

PREFACE

The format of this book is quotations from some of history's champions of individual liberty, those who promoted freedom by word and deed, followed by a short biography of each champion. Their quotations are designed to make us think about the following question: What is individual liberty? What conditions are necessary for people to be free? How can we preserve and expand our freedom?

The concept of individual liberty has been talked about and written about since before the time of the ancient Greeks. Versions of individual liberty have been attempted at different periods in history, with varying degrees of success.

Finally, the founders of the United States of America stated in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal" and have "unalienable rights" to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Then they added the Bill of Rights to the Constitution, ensuring freedom of speech, press and religion and the right to own property. These are the cornerstones of individual liberty, of which the U.S. is the chief protector in the world today.

Rights allow anyone to pursue a course of action without interference by another person or entity (such as government). An individual has the right to do whatever he or she likes as long as they aren't hurting someone else. However, these rights do not entitle me to demand that you do something for me.

Individual rights are often confused with "group rights," which do force people to do things for others. I can form a group with one or one-billion other people and then start demanding things, which I call my rights. Since group rights are granted by government they can just as easily be taken away by government. We were not born with them. In addition, when other people are forced to meet the demands of my group, they suffer a loss of freedom. Group rights decrease individual liberty; they don't increase it.

Since the perfect human being hasn't been born yet, most if not all of the people presented in this book can be criticized for some of the things they did, said or wrote during their lifetimes on the grounds that they were anti-individual liberty. Those who were contemporaries often disagreed with each other. However, I believe that the contributions made by each person justify his or her inclusion in the book.

But let's let the champions of liberty speak for themselves...