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## **What Freedoms Are Americans Celebrating Today?**

**by Jacob G. Hornberger**

The Fourth of July celebrations will undoubtedly bring forth pronouncements that U.S. troops in Iraq are defending the freedoms expressed in the Declaration of Independence. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, most of the “freedoms” that Americans will be celebrating today are antithetical to the genuine principles of freedom enunciated in the Declaration.

There is no better way to demonstrate this than by contrasting the freedoms that Americans in, say, 1880 were celebrating on the Fourth of July with those “freedoms” that Americans celebrate today. In 1880 America, there was no income taxation, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, welfare, public (i.e., government) schools, drug laws, gun control, immigration controls, foreign wars, or foreign aid. Economic regulations were few.

That is what it once meant to be an American. That is what it once meant to be free.

In the hearts and minds of our American ancestors, freedom included the natural or God-given right to sustain one’s life through labor and through economic exchanges made with others. Americans would have scoffed at the notion of asking the state’s permission to engage in an occupation or profession or having the state interfere with mutually beneficial exchanges.

Taxes on income were considered an anathema because freedom entailed a person’s right to keep the fruits of his earnings and, in fact, to accumulate unlimited amounts of wealth. Social Security, Medicare, and other social welfare programs were opposed because freedom entailed the right to do whatever a person wanted with his own money. For that matter, charity meant nothing in terms of virtue or morality if it resulted from the coercive apparatus of the state.

The freedom celebrated on July 4, 1880, entailed a person’s right to live his life any way he chose — responsibly or irresponsibly, healthy or unhealthy — so long as his conduct was peaceful. Drug laws were nonexistent because freedom entailed the unfettered right to ingest harmful or unhealthy substances.

Unfortunately, in our time Americans have rejected our ancestors’ philosophy of freedom in favor of a “freedom” in which the state’s primary role is a paternalistic one. Today, the “freedom” celebrated is the collective power of the state to take care of people in society by taxing

them. On the Fourth of July, 2007, Americans will be celebrating the “freedom” that has come with income taxation, Social Security, Medicare, occupational licensure laws, economic regulations, trade restrictions, immigration controls, and the drug war.

John Quincy Adams’s statement to Congress on the Fourth of July, 1821, that America does not go abroad “in search of monsters to destroy” is now considered a quaint and obsolete philosophy of foreign policy. “Freedom” now entails an enormous standing army whose mission is to invade and occupy foreign nations with the supposed aim of taking care of their people, protecting them from tyranny or oppression.

How is the domestic policy and foreign policy celebrated as “freedom” by Americans today different from the philosophy that guided King George in 1776?

Don’t many Americans today favor a domestic policy of ever-increasing spending (which necessitates ever-increasing taxes), subsidies, and economic regulations? Don’t they favor a foreign policy based on an enormous standing army, empire, and intervention? Don’t they favor cruel and unusual punishments and denial of due process and jury trials? Don’t they favor warrantless searches and indefinite detentions? Don’t they favor immigration controls and trade restrictions? Don’t they favor gun control?

Didn’t King George favor all those things? Didn’t those British insurgents and terrorists who signed the Declaration of Independence and take up arms against their own government and its troops oppose all of those things?

The irony is that most Americans have no idea that the political and economic philosophy to which they adhere are contrary to the founding principles of our nation. The plight of the American people can best be summed up with the words of the great thinker Johann von Goethe: “None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free.” We can only hope that, as crises and infringements on liberty grow in number and magnitude, Americans will rediscover their heritage of liberty and lead the world out of the anti-freedom morass in which it is increasingly mired.

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