

What is Freedom?

Abraham Lincoln once described freedom as “the last best, hope of earth.” No truer words could have been spoken. Trapped in a world filled with war, famine, pestilence, and death, it is easy to believe that the four horsemen of the apocalypse have already descended. In midst of all this, however, if freedom is ultimately suppressed, if people no longer have the rights of life, liberty, and happiness, only then will the world have completely ended for all hope would have been lost.

Some people can not comprehend the meaning of freedom, because they have never experienced it. Baby Suggs, a recently emancipated slave in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, for example, felt she was too old to experience freedom and couldn’t understand why her son worked so hard to buy it for her. She couldn’t comprehend what it was like to make her own decisions, live in her own house, to not belong to anybody, but to be her own person. Belonging to oneself is the first point of freedom and a natural human right regardless of age. Yet, there are people in the world today, victims of human trafficking, who no longer have that right.

It is hard to understand all the finer points of freedom, unless it is completely stripped away. Jim Crow Laws in America, South Africa’s apartheid, and the Holocaust blatantly illuminate countless of people labeled as second class citizens (or not citizens at all) who have few, if any, natural rights. Freedom of religion, the right to vote, and equality in general are all simple aspects of freedom that Americans often take for granted when countries, such as China, Iraq, and Israel are still fighting for the freedom of speech.

Freedom goes much deeper than the specific rights listed and protected by the Constitution. It is an ideal, a dream that enables a person to pursue other dreams and

accomplish a better life without consequences or fears. True freedom allows people to speak their mind and express themselves whether or not it compliments a general view point. Liberty calls for choices, variety, a chance to live life the way one chooses, and also gives people the voice and power to protect themselves, or if need be, lay down their lives to defeat oppressors of individualism. As Baby Suggs realized, “there is nothing like [freedom] in this world.” (Morrison 141). It is a valuable treasure, a fire that should never go out.