

Freedom is for the birds

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A fat pigeon soars over the thrumming streets, screeching taxies, and determined pedestrians of New York. His black glass bead eyes blur the insignificant world hundreds of feet below him, and his hidden ears feel only the buzz of the shrieking city.

He glides through the air, well, as much as he can with all his girth anyway, occasionally flapping his wings rapidly to keep himself aloft. This, he thinks, is where real freedom is! Where air supports him and not concrete, where he doesn't have to take the rigid geometric streets and obey traffic lights to go where he wants, and where he can poop without a second thought. Life holds no bounds for a creature like him! He flaps, coos, and exalts in his flight, his freedom and – with a sudden pumph he smashes into the very clean window of a forty-seven story skyscraper. His small gray body freefalls lifeless to the ground and smacks into the shoe of an unsuspecting stockbroker, who yelps with disgust and contempt. Kicking the corpse aside, the stockbroker mutters something about the stupidity of pigeons under his breath and tramps off to work. To him, the choice between the freedom of unaided flight and the safety of solid concrete is obvious.

Perhaps only because he is a human and cannot fly, but humans, especially Americans, tend to pick safety first whether the other choice is the freedom of flight or something more humanly achievable. While there are a few – very few – Americans who are staunchly and patriotically adamant about their freedom and would risk their lives to maintain it, the majority of Americans will almost always choose safety first. They sacrifice freedom for safety, they condemn freedom that threatens safety, and they have founded a nation whose very constitution is structured in a way that guarantees safety. While

the idealistic blue in the Star-Spangled Banner may symbolize freedom, this country reflects far more the CAUTION! / ? CUIDADO! red of that flag's stripes. Every animal has a basic instinct that craves safety, and for the well-developed country of America, that desire is not limited to physical well-being, but social well-being, a safety for which many have been known to sacrifice quite a lot.

Modern American society eats, sleeps, and breathes the American Dream: the belief that anyone from anywhere can get rich with enough hard work and persistence. According to this widespread dogma, if people aren't where they want to be, which is at the top (of the social ladder, the economic ladder, or the socioeconomic ladder), then they aren't working hard enough. Not working hard enough means laziness and laziness is atrociously embarrassing. Dropping a rung in one of these ladders would therefore crush an American with shame. Because of this attitude towards social classes, social safety is valued over freedom.

For instance, Daisy Buchanan, a main character in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby*, can choose to be with two different men: either Tom Buchanan, her husband, or Jay Gatsby, the man she claims to love. Tom, a domineering man with the prominent status of old wealth, is the safe choice. He can provide extravagantly well for Daisy, he is respectable which in turn helps maintain her respectability (as she's also from a prominent family), and also he is married to her. Gatsby, however, is ““ Mr.

Nobody from Nowhere” (The Great Gatsby, 130), makes his millions from shady deals bootlegging during the Prohibition Era, and by the end of the

book has the murder of Myrtle Wilson on his head. Daisy claims to be disgusted with Tom and love Gatsby. ““ You’re revolting,”” she says to Tom, referencing the multiple affairs he’s had with other women (The Great Gatsby, 131). ““ You know I love you”” she murmurs to Gatsby before drawing close and kissing him (The Great Gatsby, 116). She evidently prefers Gatsby to Tom, and if she were to do what her heart told her, she would leave Tom and go to Gatsby.

To leave Tom would be to choose freedom from his overbearing personality and his habitual “ secret” affairs. Gatsby, firm, faithful, and unscrupulously rich, would welcome her with a smile as bright as his pink suit and arms as open as his house gates during one of his famous parties. To stay with Tom would be to keep her throne. She would remain connected in her intricate web of carefully made friends and safe from the condescending sneers of her peers. She wouldn’t be known as that flighty broad who ran away with that nouveau-riche weirdo. It’s an easy choice for Daisy.

When Nick Caraway (the narrator) calls Daisy up to inform her of Gatsby’s death, he discovers that “ she and Tom had gone away early that afternoon, and taken baggage with them” (The Great Gatsby, 164). She makes her decision. She leaves without a word. Despite her purported love for Gatsby, she doesn’t free herself from her husband Tom, the aristocrat with wealth and status, to be with a man she loved but who dealt in dirty millions and would soon be convicted for manslaughter. She chooses her social safety over the freedom of being with Gatsby, casting aside passionate love (because really, what’s that worth?) for acceptance and status.

Americans can't let go the social safety, even for freedom. Freedom, in its truest, most accurate, dictionary definition, is most often condemned by Americans as being a hazard to public safety. According to Google, freedom is "the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint." This is a definition Americans do not condone. If everyone did as he or she felt, society would fall to pieces.

As a result, a separate definition of freedom was invented as early as in Puritan times just to satisfy the country's need for both safety and justification of safety according to one of its ideals. John Winthrop, an English Puritan and one of the founders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, describes two different types of freedom. The one he supports is "maintained and exercised in a way of subjection to authority; it is of the same kind of liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free" (On Liberty, John Winthrop). That the word "subjection" is in the definition of liberty (or freedom) is contradictory. People cannot obey authority and act without restraint at the same time.

This freedom isn't really freedom. Even so, John Winthrop's idea freedom is most advocated by Americans because the other freedom, defined by Google and every other reliable dictionary, would threaten public safety. John Winthrop declares that people who take advantage of the dictionary freedom are no better than animals, and that belief has since been retained. To the modern American, these people are the same as dogs peeing on fire hydrants. They are the ones that yell "YOLO!" before snorting another hit of meth, lightly spicing it with an inhale of pot, and topping it off with a needle full of heroin. Americans take John Winthrop's idea of freedom for truth because real freedom would bring about anarchy: everyone would

completely disregard speed limit signs (and driving age), the poor would rob every bank at gunpoint, and teenagers would loiter everywhere naked because that's how they feel “ most free.

” “ It's a free country!” people red-facedly assert when they're justifying questionable or criticized actions, but it doesn't matter whether this country is free or not to the person at whom they're sputtering. If the use of true freedom threatens safety, then that freedom will be suppressed. Safety, for America, comes before freedom. This nation claims to have been raised on the hearty steak and potatoes of freedom, but in a concrete sense, what was called freedom during the American Revolution was really safety from tyranny and unreasonable government. The Americans were through with those uppity Brits; they wanted safety from taxes, quartering soldiers, and being hung for talking trash about the holy and glorious motherland.

In looking at the Articles of Confederation, America's first attempt at self-government, the amount of power delegated to the individual state is immediately obvious. “ Each state retains its sovereignty, freedom and independence, and every Power, Jurisdiction and right, which is not by this confederation expressly delegated to the United States, in Congress assembled” (Articles of Confederation, Article II). This article grants a huge amount of sovereignty for individual states, essentially freedom to do as they please, but its purpose was to be a safety stamp that guaranteed that the federal government wouldn't suddenly clench its iron fist around all the poor citizens who were still traumatized by the alarming tax rates Britain had demanded. With this article in place, the federal government was helpless as a child; it couldn't levy taxes, raise an army, or create a common monetary

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system and had to instead ask politely for money to run the country. Because Americans were so afraid of their rights and money being stolen, they created an article that would make sure they were safe from federal tyranny, and although the Articles of Confederation didn't last, they showed that Americans absolutely needed that guarantee of safety from the potential of their government to suddenly turn evil and wring all the money from their pockets. The current constitution is also structured to protect the people.

Although it gives the government more power, it is only enough power to run the country properly and efficiently. It also wouldn't have been ratified if not for the promise of a bill of rights, a set of amendments that protects the rights of citizens today. States refused to pass the current constitution unless there was some guarantee that certain human rights could not be taken away the great and powerful Congress. James Madison readily agreed to write and pass the bill as soon as possible, and the states finally began to ratify the new constitution. With the promise of this bill, Americans were satisfied.

They were safe, and that is all they ever wanted and all their subsequent generations ever will want. Freedom is a nice thought, but safety is the practical number one choice. People might occasionally envy pigeons for their ability to fly, but when it comes down to it, they would still rather rest comfortably on solid ground on two sturdy legs. It's simply safer to be a human than it is a pigeon, especially in the jagged city of New York. Americans may revere freedom, but in their hearts they crave safety and

security and reject over-adventurous endeavors. Freedom compared to safety is infinitesimal in value; it is worth almost nothing.

Who really wants freedom when they're ostracized, in pain, dying, dead, broke, or paying taxes on paper goods? Not an American, that's for sure! To them, when safety is at stake, freedom is for the birds.