

# THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE AND THE CONCEPT OF LIBERTY

*by Dr. Robert George*

In this essay, Dr. Robert P. George, a constitutional scholar and historian, explores how Americans have understood liberty from the nation's founding to today. He explains different ways liberty can be defined, why it's essential to the "pursuit of happiness," and what responsibilities come with it. You'll also examine how liberty has shaped debates about justice, rights, and the role of citizens in our democracy.

Use the questions below to guide your reading.

## Understanding Liberty

1. Describe the key differences in the definitions of "negative liberty" and "positive liberty."
2. How do the different views of liberty as "freedom from" or "freedom for" change the nature of liberty? How does each definition view the role of the citizen?
3. What is the difference between "liberty" and "license" according to Dr. George?

## Liberty in the American Founding

1. What kind of connections are there between the notions of "liberty" and the "pursuit of happiness" in the Declaration of Independence?
2. What is the concept of "civic liberty"? How can this be exercised in our system of government?

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## Liberty in Action

1. In what ways can liberty be protected or limited in our constitutional system?
2. What responsibilities are required of citizens to exercise liberty “as a condition for the pursuit of worthy ends”?
3. What are some examples where liberty has been used to make a moral argument for equal justice in our country?
4. What is ordered liberty, and what role does it play in the lives of people?

## Reflect and Discuss

1. Which definition of liberty feels closest to your own values, and how might that shape the way you participate as a citizen?
2. How do you personally balance your own freedoms with your responsibilities to others?