

The Meaning of Freedom

TOM WOLFE

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During a recent afternoon drive to West Point it occurred to me that there are only 13 years left of the 20th century. I was appalled to think of what is going to happen in the year 2000, with all the TV specials. If you think the Statue of Liberty Weekend was slightly overdone, wait until you see the year 2000. What will the TV specials about the 20th century say? For a start they will record the fact that this was the century in which wars became so big, they became known as World Wars. They will record the fact that this was the century in which mankind developed the means of exploding the entire planet by pressing a couple of buttons (or turning a few missile-silo keys), but also the century in which man developed a means to escape to the stars through space flight, once he'd done it. But I think that above all, the 20th century will be remembered as the era of the fourth phase of freedom, which is the phase this country is in right now.

It is the most bizarre form that freedom has ever taken, and I think this should be of particular interest to the officer corps of the American armed services. I think you will find this fourth phase very frustrating. It may even bring you grief. But I'll get to that in a moment.

The first phase of American freedom was like that of practically every country born of a revolution. In the first phase, you are fighting for freedom from a particular government that you consider tyrannical. The leader of our first phase was, of course, George Washington, who commanded the Revolutionary forces. The second, third, and fourth phases, however, have created freedoms unique to the United States. They are what have made this country different from any other country in the history of the world.

The second phase was a calculated campaign for freedom from class distinctions. The old British class system was very much in place in this country at the end of the Revolution. You may recall from your courses in history that George Washington was offered the title of king. He declined, but as you can read in General Dave Palmer's *The River and the Rock*, Washington lived like a king. During the Revolution itself, when he had 10,000 men in rags that tried to pass for uniforms, Washington himself lived in the grand Stephen Moore mansion at West Point. He had so many servants they used to deal with the guests on a man-to-man rather than zone basis. The meals went on for three to four hours, always in the grand English fashion with two or three kinds of meat and two or three kinds of fowl, chicken, pheasants, game hens, the lot. As soon as the Lucullan main courses were over, the tablecloths would be changed. The tablecloths were custom-made for George Washington with special embroidery. Then the servants brought out more bottles of wine and half-opened nuts from the tropics and the guests would sit around for another couple of hours. Washington defeated the British militarily, but it was Thomas Jefferson who led the fight against the British status system.

The first thing Thomas Jefferson did after writing the Declaration of Independence was to campaign in the Virginia Legislature to end the system of entails. The laws of entail declared that only male blood relatives could inherit land; and land was almost the entire basis of wealth at that time. He then led a fight against primogeniture, the passing of entire estates to oldest sons. That became illegal in the United States. The ending of primogeniture broke the back of the British class system in this country. In 1839, William Steven Van Rensselaer of New York died as the head of a family that had 700,000 acres of land in New York and adjoining states. Within 50 years every single acre of that land was owned by strangers. And in 1930, when the last of the line died, he left an estate of \$2500. Jefferson's campaign was deliberate and detailed. When Jefferson was elected President in 1800, the White House was not yet finished. He moved into a boarding house in Washington and ate at the foot of the table. It was a major consideration in a class-ridden society: where you sat at the table. In the White

Tom Wolfe, writer and journalist, graduated cum laude from Washington and Lee University in 1951 and later took a doctorate in American studies from Yale. His cultural criticism, bearing the mark of the New Journalism which he pioneered, is best captured in such books as *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*; *The Pump House Gang*; *Radical Chic and Mau Mauing the Flack Catchers*; *Mauve Gloves & Madmen, Clutter & Vine*; and *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. *The Right Stuff*, a national best-seller, won the American Book Award for general nonfiction. In 1980, he received the Columbia Journalism Award for distinguished service to the field of journalism. His first novel, *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, was published in 1987. The present essay was adapted from Mr. Wolfe's Sol Feinstone lecture, "The Meaning of Freedom," at West Point, N.Y., on 8 October 1987.

House he installed circular tables for dining, so that there would never be a head of the table. Through substantive and symbolic devices, he set out to destroy the apparatus of class distinctions.

It is hard to understand the significance of this unless you have also lived in a European country. It is very illuminating to be an American businessman and to go to Switzerland, which is a very peaceful democracy, and just live there for a few years. Every year you have to renew your work permit, and to renew your work permit you go to the police station; and the first time an American goes in, he announces his purpose and is told to sit down, and a policeman comes out with a folder an inch thick. Our businessman has done nothing exciting. He has worked for a corporation. He hasn't even jaywalked anywhere. He hasn't had a parking ticket. Yet here is a fat folder in the police station with his name on it. So he says, "What on earth is that?" The policeman says, "C'est votre dossier, monsieur." "This is my dossier? Well, what's in it?" "C'est votre dossier, monsieur." And he quickly gets the message that he shouldn't ask; and if he does, he is not going to be told; and it dawns on him that his rights have been leased to him by an unseen patriarchal social order that knows best.

By the same token a European coming to the United States finds that democracy in America rubs him the wrong way. The classic example would be the liberal from Europe who from afar has loved the United States, believes in the American form of liberty, comes here to worship, to pay homage like Charles Dickens, who came to the United States in the 1840s. He was the most famous writer in the world at that time. He was a great liberal, and he came here to worship at the altar of American democracy as a way of fighting against class injustice in England, and he kept having the following sort of experience. Somewhere along the Hudson River, I believe it was, he stayed overnight in an inn; he was to catch a stagecoach into New York the next morning. The stagecoach arrived early in the morning. Here's Dickens with his valet and about six or eight pieces of luggage. The valet is having a hard time getting it all up on top of the stagecoach. The driver turns to Dickens and says, "Okay, Mac, shake a leg, we haven't got all day here. We gotta get going." The valet is indignant. He looks at the driver and says, "Just a minute. Do you realize whom you are talking to? This is Mr. Charles Dickens. You do not call Mr. Charles Dickens 'Mac.'" At which point the driver says, "Oh gee, I'm sorry. Okay, Charlie, let's get a move on. We gotta get out of here, Charlie." Now, Dickens, after a couple of weeks of this, was viscerally unable to like the United States any longer. Intellectually, he insisted on liking it. Personally and viscerally, he never wanted to set foot in the United States again.

In the United States you can find an upper class if you set arbitrary numbers for money and servants—having servants being the key to upper-class status throughout the world—and declare that anyone maintaining

those numbers qualifies as upper class. But it will be just that, something arbitrary, because the apparatus and symbolism of class deference no longer exist. I will never forget working for the *New York Herald Tribune* and following Nelson Rockefeller around New York during his campaign for governor. Once a group of reporters was out on Park Avenue, following Rockefeller from some sort of meeting. One of his aides said, "Governor, we are terribly behind schedule. We had better go to the apartment and make a phone call to so-and-so." Rockefeller, very grandly for the benefit of the reporters, said, "That's not necessary. We don't have to go to the apartment. There's a telephone booth right there. I'll go down and make the call myself. Give me a nickel." This was interesting to me for two reasons: first, because a telephone call in New York had not cost a nickel for 15 years; but mainly because it was an example of how an American politician with wealth and servants must aspire downward in appearances. For someone like Giscard d'Estaing to have put on any such exhibition would have been unthinkable.

The third phase of freedom in the United States began just after the Civil War, and this can best be described as the freedom of everyone to better himself in America—and the implicit promise that he will. To the rest of the world this was, and is still, a startling notion. Most countries have had what we might call zero-sum economic competition. If the proletariat or the peasantry, to use the Marxist terminology, is going to get more, then something has to be taken away from the upper classes. In the United States, the announcement was made in the Declaration of Independence that everyone has the right to pursue happiness. As Saint-Simon, the great French utopian, said 150 years ago, "Happiness is a new idea in Europe." Now the promise of improvement for everyone depended in no small part, according to the historian Frederick Jackson Turner, the creator of the famous Turner thesis, on the existence of the American frontier with its seemingly infinite free land for all who were adventurous enough to settle it. It was Turner's thesis that the frontier created the American character and that it did this in two ways. The roughness of the frontier made Americans leave behind all European baggage, in terms of class manners and habits. Many settlers on the frontier ended up dressing and living like Indians, for practical, not romantic reasons. It was also remote terrain. The bonds of government were left behind. Many of the settlers who went across the country were Dissenting Protestants—Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists—people who had dissented from the Church of England. Dissenting Protestants believed that authority came directly from God and was to be internalized by the individual. The individual was to march forth like a Christian soldier, bearing the authority of God with him. He was not the subject of some unseen noble order.

A fascinating thing to me is the difference between the Western experience in the United States and in Canada. Both countries had rough primitive western frontiers. But in Canada there were no gunfights. In America, there have been six movies made about the shootout at the OK Corral alone. It is generally forgotten that this gunfight was the climax of the election for sheriff of Tombstone, Arizona. The incumbent was Johnny Behan. The challenger was Wyatt Earp. They settled the matter with guns. This was very much an American idea: that an individual, or an individual and his cronies, could establish authority on the frontier.

In Dawson, Canada, about the same time, an American gunfighter from Dodge City, One-Eyed Jack Slade (I believe), was thrown out of a saloon for talking too loud. Dawson was just as primitive a town as Tombstone, just as full of mud and animals and everything else, but he was thrown out for talking too loud. Now he is out on the street, very sore at the world. He's got this six-shooter strapped to his hip, and along comes a Mountie. This Mountie is 22 years old, practically beardless, wearing the red coat, the tan jodhpurs, the black riding boots. He has on the black hat with the straight brim. He says, "Hey, you there, you, come here. You can't walk around here carrying a revolver. Give that to me." To which One-Eyed Jack Slade said, "I reckon you don't know who I am. The name is Slade. The man who could take a gun away from me ain't been born yet. Them that's tried ain't breathing now." So you have the classic American western confrontation. Jack Slade has his hands out; he has assumed the dueling position. They are out in the middle of the street, and he is taking on Gary Cooper, only he happens to be a Mountie. The arena is set. To this, the Mountie says, "Will you kindly not make a spectacle of yourself? Now hand me that gun and get out of the middle of the street. There's a coal wagon coming down here with a team of four, and you're liable to get hurt." At this, One-Eyed Jack Slade absolutely wilted. He just wilted. He was being treated like a little boy who had brought his water pistol into the house. And he somehow realized at that moment that this was not an American confrontation, with two barrels of machismo out in the middle of the street on the edge of the void about to blow each other to smithereens. He was not dealing with another man on the frontier. He was dealing with an institution, and if he shot this one, another red coat would take its place; and if he shot that one, another red coat would come; if he shot 20 of them, they would send enough red coats until they obliterated One-Eyed Jack Slade. So he gave up, and he sheepishly handed over the revolver, and he went back to Dodge City. The Canadian West was settled by the Hudson's Bay Company, which was chartered by the British government. If you didn't work for the Hudson's Bay Company and take orders from the Royal Mounted Police, you couldn't survive. The Turner thesis did not translate into the Canadian experience.

The Turner thesis was amended by the Webb thesis. In *The Great Frontier* the historian Walter Webb said that long before the land had run out, Americans had stopped going to the frontier, because they had discovered something that better achieved this third freedom, the freedom to prosper. And that was the city. People who might have headed to the frontier now headed to the cities. Did the cities fulfill the promise? The fact of the matter is, they did. It seems like only yesterday, in reading the history books, that the Irish and the Germans, two of the first great waves of immigrants, were coming into New York City. Today there are only a few pockets of Irish-Americans in New York City, and the Germans are long gone. What has happened to all of these Irish-Americans and German-Americans who used to dominate New York? They bettered themselves, as promised. They may have jobs in New York, but they live in Dobbs Ferry, Dix Hills, Westbury. Likewise, the immigrants who followed them, namely the Jews and the Italians, are moving out, leaving New York City. They have not necessarily moved up the social ladder, however. Many of them are still the air-conditioning mechanics, the burglar alarm repairmen, the cablevision linemen, to cite some typical members of the mid-1980s working class—although they think of themselves as middle class because of all the money they make. They commute from Dobbs Ferry in their Cadillac Eldorados. That has become the typical proletarian vehicle of the United States. Climate control, cruise control, electric locks, power steering, power windows—it is amazing, absolutely amazing! They go home, and before dinner they have a little designer water, play with the baby, watch the VCR. This is the American working class. Amazing. The promise has been fulfilled, and people are still coming to this country from all over the world. The great new wave is Asian, and the Asians have fared well. The dream has come true for them very rapidly.

This third phase of freedom was new to history. Toward the end of the Second World War, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt issued a famous pronunciamento in which he said that henceforth all mankind should be guaranteed freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from fear, and freedom from want. The first three were one thing; but for anyone to say that from now on “freedom from want” was a basic human freedom was a bizarre notion to Europeans and Asians. Only an American could have taken that seriously.

But, as I say, we are today in the fourth phase of American freedom, and it is the strangest of all. The fourth phase is freedom from religion. It is not freedom *of* religion; it is freedom *from* religion.

De Tocqueville. Who can speak about the United States and freedom without mentioning de Tocqueville at least once? Forgive me. De Tocqueville said, in 1835, that American democracy was the freest form of government in the world, by which he also meant the most libertine; so free,

in fact, that American society would have come apart had it not been for the internal discipline of the American people. This internal discipline, he said, was rooted in their profound devotion to religion. What we are now seeing is the earnest rejection of the constraints of religion in the second half of the 20th century; not just the rules of morality but even simple rules of conduct and ethics. That is what fascinates me.

The first time I saw this up close was when I was working on my book *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. I went to San Francisco to see what was known as the great hippie migration. Tens of thousands of young men and women were living together in communes dedicated to the idea that all bourgeois constraints should be swept away. Start from zero. That was the idea. It was at that time that I came across the remarkable Haight-Ashbury Free Clinic, a medical clinic that had been set up to minister to the needs of these young people who had arrived in such numbers. The doctors in this clinic were seeing diseases that no living doctor had ever seen, diseases that had been thought to have disappeared from the face of the earth so long ago they had never even picked up Latin names, diseases such as the thrush, the itch, the twitch, the grunge, the mange, the rot, the scroff. Why were they seeing these diseases? Well, because in the compulsion to get rid of bourgeois standards, the young people living together in these communes had decided to abandon such old rules as the ones that say that two people should not use the same toothbrush, that two people should not use the same mattress without changing the sheets or, more often the case, without putting on sheets at all; two people shouldn't use the same glass or Coca-Cola bottle or take tokes from the same cigarette. These rules were simply swept aside. What we are talking about are the rules of hygiene. The idea was: we now have the freedom to rid ourselves of these onerous constraints, the rules of hygiene. So now they were laboriously relearning the reason for the rules of hygiene by getting . . . the grunge, the mange, the itch, the twitch, the thrush, the rot, the scroff.

In that same period, I happened to go to Italy on a lecture tour, and I found that Italian students were absolutely mesmerized by the subject of the hippies. They wanted to know all about them. The thing that most amazed them was the fact that young people were able to leave home, move in together, and somehow survive, subsist in communes. Because even the most violent, radical Italian students, those who spent the day on the barricades throwing bombs and glass and bricks at the police, were home by 8:30 at night. They were always at home, having dinner, having a little gnocchi and cappellini with mom and dad and the unmarried sisters, because the only way to get out of the house was to get married. There was no other way. Nobody would think of leaving home without getting married. The old order, even among people who thought they were so radical, so liberated, had such a grip that they couldn't think of breaking free.

Just think of what has gone on in America in the last 15 years in the sexual arena. Just 15 years ago, if any public figure had suggested that there should be in this country an institution known as the coed dorm, in which young women, nubile and downy, would live not only in the same building, but on the same corridors with young men in the season of the rising sap, such an individual would have been looked at as if his eyebrows were being eaten away by weevils. And if he had suggested coed barracks, he would have been stoned. Today, the coed dorm and the coed barracks are just part of the backdrop of American life. They are like I-95, the interstate highway. It's there, it's big, you occasionally hear the hum in the background, but that's all. It's just part of the backdrop.

Or think of the institution that has grown up all over this country, even in the part of the country I hail from, the South, even in the so-called Bible Belt. I am thinking of the institution of the village brothel. Today at any crossroads in the South, in the old Bible Belt, in addition to the First Methodist Church, the Second Baptist, and the UB—that's the United Brethren—in addition to the Arby's fast food drive-in and the hot-wax car wash and the general store with the Mountain Dew soda pop medallions on either side, you're likely to find the village brothel. It's a one-story building, black or maroon in color, with either no windows or windows boarded over. Out front is a back-lit plastic sign which says "Totally all-nude girls, sauna, massage, and marathon encounter sessions inside." It's a house of prostitution. Nobody arches his eyebrows at it any longer. It's an institution by the side of the road. It's in the yellow pages; it's advertised in the newspaper.

Think of the so-called adult or X-rated movie. Fascinating. They are nothing but the old men's stag movies, only now done in 35mm or 70mm high-resolution technicolor photography. In any small city in the United States, 200,000 souls, let's say, up until just a couple of years ago you would find the following lineup. There would be about 14 movie theaters. One would be showing a movie such as *Back to the Future*. One would be showing a movie such as *Amadeus*, because it won all those Academy Awards. Nobody goes to see it, but they show it because it won the Academy Awards. A third would be showing *The Vein Strippers* or some other teenage hemorrhage movie. Eleven would be showing X-rated or adult films. Of those eleven, two would be outdoor drive-ins, with screens, five, seven, eight stories high, the better to beam all those moistened folds and glistening nodes and stiffened giblets to a panting American countryside. Absolutely amazing.

At the same time that this was going on, the divorce rate was really taking off. Last year it finally passed the 50-percent mark. Today the natural outcome of marriage in the United States is divorce.

The aforesaid burglar alarm repairman and the electrician, the air-conditioning mechanic, in addition to the chief executive officers of the

corporations, would begin to indulge in the whims of caliphs, one of the whims being an endless succession of young things at your beck and call. That is why to me one of the most interesting figures of the 1980s is someone I think of as the new cookie. This is the young woman, usually in her 20s, for whom the American male now customarily shucks his wife of two to three decades' standing once the electrolysis lines form above her upper lip. The thing that intrigued me most about these discotheques, such as Studio 54 or Xenon, was the sight of the Chief Executive Officer of the corporation out there on the dance floor with his new cookie. He is wearing his chalk-striped suit, his medium-point F. Tripler white shirt, and his shepherd's-check necktie. He's got his hair combed back over his ears in little sloops in the 57th Street Biggie look. His new cookie is out there on the dance floor with him, and she is wearing a pair of Everlast boxing trunks and a man's strap undershirt. She has a hairdo that looks as if a Snapper lawn mower just went over her head. He is staring at her with these red eyes through walnut-shelled eyelids, breathing stertorously, desperately trying to do the Eel, the Robot, or the Sado-macho, until the onset of dawn, saline depletion, or myocardial infarction, whichever comes first. And why shouldn't he? Because after all, what are Mom and the Cutlass Ciera and Buddy and Sis up against a love like this? That first night on the disco floor she wore a pair of boxing trunks, while leather punks and painted lulus, African queens and Sado-Zulus paid her court. I grow old, the 1980s way, deaf, but from a max-q-octaphonic beat, stroked out, but on my own two feet, disco macho for you, my new cookie.

I want to give one final example of this strange fourth phase of freedom. And now we move from the moral terrain onto the shifting sands of mere ethics. I am now talking about what used to be known as amateur athletics. Remember amateur athletics? Amateur athletics came to an official end in May of last year when the Boston Marathon became professional. For the marathon, of all events, to become professional, was astounding. Yet in the midst of this strange fourth phase of freedom, the change was scarcely even noticed. When the star basketball player for the University of Maryland, Len Bias, died of a cocaine overdose, this was considered an aberration in the career of an exemplary young man. I submit that it was not an aberration at all; taking drugs is a standard practice of those who aspire to be great athletes in America. I have been interested in this subject and would like to do a book about it. I have been talking to high school athletes. Many young high school athletes today will take drugs because they feel that's one of the steps you take to become a pro. That is why one tries to excel in sports: to become a professional.

I would submit—although I cannot prove it—that 90 percent of American professional athletes today play hungover. About 65 percent of big-time college athletes play their sports hungover. I think that the reason that the Soviet ice hockey team sweeps through the National Hockey League

like a knife through water is that the KGB will not let the players drink vodka in the United States or Canada when they come here for these games. I remember talking to a stewardess in Canada who had been on charter flights of the Soviet hockey team. She says, "I know these are not hockey players. I think they are spies; they are certainly not hockey players. They don't fall down, stumble, grope, stagger, throw up; they don't grab your leg and say, 'Nice material, honey.' They cannot possibly be hockey players."

If you ever have the chance to go to Columbus, Ohio, to Ohio State University, watch the football team come across the campus at about eleven o'clock in the morning. They are not in uniform; they are just walking across the campus in a group. You can spot them immediately, not only because they are bigger than other people, which they should be, but also because they are put together differently. Today, in the day and age of the Pectoflex machine and the Nautilus and the Universal Bulker, they have the sternocleidomastoid muscles that start at the lower part of the ear, and they merge with the trapezii which in turn merge with the deltoids. So they look unit-welded, like a Well-McLain oil burner. But more interesting than that is the fact that they always travel in clumps. At 11:30 in the morning, they look like Stonehenge during an earthquake. And that is because at universities with big-time sports programs, the athletes are encouraged to live together, apart from the rest of the student body. They have their own cybernetic diets. They have line-ups of officially sanctioned drugs by their plates: vitamin B12, to make the arteries writhe like king snakes; calcium lithosilicilate, to make the teeth sharper, more pointed, harder. They have separate courses. They major in campground management and muscle bulking. They have just changed the rules for taking an IQ test among athletes in the Big Ten. Up until this year, they used to have to sit down at a table like other students, and mark little boxes on sheets of paper. As of this year, that is no longer required. Today they take the test with a truck tire gauge. They put one end of the tire gauge in the ear, and it goes shhhhhh . . . 72, 73, 74 . . .

Think of the difference between that and the old ethos of Dink Stover at Yale. I suppose no one reads the Dink Stover stories any longer. Dink Stover was the captain of the Yale football team. He considered it his obligation to be an exemplar of the core values of Yale. Many of the Dink Stover stories turn on situations such as the following. Dink Stover is going out with a young lady who is obviously in love with him, but Dink Stover is worried that she doesn't love him for himself but for his status as captain of the Yale football team. Is he taking advantage of her? This goes on page after page after page.

Today, what happens in the big universities? Never mind "take advantage of." The motto today is: TAKE! Think of the cases over the past five years of outstanding college athletes at major universities being brought up on charges of molesting or raping of coeds. The entire administration of

the university turns against the young woman in question, with statements such as: "These boys are under a lot of pressure." "You have to make allowances." "They have to let off steam somehow." "What are you trying to do, ruin him?"

Why, we begin to ask, were sports ever amateur? We have forgotten. I think it is part of the social amnesia of the times. Sports, particularly organized sports, are a charade for war. The purpose of amateur athletics has always been to have a relatively harmless way of preparing young men for fighting in combat. It was well understood by military men that you may have a good mercenary warrior, but you are not going to have a great mercenary warrior. The great warrior is the warrior who fights only for duty, honor, and country, to quote a famous Superintendent of West Point; that is, the amateur. He who fights for honor, for home and hearth, will fight to the last drop of blood and the last unbroken hyoid bone for the principles of a people. If you train young men, through athletics, to be mercenaries instead, then they will act like mercenaries. They will look for the rewards of mercenaries. Which are what? Pillage, loot, rape, and a little dope on the side.

Now, when I was working on my book *The Right Stuff* I came across the extraordinary figure of Chuck Yeager. At the time, he was a brigadier general in the Air Safety Command in California, toward the end of his career. I got on the subject of the astronauts with him, and he said an interesting thing. He said, "The biggest mistake that NASA ever made was allowing astronauts to take money from *Life* magazine. That was the first bite out of the apple." "Bite out of the apple" is a phrase referring to the Garden of Eden. What was the Eden that Chuck Yeager was talking about?

That I discovered by accident, through Yeager's voice. I was out at Edwards Air Force Base, where many of the astronauts had been trained, and I met a pilot from New York City. That caught my attention because, for whatever reason, you meet very few pilots in the military from New York City. This fellow's name was Fahey, as I recall, and he was from Sunnyside, Queens, and he had an absolutely Sunnyside, Queens, New York street voice. It was unmistakable. There are two words that give away people from New York no matter how much they try to renovate their accents: "electricity" and "frankfurter." This Fahey and I were chatting. He said, "This morning I was in my apartment, back in the kitchen 'eh"—in New York the word "there" following a consonant has no "th"; it's spelled 'eh—"and the eleg-drizzidy went out while I was trying to cook a frank-fudda." Well, you'll notice that in New York the word electricity has no c's and t's. It's all g's, d's, dr's, and z's. "Eleg-drizzidy." And the term "hot dog" is never used. A hot dog is a frankfurter. And the word "frankfurter" has two d's and no t's in it: "frankfudda." So this guy was pure Sunnyside, Queens.

Well, that afternoon I was up in the control tower at Edwards—they were letting me see some of the routine operations—and this voice comes in from way out there somewhere, and it says “Edwards Tower, this is Air Force jet niner niner five, proceeding through altitude two, zero, zero, approaching Edwards tacan, air speed, two, seven, oh. Got me a little ’ol flame-out up here. Request permission to put her down on Roger’s Dry Lake.” You can immediately see the tension building up in this control tower. It is well known that Air Force 995 is an F104. An F104 is an aircraft that is capable of going in excess of Mach 2.5 but which under the speed of 250 knots has the glide characteristics of a set of car keys, and this aircraft was already down to 270 knots. So this controller starts screaming into the microphone. “Air Force niner niner five, Air Force niner niner five, what are your intentions? What are your intentions? Are you declaring an emergency? Are you declaring an emergency?” And the voice comes back, “This is Air Force jet niner niner five. Negative, I am not declaring an emergency. I am not declaring an emergency. Merely requesting permission to put her down on Roger’s Dry Lake, you pud-knocker!” And I said, “Who is this guy? Who is this guy?” And they said, “It’s this guy Fahey. He’s from your part of the world. He’s from New York City.” I said, “Wait a minute, I was talking to Fahey this morning. He has a stone Sunnyside, Queens, New York voice. But this voice I am listening to now is from somewhere in the Appalachians.” And the controller said, “Oh, that’s that Yeager voice. They can come from Sunnyside, Queens, Bangor, Maine, Long Beach, California, or Portland, Oregon. You let them up in the skies over Edwards Air Force Base, and they are all going to talk like Chuck Yeager.”

Now I had never heard, I must confess, the name Chuck Yeager before. Because the Edwards pilots were considered the pick of the litter in the Air Force at that time, all the test pilots and military pilots began to adopt the Chuck Yeager voice and, finally, all the airline pilots began to adopt that voice, and for a time that was all you could hear in the skies over America: the voice of Chuck Yeager. Through this voice, I discovered what I later came to call the Brotherhood of the Right Stuff. I discovered that there was within the flying fraternity, particularly military flying, a brotherhood based on the idea that all that counted in life was the excellent performance of routine duties, which consisted of defying death daily in the air. Rank meant nothing. Money meant nothing. Yeager, when he ascended to the top of this pyramid, was a captain in the Air Force. Excellent performance of your duty as a military officer was everything; to Chuck Yeager, this was all that mattered. He told me at that time, “Everything I ever did I did for this blue suit,” and he grasped the lapel of his blue Air Force officer’s uniform.

Well it so happens, ironically, that today Chuck Yeager probably makes more than a million dollars a year through commercials, public

appearances, and his book, which is one of the great best sellers of the last ten years. So when I ran into him recently, I said, "Chuck, what are you going to do with all your money?" He said, "I don't know. I think maybe I'll give it to my children," which apparently he has done through a trust. He said, "You know when I left the Air Force, I built my dream house." Which he did; he built a log cabin, considerably glorified but nevertheless a log cabin, in the foothills of the Sierras. He loves to hunt; he loves to fish. This was the life he wanted. And he said, "What do you do after you have built your dream house?"

That always stuck in my mind. Today, you in the military are going to have to confront, in this really quite marvelous manic fourth phase of freedom in America, the most amazing magnetic pulls upon your motivation—as you see the money, the freedom, the luxuries that are so easily available. You are going to realize that everyone else—not you—is living in the age of Everyman an Aristocrat. That is the fourth phase of freedom in America. For the first time in the history of mankind, everyone, every man and woman, now has the capability of availing himself or herself of the luxuries of the aristocrat, whether it be a constant string of young sexual partners or whether it be the easy access to anything that stimulates or soothes the mind or the nervous system or simply the easy disregard of rules of various sorts. And I must say there is something marvelous about it. For the first time in the history of man, it is possible for every man to live the life of an aristocrat. I marvel at it, and I wonder at it, and I write about it. But you will have to deal with it. You are going to find yourselves required to be sentinels at the bacchanal. You are going to find yourself required to stand guard at the Lucullan feast against the Huns approaching from outside. You will have to be armed monks at the orgy.

If I use religious terminology, I use it on purpose. One of the most famous addresses ever delivered in this century by an American was the address on 12 May 1962, by Douglas MacArthur at West Point, in which he enunciated the watchwords of duty, honor, and country. The rest of that speech is less well remembered. He said that the soldier, above all other men, is expected to practice the greatest act of religion: sacrifice. Now as I say, I love the age of Everyman an Aristocrat. I think there is something Nietzschean about a country that has taken freedom to the point of getting rid of the constraints of the most ordinary rules. For better or for worse, there is something marvelous about it. But I submit that there is something equally marvelous about the possibility of leading your life in such a way that even should your ship come in, even should you have the hoards of gold far beyond your wildest dreams, that you might be able to say in all sincerity and with great aplomb: "What difference does it make? I have already built my dream house." □