

The Culture of Liberty vs. The Culture of Obedience

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Questions to keep in mind:

- what impact do political ideas have on culture? (and vice versa)
- why do people obey authority? is the norm to obey and conform and to “rebel” is unusual?
- what have classical liberals had to say on the subject?
- how can we promote a "culture of liberty"?
- how can we oppose a "culture of obedience"?

Key Points:

- there is a dichotomy between "the culture of liberty" and "the culture of obedience"
- the "culture of obedience" has existed for millenia - "for king and country"; "ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country"
 - it expresses the political values of the legitimacy of the ruler, the need for unquestioning obedience, the justice of paying taxes and serving in the army
 - "court intellectuals" are employed to express and defend these values
- the "culture of liberty" emerged in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries - "don't step on me!"; "mind your own business"; "hell no, I won't go"
 - it expresses the political values of individual liberty, the right to resist tyrants, the social benefits of freedom of speech and expression, the joy of experimentation and creativity, the refusal to pay taxes or go to war
 - J.S. Mill's defence of non-conformity and eccentricity as vital for a flourishing free society
- the 20thC has shown how willingly people obey the state and its representatives
 - Christopher Browning - “ordinary Germans” carried out Nazi policies; Stanley Milgrim - people wearing white lab coats; Philip Zimbardo - people wearing uniforms; the My Lai massacre; Abu Ghraib prison

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