Central Region Essay Winner

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"I pledge allegiance to the flag …" is mechanically spouted out by countless American students from coast to coast every morning – never once asking, "Why am I saying this?" They stand, hand over heart, eyes fixed upon the flag hung in the corner, pledging to their country and taking a moment of silence. But what are they actually pledging to? Is it to stand by our country no matter what, to speak out for those whose liberties have been stripped, or to be prideful and grateful for those who sacrificed themselves so all can stand in school uttering these words? Over the course of my K-12 education I have learned multiple facts and written countless papers that will fade into the past. But the pledge I have recited every morning since entering my first classroom will remain with me forever.

The American flag is not just a piece of fabric we look to every day, it's not just a rectangle we stop in front of and salute: It is a symbol for those men and women over the course of United States history who died founding and protecting this country. The American flag is comprised of all of us living and dead who stand for freedom and equality.

When Sergeant William Harvey Carney ensured that the flag would not touch the ground, he was ensuring that individuals both black and white would carry on its faithful journey to freedom for all people. The flag not touching the ground that day is often a landmark event overlooked due to its minor role in the big picture, but that day furthered the cause that equality would not die on the battle field.

Over the course of history, African Americans have stood up for this country when whites refused to stand by them. Throughout World War II the Tuskegee Airmen, a fighter squadron made up entirely of African Americans, fought bravely against the Germans. The Tuskegee Airmen faced racial discrimination in and out of the military, which was still segregated during this time. (The military would not be desegregated until 1948.) They could not even share a drink with the bomber pilots they protected in the air. They held the flag high and did not let it fall because it was the right thing to do – a lesson we all should learn from and actions we all should emulate.