

What Would a Free Society Look Like?

Written by Sandy Ikeda for The Freeman.

From time to time someone asks me what I think a genuinely free society would look like. How would it be organized, and who, exactly, would build the roads? I know I'm not alone. My answer is always: I don't know, and neither does anyone else.

In a sense, I'm a libertarian precisely because I understand why it's impossible to answer that question any other way. I cannot accurately foretell what specific institutions, mores, and governance structure—let alone art and architecture—a free society would have. Will it be dominated by traditional nuclear families or same-sex marriages? Will its cities be monuments to mammon, or green and sustainable, or plain and ascetic? Will communities be small and gated or open and diverse?

Of course it's fun to envision possible libertarian utopias, whether Ayn Rand's Galt's Gulch or a modular floating city (at sea or in outer space). In fact, I think F. A. Hayek said somewhere that such utopian thinking is important as a means to inspire the next generation of classical liberals, much as Marx's workers' paradise inspired communism's fellow travelers. But unlike the workers' paradise, the ideal future we imagine should be, well, possible.

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