"You Can’t Take the Sky from Me": Examining the Political Tensions between the State and Individual in Joss Whedon’s *Firefly*

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Abstract: Like the famed *Star Trek* franchise, Joss Whedon’s *Firefly* and *Serenity* use science fiction and space exploration to tell what is really a western-inspired “frontier narrative.” However, unlike *Star Trek* where the Federation is a primarily benevolent force in the universe, the Alliance in Whedon’s futuristic western series is an oppressive political regime that attempts to rule outer-system planets from the “core” through the use of force and intimidation. Serenity’s captain, Malcolm “Mal” Reynolds, and his first mate Zoe Washburn are “Browncoats,” veterans of the Unification War who fought on the side of the outer-rim planets that failed to successfully resist the expansion and full political control of the Alliance. Captain Reynolds purchased the spaceship Serenity after the war to carve out a life outside of the control of the Alliance, and his motley crew aboard the ship seems to join Reynolds seeking the freedom that life aboard Serenity offers. The protagonists of the series are, therefore, anti-statists who seek freedom from the oppressive intrusion and regulation of government. Through the use of the frontier-narrative and the growth of the administrative state, Joss Whedon provides a framework for understanding the conflict between bureaucratic administration and individual identity.

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