

“Freeing yourself was one thing, claiming ownership of that freed self was another.”

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*



I am often asked my opinion on challenging topics. To be quite honest, I generally do not answer when asked. Everyone deserves to hear their own inner voice and when we are constantly challenged, two options emerge. Either we allow our mind to follow others, or we process appropriately. It is important for me to keep a balanced perspective and be open to all views. It is also important for me to hear other people and understand why they feel the way they do and how they came to a certain understanding on a particular topic. However, I am ever mindful that our views are shaped by her ideology- which comes from various sources.

As HUMAN BEINGS we are defined by
Whether we have religious beliefs or not,
Whether we have economic equity or not,
Whether we have educational access or not,
Where we come from rural or urban settings,
Whether we encounter individuals from other
geographic locations in the world or not,
Whether we are exposed to an event that changed
our lives,
Family Influence,
Friendships
It's all relative.

When I was asked to write this opinion piece on the concept of freedom, I was caught off guard. Admittedly I was overjoyed because no one has ever asked this question- at least of me. I taught political science for many years at St Petersburg College and enjoyed challenging students on the concept of "freedom". Exploring freedom from the foundation of our country to who freedom was extended to - to why it matters. I honor many scholars because of their perspective on the concept of freedom and am grateful for the opportunity to share my real opinion for the first time.

I was asked to discuss freedom in the context of Juneteenth. On June 19, 1865, federal troops informed enslaved persons in Texas that they were free, nearly two and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed all slaves.



[National Archives Safeguards Original 'Juneteenth' General Order | National Archives](#)

This day has come to be known as Juneteenth, a combination of June and nineteenth. It is also called Freedom Day or Emancipation Day, and it is the oldest known celebration commemorating the end of slavery in the United States. The official handwritten record of General Order No. 3, is preserved at the National Archives Building in Washington, DC.

www.archives.gov

https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/american_originals_iv/sections/preliminary_emancipation_proclamation.html

When you evaluate history, it is important to acknowledge the impact on prosperity. Freedom continues to challenge our moral compass as humans despite our many global efforts to embrace it for all. I asked my family what their thoughts were before I began to evaluate my own views. My family shared the following definitions: power, opportunity, freedom to be unexceptional, underwhelming, unburdened and unguarded, to be unchecked, have a life without penalty, fear, and stress of all the ramifications for simple normalcy. Freedom is not "being" the example, the one, representative of the whole. The ability to make a mistake without life changing possibilities that impacts generations. Freedom is being seen as a

fact and not as a request. Freedom is not made for people it's made for societies. It's made for structures.

~Descendents of Albert and Maeola Wilson

Ironically, my family shares similar views as some of our iconic scholars:

Abraham Lincoln

President Lincoln's moral opposition to slavery is well documented in his 1854 Peoria Speech, which outlined but does not address what freedom means for enslaved persons after their emancipation. The idea that those who fought for freedom but did not quite quantify what that means, continues to define our concepts of what freedom is vs. what freedom should be.

[Peoria Speech, October 16, 1854 - Lincoln Home National Historic Site \(U.S. National Park Service\)](#)

Peoria Speech, October 16, 1854. In this speech Abraham Lincoln explained his objections to the Kansas-Nebraska Act and resurrected his political career. In the speech Lincoln criticized popular sovereignty. Questioned how popular sovereignty could supersede the Northwest Ordinance and the Missouri Compromise.

www.nps.gov

Frederick Douglass

On July 5, 1852, Frederick Douglass in his famous Fourth of July Speech questioned whom freedom was given to and why. In essence he examined the fate of our future by examining the lack of freedom given to enslaved persons. In fact, he scolded his audience on their indifference to life. Frederick Douglass defined citizenship by the rules we created in our founding constitutional document and was steadfast about adherence to the rule of law.

[Africans in America/Part 4/Frederick Douglass speech - PBS](#)

Africans in America/Part 4/Frederick Douglass speech. "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro". Fellow Citizens, I am not wanting in respect for the fathers of this republic. The signers of the ...

www.pbs.org

James Baldwin

Author and advocate James Baldwin famously debated William F. Buckley on the state of the Negro. I cannot adequately summarize Baldwin, but believe it is fair to say he defined freedom in part as the right to one's own destiny.

<https://www.npr.org/2020/09/20/914548619/reimagining-the-james-baldwin-and-william-f-buckley-debate>

Justice Thurgood Marshall

During an acceptance speech, Justice Thurgood Marshall lamented that we are not nearly as far as we ought to be on equality and freedom. He reiterated that WE THE PEOPLE must do the hard work of creating an atmosphere of acceptance.

"The legal system can force open doors and sometimes even knock down walls. But it cannot build bridges. That job belongs to you and me." Justice Marshall, Liberty Medal Recipient.

[1992 Speech Thurgood Marshall - Liberty Medal - National Constitution Center](#)

Acceptance Speech. Thurgood Marshall. Former Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. July 4, 1992. Independence Hall. Philadelphia, PA. It is a pleasure to speak here on the anniversary of our Nation's independence. As someone who relishes the ability to do and say whatever I please, independence is a concept near and dear to my heart!

constitutioncenter.org

Martin Luther King

Martin Luther King prepared in my view to date the most comprehensive letter on freedom. In his letter from a Birmingham Jail. Again, I cannot summarize MLK's concept of freedom in any manner that

would do it justice. His explanation in my opinion says it all.

"Let us consider a more concrete example of just and unjust laws. An unjust law is a code that a numerical or power majority group compels a minority group to obey but does not make binding on itself. This is difference made legal. By the same token, a just law is a code that a majority compels a minority to follow and that it is willing to follow itself. This is sameness made legal." MLK, Letter from a Birmingham Jail.

https://swap.stanford.edu/20141218230016/http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/popular_requests/frequentdocs/birmingham.pdf

So, I heard what my family I said, and shared research from leading scholars on freedom and discovered there is truly not much more to say. We know inherently what freedom means. We learn what it means from the moment we run away from our caregivers as toddlers. We devour our childlike curiosity and lament when our eyes our open to reality. We know as a human race what freedom is. I debated for some time on what I could add to this concept and here are my thoughts for what it is worth.

Freedom means that you are allowed to be your best self and not defined by what others want you to be.

Freedom means that you can find your center of excellence and determine your own destiny.

Freedom means being clear of stereotypes.

Freedom means being given liberty to explore your creativity and examine your possibilities.

Freedom means that another human being does not have the right to create barriers or place a ceiling on your success.

Freedom means ownership of your soul.

Freedom means exploring your idea of your own spirituality.

Freedom means control over the footprint you leave on this earth.

Freedom should give you the ability to fall and the grace from society to rise.

Freedom should not place us in silos -

Rather it should connect humanity. In our country society is defined by rules and responsibilities. We all have a role to play in this construction, but the

field should be fair. Our freedom is fragile, delicate, and subject to interpretation- and it should not be. I believe in the divine and I believe when our spirits are created, they should fly without restrictions.

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