

## Power and Control in American Literature: Constructing the Paradox of American Freedom

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Freedom is everywhere in American culture: it's sung in its national anthem, written in its constitution, printed on t-shirts, and everywhere in-between. However, at the same time it is nowhere to be found, acting only as a myth in a nation that speaks primarily in terms of its social prejudices and domination of others. Citizens believe they are free and equal under the law and, while also believing there to exist a natural social structure that places them above others. What then, is American freedom? Howard F. Stein argues in "Freedom and Interdependence: American Culture and the Adlerian Ideal" that American freedom is a paradox:

The American cultural ethos (effective organizations) and eidos (cognitive organization) of freedom is thoroughly enmeshed in a system of paradox such that freedom can neither be denied nor fulfilled, neither repudiated nor attained. The hierarchal, pyramidal value system consistently works to undermine any horizontal, consensual, and egalitarian tendencies. Americans must believe they are free. [. . .] One is free to be a self-made autocrat, boss, at the expense of another's freedom, liberty, and equality. American autocracy can remain masked by deception and compromise. (151)

In this paper I will consider Stein's understanding of a paradoxical construction of freedom as I examine how American freedom has been constructed through literature to be both horizontal and hierarchical: first as it is built upon settlers' early call for a problematic social space that allows for both protection of their own collective selfhood, as defined by

their Christianity, and the tyrannical destruction of non-Christian others to protect this supposedly horizontal space. Building off this problematic beginning, I will explore the gradual expansion of this idea into a complex political and social structure that encourages individualism and equality only so as to provide a space for the "best" self to rise above and dominate the other, otherized by its very lack of uniformity. In this way, I will show how the construction works to undermine itself as it both oppresses the American people and enables them to believe they are free, thus creating the paradox of American freedom.

The discovery of the "new world" was anything but a discovery. Upon Christopher Columbus's landing on this supposedly "new world" he found himself among various native peoples, each possessing their own diverse culture, language, and religion. Driven by personal desires of wealth, conversion, and acceptance, he worked to exploit and destroy these native peoples. In "Journal of the First Voyage to America" (as transcribed by Bartolomé de Las Casas) Columbus establishes social hierarchies focused primarily on race and religion that ultimately continue to linger in the structure of American freedom long after his death.

As Columbus depicts his travels in this new (to him) land, he illustrates the native peoples to be one singular entity, "without any religion that could be discovered" (142). When trying to understand how Columbus interacted with these native peoples, it is first important to acknowledge the language and cultural barriers that undoubtedly limited their ability to communicate with one another. While he understands them to be beastly and without religion, it is important to think about how such a spiritual concept such as religion could be communicated with the few vague and un-translated gestures the natives and Spanish crews must have relied on. In an early entry, Columbus claims the native

people to be in desperate want of a heavenly savior: “had [the Spanish] chosen to admit the natives to accompany them, [they] might have been attended back by more than five hundred men and women, eager to accompany them, thinking they were returning to heaven” (143). How, one must ask in response to Columbus’s contradictory writing, could an entire people desire something of which they had never mentally conceived? It is in this early writing that Columbus’s language begins to contradict itself, likely due to Columbus’s personal western assumptions he brought with him from Europe.

Although problematic in representation of actual historical fact, Columbus does begin to reveal how western religion served as a tool in his early establishment of hierarchal structures in this “new world.” In address to his “Highnesses,” Columbus claims the natives to be in need of savior by not just Christianity, but the Spanish nation itself:

It would be an easy matter to convert them all of Christianity, and I hope in our Lord that your Highnesses will devote yourselves with much diligence to this object, and bring into the church so many multitudes, inasmuch as you have exterminated those who refused to confess the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, so that having ended your days (as we are all mortal) you may leave your dominions in a tranquil condition, free from heresy and wickedness, and meet with you a favorable reception before the eternal Creator, whom may it please to grant you a long life and great increase of kingdoms and dominions, with the will and disposition to promote, as you have always done, the holy Christian religion, Amen. (144)

Again we see Columbus’s western assumptions linger in his writing, as he assumes Christianity to be necessary to “free” the natives from their “heresy and wickedness.” Here Columbus allows his western assumption of Christianity as the one truthful and saving

religion to act as proof of his moral dominance over the natives. Having established moral dominance over the Native Americans, he also implicitly suggests a moral *responsibility* that is complete conversion of the people, achievable only through domination over these peoples as is the will of God. We see also, a call for physical action: extermination off those “who refuse to confess” Christianity (Columbus 144). Having justified domination as necessary for conversion and conversion necessary for fulfilling the will of God, Columbus goes so far as to call for the mass destruction of an entire people if they refuse to see God as he himself does.

Although the root of his call for domination lies in an assumed moral responsibility as a devout Christian, Columbus’s words also illustrate what else (aside from fulfilling the will of God) there is to gain from the domination of these peoples. He writes:

Your highnesses should therefore adopt the resolution of converting them to Christianity in which enterprise I am of opinion that a very short space of time will suffice to gain our holy faith multitudes of people, and to Spain great riches and immense dominions, with all their inhabitants; there being; without doubt, in these countries vast quantities of gold [. . .] Here are also pearls and precious stones and an infinite amount of spices. (145)

Although he is, on one hand, reminding Spain of the significance of conversion of “multitudes of people,” he also brings to attention potential financial gain and assures Spain they will benefit financially. These two interrelated reasons for conquest become problematic as we consider how they are simultaneously acting in opposition of one another. In his call for conversion he strives to achieve religious uniformity. His suggestion of financial gain is based upon an economic structure that functions pyramidically, placing

the more powerful nation even higher and the less powerful even lower, therefore making a horizontal relationship between the native peoples and Spain impossible.

This early problematic structure based upon both the achievement of dominance and uniformity that lingers throughout the American understanding of freedom as a new nation begins to form. As America is settled by Europeans, Columbus's hierarchal structure allows them to leave behind any concern for whose land they are "settling." As the settlers quickly find natives to be far less "conquerable" than suggested by Columbus, hostility between the different cultures grows. Mary Rowlandson, a Puritan mother, is captured by a group of Native Americans and taken from her home and family. Upon release, she writes the story of her captivity in "A Narrative of the Captivity and Restauration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson." Her story is published in 1682 with an anonymously written preface that states:

None knows what it is to fight and pursue such an enemy as this, but they that have fought and persuaded them: so none can imagine, what it is to be captivated, and enslaved to such Atheistical, proud, wild, cruel, barbarous, brutish, (in one word,) diabolical creatures as these, the worst of the heathen; nor what difficulties, hardships, hazards, sorrows, anxieties, and perplexities, do unavoidably wait upon such a condition, but those that have tried it. (466)

Suddenly the language used to describe native peoples has shifted from weak and conquerable, as told by Columbus, to that of a "heathen," as shown above. This passage warns readers that the "hardships" and "sorrows" they are about to read of are not unique to Rowlandson; rather they "unavoidably" await all settlers. With this language, comes a sense of fear of the previously established inferior that is new to this period, as well as the

expression of the self as representative of a collective community.

As Rowlandson tells her story of the physical and mental torments of her captivity she instills a fear upon her readers; however this fear is not limited to that of just physical and mental trauma. Rowlandson suggests that the Native Americans are capable of threatening the actual selfhood, which, in this context, was defined by the western-ness (or non-otherness,) of the Christian people as she tells to story of her own development of savagery within their captivity:

I went into another Wigwam, where there were two of the *English Children*; the Squaw boiling horses feet; then she cut me off a little piece, and gave one of the *English Children* a piece also: Being so very hungry, I had quickly eat up mine; but the Child could not bite it, it was so tough as sinewy, but lay sucking, gnawing, chewing, and slobbering it in the mouth and hand; then I took it of the child and eat it myself and savory it was to my taste. (481)

In this famous scene readers see Rowlandson transform from the pious woman readers know her to be to a slobbering, selfish, savage beast. Here she does not take from the Natives themselves, but from a child of her own kind. This distinction is important in her larger suggestion of fear. To be a white made savage by a Native American, in this sense, is not only to assume their “barbarous” traits and ways of life, but to turn against your own people. As a Puritan, to turn against your own people also meant turning against God. For a Puritan to turn against God, it would also entail losing his/her entire identity. It is in this way that we see both the emergence of a self in this European settlement of America, as well as the collective understanding of the inferior as threatening to the self.

Rowlandson later continues to express her understanding of Native Americans as a threatening people as she describes their use of tyrannical power: "I intreated, begged, and perswaded them, but to let them see my Daughter; and yet so hard hearted were they, that they would not suffer it. They made use of their tyrannical power whilst they had it; but through the Lords wonderfull mercy, their time was now but short" (484). By suggesting the natives to be cold-hearted, empathetic, and inherently tyrannical, she suggests natives to be threatening to the supposedly horizontal structure colonists claimed to pursue as a way to promote Christian uniformity. While Columbus claims God wills tyrannical actions like forceful conversion carried out by Christians so long as embedded within them is the goal of creating a horizontal social structure within which people are equal, Rowlandson suggests that a tyrannical act carried out by any non-Christian person or people is evil and threatening to this horizontal structure and the well-being of all. As she does this, she further instills a fear of threatened selfhood into the mind of her readers, while also suggesting that it is only in the power of their shared western God and their faith in Him that can prevent them from being dominated.

Mary Rowlandson's personal narrative works to reflect the growing fear of Native Americans among European settlers. She builds off Columbus's hierarchal structure to suggest that the otherized Natives Americas are threatening to both the Christian religion and settlers' well-being at large. In this way, she implicitly suggests that the only way to protect the self is through complete domination of the inferior (in this case, the other who does not conform,) thus beginning to establish a form of social tyranny under the guise of self-protection.

As settlements grow, so does the collective fear of tyrannical structures that could potentially result in the oppression of Christian settlers. After the Revolutionary War, the American nation truly begins to form, bringing to the forefront questions of government structure. Americans wanted to avoid the tyranny that had previously experienced and considered to be oppressive while also desiring protection of their values as a becoming singular people that could not be protected through anarchic rule. Howard F. Stein describes the influence of their fears:

A national institutional arrangement had to be forged out of the dual fear of oppression and anarchy [. . .] how could the new nation avoid influence of tyranny over the mind of man? There was a ghost question, not consciously asked: How could the new nation preserve the old order without making it appear that the old order prevailed? (147)

As men gathered in attempt to construct a government, this “ghost question” prevailed. Tyranny, as Rowlandson demonstrated, was understood to function as protection of individualism so long as it highlighted only that: self-protection.

This use of social tyranny as protection of selfhood drives Thomas Jefferson’s political writing in his influential work “Notes on the State of Virginia.” Published in 1785, Jefferson uses this text to discuss the importance of creating a republican government based upon the idea of free enquiry, or what Stein refers to as freedom of “the mind of man” (Stein 147). The text outlines Jefferson’s ideal government that allows citizens to think freely under the assumption that through this freedom truth will prevail, ultimately resulting in social and religious uniformity.



Jefferson speaks to the dual fear being experienced among Americans during this time so as to unite them under their shared fears. He highlights two forms of “evil” government in attempt to prompt compromise between the two:

Imperfect as this species of coercion may seem [in reference Native Americans], crimes are very rare among them. Were it made a question, whether no law, as among the savage Americans, or too much law, as among the civilized Europeans, submits man to the greatest evil, one who has seen both conditions of existence would pronounce it to be the last: and that the sheep are happier of themselves, than under the care of wolves. It will be said that great societies cannot exist without government. The Savages therefore break them into small ones. . . .

(Jefferson 1032)

Here Jefferson depicts both tyranny and anarchy to be oppressive forms of rule. Although he considers anarchy to be of lesser evil than tyranny, he also implies that anarchy is inherently coercive, in that way also functioning as a threatening (in terms of the selfhood) form of government. Although he uses the Native American tribes to illustrate tyranny, he also suggests that they have *small* government. Relying on the settlers’ fear of becoming the inferior (embedded in American’s minds by Rowlandson,) this functions as a justified call for large government, so as to ensure settlers’ protection as superior on this social hierarchal structure of control.

Although calling for large government, Jefferson does not neglect to address protection of individualism. He further discusses the flaws of coercion and necessity of “free enquiry” in government as follows:

Millions of innocent men, women and children, since the introduction of Christianity, have been burnt, tortured, fined, imprisoned, yet we have not advanced one inch towards uniformity. What has been the effect of coercion? To make one half the world fools, and the other half hypocrites [ . . . ] let us reflect that [Earth] is inhabited by a thousand millions of people. That these profess probably a thousand different systems of religion. That ours is but one of that thousand. That if there be but one right, and ours that one, we should wish to see the 999 wandering sects gathered into the fold of truth. But against such a majority we cannot effect this by force. Reason and persuasion are the only practicable instruments. To make way for these, free enquiry must be indulged; and how can we wish others to indulge it while we refuse it ourselves? (Jefferson 1040)

When considering this passage it is first important to note that Jefferson does not explicitly challenge the legitimacy of any one specific organized religion, or, in other words, one specific representation of selfhood. He does however implicitly suggest that among a thousand different religions there can only be one that possesses truth. As he does this, he prompts readers to assume that it is theirs, or as he writes, “our,” religion that is the one and only truthful religion, implicitly suggesting that this truthful religion should be shared across the nation by both common people and those in power. It is in this that Jefferson’s goal of eventual uniformity begins to emerge. Since force has proven statistically ineffective at achieving uniformity, he believes society to be left with only “reason and persuasion” as effective means of conversion, as opposed to tyrannical mandate. The only way to achieve these two things, he writes, is through free enquiry, thus it is only Jefferson’s recognition of forceful conversion as ineffective that drives his call for free enquiry within government.

Although on one level this passage seems to call for freedom of religion and individuality, it is only doing so under the assumption that given enough time and the *illusion* of freedom people will ultimately come to recognize one particular truth and conform accordingly, thus using freedom only as a means for eventual self-conversion.

It is in Jefferson's writing that we begin to see how this basis of American government structure did not serve to encourage individualism, as we tend to understand it now; rather it worked instead to create an illusion of individualism that, in actuality, strips citizens of any and all selfhood Jefferson claims this system to protect. By doing this, Jefferson's text did the exact opposite of what it, on the surface, claims to do, ultimately calling for conformity (functioning as social tyranny) under the guise of reason and freedom.

It is without doubt that Jefferson's manipulative writing and understanding of government entranced early American citizens, as he went on to be elected president of the United States; however that is not to say that he faced no opposition. As a new literary movement came to sweep America (to later be known as the Romantic period,) writers returned back to questions of freedom and structure in attempt to understand true equality. In 1855 Walt Whitman published the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, carrying within it his famous poem "Song of Myself." In this poem Whitman explores and emphasizes the self, pausing at moments to challenge constructed social structures Americans had, at the time, appeared to have stopped thinking about.

In a brief discussion of truth, Whitman appears to directly challenge Jefferson's understanding of one singular truth as expressed in "Notes on the State of Virginia." Whitman writes,

All truth waits in all things,  
 They neither hasten their own delivery nor resist it,  
 They do not need to obstetric forceps of the surgeon  
 The insignificant is as big to me as any,  
 What is less or more than a touch?

Logic and sermons never convince.  
 The damp of night drives deeper into my soul.

Only what proves itself to every man and woman is so,  
 Only what nobody denies is so." (sec. 30)

Here Whitman challenges America's collective notion of what constitutes truth as influenced by Jefferson seventy years prior. Rather than understanding truth as something capable of being attained through science or religion as explained by Jefferson, Whitman believes truth to "wait in all things," implying that the truth is not capable of being extracted, no matter how much knowledge a person might assume him/herself to have. Whitman instead suggests that truth is found only through the experience of one's *own* senses. He states that this process of finding or having found truth is not transferable from one person to another. Whereas Jefferson had written, "reason and persuasion" to be the only effective tools at finding truth in Notes on the State of Virginia, Whitman expresses the exact opposite, writing "logic and sermons never convince" (Jefferson 1040). In the final two lines he draws attention to the problematic relationship between truth and self. Because truth can only exist if agreed upon unanimously by all of mankind, the existence of truth must also mean complete and total uniformity. Where there is complete uniformity,

there is complete lack of individualism, thus showing truth and individualism incapable of co-existing.

Whitman continues his discussion of individualism as he challenges uniformity in his discussion of relationships between men: “What is a man anyhow? What am I? and what are you? / All I mark as my own you shall offset with your own, / else it were time lost listening to me” (sec. 20). Here he draws attention not to finding truth, but to finding oneself. In this brief discussion of individualism he continues to juxtapose uniformity with the individual to remind readers that true individualism cannot exist within a structure that ultimately strives for uniformity, as Jefferson had previously explained.

Whitman goes so far as to challenge very social hierarchies that we have watched unfold in the construction of American “freedom” thus far as he attempts to further illuminate the problematic structures American citizens have allowed themselves to blindly participate in. Using animals to represent nature social order, he deconstructs these hierarchies:

I think I turn and live among the animals. . . they are so placid and self-contained [ . . . ]

They do not sweat and whine about their condition,

They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,

They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,

Not one is dissatisfied. . . . not one is demented with the mania of owning things,

Not one kneels to another nor to his kind that lived thousands of years ago,

Not one is respectable or industrious over the whole earth.” (Whitman sec. 32)

In depicting this observation of animals, he suggests that it is their behavior that is natural and therefore more representative of a non-oppressive social structure. In each line he critiques the current American social and government structure for its various oppressive manifestations which he understands to prevent humans from enjoying their true existence as free beings. As he discusses God and sin, he seems to be challenging the very “duty” and religious selfhood the government has thus far been based upon. He also implicitly suggests this duty to be in itself oppressive as it takes away from the self on earth, placing emphasis instead on God, which, as shown above in his discussion of truth, must strip the individual of his/her selfhood as it functions as an ultimate claim of truth. Whitman’s image of “kneeling” and discussion of respectability in the final two lines work to deconstruct any hierarchy that places one being over another. In the context of American freedom, this challenges the specific hierarchal structure of control first introduced by Columbus and built upon by Rowlandson and Jefferson. In doing this Whitman again draws to attention the problematic relationship between hierarchies and freedom as had, until this point in American literary history, been overlooked by American writers.

In this text Whitman ultimately seeks to challenge the governmental and social structures Americans understood to function as a safeguard to their freedom. As he deconstructs these structures he argues that they ultimately allow and ensure that the self will oppress him/herself while believing him/herself to be free, thus consciously drawing to attention for the first time the paradox of American freedom.

Although Whitman brought to attention the problematic relationship between American freedom and oppression in “Song of Myself,” his ideas were quickly overlooked. Howard F. Stein explains, “Advance toward greater freedom, liberty, and egalitarianism is

subverted before it can reach fruition" (147). This is exactly the case with Whitman's "Song of Myself." As America transitioned from new, thriving nation to a nation torn apart by civil war and the political and economic anguish that accompanied it, the Romantic literary period came to an end. Replacing it was a group of writers interested not in romantic or idealist philosophical discussions; rather they focused on the real world and the human realities embedded within it. In 1900 Mark Twain published "The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg," a short story that captures the arguably "real" essence of the American individual. This story subverts Whitman's discussion of freedom, as Twain illustrates the harsh reality of American individualism that differed greatly from Whitman's idealistic description of the topic.

Twain begins the story depicting the town's "honest" reputation: "Hadleyburg was the most honest and upright town in all the region around about [. . .] throughout the formative years temptations were kept out of the way of the young people, so that their honesty could have very chance to harden and solidify, and become a part of their very bone" (20). Here the town's attempt at total honesty emphasizes the significance of collective good and well-being, as opposed to a hierarchal structure that allows the self to rise at the expense of others. In this story, to be an honest town is to be a fair town where no citizen has the opportunity to place him/herself above this moral code, thus serving only to protect the greater good. In order to achieve this honesty the town removes all temptation from the people; however this very lack of temptation soon proves to be the demise of the town's honesty.

Temptation presents itself in the form of a stranger. This stranger brings to the town a large sum of money that is to be granted to an unnamed man whom had previously

granted the stranger twenty dollars and a line of advice; to receive the money, all he has to do is repeat this remark. Very quickly after this the town's true character begins to reveal itself, being just the opposite of what its reputation stands to represent. Although each man of the town knows himself not to be the unnamed man deserving of the money, each quickly begins conspiring a plan to make himself appear as this unnamed man so as to receive the money for himself, even if not truly deserving. In this way the town's honesty, or collective good, is consciously sacrificed by each man of the town as he hopes to better himself. Mary, the woman entrusted with the duty to find this unnamed man, all too accurately predicts the outcome of this temptation to her husband:

It is my belief that this town's honesty is as rotten as mine is; as rotten as yours is. It is a mean town, a hard, stingy town, and hasn't a virtue in the world but this honesty it is so celebrated for and so conceited about; and so help me, I do believe that if ever the day comes that its honesty falls under great temptation, its grand reputation will go to ruins like a house of cards" (Twain 28).

Here Mary functions as a voice of reason and self-awareness in a society built upon a horizontal structure. She does not argue for remaining honest in this testing time; rather she attempts to convince her husband that he should attempt to take the money for himself under her presumption that any of the other men of the town would do the same if the opportunity presented itself. Although self-aware in that she knows she is being non-virtuous, she also consciously values her own self's potential economic advancement more than the reputation of the rest of the entire town. It is here that Twain suggests to readers that no matter how self-aware any one person is and no matter how non-oppressive



he/she strives to be in the company of others, he/she will always support a potentially oppressive system if it will better their own self-hood.

As the story continues to unravel and the town's lack of honesty becomes more and more apparent, the mastermind behind the entire scheme explains in a note, "I wanted to damage every man in the place, and every woman—and not in their bodies or in their estate, but in their vanity—the place where feeble and foolish people are most vulnerable [. . .] why, you simple of creatures, the weakest of all weak things is a virtue which has not been tested in the fire" (Twain 46-47). It is in this passage that the underlying flaw of the town is finally brought to the surface. This man suggests that it is not the reputation itself he wanted to damage, but each and every person individually. Rather than being a truly honest town full of strong sin-resistant people, this man understood from the beginning that one cannot possibly have strength against something that has never been exposed to him/her. He is not attempting to damage their supposed honesty as he understands this alleged trait to never have existed in the first place, it was merely crafted by their delusion and vanity. This stranger functions as the oppressor that kept his own hands clean by only providing the space for the townspeople to deceive and oppress one another as they thought they were bettering themselves, thus ultimately feeding the inherent selfishness that, given time, Twain believed had the power to overtake any supposedly non-oppressive system.

In "The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg," Twain shows readers the inherent selfishness of American citizens. He suggests that even in the most "honest" of structures and upbringings, selfishness remains an inherent quality of all American citizens. Because this quality remains, true honesty, or care for the collective before the self, can exist only as

an illusion until the opportunity presents itself for the self to rise, inevitably undermining the collective good for the self's personal gain. Following Romantic writers like Whitman, who claimed hierarchal structures to be oppressive and unnatural, Twain suggests that Americans realistically cannot escape the hierarchal structures embedded so deeply into their mind so many years ago by writers like Columbus, Rowlandson, and Jefferson.

Although Americans might have very much agreed with Whitman in thought and political idealism, Twain illustrates how they ultimately will fall back upon the oppressive structure Whitman exposed if the structure promises advancement for the self.

The paradox of American freedom begins with the introduction of a hierarchal western power structure to the "new world" that allows the self to rise at the cost of the collective good under the justification that he/she is only doing so to help the otherized become more western and uniform. Columbus uses this structure to justify his personal advancement and domination of the soon to be American land and its people at the cost of the Native's collective well-being, while simultaneously suggesting that he is doing so only so as to "better" them as they become more uniform with Christian conversion. Years later, this problematic social structure that emphasizes both the self and the collective remains as European settlers flood the land. Although in support of forceful conversion as a means to achieving a horizontal structure, white settlers fed off of Columbus's otherization of Natives and embraced the hierarchal structure that ultimately allowed for them to function as tyrants in their own conquest and destruction of Native Peoples, otherized by Columbus for their lack of western religion and culture. Mary Rowlandson justifies this behavior in her personal narrative as she illustrates to readers that Native Americans are threatening to their selfhood, particularly their Christianity and western-ness. Here the construction of

freedom becomes more problematic as settlers use both Columbus's hierarchal social structure and their own horizontal structure to justify the fear and destruction of "the other" (otherized by their non-western individuality) as means to protect their own collective individualism.

After the settlers officially broke free from tyrannical European powers with the end of the Revolutionary War, they were left with the crucial problem of forming a government that did not resemble tyranny or anarchy. Thomas Jefferson's "Notes on the State of Virginia" proved to be incredibly influential on the structuring of American government in this revolutionary period. Jefferson wrote of a government that claimed to support individualism only under the assumption that all people would eventually conform, thus allowing citizens to think their individuality was being protected by the government when in fact, the government strived to strip citizens of their selfhood. It is in Jefferson's writing that the American paradox of freedom truly begins to take shape, as Jefferson effectively disguises an oppressive and, at heart, tyrannical government, under the name of "freedom." It is within this emerging paradox that citizens could both believe their individualism to be protected under the law, while simultaneously suggesting to each citizen that he/she was "right" under God. This implicit presumption granted each person a sense of higher existence than anyone they considered to be "other," thus forming a political and social structure that was hierarchal and horizontal, oppressive of "the other" and protective of "the individual."

Who then, is the other and who the individual? Who is demonized by the law and who protected for his/her difference? Ken Knabb writes in "Utopia or Bust", "Most instances of majority oppression of minorities turn out to be due not to majority rule, but

to disguised minority rule in which the ruling elite plays on whatever racial or cultural antagonisms there may be in order to turn the exploited masses' frustrations against one another" (16). With this understanding, it seems to reason that "the other" *is* the individual, and the individual is "the other," identification changing only with personal perspective. Although this structure was deconstructed and exposed for its inherent oppression by Whitman, his critique was quickly forgotten as the Civil War came to an end and brought with it American Realism, led by Mark Twain, who suggested to readers that American citizens would never realistically be able to function in a truly horizontal government after having been exposed to a hierarchal structure that promised self-betterment. Just as temptation could not be fully removed from Hadleyburg in Twain's "The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg," opportunity for self-betterment could not fully be removed from society. Although Whitman suggests that it is ultimately oppressive and therefore unnatural and destructive to act on any opportunity that benefits the self at the cost of the collective good, Twain demonstrates how American citizens, no matter how enlightened of that ideology and in support of horizontal, egalitarian systems, would ultimately take part in the oppressiveness inherent to a hierarchal structure if they saw potential gain for their own self.

Twain's depiction of this paradox as inescapable remains today as America continues to function in this problematically contradictory political state. So the question remains: who is the other and who is the individual in a system that both oppresses and claims to protect citizens for their differences? There seems to be a relationship between potential personal gain and the oppression of others. In 21<sup>st</sup> century America, the American dream drives culture as it promises the individual economic reward if he/she works hard.

Its ambiguity allows each to see this only from his/her own perspective, thus allowing every citizen to believe he/she is more deserving than his/her neighbor. In this way, the American dream functions as an extension of the American paradox of freedom, encouraging citizens to oppress one another with the understanding that his/her individualism separates him/her from "the other" and makes him/her more deserving of economic and social rights. John Powell attempts to depict the role of the American self in "Moving beyond the Isolated Self:" "this self is very much the core of the American dream of liberty and opportunity for all, of a pure meritocracy, but also the core of exclusion and domination" (72). Here we can begin to understand how this paradoxical construction of freedom allows the government to function just as the stranger did in "The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg," providing a political space that encourages citizens to do its dirty work for it. By telling citizens they are free and equal, but at the same time that some are "better" and more deserving than others, the American government ensures its citizens will oppress and destroy one another in their fight to "the top," in turn keeping those in power, forever in power.

The early American texts examined in this paper function as social and political rhetoric to show how hierarchal and horizontal structures came to function together as tyranny in disguise, thus creating the American paradox of freedom. This paradox allows citizens to oppress one another while believing individually that he/she is not oppressed. For this reason, the paradox continues to appear virtually inescapable. When one individual challenges this pyramid of control, another takes advantage of his/her rebellion and takes the surrendered "power" for him/herself. Whenever a select group of individuals attempt to challenge these oppressive structures, they are shut down not by

those in power, but by their neighbors who chose to support the system for their own self-betterment, as observed in each piece of American literature (with the exception of Whitman) discussed above. In this way the paradox of American freedom supports the individual only to oppress the individual in a constant, but never won, fight for power and control, ultimately preventing American citizens from truly being free.

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