

“OUR COUNTRY, RIGHT OR WRONG” DEFENDING THE VIETNAM WAR

Americans were deeply divided over U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. In a letter written as he was about to leave for Vietnam, where he later died, Joseph E. Sintoni justified the war to his fiancée.

Dear Angela,

This is by far the most difficult letter I shall ever write. What makes it so difficult is that you'll be reading it in the unhappy event of my death. You've already learned of my death; I hope the news was broken to you gently. God, Angie, I didn't want to die. I had so much to live for. You were my main reason for living. You're a jewel, a treasure....

Please don't hate the war because it has taken me. I'm glad and proud that America has found me equal to the task of defending it. Vietnam isn't a far-off country in a remote corner of the world. It is Sagamore, Brooklyn, Honolulu, or any other part of the world where there are Americans. Vietnam is a test of the American spirit. I hope I have helped in a little way to pass the test.

The press, the television screen, the magazines are filled with the images of young men burning their draft cards to demonstrate their courage. Their rejection is of the ancient law that a male fights to protect his own people and his own land. Does it take courage to flaunt the authorities and burn a draft card? Ask the men at Dak To, Con Tien, or Hill 875; they'll tell you how much courage it takes.

Most people never think of their freedom... They never think much about breathing either, or blood circulating, except when these functions are checked by a doctor. Freedom, like breathing and circulating blood, is part of our being. Why must people take their freedom for granted? Why can't they support the men who are trying to protect their lifeblood, freedom?

Patriotism is more than fighting or dying for one's country. It is participating in its development, its progress, and its governmental processes. It is sharing the never fully paid price of the freedom which was bequeathed to us who enjoy it today. Not to squander, not to exploit, but to preserve and enhance for those who will follow after us.

Just as a man will stand by his family be it right or wrong, so will the patriot stand where Stephen Decatur stood when he offered the toast, "Our country, in her intercourse with foreign nations, may she always be in the right, but our country right or wrong."

We must do the job God set down for us. It's up to every American to fight for the freedom we hold so dear. We must instruct the young in the ways of these great United States. We mustn't let them take these freedoms for granted.

I want you to go on to live a full, rich, productive life. I want you to share your love with someone. You may meet another man and bring up a family. Please bring up your children to be proud Americans. Don't worry about me, honey. God must have a special place for soldiers.

I've died as I've always hoped, protecting what I do hold so dear to my heart. We will meet again in the future. We will. I'll be waiting for that day. I'll be watching over you, Angie, and if it's possible to help you in some way I will.

Feel some relief with the knowledge that you filled my short life with more happiness than most men know in a lifetime. The inevitable, well, the last one; I love you with all my heart and my love for you will survive into eternity.

Your Joey

From: *Shrapnel in the Heart: Letters and Remembrances from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* By Laura Palmer

Name _____

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Directions: *After reading the letter, answer each question with a complete sentence.*

1. What do you think Sintoni means when he says, “Vietnam is a test of the American spirit”?

2. What does Sintoni think of men who burn their draft cards?

3. To Sintoni, why is freedom like breathing?

4. How does the quote from Stephen Decatur relate to Sintoni’s argument?

5. How do you think Sintoni’s fiancée reacted to receiving this letter?

6. What is your reaction to this letter?

7. Do you agree with Sintoni’s argument about the Vietnam War? Explain.