

Freedom of expression



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Freedom of Expression

One of the basic civil freedoms is the freedom of expression. Without freedom of expression, individuals, groups, and organizations cannot protest government actions or the lack thereof (Jimenez 75). Diverse movements promoted freedom of expression with numerous goals. This paper compares the various movements that aimed to expand the meaning of freedom of expression, from the Alien and Sedition Acts to the abolitionists in the antebellum era, with the labor movement in the Progressive age. It argues that the labor movement expanded the meaning of freedom of expression by promoting freedom of the press and freedom from private forms of oppression.

The Alien and Sedition Acts are landmark policies that aimed to curtail the freedom of expression. The Alien Acts pertain to the status of naturalization of aliens, extending the required years of residence from five to fourteen years. They also include the legalization of actions against aliens, such as giving the President or his administrative assistants, the power to deport aliens who are deemed as threats to the government. The Sedition Act of 1798 made it a crime for any person to make “ any false, scandalous, and malicious” statement about the U. S. government, Congress, or President (Werhan 12). The Congress opposed the Sedition Act. Republicans argue that the First Amendment does not give power for Congress to regulate the freedom of expression (Werhan 12). They also emphasize that it prevented citizens from getting the information they need to vote their officials in and out the office (Werhan 12). This movement expanded the freedom of expression to closely reflect the goals of the First Amendment and to protect the freedom of speech in relation to criticisms against the government.

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The abolitionists used the freedom of speech to fight for the “ immediate end of slavery” (Werhan 15). They formed organizations, held public rallies and meetings, and even directly advocated to slaveholders, by sending them antislavery publications (Werhan 15). The abolitionists attacked slavery in the national media, because they believed that by doing so, they could make the abolition of slavery as the primary agenda of the government (Werhan 15). The Southern slave states fought back by banning anti-slavery speech (Werhan 15). When the abolitionist, Presbyterian minister Elijah P. Lovejoy was killed by a mob trying to burn his warehouse, where he protected free press, it further fueled the fire for freedom of expression (Werhan 16). His death highlighted the urgency of protecting the freedom of expression as a right of all citizens, so that they may be protected against the infringement of civil freedoms.

The labor movement in the Progressive age expanded the meaning of freedom of expression by promoting freedom of the press and freedom from private forms of oppression (Jimenez, 2010, p. 75). After the National Labor Relations Act is passed in 1935, it promoted the freedom to strike and express opinions against corporations and the government using the press (Jimenez, 2010, p. 75). The modern concept of civil liberties asserts that the state will constructively protect the people from private forms of oppression. When a black, fourteen-year-old Emmett Till was brutally murdered in 1955, his family and friends tapped the media to make sure that the world knows how he has been brutally killed by white men (Hampton and Fayer 6). Hence, freedom of expression expanded greatly to empower the press in freely covering and reporting different kinds of news, no matter how much it can hurt the “ image” of the government and to highlight the freedom from

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private oppressions.

The Alien and Sedition Acts broaden the concept of freedom of expression by providing freedom of expression rights to anti-government individuals and organizations. The reaction of the Republicans against the Alien and Sedition Acts is the first attempt to fight for the First Amendment too. The labor movement in the Progressive age developed the meaning of freedom of expression further by promoting freedom of the press and freedom from private forms of oppression. It magnified the rights of individuals to speak against public and private agencies, which are infringing on their civil freedoms.

Works Cited

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