

We Hold These Truths

The Global Quest for Liberty

And the Promise of America's Declaration of Independence

With Judge Douglas H. Ginsburg



Discussion Questions

1. Professor Danielle Allen said (04:36) of the Declaration of Independence, “Self-government is an extraordinary human convention. Those documents that have birthed that invention deserve a special place in the human treasury. The Declaration of Independence is, for sure, one of those.”
 - a. What other documents hold this special place in the human treasury?
 - b. Why is self-government so important to humanity?
2. Professor Danielle Allen stated (08:43), “The really interesting thing that happens is that the drafters of the Declaration didn’t say life, liberty, and property. They chose happiness instead. And in that moment, they were actually putting aside the vocabulary of the slave-holding faction.” Do you agree with this statement?
 - a. What additional reasons can you think of that would make the Founders decide to go with the happiness terminology instead of property?
3. Judge Ginsburg and Emily Sneff discussed (09:24) the origins of Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* pamphlet and how Paine distributed them anonymously throughout Philadelphia. Why do you think he decided to distribute them anonymously?
 - a. What threats were the original colonies facing if they spread information like this?
 - b. With cancel culture continuing to be present, do you think some of these threats remain today?
 - c. Do you think we truly have free speech if our opinions or thoughts can be weaponized against us online?
4. François-Henri Briard described (18:29) France in 1793 and the subsequent death by guillotine as the “terror time.” Can you think of any “terror times” in the United States - from history or recently?
 - a. Did any of these times of terror lead to revolutions as they did in France? If so, what changed, or what were the repercussions?
5. Janine Waller stated (22:49) that, in the Declaration of Independence, “The obvious omission there is that all men **and women** are created equal.” Do you think that the Founders left out women on purpose? Why or why not?
 - a. How do you feel about this omission today? Do you feel women are treated equally in the United States?

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- b. Do you think that women should be added to The Declaration, or what about changing it to “all **people** are created equal?”
 - c. Would it have made a difference in our society had the Founders added “and women” to begin with?
6. Adéla Gjuričová stated (42:31), “At the end of the Communist era, somehow the democratic ideal came up again with people who have mostly not lived in democracy for all of their lives. When one thinks about whether the American Declaration is somehow still alive, somehow it is with us and in us, even if we don’t have the concepts, the words, and the democratic practice.”
 - a. Why do you think the American ideals in the Declaration are so well-known and inspirational, even if someone has never experienced it for themselves?
7. Professor Danielle Allen stated (43:43), “If you’re free as a citizen, you can have that freedom only if you have equality with the other citizens.” Why do you think you can only truly have one if the other is also present?
8. Judge Ginsburg discussed (44:43) Martin Luther King, Jr.’s famous speech, where he states that the Declaration was a promissory note and that the country would eventually live up to the ideals outlined in the Declaration: That all men are created equal. Do you think the United States is living up to its ideals? If so, what is the nation doing right? If not, what could we be doing better?
9. At the end of the film (52:20), it’s discussed that the world may need another wave of independence. Do you agree or disagree?
 - a. What countries may be a part of a new wave of independence? Why?
10. Judge Ginsburg asked (53:50), “Every 4th of July, we celebrate our independence, but do we appreciate our Declaration of Independence?” How would you answer this?
 - a. What are some things that we could be doing, as a nation, to appreciate it more and to live up to the ideals?
11. What does “The Pursuit of Happiness” mean to you?
 - a. How do you think our society in the U.S. would be different had the Founders decided on “The Pursuit of Property” instead?
12. Do you think the Declaration of Independence lives up to the words of the Founders? Why or why not?

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13. Do you think the American Declaration of Independence has lived up to its worldwide inspiration?
 - a. Does our current society still embody that inspiration now? Why or why not?
 - b. What do you think, specifically, makes this document so inspirational?
14. "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness" continues to be a huge draw for immigrants to come to the United States. Has anyone here themselves or their family members emigrated from a country where unalienable rights are not protected? What differences have you or your family member seen here v. there?
15. Take a moment and imagine if, overnight, our inalienable rights were stripped away from us, like they were in Hong Kong. Do you think there would be any immediate changes? What do you think the U.S. would look like just one year after our inalienable rights were taken away?
16. How do you think the ideas of equality expressed in the Declaration of Independence affect you today?
17. "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." How is our nation fulfilling the intent of these inspirational words?
 - a. Can any nation live up to the ideals expressed in our Declaration?
18. Throughout the film, various countries that overturned democracy in favor of dictatorships or other forms of government are discussed. Why do you think countries do this? Money? Greed? Power? Some other reason?

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