Question 1: Evaluating “freedom” in US social, cultural, economic, and political history since 1945.

Using readings that span the course from the last to the first week, do you think that the United States represents an “empire of freedom,” a term first coined by Thomas Jefferson and then frequently revived by American politicians in the context of the Cold War and the post-September 11 “War on Terror.” In your first paragraph, define what “freedom” means using specific examples (as many as you wish) from the readings, and remember that “freedom” can be defined in the law—for example, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 or the Immigration Act of 1965—as well as through cultural norms and behaviors. Consider complicating your definition by examining how different aspects of American society defined freedom differently. For example, many right-wing politicians claimed that the Civil Rights Movement would take away the “freedom” of white supremacists to discriminate, and many industrial companies claimed that the Environmental Protection Agency took away their freedom to dump waste into waterways. You obviously don’t have to agree with any position in order to explain its potency. As you write your first paragraph, you might think about how your readings define freedom and whether you think, in the end, freedom can be objectively defined or is simply “in the eye of the beholder.”

In your subsequent paragraphs, support your argument by citing at least one example of the ways in which the United States has redefined and expanded “freedom” as well as one of the ways in which “freedom” has contracted in all six of the following decades (use one example per decade): 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and the 2010s. In the final paragraph, argue whether Cold War and “War on Terror” policies, domestic debates over civil rights and other policy areas, and conflicts around race/gender/sexuality have meant that the United States is truly a beacon of “freedom,” or is it simply a society lurching toward authoritarianism and military imperialism with soaring but empty rhetoric?

As you formulate your answer, consider the connections between the Cold War (1945-1990) and the War on Terror (2001-present), the context and impact of the Civil Rights Revolution, and the “culture wars.” Remember that when I ask for specific examples or specific information, you are expected to explain at the very least the following: a person’s name or a reference to a specific person if the person is unknown, names of organizations (e.g., SNCC) and institutions (like the US Department of Defense), a date or dates, relevant geographic locations, the name of any other relevant information (names of ideas, books, films, or documents), and most importantly, where you are getting the specific example with a page or location number to your readings or supplementary lecture materials.