

2009 LAW DAY  
ESSAY CONTEST

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**SECOND PLACE**

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A Legacy of Liberty:  
Celebrating Lincoln's  
Bicentennial

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### "A Legacy of Liberty" Essay

The Gettysburg Address and the Declaration of Independence both state that our country is one that values equality and liberty. There is no doubt that our nation has made progress in achieving these goals. The law strives to ensure that freedoms are protected and that all people receive equal opportunities. Although our nation has come a long way since Abraham Lincoln uttered his well known address, prejudice has prevailed in our past.

On September 15, 1963, almost 100 years after Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, four teenage African American girls were killed in the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama. The Governor of Alabama declared, "...and I say . . . segregation today . . . segregation tomorrow . . . segregation forever." (George Wallace's Inaugural Address). A week before the bombing Governor Wallace also stated that to stop integration a "few first-class funerals" were needed. In this case the law disgraced itself. Although this occurrence did not fuel the goal to secure liberty and equality, other moments in our history have.

In another circumstance the law defended the statements made in the Gettysburg Address and Declaration of Independence. When an African American girl named Julia McLaughlin was not accepted to Boston Latin School because of her race, her father sought justice. The law addressed the situation and warranted that the school must allow Julie to attend. When situations regarding prejudice actions occur the law must react with a mindset similar to Abraham Lincoln's. Occurrences of prejudice against race, gender, religion, and culture are still prominent in our society today.

Whether it is a joke in a school hallway or an employer who only hires people of a certain racial descent, displays of inequality occur every day.

Our country demonstrates its unique views by our liberty. Freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of religion promote liberty to everyone in our country. However, these liberties are often abused and manipulated. Samuel Adams stated, "He therefore is the truest friend to the liberty of his country who tries most to promote its virtue." The law works to instill freedom in our society, but their efforts often lose effect. When the citizens of the United States of America stress the limits of their liberties to disadvantage others, the value of freedom is degraded.

Our country signifies liberty and equality to all nations. While we are still a nation with numerous faults, our nation is moving in the right direction. Abraham Lincoln and our founding fathers would be proud of our accomplishments. Earl Warren pronounced, "It is the spirit and not the form of law that keeps justice alive." The law needs to continue to strive towards liberty and equality in every aspect. It also becomes the duty of the people to help ensure that the rights of liberty and equality are enforced.

## REFERENCES

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