

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

LESSON 10 SESSION 03

10.5.1 Law and order.

The best government is that in which justice is most evenly administered. The better our Government, the more prosperous and contented the people. Every time the citizen assists the administration of justice he makes a material contribution to the welfare of all.

Every citizen should observe and respect the law. It is no excuse that if a certain law interferes with his personal habits, desires, or beliefs he should disregard it. Absolute acquiescence in the decisions of the majority when legally expressed is the vital principle of republics.

It is your personal responsibility not to contribute to the defeat of justice either by evading the law or consenting to its evasion by others. Statutory laws are presumed to be just and for the benefit of all law-abiding citizens. No greater responsibility rests upon the citizen than to demand just laws and their enforcement. There is nothing more degrading, more destructive in its effect upon personal honor and character, than evasion of law, bribery of officers, or contributing to the delinquency of others.

Respect for its authority, compliance with its laws, acquiescence in its measures, are duties imposed by the fundamental maxims of true liberty. The basis of our political systems is the right of the people to make and alter their Constitution and Government.

But the Constitution which at any time exists till changed by an explicit and authentic act of the whole people is sacredly obligatory upon all. The very idea of the power and the right of the people to establish government presupposes the duty of every individual to obey the established government. — *George Washington — Farewell Address.*

The highest test of good citizenship is obedience to all laws. We cannot develop and keep alive the high sense of civic duty and pride by half-hearted allegiance to the Constitution.

There should be no such thing as an oath to support the Constitution with mental reservation. — *W. B. Sicaney*.

The law of the State of Illinois provides that every male person above the age of 18 years must respond to the call of the police officer in securing and apprehending an offender and provides a penalty for failure to do so. A good citizen will never hesitate to inform an officer of any criminal act of which he has knowledge and to assist in apprehending a criminal and aid the officer in his prosecution. Under the laws of Illinois, a person who has knowledge of a crime and conceals it is also a criminal.

10.6 Public opinion.

Within each community there is an invisible, government which we call "public opinion." Without this force our courts and police would be powerless in their effort to control. Only in proportion as public opinion backs the law can it, or will it, be enforced. To protect the land from the overflow of our great rivers we erect dikes along their banks. The moment a "sand boil" appears behind a dike a crew is rushed to the place, and repairs are made to prevent a break that might bring disaster to thousands.

Public opinion, expressing the true character of home and community, is the dike that protects America from the overflow of crime, immorality, irreligion, and injustice, which, if allowed to break through, will do an irreparable damage to the free institutions of America.

Public opinion reaches an uncommonly high level because every citizen is called upon to express his own judgment in community and national affairs, and to work for the betterment of his town, county, State, and country.

It is your personal responsibility to mold and control public opinion.

10.7 Responsibility cannot be transferred.

"Responsibilities gravitate to the man who can shoulder them and power flows to the man who knows how." The recognition of the inequality of ability and the equality of moral obligation makes individual responsibility distasteful to the defective citizen.

Efforts are being made to supplant the individual responsibility of American citizens with "State responsibility" which destroys self-respect, ambition, and national character. It demands "State control" which not only promises to relieve the citizen of his individual responsibility but it also deprives the individual citizen of his personal liberties.

It is the duty of every American citizen to prevent the destruction of our Republic and individualistic form of government by any such destructive political philosophy.

10.8 Our example of individual responsibility.

The closing words of the Declaration of Independence reveal the seriousness with which the signers fulfilled their personal responsibility:

"For the support of this Declaration with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor."