

Story by Mike Latona • Photos by Greg Francis

MOVIE on the

Proud to be American

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.

As Independence Day approaches, we celebrate important freedoms — such as those listed above in the Constitution's First Amendment — that citizens in many other countries can only dream about.

Teens from our diocese acknowledge these privileges on this page. They also exercise their freedom of speech by evaluating America's current state of affairs, pointing out areas where we could stand a bit (or lot) of improvement.

Anytime people are killed because of what America has done, I am not proud at all. I am not proud of what went on in the Korean War, or the Vietnam War, or Kosovo...

America thinks we have to destroy all of communism.

AMANDA CAPUANO, 16
Guardian Angels Church, Henrietta

I think America and Americans are a lot better off than Third World countries, which are very poor. In Africa, so many people are starving. Some of the corruption in government, I'm not proud of at all. Or the violence, or the school shootings like in Colorado. We need to do something to change that.

BETH DOMBROWSKI, 13
St. Vincent DePaul Church, Churchville

I'm proud to be American. I realize how lucky I am to have a lot of the basic freedoms — like just to be able to go to school, which a lot of kids take for granted. (But) when you see stuff like legalized abortion and the death penalty, if some of our founders were alive today, I don't think they would be proud. I think some of these freedoms go beyond what they dreamed up when they laid out the Constitution.

SARAH KEATING, 17, Immaculate Conception Church, Ithaca

I get to do so many different things. China, Kosovo, places like that — you wouldn't get to do the things you want, because they would have control over you.

I don't like some of the ways our government acts, like Bill Clinton (with the Monica Lewinsky sex scandal). I also don't think we treat minorities fairly.

DANIEL KURYCKI, 15
St. Vincent DePaul Church, Churchville

The United States of America is indeed the most commercial place in the world to live, and possibly the most fun. We have Disneyland, pizza and a lot of great movies, but I do wonder if I might have a greater respect for the things that make them possible if I hadn't been able to enjoy these luxuries my whole life.

NICHOLAS GUREWITCH, 17, St. Dominick's Church, Shortsville

There are plenty of times that I'm not proud to be an American at all. These times would be when we get involved in the affairs of the world (i.e. Kosovo and Bosnia) and tell them that our views are the only ones that are valid. I believe that we could do so much more to help humanity here at home than we can do overseas.

MARGARET MARISA, 17
Immaculate Conception Church, Ithaca

We have one of the highest living standards in the world, and we have a pretty good society. Granted, we have our problems, but we don't have wars or conflicts with nearby countries. Sometimes I'm a little disappointed at how we use freedom of speech. People in the media say outrageous things, like

Howard Stern.

COLLEEN HOROHOE, 14,
St. Anne Church, Rochester



Paul Robbins

You have the freedom to do mostly whatever you want. Other countries, they're not free as much. Here you have freedom to express what you feel — freedom of speech, freedom of religion.

PAUL ROBBINS, 14
Sacred Heart Cathedral, Rochester

We aren't forced into other people's beliefs, like you would with a king and queen or a dictatorship. Maybe we could do a little bit better on the gun control, but I like our system pretty much.

BRANDON FOSTER, 15
St. Vincent DePaul Church, Churchville



Colleen Horohoe

We can choose anything we want to do and nobody can stop us, unless it's inappropriate. For the kids who think we're not that lucky to live in America, (Independence Day) reminds us that we fought to get our freedom and independence from Britain.

COURTNEY CRABB, 14
St. Joseph/St. William Parish, Lewis & Cassus

Coming next week: Heartbreak