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Liberty and freedom are frequently invoked to justify political action. Presidents as diverse as Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, and George W. Bush have built their policies on some version of these noble values. Yet in practice, idealist agendas often turn sour as they confront specific circumstances on the ground. Demonstrated by incidents at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay, the pursuit of liberty and freedom can lead to violence and repression, undermining our trust in universal theories of liberalism, neoliberalism, and cosmopolitanism.

Combining his passions for politics and geography, David Harvey charts a cosmopolitan order more appropriate to an emancipatory form of global governance. Political agendas tend to fail, he argues, because they ignore the complexities of geography. Incorporating geographical knowledge into the formation of social and political policy is therefore a necessary condition for genuine democracy.