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The Privatization of Freedom in America
Its Meaning and Consequences

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Introduction: The American Paradox

America's veneration of freedom and the claim that we have a special mission to impart it to the world goes back to the founding of the nation. It has been infused with renewed vigor by President Bush who, to the great alarm of many peoples around the world, has declared in his second inaugural and many subsequent speeches that freedom is now the central mission of America's foreign policy. To quote:

- We are led, by events and common sense, to one conclusion: The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world.
- America, in this young century, proclaims liberty throughout all the world and to all the inhabitants thereof. Renewed in our strength -- tested, but not weary -- we are ready for the greatest achievements in the history of freedom.
- We go forward with complete confidence in the eventual triumph of freedom…
- We have confidence because freedom is the permanent hope of mankind, the hunger in dark places, the longing of the soul. [1]

[1] George W. Bush, "Celebrating Freedom, Honoring Service," Second Inaugural Address, January 20, 2005.

One of Bush's speechwriters had him citing a story first told by Henry Watson in 1852 in which a veteran of the independence war, upon hearing the Liberty Bell ringing after the Declaration of Independence was first read in public, recalled that "It rang as if it meant something."[2] Bush commented that: "In our time it means something still."

Yes, but what? America's view of freedom has long been a puzzle both to contemporaries and to those of us who have studied its history. Take first, what I have called the paradox of the confounding fathers. Why was it, how could it have been, that nearly all the Founding Fathers, and certainly, with the sole exception of Hamilton, the greatest of them—Jefferson, Washington, Madison—men who fought hard for , and laid the foundations of the nation's freedom, and celebrated it in some of the finest prose ever written by statesmen, were nonetheless not just minor slaveholders but large-scale slavemasters who all went to their noble graves holding hundreds of their fellow human beings in bondage?

And there was the related paradox that confounded Lincoln, undeniably the greatest of our presidents. Not just the fact that the Southern half of the country had gone to war to defend slavery, but that Euro-American Southerners genuinely believed that they were doing so in defense of their liberty--- the liberty to enslave a sixth of the nation.[3]

The paradoxes of freedom in America, however, are not confined to its past. Consider the following commonplace social statistics about the country:

- America is the only modern industrial society that still executes its citizens, including many young enough to be considered children and, until recently, others too old and senile, or too retarded, to even understand what is going on in their trials
- It has the highest incarceration rate in the world—about 2 million of its citizens are in jail, most of whom lose basic rights of citizenship after serving their time

[2] Henry C. Watson, The Old Bell of Independence; Or Philadelphia in 1776 (Philadelphia, Lindsay & Blakiston, 1852)
[3] Abraham Lincoln, "Address at a Sanitary Fair," April 18, 1864. See also the Fifth Lincoln-Douglas debate, Oct. 7, 1858, Galesburg, Illinois.

- Long before 9/11 there existed persistent threats to privacy from the state and corporate sectors
- Today the Patriot's Act that severely threatens civil liberties, so much so that even far right organizations such as the Cato Institute have expressed alarm.
- These threats even include an assault on *habeas corpus,* the most ancient and cherished legal protection in the Anglo-American system of justice
- America now has a deeply flawed democratic process in which there is widespread contempt for political leadership at all levels and growing voter apathy..

The burden of my talk today is to attempt to make some sense of this bewildering paradox. Let me cut straight to the chase by giving you a preview of my explanation of it. America I argue, has not one but two cultures of freedom.
There is, on the one hand, a *formal, public tradition of freedom* that:

- Constitutionally protects civil liberties
- Is highly institutionalized in our legal and political systems
- Is supported by an active civil society, although one that is increasingly elite dominated[4]
- A vigorous, though increasingly threatened political tradition of the division of powers
- An independent judiciary that has powers of review and restraint unique in world history, and an unsurpassed tradition of litigiousness among the population at large, fed by the highest per capita number of lawyers in the world.

[4] On the socio-economic basis of participation and the puzzle of how a small, active public keeps American democracy alive and protects its tradition of public freedom see W. Russell Neuman, The Paradox of Mass Politics: Knowledge and Opinion in the Americn Republic (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986. Still valuable is on the subject is Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); and

On the other hand, there is an informal, highly privatized tradition of ***ordinary liberty*** which conceives of, and experiences, freedom in terms that are almost entirely uncoupled from the democratic political process. When I say that ordinary freedom is uncoupled from democracy I must not be taken to mean that Americans dislike democracy although it is undoubtedly the case that a good number of Americans do in fact dislike politics. I will have more to say on this later: my point rather, is that whatever their views of, and relation to, the democratic process, they do not consider these as meaningful parts of freedom as lived and understood in their ordinary lives.

2. Methods, Objectives and Sources

At this point, let me comment briefly on what's different about my approach. A legal theorist, political philosopher or political scientist, or a political economist working in the vein of Amartya Sen, would go about addressing this issue in a manner very different from what I propose to do here. For them, the matters to be discussed would be entirely restricted to questions of consistency and rationality in interpretations of what I have called the formal tradition of freedom. An attempt would be made to clarify what freedom means and has meant in American legal and political discourse and to show how recent developments are inconsistent with these meanings, as understood by the analyst. A conservative supporter of recent developments would reply in like manner, arguing that, far from being inconsistent with the formal tradition of freedom, the developments I mentioned above are meant to protect and preserve our freedom.

Now, I want to make it clear that, with one reservation, I have no problem with this kind of discourse and, indeed, have sometimes engaged in it myself. I am, however, not a political or legal theorist or a philosopher of freedom but an historical sociologist of freedom. My approach to the subject is empirical and developmental. I am concerned with how people have both in the past and present understood the thing we call freedom. Among the views to be considered are, of

course, those of prescriptive theorists past and present. But such views are in no way privileged.

In the final analysis, freedom is what ordinary people have come to understand by the term, and what can be inferred from their behavior when they claim to be experiencing it. On this, I refuse to be intimidated or impressed by talk about the naturalistic fallacy: that what ought to be cannot be derived from what is. Freedom, like most socio-political values, is only partly an ethical and philosophical issue: it embraces, to be sure, what smart thinkers over the ages have thought freedom should be, or really truly is if we were to think clearly about it and were as smart as the philosophers when we do. But such prescriptive thinking is, for the historical sociologist, merely part of the data of freedom, part of what is incorporated into what people have actually thought freedom to be and how they have actually lived it. To the degree that these prescriptive doctrines have been influential, to that extent are we obliged to consider them, but only to that degree.

Stanley Cavell's very smart essay, "Must We Mean What We Say," is my standard philosophical defense of this position on those occasions that I consider a defense at all necessary. Like Cavell, I find "something oppressive about a philosophy which seems to have uncanny information about our most personal philosophical assumptions—and which inevitably nags us about them," and I agree wholeheartedly with his view that "what we ordinarily say and mean may have a direct and deep control over what we can philosophically say and mean," even if most philosophers find such a view oppressive, and that when ordinary people say things they "do not, in general, need evidence for what is said in the language, they are the source of such evidence."

With this in mind, I can now state my objectives , in more formal terms. They are:

- To examine closely the privatized view of freedom held by ordinary Americans
- To indicate the important and disturbing ways they differ from the view of freedom that prevails in the formal tradition of liberty in America

- To offer some reasons for the uncoupling of the ordinary view of freedom from democracy
- And, finally, to discuss some of the main consequences of this ordinary view and its semantic un-coupling from democracy.
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Sources of data:

I have employed several methods in getting at what ordinary Americans mean be freedom.

- Primary and secondary historical sources
- Survey data, including :
    - My own national survey conducted in 2000
    - Re-analysess of survey data from archival sources
- Interview data which are of two types:
    - Conventional interviews and interpretations
    - Z-Met interviews and analysis (to be explained shortly)
- Newspaper accounts of Americans being free

This essay will be based mainly on the results from the national survey and the Z-Met interviews, both of which will be explained in more detail below. In addition to the elicitation of meaning from what people say about freedom, we can infer much of what they mean from what they tell us they are doing when they feel most free and most unfree. Another way to get at this is to is what I call the found accounts of freedom. I mean by this the things people do and say in their everyday lives when they are not being asked about freedom but are simply experiencing it naturally. Following Erving Goffman's lead, I have mined a random sample of 355 contemporary newspaper stories from the nation's 40 leading newspapers dealing with ordinary Americans being free over the course of the year, July 1999 through June 2000.

My examination of these materials has left me in no doubt about the sincerity and depth of commitment of Americans to the idea and practice of freedom. In their dealings with relatives, lovers, spouses, employers, or just strangers on the street, Americans constantly draw on the vocabulary of freedom—protecting their private spaces, screaming at their parents to leave them alone before they can barely speak, demanding to be left to do their own thing, or to use the vividly raw phrase from Aeschylus' *Persians*, forever "bawling their liberty." Let me begin with one of the most moving of these stories.

3. The Anatomy of Private Freedom in America

Nancy was a 63 year old retired attorney who lived in Spokane, Washington. In the late nineties she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's after husband found 95 pairs of shoes and a party dress in her closet which she could not recall buying. After discussing the matter with her husband, they agreed that she should continue driving to her aerobics class only a few blocks away from their home. They both considered this a matter of deep personal freedom: if she couldn't do this one last thing on her own, all freedom was gone and life would not be worth living. On her way to the gym one day in 1999, she got confused, missed her turn, and disappeared. Eventually she was found in a farmer's field with her coat folded under head. She had frozen to death, not far from her Ford Explorer. There was much debate in Spokane about the tension between freedom and security. But in the end most people agreed that she and her husband had made the right decision. "Safety versus freedom," one local expert on Alzheimer's summed it all up," I'm very much on the side of freedom." He added that driving is the ultimate expression of independence in America and that "giving up the keys amounts to giving up the fight for a fulfilling life." (*The Seattle Times*, 10/03/1999) It is hard to imagine such a view being voiced in any other part of the industrial world, certainly not in the welfare states of Western Europe.

This story illustrates many elements of ordinary or lived freedom in America: the depth of commitment to it and the significance of the car as an expression of freedom. I

have 354 other stories like this from my newspaper files on ordinary Americans from all walks of life and from all ethnic groups and regions: from ferocious opposition to seat-belt legislation in Kansas (where else?), to rallies by lay Lutherans in Minneapolis against a proposed union with Episcopalians because of the unfree nature of the latter's denominational structure, to debates between advocates for freer and better choices in houses and opponents of urban sprawl in New Jersey, to heated arguments over whose freedom was being violated in the opposition to the location of a soft-porn stores in a Miami neighborhood.

But let me move now from the anecdotal to findings from my 2000 survey of a statistical sample of the U.S. population. First, let us look at how much freedom Americans claim they have.

Figure 1 about here

Among the questions asked of respondents were the following two: "How much freedom do Americans have?" and "How much freedom do you have?" Both were coded with a five item code ranging from "No freedom at all." to "Complete freedom."

One of the more important finding is that both genders, and all classes and ethnicities consider themselves to be very free. The similarities outweigh the relatively minor differences between them. If there is one surprise, it is the fact that somewhat more women than men consider themselves to be very free. My expectations to the contrary may well have been a reflection my own class position as an middle class, professional American and my liberal academic background, working and living as I do among the section of the nation's female population that is most inclined to express skepticism about their level of freedom. The finding that the vast majority of American women consider themselves to be very free may well explain a good deal of the disappointments that liberal and other progressive feminist leaders have faced in recent years.

We turn next to Americans' perception of changes in their level of freedom from the past. Two questions probed their perceptions of change: one asked respondents to say how much more or less free they felt compared with the past; the other asked them to say how they think freedom has changed in the nation at large. This is a standard ploy by

survey analysts, the idea being that people are often more willing to be candid in their views about others rather than themselves. The results are reported in Figures 2 and 3.

Figure 2 About Here

Three points are worth noting on views about changes in their own condition. African-American women are the group who report the highest level of changes in how free they feel. Second, more Euro-American men report experiencing less freedom than any other group: a quarter of them claim that this is true of themselves. Third, although more Euro-American women report feeling more free than white men, we expected substantially more than 44 percent to have thought so. These patterns are even more pronounced in responses to the question regarding changes in the level of freedom in the nation at large.

Figure 3 About Here

What does this all mean? In many ways these responses reflect changing realities and they partly explain some important political changes in America in recent decades. African American women have, indeed, enjoyed more change in their level of freedom in all respects, but especially in personal socio-economic terms, than any other group in America over the past forty years or so. College educated black women now earn, on average, about the same as college educated white women. It is no accident or fluke that the two most powerful women in America today are black women: As Secretary of State, Condoleeza Rice holds the second most prestigious and powerful political position in the nation. Of equal importance is the fact that she has the ear and complete confidence of the President. However, the most powerful cultural figure in America is also a black woman: Oprah Winfrey. And let us be in no doubt about that. She not only has amazing power over the views of American women through her talk show, but also has unusual power in the nation's high culture through her book club. She is the only person alive who, by simply inviting an author to her book club, guarantees that he or she immediately hits the best seller list. That's raw cultural power.

The picture is quite different for African-American men. Not only have they not closed the already large income gap with Euro-American men, but in recent years there has been a serious decline in the fortunes of young black men who now drop out of

school, and fall into crime and drugs at a higher rate than almost all other groups. They also have extraordinarily high incarceration rates.

The feeling among white men that there is less freedom may partly reflect a zero sum view of freedom: the fact that women and minorities have more of it may be taken to mean that white men have less. This sense of lost freedom goes a long way in explaining the wholesale abandonment of the Democratic Party by working class white men to the Republicans, in spite of the fact that the Republican tax and economic policy and anti-union stance would seem to undercut every one of their economic interests. What's the Matter With Kansas? To Frank Thomas' reply that that cultural issues trump economic ones in the political behavior of the white male working class, we may add the fact that they feel less personal freedom than they used to and they do so because of the intensely cultural and personal conception of freedom they hold.

Let us shift our focus now from how much freedom Americans think they have, to how they actually perceive freedom. This question is more effectively answered by the in-depth interview materials to be considered later, but we did glean important insights from the survey questions we asked on this subject.

Figure 4 About Here

This figure reports what we call notions of freedom. These are responses to the first of our two open-ended questions which asked Americans to tell us what they meant by freedom. In general, Americans seem to hold quite positive views about freedom: it is doing what one wants, exercising one's rights and making choices. Purely negative conceptions of freedom would seem to be of minor importance, only 5 percent giving explicitly negative responses. This is very important in understanding the puzzle of why, in spite of their withdrawal from the state, Americans nonetheless seem indifferent to the growing power of the executive and the intrusion of the state in areas once considered sacrosanct.

We found surprisingly little difference along ethnic or class lines in their notions of freedom. Differences between men and women were significant, but not very strong. Men tended to emphasize getting what they want more than women while the latter emphasized rights and inner peace as the main notions of freedom.

Our survey also asked Americans to tell us the experiences that made them feel most free, and in many respects this was more informative than their views concerning notions of freedom.

Figure 5 about here

As the figure shows, movement—especially associated with their cars—leisure activities, inner peace (usually some kind of religious experience), being engaged, especially with family and loved ones, but also being disengaged from these very people and from one's responsibilities, are the experiences that lead Americans to feel most free. There are significant gender differences in how Americans experience freedom. Men's somewhat grater tendency to emphasize movement, economic security and leisure activities, especially sports, with freedom, is broadly consistent with what we would expect. So too, is the greater female tendency to mention inner or spiritual experiences with freedom as well as engagement with persons, especially family.

What came as a real surprise, however, was the fact that women were more likely than men to emphasize disengagement from responsibilities as one of their most important experiences of freedom. The survey data, their inherent problems with nuance notwithstanding, are trying to tell us something here. These results suggest that we reconsider our assumption that disengagement and engagement are at odds with each other when viewed as experiences associated with freedom. The opposite may be the case. That is, experiencing caring, responsibility and commitment to others as freedom may well generate a desire for release and escape from these relational commitments. The woman who told one of the survey interviewers that her most memorable experience of freedom was the day she received her divorce from her husband may well have held, with equal intensity, the view that a successful marital relationship was the experience that made her feel most free. And, as we will see later, the strong sense of freedom and control which women feel in their roles as mothers and caregivers in no way obviate the liberating sense of freedom they experience when temporarily relieved of these responsibilities. We call this the engagement-disengagement syndrome in women's experience of freedom and explored it at greater length in our in-depth interviewing.

Figure 6 about here

We were interested in finding out whether there are underlying differences among Americans beyond those of gender and ethnicity which we have discussed above. Figure 6 reports the result of our latent class analysis of six of the response variables: freedom defined as 'doing what I want," as "being in control" of one's life and circumstances, as primarily a spiritual notion and experience such as inner peace, as minimal government interference in one's life, the view that a free society is compatible with a great deal of inequality, and agreement with the view that a completely free press is essential for freedom. We found three broad clusters of Americans. The first may be called mainstream Americans and they are about a half of the population. They strongly emphasize doing what they want, being in control, having inner peace and no government involvement with their lives as the key ingredients of freedom. However, they disagree that freedom is consistent with a great deal of inequality, which is rather interesting in light of the massive shift toward inequality in America.

The second cluster of Americans are your classic conservatives and they constitute about a third of the population. They are fairly similar to the first cluster but with the important difference that most of them see no inconsistency between freedom and high levels of inequality.

The third cluster may be called liberal Americans who are about 18 percent of the population. Their most distinctive feature is the much lower emphasis they place on getting what one wants and on no-government as central components of freedom.

All three groups, however, share a strong emphasis on personal control and on spiritual factors as defining elements of freedom. They also all place similar emphasis on a free press as important for freedom, which is moderately good news. The bad news, however, is that no more than 50% of Americans of any group cite a completely free press as critical for freedom. There is support for the idea but it is soft. Indeed, more detailed questioning on Americans' views of the press, which we don't have the time to report here, indicate an alarming level of willingness to exercise some kind of control of the media.

However, the most important finding of our survey is what we did *not* find. I am reminded of the famous Sherlock Holmes story in which the clue to the solution of the case was the fact that the dog did not bark. I find it truly remarkable that almost no American mentioned any aspect of democracy in their notions and experiences of freedom, in spite of the fact that the survey was conducted in the midst of a hotly contested presidential primary campaign! To be precise: only 15 persons out of the total national sample of over 1500 persons—a statistically insignificant number—touched on the right to, or act of voting, or some kind of participation in the political life of the nation, as experiences central to what they considered freedom. Note that this is not a rehash of the Putnam thesis about civic disengagement in America.[5] I agree with critics such as Andrew Kohut that the disengagement from politics and more public engagements does not necessarily mean a decline in associational life and that, as data from Philadelphia show, such associational activities are as lively as ever. Instead, what we find is that associational life has become almost entirely private, which is consistent with my finding concerning the privatization of freedom. [6]

We have reached the limits of what surveys and statistical tables can tell us about people's views. But there is still a lot to learn. I am reminded here of a joke attributed to an Australian economist who remarked that a statistical table is like a bikini on a lovely woman: what it reveals is very important, but what it conceals is vital. As a red-blooded Jamaican, I have always had a deep interest in what is concealed, which is why I am mainly a historical and qualitative sociologist. So let us now turn briefly to the results from one set of our interviews.

The Z-Met interview strategy, developed by Gerald Zaltman and his associates at the Harvard Business School, relies on visual images as aids to communication in the belief, well established in cognitive science, that people better communicate their deepest and

[5] Robert Putnam, Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community(2000)
[6] Andrew Kohut. Trust and Citizen Engagement in Metropolitan Philadelphia: A Case Study (Washington, D.C. Pew Research Center, 1997)

most abstract ideas and views by means of sensory experiences and images.[7] A week before the one-on-one, two-hour meeting, interviewees were told what the interview would be about and were asked to collect or construct visual images that expressed their thoughts, values and feelings about the subject in question. In our case, we asked interviewees to collect or make at least four images that expressed their feelings and experiences about freedom and four that expressed their feelings about being unfree. A Z-Met interview is thus a kind of reverse Rorschach, in that the interviewee comes with the images that will form the basis of the interview (and not the interviewer) and the interviewee offers interpretations of these images in the course of the interview. These initial interpretations by the interviewee are then used as cues by the interviewer for deeper probes over the course of the two hour interview. The interview itself proceeds in different steps, each step employing a different interview strategy such as storytelling about the pictures, triad tasks, metaphor probes and so on. At the end of the interview a digital expert scans the images and the interviewee is asked to construct a composite image or collage that, in her view, best expresses the relationship between the ideas that emerged during the course of the interview. The idea here is that each step acts as an internal validity check on the others. [8]

Interviews were then analyzed using the ATLAS ti program. We broke the interview transcripts down to basic units that we call a quotation, each describing a construct used by the interviewee. We then analyzed these constructs to decipher thought patterns, basic metaphors and networks of ideas that constitute the thing we are studying, in our case, freedom.

Nine constructs emerged as core properties in our interviewees most deeply felt views of freedom. These are: choice, control, autonomy, doing what one wants, embodiment, belonging, self-actualization, engagement and disengagement. Of these, the first five were the most important. As can be seen, there was a fair degree of agreement

[7] Gerald Zaltman. How Customers Think: Essential Insights into the mind of the market (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2003)

[8] for more on the Z-Met interview method see the website http://www.olsonzaltman.com/oza/zmetint.html.

between the survey data and the interviews with respect many important components of freedom, but the interviews did bring out certain beliefs missed by the survey, especially the significance of embodiment, self-actualization and belonging.

There is no space here to discuss our results at any length. However, I will try to given some sense of how Americans voice their views on freedom when allowed to speak at length about the subject after a week of thinking about it. Having choices emerged in the interviews as a major component of what Americans mean by freedom. While important to both genders, women gave it greater weight and centrality. However, class interacted in important ways in the articulation of choice with freedom. There was surprisingly little mention of choice among our working and lower middle class interviewees. Joe, a somewhat bitter working class man in his mid-fifties who felt strongly about the subject of personal freedom, mentioned choice only once in our interview, in reference to the image he brought in of a man shopping in a music store: "O.K, he is happy," he commented," and the freedom is, he has the freedom to pick whatever he wants out of these CDs and all."

There were substantially more references to choice among our middle class subjects, all of whom emphasized the role of education and upbringing in making it possible to exercise freedom through choice. Referring to an image of a bridge from Burma which she had visited and found frightening in its unfreedom, Laura, a graduate student, claimed that freedom "is kind of inherent in our society, in our culture," and "constantly in our education system" which "gives you freedom. I mean, it gives you freedom to make choices and to say, 'I want to do this and not this.' Or, "I want to see this happen; I don't want to see this happen'" While recognizing the importance of upbringing, middle class subjects emphasized the point that people always have the power to break out of dysfunctional patterns of behavior.

FIRST Z-MET IMAGE HERE: CLARA

Among upper middle class female subjects choice emerged, along with control, as a defining feature of freedom. Clara, a very poised and articulate real estate consultant, was typical. Having choices, she said, meant having options. "I think options are extremely important to me and the more options I have, the more I feel free to choose."

Asked how she got to the point of having many options, Clara, was emphatic: "You have to create them" She later elaborated: "O.K. When you have more options available to you and you understand what they are and you're comfortable with them—by the way, an option is only really valid if it's something you would gladly have; if it's a compromise or you feel like you're settling, it's really not an option. So when you can create many options for yourself it gives you tremendous freedom in the process of negotiating." Asked what it does for her to have "tremendous freedom," she replied unhesitatingly: "It gives you power.... the power to say yes and the power to say no." Clara's two dominant images of freedom were a group of modern male dancers in full motion, seeming to defy gravity, and a wad of hundred dollar bills. She used the image of the dancers to make a distinction crucial for our upper middle class subjects: that between the choices they made and what she called "choice by default," the choices that are made almost unconsciously or because they are expected of you and that are, as often as not, pre-made for you. These are choices made "in a world of 'shoulds.' It's living in the conditional." Real choices , she insisted, are those made and created consciously.

Middle and upper class Americans seem exhilarated by their ability to create their own options and, as such, determine their choices. For many, especially women, this is a fundamental element of freedom which brings challenges that, when met, lead to a genuine sense of fulfillment. Jessica, a young consultant, added that real choices created "a blank slate of creativity;" another woman said that "you have that choice to test yourself" and "to choose your quality of life;" and yet another went so far as to speak of "the tool of choice."

Control is close to being the central component of Americans' conception and experience of freedom. It is of nearly equal significance to men and women although cited relatively more frequently by women. This sense of control as a defining feature of freedom is pervasive. It applies as much to familial as to non-familial relationships. This is how Sophia described her relationships with her children: : "O.K. It's just knowing that they are with you and that no matter what happens anywhere—there could be an earthquake, there could be a storm, there could be a fire, anything. No matter what, you have the power to protect them… The physical power to protect them." Asked what that

did for her, she replied: ”It makes me feel in control which is key to making me feel free for my personality. I don’t know why. But in control and just happy. They are good kids. They are fun and they are very cool to be around. So that’s the other part of it. But as far as feeling free it makes me feel like I don’t owe a thing to anybody. I don’t have to call and check in with anybody… They are with me.” Asked what having control over her children made her feel free from, she responded: ”From checking in and from that worry, that ever lingering, that muted back of the head kind of worry of ‘What are they doing?’ What’s going on? Are they O.K.? Are they behaving?’

This is about as private as you can get with the idea of freedom.

More typical of male views of freedom was the emphasis on the liberating feeling that came with control over others or their environment. Michael, a lower-middle class African-American told us that his most exhilarating feeling of freedom came from beating others on the basketball court:”.. Yeah! Because I know that I’m a good basketball player and to have my way with someone on the court that’s kind of like being free. So I feel really good about that…. Someone is trying to defend me and they can’t and after I score I’ll run back and I’ll say something like, ‘I thought you were playing defense’ or just something like that, just to keep me going. And it takes a couple hours of that, and then I’m good and then I go back to my quiet silly self, and that’s it.”

SECOND Z-MET IMAGE HERE: MICHAEL

A middle class gay man in his mid-forties, Jeremy, brought an image of a gay “circuit party’ to the interview which he called “a picture of like freedom,” and said he felt most happy and free when he took over : “I’m just a very dominant personality. I am in control most of the time. My boyfriend was, like, you know, he went along for the ride. He was a great partner to do that with, because he was just like, ‘this is great.’” Another middle class Euro-American in the construction business, expanded on the image of a river in the metaphor elaboration part of our interview to express his views of freedom as control: “I put a bunch of rocks and I build any kind of rock wall in that river, then I can divert the course of the river so that over time it—the river will change. I can flood an area; I can dry up an area, you know.” When probed how all this related to freedom, he responded:

"It gives me a sense of control over my own life… there's only so much time that you have to be here and , you know, if there's things that you want to do…you should start working on it or, you know, try and be the person that you want to be instead of , you know, letting life or people hold you down or hold you back. *Be* the river."

Our quotation analysis corroborates the survey finding that doing what one wants is not only a core component of freedom, but one that strongly discriminates between men and women, the former being over three times more likely to refer to it in their talk about freedom than women. Having control and doing what one wants are obviously related, but the Americans we interviewed nonetheless took care to distinguish between the two concepts, as they did between choice and control, findings that are here consistent with those reported by Schwartz.[9] . They spoke of doing what they wanted in two senses. One was simply the feeling that they were free to do anything they wanted as long as they broke no laws and, of course, were willing to pay the price. Mark, a financially strapped, divorced school teacher told us that: "You have total freedom to do whatever you want. And I suppose there is nothing that is stopping me from just quitting my job and doing whatever. Ultimately I guess I could. There are going to be serious ramifications because of it, but I could. There is nothing stopping me and there is freedom in that -- to be able to say, I can do anything I want. That to me is amazing freedom."

Often, doing what one wants meant getting away from all control—control by others or by forces beyond one's control. Freedom as escape is often interpreted as the obverse of freedom as control. The iconic American figures of the lonely cowboy in the middle of nowhere on his horse, or the isolated farmsteader are classic cases of people who have little control except over themselves, and even then only to a limited degree, should disaster strike in the form of outlaws, tornadoes or illness.

THIRD Z-MET IMAGE HERE: JOE

Joe, the working class retiree in his mid-fifties, just wanted to spend as much time as possible by himself on a lonely Boston beach where he had fantasies of surfing: "The

[9] Schwartz, Barry. The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less (New York: Harper Collins, 2004):115-116.

ocean just relaxes me. … Away from people. Away from the pressures of family members… they pressure me with all these invitations and surprise parties—the fiftieth—the sixtieth.. it is a lot of pressure… it does a job on your head. Everybody has their own mind. They have the right to do what they want. I do too. .. I don't have to answer the phone. This is my freedom of rights. Nobody is going to push me into things I do not want to do" Note here the very personal sense in which rights is being used. It has nothing to do with the state or even legal protections, but is rather a matter of how he relates to his relatives and friends or ex-friends. Joe's view of freedom as escape was reinforced by anxieties and fears of being chased and devoured by mighty forces beyond his control, a recurring dream being run down and swallowed up by a huge tornado in the middle of nowhere (see right, lower image of Joe's collage).

However, it was in the second sense of doing what one wants that most of our subjects most frequently used the term, especially when identifying it as a core component of freedom. In this second sense the term was closely associated with decision making, especially in regard to important events in the life course. Michael, the African-American man who satisfied his desire for immediate control on the basketball court, felt deeply anxious about making the right decisions concerning what he wanted to do with his life: "Well, this is kind of like what I'm going through right now, this is my life. It's kind of like trying to figure out what's going to happen. Either I'm going to win or I'm going to lose. And it's basically dealing with what I want to do, what I've actually done. And that's kind of like anxiety in a way, trying to figure out if I'm doing the right thing."

Americans in all walks of life seemed to share these anxieties about what they wanted to do, what they *really* wanted, and it was closely related to how free they felt. Daniel, a middle class Euro-American in his twenties, thought that getting to know what he wanted required a good deal of introspection: "Becoming aware of the person you are. That means my individual desires and plans and so on" When asked, why, he responded: "Because if you ignore what you really want then you don't end up being where you want to be." Exactly similar sentiments were expressed by other young Americans we interviewed. As another put it, our freedom inheres in the fact that it is entirely up to us

"to make those decisions and it comes from this desire to want to be more and do more. Not necessarily financially, but just to be able to be more of a person and to have more life experiences. It comes from just saying, you know what, I know what I want in my life and I know what decisions I got to make to get there."

Americans' strong belief that they should have control if they are to be free combined with another important value associated with freedom--- the idea that life and work should be fulfilling or self-actualizing —to create enormous problems for them with respect to work. I was surprised to find that work was the site for Americans' strongest feelings of *unfreedom*, and, even more surprisingly, that this cuts across all classes. As is now well known, Americans are obliged to work harder and longer than any other group of people in the industrial world, longer even than the Japanese. For the growing ranks of the barely coping working classes it often takes each member of a couple working two jobs in order to fend off poverty.[10] Globalization and brutally regressive tax policies have created a harsh and insecure environment even for middle and some upper middle class Americans.

And yet, Americans still insist that work must be self-actualizing and define their freedom in terms of such fulfillment which sets them up for deep anxieties. Michael, the African American clerk, used a photograph of an office party which included his boss. As he pointed her out his entire countenance changed. He became anxious and agitated as he spoke: "This is making me feel not free. This picture represents my non-freedom, my chains, my shackles, my glass ceiling." These anxieties, as I mentioned, cut across class.

4th Z-MET IMAGE: WORK AND TIME--ROBERT

Robert is in a solidly middle class job and earns close to a hundred thousand dollars a year. But he is tormented by his watch, his sense of not having enough time and his sense of un-fulfillment and hence, of not being free.

[10] Juliet B. Schor, The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure (New York: Basic Books, 1993); see also Elizabeth Warren and Amelia Warren Tyagi, The Two-Income Trap: Why Middle Class Mothers and Fathers Are Going Broke (New York: Basic Books, 2003)

> "As far as the job goes, I think being free is something that you really enjoy doing. I mean, when you work somewhere you want to help the company do well, you want people to like you; you want people to think you are doing a good job for the company and when you get fired, maybe you look at yourself and say, well, maybe I didn't go a good job, maybe I didn't do what I set out to accomplish."

This is so sad. Note the complete absence of any anger toward the firm that does the firing. Instead it is all turned inward on himself: there is shame in his inability to be in control and to find fulfillment in his work and this is experienced as a deep sense of unfreedom, a condition for which he blames himself. [11]

I turn, finally, to something that only emerged in the interviews: the role of embodiment, for it is with respect to the body and its relation to freedom that gender differences are most sharply defined. All the women we spoke to spontaneously raised the subject of their bodies when talking about freedom. The body emerged, independent of class and ethnicity, both as a metaphor and as the basis for the experience of both freedom and unfreedom, as object and as agent , in ways wholly consistent with what we learned from our review of the feminist and other literature on the subject.[12]

First, there were the references to the body as the source of deep feelings of freedom and unfreedom. One of our African American subjects put it most forcefully, cueing from a photograph of herself: "We can start with me. It's a picture of me on a day of a wedding that I went to. I like the picture because it makes me feel most free, because it's actually like the first time that I really wore a dress that fit me." Losing weight, she explained, had major consequences. It made her more confident: "I am able to walk down

[11] For the best account of how Americans came to interpret their work for others in such self-directed, characterologic and moral terms, see the classic study by Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, The Hidden Injuries of Class (New York: Knopf, 1972). Cf my discussion below of Sennett's work on the decline of the public sphere in personal development and identity.

[12] See, for example, Jane Arthurs, Jean Grimshaw, eds Women's Bodies: Discipline and Transgression (London: Cassell, 1999); Susan Bordo. Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993)

the street and not worry about anyone saying negative things about me. I can be myself." This, in turn, gave her a positive view on life, which helped her to "know what's wrong and right in life." And knowing what's wrong meant that she did not end up neglecting her children.

Marion, a successful professional, Euro-American, used a picture of a beautiful model in a bathing suit to make much the same point: "I do not feel free when I look at pictures in magazines, stuff like this. Because it reminds me of how I feel about, like, I'm not happy with my body, and so that's what it reminds me of, and it makes me feel, it doesn't make me feel free. It just reminds me of what I need to be doing, you know, it's constant, what I need to be doing physically at the gym, and I'm not necessarily motivated at the moment, so it makes me feel not good. I'm not free… I don't feel free in my, I don't think I feel free, say, in my womanhood." This, in turn, meant that she did not "feel like I'm connecting to myself. In who I really am. Because I'm letting like maybe my body weight right now get in get in the way of it, or something." Sooner or later, she added, she had to face her "demons': " I need to face that and be real about it and be honest about it and do something about it." Only then, she told us, would she be truly free.

On the other hand, women who were fit and happy with their bodies said that this was a major source of freedom and power for them.Clara, the prosperous consultant, was quite explicit. "Freedom to make choices about her own body," she said, referring to an image of a Nigerian woman buried alive up to her neck who was about to be stone to death for adultery "that's the most basic of freedom." While women were not stoned to death in America, Clara unwittingly implied, there were still serious consequences for the choices they made about their bodies: " Well, when you have a really good body and you're that confident, you know, particularly as a woman, I think it empowers you with self-confidence. Particularly in a society where having a certain body image is—there's so much pressure associated with that." Clara told us that she enjoyed having a slender, fit body and that "I have a real sense of--- and direct experience of—it gives you power."

5th Z-MET IMAGE HERE: NUDITY AS SYMBOL OF FREEDOM

In addition to the direct experience of feeling free or unfree, the body was frequently used as a metaphor for freedom and its absence, most notably the nude body. Sara, a middle class Euro-American woman, used the image of two nude bathers skinny dipping to make this point, an image she told us was her favorite and which she keeps taped to her refrigerator. Sara was aware of the fact that she was conflating two powerful images of freedom with her picture: nudity and water. The combination of an environment in which you can be completely nude and uninhibited and move around in water was, for her, a "phenomenal" expression of freedom: "when you're swimming in calm water like that and you can be just totally free, there's no gravity, there's no clothes inhibiting you, there's no other people around in the picture that could be disapproving. You are free to swim anywhere, move any way you want to move, go anywhere you want. And I'm assuming this picture is not in New England… In my mind it's in nice warm water, so that it's just total freedom. That's my best picture of freedom." One of the upper middle class women expressed similar sentiments with a nude female image: "Well, I think if you can stand naked to the world and feel really good about it, you've got to be feeling really free."

6TH Z-MET IMAGE HERE: NUDITY AS METAPHOR OF UNFREEDOM

At the same time, several women used the body as a metaphor for much that was unfree about their gender. Rachel, a middle class woman in her late twenties, used a strong image of a painting of a nude woman with her hand in front of her face, as if trying to hide from view, to make her point. "Well, it kind of made me cringe inside a little bit, and it just seemed to process a feeling like , leave me alone, and you know, like it want to kind of set some boundaries and maybe those have been violated and just like, get out of here and also the feeling of being exposed or overexposed, like wanting privacy and not getting it. Rachel then used this image as the basis for a reflection on the need for "a healthy sense of boundaries" and of "personal space" in women's perception of feeling free. Freedom, she told us, was the feeling that your personal space is being respected, which made it "easier to kind of just be in your own wisdom," by which she meant, the confidence to "tap into your higher self and just listen to your intuition and operate from there and just really be grounded also."

A middle class woman reflected the view of nearly all the women we interviewed when she said that freedom, for her, meant self-acceptance, and, "when you accept yourself it's like the whole weight of the world is off your shoulders," which brings " a sense of peace, security, happiness, joy, fulfillment. Contentment."

Recall that in our discussion of the survey data we found the women's and men's *notions* of freedom were relatively quite similar. One conclusion we draw from this is that gender differences are important, less in the nature of the conceptions of freedom men and women hold, than in the ways they are expressed and experienced.

Of even greater relevance to our argument here is what not only men and women, but all major ethnic groups and classes in America have in common. Our in-depth interviewing confirmed what the survey data had already indicated: that political life in general, and democracy in particular, is no longer a meaningful part of the semantic field of freedom. Again, let me hasten to add that this does not necessarily mean that Americans actively hate politics, although there are many perceptive analysts such as E.J. Dionne who insist that this is the case. [13] My own survey, as well as those of others, indicate that when directly asked if they are satisfied with democracy the great majority of Americans say they are. And when, after a couple hours of interviewing we mentioned to our interviewees that they never once mentioned democracy in their talk about freedom, they all said that it was something they took for granted and are certainly grateful that they live in a democracy. It should be added that there is always a certain rote-like tone in people's acknowledgement of the value of democracy and their satisfaction with it. And it would seem that Americans distinguish between democracy in the abstract (which is what they seem satisfied with) and democracy in practice—the actual behavior of politicians (though rarely their *own* Congressmen) and the way the system works. Numerous works have shown that Americans have been thoroughly turned off by the negativity and superficiality of political campaigns and the failure of Congress to meet the needs of "ordinary people like me."[14]

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[13] E.J. Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics: The Death of the Democratic Process*, 1992

[14] Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Dirty Politics: Deception, Distraction and Democracy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); see also Joseph Cooper, "Performance and Expectations in American Politics," in

My point, however, is that America is unique among modern Western polities in the uncoupling of democracy from the meanings and experiences people attribute to freedom. And this is very bad news for both freedom and democracy. How did America get this way? And what are the consequences of this uncoupling? Let me now turn briefly to these questions.

4. Liberty against democracy: the historical roots of privatized freedom

America's divorce of democracy from the ideology, valorization and experience of freedom has been long in the making. It goes back at least to its revolutionary moment and the compromises that made the constitution possible. One such compromise was the fact that, for all the glorious rhetoric of equality and fundamental human rights, a fifth of the nation would remain in slavery. This constitutional compromise, as Foner has noted, not only tolerated but strengthened the system of slavery.[15] This meant, further, that the Southern version of primal democracy, based on the herrenvolk system of trust, would continue for another one hundred and seventy years, 78 of them as a slave system, and what's more, would powerfully influence the other two forms of democracy with each of which it formed alignments from one era to the next.

The second major compromise had to do with the expansion of the franchise and the degree to which the egalitarian impulse of democracy would be controlled. The elites of both the south and the north dreaded the specter of uncontrolled democracy, of majority rule in which the masses participated fully. From a concern during the revolutionary era of how to protect the ruled from their rulers, the elites of post-revolutionary America became obsessed with the problem of how to protect the ruling class and other powerful minority interests from the ruled. It is now generally agreed that most of the revolutionary leaders were on the whole wary, even hostile to the idea of universal suffrage.

Joseph Cooper, ed., Congress and the Decline of Public Trust (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999):131-168; and, in the same volume Diana Mutz and Gregory Flemming, "How Good People Make Bad Collectives: A Social Psychological Perspective on Public Attitudes," pp. 79-100.

[15] Eric Foner, The Story of American Freedom (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998)36-37.

Counteracting this was the stormy emergence during the Jacksonian era of forces in favor of a more inclusive democracy and greater participation on the part of white, male non-elite persons in the electoral and governmental process. This would eventually culminate into the form of pluralist democracy. However, the process was not a simple linear development. It was, in fact, extremely messy, contradictory and, in its use of racism and nativism, quite sordid. It involved the collapse of one party system, the Whigs, and the emergence of another. But the development America's party system is itself a complex and ideologically convoluted process. In no sense can we identify these parties with permanent commitments to one or other of the evolving forms of democracy, given the frequency of their shifting ideological alignments.

In broad terms, three competing versions of democracy began to take shape by the mid-nineteenth century,(and not *two*, northern and southern, as Sean Wilentz has recently argued.[16]) They differed in the following ways. Elitist capitalist democracy was deeply libertarian, suspicious of majority rule and fearful of the power of the masses. Its roots lay partly in the eighteenth century British conception of liberty as restraint on state power and as the security of property.[17] It was extensively inclusive, by which I mean that it was willing to embrace all groups of persons, including blacks and immigrants, partly due to its commitment to market forces and hostility to all forms of constraints on individuals, partly to its more legalistic and universalist conception of citizenship--- to some extent a secularized heritage of the Puritan past---, but mainly because such a broad-based citizenship minimized the possibility of solidarity among the masses. At the same time, it resisted any deepening of citizenship, either by way of expanding opportunities for participation beyond the vote or any extension of the notion of political citizenship and equality to the domain of social security. Indeed, it seized every opportunity to demobilize the citizenry and to emasculate the power of the vote.

[16] Sean Wilentz, The Rise of American Democracy (New York: Norton, 2005)
[17] See John Phillip Reid, The Concept of Liberty in the Age of the American Revolution, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1988), 108-111.

Two powerful weapons were employed toward this end: the ideology of minimal government accompanied by a demonization of state power; and the uniquely American legal doctrine of judicial review.

The ideology of minimal government entailed a historic change in the Western conception of freedom. Up until the end of the revolutionary era, a triadic conception of freedom prevailed in America and Europe: it was the tense chordal interplay of negative freedom (freedom from the power of others, including arbitrary state rulers), positive freedom (freedom to exercise power over oneself and one's world) and freedom with (democracy or civic and legal equality).It was in the early nineteenth century that the chord of freedom was fragmented and the idea emerged that liberty was potentially in conflict with democracy. In America, there was a swift decent from the revolutionary ideal of freedom being, in good part, active citizenship in a virtuous republican state (though one, to be sure, with a highly restricted view of the size of the demos and the qualifications for participation) to the mid-century liberal view of the state as a sinister power, the greatest threat to one's liberty. In short, liberty against the state emerged as one of the central themes in the conservative northern democratic tradition of America.[18] The state, quite simply, could not be trusted, nor could the institutions it required. It was, at best, a watchman, a policing guardian of national security and personal liberty; at worst, a potential monster under the command of corrupt politicians. Willis has argued that this "fear of government, sometimes sensible, sometimes hysterical, but always pronounced" is a "constant of American history."[19]However, this is too sweeping a claim: rather, is well describes what I am referring to as the northern conservative, libertarian version of democracy.

This view of the state was reinforced by, indeed joined to, the principle of judicial review. Through the "due process" and "equal protection" doctrines of the supreme court, liberty came to be interpreted as a constitutional limitation on the legislative branch of government. This became so entrenched a principle in American law and commercial life

[18] Clinton Rossiter, Conservatism in America, 1630-1933 (New York: Knopf: 1955)
[19] .Garry Willis, A Necessary Evil: A History of American Distrust of Government, 1999.

that by the early twentieth century it was hard for Americans to grasp the newness, and peculiarly American nature of this legalistic twist on the notion of personal freedom. But as Edward Corwin notes: "In the Ciceronian-Lockeian conception of natural law, liberty and equality are not hostile, but friendly conceptions; and in the Declaration of Independence the same amicable relationship holds... In the legalistic tradition, on which judicial review has operated in the past for the most part, "liberty" and "equality" are, on the other hand, apt to appear as opposite values, the former as the peculiar care of the courts, the latter the peculiar care of the legislature."[20] By the Reconstruction era even the notion of economic security and autonomy as fundamental pre-requisites of freedom for all citizens—so central to early 19th century republican thinking—had been scrapped: "there was no contradiction, in northern eyes," Foner has noted," between the freedom of the laborer and unrelenting personal effort in the marketplace." [21]

Sooner or later this sustained propaganda against the state was bound to taint democracy itself, for after all, is not democracy quintessentially an act of political life and an involvement with the state. The success of this propaganda has also denigrated political parties, which are essential for any well working modern democracy. As Kleppner points out: "A deep-seated ambivalence toward political parties has always been a characteristic of American political culture. In the best of times parties have been viewed simply as necessary evils, and at other times as more evil than necessary."[22]

Jacksonian democracy championed the common (Euro-American) man and actively encouraged the view that ordinary people could participate in government, politics being "a simple thing." Trust in the nation's political institutions was promoted and the electorate mobilized, to a degree never to be repeated in American political

[20]Corwin, Liberty Against Government (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1948,1979),182.

[21] Eric Foner, Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) p.101.

[22]Paul Kleppner, Who Voted: The Dynamics of Electoral Turnout, 1870-1980 (New York: Praeger, 1982), 150.

history. While there was a strong attack on monopoly power and privilege, laissez faire was strongly supported.[23]

But while there were many admirable features in the Jacksonian system, it was riddled with contradiction, a point reaffirmed recently by Sean Wilentz in his detailed, back-to-narrative history of the period.[24] Jackson's southern background was the filter for many of the region's primal influences. The rabidly racist subsequent history of populist democracy had its origins here. The white republic with its expanded franchise learned the Southern primal trick of exclusive inclusiveness, of uniting and expanding the club of democracy by the exclusion, marginalization and demonization of certain groups, including the recently arrived not-quite-white Irish.[25]

The third version of democracy was the southern herrenvolk system that thrived on slavery and, after the Reconstruction, remained "mired in the defense of a totally segregated society."[26] It shared with the northern elite a suspicion of majority rule and mass participation. It continued to use collective systems of mutual trust (based on white solidarity) both to provide political cohesion and to divide and discourage participation in the political system. That it is a system frankly acknowledging hierarchy hardly makes it unique, but that it is one explicitly based on social orders of blood and race certainly places it apart from other forms of modern democracy (unless one counts *early* Nazi

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[23]Harry L. Watson, Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America (New York: Noonday Press, 1990), esp. chaps. 2 and 4.

[24] The Rise of American Democracy

[25]Eric Foner, Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men : The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995); Alexander Saxton, The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth Century America (New York: Verso, 1990),Chap.6.; David Roediger, The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class (New York: Verso, 1991), Part. 2.

[26]Earl Black and Merle Black, Politics and Society in the South (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1987), 75. On the origins and operation of herrenvolk system during the 19th century see Geroge M. Frederickson, White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History (New York: Oxford, 1981) chap.4; and James Oakes, Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South (New York: Knopf, 1990). On the reconstruction interlude and its brief vision of what might have been in American history, see Eric Foner's classic: Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution (New York: Harper and Row, 1988)

Germany as a democracy which, in a ghastly way, it was.) Its "modernity" when compared with, say, the primal democracy of Athens, inheres not only in its agrarian capitalism, but in its majoritarian representative system manipulable by an oligarchic elite periodically upset by charismatic, populist gadflies.

The history of political participation in American elections when viewed from the broad perspective of the nineteenth century up to the present, casts a rather different light on academic claims of a *recent* decline in trust in government and civic engagement. Paul Kleppner's work clearly demonstrates one of the great anomalies of American political life: "Since the 1840s aggregate turnout rates display an unmistakable trend: a long-term decline in the general level of voter mobilization. That decline has occurred as the measures of the individual and structural factors that mediate turnout have moved at lest as decisively in the direction predicting increased participation."[27]

Beneath this broad trend, Kleppner identifies four great turnout eras in American democratic history in the north and three such eras in the South. In the north there was a great era of citizen mobilization between 1840 and 1900; this was followed by the era of electoral demobilization between 1896 and 1928; then came the New Deal and a new wave of electoral remobilization between 1930 and 1960; followed by what Kleppner calls the era of "demobilization and disillusionment" between 1964 and the present. In the South, the trajectory has been a long downward slope after the northern post-bellum retreat.

There is no space here to summarize Kleppner's many subtle, empirically informed, findings. One of them, however, is especially relevant. While citizens' orientations, and social structural factors, are no doubt important in explaining these changes, he makes it clear that participation and political competitiveness were not simply outcomes automatically emerging from structural forces and changing attitudes, but rather "required human intervention to develop concrete institutions capable of mobilizing mass opinion." What is more, these interventions can "offset the impact of

[27] Paul Kleppner, ibid p. 13.

socioeconomic inequalities and low education." [28] Conversely, it was the declining capability of political parties that explain the demobilization eras of the North. And in the South demobilization was the direct result of sustained efforts to disenfranchise the black and poor white citizen body. In other words, the present apathy toward the electoral process, like the highly privatized view of freedom we have documented, in good part the outcome of direct elite agency, deliberation and mobilization.

The peculiar features of the southern version of democracy made it possible to align with either of the northern parties, as long as its insistence on the herrenvolk use of blacks and its other sacred "traditions" were tolerated. Just such a compromise accounts for the long alliance of both the pluralist and herrenvolk versions of democracy within the embrace of the democratic party for most of this century up to the 1960s. That alignment collapsed exactly when the democratic party came out in favor of the civil rights movement. This opened the way for the alliance between the elitist northern system and the herrenvolk south, skillfully forged by Nixon with his so-called "wedge" politics. To this day, race continues to play a central , anti-democratic role in American politics. For all its enormous progress in ethno-racial relations and fundamental changes of attitudes on the part of a majority of Euro-Americans, race sadly continues to play a pivotal, if no longer covert role in American politics, to the detriment not only of blacks but of democracy itself and of the personalized view of freedom.[29]

To summarize: the sustained secular trend in the demobilization of the electorate from the middle of the nineteenth century, occasional periods of voter engagement notwithstanding; the conception of freedom as restraint on state power accompanied by a relentless ideological demonization of the state that amounted to a thinly veiled smearing of democracy; the role of the courts and especially the use of the principle of judicial

[28] ibid, pp.30, 43.

[29] On which see, most recently, Nicholas A. Valentino, "Old Times There Are Not forgotten: Race and Partisan Realignment in the Contemporary South," Journal of Politics, Volume 68 (2006):1468-2508.

review in curtailing popular legislative action and, until the middle of the twentieth century, in eviscerating the Bill of Rights, all contributed to the perception among ordinary Americans that political participation was irrelevant to their daily lives and interests. If freedom was to be cherished—and all parties and institutions reinforced this conviction—then it had to be in their private lives and in their personal relations.

Another major aspect of American life powerfully reinforced this uncoupling of private from public freedom. The growth and eventual triumph of American capitalism and its tremendous emphasis on mass consumption. The term "conspicuous consumption" was coined by Veblen to describe America at the end of the Gilded Age and the 19th century. But it was during the succeeding so-called progressive era that a qualitative shift toward mass consumption took place, accompanied by the rise of modern advertising. With it also came the distinctive American practice of identifying freedom with consumerism. Foner nicely summarizes the early phase of this development:

> ".. the new advertising industry perfected ways of increasing exponentially the "wants" of mankind. It hammered home the message that freedom would now be enjoyed in the market place, not the workplace. Numerous products took "liberty" as a brand name and used an image of the Statue of Liberty as a sales device. Consumption was a central element of freedom, an entitlement of citizenship…Consumerism was also, according to the department store magnate Edward Filene, a 'school of freedom,' since it required individual choice on basic questions of living." [30]

The enfolding of freedom and consumerism intensified over the course of the twentieth century with major consequences for America's view of freedom. It was, however, a complex development, as Lizabeth Cohen demonstrates in her authoritative work on the

[30] Eric Foner, Story of American Freedom, 147.

subject.[31] The New Deal and Second World War periods saw the emergence of two "ideal types" of interactions between the roles of citizen and consumer. One of these was potentially good news for the re-insertion of democracy and citizen participation in the domain of freedom, what Cohen calls, the "Citizen consumer" of these periods which "put the market power of the consumer to work politically, not only to save a capitalist America in the midst of the Great Depression, but also to safeguard the rights of individual consumers and the larger 'general good." This ideal was embraced and promoted by the New Deal policy makers and grass roots consumer activists. (pp. 8, 28 and chapter 3). Competing with it was the "purchaser consumer" ideal type which "championed pursuit of self-interest in the marketplace" as a means of growing the economy. In the post-war period, however, a new ideal grew out of these two resulting in what Cohen designates the "Consumerized Republic" in which "self-interested citizens increasingly view government policies like other market transactions, judging them by how well served they feel personally." [32]

This integration has been one of the most potent forces in the privatization of citizenship and of the American view of freedom. For the complement of viewing government transactions in market terms is the still ongoing transformation of the citizen into a customer in the eyes of politicians and statesmen. As Matthew Crenson and Benjamin Ginsberg have argued, leaders of both political parties outdo each other in seeing the citizen as a passive customer and attempt, in the words of then Vice- President Al Gore " to make the federal government customer friendly." The result has been the devastating "narrowing political role of American citizens," and a general privatization of government.

The "consumerization of the republic" in its present phase has meant, in fact, the final demise of the once promising citizen consumer ideal of the New Deal era. In tandem with the rise of the citizen as private, disaggregated customer is a harsh new economic inequality and a privatized view of returns to voting among the declining

[31] Lizabeth Cohen, A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America (New York, Vintage Books,2004)
[32]Cohen, A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America .

numbers who do vote, which rejects policies that pursue the public good as giving others "something for nothing." [33] Crenson and Ginsberg, in their recent work on the decline of citizenship in America, sum up the outcome of this development in dire—perhaps too dire-- terms:

"The era of the citizen is now coming to an end… despite the nation's initial democratic exceptionalism, contemporary political elites have substantially marginalized the American mass electorate and have come to rely more and more on the courts and the bureaucracy to get what they want. We call this personal democracy to distinguish it from popular democracy, a way of doing business that requires elites mobilize non-elites in order to prevail in the political arena. It is personal because the new techniques of governing disaggregate the public into a collection of private citizens."[34]

The personalization of democracy that Crenson and Ginsberg identifies, is actually part of a broader and deeper cultural shift that sociologists of culture and other cultural analysts such as Lionel Trilling have long recognized and dissected. As early as 1966 Philip Reiff was announcing the triumph of the therapeutic which the considered "the first cultural revolution fought for no other purpose than greater amplitude and richness of living." The end of living was self-realization and engagements with broader social commitments increasingly came to be viewed as extreme and neurotic. Reiff attribute this development mainly to the influence of Freud and the post-Freudians, although he also felt that modern consumer culture made possible this shift toward a psychologizing rather than social view of existence. 'The strange new lesson we are beginning to learn in our time," he wrote, " is how not to pay the high personal costs of social organization" which contributed to a strongly anti-political ethos. " That a sense of

[33] Cohen, A Consumer's Republic, 397.
[34]Matthew Crenson and Benjamin Ginsberg, Downsizing Democracy: How America Sidelined its Citizens and Privatized its Public (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002)

well being has become an end, rather than a by-product of striving after some superior communal end," he lamented, "announces a fundamental change of focus."[35]

Lionel Trilling echoed many of these views in more literary terms in his Norton Lectures, given at Harvard in 1970, in which he found that the post-Renaissance Western tradition of sincerity was being replaced by a culture of authenticity. Sincerity "requires of us that we present ourselves as being sincere, and the most efficacious way of satisfying this demand is to see to it that we really are sincere, that we actually are what we want our community to know we are." [36] In other words, it was profoundly social and public in its orientation. Authenticity's preoccupation was "advancing the aims of the ego," and like Reiff, Trilling attributes a good part of this development to the Freudian revolution.

It was Richard Sennett, however, who first brought the methods and analytic tools of the historical sociologist to an understanding of this transformation.[37] While I do not share Sennett's enthusiasm for the eighteenth century and its salons —a ghastly period for all but the privileged, and dangerous for even so singular a scientist and public intellectual as Joseph Priestly—his analysis of the contemporary scene is persuasive in its claim that "this public enervation" as he elegantly calls it, " is in its scope much broader than political affairs." It reflects, he argues, a broader and deeper cultural and psycho-social flight from engagement with the public world as one important means of fashioning oneself to a narcissistic pursuit of self-knowledge, intimate feelings and authenticity as ends in themselves.

> "The reigning myth today is that the evils of society can all be understood as evils of impersonality, alienation and coldness. The sum of these three is an ideology of intimacy: social relations of all kind are real, believable and authentic the closer they approach the inner psychological concerns of each person. This ideology transmutes political categories into psychological categories."[38]

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[35] Philip Reiff, The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud (New York: Harper and Row, 1966),pp. 11, 23-27,242-243, 261.
[36] Lionel Trilling, Sincerity and Authenticity (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovoich, 1971) p.12.
[37] Richard Sennett, The Fall of Public Man (New York: Knopf, 1974)
[38] Sennett, The Fall of Public Man, p.259.

Sennett cogently argues that this development is as bad for the public sphere as it is for the private. It encourages withdrawal from active participation in the public sphere by ordinary people who, at best, relate to the state "in a spirit of resigned acquiesce." It promotes an evaluation of public figures in purely personal terms—is he a nice, regular guy? Is he authentic? –with disastrous consequences. And it creates the spectacle of presidents and other holders of the highest office in the land—the ultimate political insiders and budget busting deficit spenders—all claiming to be authentically "ordinary" outsiders profoundly hostile to Washington's politics and "big government," and yearning for nothing more than a hasty return to the haven of their homes and farms where they can cut wood and really be themselves. A more recent study has more thoroughly document the growing permeation of the many areas of the state itself – civil case law, criminal justice, public education, welfare policy, and political rhetoric and legitimization—by the therapeutic ethos with problematic consequences for the formal culture of freedom. [39] The ironic paradox, again, is that the impulse toward privatization in which the public-- and society more generally-- is no longer "something the self must adjust to" but "something "the self must be liberated from" ultimately results in a state that uses the ethos of therapy to justify serious threats to formal liberties.[40]

But withdrawal from the public dimension of personal development also has inimical consequences for the private sphere and individuals. One of Sennett's major points is that the quest for self-actualization in all our relations inevitably generates frustration when we fail to find fulfillment in our work and relations with others. My discussion earlier of the deep anxieties and sense of un-freedom Americans of all classes and ethnic groups feel about their work fully exemplify the degree to which the compulsion toward self-realization and personal fulfillment have become a burden. When Sennett asked, in 1974, "Is it humane to form soft selves in a hard world?"[41] America still had an economy in which a rising tide lifted all boats and a distribution of income that

[39] James L. Nolaln, Jr., The Therapeutic State: Justifying Government at Century's End (New York: New York University Press, 1998)
[40] Nolan, The Therapeutic State, 306-308.
[41] Sennett, The Fall of Public Man, pp.3, 260.

compared favorably with the other advanced industrial countries. And the term globalization had yet to be coined.

There has been one other, more recent development that has profound consequences for the growth of privatization and its impact on the public: this is the internet revolution and the rise of virtual communities. Several notable commentators and analysts have already jumped the gun and claimed that virtual communities will reverse the withdrawal form the public in that it enhances easier communication and stimulates the formation of countless new groups in the public sphere. The colorful, but intellectually serious Howard Rheingold has documented the global development of what he calls "smart mobs" made possible by the combination of the mobile telephone of the internet. Urban youth, radical movements, but also conservative movements and terrorists have established virtual communities that, he insists, replicate and go beyond traditional public associations in their size, range, speed and frequency of interaction.[42] Sociologist Felicia Wu Song is far less optimistic about the impact of virtual communities on the democratic process and the public in general. She agrees with Sherry Turkle that the internet allows individuals to explore and construct alternate identities, but she finds the claim that virtual communities offer the promise of renewing communities and civic association to be without foundation. Instead, what she finds is a reinforcement of the very therapeutic culture and privatized mode of understanding that Reiff deplored, and with the same tendency to undermine "sensibilities necessary for citizens of a vibrant democracy." She adds that "the strength of virtual communities is ultimately their capacity to subvert embodied social authority. This however, effectively weakens the community's ability to prioritize external communal ends over personal well-being. When there is an absence of anything socially binding, individuality and freedom can

[42] Howard Rheingold, The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000) especially chapter 10; and his Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution (New York: Basic Books,2003); see also Sherry Turkle, Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet (New Yoork: Simon and Shuster, 1997).

flourish as we desire. But, the cost is a loss of effective sanctions than can encourage the pursuit of larger communal purposes."[43]

5. Some Implications of the privatization of freedom

What are the consequences of this privatized view of freedom. My remarks will be speculative since there is no way of proving that there is a causal connection in the clear associations to be discussed below. And even if it is granted that there is a likely causal link, I am not suggesting that the privatized view of freedom is the sole, or even the major reason for all these developments. Nonetheless, it strikes me as reasonable that there is some causal relation – if mainly proximate-- between the uncoupling of public freedom from the private view of everyday life and the following ominous developments.

- The extraordinary state of political/civic apathy
- The alarming Post 9/11 threats to civil liberties in the name of security
- The rapid rise of a plutocratic democratic regime
- Indifference to the incumbency crisis in Congressional seats

The growth of political apathy, reflected in low and declining voter participation rates has been widely commented on and hardly needs documentation. As Figure 7 shows, America ranks dead last in voter turnout among the industrialized nations and is way behind many of the established democracies of the developing world such as Barbados, Jamaica and India.

Figure 7 About Here

I noted several times earlier that the uncoupling of freedom from democracy does not necessarily mean that people hate democracy. What it does mean, however, is that

[43] Felicia Wu Song, "Vurtual Communities in a Therapeutic Age," Society, Janyary, 2002, Vol. 39. Issue 2: 39-45.

democracy and the democratic process are either taken for granted to the point of indifference or are not viewed with much confidence or enthusiasm. It also means that the enormous psychic force and moral valorization associated with freedom does not accrue to democracy. No democracy can long last without such civic passion . It might even be argued however, that an active, passionate distrust of democracy would be better than tepidly taking it for granted. Libertarians who fear the state and all but a night-watchman kind of democracy, are usually active voters and participants in the democratic process in order to keep a watchful eye on what office holders are doing; and alertness to any threat to liberty by elected officials. It is no accident that conservative libertarians are among the severest critics of the present government. The great danger of not regarding democracy as having much to do with one's personal freedom is that it makes possible great abuses of power. And this is exactly what we are currently witnessing in America.

Post 9/11 threats to civil liberties

The terrorist assault on America has enormously strengthened the hand of the Vice President and those who have long sought a more imperial and powerful presidency. More alarmingly, it has allowed the demand for greater security to be used as cover for the assault on a wide range of our liberties, now thoroughly documented in several authoritative documents. Attention has been repeated called to the Patriot Act and the threat to established civil liberties that it poses. One important study by a group of civil rights lawyers observes that a "new normal" has emerged in which government has become less and less transparent while intruding more and more on the privacy of individuals, the very reverse of the traditional default position in America. [44]The many abuses and threats are too well known to repeat at length here—the secret tapping of telephone conversations and probing of citizens library usage; the secret shift toward domestic spying by intelligence agencies; the by-passing of the Federal Judiciary and the

[44] Fiona Doherty and Deborah Perlstein, eds.Assessing the New Normal: Liberty and Security for the Post-September 11 United States (New York: Lawyer's Committee For Human Rights, 2003).

use of extra-judicial organizations such as military commissions and detention centers; indefinite detention; the skirting of habeas corpus; the jailing of journalists and other threats to the press; executive branch efforts to restrict Congressional access to information; the rejection of the Geneva Convention and the justification of the use of torture in the interrogation of enemy combatants or suspected enemies, several of whom have turned out to be innocent, to list the most egregious.

Again, while the privatization of freedom does not alone explain this frightening development, what is alarming is the passivity of the general public toward them. Richard C. Leone, the President of the Century Foundation, emphasizes this point in his introduction to one of the most authoritative of the recent spate of works addressing these abuses finding it "alarming how little public deliberation has occurred." [45] Especially troubling are polls showing that sixty percent of Americans say that the government's power to keep wartime secrets is more important that the freedom of the press. Alarming because the war on terror is considered endless by the government. Even the Economist, which has been generally supportive of the present government, was led to marvel in an editorial that "Although one of the principal aims of the American Constitution's Bill of Rights was to restrict the government's powers to spy on suspects and lock them up preventively, this legal tactic has drawn few protests." [46]

What accounts for "the Quiet Republic," to borrow Leone's phrase. My answer, in part, is the two cultures of freedom that currently exists in America. Because Americans no longer view public liberties and what the state does as one of a piece with their exercise of private liberty, and because they imagine that the latter is in no way threatened, there is little concern with the tragedy unfolding in the public culture of liberty.

[45] Richard C. Leone and Greg Anrig, eds., The War on Our Liberties: Civil Liberties in an Age of Terrorism, Century Foundation, 2003),
[46] Economist, March 8, 2003.

The privatized view of freedom also partly explains the public lack of interest in the growing plutocratic nature of American democracy. Elections were always expensive engagements in America, but the costs have grown exponentially in recent decades creating a political environment in which, to be elected, one must either be personally wealthy or become financially dependent on special interests. In 2004, incumbent Congressmen spent on average of $972, 143.00 to retain their seats, while challengers spent far less: $205,000.[47] The cost of defeating a sitting congressperson was $2M. The sums are much larger for the Senate where the average incumbent spent $6.9M to retain his or her seat, compared with $1.8M by challengers. Defeating a sitting Senator costs the challenger $14.6M compared with the $21.3M spent by losing incumbents. It is hardly surprising then, that there is no serious contest in the great majority of congressional and senate seats. Political scientists refer to this as the incumbency crisis, but most Americans seem unaware of how serious it is. In 2004, 98 percent of Congressmen and 96 percent of Senators got re-elected. It is seriously to be wondered whether a democracy in which the chances of removing an incumbent are less than 15 percent still deserves the name democracy. At the very least, we should qualify it as a plutocratic democracy and understand that, as in all such systems, the existence of chronic corruption is inevitable. No one has more exhaustively and urgently documented this development than Kevin Phillips, once the leading electoral theoretician of the Republican party. America today, he persuasively argues, has become a plutocracy that surpasses the corruption and undermining of democracy during the Gilded Age in "the vast, relentless takeover of U.S. politics and policymaking by large donors to federal campaigns and propaganda organs."[48]

And yet, there is hardly a whimper from the public even though, amazingly, poll data repeatedly show that they are aware of the distorting role of wealth and consider it a problem and the behavior of politicians unethical.[49] Campaign finance laws are toothless charades. Rarely do challengers even raise the issue of the corruption of the democratic

[47] Data source for figures cited in this paragraph is The Center for Responsive Politics.
[48] Kevin Phillips, Wealth and Democracy: A Political History of the American Rich (New York: Broadway Books, 2002) 322.
[49] See Phillips, Wealth and Democracy, p. 328.

process since, as often as not, they have been forced to play the game which conservative Presidential contender, John McCain accurately described from the inside as "an elaborate influence-peddling scheme in which both parties conspire to stay I office by selling the country to the highest bidder."[50] In the final accounting the blame for this must fall on the apathy of the electorate. Why the apathy? Why is there no outcry at this dire threat to the democratic process? Because, quite simply, a threat to democracy is not considered any threat to freedom, understood in the highly personal and privatized terms we have delineated above.

Conclusion

If the modern history of freedom has taught us one lesson it is the fact that freedom without a robust and active democracy as a constituent element is freedom in serious danger. All the greatest statesmen and fighters for freedom in America have been in no doubt about this. In the revolutionary era Paine made this clear in his warning that "those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom, must, like men, undergo the fatigue of supporting it." Franklin D. Roosevelt, who stood at another great turning point in American history, reiterated the necessity of this interdependence when he declared that: "The only sure bulwark of continuing liberty is a government strong enough to protect the interests of the people, and a people strong enough and well enough informed to maintain its sovereign control over the government."

Today we have a government that has accumulated vast powers in the name of defending the interests of the nation against foreign enemies, but in the process threaten fundamental civil liberties. What we do not have is a people either strong enough or informed enough or even aware enough to recognize, much less take action to defend freedom against the threats that now menace not just the formal, public freedom, especially democracy, that they uncaringly take for granted or disdain, but the very personal, ordinary freedoms that they so dearly cherish.

[50] Cited in Phillips, Wealth and Democracy, p. xvi.

FIGURES AND COLLAGES

Figure 1. Percent Reporting 'Complete' or 'Great Deal' of Freedom by Gender & Ethnicity

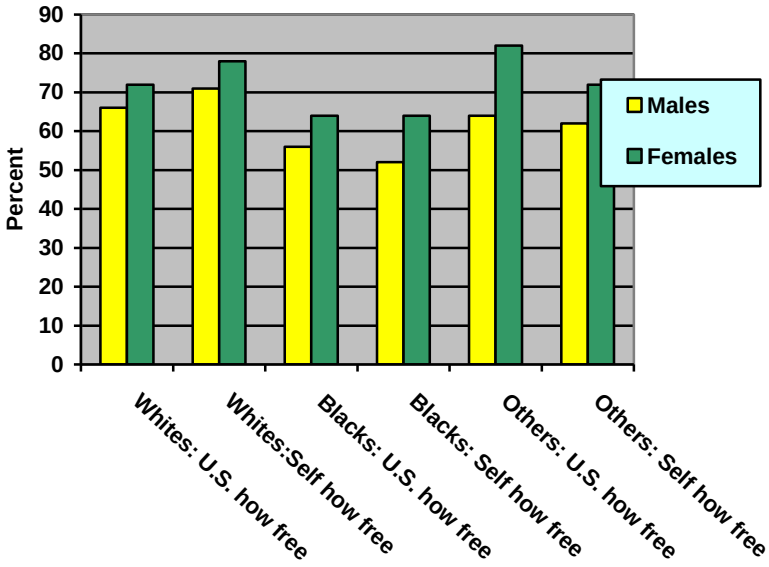


Figure 2:Perception of Change in R's Own Freedom

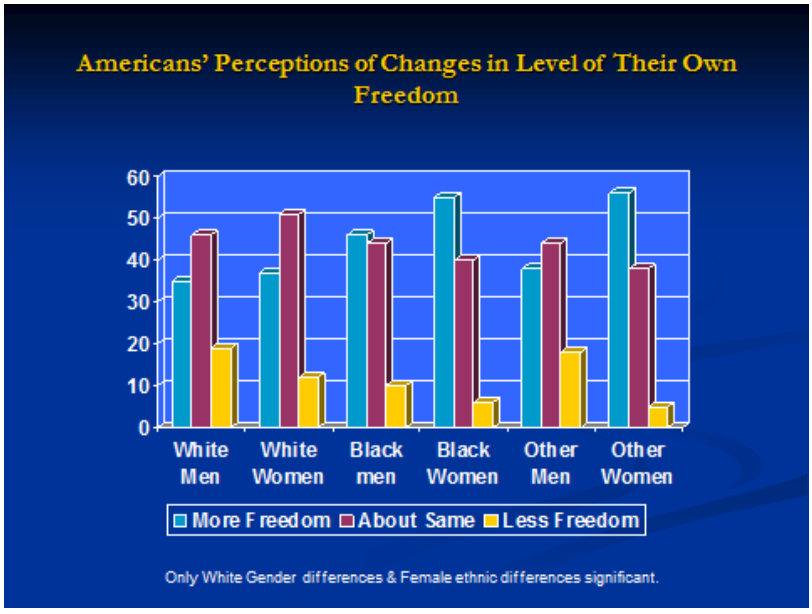


Figure 3. Perceived Change in Amount of Freedom in Nation

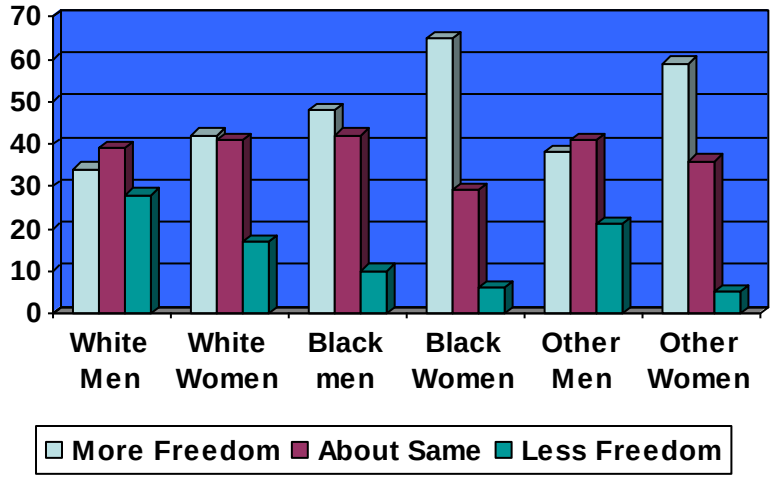


Figure 4. **First Mentioned Notion of Freedom by Gender**

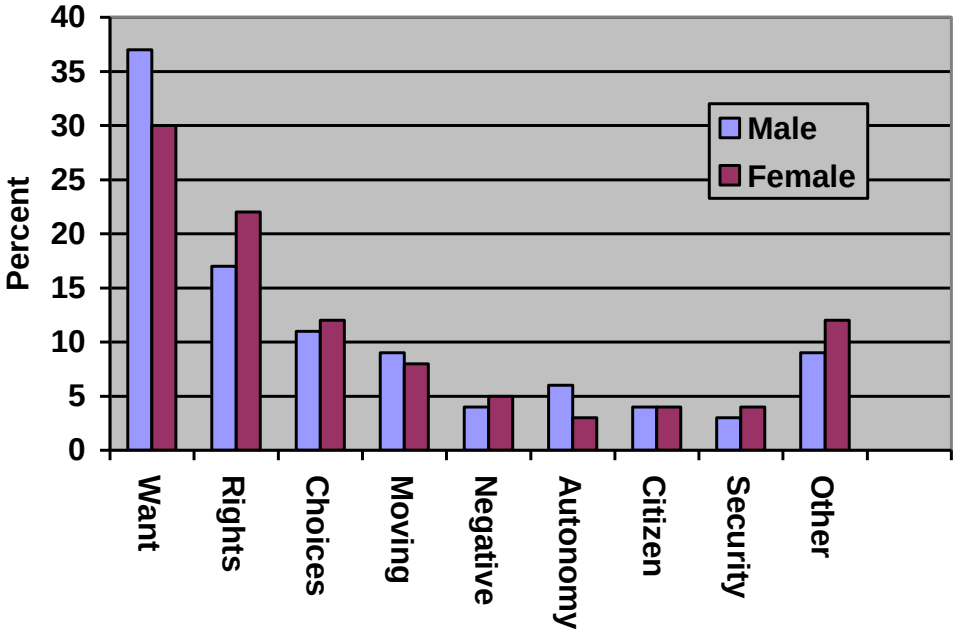
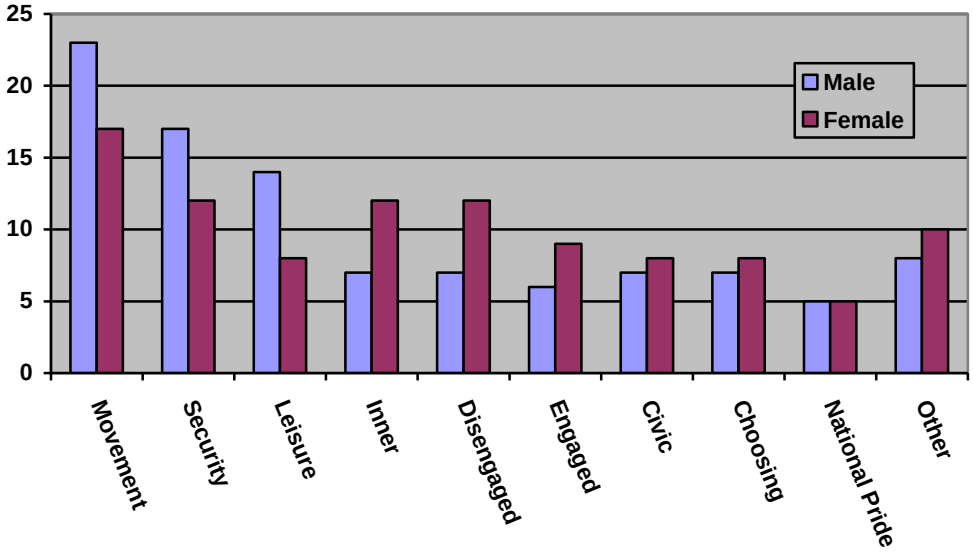


Figure 5 **. Percent first Mentioned Experience of Freedom, by Gender**



1. CLARA'S COLLAGE

2. MICHAEL'S

3. JOE'S

4. ROBERT'S

5. SARA'S COLLAGE

6. RACHEL'S