

Gary nash college essay



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In the essay written by Gary Nash, he argues that the reason for the American Revolution was not caused by the defense of constitutional rights and liberties, but that of “ material conditions of life in America” were not very favorable and that social and economic factors should be considered as the driving factor that pushed many colonists to revolt. The popular ideology which can be defined as resonating “ most strongly within the middle and lower strata of society and went far beyond constitutional rights to a discussion of the proper distribution of wealth and power in the social system” had a dynamic role in the decisions of many people to revolt. The masses ideas were not of constitutional rights, but the equal distribution of wealth in the colonies that many felt that the wealth was concentrated in a small percentage of the population in the colonies. The Whig ideology that was long established in English society had a main appeal towards the upper class citizens and “ had little to say about changing social and economic conditions in America or the need for change in the future.” The popular ideologies consisted of new ways of changing the distribution of wealth. Nash in his essay continued to give good evidence to prove his point that the American Revolution was not caused by the defense of constitutional rights and liberties, but by improper distribution of wealth. During the pre-American Revolutionary times, the “ top five percent of Boston’s taxpayers controlled 49 percent of the taxable assets of the community, whereas they had held only held only 30 percent in 1687.” As evident by this statistic, it is clear that the wealthy were getting wealthier and controlling more of the taxable assets of the community. As the wealthy increased their assets in the cities, at the same time, a large class was “ impoverished city dwellers.” A huge contrast between the wealthy and the poor were forming and becoming

more apparent from the beginning of the eighteenth century in the colonies.

The data that was collected on the people who were submitted into poor houses clearly with little “doubt that the third quarter of the eighteenth century was an era of severe economic and social dislocation in the cities, and that by the end of the colonial period a large number of urban dwellers were without property, without opportunity, and except for public aid, without the means of obtaining the necessities.” This evidence of poverty in the colonies is one that Nash tries to point out to support his argument that there was a sharp contrast in the distribution of wealth, and that the masses were at this time more focused on the economy’s downfall of the period than defending for constitutional rights and liberties. Protest sparked as the result of the enormous poverty in the colonies. Frustrated with their living conditions the middle and lower classes protested violently in the cities.

During this time of frustration with the economic conditions, “rank had no privileges, as even the lieutenant-governor was shot” in Massachusetts. The wealthy were attacked with tremendous force as disgruntled individuals wanting a fair share of the wealth destroyed many of their homes.

Bostonians were even more upset when the wealthy merchants rejected a “land bank which would relieve the economic distress by issuing more paper money and thus continuing the inflationist policies.” The wealthy merchants did not want paper money because it only favored the poor. The bitterness between the wealthy and the poor continued to escalate by the “outbreak of religious enthusiasm throughout the colonies.” Preachers of the time were spreading a message to the masses about establishing authority. “City dwellers were urged to partake in mass revivals, where the social distance between clergyman and parishoner and among worshippers themselves was

obliterated.” The messages by preachers spread itself throughout the region and place a thought in the masses that they had authority, and a vision of establishing a government that derived its’ powers from the people, and “ which were free from the great disparities of wealth which characterized the old world.” People in the lower classes began to feel that they had a say in government policies, but in reality the wealthy still had a great influence in authority. The lower classes continued to hate the wealthy and attacked them for not distributing wealth evenly. It is evident that the economic constraints of the time were far more important and people were in very need of a change in the social and economic structure of the time, and there was no apparent defense of constitutional rights or liberties as many historians of the past have claimed. The essay by Gary Nash clearly defends his argument that there was no apparent defense of constitutional rights or liberties. The people of the time especially in the lower classes were very concerned with their finances and were upset that the concentration of wealth were held by a very small percentage of the population in the colonies. Many rebelled and protested against the wealthy colonists. They wanted to give a clear message to the wealthy that they needed to have a say in the economic situations of the time and there was a need to reform the way that the money was distributed in the colonies.