

Analysis on the Reasons for the Failure of Revolutions: A Comparison Between the American Revolutionary War and the American Civil War

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Abstract: The American Revolutionary War aimed for political equality, resulting in the independence of the United States and the retention of the social order. The law established after the movement preserved slavery without making a direct claim. In contrast, the target of the American Civil War was to abolish slavery. It gained legal success but failed to change American society. Treating citizens differently according to their skin colour was banned, however, racial segregation remained in the country. In this paper, the causes of the failure of the two revolutions mentioned above are discussed, focusing on their influences on laws and communities. The principles, aims, and results of the events are compared and contrasted, so as to discover the reasons why revolutions are not able to shape society according to their purposes. Conclusions can be drawn that revolutions do not succeed mainly due to two reasons: either because the laws that line up with the principles of the revolutions are not established as the revolutions themselves do not aim for the principles or because the principles are not carried out in society even if related laws are established, for the domestic force against them is too strong.

Keywords: American revolutionary war, American civil war, American revolutions, the United States of America

1. Introduction

Revolutions refer to citizens' movements against their governments aiming to improve society or the political order. They sometimes fail as the societies they take place do not change to follow the spirit of their principles. A successful revolution does not need to overthrow the current ruling class or change the social order but needs to cause the society it takes place in to adjust and fit with the revolution's idea. By conducting a comparative analysis of the American Revolutionary War and the American Civil War, possible reasons for the failure of revolutions are discussed in this paper. The mentioned revolutions were chosen for this topic to minimise the influence of other factors or to create control variables. Both events happened in the USA, both were wars, the nature of both revolutions was related to equality and human rights, and both documents analysed for consequences were legal ones, as a result, no personal opinion is involved.

In this paper, the principles and outcomes of the two revolutions are compared. The United States Constitution is studied for the result of the American Revolutionary War, while the

Reconstruction Amendments are studied for the American Civil War. The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America, written during the former revolution, and the Cornerstone Address, established on 21 March 1861 during the latter, are each used to demonstrate the ideas in the corresponding revolutions. The principles and the changed societies after the revolutions shown in the documents are compared to identify if the societies lined up with the ideas and to tell if the revolutions were successful. This paper can enrich the research materials in related fields, for example, the study of history regarding revolutions and the United States.

2. The American Revolutionary War

The American Revolutionary War was fought between the Kingdom of Great Britain (Britain) and the United States of America (USA), with the latter aiming for independence from the former. The USA's principle of the revolution was political equality [1] and the event resulted in the retention of slavery, which failed to make all citizens equal in political means [2].

By the time when the USA was colonies of Britain, it observed the political crisis in Britain including corruption, autocracy, and turbulence. As a result, it started to question the rule of the country and stopped admiring the political system of its suzerain. After the Seven Years' War, Britain taxed the American colonies to pay its debt, and the colonies responded by offering the slogan of no taxation without representation, aiming for the autonomy of colonies and freedom from tyrannical interference. Finally, when the British king passed legislation to frighten the colonies, they decided to contend for their freedom, and Britain used military force to suppress them [3].

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal", claimed the USA during the revolution. Here, "equal" stood for equality in political rights, as it was stated that "the right of representation in the legislature" was taken from the American people, taxes were imposed on them without their consent, "the free system of English laws" and their "most valuable laws" were abolished in the colonies, their "own legislatures" were taken, and so on. The USA did not aim for social or racial equality in this revolution but wanted political equality and independence to gain it [1].

Nevertheless, after the revolution, it was stated that "Representatives and direct Taxes... shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, ... three fifths of all other Persons", and "the migration or Importation of such Persons as any of the States now existing" "shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the Year one thousand eight hundred and eight, but a Tax or duty may be imposed on such Importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each Person". Here, the "other persons" did not share the same political rights as the "free Persons", as they were not represented and taxed in the same way. They were treated as less than a person. If the USA was to have total political equality, all citizens should have been counted as one person, instead of "three fifths" of a person. Allowing the "Persons" to be migrated or imported did not give them the same political rights as the others as well, as they were treated as goods but not people. Taxing the action further proved the idea that they were not treated as humans because citizens are not taxed when they migrate or move to a different country [2].

It could be observed that inequality represented slavery was still preserved in an obscure way, causing people to have different political rights, therefore the revolution's principle, "all men are created equal", was not equivalent to its legal outcome. Thus, the revolution did not lead to complete success.

This situation appears because the revolution itself, despite fighting for independence, did not aim for political equality. The wanted result of the USA from the event was to become a sovereign nation, instead of changing the political order to create equality. As a result, the people of the country did not fight the war and aimed for consequences according to the principle of the

revolution. As the wanted result was not the same as the claim of the revolution's principle, it would be impossible for the principle to be carried out after the event, therefore the revolution could not succeed in this case.

3. The American Civil War

In contrast, the American Civil War was the war between the United States of America and the Confederate States of America (CSA), targeted for abolishing and remaining slavery respectively, and correspondingly for and against racial equality. The victory of the USA led to the establishment of the Reconstruction Amendments, and only the idea and goal of its side are discussed in this section.

Before the war, the slave owners from the southern states were represented by the Democratic Party, which often gained the majority in Congress, and a number of presidents were from the party. Thus, slavery, presented in these states, was protected. In contrast, the black slaves in the region could not vote and did not have any civil rights, as they were seen as property instead of citizens, with a population of three million, taking up a quarter of the southern states' residents. They produced cotton, which was vital to the economy of these states. In conclusion, slavery was in the dominating position of the politics and economy of the states mentioned above. Thereby, it would be unlikely for these states to abolish slavery in this situation, as it was vital for their economy, of which the majority was taken up by the cotton plantations. The slaves did not have the political power to vote to forbid slavery, and the system was well protected in the country [4].

The USA, under this circumstance, had the principle of abrogating slavery. It ordered and declared that "all persons held as slaves ... are and henceforward shall be free; and that the executive government of the United States, ... will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons." Different from the principle of political equality of the American Revolutionary War, the principle of the American Civil War was racial equality. It only aims for the races to be equal, which was not related to political rights and power [5].

The consequence of the revolution was that "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude ... shall exist within the United States...", "No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States", "Representatives shall be apportioned among the several states according to their respective numbers, counting the whole number of persons in each state, excluding Indians not taxed", and "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, colour, or previous condition of servitude." It could be observed that although slavery was abolished, all citizens were counted as one person, and the former slaves gained the right to vote, their right to live in the same way was neither protected nor deprived. In other words, this did not allow racial segregation but did not remove it either [6].

The law followed the principles of the revolution and established concepts regarding racial equality, while the society remained influenced by slavery, and the remains of slavery, inequality, still existed. For example, by 1900, Virginia established a law to enforce the railroads to have the different races on different cars, which was against racial equality, and thus against the Reconstruction Amendments. The law could be passed because the politicians were being racist, and the white people were lack of courage to stand against the law and for the black people. This showed that ideas relating to racial inequality still remained in the society of the USA. The law also encouraged segregation supported by the state to increase, for instance, further laws in the 1900s prohibited coloured people from the dining, Pullman, parlour, chairs, or compartment cars, another law segregated coloured people from the white on the steamboats, and there was also a law assigning districts each to the white or coloured people and forbidding citizens from different races to enter succeeding one year after the region was assigned. The last law was abolished following the

Buchanan v. Warley case. However, in 1920, a law to separate prisoners were established. By the 1920s, a group of people, mainly the Anglo-Saxon Club, strongly supported racial segregation and demanded that the separation of races in all public places be enforced by law [7].

This is for the fierce domestic forces against the revolution, especially the ideas of the CSA. Its vice president claimed that “the negro is not equal to the white man”, “slavery, subordination to the superior race, is his natural and moral condition”, and the USA was “attempting to make things equal which the Creator had made unequal [8].” As a result, even if slavery was made illegal by legal documents, the influences of it remained in the society of the USA. In conclusion, even if the revolution aimed for its principles, the strength of domestic opposing forces can still make revolutions into failures.

4. Conclusions

To conclude, the American Revolutionary War, fought by the USA for freedom from Britain, did not succeed as the revolution’s goal did not align with its principle. The war, aiming for freedom and equality [1], neither abolished slavery nor changed the social order of the USA. The newborn nation did not protect absolute equality but provided the chance for slavery to exist without being directly stated [2], for it happened to gain independence instead of establishing these ideas.

In contrast, the American Civil War, in which the USA fought for racial equality and the abolishment of slavery, failed because the society, despite the law claiming equality between races [6], remained under the influence of slavery. The reason for this fact was the strong opposing domestic force was still able to affect the country [8], therefore some of the ideas of slavery stayed.

Consequently, revolutions may fail under two circumstances: either they do not happen according to their principles to make the laws established as their result follow the principles, or fierce opposition in the country stop the laws from being respected in society.

To reduce the number of factors that can influence the outcome of the revolutions, only those in the USA were selected, leading to a limitation in the revolution types. There can be variables that only apply to or do not exist in this country, which can cause this paper to be unilateral. For example, the paper did not discuss revolutions in communist countries, countries with one race, countries outside North America, or movements that were not wars. This can be improved by comparing a broader range of revolutions and focusing on different political systems, societies, locations, and forms. Therefore, future research can discuss further details of the revolutions. A more in-depth analysis can be conducted to develop the reasons in more detail.

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