

Morality In the Government

The United States of America was founded by diverse groups who wanted freedom, equality, and a government free from monarchy and corruption. This diversity and values that we were based upon has put our country on a much different caliber than other older, more established countries. We began with the idea of Christian morality and tolerance of those different than us religiously and culturally. This idea was very much a part of the government's structure and mindset in the beginning, but we started to walk away from that. Whether we use "Christian" values or not, as human beings we know what is right and what is wrong. Every human being has an obligation to do right when they see that wrong is being done that causes harm to others, especially our government. Morality should have a strong place in government because they are our example, our protectors, and should reflect what kind of society that we are and strive to be as a whole. Without morality, people are oppressed and hurt, as seen in the civil war and reconstruction, the Indian Wars, Big Business, WWI and the Great Depression. If the government believes, practices, and enforces morality within the country there would not be the death, destruction, and ignorance that has occurred throughout history.

There has been many instances where unmoral activities were the heart of this country's economic standpoint and nothing was done for decades. The most horrendous is slavery. The buying and selling of human beings as a piece of property was what our economy thrived on, and it became a mindset. African Americans were a subordinate

race, and whites were superior. This mindset has carried with us into present times. Before the civil war, a change started to arise. The North was urbanizing, and with it the free labor ideology began to arise. This was a belief that you had to work hard to be successful, and that every American should have the right to do so. Also, radicals like William Garrison and Elijah Love Joy were leading a group called abolitionists, who wanted slavery abolished and equality for all. This obviously did not sit well with the south, whose economic stability rested on the back of slave's hard work and free labor of the plantation owner's land. The Civil War, though it had many political advantages, also had many moral issues behind it, the biggest being the freedom of the slaves. The south refused to compromise about slavery, which ultimately cost them more than they could ever have imagined. Compromise is a huge aspect of morality. If you are not willing to meet someone half way and put yourself in their shoes, then there is always going to be bitterness between the groups. The government tried to compromise with the south, but they wouldn't budge on the issue. The government had to intervene. Though the Union "won" the war, the true victory is disputed. The government reprimanded the south, taking them out of the union unless 10% loyal in their votes, threatening to redistribute their lands, and keeping military in their towns. Though some disciplinary action was necessary, this was not a good, moral thing to do on the government's part. If the government would have tried to teach tolerance and equality, rather than punish the south, then the mindset might have changed rather than animosity toward the U.S. government.

The government didn't completely rescue the freed slaves though. When the slaves were freed, they were basically let out on the streets, with no homes, jobs, and

education to fall back on. Groups like the Freedman's Bureau helped many slaves get on their feet, but not to the extent that the government could have implemented. The government was going through its own moral segregation as well. President Andrew Johnson was a power hungry racist that completely contradicted the work of the civil war and the reconstruction. He gave pardons to rich plantation owners, disagreed with the Freedman's Bureau, and approved of the Black Laws, which instilled further the idea that blacks should be looked down on and segregated from whites. He was a supporter of restoration, not the reconstruction that was desperately needed in the economic, political, and most of all, moral stand point of the U.S. All of these things were back peddling on the positive aspects of reconstruction. More than that, the morality of the country was so mixed that it caused many issues. On one hand the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> amendments were a huge moral breakthrough for the country, but on the other we had a racist south, and a even worse president that had to have his military power limited due to corruption, and later was impeached for his unethical behaviors. When the war with the Indians west took the thoughts and resources of the government, the fuel for the reconstruction was depleted. Many people say that the south won in the end due to the fact that they basically got their slaves back with sharecropping, Jim Crow laws, KKK, etc. but in reality, the reconstruction paved a path that would later be used by racial equality and women's rights leaders as support in their fight. This was all possible due to a few moral leaders who knew a change could be made if power was utilized through the government to do so.

The government wasn't always such a noble force though. When the western frontier arose, it brought on its own set of moral conflicts. Around 1820 settlers moving

west encountered, once again, Indians. The culture of Indians verses that of Americans were much different and therefore misunderstood. The Indians were a sustainable and communal group. This means that they only took what they needed from the land and roamed when they had depleted the resources in that particular area. Americans on the other had, believed in private property and using up all resources to make money. The immoral idea that whites were somehow superior arose once more. The Indians were taken from their land, once again, and put onto reservations. While Americans were thriving on the outside of the reservation lines, the Indians were starving. This is where the idea of humans have a responsibility to do right, when wrong is being done, steps in. It can be argued that Indians are the TRUE Americans, that we are merely visitors in their land, but the government conveniently started to believe that they shouldn't interfere because they are "understanding" to the fact that Indians are their own culture, though the Indians are in a unfamiliar area and lack resources to survive. This negligence of moral obligation caused what it always does, war. If the government would have taken responsibility to do what is right, and practiced the equality that many fought for in the civil war, instead of worrying about land or money, then the unrest and death of the Indian wars would have been avoided completely.

The government didn't learn its lesson either. In the late 1800's, early 1900's, there was a huge change in the American culture. Consumption and production took over the American marketplace. Thomas Edison and his electricity, Henry Ford and his model T assembly line, were both examples of the technological frontier that many were breaking through. With this industrialization, a part of our rich, diverse culture died. Producers and artisans couldn't compete with the monopoly of big business, and

therefore became an employees. The idea that no one was unique made the emphasis on “what you own is who you are” a huge part of our culture. This wasn’t the worst part though. The work conditions of these industrial workers were as bad as the slaves. They worked for long hours with little pay and in unsafe conditions. Everyone in a household worked like this, and when someone was injured (which was often) they had no financial help from their employer, and it usually resulted in losing their job completely. Though the economy was doing well, the people were suffering. The government “attempted” to regulate big business with things like the Sherman Antitrust Act and Tariffs, but it was not implemented to the full extent because the big businessmen were powerful. Things like the Homestead Act, which caused death and destruction once again, finally made an impression as to how bad big business actually was. The formation of labor unions and eventually labor laws finally eased the pain of the industry workers.

When WWI came along, a new moral issue arose for the US government. Do you get involved in other countries’ despair when wrong is being done, but at the cost of American lives? President Wilson didn’t think it was our place to be in the war at first. He decided to stay neutral, until a events like the sinking of the *Lustina* with 114 Americans and the Zimmerman telegram intercepted from Germany occurred. We then had a moral obligation to do something that we hadn’t had to encounter since the beginning of the United States...protect our country from an European threat. Though we lost many men, we protected our country and came together to support our military over seas. Woodrow Wilson, though unsuccessful, came up with his 14 points at the end of the war to bring to the Treaty of Versailles. This showed a strategic and peaceful way to avoid a war of this magnitude to ever occur again. Though Woodrow was looked at as

crazy for these points, I think it was an excellent example the morality we need in our government. Woodrow brought us through a war and wanted to utilize what we knew to prevent death and destruction. He also knew that punishing Germany was unethical, and would only cause another war if the other leaders did so. This shows the attitude that we needed in the other issues in history I have described. The willingness to learn from our mistakes in order to teach others how to live in peace. That is the kind of moral compass our government needs all the time.

Unfortunately, that doesn't always happen. After the war, the U.S went through its biggest trial ever, the Great Depression. Though there is some debate as to what actually started the Great Depression, most fingers point toward the American Federal Reserve, who by poor policy making and not acting allowed the money supply to shrink to 1/3 of its normal amount. This caused unemployment rates to sky rocket, along with homelessness and despair. People lost everything. Many people were thrown off their land by government officials who were unsympathetic and forced to move west, like the migrant farm workers of the Midwest. Though some government officials were cruel to the poor Americans, many tried everything to get our country out of it. For example, president Roosevelt began to establish work programs and camps for the homeless and jobless Americans. Though greedy and careless actions got us into the mess of the great depression, the American determination of Roosevelt, some of his colleagues, and ultimately the American people show that we always seem to find a willpower to work ourselves out of despair.

The United States is the greatest country in the world. We have a diverse culture and a people who know when to band together for what they believe in. Our history is

rich with battling frontiers, whether physically or morally, and we have changed the lives of millions with the breakthroughs founded on our soil. Unfortunately, we break away from this greatness from time to time and I believe that it is because of our leadership. Morality is a key essential to leading a country, especially one as diverse as ours. We have to be lead with a strong institution that supports equality, peace, and tolerance. When corruption, greed, and self interest start to take over government officials, death and destruction arise. This can be seen in things like slavery, Indian wars, big business of the 1900's, WWI and the Great Depression. All of these things were tribulations that we had to go through to make our country stronger, and if we reestablish our morals, use what we have learned, and have a strong government to implement them, we will forever be the greatest country in the world.