



# Respect: The Bridge Between Natural Rights and a Free Society

The phrase “...endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights...” (Archives) was a thunderbolt across the colonies in 1776, shaking the British Crown and electrifying the European continent. Today, the unalienable rights of an individual, which are the foundation of the American Constitution and all Western political systems, are widely known but often misunderstood. Many know of natural rights and the concept of respect but intertwining them is critical to building a society in which all people feel welcome and have the same opportunities to achieve success. An understanding of both natural rights and respect builds a free society by uniting citizens and building everybody up, so all may contribute to everyone’s advancement.

Protecting one’s natural rights unites struggling citizens especially because they should be respected by their government. As the Declaration of Independence listed grievances with the King of England, it states “He [King George] has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.” (Archives). Such grievances made it clear to the colonies that they were not being considered or respected. Effective leaders “take the time to actively listen to understand someone’s experience, ideas, and perspectives. It is respectful, even if they choose another path” (CCL). King George refused to even consult the colonies. That highlighted the direct relationship between respect and natural rights and how a disrespectful environment forced citizens to unite. The framers united “in order to form a more perfect Union”(U.S. Constitution). One with respect for each other to protect natural rights unlike the King of England. That understanding for respect united citizens to protect natural rights from tyranny and to create a free society.

The ideals for respect as they pertain to natural rights have been recalled many times since. When reacting to Black Lives Matter protests, former Governor of California Arnold Schwarzenegger wrote “We should be willing to listen, to learn, to look in the mirror and see that none of us is perfect” (Schwarzenegger). In protests, demonstrators are asking for “a state-wide



adoption of Breonna's Law' - the Louisville legislation banning the use of no-knock warrants." (Popat). These demonstrators demand respect from their government, respect that can be shown through attentive listening and willingness to compromise and negotiate. By granting them respect, the government can work with citizens, who are united to protect their natural rights and construct a free society.

Alongside understanding the respect governments must provide their citizens, it is imperative to understand the respect citizens must provide each other. As a 2021 American Legion Boys Nation senator, I recognized that when citizens hold no respect for one another, all suffer consequences, and everyone's natural rights are ultimately inhibited. For example, in the 1959 decision of *Gilmore v. City of Montgomery*, a federal judge ordered that city in Alabama to integrate its recreational facilities (Merriman). Instead of integrating the city's parks, recreational centers, and pools, city officials promptly closed all of them and filled its eight swimming pools with dirt (Merriman). This display of zero-sum theory, meaning "if it's good for you, it must be bad for me, so you can't have it" was due to the lack of respect the Jim Crow South had for African Americans. Because there was no respect, African Americans were viewed as unequal and to use the same facilities and pools seemed unfathomable to whites. The authorities shut the facilities down and everyone lost because of the disrespect that tore apart the natural rights of certain citizens. Unfortunately, the idea of zero sum thinking persists in society today. "Many white Americans believe that the decrease in anti-black prejudice has been offset by an increase in anti-white prejudice" (Davidal).

As an Eagle Scout, I have been fortunate to spend time and be exposed to people from a variety of racial and religious backgrounds. Even if people did not look like me, I understood that they truly were not that different from me. They had similar dreams: to be studious and enter a prestigious university or to earn the rank of Eagle. These aspirations were like mine and I came to appreciate their perspectives and abilities. I respected them and knew their advancement in rank did not prevent mine. After all, their success created a feedback loop, which resulted in the entire Troop becoming better. Their skills were used in future campouts, fundraisers, and events, much



like the advances of minority groups create opportunities for them to help all of us and our nation. Building a free society is highly dependent on citizens' abilities to respect each other but also a government's ability to respect its citizens. Through listening and responding in appropriate manner, the natural rights of those in a society can be protected, so together, citizens can work towards progress and the creation of a free society

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