

“I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all.” I have recited this pledge everyday from preschool on... I declared it passionately in preschool, kindergarten, first grade, and second grade. I mumbled it carelessly in third grade, fourth grade, and fifth grade. I questioned it in six and seventh grade. Now, I do not even say it at all.

I do not say the Pledge of Allegiance anymore because what it says is untrue. I do not want to pledge to something that I perceive is a lie. The United States is not a free country that honors “liberty and justice for all.”

I am barely a free person. I grew up on a large property with grass fields, lemon orchards, a barn, a trampoline, a swing set and monkey bars, and three dogs. What more could a seven-year-old ask for? I was really happy growing up. I ran through the grass with hair in my face. As a young girl that freeing feeling was the life. It was wonderful. As time passed, the freedom I felt as a child was less exciting and my sense of freedom became more restricted.

Now I am sixteen and I couldn't feel more trapped. I can drive, but I have a curfew of eleven. I'm not allowed to go to the beach at night because my parents think it's too dangerous for a girl my age. It's illegal for me to drive my friends around. I need a parents' permission to get a tattoo. Why do I feel so contained? My parents don't seem to trust me to do anything. It's strange how at a younger age I felt freer, but at sixteen (the driving age) I feel like all of my freedoms have depleted into nothing. Will I ever really be free? I have to obey laws that the government and my parents have laid out for me for my own protection or the protection of others. When I was six I never had to deal with those laws because I never had the urge to break them. Why do I now feel the need to break the law? Why is it that breaking a law is the only thing that is fun anymore? Maybe it is because that is all that my friends ever want to do, or that I've already experienced the free life when I was younger. Breaking the law gives me an adrenalin rush that I can't resist. I wish I could go back to being six or seven and have running around in the grass as the most freeing thing in the whole world. Is there a way that I can run around in the grass and feel free at sixteen? Is anyone ever really free? I will never feel free because as I age, things that make me feel free will change. Laws will adapt to my age and my parents will find a new way to control me.

One of the main obstacles that get in the way of freedom is law. There are certain laws that apply specifically to the youth population that I consider discrimination. Laws are a part of being an American citizen, but to make laws specific to young people is discrimination. A few of those laws include: curfew, drinking age, and voting age. All of these laws have been heavily debated within the government and there have been groups specified to oppose these laws. I think that age-specific laws should be reconsidered and taken away completely.

One of the laws that bother a lot of people is curfew. The curfew law is a state-by-state law, but sometimes differs from city to city. The curfew in San Diego, California states, “Parents should know the activities and whereabouts of their minor children (under 18 years old) and make sure that they are home during curfew hours, which is the period from 10:00 p.m. any evening of the week until 6:00 a.m. the following day in the City of San Diego. Minors can be cited for curfew violations under SDMC Sec. 58.0102, which also defines ten defenses to prosecution. These are summarized as follows: “accompanied by the minor's parent or guardian, or a responsible adult, on an errand at the direction of the minor's parent or guardian, or a responsible adult, without any detour or stop, in a motor vehicle involved in interstate travel, in an employment activity, or going to or returning from an employment activity, without any detour or stop, involved in an emergency, on the sidewalk abutting the minor's residence,

attending or returning home from, without any detour or stop, an official school, religious, or other recreational activity supervised by adults and sponsored by the City of San Diego, a civic organization, or another similar entity that takes responsibility for the minor, exercising or returning home from exercising, without any detour or stop, First Amendment rights protected by the U.S. Constitution, travelling between activities listed above, emancipated pursuant to law.” In addition, parents can be cited if they knowingly permit or by insufficient control to allow the minor to be present in any public place or on the premises of any establishment within the City of San Diego.... from 11:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m... And the evening curfew time is an hour earlier than the time a child under the age of 18 with a provisional California driver license cannot drive without a licensed parent, guardian, other adult 25 years of age or older, or licensed or certified driving instructor in the vehicle” (“sandiego.gov”). This law is just silly because what who would a “responsible adult” be or what would “an errand” be?

The reason the government has put the law in place is to keep less people out on the streets past a certain time in order to lessen youth crime. By removing a significant amount of young people from the streets, the crime rate overall should go down. Some of the arguments that go against this law are that it breaks the First Amendment: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances” (“Bill of Rights”). Many people argue that forcing certain people to reside in their homes, or another home, at a certain time by law disallows them from freely meeting, thus breaking the First Amendment rights. If people under the age of 17 are not allowed to leave their house past curfew to meet anyone freely, then that breaks the First Amendment. Andy Herm, a 17 year old who filed a lawsuit that petitioned curfew in Colorado in 2002, argued that the curfew law violated the Fourth Amendment its protections against unreasonable search and seizure. The suit also contended that the curfew impeded minors’ First Amendment rights during curfew hours” (“cbsnews”). After filing this lawsuit as a minor, it was thrown due to the fact that, in Colorado, minors are not allowed to file lawsuits. The government does not have a reasonable justification to keep young people off the streets and it directly violates the First Amendment.

Another law that has existed for a while and is only forced on people of a certain age is the drinking law. It is usually different for each state in America. In California, where I live now, the law is, “No one under the age of 21 is allowed to consume or possess alcohol unless a parent or guardian gives permission for their child or ward to drink, but only on private property and under the supervision of the parent or guardian” (“youthrights.org”). While in Colorado, where I used to live, the law states, “No one under the age of 21 is allowed to consume or possess alcohol unless a parent or guardian gives permission for their child or ward to drink, but only on private property and under the supervision of the parent or guardian” (“youthrights.org”). One of the main arguments that are given to keep the drinking age law is that it affects brain development. Studies show that the brain does not fully develop until someone turns around 25. The law was made to protect people from brain damage at a young age, but shouldn’t it be the person’s choice to damage their own brain and not the government’s? It has also been said that, “Underage drinking cost society \$68 billion in 2007, or \$1 for every drink consumed. This includes medical bills, income loss, and costs from pain and suffering... In 2009, 19 percent of drivers, ages 16–20, who were involved in fatal crashes had a blood alcohol concentration over the legal adult limit (0.08)... Alcohol use encourages risky sexual behavior. Youth who drink may be more likely to have sex, become pregnant, or contract sexually transmitted diseases”

("ojjdp.gov"). All of these reasons are good reasons to limit the consumption of alcohol, but the same thing is true for adults. Adults can cost the society millions by "medical bills, income loss, and costs from pain and suffering", adults can drink and drive and get in car crashes that kill people; alcohol affects adults in the same way as youth by causing bad decision making. So why should people under the age of 21 or 18 be unable to drink when it has the same effect on society for people over the drinking age? One of the main dilemma's about the drinking age is that someone is allowed to vote and die for their country at 18, but they are not allowed to drink alcoholic substances. The reasons do not make much sense to me and the only one that is legitimate is for the protection of the person drinking. Whether someone wants to be protected or not should be their choice, not the government's.

Isn't that true for children as well? Why should the parent be able to restrain children? Children are people too, and they have rights. Parents are like the law for most kids. Parents set rules for their kids to obey and are punished if they disobey those rules. Some kids, including myself, don't exactly take their parents' rules so seriously because they are either not well-enforced, they do not get punished, or the rules do not exist. Parents have a lot of control over what their kids do. My parents, specifically, have a lot of power over me because they punish me when I do something that they do not approve of. I know that parents provide home, food, protection, and medical care for their child, but should they have the right to decide whether they can go out at a certain time, go on a certain website, or wear certain things? Their child is an individual. They have a mind to make their own decisions whether they are bad ones or good ones. Another person should not have the power to control another person in a sense of decision-making. If someone wants to wear revealing clothes, that is their choice; if someone wants to go to their friend's house at noon, that is their choice. No one else should be capable of making that choice for them, regardless of the care they provide. The children should have rights of their own.

Adults seem to never take the youth seriously enough to let them do anything about their freedoms. There are many organizations, such as the Youth Rights group, or Americans for a Society Free from Age Restrictions, who look out and fight for the rights of the young population. Organizations like these have been encouraging people to fight for their rights as the youth population. It's really helpful to have people, young and old, encouraging youth to discover their rights and confront the government about it. Andy Herm, as I mentioned before, was a 17 year old who wanted his rights as an American citizen but was shot down because he was too young. People who are younger should not have to fight for their rights. Age is just a number. A number does not define how experienced or wise someone can be. A number should not stop someone from being out of the house at a certain time, drink, drive, vote, or go into the army. Everyone is different and some people get a lot of experience at a young age. Some kids might argue that they are smarter than their parents. The young will never be truly free because they will always feel restrained by a number. I do not know if I will ever feel free at any age because of laws, but it does not make it acceptable for certain laws to be made directed at the youth. At some point in life, everyone is 16. Obama was 16 once. He had similar rights that I have, yet he continues to repress the youth. Why? It is because he knew what it was like at 16 and has some preconceived notions about youth? Just because there is no way to measure experience does not make it okay to tyrannize the youth just because they are young.

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