Democracy promotion has been an overt objective of American foreign policy ever since Woodrow Wilson declared it the goal of WWI. This dissertation examines the influence of Freedom House on those policy decisions as well as on academia. Freedom House was created in 1941 with the “quiet encouragement” of both Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt to combat the pervasive isolationism in the United States. Erected as the Western counterpoint to the *Braunhaus*, the Nazi propaganda center, Freedom House has distinctly political origins. Over the course of its institutional life, Freedom House has evolved from keeping a “balance sheet” on the level of democracy across the globe to being a major manufacturer of statistics aimed at measuring its practice. Using archival documents, this dissertation traces the development of those scores, which were first published in the Comparative Survey of Freedom in 1973. Findings reveal that the creation of the Comparative Survey involved the opinions of only two men and resulted in a fuzzy, inexplicit ranking system disguised as objective and scientific merely because it involved sets of numeric values. Conceived by Freedom House Executive Director Leonard Sussman and carried out by political scientist Raymond Gastil primarily behind closed doors, these scores are now the most widely used indicators of democracy. During the
pivotal time period surrounding the creation of the Comparative Survey, this dissertation finds that a dramatic shift occurred in the concept of democracy that Freedom House promoted. This change was accompanied by a decrease in the transparency of the organization’s reporting, and a determined campaign on the part of Executive Director Leonard Sussman urging the United States government to use the Comparative Survey in foreign policy decision-making. By 2005, annual funding for Freedom House reached $27 million. Over eighty percent of its budget comes from the U.S. State Department and the United States Agency for International Development, despite Freedom House’s insistence that it is an independent organization. Ultimately, this dissertation serves as a reminder to historicize such tools, rather than see them as independent entities. As is the case with the Freedom House Survey, these seemingly objective numeric indicators have a long, obscured history that, particularly given the power they wield, should be brought to light.