

Freedom Issues

One of the major mistakes made by the Democratic Party is to focus on election campaigns but not on the constant framing of public discourse. All politics is moral. Voters vote on what they implicitly, automatically, and unconsciously believe to be right. In short, elections have everything to do with how biconceptuals have adopted the moral vision of one side or the other. And elections depend on the language voters hear and the images they see every day—not just during the campaigns.

Democrats tend to address interests: kitchen table economics and the objective facts affecting the interests of middle class and poor voters. Yet, poor conservatives and biconceptuals regularly vote against their interests. Many Tea Party voters are poor or made poorer by conservative policies. But the conservative message machine is relentless and extends almost everywhere. Conservative messaging dominates everyday public discourse. And the domination of everyday public discourse—at least as much as the domination of electoral discourse—determines our political realities.

Conservatives have come to own the words *freedom* and *liberty*. These words weigh heavily in the conservative vocabulary. These words are among the most powerful in our politics because of the centrality of the concept of freedom to democracy. Conservatives have no right to that ownership.

Words have contestable meanings, and the word *freedom* means very different things to progressives than to conservatives. As I pointed out in *Whose Freedom?*, freedom is a contested concept. Conservatives and progressives use the word to opposite effects.

As we have seen from a careful reading of the original Declaration of Independence documents, the progressive meaning is at the heart of our democracy and it is time to take it back. Most of the issues in public discourse, both in elections and in everyday decision making, come down to