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In a dark time the eye begins to see.
- Theodore Roethke

RAY DRIVER



THE PRICE OF FREEDOM

BY BEVERLY BROWN

At the close of the 18th century, in the city of Philadelphia, a bold experiment was begun, and the rest of the world watched as the American concept of self-government was born. Just over 200 years later, this American dream of self-determination has become a nightmare of government control. Most of our representatives no longer represent us. Instead, they represent the interests of a powerful central government and the corporate influences which stand behind it.

How in the world did this happen to us? Who in the world is responsible for this bureaucratic mess? And when, in the course of human events, are we ever going to find ourselves living in a truly open society?

Thomas Jefferson is credited with being the father of American Libertarianism. An eloquent writer, he penned the Declaration of Independence. This is a document so radical that, more than 200 years after it was written, it still shocks many of its readers. Unfortunately, however, Mr. Jefferson's actions while in positions of political power were often inconsistent with his rhetoric. While in public office, Thomas Jefferson supported many repressive acts of government, among which were loyalty oaths, criminal prosecution for libeling the President in the press, and internment camps for people suspected of being dangerous to the security of the United States.

In Mr. Jefferson's defense, he was dealing with a brand new concept. In the 18th century, individual liberty and self-government were abstract concepts, as yet unsupported by experience. Thomas Jefferson and the rest of our founding fathers had no precedent to follow in establishing this country. Quite simply, they didn't know what they were doing. The American experiment was one of trial and error, and certain aspects of it were so frightening that they were never put into practice. Fear of the chaos that might have resulted from an uncontrolled society caused America's attempt at

self-control to lose ground from the very beginning.

Less than an hundred years after the birth of the Union, several southern states attempted to leave it and form their own confederacy. This secession attempt began the Civil War, which was fought less over the issue of American slavery than over the question of American states' rights. When the war was over, the slaves had gained their freedom, but all Americans of every color had lost more ground in their struggle for self-determination.

Had the South been allowed to secede, we would most likely be living in several loosely aligned, sovereign states today rather than a single nation. The Mormons, for example, might have retained their autonomy and never become part of the United States, if they'd had a choice in the matter. The leaders of small, independent states would have been better able to meet the needs of their citizens than has the sprawling, inefficient bureaucracy that grew from a large central government.

In 1914, when war broke out in Europe, several powerful American businessmen saw the European conflict as a way to make enormous profits and greatly increase their powers by expanding their businesses beyond the borders of this country. In order for this to be possible, of course, America had to enter the war. By a combination of patriotic propaganda, scare tactics, and (in the case of the sinking of the "Lusitania") outright misrepresentation, Americans were convinced that this country was vulnerable to attack. Our involvement in the European conflict escalated a continental war into a world war, set the stage for the next world war and the "cold war" that followed it, and helped create the phenomenon of the multinational corporation.

For an example of the power these corporations wield, we need only look at the present crisis in Iraq. Hundreds of thousands of troops are massing today in the Middle East from

countries all over the world. Our President tells us that we are in Saudi Arabia to protect "American interests" in the region. The interests of which he speaks are those huge multinational business conglomerates which are, by no means, entirely American. Their interests lie in their own corporate powers and profits. It is not clear whether the heads of these corporations actually wish to control the world, as some people fear. It is clear, however, that they are nearly in a position to do so. It is impossible to calculate the number of freedoms we stand to lose at their hands should they decide to seize control.

There have been many other abuses of power throughout America's history. These are only some of the most obvious examples. None of them is responsible for our loss of self-determination, however, because they all have one thing in common: they could never have done it without us. We, the people of the United States of America, in order to avoid taking responsibility for our actions at any cost, have aided and abetted every attack on our freedoms. We cannot escape responsibility for the abuses of our government simply because we are our government. We hire our leaders, and we pay them to abuse us. If we do not have the sense to fire them when they have gone too far, we deserve them.

The American dream is broken and it needs to be fixed. We can fix it at the polls, or we can fix it in the streets; but the one thing we cannot do is expect anyone else to fix it for us. We will never find ourselves living in a truly open society: we will have to create that society by taking full responsibility for everything we do, and everything that happens to us. That is the price of freedom, and we will never be free until we are willing to pay that price every day of our lives, forever.

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**'THE PRICE OF FREEDOM IS ETERNAL VIGILANCE'
-THOMAS JEFFERSON**