

Freedom is not enough - book review examples

[Politics](#), [Civil Rights](#)



MacLean, Nancy. *Freedom Is Not Enough*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2008.

In Nancy MacLean's *Freedom Is Not Enough*, the difficult transition between a white-dominant culture into one of greater acceptance is described, particularly as it extends to the workforce of the United States. According to MacLean, after World War II, American society could be classified as a "culture of exclusion" ¹; whites still had the political and social power to prevent African-Americans and Mexican-Americans from participating in the American workforce on an equal level. However, many different forces came into play that managed to increase and promote diversity in the workplace, including the efforts of many civil rights activists and organizations to grant opportunities for minorities to receive gainful employment.

The book delves into many different topics over the course of its narrative. First, the aforementioned 'culture of exclusion' is described, noting just how important white Americans thought it was to maintain the status quo, particularly in the aftermath of World War II and the 1950s themselves. The pride of being a breadwinner was demonstrated, and so naturally whites wanted to hold onto that privilege. However, minorities wanted that too, and women wanted the chance to work; subsequently, the struggle for civil rights began, leading to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act².

Other groups besides African-Americans (a group whose unique struggle precipitated the Civil Rights Act) had their own troubles; black women in particular found it difficult to get into the workplace, due to their battle being on two fronts³. Mexicans, who until then simply thought of themselves as

white to get jobs, had to reevaluate their identities in this new world where they could still get jobs, despite being Latino⁴. Jewish Americans started to have their rights infringed upon by these other minorities gaining their own sense of equality⁵. Meanwhile, conservative thinking began to change and shift in tone, as values increasingly changed due to greater acceptance of equalized workforces⁶. What's more, even after Reagan became president, minorities still had to work in order to be included in the workforce on an equal basis⁷.

MacLean's purpose in writing this book was to provide a concise and compelling portrayal of the myriad civil rights organizations and actions that led to an increased level of diversity in the American workforce. Civil rights activists and the resistance to their work provided a unique push and pull which contributed to the specific society that resulted. The thesis of the book revolves around MacLean's idea that the struggle for equality in the workplace for blacks, Latinos and other minorities stemmed from the idea that their fight for freedom extended beyond their basic rights. By being allowed to participate in the workforce, the minorities of America were permitted one more thing that whites held onto as privilege: their pride. This book does a tremendous job of delineating the struggles each group had in fighting for their simple right to work and provide for their families; it also manages to provide a well-rounded examination of the conservative mindset that challenged these reforms.

Compared to the thesis of *Red Chicago* by Storch, *Freedom is Not Enough* emphasizes a more multicultural approach to equality. While the American

Communist party followed a political ideal that eschewed capitalism, the subjects of MacLean's book simply wanted the chance to participate in a capitalist world the same way that whites did. What's more, there were many different political factors at play for the protagonists of *Freedom Is Not Enough*; multiple demographics and interests were portrayed, not just the single American Communist party movement as in *Red Chicago*.

At the same time, the social movement carries unique similarities to the struggle of the labor unions in *Making a New Deal* by Liz Cohen. In both instances, groups of varying races are fighting for their equal rights in a workplace-related setting. However, the primary difference in these situations is that, while the varying races in Chicago ended up working together to fight for a common goal, many different demographics and interests were being portrayed. The demands of the African-American community, for instance, were somewhat different in scope and direction than the struggles of women activists; while they overlapped greatly, they never provided a singular, combined effort. This makes the thesis of MacLean's work somewhat broader in scale, and much more systemic in regards to American society. The previous two works reviewed dealt with civil rights issues in Chicago; MacLean's issues were spread throughout the country.

Nancy MacLean is an Arts and Sciences Professor of History at Duke University, and author of many different books delineating the history of both race relations and conservative politics in America; this makes her uniquely qualified on this subject. Given her extensive study into these various

subjects, MacLean manages to demonstrate a somewhat objective view of the circumstances and viewpoints surrounding many of the decisions that were made in this era. For example, when the Civil Rights act was passed in 1964, Title VII required all organizations and companies to stop discriminating against sex and gender in the workplace. The Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) was placed in charge of enforcing Title VII. While this was considered to be ostensibly a good thing, there was some resistance from Jewish groups, who argued that quotas would form and reverse discrimination would follow, thus depriving qualified Jews of jobs⁸. This is but one example of the even-handed approach MacLean takes to each issue; the clear cut civil rights inequality is solved, but it creates a wholly new problem for a different set of Americans. The conservative perspective is described and defended without being excused; this leads to a greater objective viewpoint, and a distinct lack of bias in the work.

In writing this book, MacLean uses a combination of interviews and statistics to portray and support the facts she provides in her narrative. A keep observer of history, MacLean consults with real civil rights activists, economists, other professors and the like to offer support for her claims. A wealth of secondary sources and substantial information is provided to base her analysis of these socioeconomic factors in truth, providing a well-researched outlook on the subject. Magazine articles and newspapers of the time offer a snapshot perspective of what was happening at that moment in time, lending further history to MacLean's subject matter.

Overall, MacLean's presentation is extremely effective; dividing the overall struggle for workplace equality by racial/gender group was a smart move. By doing so, MacLean manages to delve deeply into each group's particular struggles, such as the Jewish American divide between assimilationism and conservatism. What's more, the struggles of black women to enter the workforce, and the debate over the 'whiteness' of Mexican-Americans are split into separate chapters as well, so as not to clutter the presentation unnecessarily. If the book were presented in a strictly chronological narrative, the many perspectives and subplots would get lost; MacLean's presentation permits straightforward, encapsulated narratives of each group's unique issues.

MacLean's presentation does not lack in excitement, as well; the constant back-and-forth between social issues, combined with spirited debates about complex issues relating to equal rights and free market capitalism, make the book a tremendously interesting work that compels the reader to keep reading. The chapter-by-chapter division of issues also makes for an interesting rollercoaster ride; as one group's concerns are met and solutions are raised, a wholly new issue arises to grip the reader. The ongoing, multifaceted struggle for equality and pride in the workplace is presented ably by MacLean's writing and research.

MacLean's book is very well written; the text is clear cut while maintaining a clear flow and style, making it very easy to read and assimilate the information contained within. Explanatory prose is intermixed with quotes and sources in a very organic way, offering context for a great deal of

secondary sources that are provided in the work. While a great deal of the book is shrouded in quotes, this lends a greater objectivity to the work, as MacLean simply wishes to present the facts as-is, without a great deal of editorializing. In this way, MacLean provides one of the most unbiased books on the subject as could be written.

MacLean does a tremendous job of fitting the content in with the context of the time period. The entire book is an encapsulation of the civil rights movements from 1945 on - MacLean's extensive research demonstrates an awesome command of the history and narrative of that time period. MacLean presents it as a circuitous, often deceptive struggle by two groups (conservatives, equal rights groups) to win out in the workplace, thus preventing the losing side from being fully ignored. This places the reader firmly in the place of those living throughout the 50's, 60's and 70s, when the debate was still raging; by doing so, the reader understands the varying perspectives with a greater degree of accuracy.

In conclusion, MacLean's *Freedom Is Not Enough* presents a well-rounded, historically accurate and deeply-researched account of the struggles that minorities have gone through to open up the workforce to include them. Their struggles continue to this day; however, the heat-up of other pressing political issues (e. g. the Cold War), as well as a disparity between perceived equality by whites and what is really the case, minorities still have a long way to go before achieving true equality⁹. With MacLean's book, a better understanding toward that end is reached.

Works Cited

MacLean, Nancy. *Freedom Is Not Enough*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2008.