



Winged Victory

F O U N D A T I O N

Advancing liberty through storytelling and the arts

The Role of Storytelling in Spreading the Ideas of Liberty

By Gen LaGreca

The struggle for liberty has been a crucial theme of storytelling through the ages. Legends, plays, novels, and films have dramatically depicted the individual's timeless yearning for liberty and battles against authoritarian control. The unique attributes of fiction—i.e., in putting the audience in the heart of the action and causing them to experience events as if they were actually in the scenes themselves—make the literary arts, plays, and narrative films compelling media to illustrate important ideas and inspire an audience to understand and embrace them. Conveying ideas through fiction can have a profound and lasting effect on an audience, even more so than the most eloquent article, lecture, or documentary.

Legends and myths have expressed the human struggle for freedom. For example, the ancient story of Prometheus relates how he defied the authoritarian rulers of his time (the gods) by giving the fire that they possessed to humans, which made mankind powerful and no longer dependent on the deities. This infuriated the gods, who chained Prometheus to a rock and cruelly punished him. Making humans self-sufficient and efficacious so that they no longer needed to be subservient to rulers is a haunting theme that endures through the millennia.

Plays have been liberty-themed. For example, Friedrich Schiller's "William Tell" is the story of a marksman in Switzerland who defies a tyrannical foreign ruler by refusing to follow a law

requiring him to bow to the ruler's hat. For punishment, William Tell is forced to shoot from a distance an apple atop his son's head, risking the boy's life should he miss. The incident triggers a rebellion by the Swiss people for their independence. This play, an enduring dramatization of the human quest for freedom, has been performed worldwide, translated into numerous languages, made into children's books, spurred an opera, and become the proud symbol of Switzerland's freedom from foreign rule.

Another example of a play inspiring the ideas of liberty is Joseph Addison's "Cato: A Tragedy," the story of the ancient Roman Stoic Marcus Porcius Cato, who resisted the tyranny of Julius Caesar and eloquently championed liberty. This highly influential 18th century work was George Washington's favorite play and widely quoted by America's Founders. During the Revolutionary War, disregarding a Congressional order banning the performance of plays during wartime, Washington had this play produced for his troops in order to inspire them after enduring their hard winter at Valley Forge.

Edmund Rostand's 19th century play, "Cyrano de Bergerac," depicts a poet with unusual integrity in 17th century France, who refuses to write lines that would please the count and thereby land him a royal patron. In today's world, Cyrano's impassioned calls to stay true to your ideals and never surrender to the pack couldn't be more relevant.

Novels have contained moving messages about freedom. In the prelude to the American Civil War, the most important abolitionist writing was a novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, by Harriet Beecher Stowe. It was this book—a work of fiction—that made such a profound impression on readers that it was banned throughout the South and it galvanized the North against the evils of slavery.

The term Big Brother, which originated from George Orwell's novel *1984*, has become the enduring worldwide symbol for an oppressive, statist government, with the term still in use decades after the novel's original publication in 1949.

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Ayn Rand's epic philosophical novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, as well as her other novels, have tremendously enhanced the understanding of the role of the individual's free, creative mind and productive activities as the generator of human progress. These novels have inspired millions of people, especially the young, to oppose statism and embrace limited government, capitalism, and the glory of freedom.

Popular fiction has exemplified the values of a free society, where outlaws violating individual rights are brought to justice. In generations past, comic books, radio and television series, and other popular fiction were dominated with distinctly American heroes that imbued the nation's youth with the ideals of protecting freedom and individual rights. For example, the original "Superman" fought "a never-ending battle for truth, justice, and the American way." The original "Lone Ranger" strove to instill the rule of law, justice, and a civil society in the Wild West. These radio and television series were enormously popular and influential.

Today's culture needs liberty-themed art. Today, there are too many examples of novels, plays, and feature films that subvert true heroes and the values they embody. Instead, many works today focus on violence, malevolence, depravity, and anti-individualist ideas and politics, thereby crowding out other works and themes.

This trend toward losing the heroes and values of a free people must be combatted. Defenders of freedom need to reach out to a wide audience through art and entertainment that applaud liberty, the American system of government, and the protection of individual rights, which is what the Winged Victory Foundation does.

Pro-freedom educational efforts today focus on works of nonfiction, rather than on works of art. To counteract the onslaught of socialist, collectivists ideas being taught in the nation's public schools and universities and being uncritically accepted in the mainstream media, there are many pro-liberty think-tanks that are educating the public and advising lawmakers on the principles of a free society. The work of these organizations is invaluable and noble. However, there is a gap in that many people do not follow politics, economic theory, and public policy.

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They, therefore, cannot be reached through think-tanks. Far less effort is being dedicated to spreading these all-important ideas of liberty through the enchantment and entertainment of storytelling—through novels, television series, movies, and plays—with an audience reaching into virtually every household.

The Winged Victory Foundation proudly strives to fill this gap by entertaining and enlightening students and communities with powerful works of fiction, classical and modern—and with discoveries of new talent.

We hope you'll join us as we proudly carry Prometheus's torch to our schools and communities.

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Gen LaGreca is the author of four liberty-themed novels and the president of the Winged Victory Foundation, which celebrates through works of fiction the inspiring ideas that shape a free society.

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