

## What Freedom Means to Me

by Chloe Hanks

To me freedom means being able to have happiness and fun, to have any race or religious background, and to be able to love without boundaries. In the United States we have come a long way with freedom. Everyone has the right to vote, to own property, to get a good education, and to make their own money.

There are so many amazing people who helped pave the way for the United States to get to where we are today. One of those people is Martin Luther King Jr. His speech "I Have A Dream" delivered on August 28, 1963, helped to change the way we think of others, and supported people respecting each other no matter what we look like. A huge step we have taken is no longer segregating our community by race, and everyone being allowed to get an education.

Another important person is Susan B. Anthony, who was a women's rights activist. In 1888 she helped to merge the two largest suffrage associations into one, the National American Women's Suffrage Association, which played an important role in passing the 19th amendment which gave women the right to vote in 1920. It wasn't until 1974 that a woman could have a credit card in her own name. Over time, things have changed for the better for women. Women are much more likely to have equal pay in jobs to men over the past ten years, and there are laws against sexual harassment in the workplace.

A really impactful person in the fight for gay rights was Harvey Milk. In the late 1970s in San Francisco, Harvey Milk was voted to be a city supervisor, and during his eleven months in office, he sponsored a bill and got the support of the mayor. The bill passed and banned discrimination toward people who were homosexual in public accommodations, housing, and employment. It was against the law in many states to have a gay relationship. A great many strides have been made since the 1970s, and it was only in 2015 that gay marriage was legalized in the United States. I think this is so amazing because you should be able to love who you love and be able to be with them!

We've come so far here in the United States, and I have to say, I absolutely love my country! But although we have come a long way, there is still work to do. Although many people in the United States have become more compassionate to people who may be different from them, it is by making changes that prevent "institutionalized" inequality that real change happens. This is done by making laws that change behavior through consequences for discrimination. Though you can't really change the way people feel, you can change the way they behave around others and eventually this can become accepted and normalized, like being respectful toward people of color, women, and people who are gay. Our generation must become fierce advocates for human rights and make a difference for future generations. To me, freedom is one word: Equality.