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National Patriotic Instructor

Monthly Patriotic Instruction
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This month we gather once again to conduct the national business of our Allied Orders and to renew bonds of Fraternity, our first cardinal virtue. For this, my final published patriotic instruction, I want to draw attention to American citizenship. Rather than attempt to define who is or is not a citizen of the United States, I would rather fall back on the statesman nicknamed “the Sage of Ashland,” Henry Clay, and attempt in some small way to give some illustrations of his example.

When Speaker of the House Clay was home in Kentucky during the first congressional recess during the War of 1812, he was asked to address a brigade of militia departing for active service around Detroit. With his usual gusto and booming voice, Clay pointed to the men and said to them, “Remember as you shoulder your rifles that today you have two responsibilities: duty to uphold the honor of your state, and duty to uphold the honor of the United States.”

Clay, then a die-hard states’ rights man, identified the complex nature of what an American citizen really is: the American citizen is glue. Each individual citizen owes equal loyalty to two masters, the state and the nation. Not separately, but simultaneously and equally. This duality of citizenship, one found nowhere else in the world, was cast aside during the Civil War, and we, at the end of the sesquicentennial of that war, have a task of unparalleled magnitude: we must remind people not just about the Civil War, we must remind people of the individuality of the Civil War. Each person who performed some task during the war, at home or on the battlefield, north or south, made an individual choice to do so.

First, in this month of our national gatherings, let us remember Benjamin F. Stephenson, the founder of the Grand Army of the Republic, and August P. Davis, the founder of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War. Although the sesquicentennial of the G.A.R. is months ahead of us, we must remember the fraternal bonds Stephenson was no doubt feeling 150 years ago and the same felt by Davis in 1881. The Civil War was over, the armies dispersed, but the connection between those men who fought to preserve our nation had not dimmed in the least. These two founding men individually felt the Civil War down to their very souls.

Our nationwide and even international connections to one another owe themselves to our common interest in the soldiers of American Civil War and the bonds they shared in common, just as we do today. No matter what color the ribbon on our badges may be, the top bar and medallion remain the same, uniting us in common as brothers. The old, snarky maxim of offices everywhere seems to apply especially to us: There is no “I” in “team,” but there is a “me.” That “me” is the glue. My Camp. My Auxiliary. My Tent. My Circle. My Department. ***Our National Orders. The Allied Orders.***

The second and final point I must address is one for our Sister organizations. I have been remiss in not including their mighty contributions since the founding of the Grand Army of the Republic, and August is a fitting time to recognize them. On August 26th is Women’s Equality Day, celebrating the anniversary of the passing of the 19th US Constitutional Amendment, which

guaranteed women the right to vote. We must remember their struggles for equality still go on today, despite the innumerable contributions of women to our national character and legacy.

With this instruction concludes my “year in the sun” as national patriotic instructor and heralds my return to just being a brother among many. I thank you all for reading my writings, for your friendship and many laughs over the past 13 years I have been a member of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, and for your service to our organization in every way. I also thank Commander-in-Chief Tad Campbell for his unwavering confidence and the Brothers of Illinois and Iowa for their generous hospitality during my visits.

I consider this appointment to be the highest honor I have ever received *in my life* and I am proud to remain a Brother in this, our fine organization.

In Fraternity, Charity and Loyalty,

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