



Palm Beach Fellowship of Christians & Jews 2016 Essay Contest

Honorable Mention – Skylar Hines

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What Liberty Means to Me

The simplest definition of liberty is freedom. My definition is more specific: it is freedom to access justice, to have rights respected, and to be governed fairly. All people, no matter where they live or what they believe, deserve liberty in order to be guaranteed the chance for basic happiness and comfort.

People's race, gender, sexual orientation, economic status, and religion should have no effect on liberty. Sexual orientation, race, and gender are predestined, so it is unfair to discriminate against an individual for these characteristics. Additionally, people of low economic status should not have less liberty than richer individuals because most people do not become poor by choice, and limiting their freedom could make it difficult for them to grow wealthier and thus gain more liberty. Another quality that should not change the amount of freedom people enjoy is religion. One of the most basic human rights is to have a personal opinion, and a religion is truly just a type of opinion. Therefore, the liberty allowed to people should be unaffected by their spiritual beliefs.

This idea of protection of liberty from religious discrimination is directly dealt with in the current issue of Muslim immigration into the United States. Small but destructive groups of extremists have driven Americans to create a stereotype: that all or most Muslims are violent, dangerous individuals who should be shut out of this country. Some politicians have suggested preventing any Muslims from moving to the United States. Although the reasoning behind this is understandable, it is an unjust measure to take because a large number, if not the majority, of Muslims are peaceful. Most of the Muslims who wish to emigrate to the United States are nonviolent people who are hoping to leave the war-torn Middle East and create a new, safer life. Denying these people the opportunity to live in peace and security is a violation of the liberty that all people deserve.

When isolated events lead one group of people to fear another, protective actions that oppose the core values of society may be suggested. That is happening right now in the United States. Preventing from beginning new lives in this country violates the liberty that every person deserves and pushes against the principle of freedom on which the United States is founded. If an exception is made in these circumstances, it can just as easily be made in future times of difficulty, which may include racial, sexual, and economic prejudice. And if an exception is made just one too many times, the United States' foundation can crumble.