but we would therefore honor the legacy of each person who fought for and often gave their lives to create the world we live in today. As I pursue this next chapter in my life, I aspire to join and equip the next generation of leaders to honor and fight for this great country.

The identity of the United States of America was defined by generations of Americans dedicated to formulating this free country. The American flag is the realization of their efforts. It is a symbol of opportunity and hope. The result of commitment and sacrifice. The embodiment of liberty and freedom. But above all to me, the American flag means home.