Q10 – Name two important ideas from the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.

DOUGLAS GINSBURG, Federal Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals, D.C. Circuit:
The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution together express the essence of freedom. Both documents advocate the right of the people to enter into a social contract to govern themselves. And the Constitution defines a government of limited reach. The Declaration of Independence states that all people enjoy certain natural rights – including the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

The most famous phrase in the Declaration of Independence is “all men are created equal”, five of the most famous words in the English language. But what do they mean?
Some people are taller than others. Some stronger. Some smarter. The word “equal” here refers to a different and universal kind of equality, just as the word “men” refers to mankind, including women.
The Declaration means all people possess the same rights – rights that no government can take away. Before the law, all people are equal – the factory owner and the factory worker alike. Our republic doesn’t guarantee equal outcomes. No government should, or can.
Instead, the Constitution guarantees equality before the law. A dirt-poor farm boy can grow up to be president. And, in fact, a few have. Likewise, our Constitution guarantees the rights to liberty and to the pursuit of happiness. At least, it does now.
Slavery long denied those rights to most Black Americans. Then, a separate and unequal system of laws – Jim Crow – continued to deny them their liberty, until the victories of the Civil Rights era made the United States a more perfect union.
Now we can truly say that never in our history have so many enjoyed so much liberty and equality: a triumph of self-government.