

LIBERATION

Liberation came into English from C15, from *liberation*, F, *liberatio*, L – setting free or releasing from. Its early uses were

primarily legal and administrative, as in the discharge of a debt or exemption from military service. This connects with the restricted use of *liberty* (cf. LIBERAL), as leave, permission or *franchise* (itself a legal immunity or privilege from C14, extended as *elective franchise* from C18). The positive senses of *liberty* and *liberation* were known from Latin, and *liberty* and *liberator* have the political sense from mC17; *liberation* was less common, but has an occasional political sense from C16, becoming more common in mC19 and especially in mC20 (specifically, here, as the name for movements of resistance to Fascism in the occupied countries, notably France, and then for the armed overthrow of occupying powers or forces). The British army which landed in France in 1944 was officially known as the *British Liberation Army*. The word was then widely adopted, as in Algeria and Vietnam, for movements of resistance to occupying colonial powers, especially from the 1950s.

A **liberationist**, in mC19 England, was still primarily a supporter of church disestablishment. **Libertarian**, which had been used from lC18 for a believer in *free will* (itself in English from C13 as a translation of *liberum arbitrium*, L), came to have its modern political meaning from lC19. There has of course been a parallel development, in English, of words derived from the Latin *liber* and the Teutonic *freo*, oE. In each case the meaning depended on an opposing term; in Latin *servus* – slave; in the Teutonic languages those outside the household, again in practice slaves. The root sense of the *free* words is *dear*, as applied within the *free* household or family. The extended political senses have developed mainly around the Latin group, as indeed in Latin itself, though in *Free State*, *freedom fighter*, *free world*, *free enterprise* and so on there has been extensive C20 use of the alternative group.

The use of **liberation** (and then of **liberationist** and the adjective **liberated**) by the women's movement – shortened to *Lib* in the late 1960s – was by association with the political movements from 1940. The common earlier word had been *emancipation*, in English from C17, at first following the sense from *emancipo*, L, which in Roman law meant to release (usually a child but sometimes a wife) from the *patria potestas*, the legal powers of the *pater familias*; the person thus *emancipated* could act *sui juris* – in his/her own right. (The Latin word was formed from *e* or *ex* – from, out of, and *mancipium* – a legal purchase or contract, from *manus* and *capio*,

thus literally a taking by the hand to make a bargain.) There was some early metaphorical extension, as in Bacon's 'Humane Nature . . . fit to be emancipate' (1605), and there was a political application in Donne, 'to emancipate them from the Tyrant' (1625). But from C18 the term became heavily specialized to the act of freeing from slavery, and this culminated in the *Emancipation Day* of 1863 in USA. In Britain the term was also specialized, for a period, to the *emancipation* of Catholics (1829) from civil disabilities. Yet in the course of C19 the word was more and more widely applied to the removal of the legal and political disabilities of women (an in context unfavourable use of *emancipatress* is recorded from 1882), and was common in Britain and USA in C20. It was also applied to or used by the labour movement, as in 'emancipation of the working class', where there was already an association through the phrase *wage-slavery*.

The subsequent shift from *emancipation* to **liberation** seems to mark a shift from ideas of the removal of disabilities or the granting of *privileges* (cf. UNDERPRIVILEGED) to more active ideas of winning *freedom* and *self-determination*. *Self-determination*, which had referred to ideas of 'free will' from C17, acquired a political sense from mC19 ('a free, self-determining political aggregate', Grote, 1853) and was especially common after 1918 ('the right of nations to self-determination'). Some recent uses seem to unite the personal and the political senses.

See FAMILY, LIBERAL, SEX, UNDERPRIVILEGED