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The Fifth
Sol Feinstone Lecture

**THE
MEANING OF FREEDOM**

by
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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 Mr. Sol Feinstone, a dedicated American patriot whose commitment to the ideals of the American Revolution has 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 will insure 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 free 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*

General Goodpaster, Cadets of the U.S. Military Academy,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

As I listened to General Goodpaster introduce me, I was reminded of the story that is told about two elderly spinsters who lived in a small town. They had the daily habit of going, early in the morning, to the corner store to pick up the county newspaper and return to one or the other's kitchen; and, over a cup of coffee, they would read, enjoy, embellish upon, stretch, and fantasize about the local gossip column. One morning one of the spinsters, being a bit indisposed, was unable to go. Her friend went in her stead and rushed back to her bedside and said, "Honey, you ought to see what the gossip column says this morning. It says that you, at 75 years old, after all of these years as a single woman, have eloped with a young, handsome, wealthy, debonair barrister, and that you are now honeymooning on the French Riviera."

The spinster reared slightly from her bed and said, "You know, that has always been my dream. That has always been my hope. That has always been my greatest aspiration. But, you know as well as I do that what is in that gossip column just ain't the truth." Then she paused and said, "But I sure thank God for the rumor."

So, as I listen to you, General Goodpaster, I want to thank you for the rumor, and I want to give you my express permission to tell it whenever you want to tell it.

It is a great pleasure and a great privilege to have been asked to come to West Point to give the annual Sol Feinstone Lecture. I appreciate this privilege, and I thank you very much. It is largely attributable to four handsome cadets who came to my office in New York, with a letter from General Goodpaster, and imposed upon me, almost in silence and nonviolently threatened me. And consequently here I am. As I said earlier, I would like to make a deal with them, all four of them, to go with me to the University of Pennsylvania to see my eighteen-year-old daughter and her three roommates. That is not a bad bargain.

I should confess in this forum that I have never served in the armed forces, and I'm 42 years old. The little exposure that I had to the military was two years in ROTC, 1953-1955; I had

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the unique distinction at DePauw University of being the only student in its history to flunk ROTC. So my presence here is suggestive of what freedom really means.

In 1776 Americans rose in armed revolt against the British Crown, basing their actions upon the philosophical premise that "All men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

The leaders of that revolt were largely drawn from the elite of colonial society. For many of them, the "inalienable rights" inherent in all men were rights they themselves denied to black people whom they owned as chattel, whose lives and labor they commanded.

But if the men who gathered to declare their independence from English rule were blind to the hypocrisy of their position, those whom they held in bondage were not. Two years before the Virginia slaveowner, Thomas Jefferson, enshrined the concept of "inalienable rights," a group of black people petitioned the Massachusetts General Assembly for their freedom, declaring:

We have in common with all other men a natural right to our freedoms without being deprived of them, as we are a freeborn people and have never forfeited this blessing by any compact or agreement whatever.

Thus, masters and slaves agreed on the common concept of man's natural right to freedom, and the history of our nation has largely been the record of the fight to reconcile the ideals of freedom with the reality of its denial to significant segments of the population. Our first century was characterized by the struggle to extend the most elementary rights to all Americans, and it took a long and bloody Civil War to do it. Our second century was marked by the struggle to break the bonds of a narrow interpretation of the meaning of those God-given "inalienable rights" in order to extend to larger and larger portions of the population the rights and privileges enjoyed by the few.

This effort may be seen as an illustration of Lincoln's dictum that the "legitimate object of government is to do for a community of people whatever they need to have done but cannot do at all or cannot do so well for themselves in their separate and individual capacities."

Governmental power is thus seen as an intervening force to help right the balance between the powerful and the powerless: But government has never been neutral; indeed, it has often been

the instrument to deny rights to people without the wealth, status, and education that characterize the powerful. It was state power that made formal freedom for blacks relatively meaningless, and it was federal power that enshrined “separate but equal” as the law of the land, that encouraged rapacious “robber barons” and discouraged social and economic equality for blacks and for working people of all races.

With the coming of the New Deal and World War Two we saw more active federal action on behalf of the dispossessed and a new awareness of the need to widen basic human rights. The shared agonies of the Depression, the hardships, sacrifices and democratic rhetoric of the war experience, and the large-scale economic rearrangements caused by both events, helped to open our society to the winds of change.

For black people, the mass migration from southern agriculture to northern urban industry, the growth of the union movement, the New Deal reforms, and the experience of fighting for democracy in a segregated army resulted in a new insistence that rights are not of whiteness, and the Constitutional guarantees enjoyed by white people must be extended to the black minority.

The civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s fought for those rights, but even while demonstrating against segregated buses, segregated drinking fountains, and segregated schools, there was a basic awareness that beyond the basic rights of equality before the law, was the need for equality of opportunity in every sphere of human life. It is often forgotten that the slogan of the 1963 March on Washington was for “Jobs and Freedom,” and not for an otherwise empty “Freedom” alone.

Without access to jobs, economic security, quality education, and other means of exercising political rights, our traditional rights would wither and die. And because traditional “rights” are empty without the ability to use them, the struggle to secure what may be called “social rights” has become the focus of our attention. Indeed, from the Declaration of Independence’s insistence that “all men are created equal” comes the natural conclusion that those elements basic to securing equality of opportunity are rights as fundamental as those enshrined in the Bill of Rights.

It is a measure of the vision of the architects of the New Frontier-Great Society era that much of their energies were devoted to extending economic and social rights to those denied them. This Second Reconstruction combined executive orders, judicial de-

cisions and Congressional actions to dismantle some of the barriers to equality, and to confer upon the poor and the powerless some small measure of economic security.

The Second Reconstruction swept away laws and practices that denied civil rights to blacks and other minorities, extended the right to vote, enabled access to schools and housing to those denied them, and provided for federal programs of health, housing, education, and economic security designed to assist groups disadvantaged in those areas. Through the "war on poverty," it stimulated organization of the poor and increased their access to the judicial system and to public policy-making, in addition to concrete programs to improve their neighborhoods.

This was a significant era in our national history, one that will be seen as effecting a revolution in the status of minority groups. It enabled the South to finally rejoin the Union. And by stressing the economic prerequisites for a more equal society it helped win greater acceptance for the concept of social rights, and for their extension to all citizens.

If history will judge those Kennedy-Johnson years favorably, it must be admitted that our own day does not. Today the period of the '60s is widely regarded as a time of unwise social experiments, unfair advantages to minorities, and undue governmental interference in the economy and in private decisions.

Such a view is mean-spirited and wrong. It is the natural response of many forced to share their monopoly on rights and privileges. It elevates the rights to oppress and to discriminate above the right to equality.

What concerns me most is not the attack on the reform of the 1960s by last-ditch segregationists and the radical right. Such a last gasp of venom is expected from those unwilling to admit black people's right to vote and to work.

What distresses me is the failure of moderates and liberals to take pride in the accomplishments of reforms they helped institute and supported. There is a fatal flaw of compromise and timidity in conventional liberalism that today takes the form of retreat from the uncompleted battle for equality and in the overly defensive reaction to unfounded criticisms of the reforms of the '60s.

It cannot be said too often—the Second Reconstruction was a success. Whatever the failings of this or that specific program, the overall thrust to extend equality, increase community initiatives,

focus attention on the real problems of our society, and mobilize national efforts to solve those problems constitutes one of the few periods of our national history of which we can be proud.

The social programs of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations did not bring about full racial equality, they did not end poverty, they did not build a new Jerusalem. No eight-year-long effort can be expected to overcome centuries of poverty, neglect and discrimination. No social thrust as underfunded as were the programs of the '60s, and so bitterly opposed by so large a segment of the population, could possibly achieve all its goals. And like other periods of social reform-Wilson's New Freedom and Roosevelt's New Deal-the Second Reconstruction ended on the battlefields of a far-off war, untimely killed before it could achieve its ends.

For black people, the era of the '60s was a period of unprecedented advances. The numbers of the black poor were reduced from over half the black population in 1960 to a third in 1969. Median black income, half that for whites in 1960, rose to over 60 percent of white income by the end of the decade. Black college attendance doubled. Black gains in housing, political participation, job distribution, and other indicators all showed startling improvements.

So black people are not inclined to be apologetic about the experiences of the '60s. We are not inclined to be overly critical of the Kennedy-Johnson social programs although they were too few and too underfunded to fully solve the problems they tackled.

But the changes of the '60s did not bring equality to black people. They did remove the restrictions imposed by race on crucial civil rights. They did provide the impetus of development that made it possible for that portion of the black community that had skills and education to win a measure of economic progress. And they provided some measure of assistance to the majority of blacks chained in the prisons of poverty.

It is all too often conveniently forgotten that the real beneficiaries of the social reforms of the '60s were white people. Even in those programs popularly believed to be "black," the majority of participants were white. The so-called "black" war on poverty became a major instrument for reducing white poverty faster and in greater numbers than black poverty.

It is a truism that some poor whites raised to middle class status by the New Deal wound up cursing "That Man in The White House"

for his liberalism. So too, in the '60s, we saw the weird phenomenon of white people trained by manpower programs and placed in well-paying jobs, who bought their homes with federal loans and guarantees, whose children went to college on federally-financed scholarships and grants, and whose entire well-being was made possible by the programs of the Kennedy-Johnson era, now castigating those same programs as being for black people.

To the extent that blacks benefited in disproportionate numbers from those programs it is because blacks were disproportionately poor. But by sheer weight of numbers, those programs were white programs, just as today the so-called "black" welfare system has more whites than blacks on its rolls.

At the end of the '60s a great gap between whites and blacks remained, a gap that has grown wider with each passing year. The reason for that gap is not hard to find. Without positive intervention on behalf of the poor and the powerless, the wealthy and the powerful will increase their share of both wealth and power.

This has been proved through recent experience. The abdication of federal responsibilities has been followed by intolerably high levels of unemployment, accelerated urban decay, and increased black disadvantage. Today, every fourth black worker is unemployed, two out of three black young people cannot find jobs, the numbers of the black poor are increasing, and a people who, just a few short years ago, were glibly characterized as "middle class" are once again struggling simply to survive.

It's not enough just to say "we won't discriminate any more." Shortly before he died, Lyndon Johnson said: "To be black in a white society is not to stand on level and equal ground. While the races may stand side by side, whites stand on history's mountain and blacks stand in history's hollow. Until we overcome unequal history, we cannot overcome unequal opportunity."

And Johnson concluded by saying, "It's time we get down to the business of trying to stand black and white on level ground. In specific areas we must set new goals, new objectives and new standards."

It is indeed time our society stopped the rear-guard warfare against affirmative action programs that compensate for an unequal past. It is time our society scrapped the outmoded myths of limited government and neutral market forces and replaced them with policies based on the new realities of the complex economy we live in today. And it is time. long overdue. for our society to

build upon the pioneering reforms of the past forty years to finally build a nation of political, social and economic justice for all.

A prerequisite for such an effort is the formulation of an extended concept of rights, a concept that includes the traditional rights embedded in the Constitution but goes beyond them to assure economic and social rights so long withheld from those excluded from privilege based on wealth, class and race.

Thus, I suggest the necessity for a New Bill of Rights that extends traditional American freedoms to include the natural rights that truly enable groups and individuals to enjoy "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

The New Bill of Rights for America's third century would include :

: ***The Right to Education.*** Preparing all children for fuller, freer lives ;

: ***The Right to Economic Security.*** Which includes the right to a decent job at a decent wage for all and an income maintenance program that replaces the welfare system;

: ***The Right to Health.*** And the need for a national health policy that ensures decent health care for all;

: ***The Right to Family Stability.*** Enabling families to survive the relentless pressures of poverty and discrimination;

: ***The Right to Representation.*** Enabling minorities to achieve full participation in the political process; and

: ***The Right to Safe Communities.*** So that no neighborhood need live in fear of crime and violence.

And implicit in these rights is the ***right of our cities to survive***, to prosper, and to flourish as the centers of our economy and of our civilization, thus fulfilling their historic role in human history.

I suggest these new rights not as vague formulations, unattainable goals toward which to strive, but as essential elements of true democracy to be enjoyed--as rights--by all of our citizens. There is no reason why this, the world's richest nation, cannot implement them within a short, realistic time frame. There is no reason why we cannot have zero-level involuntary unemployment, and not the five percent level that's supposed to be "full employment," a level, incidentally, that means 10-12 percent black joblessness. There's no reason we can't have an income maintenance program built into a reformed tax structure, health and educational systems

that deliver quality service to all, or a Domestic Marshall Plan that restores urban viability.

Despite the warnings against too much government, the federal share of the gross national product is about what it has always been since the 1950s. Despite alarmist warnings about higher national debt, it is lower in proportion to GNP than in the past. Despite the warnings against inflation, there is plenty of slack in the economy, and we suffer not from classic inflation but from under-production and from wasted resources.

There is a view of federal responsibilities I have called "The New Minimalism." It is a view that insists on less government, less social programs, and-ultimately-fewer rights and freedoms for those on the bottom half of our social ladder. It is a view that is incompatible with a desire to extend and reinforce social rights, for it sees as exorbitant spending programs what are really basic investments in our nation's future, investments in America's third century.

We of the Urban League Movement have experience with the kinds of investment in human resources that pay off, and pay off well. For the past nine years, our Labor Education Advancement Program has been recruiting and training young people for jobs in the construction trades. Some of these young people were on welfare. Some of them were on street corners and some of them, yes, some of them were keeping body and soul together in hustling and in crime. Many were high school dropouts. Most were on the outermost margins of our society, part of the growing pool of invisible black people ignored by the *statistics-keepers*.

Over the nine years of LEAP's life, the government has invested \$22 million in the Program. Last year alone, LEAP's 16,000 placements paid \$31 million in taxes---or nine million more than Washington's total investment over nine years. Over the whole nine years, LEAP's placements earned a cumulative \$380 million and their total taxes have come to \$90 million. That means for every dollar the government put into LEAP, it got four back.

So social programs, federal spending, and a new Bill of Rights are perfectly compatible with sound resource management and practical human investment policies. The social devastation we see around us today, the blasted hopes and embittered dreams of so many millions of our people, the hunger and *homelessness* and bleakness that characterize so many of our cities, must inspire us to reject the prophets of the new minimalism, to restore the social

concern and activism of the Second Reconstruction, and to devote our energies to securing new human rights in our third century.

A hundred years ago, on the occasion of the Centennial, Thomas Huxley said:

As population thickens in your great cities and the pressure of want is felt, the gaunt **spectre** of pauperism will stalk among you Truly America has a great future before her: Great in toil, in care, and in responsibility; great in true glory if she be guided in wisdom and righteousness ; great in shame if she fail.

History should record that we strove to take our country on the high road of care and responsibility, that our energies, accomplishments, and even our mistakes, were all informed by the desire to capture for America the greatness that is based on decent and righteous behavior.

“The Meaning of Freedom” is the subject of this lecture. And I have set forth my own thesis here tonight. But, as I think about freedom and America, and as I think about America, as one born black in it and in the South and under systems that defy any standards of humanity, I am reminded, in this institution, of an experience with one of its graduates and a classmate of General Goodpaster’s, Michael Davison.

In 1972, the summer thereof, for the Defense Department I spent some time visiting U. S. Army Europe, in Germany, dealing with some of the problems of black soldiers there. And in an exit interview on the problems of racism in the armed forces and in U. S. Army Europe with General Davison, after we had gone through all the analyses and reached certain conclusions, and even debated some points, we got on to other things; we got on to the subject of freedom. And I remember very vividly Michael Davison reaching to the back of his desk and pulling out a piece of fence, and he said to me, “Grip this fence.”

And I gripped the fence. And as I held it tighter, the sharpness of the wire began to cut into my flesh. And I said, “Mike, where does this come from?”

And he said, “It was cut out of the Berlin Wall.” And he said to me, and I shall never forget it, “That is the enemy.”

The summer of ‘76 I visited the Union of South Africa. For ten days I spoke to Black South Africans, white South Africans, South Africans in Pretoria, South Africans in the Province **Sector**;

and experienced and saw, first hand, repression and inhumanity in a police state from the right at its very worst. And after ten days in that atmosphere, I flew back to America.

And for the first time in all of my landings at Kennedy, I was glad to see the Statue of Liberty, which doesn't mean much to black people. If you remember, the words inscribed on the Statue of Liberty say, "Give me your tired and give me your poor." Those words on the Statue of Liberty were not written for me and my people because we did not come to America by way of Ellis Island. We did not come freely to the new land seeking freedom. We came in bondage to remain in bondage. But after experiencing repression on the right and a few days in South Africa, America, even the Statue of Liberty, which is not there for us, was a welcome sight.

In July of this year, I was in the Soviet Union for a week, attending a conference with Americans and Soviets discussing unilateral and bilateral economic cooperation, problems of the Middle East and Africa, and the problems of weapons between the two giant powers. And experiencing there and seeing repression on the left, seeing totalitarianism, caused me when I landed in New York, the day of the blackout, driving in from Kennedy Airport, to say to myself, "Despite all the problems black people have in America, I'd rather be in America with the lights out than in the Soviet Union with the lights on."

And in October I had the experience of crossing from West Berlin into East Berlin—from freedom into oppression—and then coming back to West Berlin. And somehow, despite all of the problems that I complain about in America from day to day, coming back across the Berlin Wall I somehow understood the true meaning of freedom.

And as a black American, it is a privilege to stand in this institution and say to you that you are the protectors of that freedom, and to say to you, as an old black lady said to a bunch of young blacks demonstrating in Atlanta—as they marched **downtown**—she couldn't march, she couldn't join in, she could only cheer; and she stood there and she said, "March on, children, march on." And I'm proud as a black American to be able to say to you cadets, "For the meaning of freedom, march on, march on."

Thank you very much.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER . .

Before he became President of the National Urban League, Mr. Jordan was its director for six years. The National Urban League, Incorporated, which has 109 affiliates, four regional offices, a Washington bureau, and the New York headquarters, works tirelessly for the advancement of the minority community.

He was born in Atlanta, Georgia, August 15, 1935. He received his B.A. from De Pauw University in 1957, his J.D. from Harvard University Law School in 1960, and was a Fellow in the Institute of Politics, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University in 1969.

Before joining the National Urban League, he was Executive Director of the United Negro College Fund; Director of the Voter Education Project, Southern Regional Council; Attorney General, U. S. Office of Economic Opportunity; Georgia Field Director, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; and he had private legal practices in Georgia and Arkansas. In addition, he has held federal appointments on numerous boards and commissions.

Over 600 newspapers publish his column, "To be Equal," and he has written on national issues extensively for numerous publications. His radio commentaries are broadcast three times a week on the Westinghouse Broadcasting Network.

Mr. Jordan has received several awards in recognition of his accomplishments, including the Alexis de Tocqueville Award of the United Way, which was a special tribute to his leadership in voluntarism. In addition he holds honorary degrees from several colleges and universities, including Benedict College, Brandeis, Duke, Hamilton College, Michigan State, Morehouse, New York University, Notre Dame, Tuskegee Institute, and Yale.

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