

Discussion Questions for:

“Introduction” to *The Story of American Freedom* by Eric Foner

- (1) In what historical context was the book written? When was it written? What was going on at the time?
- (2) Why does Foner consider “freedom” to be the essential American value and therefore an appropriate organizing theme for a history of America?
- (3) On page xiv, Foner writes, “The very universality of the language of freedom camouflages a host of divergent connotations and applications.” What does he mean and what are the implications of that?
- (4) How does Foner see “freedom” and how does he attempt to express that understanding in this work?
- (5) What is the problem with defining and redefining “freedom” with reference to “unfreedom?”
- (6) What 3 themes does Foner center his *Story of American Freedom* on? What does he mean by each theme?
- (7) What “elements” or “dimensions” of freedom does Foner focus on?
- (8) Why are discussions of freedom inevitably political?
- (9) Why is the question, “Who is an American?” relevant in the discussion of freedom?
- (10) According to Foner, who is responsible for establishing in American culture the idea that freedom is a universal birthright? Do you agree? Why or why not?
- (11) Why does Foner title his book, *The Story of American Freedom*, and not, *The History of American Freedom*? [emphasis added]
- (12) On pages xxi-xxii, Foner quotes the eminent historian, Eric Hobsbawm’s definition of historians as the “professional remembrancers of what their fellow citizens wish to forget.” Do you agree with that definition? Why or why not?