

CORNERSTONE

INSTITUTE FOR CIVIC THOUGHT

Cornerstone Institute for Civic Thought Spring 2026 Contest “Liberty”



“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Thomas Jefferson, 1776

The Declaration of Independence is the clearest and most sublime statement regarding human rights, liberty, and legitimate government. It has always served as a north star for American civic life. Although we have sometimes failed to live up to its principles, it nevertheless has been the guiding light for Americans as they strive towards the promise of a more perfect union. This year, America celebrates the 250th anniversary of its experiment with self-governance.

For its inaugural contest, Cornerstone Institute for Civic Thought invites student submissions that reflect on the central theme set down by this transformative text: liberty. Taking inspiration from your readings and discussions this semester, share your insights on what liberty means to you. Are there times liberty can conflict with other important civic goods—like equality, security, and independence? Should all societies be rooted in liberty? Does liberty look different for you than it does for others?

Eligibility: Any student currently enrolled in SCLA 101, 102, 110, 111 or 210.

Criteria: Artwork, essays, short fiction, videos, and poetry inspired by your reading. All contest entries must be a student’s own work without *any* use of generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT, DALL-E, Midjourney, DeepSeek). A committee composed of Cornerstone faculty will judge submissions based on originality and creativity.

Prizes: Amazon Gift Cards. First Place: \$95; Second Place: \$65; 3 honorary mentions: \$35. Winners will automatically be nominated for publication in *The Cornerstone Review*.

Timeline: Submission deadline: **Wednesday, April 8, 2026**. Please send your submissions to cornerstonecontest@outlook.com. All files must be labeled with your last name. In your entry, please list your full name and your professor’s name. Winners will be announced on **Friday, April 24, 2026**.