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There are many civic values, each with its own ability to advance the American people and to improve our nation. Each has its special qualities, its brave heroes, and its significant documents. No civic value, however, is as essential to lives of America's people and to the society of our nation as justice. Justice is the civic value that protects every American's inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Our founding fathers recognized the importance of justice and protected it in five amendments of the Bill of Rights. They set forth a fundamental idea of justice in the fourth amendment, where they stated that the people should be secure from unwarranted search and seizure. This showed that a citizen's belongings are private and are protected from a government search and confiscation without probable cause. In the fifth amendment, our founding fathers extended this idea to people themselves by stating that a citizen may not "be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of the law". Thus, citizens themselves could not be seized without the approval of a just court. In the sixth amendment, they took the essential step of ensuring that the just ideas they had outlined in previous amendments applied to "all criminal prosecutions" by ensuring that all American people have the right "to have the assistance of counsel" for the defense of their life and liberty. In the seventh and eight amendments, our founding fathers continued to ensure that our country was fair to all by ensuring trial by jury and preventing excessive fines and bails. Thus, our founding fathers used justice to protect the rights of American citizens.

One of the unfortunate things about justice is that it does not occur by itself; the fundamental American idea that citizens are protected from the seizure of liberty by their government no matter who they are must be advanced and developed by citizens themselves. Although the founding fathers set forth the ideas of justice in the late 1700s, in 1963 Clarence Earl Gideon still had parts of his justice taken away. Gideon was a poor man who, charged with burglary, was unable to hire a lawyer. The court refused to assign him one, so Gideon tried to defend himself and was found guilty. Gideon sat in his jail cell and wrote a letter to the United States Supreme Court saying that his right to counsel had been violated. The Supreme Court overturned Gideon's conviction and stated that all citizens had the right to counsel in all criminal cases where a citizen's liberty was in danger. This decision led to the creation of the public defenders system.

Gideon's contribution was essential to American justice because, in the words of Justice Sutherland, an innocent citizen may face "the danger of conviction because he does not know how to establish his innocence" in a court. With this conviction could come the loss of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These qualities are what make American citizenship so special and, indeed, are for many what it means to be American. Because of Gideon's brave contributions to the civic value of justice, Americans unable to hire a lawyer no longer have to worry about the loss of these rights.

The way I have put justice into practice is by learning about the judicial systems, documents, and decisions that affect American liberty. In school, I have learned about famous Supreme Court cases which affect my rights, like *Tinker et al. v. Des Moines*, *Miranda vs. Arizona*, and *Hazelwood vs. Kuhlmeier*. That way, I will know if my right to freedom of speech or my right to remain silent is ever violated. Hopefully, if this ever happens I will have a little bit of Gideon's bravery and be able to use the American court system to protect my rights and advance American justice.

In conclusion, justice is the most important civic value because it protects the rights that Americans hold dear. It protects us from danger by prosecuting criminals while still allowing us to go about our lives without unnecessary government intrusion. Without justice and Clarence Earl Gideon, thousands of poor citizens might be locked in American jails today, their rights gone because they did not have lawyers and just courts.