



## **VFW Essay: “Freedom’s Challenge”**

Freedom is the personal right of every person to live free from oppression, discrimination, and unjust persecution. It is considered an innate right that cannot justifiably be taken away. The principle challenge of freedom has historically been from those in positions of power who wish to undermine this personal right for their own gain. Many movements and rebellions in history have been carried out with the intent of securing personal freedom for the average person. This concept of freedom is now common to most societies in the modern age, and is guaranteed by the founding constitutions of many countries, in addition to the United Nations charter. Despite this, freedom is still the subject of an intense amount of controversy and debate, and is still challenged whenever this right is ignored for the sake of more control.

In this sense, freedom is the liberty of every person from discrimination, not the allowance of every person to do as he or she pleases. Governments must rule justly and enforce laws to protect the well-being of the people. However, it is also the job of government to uphold the liberties which result from the personal right of freedom. For example, the United States Declaration of Independence declares many “unalienable rights” of man, including the right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” The United States Bill of Rights further guarantees every individual’s rights for freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of the press. These liberties stem from the personal value of every person, and are all aspects of freedom themselves. When any one of these rights is taken away, it is an offense against the individual’s dignity, and potentially a failure of the government to uphold it.

There are, perhaps unfortunately, many examples of how freedom is challenged by those who want control. There is no better example of this than dictatorships, which can still be found



in the world today, even long after the standards for freedom have been set. Dictatorships are controlled by one absolute ruler who has power and control over all things in government and the lives of its citizens. In this sense, the rights of people against discrimination or persecution can be arbitrarily ignored if they speak against their government or ruler. Worse than this, people can be killed for said crimes as well as any reason, violating every person's right to life. While this is an extreme example, it is a reality of many nations today that their citizens are not guaranteed any rights at all. Tyrannical leadership is not restricted to dictatorships, either. We need not look any further than America's Independence against the tyrannical control of Britain under King George III for an example.

A more familiar example of opposition to freedom is the threat of terrorism, which doesn't seek to undermine freedom so much as to destroy it. The goal of terrorists is to cause destruction and to otherwise instill fear in their targets, taking away their victim's innate right to life and freedom from oppression. A major threat in the world today, terrorism is perhaps the most direct challenge to freedom there is, as its goal is often to eliminate freedom itself. Perhaps ironically, many anti-terrorism measures by the American government have been equally detrimental to freedom. The Military Commissions Act of 2006 would allow the government to arbitrarily suspend habeas corpus, a right guaranteed for every person by the Constitution, for any alien who is engaged in illegal hostilities against the nation. While such measures may be effective against terrorism, it ignores the fact that both are harmful to the freedom of every individual.

Freedom is not only at odds externally, but internally as well. Freedom must be defended by the governments of the people, as failing to do so is just as much a detriment to freedom as its



opponents. One of the most important duties we have as citizens is to defend our freedom by exercising our rights: our right to vote, to free speech, to freedom of assembly, and more. If we as citizens do not utilize the rights we are given, then we risk having them taken away. It doesn't take much effort for the average citizen, then, to help preserve freedom. We simply must be involved in our government and active supporters of it, fulfilling our duty as citizens.

The challenge of freedom is from those who wish to undermine people's rights for the sake of gaining power or control. Despite the great strides which have been made towards freedom in the past few centuries, we are still very vulnerable to the detractors of freedom. Not only must freedom be sought and fought for, it is our task to defend it, by exercising our rights. The ideal of freedom is very real and possible to achieve, and I believe that it is crucial for every society to try to move towards this goal as the fulfillment of how we should live and interact as human beings.