

# Liberty, life, and the pursuit of happiness argumentative essay examples

[Family](#), [Same Sex Marriage](#)



Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence with of aim of establishing the revolution that the colonists were planning and enforcing on America. A famous line from the declaration reads, “ life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” With this line, Jefferson meant that all men are equal and they deserved equality in life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (Amitarge 145). This line is not an absolute. This is because in our society, there is evidence that some people have more rights than others while other people are oppressed. There are many forms of oppressions that prove this statement is not absolute. The right to life, for instance, means that everyone has a right support their own life through work. However, this statement does not imply that other people must provide for this right in order to ensure equality. If this was an absolute statement, people would share equally in order to ensure that everyone had equal rights to life. Take an example of the minority rich and the majority poor. If this statement was absolute, wealth could be distributed equally among people so that everyone would own equal wealth. There are very many people who are unemployed in America today. This unemployment is common even among graduates. There is a shortage of jobs and job opportunities meaning that people will stay unemployed. Therefore, how can people provide for themselves and fulfill their right to life if they do not have access to work? This proves that Jefferson’s statement is not absolute.

This is not the only evidence that Jefferson’s statement in the Declaration of Independence is not absolute. In 1791, Benjamin Banneker wrote to Jefferson and responded that all people were definitely not equal in the 1700s. In his letter, he mentions to Jefferson that even though Jefferson had written about

the right to liberty that was a benevolence provided to human kind by the Father of Mankind, he was still going against the will of the Father of Mankind and counteracting his mercies through fraud and violence and captivity and oppression of Banneker's brethren. He tells Jefferson that through "detaining by fraud and violence so numerous a part of my brethren, under groaning captivity and cruel oppression you should at the same time be found guilty of that most criminal act, which you professedly detested in others, with respect to yourselves" (Banneker).

Banneker argued that people of the African race, who had been enslaved at that time, were definitely not equal with white people. This shows how the right to liberty is not absolute. During the colonial time, African slaves were seen as an inferior race. They were discriminated against and could not share transport, room, schools, and other amenities with white people. Of course this is different in the current world, but there are still other forms of discrimination that prove that Jefferson's statement is not absolute.

Banneker's argument also shows that, although some leaders might fight for people's equal rights, there are just no equal rights for all. For example, Banneker tells Jefferson that these rights to life, liberty, and pursuit to happiness were already bestowed on him by the creator. He compares these rights to the rights of his brethren who are suffering under oppression and detention as slaves. This clearly shows that not all men are equal. Men do not have equal rights to life and liberty (Banneker).

Another example that proves that the right to liberty not absolute because we find that people from different groups, be it race, nationality, and demographics, lead different lives and have different rights (Amitarge). For

example, in the current U. S. government, some Supreme Courts in different states have ruled against gay marriage. On the other hand, in June 2013, the US Supreme court ruled against DOMA (defense of marriage act) because it is unconstitutional (Savage). This means that gay people in states that allow same sex marriage do not have the same rights as the gay people who live in states that restrict same sex marriages. It also means that in these states that restrict same sex marriage, homosexuals and lesbians do not have the same rights as straight people to marry their partners. If Jefferson's statement was absolute, gay people would have the same marriage rights as straight people in all the states in the US.

Moving on to the right to the pursuit of happiness, what Jefferson means is that people have rights to live for themselves, to choose what they constitute as private, personal, individual happiness and work towards the achievement of this right. This means that man's rights are not guided by government laws or divine laws. Man has these rights as long as they do not interfere with other people's rights (Amitarge 145). From this definition, we find that equal rights are not absolute. First, man's rights to pursue happiness are restricted by the fact that he should not interfere with other people's rights while in the process of pursuing his own rights. If it was absolute, there would be no restrictions like these. This is where we find governing laws coming in. These laws also restrict the ends to which one can go in order to pursue happiness.

In conclusion, Jefferson's statement that everyone has equal rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is not absolute because some aspects of life restrict people from accessing the same rights as others. For example,

the poor do not have the same rights to access wealth as the rich, some gays do not have the same rights to marry their partners as straight people do, discriminations, such as racism prevents people from accessing the same rights, and slaves do not have the same rights as their masters.

## **Works Cited**

Amitarge, David. *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History*.

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007. Book.

Banneker, Benjamin. *Benneker's Letter to Jefferson*. 1791. Letter. 15 August 2013.

Savage, David G. *Gay marriage ruling: Supreme Court finds DOMA unconstitutional*. 26 June 2013. News Article. 15 August 2013.