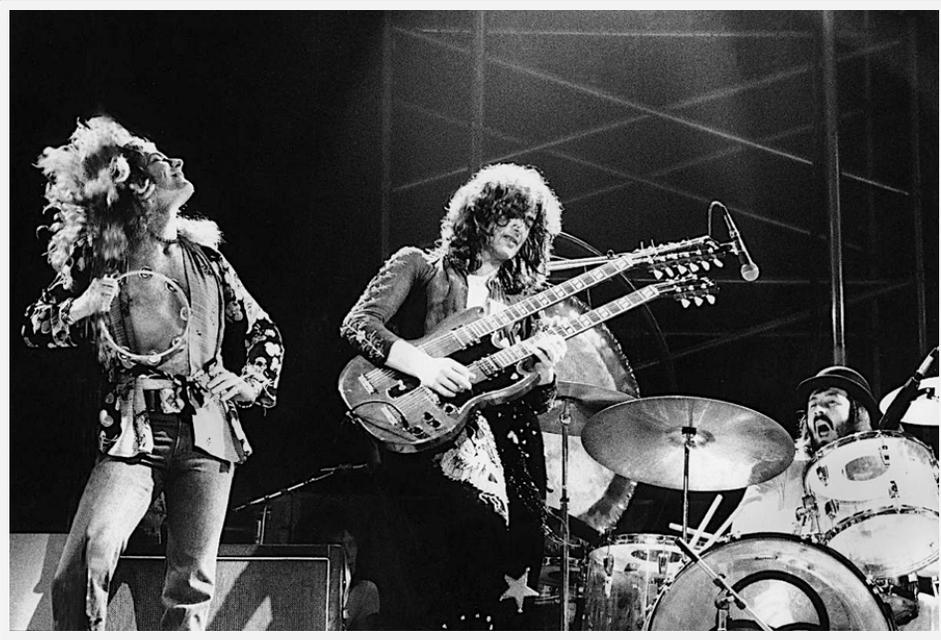


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# I Miss the Freedom of the 1970s

By A.J. Smuskiewicz, on May 18th, 2020



I never thought I would live to see freedoms and liberties being stripped away from Americans to the extent they are being stripped away today. It is shocking to see and infuriating to live through. But I am reminded that although we are losing our basic freedoms en masse today, they have actually been gradually eroding for many decades, mainly as a result of the ever-expanding power of government. This is happening throughout the Western world, but it is particularly disturbing in the United States—because the United States is supposed to be a special, exceptional nation.

Younger Americans today have no idea what life in a truly free country feels like. I do. I am 60 years old, and I can tell you that the last time the United States was truly free—for average Americans—was the 1970s. That was the peak decade of American freedom—the last time that average people could do whatever the hell they felt like doing without fear of government punishment, social ostracism, or infectious disease.

In this essay, I share my perspective on the changing times, with some admittedly rambling insights. Hopefully, you will find my ramblings somewhat coherent, held together by the concept of freedom. To get in that 70s mood, you may want to check out **Dickey Betts and The Allman Brothers performing “Ramblin’ Man” in 1972 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jUTORC4eoGc>.**

## Economic Peak

From the beginning of 1970 to the end of 1979, I grew from a 9-year-old boy into a 19-year-old freshman college student. During this 10-year period, my interests and passions evolved from the Chicago Cubs, baseball cards, Hot Wheels, *Star Trek*, and the Apollo moon missions to art, music, science studies, politics, women, sex, and alcohol. I was in love with Linda Ronstadt, who was dating Democrat presidential candidate Jerry Brown in 1976. I fantasized about her becoming First Lady, but was not to be.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGldbF8T7Ns> (Linda Ronstadt, “That’ll Be the Day,” 1976)

These were generally good times for me—before I had any real tough responsibilities or burdens—so you might suspect that is why I look back so fondly at the 1970s. That is no doubt partly true. However, my admiration for this decade goes beyond my own happy personal memories.

The 1970s were a special time in American history, in many different ways. They came after the social revolutions of the 1960s, which led to an unprecedented blossoming of social and sexual freedoms, and before the 1980s, when various aspects of social and economic life in the United States became much more complicated for people. The complications grew into even more serious obstacles during the 1990s and early 2000s—not just for me, but for many other Americans.

My father, who worked as a machinist, used to tell me that the late 60s and early 70s (when he was in his late 30s and early 40s) were the best time financially in this country. That was the peak of the post-World War II economic boom. That was when a regular guy who did not graduate from high school could still have a solid, secure, dependable blue-collar job in which he could make enough money to support a wife and raise two kids in a comfortable manner. The wife didn’t have to work, and the kids had everything they wanted. The guy knew that the job was going to still be there tomorrow. If it wasn’t, for whatever reason, he had no worries that his skills and experience would easily land him another job.

That all began to change after the Arab Oil Embargo of 1973–1974. That event produced a lot of negative fallout that gradually spread throughout the U.S. economy, and the country would never be the same. As the years went by, Americans had to grow accustomed to the ideas of insecure jobs that might disappear at any time, income not stretching as far as it used to, husbands and wives both working to make ends meet, and other developments that made life for the average American seem more insecure than it was before.

The economic challenges of the later 70s are typically blamed on Jimmy Carter—at least by conservatives and Republicans. But I’m not sure how fair that is. Carter happened to be there as the economy was changing due to events that happened before he was in power. It would have been difficult for any president. Conservatives also like to give Ronald Reagan credit for the economic turnaround in the 1980s, in which the job and financial situations improved for many Americans. That credit is indeed justified and deserved. Nevertheless, the relatively strong economic situation of the 80s was not the same as the late 60s and early 70s. The same degree of long-term security, confidence, and optimism was not there for the average American. A job and a dollar just didn’t mean quite as much as they did before for the regular guy—regardless of what certain selected statistics might seem to suggest.

I don’t want to focus on economic matters in this essay, but I did want to open with them, to describe the general environmental situation. After all, money certainly helps a person enjoy his or her freedoms. You usually feel freer when you have cash to spend. But the freedom I am focusing on here goes beyond money.

## Freedom to Have Fun

You could enjoy your American freedom by having a lot of fun in the 60s and 70s. It was a great time to be young, single, and dating—or maybe just looking for sexua

adventures. This was a swingin' era, influenced partly by Sinatra's sexual swagger and partly by the "free love" movement and the spread of liberal attitudes regarding sex. Men could flirt with women and make complimentary or respectfully suggestive comments without worrying that their behavior might somehow be interpreted as offensive or sexist. Men and women looking for love did not think twice about hooking up if they felt a mutual attraction.

That casually sexual lifestyle became less common in American nightclubs and bars after the emergence of HIV-AIDS in the 1980s. Awareness of the risks of sexually transmitted disease was suddenly more prominent in people's minds, including both heterosexuals and homosexuals. The hippie dream of free love began to seem hopelessly naïve. In addition to these worries about STDs, men and women by the 1990s also had to deal with the development of a kind of "new puritanism" in their romantic relationships. Behaviors that had been normal aspects of romance and flirtation for generations were now deemed to be socially unacceptable. This warping of romance has become firmly ingrained in the social consciousness. I'm glad that I'm not a young guy trying to navigate through the modern dating scene with all of the silly, irritating rules.

Back during the 70s, while guys and girls were flirting, they may have also been smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol. Fascinating, isn't it? Although I have never been a smoker, I believe that people should have a right to smoke wherever and whenever they want, if that is what they enjoy. When you watch TV shows and movie from that era, you notice that almost everyone is smoking and drinking. It was accepted as normal, and it was often the source of humor, rather than finger-wagging social reprimanding.

One of my favorite TV shows from that time is *Bewitched*, the situation comedy starring Elizabeth Montgomery as the beautiful blonde witch "Samantha." Liz was my first fantasy girlfriend. But when I watch those fun old shows today, the main thing I notice is that most of the characters are constantly drinking booze. Darrin, Sam's harried husband (originally played fantastically by Dick York), drinks at work with the boss and business clients. Then he drives home and drinks some more. After all, it was very stressful living with a witch! Sam and Darrin frequently entertain guests, with lots of drinks of course.

The boozing and smoking of the 70s happened before the paranoia about second-hand smoke, before the organized shakedowns of tobacco companies, and before the political power of groups like Mothers Against Drunk Driving (another aspect of the modern puritanism).

Many people associate the 60s and 70s with recreational drugs, especially such "mind-expanding" psychedelic drugs as LSD. I was never into those illegal chemical substances, but I suppose they could represent the freedom to explore one's psyche. These chemicals can surely have harmful effects, on both the users and society. Even marijuana—which is widely touted today as benign—can cause health problems, including neurological and respiratory issues. I point out a lot of ironies in this essay. One irony is that pot has been legalized and it is promoted today by the government, while cigarettes and alcohol are demonized and their users are harshly penalized. So, the government decides which vices are socially acceptable and which are not. Needless to say, the main reason that pot has been legalized is revenue from sales taxes, as well as revenue from the resulting DUIs. Because of Uber and Lyft, DUI arrests from drinking have been declining in recent years. That is very bad for local and state governments, which have made massive amounts of cash from the DUI racket. Legalizing pot will likely lead to more impaired driving to boost the DUI arrests and restore the revenue stream for governments.

## Fashion, Style, and Music

The fashions and styles of the 70s were clearly representative of feelings of freedom, self-expression, and even joy, partly because of the excessive nature of some of these styles. Long hair was in style for both men and women. Lots of guys had long sideburns (think of early 70s Elvis in his prime), or bushy mustaches or beards. Big natural afro hairstyles were common. Men's suits were more colorful than they had ever been, and they had wide lapels, wide collars, and wide ties. (Baseball uniforms of the time were wildly colorful.) Both sexes wore bell bottoms. Lots of women wore longish flowy dresses or skirts. Yes, the miniskirts of the 60s gave way to longer skirts in the 70s, before minis made a comeback in the 80s. Men and women wore high platform heels. It was as if all the styles were purposefully excessive and exaggerated—like people were proudly and boldly expressing their freedoms with their clothes and hair. But unlike much of the self-expression of women's fashion today, the styles in the 70s were generally not overtly sexual or vulgar.

I have loved music ever since I heard “I Think I Love You” by the Partridge Family in 1970. Nothing says freedom to me like music. The most creative popular music ever made—including rock, country, and pop—was produced in the 1960s and 1970s. Many of the songs were about the idea of freedom, with the greatest one of all being **Janis Joplin’s 1970 recording of the Kris Kristofferson composition “Me and Bobby McGee”**: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHkBV-AtKDA>

Rock music was at its absolute zenith in the 70s, with the masterful compositions and performances of Led Zeppelin and other bands that featured wildly amazing extended guitar solos, swirling melodies, and the pure awesome power of rock. Every guitar riff from Jimmy Page, each crying vocal from Robert Plant, and all the pounding drum rhythms from John Bonham (three guys in Zeppelin) shouted freedom at full blast. These were musicians who relished in coaxing all the creative energies out of their instruments. Most of the greatest rock musicians of the 70s happened to be British (like Zeppelin, the Who, and Eric Clapton), or from the South (like The Allman Brothers, Lynyrd Skynyrd, and ZZ Top), or from California (like Ronstadt and the Eagles).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HGFITl5mFvs> (**Led Zeppelin, “Trampled Under Foot,” 1975**)

Country music also reached its creative peak in the 70s, as best represented by the “outlaw” music of Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson. These two wild Texans grew beards and long hair and asserted their artistic independence over the stodgy Nashville music scene, playing music in their own rebellious ways. Those guys really appealed to me when I was a teenager, and they still do today. They told me it was okay to fight for the freedom to do things your own way. And that has always been the motto I have lived by.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gu83-GufBT8> (**Waylon Jennings, “Freedom to Stay,” 1973**)

The other main thing about the country music from that era was the intelligent lyrics of writers like Kristofferson, Billy Joe Shaver, Shel Silverstein, and Tom T. Hall. That was before country music turned into the idiot party trash that it is today.

Yeah, country music is now brain-dead pseudo-pop, real rock is long dead, and the preferred music of the masses (pop and rap) is either hypersexualized synthesizer masturbatory fantasies or predictable woke progressive preachiness. Hey, I know I sound like an old fart—because that’s what I am—but it is a fact that kids these days don’t know what real music is!

## **Enjoying Nature, Taking Risks, Thinking for Yourself**

I find my greatest sense of freedom in nature, such as during a hike in the forest, a bicycle ride along the I&M Canal (here in Lockport, Illinois), or gazing up at the stars at night. I feel a spiritual connection to the universe when I am in a natural setting—a wonderful, profound, relaxing, peaceful, and joyous connection that I have never felt in any church. No matter how oppressive the government gets, it can never take that away!

When most folks ride bikes—regular bicycles or motorcycles—in my area, which is about 40 miles southwest of the fascist stronghold of Chicago, they do not wear helmets. Shocking, isn’t it? The closer you get to the city, the more you see the helmets. Back in the 60s and 70s, nobody—certainly none of us kids—wore helmets to ride a damn bicycle!

Somewhere along the line, Americans grew very averse to the concept of risk. Today, they expect the government to protect them against all potential harm. So they follow the mommy-state rules and wear the helmet on the bike, they strap on the seat belt in the car, and, now, they wrap their face in a mask to go inside the grocery store.

Risks—in the form of environmental pollution—used to be real, not imaginary. My dad used to tell me how—because of the widespread use of coal for heating, and the resulting dirty emissions from homes—the air in Chicago was often so polluted in the 1940s that the snow would turn black. The environmental regulations of 60s and

70s greatly helped clean up the air and the water in the United States. Those were useful and meaningful regulations.

Unfortunately, after the EPA bureaucracy was established, it had to keep expanding to continue to justify its existence—long after the serious problems were solved. So, environmental regulations have intrusively warped all aspects of our lives—sizes of residential toilets and water heaters, water pressure in homes, car mechanics (which have become too complex for most guys to work on, because of both environmental and computer features) and car emission requirements, and countless rules that you have to follow to develop property or to build and run a business. Many of the environmental rules and regulations today, of course, are related to the paranoia surrounding global warming/climate change—the predecessor of the coronavirus paranoia, in terms of a manufactured crisis based on pseudo-science.

Fear of risk (with consequent surrender of individual freedom to government) and adherence to mainstream orthodoxy (on the environment, the virus, and other matters) have led to the worst, most un-American aspect of American life in 2020. That is the loss of free thinking and free speech. And the worst part of that development has been the way that this cultural orthodoxy has affected humor.

In the 1970s, there was a form of social interaction called humor. This is probably hard for young people to believe, but people used to get together and make jokes—jokes that were sometimes very funny, about any subject that people wanted to make jokes about. Some of these jokes poked fun at people on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. (I heard plenty of Polish jokes in my time, believe me!) These were mostly not mean-spirited. Rather they were light-hearted and funny, and sometimes stupid but silly. They were harmless. People naturally enjoy laughing at other people because of certain obvious or perceived physical or behavioral traits of those people. They always have, and they always will. This is human nature. This formed the foundation of the slapstick acts of the 1930s, and it was the appeal of such 1970s TV comedy shows as *Sanford and Son* and such 70s comedy movies as *Blazing Saddles*. You could never make shows or movies with those kinds of jokes today. People wouldn't get the jokes. People have no sense of satire or irony today. People take things too seriously and literally. They get offended over little things, and they are too afraid of offending others.

Comedy, like journalism, is dead. It is one of the tragedies of our loss of freedom.

Honest and meaningful political discourse and debate have also been casualties of the stifling of free speech. In the 70s, most Americans were proud of the fact that there was no censorship in the United States. The very idea of censorship of free speech was unthinkable then. That could never happen in the United States. That's what most people thought then. Unfortunately, censorship is indeed alive and actively practiced today. As any politically conservative person knows, the powerful multinational social media corporations, like Facebook and Twitter, practice a form of censorship that is far more effective, comprehensive, and stifling than any earlier form of government-imposed censorship. Although these social media companies are not owned by the government, they enthusiastically target their censorship to match the agenda of the deep state. Social conformity and group-think are enforced.

### **I'm Talking About the Average American**

As I previously indicated, I'm from a lower middle class background. That's what I call average American. By average American, I mean middle class working folks who go about their daily lives trying to survive and have a little fun along the way, basically minding their own business and taking care of their own. Male, female, any race any ethnic group...they can all be average Americans. That is the majority of the population, and they are who I address this essay to. These are the people who have suffered the most by the deterioration of individual freedoms over the past 40 years. These are the regular people that Trump used to talk to, at least in 2016. I'm not sure who he is talking to these days.

In this essay, I am not concerned with the select minority groups that are often cited today as examples of recent social progress—such groups as gays or transgenders, or Muslim Americans, or individuals with certain disabilities. I have nothing against any of these people at all, but they are not, in my mind, representative of the majority population of average Americans. And it is an unfortunate phenomenon that as the “freedoms” of these select, preferred minority groups increase as a result of various government regulations, the freedoms of the mainstream majority population decline. That is because of government-imposed

requirements that affect the way average Americans live—such as requirements on how people run their businesses and serve their customers and rules about the values and priorities that are taught to children in school.

It is very sad to see the decadent state of free speech in high school and college today. I was the first member of my family to go to college, and I appreciated the experience. I still have great memories of the stimulating discussions I enjoyed in my high school and college classes in social studies, history, and science. In the 70s students could express any views and ask any questions without fear of academic retribution or social marginalization. Such free exchange of ideas is no longer tolerated in the typical classroom. It is the height of irony that the old hippies, who used to stand up for genuine freedom and tolerance in the 60s, have become the intolerant enforcers of official dogma in the classroom in recent years. In their middle age and geriatric years, they became exactly what they claimed to hate when they were young.

Thus, we see that many people are brainwashed today—especially young people, who are afraid to actually think for themselves or say what they really may feel about any subject. When a social mindset like that sets in, can you say that individual freedom is still a viable, functioning concept? I don't think so.

The decay of freedom began in Europe long before it spread in the United States. The older a society gets, the larger and more intrusive the government becomes. This seems to be the way in which societies inevitably evolve, as people in older societies become more willing to sacrifice their personal freedoms for government-promised “improvements,” or “perfections,” in the social order. In the United States, much of this began—once again ironically (my favorite overused word)—with the hippies and liberal protestors of the 1960s and 1970s. As these idealistic, well-intentioned young people were speaking out for social, racial, and sexual freedoms, the bureaucrats in government were using the cultural upheaval to institute regulatory foundations over society that would steadily whittle away at Americans' freedoms.

## Escape from 2020

I have been observing the anti-freedom trend for the past few decades. It was disturbing enough to me when it was a gradual trend. But now, shockingly, the rate of erosion of freedom has gone into warp speed—like a heavy rain storm is rapidly wiping everything away. The coronavirus—or rather, the government reaction to the virus—has, in a very short time, destroyed what was left of the free American way of life.

The freedoms and liberties that Americans had managed to cling on to are now being boldly and brashly stripped away by state governors. These are our most basic freedoms—like the freedom of assembly, freedom to practice religion, freedom to protest and express dissent, freedom to run a business, freedom to work for a living, and freedom to pursue happiness in any way you please, such as spending a few hours in a bar or club or at a baseball game. These power-mad governors are using the media-hyped public health scare as an excuse to institute the socialist agenda and strict social control—the control that politicians and bureaucrats always dreamed of but never before thought practical.

This destruction of freedom and liberty is best symbolized today by the face masks that many of us are forced to wear to go into any store, such as here in Illinois. These masks may be essentially useless against the virus, but they are extremely functional in marking people with the symbol of shutting up and obeying their government masters. Many people willingly wear these disgusting face coverings because they have been made hysterical with fear by the media and government liars. During the 1970s, such behaviors would have been unimaginable in America, except in a science fiction or horror movie.

You never willingly give up your personal freedom—of any kind—to the government—no matter what risk the government claims to be protecting you from. You do not believe the government or the media. They lie. You need to adapt that old hippie slogan from the 60s: “Never trust anyone over 30.” But change it to: “Never trust anyone in a position of power.” That means the government, and that means the media.

This freedom-loving ramblin' man doesn't like living in this fascist, weak, and unthinking American society. But, as of today, there is seemingly no way out of this nightmare. So I'm going to build a time machine, and I'm going to travel back to the 1970s, when Americans were still strong, smart, independent, happy, brave, and

free.

If I can't travel back in time, then please stop this crazy world and let me off!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynEYKddfD6w> (**Waylon Jennings, "Stop the World and Let Me Off," 1975**)

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