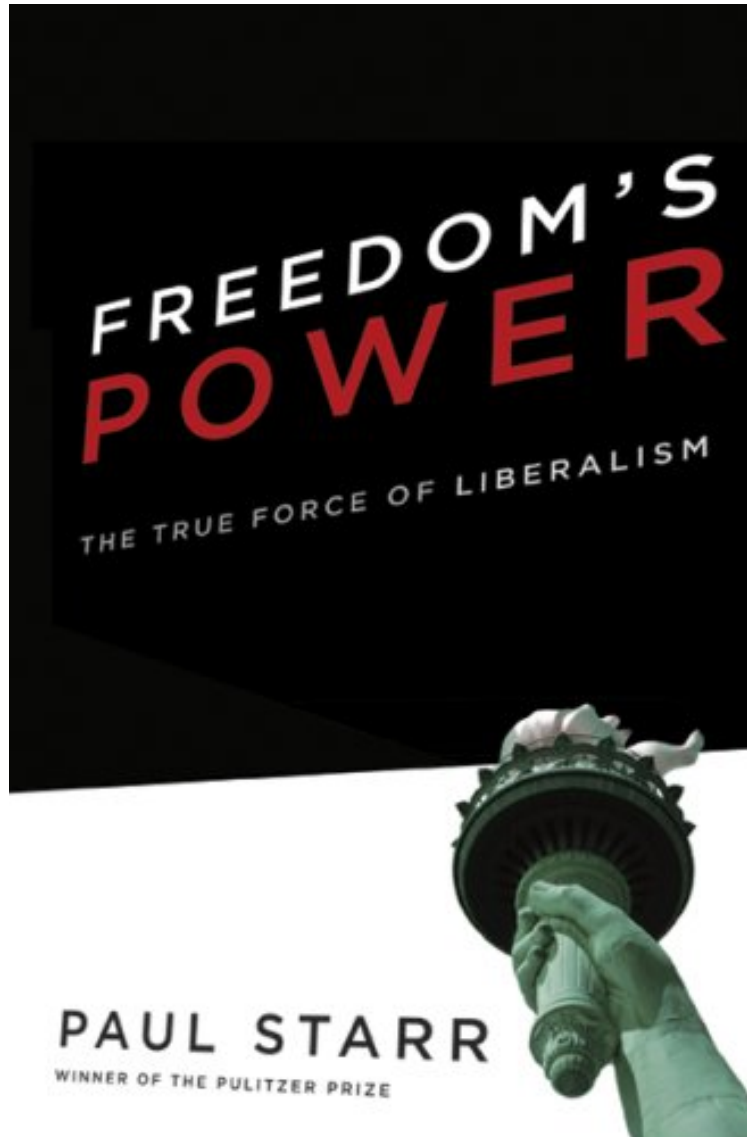


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## Freedom's Power: The True Force of Liberalism

*Paul STarr*

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**Paul STarr : Freedom's Power: The True Force of Liberalism** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Freedom's Power: The True Force of Liberalism:

19 of 20 people found the following review helpful. A New Definition of LiberalismBy Izaak VanGalenThis is a book you would not want to read if you are either sleepy or distracted. The first part is very dense and abstract. The author goes from general concept to general concept without giving any historical support or citing other works that support his theoretical claims. However, toward the end, he comes down to earth with a more fleshed-out and partisan message that sees little good in Republicans, especially the Bush administration. He tries to build the case that only

Democrats, who are the true liberals, can save the country. Paul Starr is not only a professor of sociology and politics at Princeton, he is also one of the founding members of "The American Prospect." On the political spectrum, that would place him to the left of "The New Republic" and to the right of "The Nation." In this book, he attempts to rehabilitate modern liberalism from being a term of abuse. He traces its origins back to the 17th century. According to Starr, the first phase of liberalism was known as "classical liberalism" or "constitutional liberalism," forged by the Glorious Revolution in Britain and the American Revolution. In this phase liberals sought to contain state power in the name of individual liberty. A balanced constitution would guarantee rule of law and individual rights. It is from this historical milieu that conservatism also springs. They also trace their origins back to these two revolutions. (Read Michael Barone's *Our First Revolution: The Remarkable British Upheaval That Inspired America's Founding Fathers*.) It can be said that the Anglosphere as a whole can attribute its wealth and social capital to the discipline and power constitutional liberalism. Starr goes on to describe how, at the end of the 19th century, classical liberalism became "modern democratic liberalism." This phase of liberalism ushered in with the Progressive Movement. The reach of government expanded and continued to expand during the 20th century with the New Deal and the Great Society programs. The goal of the so-called Liberal Project was to make society more egalitarian through activist government. This was done by income redistribution, extending rights to women and blacks (rights were by definition universal but not in practice), and by "deregulating private life" (namely artistic and sexual liberation). There was a conservative backlash against this unprecedented government intrusion into the economic and private life. Conservatives sought to preserve the status quo, to "stand athwart history." Eventually, however, conservatives came to accept the civil rights movement and certain forms of freedom of expression, though they still have a problem with income redistribution. The crux of Starr's argument is that liberalism believes that an activist government is needed to further individual liberty. Conservatives, on the other hand, believe that liberty can best be achieved when government gets out of the way. This is the central back and forth of the liberal/conservative divide, someday they might realize that they are both right. Take capitalism, for example. Capitalism unregulated or laissez faire would lead naturally to monopolistic practices. Liberals can come in with regulatory rules to keep markets competitive, but not too many rules as to stifle growth, and so on. It's a question of balance. Today conservatism is going through an identity crisis, it is displaying all the excesses of the liberalism of the 1960s and 70s. The Bush administration has expanded government spending - homeland security, prescription drug benefits - not seen since the Johnson administration. They are borrow and spend conservatives, rather than tax and spend liberals. Borrowing is actually a more expensive and dishonest way to finance social programs. It has actually gotten to a point where neither liberals nor conservatives can muster the political will to stop the inexorable growth of government. It would be good for both camps to pick up a copy of this book to become reacquainted with their historical origins.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars  
By Benjamin Johnson  
People need to read this book before they decide whom to vote in November.  
19 of 22 people found the following review helpful. The Grownups Speak (at long last)  
By Joseph F. Panzica  
The greatest weakness of this book is also its greatest strength. Full of resentful fury at the ideologically based incompetence, irresponsibility, and felonious assaults on constitutional liberty that characterize the bush "administration", one might crave more stirring reading. One MIGHT be disappointed... Except, this is not a book for people who just want to be outraged. It is a well-crafted explanation of the development of "liberal" thinking AND ACTIONS starting from the late Enlightenment/early Industrial Revolution. This evolution involved many splits and transformations. But it also represents some coherent progression to a consensus that MAY actually be growing in power and acceptance. It should be required reading for citizenship . . . but that would be a naive, moralistic (as well as utterly unenforceable and counterproductive) requirement. It would also be contrary to democratic liberalism, as it has evolved. Still reading this book drove home several points. First, even without the current "presidential" disaster, we should never be complacent about our constitutional liberties and their economic, political, civic, and other structural underpinnings. Second, worthwhile progress takes lots of hard work, serious clear eyed thinking, and strategic compromises; its success and failure is measured more in decades than in years. Third, so much cynicism (along with so much idealism) is rooted in thoughts and feelings divorced from responsible experience. Not everyone will read this book. But I hope that many who do will work to use its examples and ideas to bring more citizens back into the political process. The stakes are very high. (I'm still gonna try to give less \$\$ to the Democrats and more to orgs like MOVEON)

American politics are as fractured and partisan as they have ever been and liberalism is in greater peril than at any time in recent history. Conservatives treat it as an epithet, and even some liberals have confused it with sentimentality and socialism. But Paul Starr, Pulitzer Prize-winning author and one of America's leading intellectuals, claims that, properly understood, liberalism is a sturdy public philosophy, deeply rooted in our traditions, capable of making America a freer and more secure country.

From Publishers Weekly  
Part political theory and part intellectual history, this book tracks the development of liberalism as the world's dominant political tradition and argues for its continued ascendancy as the best guarantor of

individual rights and prosperity on the global stage. Starr, a Princeton sociology and public affairs professor and founding editor of the American Prospect, explains modern liberalism as an evolutionary process, rooted in classical laissez-faire liberalism, and gradually accreting a greater role for the state to provide a social safety net, defend equal rights for all and institute true democratic pluralism. Defending liberalism from its socialist as well as its conservative critics, Starr sees his ideology as a middle path, harnessing the creative power of the free market while tempering some of its capriciousness. A central thesis is that "[t]he peculiar internal tension of liberal constitutions is that they constrain power even as they authorize it—that is, they attempt to curb the despotic power and ambitions of individual rulers and officials and, by doing so, to permit stronger systemic capacities." The first section of the book discusses the causes and consequences of liberal revolutions in Britain, America and France, while later chapters cover recent events, including the 2006 congressional elections. Complex macroeconomic, demographic and philosophical trends are presented engagingly and understandably for casual readers and political buffs alike. (Apr.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

About the Author Paul Starr is Professor of Sociology and Public Affairs at Princeton University and its Woodrow Wilson School of Public Affairs. He is the author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* and *The Creation of the Media*. Starr is the co-founder and editor of *The American Prospect*. He lives in Princeton, New Jersey.