

THE LEGACY OF JOHN ADAMS

BY JACKSON VRTIS

John Adams, perhaps best known as the second president of the United States, led a life in which he exemplified many of the values on which the nation he helped create was founded. Adams led a life often overshadowed by the considerable prestige of being George Washington's presidential successor. However, there is much that can be learned from the life of John Adams the writer and lawyer, as well as John Adams the president. One of the most notable illustrations of Adams' strong belief in liberty and justice comes from his legal career, specifically his effectively pro bono defense of the Boston Massacre perpetrators.

The defense of the British Regulars accused of firing on colonial civilians seems, upon first glance, a betrayal of Adams' intense support for the growing revolutionary movement in the American colonies, and it was, indeed, viewed this way by many at the time of the event. It was, in fact, one of Adams' greatest manifestations of his support for the ideological grounds upon which the American Revolution was fought. While Adams could have easily given in to the justifiable outrage of the colonists and chosen to abandon the accused redcoats to the mercy of the citizens of Boston, he instead chose the path of true belief in liberty. Freedom, Adams believed, cannot exist without a system of justice that protects the rights of the perceived enemies of the majority, and there cannot be justice without fair representation of the opinions of all disputing parties.

Later in his political career, Adams, an ardent Federalist and, therefore, a supporter of centralized government proposed in what would become the final Constitution of the United States, remained a proponent of individual liberties and the commitment to justice necessary to preserve them. As a supporter of separation of powers within the government and

defender of popular sovereignty, Adams remained a vanguard of liberty and justice even after his career as a trial lawyer ended. The principles for which John Adams stood continue to be profoundly important to the American system of government and way of life in the modern age, as our society is grounded in a belief in rule by the people and the personal freedoms necessary to a true democratic government. The need to protect these freedoms from encroachment has not lessened with the passage of time; rather, it has increased in an era in which technology offers immense potential for growth but also for repression when improperly managed. Therefore, the need for people who embody the values of John Adams in the courtroom, the political arena, and in daily life

remains critical. The defense of Guantanamo Bay prisoners to the representation of domestic criminals such as Fort Hood shooter Nidal Hassan or Jared Loughner and political dissidents, such as Julian Assange of WikiLeaks, remains an integral part of this system. Regardless of how morally reprehensible the actions of such people may be, the preservation of their legal rights safeguards the rights of all ordinary citizens. ✪



Temple High School senior Jackson Vrtis reads his winning essay at the Law Day celebration held on May 9 at the Texas Law Center in Austin. The theme of this year's Law Day was "The Legacy of John Adams: From Boston to Guantanamo."

LAW DAY 2011 CONTEST WINNERS



2010–2011 State Bar President Terry Tottenham recognized Julian Rivera of Austin for his award-winning Law Day poster.



Following the Law Day ceremony, Elle Boyd of Corpus Christi and other award recipients toured the Court of Criminal Appeals.

POSTER CONTEST GRADES K-2

1ST PLACE

Kendric Goodloe

R.C. Burleson Elementary

2ND PLACE

Azelie Gonzales

East Cliff Elementary

3RD PLACE

Julian Rivera

Galindo Elementary

POSTER CONTEST GRADES 3-5

1ST PLACE

Daylon Franklin

R.C. Burleson Elementary

2ND PLACE

Elle Boyd

Windsor Park Elementary

3RD PLACE

Nicolas Muñoz

Galindo Elementary

POSTER CONTEST GRADES 6-8

1ST PLACE

Halle Brazda

The Kinkaid School

2ND PLACE

Edgar Lopez

Bob Hope School

3RD PLACE

Madison Rawls

IWA – Middle Level

POSTER CONTEST GRADES 9-12

1ST PLACE

Guadalupe Rocha

Bob Hope School

PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST

1ST PLACE

Brennan Boydston

Salado High School

PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST

(Continued)

2ND PLACE

Alanna Mumphrey

H. Grady Spruce High School

EDITORIAL CONTEST

1ST PLACE

Jackson Vrtis

Temple High School

2ND PLACE

Mary Mikule

Bishop T.K. Gorman

3RD PLACE (TIE)

Brian Boyle

Sharyland High School

Victor Lam

Cypress Lakes High School