

Declaration of independence in american radicalism

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The United States Declaration of Independence is considered to be one of the most influential documents in world history. Since the time it was fashioned till the end of colonialism and even thereafter, it has continued to be studied and has influenced other documents around the world as well as in America. Some of the concepts underlined and statements made had never been so sweepingly made before and can be said to have prompted a new era for the people of the new and the old world.

The states of the new world used to be British colonies, giving their unchallenged allegiance to the King of Great Britain. The two enjoyed significant commerce between them and shared a common heritage as well as culture. However, a schism soon arose when Great Britain tried to exert greater control over the colonies by taxing them from London without consent. This was soon followed by protest and a resulting show of force by the motherland by sending contingents of troops across the Atlantic (Foner, 49).

This act however, combined with subsequent developments, resulted in the colonists rising up in rebellion which was eventually followed by a formal declaration of independence by the Continental Congress of the colonies, from Great Britain in 1776. After the document was signed and approved by the Continental Congress, it did not hold that much of an important space among the intellectuals of the United States. The concept of it, signifying independence was important but the text wasn't considered as something to be pondered upon.

The author of the draft that was approved was Thomas Jefferson who was thought to have borrowed significant influences for the formulation of this document. He was in particular a great admirer of the English philosopher John Locke whose ideas pervaded through American society at the time. Others contended that the text of the declaration showed elements of republicanism more than John Locke's classical liberalism.

The text of the declaration of independence started gaining increased importance after the United States' major political parties started forming where the Jefferson Republicans used the name of Thomas Jefferson as author of the declaration to further their cause (Foner, 103). It was at that time that the sections about grievances against the King of Great Britain and regarding independence became less significant as the separate country had been formed and the need for some text to define the reasons for rebellion against the motherland and to rally people no longer existed.

However, the part regarding unalienable rights and self evident truths came into the limelight as something which was at the core of the formation of the new country (Declaration of Independence). It began to be looked at as something inherently American and the sweeping statement of equality of all men in a society with slaves and cases of marginalization began to be evaluated. This had serious effects on many movements running in the West during those times.

The movement for women's rights was particularly vehement in bringing the text of the declaration to the forefront and using it as a base to further their own cause for attaining rights. The situation of the women in society began

to be viewed in comparison to what was claimed in the declaration of independence, around the time of the meeting in Seneca Falls. Women were not allowed many liberties at the time. They were entitled to all the responsibilities that accompanied being a citizen of the United States but not the rights.

There was no vote for them, neither were they allowed to own property or have wages and as such enjoyed a very subdued position in society (Grimke). Some of the sweeping values espoused in the declaration of independence were thus taken as a launching point by Elizabeth Cady Stanton who was the major contributor in the formulation of the Declaration of Sentiments, a document similar in words and structure to the American Declaration of Independence but asked for rights for women, similar to men (Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions).

This was the prelude to the Suffrage Movement which followed soon after, eventually culminating in women attaining the right to vote and many others, bringing them to an equal status with men in the eyes of the state. In the struggle for labor rights and opposition to the monopoly of the few and exploitation of the workforce, the declaration of independence had a pervasive effect. As the workers fought to protect themselves from greater working hours per day, new legislation that worked against them and issues regarding their health, safety and that of their families, the Working Man's Party was formed.

It fought for the rights of the labor and eventually George Evans, a Jacksonian Democrat, formulated the Working Man's Declaration of

Independence in 1776, declaring that a government was responsible for perpetrating abuses, it was the right of the people to use the means available to reform it (STRIKE ORGANIZATION). This went a long way in the struggle for the working man against the higher classes and became a corner stone for the labor movement. The document was also thought to carry striking resemblance to Marx's manifesto.

The most profound effect that the text of the document had was in the abolitionist movement. The declaration of inalienable rights for all men who were said to be equal meant there was no room for slavery. It still persisted as an institution however in America. Prominent abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison held the declaration at the core of the demand for emancipation of slaves, considering its persistence as a heinous act of oppression against people who are supposed to have freedom as an inalienable birth right (Foner).

The institution persisted more in the South where social beliefs as well as customs set forth to defend slavery, with southern newspapers even declaring that the piece of the American Declaration of Independence regarding universal equality was nothing but words. Eventually this divide led to civil war and under Lincoln, the North reaffirmed the fundamental rights of men being equal, leading eventually to the emancipation of slaves throughout America (Foner). Thus considering the time line since the date the document was fashioned, the American Declaration of Independence has been the cornerstone of American Radicalism.

Since the first time in 1776 that the sweeping statement of rights and equality were made, it was taken up by the labor and women rights movements to express their demands and it led to a civil war because of a cause that had its basis in the text of the American Declaration of Independence. This bears testament to the extent to which this document was important among the intellectual minds of the country as it progressed and of the limits they were willing to go to defend the ideals stated within.