



Palm Beach Fellowship of Christians & Jews 2016 Essay Contest

Third Place – Shane Lunsford

St. Mark's Episcopal School (Grade 8)

Teacher: Nicole Robison

A New Start

Liberty is, in essence, freedom; yet the form incorporates equality in treatment, opportunities, and rights. These values are all integral aspects of the concept of liberty. To truly embody liberty, this equality must be spread to people of all races, genders, and beliefs no matter where they live. Unfortunately, many nations are or have been blind to the need for liberty among all citizens.

Ellis Island opened in 1892 as a federal immigration station and, for over 60 years, processed millions of new immigrants to the United States. These immigrants suffered through an arduous sea voyage, tedious medical and legal inspections, week-long quarantines, new foods, and cramped, crude living spaces. However, these challenges were trivial when compared to the oppression and persecution that many faced in the nation that they fled. Countless Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe escaped political and economic oppression due to their religion while Italians ran from inescapable poverty. These environments each lacked a quality crucial to society, one that these people saw in America: liberty.

The values that our country represents are founded around the concepts of liberty and equality, the same concepts that the immigrants' societies were lacking. This famous line from our Declaration of Independence embodies these values, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Citizens of foreign nations saw this liberty, this equality available in the United States, and rushed through our gates to take advantage of the opportunity. Unlike their former home, this new country offered chances for everyone to succeed and prosper, despite religion or ethnic background. People could start anew with equal rights and equal treatment, knowing that they too would be given the same freedom as all those around them. They could overcome the poverty that enveloped them in their former homes and claim their heritage of liberty. As these immigrants entered America for the first time and gazed upon the Statue of Liberty, hope for a new and better life, one full of tolerance, equality, and liberty, was at the forefront of their thoughts.

Liberty can be interpreted as freedom, autonomy, birthright, choice, independence, or self-government; yet, the primary core aspect of this concept is equality. God shows us that all people, no matter their race, gender, religion, ethnicity, or economic status, are his children that he has created with a unique purpose and set of talents. Some may view liberty as a foreign value, one reserved for governments and national affairs; however, it can be seen in everyday events. The way we view those around us, the opportunities we have to succeed, and the freedoms of speech, choices, and treatment we are given are what drew many immigrants many years ago. They fled from oppressive environments lacking freedoms and found new hope in America in the form of liberty, the same liberty that continues to draw refugees today.