

Edmund morgan's views on american popular sovereignty rise term paper

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



According to Edmund Morgan, fiction is the belief that government is sovereign. To this scholar, the rule of the majority by the few is only possible by making them believe that they chose those representatives. However, the nature of elections is that they are extremely extravagant. This means that they are only accessible to the elite who can then maneuver their way into governance. In the end, democracy becomes just another way of imposing the will of the few upon the many thus implying that governments claiming to be governments of the people are really fiction. To Morgan, governance by the people is a myth.

Edmund Morgan postulates that the use of the word "The people" to explain the origin of the government is quite misleading because this word is so vague that it cannot really ascribe certain rights or duties among parties concerned. When this term was taken up, it was used as a term to replace the use of divine forces or God because the will of the people was equated to that of God. However, the major problem with the term 'people' was that these entities were very difficult to get to yet the concerned leaders had to reach to them if they really wanted to appear legitimate. In other words, although the people were visible and could be perceived by the senses, it was still relatively difficult to access them in terms of their role as authorities that give government powers.

Therefore, the concerned government needed to look for ways of convincing the people that they had a claim to power that was solid enough to warrant submission from them. This claim started in 1787 at Philadelphia when the term "We the people" was coined and their affirmation was sufficient

enough to cause the nation in subsequent years, decades and centuries later to continue ascribing to the same claim. At this point, they made the claim that all the people in the republic were endowed with the right to exercise sovereignty in power. People therefore expected that they would be granted greater political participation and that they would be content with their respective powers although this was not the case in all scenarios.

Americans were made to believe that they possessed authority as the sovereign. This belief comprised an assumption of fiction that continued to be perpetuated even up to today because it was sufficient enough not to lead to some kind of questioning of the belief systems. (Morgan, 256)

In the United States, fiction can also be witnessed by the continuous exaltation of the common man who is presumed to be enterprising and hardworking. This keeps sustaining the perception that the farmer or any other ordinary citizen is important yet he is not. The US government also requires citizens to take part in certain civic duties like the military which often enforces social hierarchies and makes it look alright to have them even in the political spheres. Nonetheless, certain social gatherings like carnivals can allow for a reversal of these roles and thus cover up the notion that the government comprises of the elite.

Even the nature of elections within the United States continues to propagate these falsehoods. For example, only certain elite candidates make it to the list of nominees from various parties and these individuals are the only ones who can hassle it out. At the end of it, it can be argued that there is a

complex interplay of roles between the local peasantry and the elite where the elite try to remind the public that they are superior than them but are also similar to them in one way or another. These interactions actually subvert any attempt by the majority to be involved in the process of exercising power.

Although a lot has altered since the formation of the nation, there are still certain patterns that are still prevalent. Communication today is very different from what it was at the beginning but it still serves to reinforce the popular government myth. Mass communication allows the elite to send the message that they are actually empowering the people. This kind of fiction is what keeps them in power and perpetuates the cycle of minority rule against the majority.

The organization of institutions within the United States further adds insult to injury. Although the masses have the numbers needed to have their say, they are rendered powerless by the fact that presidents, judges and other representatives make decisions and already control much.

The problem of determining how it would be possible for cooperative sovereigns to rule was always a difficult one and eventually led to the crisis that occurred during the Civil war. However after completion of the war, nation government was now described as being representative of the sovereignty of the people. This was in contradiction to the understanding that the people were meant to rule. It is therefore fictional to presume that

representation actually signifies popular sovereignty because Americans have lost the capacity to govern (Morgan, 242).

Popular sovereignty is fiction according to Edmund Morgan because the people of a nation cannot have the capacity to rule themselves unless they can get representation through a government. Therefore, citizens never really get to exercise power as the concept promises. Eventually, this popular sovereignty became an ideal that is continually being sought even up to today. Popular sovereignty ceased to be an actual reality and now serves as a goal to be reached by the Americans. Throughout the history of the United States, popular sovereignty has always been something worth pursuing because it appears to be very close yet so far. Essentially, the few in government have always been trying to change the social and political circumstances around them in order to ascertain that the principles or goals being fostered by the 'popular sovereignty' notion are achieved. This has always been a challenge for those involved in it. It is thus fictional because it is something that can barely be achieved as seen in history.

It was necessary to invent "the people" during the creation of the American constitution so as to guard against the propagation of factions. This matter was discussed heavily in Federalist No. 10. In this writing, it was argued that a faction can arise when certain citizens have particular interests and passions that actually contravene the rights of others. Therefore if the constitution is to be upheld then there was a need to propagate the concept of the people in order to preserve a sane political landscape.

Factions are inherent in man and since it would be undemocratic to prevent their occurrence through elimination of liberty then a nation would be better off trying to prevent its spread through the use of the principle of the people. Here, citizens will be not be directly granted the power to vote for all the laws in their nation but will be given the power to select a few representatives who can then be given the platform for changing those laws. In this regard, supporters of the constitution are illustrating that if the electorate believes that it is fairly represented by some few individuals then chances are that it will uphold the constitution. The constitution would have been rendered useless if it required participation by all members of that nation. Entities would have to go back to the first step in order to involve everyone.

However, if there was a common perception of unity amongst the people then it would be possible for them to accept the constitution as it was since it had been created by only a small portion of the population. Also, because the United States is composed of a relatively large population then the public had to be convinced that they possessed a fair stake in issues of representation. These supporters of the constitution asserted that because it would be difficult to corrupt or bribe members of such a big republic then it will be easier to ensure fair representation. This fact will also be further supported by the fact that a large republic possesses a wider degree of leaders who can then fairly represent them. Supporters of the constitution therefore coined the term the people in order to protect the few individuals who had been responsible for its creation. If they were made to appear as

though they represented the people's voice then this would easily allow them to impose it amongst the people.

The American method of governance has been based on a number of fictions that serve the purpose of bridging political reality with political ideas. One of the key concepts described by Morgan is that popular sovereignty is just one justification for imposition of the rule of the few upon the majority. American citizens have to suspend any sort of disbelief concerning this political fiction in order for the ruling elite to continue remaining in power. This is the very reason why supporters of the constitution had to establish the concept of the people.

Morgan, Edmund. *Inventing the people: the rise of popular sovereignty in England and America*. NY: Norton and Company, 1989. Web.

Madison James. *Federalist No. 10*. *Daily Advertiser*. 1787. Web.