

Lecture 4: *The American Revolution*

Revolution marks the end of the Colonial period

Liberalism and Republicanism

- More notions of liberty circulating through the colonies in the 18th century
- Very influential in sparking resistance
- Both serve to define idea of “liberty” at the heart of American Revolution

Summary

Rhetoric of freedom is seen in the documents of this time

Freedom means different things to different people at different moments

What did it mean for the people who rose up to the British at the time?

→ Liberalism and Republicanism is what freedom meant to the colonists at this time

Republicanism

- Stresses the public, community
- Active participation of economically independent citizens is vital to liberty (freedom)
- Idea of civic virtue, the public good
- Independent citizens would serve to check any infringement of liberty

Summary

Republicanism is a way of thinking

Absolute individualism = chaos

- To create freedom, you need order and stability
 - With rules and community that come together (like minded individuals)
 - Civic Virtue or the common good

Must check any infringement so no one individual could become too powerful

Liberalism

- John Locke
- 1680 published “Two Treatises on Government”

Summary

Liberalism is a way of thinking

Father of liberalism in America is John Locke (a philosopher)

Enlightenment and Scientific revolution influenced John Locke

Fundamental truths in how people can be organized can be ascertained like any other scientific law

Liberalism II

- Contrast with republicanism
 - Focus on the individual, the “private” realm
- Locke and “natural rights”
- Life, Liberty, property
- Liberty = freedom from interference from state into these private, natural rights
- Natural rights for some... for all?

Summary

Defines freedom through the individual and their natural rights

Natural Rights – rights given to individuals when they are born (unalienable rights). They cannot be taken away

Peoples rights are stripped away when the government (monarchs) rules without the consent of the governed

Rules are imposed on the individuals that take away our rights

Your liberty should not be restrained unless it infringes on someone else’s liberties

“universal” language is shown in these documents, however it still only applied to white, landowning males.

- Establishing the vocabulary of American History, aka universal terms

Liberalism and Republicanism

- Overlap, compatible
- Abstract ideas of liberty
- Match with real, culturally rooted ideas of liberty associated with being a free Englishman
- Invoked by rebellious colonists

Summary

Ideas of Liberalism and Republicanism are associated with being a free Englishman

Imperial Policies after 1763

- Legacy of Seven Years War (French and Indian War)
- 1765 – Stamp Act
 - Unprecedented direct taxes that affect all the colonists
- Conflict over ideas of freedom
 - Crown: freedom to order Empire
 - Colonies: Freedom from confiscation of property without consent

Summary

Great Britain wins Seven Years War against France and Spain

- Result is that Britain becomes most dominating Empire in Americas
- France gives up Empire in Americas
- Spain loses a lot of its territory in Americas

Great Britain went deep into debt in order to win the Seven Years War

Direct tax on all economic activity in the 13 colonies, without knowledge or a decision from representatives from the colonies

More than money was at stake, their property and freedom were at stake

Repeal of Stamp Act

- Stamp Act Crisis
 - Riots, attacks on tax collectors
- Boycotts of British goods
 - Commodities as common language. Common experience
- Language of liberty
- 1765 Stamp Act Congress meets
- 1766 Stamp Act repealed

Summary

Resistance becomes more deliberate and planned and coming together as an effort

13 colonies were coming together for a common cause against the British in the name of liberty

“UNITED” States of America

Stamp Act Congress

James Otis and Ben Franklin would go to Britain in a speech to repeal the Stamp Act who speak for ALL the colonists

- King listens and repeals the Stamp Act
 - Had no real choice unless the King wanted a revolution

Tea and Intolerable Acts

- 1773 Tea Tax
 - Colonists object
 - Refuse to concede that Crown has right to tax
- Boston Tea Party
- Intolerable Acts
- Freedom of assembly, private property rights imperiled

Summary

King still needed money from the levy of taxes

- Levied taxes in a more covert way, hidden taxes into the final price of goods
- One of these items being taxed was the special commodity of tea
- Tea couldn't grow within geography of the Americas
- Political resistance to open resistance against the Crown

Continental Congress

- A colonial crisis, connect Massachusetts
- A coordinated response
 - Halt trade to Britain
- Changing identities
 - Patrick Henry
 - “I am not a Virginian, but an American”

Cause of Boston, cause of all colonies

Summary

Intolerable acts were taken as a threat to all colonies even though it had applied only to Massachusetts, the place of the Boston Tea Party

Continental Congress

Identity of American is first articulated and expressed in the Continental Congress

“Give me liberty, or give me death”

Identity shifts from British to a separate identity called American (meaning part of the 13 colonies of America)

Discontent to Independence

- 1775 fighting breaks out in Massachusetts
- Continental Congress meets to formulate coordinated response
- Many delegates still seek to be seen as full and equal members of Empire even as they rebel against dictates of that Empire

Summary

Colonists call themselves Rebels

Some delegates of the 13 colonies do not agree with rebelling against the British Empire

Loyalists (Tories) vs. Patriots (Rebels)

Common Sense (1776)

- Attacks monarchy, aristocracy, religious authority
- Hopes of a future free of Europe
- America as new, different
- Clear, accessible
- 150,000 copies sold

Summary

Rather than having a monarchy we can have a country where elections are held (a representative government) in a republic.

Common Sense was an accessible book that could speak to all the colonists (no matter their background) that helped the American Revolution.

- Helped spread the word of Locke, Republicanism, Liberalism, to the masses

Declaration of Independence

- 6 months after Common Sense, delegates made the transition
- July 2nd, July 4th
 - Document brimmed over with specific grievances but also transcendent ideas of freedom and “natural rights”
- Long, arduous war ends in 1781, treaty in 1783
- What government will rule now?

Summary

Continental Congress signs the Declaration of Independence detailing their grievance and justifying their breaking away from England