

Through Radicalism They Achieved It

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Mid-Term Paper

July 4, 1776 was a momentous day. It is the day America claimed its' independence with the words so carefully and cleverly written by our founding fathers. Those brave men, for they would all have faced the charge of treason if unsuccessful in their pursuit, indefatigably stated humankind's right to abolish a government when it has failed to do its duty. In their declaration they documented that a government only has power if it is given consent of the governed (Jefferson). By the mid to late seventeenth hundreds Britain seemed to be consistently losing its' consent of the colonists. Conservative measures were taken by the Continental Congress to come to a compromise with its' Mother Country; however, none of the attempts ever pleased both the Mother and her Child. The revolution was inevitable. Although some members of the Continental Congress favored compromise over separation, a majority of our founding fathers knew that nothing would change unless they took radical actions. Our founding fathers' passion for change, knowledge of democracy, thirst for respect, and growing patriotism set in motion the American Revolution; a radical revolution at the very least.

America's Founding Fathers risked all they had in their pursuit for change. Most of the men, if not all, were of wealth and family status. If they were to fail, it is plausible to assume that Britain would have stripped their families of their wealth, status, and worst of all the men could have faced execution. This leap of faith taken by the gentlemen of the thirteen colonies could deem the revolution radical in its own merit. All the members of the Continental Congress were well educated men, so it is reasonable to assume that they all fully understood the consequences of the choices they were making, but they continued to push Britain back every time Britain pushed the colonists. The Continental Congress can be seen as the first American government because even though it may have been formed loosely it was formed to represent and protect the

rights of the colonists. Not only can the revolution be hailed radical through the Founding Fathers leap of faith, they also took drastic measures by fighting their grievances at the root.

Attacking a problem by the root is literally the definition of the adjective use of the word radical (An Ask.com Service: Dictionary). With that noted, simple reasoning can attest that the American Revolution was radical. The simple reasoning is as follows: the Founding Fathers sought to free the colonists from Britain's oppression, being that Britain is a hierarchy foundation their King is the root of that oppression, and the Continental Congress formally addressed their grievances to the King; therefore, by definition the American Revolution is radical. Although the definition can technically confirm the revolution as radical, there are other factors that further support the radicalism.

Some may argue that because the wealthy still ruled after the revolution it was far from radical. Fortunately, the actual course of events involving the change of power after the revolution proves the naysayers quite inaccurate. Following the revolution the United States went from thirteen completely separate colonies ruled by a hierarchy across the sea, to thirteen United States with equal representation in a democratic government. Not only did the Founding Fathers understand that a radical change in power needed to take place, some of them even refused offers to become the new King. In Washington's God, written by Michael and Jana Novak, they document that George Washington is encouraged by one of his lieutenants to become the new King. Even as tempting as that may have been for George Washington he knew that a hierarchy rule would no longer suffice and rejected the request of his peer (Novak and Novak). So even though the Founding Fathers could have easily abused the power to govern, they still strode towards a representative government. Thus, the way in which the colonies had been governed completely changed, making the American Revolution a radical event. Although

a complete change of power took place, it may have been out-shined, or at least equaled by the complete change of thought.

Going into the revolution many colonists may have considered themselves loyal, especially the gentlemen; however, after the last gun had been fired many of them had changed their perception of their Mother Country and now were American Patriots. This complete, extreme, change of thought due to the revolution is best told through Benjamin Franklin's eyes. He was a man who before the revolution, and declaration of war, had the deepest love for England. Franklin, though born in the colonies, moved to England to study aboard and take place in the Parliament. However, with the happenings of the revolution his heavy flame for England burnt out. Once war had started he wrote a letter back to a close friend of his in Parliament and stated that because his hands were responsible for the bloodshed at his home they were no longer friends, but enemies (Rees, Scott and Mann). For a colonist to go from an England fanatic to an American Patriot in that short period of time is a radical change. That change of emotion and thought took place because of the revolution, a change that presumably took place for many colonists. The dramatic changes in the way the colonists thought and felt about their Mother Country can easily verify the radicalism of the American Revolution.

Patriots were not only the gentlemen of the colonies. A patriot could have been any colonist. That feeling of pride for their country alone united the colonies in a rapid, radical fashion. These patriots took any measure necessary to support their rights and pride. They boycotted, they publically humiliated and scared royal officials and they formed an army and intended to defend their freedom even without the supplies, food, clothing or shelter to properly support armed forces. None of those actions can be considered conservative. Some may argue that they were indeed conservative because there was no violence (outside of the warfare).

However, does it not make a better man, a more radical man to revolt in ways that are not of a traditional revolution? It should, because the act of being radical is not defined by violence.

Radicalism, in this instance, can be seen as extreme or fanatical actions. The American Revolution can be argued as radical because their boycotts, public humiliations, and the formation of a standing army are all extreme and fanatical actions. Boycotts were extreme because colonists completely changed their way of life and consumption of products to make their point. Public humiliations were fanatical at the very least because the colonists would do anything to scare the royal officials out of office or town. Finally, the formation of the standing army was far-fetched because it was established without any of the standard means seen necessary in that time. All of the patriots actions combined define one radical revolution.

Some historians and Marxists may argue that the American Revolution was conservative. Those who call themselves Marxists believe that the revolution was not radical because it did not effect race, class or gender; however, those issues were not as heavily weighted in the seventeen hundreds as they are today. It is a known fact that slavery existed and the revolution did not abolish it, but the documents written and words spoken from the revolution initiated the radical change that eventually took place between races. It is also argued that gender and its roles or rights were not affected; however, the revolution, just as it set in motion the change between race, enabled women to come forward and demand change. Even though change did not come immediately the fact that the revolution gave all people a voice made it radical. Before the revolution blacks and women found it hard to stand up for equal rights when the hierarchical system which ruled them did not allow it; however, with the outcome of the revolution it empowered women and blacks to fight for their rights. The power the revolution gave oppressed groups made it a radical change. Finally, Marxists argue that class did not change hence the

revolution was not radical. Although class as it is understood today did not change, the class system that the colonies were ruled by was completely abolished; therefore, the revolution was radical.

Radical is just another word in our dictionary, but in late seventeen hundreds it was brought to life. Through the radical actions, now referred to as the American Revolution, taken by the Founding Fathers and American Patriots all pursuits were achieved. The Founding Fathers sought change, they achieved it. They sought respect, they gained it. They sought a representative and democratic government, they created it.

Works Cited

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