

Consider the
meaning of liberty.
what do these
documents tell us
about the meanin...

[History](#)



Consider the meaning of “ liberty”. What do these documents tell us about the meaning of “ liberty” in the United States during the late 19th century? Liberty has been one of the most essential ideologies celebrated in the modern world, especially in the background of contemporary liberal politics of the United States. The meaning of the concept ‘ liberty’ has undergone a drastic change in the United States during the late 19th century which is well reflected in some of the documents available. Liberty came to mean a total freedom from the political system which interrupts an individual’s enjoyment of the independence irrespective of his social existence. Thus, liberty has been interpreted as a basic concept that is opposed to patriotism, social justice system, and the policies of immigration in existence in the country during the period.

One of the significant meanings of “ liberty” in the United States during the late 19th century is suggested by Emma Goldman’s essay on patriotism, according to which patriotism is a menace to liberty. In other words, liberty was comprehended as a concept which highlighted the anti-patriotic views of the people in the US during this time. According to Goldman, patriotism is all about a life of slavish submission, vice, and distortion, etc during peace, and a life of danger, exposure, and death, etc. at time of war. To her, “ there is still enough of the spirit of independence and love of liberty left in the average American to risk starvation rather than don the uniform.” (Goldman, 7) Therefore, liberty is not possible for an individual when patriotism demands total submission of the individual freedom to the nation.

In a reflective analysis of the law-system and the justice-system of the nation during the late 19th century, it becomes evident that individual liberty was

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cut back in the name of the public welfare. Thus, the concept of liberty was comprehended as something above the law-system and the justice-system which aimed at public welfare. “ We have seen more than once that the public welfare may call upon the best citizens for their lives. It would be strange if it could not call upon those who already sap the strength of the State for these lesser sacrifices, often not felt to be such by those concerned, in order to prevent our being swamped with incompetence.” (Buck v. Bell, 2)

The meaning of the term ‘ liberty’ during the late 19th century was also affected by policies of the government in the United States of America, especially the foreign policies. Accordingly, the government policy for the immigration of foreigners to the nation also affected the enjoyment of liberty by the citizens of the nation. Thus, the Immigration Act of 1924 was introduced in order to limit the immigration of aliens into the United States, and for other purposes. (Immigration Act of 1924, 1) According to the common understanding during this period, liberty was meant to be enjoyed without the intervention of the state or the socio-political systems and practices.

In conclusion, the change in the meaning of “ liberty” in the United States during the late 19th century is well reflected by the various documents. Accordingly, liberty was interpreted as a concept that is in opposition patriotism, social justice system, and the policies of immigration in existence in the country during the period.