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The Changing Meaning of 'All men are created equal'

In 1776, Thomas Jefferson used the phrase "all men are created equal" in the Declaration of Independence to clearly state the American colonies' desire for independence from British rule. However, because it mostly favored white, male property owners, it did not apply to everybody at the time. As numerous leaders reinterpreted it throughout American history, the term expanded to embrace a wider range of interpretations. The speeches and writings of Martin Luther King Jr. in "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" and Abraham Lincoln in the Gettysburg Address show how the concept of "all men are created equal" has evolved from its initial, limiting understanding to one that advocates racial fairness.

Thomas Jefferson's first use of the phrase "all men are created equal" in the Declaration of Independence was groundbreaking in its rejection of monarchical power and the doctrine of divine right. Jefferson said that governments' power stems from the consent of the people they govern, and that everyone is entitled to certain unalienable rights such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Nonetheless, despite his breakthrough work, Jefferson's understanding of equality was limited by the societal and political standards of his time. He did not believe in equality for enslaved African Americans, women, or Native Americans in the new republic, so they were denied fundamental rights and liberties. Jefferson possessed slaves, highlighting the difference between the concept of equality and its practical practice. During Jefferson's time, the phrase "all men are created equal" referred to equal political rights for white males, rather than universal human rights.

Abraham Lincoln's 1863 Gettysburg Address expanded the meaning of "all men are created equal" by linking it to the end of slavery and the nation's unity during the Civil War. Lincoln described the struggle as a test to see if a republic founded on liberty and the idea that everyone is equal could survive. His speech reframed Jefferson's statements in the context of a divided nation, with slavery contradicting the concept of equality. Lincoln's manner throughout the Gettysburg Address is solemn and determined, emphasizing the nation's responsibility to defend its essential principles jointly. Lincoln's strong speech, with its succinctness and moral clarity, linked the fight for equality to soldiers' sacrifices in battle. Lincoln revised the phrasing to promote national unity and justice, setting the path for the eventual abolition of slavery with the passage of the 13th Amendment.

Martin Luther King Jr. elaborated on the idea that "all men are created equal" in his 1963 "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" during the Civil Rights Movement. King addressed the systemic oppression of African Americans in the South by using the phrase to promote racial justice and equality. He called for swift, nonviolent action to end racial injustice and denounced the slow pace of civil rights development and the apathy of white moderates. The monarch uses moral, theological, and legal arguments to support his case for equality in a letter that blends reasoning and passion. His use of Jefferson's quote exposed the hypocrisy of a nation that had not yet lived up to its initial promise. Due to its rhetorical force and resonance with the American ideal of justice and freedom, the King letter was convincing. His allusion to the shared ideals of the Declaration of Independence resonated with an audience that was discriminated against and subjected to segregation today.

The notion that "all men are created equal" has evolved throughout time to reflect shifting social mores and obstacles in American culture. A modest declaration of political parity for Caucasian men has expanded into a global call for human rights. Martin Luther King Jr. and Abraham Lincoln both played crucial roles in transforming this concept into a powerful symbol of justice and equality, with King fighting for racial equality and Lincoln working toward the abolition of slavery. The message remains relevant today as a reminder of the constant battle for equality in a multitude of areas, including sexual orientation, gender, color, and socioeconomic status. It is believed that as society progresses, the concept of "all men are created equal" will evolve to meet new challenges and aims in the pursuit of global justice.

Note that the phrase "all men are created equal" has spread significantly since its original use in 1776. Because of the contributions of Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King Jr., the phrase has come to symbolize America's devotion to justice and fairness. The saying serves as a constant reminder that, despite triumphs, progress in the goal of equality continues. Its ability to adapt to new social movements and difficulties ensures that it will remain an important player in American politics for many years to come.

Works Cited

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