

Civil Liberties vs Civil Rights

Definition

Civil Liberties are freedoms guaranteed to us by the Constitution to protect us from tyranny

(Source: FindLaw)

Civil rights are the basic rights to be free from unequal treatment based on certain protected characteristics (race, gender, disability, etc.) in settings such as employment, education, housing, and access to public facilities

(Source: FindLaw)

Differences

Civil liberties are protections against government action stated in the Constitution

(Source: UShistory.org)

Civil rights refer to positive actions a government should take to create equal conditions for all Americans

(Source: UShistory.org)

Relation

Advocates for historically marginalized groups such as the abolitionist Frederick Douglass and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) effectively exercised their speech, press, association, assembly, and petition liberties to achieve more equal civil rights best illustrated by the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

(Source: "What is Civil Liberty," from Tim Shiell, Ch. 1 "Introduction," in Shiell (ed.), Civil Liberties in Real Life (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020). Used by permission of the publisher.)

Example

Freedom of expression is a civil liberty that limits government restrictions on the expression of private organizations and individuals, whereas the right to equal access to public accommodations provided by private businesses is a civil right that extends or expands government authority or power over private organizations and individuals.

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