

Example of how race, class and gender shaped the development of the u.s. essay

[Countries](#), [England](#)



How Race, Class and Gender Shaped the Development of the U. S.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. This statement is the first line of the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence and many U. S. citizens have committed this sentence to memory. This premise has become one of the very foundations the United States was built upon yet gender, race and class conflicts remain ingrained in the country's social, political and economic fabric. Still highly prevalent and influential to this day, these issues certainly played a key role in the development of the United States as a nation from the Revolutionary War in 1776 to the Mexican War in 1846.

Long before the United States engaged in war to extricate themselves from the British yoke, class, race and gender inequalities already existed. In fact, they contributed to the decision to resist colonial rule and set the stage for what sort of nation the United States would be once it obtained its independence. For example, “ The American Revolution was a war for independence from England. For a hundred years before the Revolution, the colonies were torn by class conflicts: tenants against landlords, riots of the poor. That internal conflict would now be temporarily obscured by the struggle against England. But it was still there, bursting out now and then during the war, and emerging again after victory over the British Empire.” Lauded for more than two hundred years for their foresight and genius for creating the framework for the United States was built upon, the Framers of the Constitution or Founding Fathers definitely deserve praise, but it must be

recognized they did not produce the Revolutionary War and the resulting political, economic and social systems that following out of beneficence. These men, and yes, here you have the gender bias, for women were not allowed to participate in government wanted to preserve their own social position. Nearly all of these men were of considerable means and not only directed the rising tensions over their enviable stations towards the British, but sought to preserve their status long after the British were driven from American soil. For instance, “ The Declaration of Independence contained the stirring language of egalitarianism and democracy, that “ all men are created equal” and promised the rights to “ live, liberty and happiness.” But the reality of behind those inspiring words was that a rising class of important people needed to enlist on their side enough Americans to defeat England, without disturbing too much the relations of wealth and power that had developed over 150 years of colonial history.”

In fact, Zinn and Arnove make an excellent point when they discusses how class conflict came to the fore during the Revolution. The authors use a mutiny on the Pennsylvania line in New Jersey in 1781 to illustrate their point. Washington was quite harsh when it came to doling out punishment to men that already were on the verge of starvation, dressed in rags and were not being paid for their services. The soldiers, not of the same ilk, as their commanding officers fought back the only way they knew how and were sternly rebuked for standing up for themselves. Zinn and Arnove wrote, “ Class conflict inside the American Revolution came dramatically alive with mutinies They had seen their officers paid handsomely, fed and clothed well while the privates and sergeants were fed slop, marched in rags without

shoes, paid in virtually worthless Continental currency, or not paid at all for months. They were abused, beaten and whipped by their officers for the smallest breach of discipline.”

While the institution of slavery continued to grow in the South, and the population of the nation began to explode from increases in immigration as well as industrialization, many people turned towards the West to explore new territories and accumulate wealth. This commenced prior to the Louisiana Purchase, but really began to gain momentum in the 1820’s, 1830’s and 1840’s. This is where the concept of Manifest Destiny, where United States citizens had a right to these lands, applied. Spain had given Mexico their independence in 1821 after a long struggle, but Mexico could not control most of the territory the United States was disputing it owned. Zinn and Arnove wrote, “ The defeat of England in the American Revolution paved the way for the colonists to move westward into Indian territory, because the British had proclaimed in 1763 that they could not settle land beyond a certain line in the Appalachian Mountains.”

Although the process was not quite like Hitler’s Holocaust, the United States treated the Indians with an air of careless indifference and saw them merely as something to rid themselves of so they could take control of their lands. Removing them using whatever means necessary seemed to be a foregone conclusion and the fact humans lives were at stake, as well as vibrant and established cultures did not seem to enter into the government’s mind. It was clearly genocide. “ Thus by 1840, out of a population in the United States of 13 million, 4, 500, 000 had crossed the mountains into the Mississippi Valley in 1820 120, 000 Indians lived east of the Mississippi. By

1844 fewer than 30, 000 were left. Most of them had been killed or pushed westward by force. It was an early example of what in the late twentieth century, referring to other countries, would be called “ ethnic cleansing.” A prime example of the United States’ Indian “ removal policy” was the plight of the Cherokees. They took their case all the way to the Supreme Court, lost and then were forced to relocate 1, 000 miles westward. Known as the “ Trail of Tears” this march took the lives of thousands of Cherokees and the government showed not a bit of remorse. In a memoir to this children, Private John Burnett recounted his role in the march as member of the mounted infantry and what he referred to as “ execution of the most brutal order in the History of American Warfare.” Burnett also wrote, “ At this time, 1890, we are too near the removal of the Cherokees for our young people to fully understand the enormity of the crime that was committed against a helpless race. School children of today do not know that we are living on lands that were taken from a helpless race at bayonet point to satisfy the white man’s greed.”

In addition Burnett said, “ However, murder is murder, whether committed by the villain skulking in the dark or by uniformed men stepping to the strains of martial music. Murder is murder and somebody must answer. Somebody must explain the 4, 000 silent graves that mark the trail of the Cherokees to their exile. I wish I could forget it all, but the picture of 645 wagons lumbering over the frozen ground with their Cargo of their suffering humanity still lingers in my memory.”

Obviously at the time of the Revolution and until the war with Mexico commenced in 1846, women were not allowed to vote. They were

considered secondary to men and were responsible for bearing children in addition to caring for their husbands, fathers, brothers, etc. A woman's opinion was not generally sought after in affairs of state and they were often not

very well educated. Although women began to work in the factories during the early 1800's and one such example of them as a factory work force was in Lowell, Massachusetts, a women's rights movement really did not begin to come together until the 1820's and 1830's. Even then, it still did not gain a large amount of momentum until the 1840's. The Seneca Falls Convention did not take place until 1848, but there were notable women that did speak out and attempt to gain equality for women throughout the decades long before Elizabeth Cady Stanton stepped on that podium in upstate New York. This movement was also tied into abolitionism, as many women fought to eradicate slavery and in doing so found their own voice.

Zinn and Arnove use the example of the Grimke sisters and states they were doubly discriminated against because they were black in addition to being female. Angelina, however, did not make her famous speech in Philadelphia until 1848, which is after the Mexican War. Therefore, probably one of the leading feminist publications during that era was Margaret Fuller's 1845 work *Women in the Nineteenth Century*. This book influenced many women into fighting for equal rights. She wrote, "It is inevitable that an external freedom, an independence of the encroachments of other men, such as has been achieved for the nation, should be so also for every member of it." upon them up until this now modern era, but they will always persist because they are woven into the fabric of the nation. Blacks were enslaved,

the Indians simply killed and the Founding Fathers amassed more power to secure their position in addition to establishing the political, social, economic and cultural tableau that still exists in the United States today. The Constitution simply made their ambitions legal.

References

Zinn, Howard and Anthony Arnove. (2004). *Voices of a People's History of the United States*. Seven Stories Press. New York, New York. Print.