

What Does it Mean to Be American: Augustus Roberts, Jr., Maryland

As told by Augustus Roberts, Jr.
Salisbury, Maryland



Photo of Augustus Roberts, Jr.

This snapshot was gathered in conjunction with the Maryland Voices initiative at Maryland Humanities, specifically to supplement the "Voices and Votes: Democracy in America" traveling exhibition from the Smithsonian's Museum on Main Street program. This collection, made up of stories of first-time voters between the ages of 18 and 24, showcases the experiences of young people as they wrestled with the 2020 presidential election, issues around social justice, the environment, immigration, and the pandemic.

Story Narrative:

Augustus Roberts, Jr. (00:00): My name's Augustus Roberts, Jr. I'm currently a senior English major at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore.

Augustus Roberts, Jr. (00:08): A couple of facts about myself.

Augustus Roberts, Jr. (00:10): I like to create from graphic design to film to even still life pictures, which is my main passion. But that's the main thing I love to get my hands in when it turns to digital media.

Augustus Roberts, Jr. (00:23): What is it to be an American?

Augustus Roberts, Jr. (00:24): Wow. Okay. Because so far, everyday I wake up and tell myself, okay, I'm Librarian, I'm Liberian. But then again, I walk around everybody a month, since I've been here for over 21 years.

Augustus Roberts, Jr. (00:37): To me, from what I've seen so far to be an American starts off with a dream. And no matter your skin color, you see past any other system or obstacle. No matter your skin color or economic status, you see that dream past any of that that's hindering you. And you chase it thinking in this country and land of opportunity this is what is available to me and I'm not going to have to go out there to explore it because I'm from the best country in the world that's offering me these opportunities.

Augustus Roberts, Jr. (01:08): It's a sense of nationalism. It's a sense of honesty. It's a sense of honesty with yourself. To truly be an American is to come to terms with our past. And not even from the victor's standpoint, but taking time to understand the research and viewpoints of those Native Americans that were affected. Not even just African-Americans when it comes to how they show our trauma. But actually taking the time to explore some of the voices that actually weren't heard. Like transgender people. A lot of the people that have been marginalized. Taking the time as an American to realize whether I might be the majority in a mixed land, but we're still that melting pot that I need to educate myself. It's still that melting pot that you need to educate yourself about to where, even if you're not seeing it melt evenly where you are, take time to explore the places around you in America because it's still America.

Augustus Roberts, Jr. (02:17): Even though I've traveled some parts down south, parts out mid-west, there's been a mixture of both. not even just black and white that I've had to interact with. So to truly be an American is to be honest about our past, honest about the culture and people here.

Augustus Roberts, Jr. (02:40): I wasn't even looking at that question that you sent earlier about what's an American pastime for you. And for me, I don't know about you, but it was sunflower seeds and pickled eggs as a child every day. From the ice cream truck, having those little experiences with the neighborhood. And y'all riding your bikes as a kid. I'm

getting nostalgic and whatnot. I don't want to say 'free.' I don't want to say that truly being American is free because it's even a lot of other systems above our heads that we don't see and educate ourselves about that I don't consider ourselves really free. But freedom starts from within, in my heart, again, not with any system above me in America right here. So to truly be an American is to be free in your heart. And I say that lightly even with the American standards, but to truly be American is to be free in your heart in my eyes.

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