

Main Principles in the Declaration of Independence

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All People are created equal.

The principle emphasizing the fact that all men are meant to be equal is a major European enlightenment belief. However, the interpretation of the principle has affected the Declaration of Independence from the time it came into existence. (National Archives, 2026) Some people argue that “all men” stand for humanity, whereas others say that Jefferson among other leaders sought to keep out females and children. (Hartsell, 2023)

However, considering the context of the phrase, it clearly stands for humanity or the people. Therefore, individuals like Abraham Lincoln and others who took advantage of the declaration of independence to fight for the equality of black Americans and females captured the historical and moral high ground. (Bunch, 2024) A Declaration of independence, therefore, is not just a declaration of freedom but a declaration of principles. In his document, Thomas Jefferson stated that all people are in nature political equals. (Le Monde, 2026) There is no person who is rightfully the ruler of other people by birth. Similarly, one does not become the subject of a leader by birth. Hence, morally or otherwise, all people have equal value and significance, especially before their creator. Thomas Jefferson insisted that when he was writing the [Declaration he ensured that he was expressing the American](#) mind, rather than his own ideas. The sense of natural equality among men was a common belief of the Americans during colonialism. In sum, each living individual has the right to pursue what s/he wants in this God-given world. Hence, there is no person who possesses exclusive rights. With all people being equal in a just society, the fear that some individuals will usurp others' rights does not exist. Despite the many things that may put some people ahead of others, such as great health or wealth, the fact remains that all humans are equal.[1]

All people have fundamental rights that cannot be usurped.

As Jefferson stated in the Declaration, all men have unalienable rights that their creator gave them, such as liberty and life. Hence, no one can take the rights away from the people. The American founding fathers held that the rights rightfully belong to the people irrespective of whether they can put them into practice. They are, therefore, natural rights and are among the aspects that make a person complete. However, a government can deny the rights to a person under meticulously restrained circumstances. Governments are only legitimate if they are able to protect such rights.

Governments that arbitrarily take them away do not have moral authority. All people have these unalienable rights at birth. It is not the government that gives these rights, and hence, it cannot take them away. Unalienable rights are, therefore, the rights that one cannot give up, even when he is willing to do so. As stated in the Declaration of Independence, liberty is one of the unalienable rights. This means that if a person signs a contract to become a slave, there is no obligation to honour the contract, and apart from the contract, there is no person who has a right to his or her services. Inalienable rights cannot prevent someone from arbitrary killings, imprisonment, or oppression. Nevertheless, the concept means that such deeds are not morally acceptable and that one can complain on moral grounds.[2]

The Government draws its decision-making and right protection powers from the People.

Thomas Jefferson stated that a government gets its power from the people, so the government must have its interests at heart. Jefferson drew a contrast between a representative government and an autocratic government. A government should reflect the will of the governed, and hence it should be a true representative of the people who elected it. Jefferson and other leaders sought to establish a government profoundly rooted in people's interests, a government that would not exercise unquestioned power over its subjects. The government needs to be democratic and the people have the right to elect their government. For instance, in the US and several other democratic nations worldwide, citizens have the right to vote their government in or out. The people are able to elect their representatives who represent them in the government. Voting is a way of giving power to the government to make decisions and protect the rights of its citizens. It is a way of implementing the third key principle of the Declaration of Independence. The government presents options to the governed and the people either give or deny the government the power to implement the options on their behalf. The people, therefore, have the final decision.[3]

The Purpose of the Government:

Thomas Jefferson stated that rights are inseparable from the people, such as the right to liberty, the right to life, and the right to pursue happiness. The main function of any government is to protect the rights of the governed. According to Jefferson, if a government is not able to protect the rights of the citizens, the people have the right to change or do away with it. They should then immediately vote for a government that is ready to protect their rights. At the time of the Declaration of Independence, there were many things that the Americans had against their colonizers. For example, the King of England abused their rights. The government taxed the colonists and prevented them from having a representative in government who could fight for their rights. As a result, Thomas Jefferson declared that the colonists would rise against the government and replace it with a government that would protect the colonists' rights. In simple words, a government must be ready to protect the rights of its

subjects, a failure to which it has to be replaced by a more responsible government.[4]

How are the Principles reflected in the two films?

In the 1776 film, there is a discussion of the first principle: all men are created equal. Some leaders are against slavery and want it to be abolished while other supports the continuation of slavery. For instance, John Cullum (Edward Rutledge) among other delegates from the South avoided the debate on the Declaration for Independence because his friends refused to remove a section of the Declaration that wanted slavery to be abolished. However, William Daniels (John Adams) among other leaders supported the abolishment of slavery as it infringed on other people's rights. Adams and his friends may have understood that all people are created equal and hence decided to seek the abolishment of slavery. The majority of the leaders are also ready to fight for independence. Their plan was to establish a new country and government to replace the colonial government that was more oppressive than representative. The fourth principle states that if a government does not protect the rights of its citizens, the citizens should replace it with a new one that will uphold their rights.[5]

In the second film (Gattaca 1997), a genetically inferior man is labelled invalid and cannot achieve what others can. Though the author of the film bases it on science fiction, the film reflects some principles of the Declaration of Freedom. For instance, the video mirrors a violation of the principle that states that "all men are created equal. Society considers the genetically inferior individual (Vincent) incapable of accomplishing what other people (for instance his brother Anton) can accomplish. Hence, they limit his ambition to pursue happiness by becoming a space journey professional. Vincent, however, proves society wrong by devising clever ways to achieve his dreams. He also defeats his brother in most games they play together.[6]

The Declaration of Independence and the Seeds of Our Eventual Success or Demise:

The Declaration of Independence plants the seeds of our eventual success as a country. For instance, the Declaration of Independence in America in 1776 led to the achievement of many things. The declaration helped establish a contemporary government theory. The declaration helped Jefferson and other leaders to communicate to the colonialists why they wanted to separate from England. Moreover, several colonies attained independence from colonial laws. It made the people understand that they had the right to be independent. The people also understood that the colonial government ought to have protected their rights, something it had failed to do for a long. The Declaration of Independence led to the establishment of a new country and new hopes. Furthermore, the principles stated in the Declaration of Independence set the foundation of the democratic government that the US has today.[7]

Mayflower Compact:

The Mayflower Compact refers to some rules for self-determination written by English settlers. When the settlers decided to travel to America in the 1620s, they wanted to land in Virginia. However, they could not land there due to storms and other challenges; instead, they landed in Massachusetts. At the time some strangers argued that since they were not subject to the local rulers, they would employ their own liberty as there was no one to rule over them. To avoid problems, the settlers decided to start a government. The settlers knew that without laws, life would be very hard. They, therefore, established the Mayflower Compact to make sure that the social structure functioned smoothly without collapsing. The settlers based the Mayflower Compact on a majority model and the settlers' loyalty to the king. Children and females were not allowed to vote. It was simply a social contract where the settlers agreed to adhere to the compact rules and directives to ensure that there was order in the society. This analysis shows that the Mayflower Compact does not offer new principles. Instead, it resembles earlier systems of governance where women had no voice. The systems did not allow women to participate in government establishment among many other things[8].

The questions are relevant. They touch on the journey that the US among other nations has traveled before attaining self-governance. Moreover, the questions highlight some fundamental principles of governance that are important in a democratic society. For instance, a government must be a true representative of the governed. The government must also protect the rights of the people.

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