

Insight into universal nature provides an intellectual delight and sense of freedom that no blows of fate and no evil can destroy. —Alexander von Humboldt

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Vol. 18, Issue #5

A Bi-Monthly Publication Covering Alachua County & Surrounding Areas

July-August 2023

SILVER SPRINGS:

Florida's First Theme Park

by Don Davis

Tourists found Silver Springs before attractions were known as theme parks. They were drawn by the natural beauty of the clear water and jungle-like trip on the Oklawaha River. Steamboats, known as steamers, brought them from Palatka. Helen Pomeroy of Cooperstown, New York, wrote about the trip in a 1904 pamphlet printed by Hart's Daily Lines, owners of the Ocklawaha Navigation Company. As Miss Pomeroy tells the story, she bought her ticket on the "quaint little steamer, *Okeehumkee*," in Palatka. The double-decked steamer left Palatka at 12:30 p.m. and at 4:00 p.m. arrived at "a little creek emptying into the river." As the steamer entered the Oklawaha River, Miss Pomeroy saw it encounter "a thousand and one horseshoe-shaped curves." Trees closed in from both sides, and she said the fallen trees caused the boat to dart from shore to shore. She quoted the captain as saying his boat "has to climb the trees to get around them." Miss Pomeroy and the two ladies traveling with her enjoyed dinner and rose the next morning to a hearty breakfast. Eighty-one stops and one hundred and thirty-five miles from Palatka the ladies found themselves at Silver Springs. There they rented a rowboat. The guide showed them several springs including one named "Ladies Parlor," because a chair and some dishes could be seen at the bottom of the boil. As she looked down through the glass-bottom of

the boat she was in awe of the underwater beauty. She said "the entire bottom is a moving kaleidoscope of the primary colors green, yellow and red, and is beyond description."

Glass-Bottom Boats Were Invented at Silver Springs

Steamboats first came in the 1870s. By 1880, Hullum Jones and Phillip Morrell, were giving tours in homemade glass-bottom boats. According to an early brochure quoted by Wendy Alice King in "Through The Looking Glass of Silver Springs," Morrell built the first glass-bottom boat and Hullum Jones followed. No information on Morrell or his boat was available but Hullum Jones was not hard to find. He is buried a few miles North of Silver Springs in Anthony Cemetery. His three-foot wide dug-out canoe was even easier to find. The glass-bottom canoe is at the Museum of Florida History, in Tallahassee (see photo on page 4).

Liquor Distiller Buys Silver Springs

At the time of Miss Pomeroy's trip, Columbus Ed Carmichael and his father were making liquor, which they sold by mail to avoid dry-county laws. According to Antiquebottles.net, Carmichael

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A scene along the Silver River where the iconic Silver Springs resides.

Independence Day and the Idea of Freedom

by Barb Howe

America is unique among all nations because at the center of its identity as a country is not a race or a religion or an ethnicity but an idea: the idea of freedom.

But freedom is a word whose meaning is ambiguous. Each person can define it however they want, which is what makes it so useful as a symbol to inspire collective action. Each soldier fights for their own image of freedom. At best, the meaning of the word is taken for granted as self-evident; at worst, the concept is just a vacuous buzzword that sounds vaguely reassuring whenever we are asked to do something difficult, scary, or unpleasant in the name of it.

When in the late eighteenth century people like George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison set out to design a government from scratch, they were not aiming to maximize freedom. After all, these were men who owned other human beings as property. Yet the language Jefferson used in the Declaration of Independence is unambiguous: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights . . ." So, either Jefferson wrote these words knowing he was being hugely hypocritical, or he honestly thought slaves were not fully human. Needless to say, most likely it was the latter: the scope of humanity was indeed greatly constrained in his eyes. Neither slaves

nor women were considered fully human enough to be included and thus deserving of the above enumerated rights, so there is a definite limit as to whom the intended subject of that famous sentence refers. It is as if there were an invisible asterisk next to the words to indicate exceptions and exclusions. It was into that category of exceptions and exclusions that the greater part of humanity fell.

This much we know: according to the schemata in their heads at the time, the founding fathers thought wealthy white men were the only ones who were supposed to rule, by natural (that is, God-given) right, because they were the only ones who were seen (by themselves) to be Fully Human. Everyone else was not quite.

It should also come as no surprise that, since it is mostly a list of grievances against the king, the word freedom does not appear in the Declaration of Independence. The word liberty appears only once, in the famous phrase about the inalienable rights all Fully Human beings are endowed with: "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

If you look at the form of government the founders came up with, it's not at all clear that they were seeking freedom for all so much as a transfer of rule from the British Crown to themselves. The famous system of checks and balances can be seen to be either a

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Front, shown without detachable step.



Back, showing electric, vent hookup, and left side.



Front, with finishing drawer open.

Idea, from Cover

check on the power of the executive or a check on the power of the people. In reality, it is both. In the new government, the people* (with all the above exceptions and exclusions) would be represented in the House, which would propose and vote on legislation, but there would also be various layers of checks on that power: there was an electoral college who would do the actual voting for the representatives, a Senate whose members would be appointed rather than popularly elected (until the 17th Amendment changed this in 1913), plus a Presidential veto that could override any potential legislation, and a Supreme Court that could nullify anything that, in their interpretation, was unconstitutional. Instead of being something they championed whole-heartedly, freedom seems to be an idea the founding fathers were quite fearful of. And yet America became known and championed ourselves as "the land of the free."

This uncomfortable contradiction at the heart of America's identity as the land of the free was pointed out in 1852 by a former slave who became one of the country's greatest orators and statesmen, Frederick Douglass. When asked to give a speech on Independence Day he openly opined

"What, to the American slave, is your Fourth of July? [Answer:] It is a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your

sound of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants brass-fronted impudence; your shout of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of the United States, at this very hour."

His words were painfully honest and brutally accurate. More than a decade went by and a bloody civil war had to be fought before the practice of holding humans as property was officially abolished. But even then, no one could abolish the idea of white supremacy that lived on in so many bitter hearts, and still haunts this country today, making a mockery of our foundational idea/ideal of freedom; making us, as Douglass said, hypocrites. Freedom for me, but not for thee . . .

Anna Howard Shaw, an early twentieth-century physician, Methodist minister, and suffragette, also noted those contradictions at the heart of America's love affair with the word freedom. She was fond of reminding everyone that if this country was truly a republic, as it claimed to be, it had darn well better start acting like one. Republics were supposed to mean rule by the people, and in her eyes this meant women, too. "There are two old theories, which are dying today," she claimed in a speech given in 1915 during the first World War. "One of them is dying on the plains of Flanders and the Mountains of Galicia and Austria, and

that is the theory of the divine right of kings. The other is dying here in the state of New York and Massachusetts and New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and that is the divine right of sex. Neither had a foundation in reason, justice, or common sense."

These two social reformers embody one of the best things about America: that we have a proud history of people having the courage to take the idea of freedom seriously, and the gall to take America at its word. They interrogate this word, freedom, to see what the nation means by it, if it is truly living up to the ideal it says it was founded upon. They dare to believe in that ideal and call America out when it comes up short. Mary McLeod

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Becky Tailor

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Freedom, from Page 2

Bethune-Cookman, who founded a college for African American students near my hometown in Daytona Beach, delivered a speech on a popular radio program in 1939. She talked about democracy as a goal yet to be realized but a dream she and many others fervently believed in. She was proud that African Americans fought to defend that dream even as the country repeatedly and painfully excluded them:

“We have always been loyal when the ideals of American democracy have been attacked. We have given our blood in its defense—from Crispus Attucks [the first person killed in the Revolutionary War] on Boston Commons to the battlefields of France [in World War I]. We have fought for the democratic principles of equality under the law, equality of opportunity, equality at the ballot box, for the guarantees of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We have fought to preserve one nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Yes, we have fought for America with all her imperfections, not so much for what she is, but for what we know she can be.”

That is a statement of great faith and commitment to that American idea/ideal of freedom.

Because of these people, the dream of freedom is not just an empty talking point, something to be invoked ad nauseum as a cover for petty meanness and bigotry. They have defined the concept, fleshed it out, and given it substance. Through more than 200 years activists like Sojourner Truth, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Alice Paul, and James Baldwin forced us to undertake the often painful struggle to live up to our ideals because as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said “however much she strays away from it, the goal of America is freedom.”

I started out this essay wanting to really probe into the

definition of the word freedom to see if we could nail it down to something more concrete, but it kept getting too abstract. I was going to talk, for example, about a mid-twentieth century philosopher by the name of Isaiah Berlin who wrote a famous essay about two kinds of freedom: negative freedom and positive freedom.

But as interesting as that distinction may be, ultimately abstract discussions like this feel so remote from actual human experience that I wonder if they do more harm than good. Because the more one tries to pin down the meaning of the word freedom, the emptier the concept seems to become. It’s like trying to nail Jell-o to the wall. Yet this is how philosophers going back millennia have talked about the concept of freedom: in the abstract. Does this contribute to the hollowing out of the word? Have they made the concept so removed from actual human experience that it becomes empty of meaning, making it all the more pliable so that it can be used by demagogues to exploit for their own ulterior motives?


That is a real danger that Alexander Hamilton, one of the authors of the Federalist Papers, warned us about: “a dangerous ambition more often lurks behind the specious mask of zeal for the rights of the people. History will teach us that [this] has been found [to be] a . . . certain road to the introduction of despotism . . . and that of those men who have overturned the liberties of republics, the greatest number have begun their career by paying an obsequious court to the people, commencing [as] demagogues and ending [up as] tyrants.”

We do see a lot of this kind of talk from politicians today, and it happens because the word has been hollowed out of precise meaning and is so open to interpretation. Using the word in this way does nothing to help us make the ideal of freedom a lived reality; it just ensures that the dream of freedom remains abstruse, inchoate, and unattainable, and worse, that we remain hypocrites for talking about it.

Historian Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. wrote in a recent essay that “true freedom, for all Americans, requires that we tell a better story, a true story, about how we arrived here,” and I think the way we do that is the same way we can reclaim the word freedom as something more than an empty talking point. We must tell the stories of those who have lived freedom by challenging America to live up to her ideals. I think we should define freedom not as an abstract theoretical concept but as this everyday real-life struggle that people have undertaken for rights and recognition as Fully Human Beings. This struggle is the embodiment of the idea of freedom itself.

Freedom is not a fixed, static concept that we have either achieved or failed to achieve. It is not something that is achieved once and then we’re done. We cannot sit back and congratulate ourselves on having finally become free in 1776 or 1863 (the date of the Emancipation Proclamation) or 1964 (the date of the Civil Rights Act). Freedom is a way of life. It is a living, organic concept that describes a way of being in the world and evolving through struggle. We can lay claim to this way of life by modeling ourselves upon those great Americans cited above, living and struggling to be recognized as Full Human Beings deserving of rights and respect. When we do, America will be on the road to truly being the land of the free.

Barb Howe is a graduate of the University of Florida in Gainesville and currently a PhD candidate at the University of South Florida in Tampa doing a dissertation on how authoritarian countries use social media.



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