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Integrity is often overlooked as a civic value in American society. The principal of integrity includes remaining faithful to the constitutional ideals of our nation. As such, this may be the most important civic value because the Constitution does not protect our rights unless both government officials and citizens act with integrity.

Early Americans valued integrity in their elected officials because of their experiences as British colonies. Under the British, the colonist's rights were abused by a strong central government. Therefore, state and national constitutions were crafted to check the power of the government. However, the success of these checks depended on individual officials to respect limits on their power. The writers of early state constitutions created a safeguard against officials who might not abide by the checks to their power by including an oath of office. Under Pennsylvania's 1776 constitution officials were required to swear to act as a "faithful honest representative and guardian of the people". Under South Carolina's 1778 constitution officials were required to swear to "serve the said State... with fidelity and honor". In each oath, the official must pledge to act with integrity and consent to abide by constitutional checks on their power.

President Abraham Lincoln's firm adherence to the Constitution during his difficult presidency is a testament to his integrity. Lincoln's integrity was not confined to returning the proper change to a woman at his store. He continued to practice integrity in the highest position in the country. In his First Inaugural Address, Lincoln assured the divided country of his resolve to honor his oath of office in which he promised to "preserve, protect, and defend, the Constitution". Rather than cater to his personal views or the common sentiments of his party, Lincoln promised to uphold the Constitution in regards to slavery and all other presidential duties. Lincoln assured the country that he would not interfere with the institution of slavery in the states because he had "no lawful right to do so". He promised to allow slavery "as far as practicable, unless my rightful masters, the American people, shall withhold the requisite means or in some authoritative manner direct to the contrary".

Lincoln continued to act with integrity throughout the Civil War. Though he eventually acted to abolish slavery, he did so in a constitutional exercise of his authority as President. In the body of the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln declared that his act was "warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity". By exerting his presidential war powers according to the Constitution, Lincoln proved himself to be a man of integrity.

Integrity is a civic value that must be practiced from the highest government officials to the average American citizen. I can practice integrity by choosing to be honest in spite of the consequences I may face for my actions. I can also practice integrity by obeying state and national laws and holding my government officials accountable if they violate the Constitution. As a voter, I will be able to practice integrity by voting for people who will uphold constitutional principals through their actions in office.

Though integrity can mean personal honesty, it can also mean defending the rights of all individuals in society. While the Bill of Rights and subsequent amendments may list the rights of Americans, they cannot in themselves defend those rights. James Madison said the Bill of Rights is just a "parchment barrier". Unless people defend their rights with integrity, the Bill of Rights means nothing.

In a country as diverse as the United States, a great number of interests are represented, some of which may conflict with others. When one interest holds a majority over an opposing interest, it is easy for the majority to oppress the rights of the minority. As citizens of integrity we must defend not only our own rights but also the rights of those we disagree with. For as Martin Luther King Jr. wrote in his Letter to Birmingham Jail "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere". Therefore, citizens must act with integrity to ensure that the rights of every group of society are protected. Integrity requires every citizen to know what their rights are and to defend their own rights and the rights of those around them. It takes a country of people devoted to integrity to see to it that no one is deprived of their constitutional rights.