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MILITARY ACADEMY

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The 20th
Sol Feinstone Lecture

on

**THE
MEANING OF FREEDOM**

BY

Dr. Orlando Patterson

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The United States Military Academy is pleased to sponsor an annual lecture series on the Meaning of Freedom. It is significant that this lecture program has been made possible by the generosity of the late Mr. Sol Feinstone, a dedicated American patriot whose commitment to the ideals of the American Revolution led him to devote many years of effort, as well as considerable personal resources, to the collection of important letters, manuscripts, and books dealing with our heritage of freedom. His donation of these items to libraries and educational institutions ensures that the message which they proclaim will be preserved and transmitted to future generations of Americans.

Mr. Feinstone's abiding faith in a brotherhood of free nations of men has found further expression in several lecture series which he has endowed in order to permit prominent Americans to interpret the Meaning of Freedom.

The U.S. Corps of Cadets and the staff and faculty of the Military Academy are pleased to recognize the generosity and loyalty of this great American for providing a living endowment in the defense of freedom.

THE MEANING OF FREEDOM

Dr. Orlando Patterson

I think you will all agree that freedom stands as the most important, the most cherished value in America today, and in the West generally. It is at the core of our civil religion, as well as our sacred religion. We like to interpret our history, and the history of the West as the emergence of freedom, the thing our ancestors fought for, the one thing we would all die for. All Americans share this value. The one thing we can still agree on in these factious, particularistic times, whatever our race or creed, or ism, is that nothing is more desirable than to be free. Freedom is the catchword of every politician; the secular gospel of our economic, "free enterprise" system, and the foundation of all our cultural activities. It is also the central value of Christianity: being redeemed, being freed by, and in, Christ, is the ultimate goal of all Christians.

Today we are witnessing an extraordinary diffusion of this ideal throughout the world. The extraordinary developments in Eastern Europe are only the latest, and most dramatic, phase of the commitment of peoples all over the world to the ideal of freedom. Since the second World War, scores of countries all over the Third World and the Far East have either embraced the value and practiced it, or at least paid lip service to it.

The time is therefore ripe to ask certain basic questions about this value we cherish so much. One kind of question, the one most commonly asked, especially by philosophers and other thoughtful people, is quite simply, what is it? This, however, is not the question I wish to ask this evening. I should briefly state, however, that there are two ways of going about answering this question: one can respond prescriptively, that is, one can state what freedom should be, or logically ought to be, given certain premises. This is not the way I go about answering this question. My

approach is, rather, to observe the central tendencies over time in common usage and common practice denoted and connoted by freedom.

What I have found is that freedom is a tripartite value, a cultural chord made up of three sub-values. What holds the triad together is the idea of power. There is no understanding of freedom without an understanding of power. The first and most fundamental note of freedom is the value we place on not being under the power of another, not being restrained in that which we want to do. The second note of freedom is the positive desire to exercise power, to control first and foremost ourselves, and also to exercise power over others. The third note of freedom concerns the sharing of power, the collective power that must inevitably exist if there is to be ordered community.

What interests me, however, is not so much the nature of freedom, but several questions rarely asked about this value. These are: first, why did freedom become a valued ideal in the first place? Second, why did it emerge as the preeminent value, the overarching ideal in the West? And third, why did this happen only in the West?

Scholars rarely ask these questions, largely because it is assumed that a love of freedom is something innate, something for which we naturally strive. This, however, is simply not the case. Were it so we would have found freedom, at least sporadically, celebrated as an ideal all over the world. Yet, until the middle of the twentieth century, freedom has remained an exclusively Western ideal. The rest of the world now celebrates it, either because they have learned to love it from the West, such as India, or because they have been forced by a Western nation to love it at gun point, as was the case with Japan.

So first, then, how and why was freedom invented, or as we say in sociology, what occasioned its social construction as a shared value? My answer, in a nutshell, is that freedom emerged in antithesis to slavery. Without slavery there would have been no discovery of freedom as value. Before slavery, people found no need to cherish this value.

Instead, they cherished other things, things which, for all we know, may well have been more valuable than freedom: the harmony of heaven and earth, serving one's lineage or clan, glory of warfare, the worship of God, the pursuit of pleasure, or what have you.

Only with the introduction of this most perverse form of human domination did the need for the idea of freedom as something to be cherished emerge. Slavery does three things that are unique. First, it gives one person absolute powers of life and death over another. Second, it naturally alienates the slave. The slave is an uprooted person, a deracinated person, one taken from his native land and re-inserted in the society of his master where he has no legitimate social existence, and becomes instead a living surrogate of his master's will. The slave is, socially, a non-person. Finally, the slave is the most utterly degraded of persons. In many cultures the slave is considered to be a socially dead person.

This perverse condition is immediately generative of several things. First and foremost, it creates in the slave the desperate desire for something no one previously wanted: the desire simply to be removed from the power of another, regardless of the consequences. It is in this desire that the note of the chord we call personal or negative freedom is born. Slavery, however, does a second thing that is utterly unique: it gives the master absolute freedom over another person. The idea of being free in the selfish exercise of one's will over another only begins with slavery. This perverse institution, however, generates a third unique social creation: the status of the native as a free person. Before slaves are brought into a community, it makes no sense to think of one's tribe as a tribe of freedom. Only with the intrusion of slaves, the domestic enemy, the outsider within the community, is the contradistinctive status created of the native as a freeman. Hence the primitive association of freedom with kinship, belonging, solidarity with the in-group.

No slavery was a universal institution, so the question must immediately be asked, why was freedom not generated everywhere? Well, you see, for a value to be created it is not enough that generative conditions exist. All that does is to suggest the idea. For the idea to be institutionalized, to become a value shared by all as something to be cherished by all, much more is required. Indeed, the very fact that freedom was generated by so contemptible an institution would condemn it, if only by association, to a lowly status.

So the question remains: how and why did a value with so horrible a pedigree become constructed as a shared value, a preeminent value? Well, three developments were necessary for this to happen: one is the existence of a large proportion of slaves desiring their freedom; the second is that slavery and slaves must have become extremely important for the economic and social life of the community, and especially for the elite, so important that slaves had to be motivated by manumission on a large scale; and third, the kind of society had to be one in which the freed person could find some social and economic space.

Now we know, almost to the decade, the time and place when just this configuration of social space first existed. That was in ancient Greece, especially Athens starting about the beginning of the sixth century. Greek civilization rose with, and was made possible by, the rise of large-scale slavery. Slaves played a decisive role in the urban and mining economy that emerged over the course of the sixth and fifth century. But slaves and slavery did not simply make Greece and Greek freedom possible. It culturally constituted the value. I and others have tried to show how, first Greek women; then later foreign male slaves constructed the value of personal freedom. It had also been shown that Greek democracy emerged in direct relation to the rise of the large slave population. Democracy was first and foremost an emerging bond of solidarity between slave masters and native Greek freemen, in contradistinction with alien slaves and excluded Greek women. Finally, we find with the rise of Greeks to hegemony, what many today find

to be the most problematic note of the chord of freedom: the idea of freedom as power over others, both within the state and over other states. The Greeks had no moral qualms with this notion. Indeed, neither did any Western people until right down to the end of the eighteenth century.

It was in Greece, too, that we find the second major development in the history of freedom. Starting mainly in the fourth century B.C. the idea emerged that what the common people conceived of as freedom, what common usage denoted and connoted as freedom, was really not the real and true thing. The philosophers now entered the discourse on freedom, and what they immediately proposed was that the only real and true freedom was to be found within the person. So emerged the important distinction between inner and outer freedom. It is important to note, however, that from the start outer freedom was used as a direct metaphor for inner freedom. Thus, in Plato, the material desires and appetites were seen as a kind of inner slave, while reason was interpreted as a kind of slave master. A person is only truly free when reason exercises power over the slave appetites, which was the direct counterpart to the outer elite conception of freedom as power over others.

But Plato didn't have it all his way, even on the inner terrain. Hence we find in the philosophy of cynicism a similar introjection of the idea of slavery and freedom, only with Diogenes true freedom becomes the inner escape of the emotions and desires from the slave-like power of rational discipline and conventions.

After the Greeks there were two further great moments in the history of the institutionalization of freedom. One was the rise of Rome; the other the rise of Christianity.

The most important thing to note about Rome is that it was the greatest slave system that has ever existed, far greater in scope than anything found in the U.S. Both the rural economy of Rome and its Roman economy and society were dominated by slaves and freedmen. So were the lower ranks of the imperial bureaucracy. What is more, by the

time of Christ, when Rome was at its peak of glory, the Roman population had become completely dominated by persons who were either slaves, freedmen or the descendants of either.

For these people freedom, simply negative personal freedom, was the most important value. They were not ashamed of their freemen status; indeed, they proudly celebrated the occasion of their manumission as their most important experience on their tombstones.

Complementing this popular triumph of the idea of personal freedom as supreme value was the development of the idea of freedom as supreme power. Again, this idea created no problems for the Romans: the more power a man had, the more honor, glory and virtue he had, and the more freedom. In this scheme of things the most free person was the most powerful, the emperor himself. Hence emerged a strong complementarity between the notion of freedom as power and freedom as immunity from control, a complementarity expressed in the mutual support of emperor and freedmen masses.

It was within this hothouse of large-scale slavery and the large-scale development of freedom that the religion that was to dominate and fashion the mind and soul of the West emerged: Christianity. Jesus was born in 4 or 3 B.C. in the periphery of the Roman empire. The movement he initiated had relatively little to say about freedom. Instead he was concerned with preparing people for the coming Kingdom of God. His movement was apocalyptic and eschatological.

Things were to change dramatically in the urban centers of the empire, especially Corinth and Rome. Here the main supporters of the new creed were freedmen and it was the special achievement of Paul to transform the theology of the young religion by making the proclaimer the proclaimed and by reinterpreting his creed as a religion of freedom, the only religion of freedom that the world has known. He did this by using the outer expression of slavery into freedom as the direct metaphoric source of the spiritual ideal of mankind. Sin became a form of spiritual slavery; and salvation was

interpreted as redemption, which literally means the buying out of slavery into freedom by a savior. Jesus death on the cross was that slavish act.

Hence with the triumph of Christianity we find the conquest of the very consciousness and soul of the West by a creed which made freedom its most sacred ideal.

Thus both in the outer and inner domains of existence freedom had become the core value, the preeminent ideal of the West.

Of course, how it was to be interpreted, which note of the chord was to achieve preeminence remained a source of conflict both in the inner and outer realm. But whatever note of the chord dominated, the fact remains that note as a note of freedom, always requiring, however agonistically, the other two notes of this most defining of chords in the culture of the West.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER . . .

Dr. Orlando Patterson, Professor of Sociology at Harvard University, was born in Jamaica. He received his early education there and later earned a BS in economics from London University and a PH.D. in Sociology from the London School of Economics. Professor Patterson has served faculty appointments at the London School of Economics and at his alma mater, the University of the West Indies. In 1969 he was a visiting professor at Harvard and was appointed the following year as Professor in Sociology.

During the 60's and 70's Professor Patterson pursued a parallel career as a novelist and critic. He published three novels, a number of anthologized short stories, and numerous critical essays. He also served as special advisor to Prime Minister Michael Manly of Jamaica between 1972 and 1980 and worked extensively for the government of Jamaica on the problems of underdevelopment. His dissertation, the Sociology of Slavery, Jamaica 1655 - 1838, explored the problem of domination, resistance, and cultural change among the slaves of Jamaica.

His most recent book Freedom won the 1991 National Book Award for nonfiction. In it, he explores how and why freedom came to be the central value of Western civilization, as he puts it, the germ of its genius in all of its grandeur. But he warns "freedom" is also the root of Western greed, alienation, and social injustice. These may be the very qualities that developing democracies today are most likely to imitate.

PAST FEINSTONE LECTURES

- 1971 - General Harold K. Johnson
- 1975 - Rear Admiral Jeremiah A. Denton, Jr.
- 1976 - Herman Wouk
- 1977 - Sidney Hook
- 1978 - Vernon E. Jordan, Jr.
- 1979 - Barbara W. Tuchman
- 1980 - Isaac Bashevis Singer
- 1981 - Carl Sagan
- 1982 - George F. Will
- 1983 - Hanna H. Gray
- 1984 - Milton Friedman
- 1985 - Daniel Patrick Moynihan
- 1986 - Tom Wolfe
- 1987 - Elie Wiesel
- 1988 - A. Bartlett Giamatti
- 1989 - Dr. Richard Selzer
- 1990 - Dr. John Stoessinger
- 1991 - Fred Friendly



Dr. Sol Feinstone, (1888 - 1980), Founder and First Director of the David Library of the American Revolution, Washington Crossing, Pennsylvania, presenting to Major General J.B. Lampert, Superintendent, USMA, a gift of an original George Washington Letter (24 February 1965).

SOL FEINSTONE'S CREDO

DEDICATED TO

The Judeo-Christian commitment of self-sacrifice for peace on earth, and the brotherhood of free nations of free men;

The Spirit of '76, a struggle of free men to remain free;

The immigrants who came after the revolution and helped build our country in freedom;

The underprivileged of all races who, by uplifting themselves, will raise all mankind to a higher humanity.

MY DEFINITION OF FREEDOM

In the beginning there was the void of sameness; the spark of life made everything different.

The stamp of sameness is the stamp of death.

Freedom to me means a social order based on individual freedom to live differently and to dream differently. I dream of a Brotherhood of Free Nations of Free Men.

SOL FEINSTONE



