

Understanding Thomas Jefferson's Political Philosophy

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Introduction

Thomas Jefferson is considered to be the most significant political leader in the history of America. He is known as one of the seven founding fathers of the United States. He was the person who helped to draft the Declaration of Independence. He is also known as the founder of the Democratic-Republican Party, which was created as an opposing party of The Federalists. Jefferson was a sensational writer who left a rich legacy in philosophy not only for the Americans but for all the people. His presidential addresses, numerous bills, public papers, presidential messages, his book Notes on the State of Virginia, and his philosophical letters show us the philosophical legacy that he has left behind for everyone (Sehat, 2017). The political philosophy of Thomas Jefferson is considered to be a secure philosophy that was guided by a progressive and consistent vision of humans. Jefferson was an abolitionist and was in favor of freeing the slaves. It is considered that the Emancipation Proclamation that President Lincoln issued was also an affect of the policies and political philosophies of Jefferson. This raises the question of what the impacts of Jefferson's political philosophy were and how it impacted Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation.

Discussion

Thomas Jefferson is considered to be one of the most important political figures in the history of America. Born on 13th April 1743, Jefferson is considered one of the seven fathers of America and a person who helped to draft the Constitution as well as the Declaration of Independence. He was the first secretary of state and the third elected president of America. Apart from being a political leader, he also served in the fields of science, arts and architecture. He was considered to be a bountiful writer who wrote thousands of letters, presidential messages, speeches, books and many more things. He led the foundation of the first American philosophical society.

Being a leading political figure in the United States, Jefferson always believed that there should be a power balance between the states and the federal government. His philosophy was that if you give more power to the federal, it will ultimately affect the state government, and thus, the common man will face many issues in his life. He was a man who was in favor of giving equal rights to all the citizens in the United States, which was only possible if there would be greater power in the hands of the state government (Hellenbrand, 1990). According to Jeffersonian philosophy, if there are more small societies that are harmonized, then it will be easier for the governments to give equal rights to

all the citizens in the country. The basic right of freedom and liberty can only be fulfilled if there are small administrative units in the United States.

Jefferson's political philosophy was a bit different from his opponents. According to him, democracy was not a type of government in which you can dictate the people, nor a type in which the rich become richer and the poor become poorer (Hellenbrand, 1990). He believed that democracy is a form of government in which you are an agent of the society and you are representing the society's expression. He believed that if you want prosperity in society and want to enjoy the true meaning of democracy in the United States, then there is a need for cultural uniformity, public education and self-determination. According to researchers, Jefferson believed that we have to give proper knowledge and easy access to information to the people, for which there is a need for free media in the United States because, without that, no one is safe in this world.

After becoming president for the first time, the important thing that Jefferson did was to secure the Louisiana Purchase (Cohen, 1969). The first presidency term of Jefferson was a huge success. He was successful in implementing his political philosophy, through which he filled his first tenure with a lot of achievements. Through his extraordinary work in his first tenure of the presidency, he proved that a philosopher can become successful in politics. The thing is, they just have to make proper policies and to properly implement those policies.

Many researchers have written that Jefferson was not a proper philosopher as they did not find any formal philosophical paper written by Jefferson. Despite many of the letters, speeches, messages and his efforts in drafting the Declaration of Independence, there is no complete paper of Jefferson's philosophical literature. Jefferson was known as one of the most prominent people during the American Revolution (Cohen, 1969). He embraced death on 4th July, 1826. His efforts for the end of slavery, equality among all the citizens in the United States and his efforts for the fundamental rights of all the citizens not only made him popular in America but worldwide, especially in the African countries (Cohen, 1969).

Thomas Jefferson worked a lot to make a government in which all individuals have freedom, and the nation feels free from all the burdens and no fear of anyone (Thomson, 2017). Although, while drafting the Declaration of Independence, he said that slavery was a punishable crime, it did not help to end slavery. In fact, for a very long time, he was a man who owned slaves (Thomson, 2017). Jefferson and the other six fathers of America declared slavery as a punishable crime but still did not work to abolish it because they thought that if they did so, the nation would be divided. To end slavery, it took the Civil War, 87 more years and the Emancipation Proclamation.

What Is The Emancipation Proclamation?

As the American civil war started, President Lincoln looked at the matters and rather than doing work on ending the slavery, he worked on the conflict that was related to the preservation of unions.

Although President Lincoln was a man who was against the slavery and a big abolitionist but he was aware of the fact that no one in this country neither the northerners nor the states whose residents have slaves will support the cause of abolition. But as the 54th regiment found, consisting of more than 1000 black soldiers and showed their marvellous work in the battle field, hundreds of thousands of more black people joined the military during the American civil war. President Lincoln, who was a prudent man, was observing all this situation very deeply (Guelzo, 2005).

With the joining of hundreds of thousands of black people joining the military, President Lincoln thought that is the right strategy to end the slavery. Therefore, after the union victory, President Lincoln, issued Emancipation Proclamation, which stated that all the slaves in the country would be free forever (Brewster, 2014). This declaration was not about the freedom of one single slave, rather, it was a turning point during the war, which transformed the war for the freedom of human race.

Facts About The Emancipation Proclamation

The Emancipation proclamation is considered to be one of the most important document in the United States. But it is a document that has been misunderstood by the majority of the people. Here are some facts about emancipation proclamation.

- It applied to the rebellion states.

President Lincoln said that the proclamation was necessary to immobilize the confederacy. While declaring emancipation proclamation, President Lincoln tried to limit his authorities and applied the proclamation to the states that were rebellious and were in the southern region.

- Initially, cabinet secretaries did not support the Emancipation Proclamation.

In 1862, when for the very first time, president Lincoln presented this idea before his cabinet, majority of the secretaries strongly opposed the idea by saying that the decision is too radical (Brewster, 2014). But Lincoln's commitment to the cause and the ideology of his predecessors Thomas Jefferson made sure that he implement this proclamation. After the victory at Antietam, President Lincoln became successful to persuade his cabinet for the support of this cause.

Antietam War provided enough reason for the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation.

In July, 1862, when for the very first time, President Lincoln presented the idea of emancipation proclamation, iWilliam Seward, secretary of state suggested the president that he should wait till the victory at the Antietam war, so that he can provide a reason to the people of the United States for the implementation of this proclamation. Although, the war was ended in a draw but the union army became successful to throughout the confederates, which was considered as a victory by the republicans i.e., Lincoln and his partners, after which they realized that it is the time for the declaration of emancipation proclamation.

- Executive war powers of the president were demonstrated through this proclamation.

Slaves were used as the front end by the southerners during the war. They used slaves for managing their home front so that more people can go on fight. President Lincoln who was a prudent man, understand the whole scenario and issued the proclamation in order to handicap the use of slaves by the confederants in the war (Brewster, 2014). During the declaration of proclamation, President also said that this proclamation will be implemented under his supremacy and al the slaves would get their freedom under the executive power of the government of United States.

- The focus of the war was changed due to this proclamation.

Preservation of union was the basic focus of the war. But after the declaration of the proclamation, the focus of war diverted from preservation of war to the freedom of slaves.

- Proclamation prevented the invasion of other countries in the civil war.

It is a general perception that France and Britain were supporting the confederates during the American civil war in order to create more influence in the west. Many Europeans were against slavery but the Britishers saw that the emancipation proclamation nothing but useless. But Lincoln's commitment to implement the proclamation changed the mood of international powers to intervene in the American Civil War.

- Proclamation led the path of the freedom fight for African Americans.

Proclamation declaration by President Lincoln said that the African Americans who are physically fit and are in good condition will be welcomed in the US military services. After the few months of the declaration, more than 200,000 African American were serving in the US military and US navy (Guelzo, 2005). A whole new regiment with the name of 54th regiment of Massachusetts were formed that was consisting majority of the African Americans.

- Proclamation paved the way for the abolition from the United States.

The proclamation changed the focus of war from preserving the union to the freedom of slaves. Initially the proclamation only focused on the freedom of slaves from the rebellious states but shortly it persuaded all the citizens both in the north and in the south for the acceptance of abolition across the country. After the proclamation, on 6th December, 1865, an amendment was passed from the assembly, which was the last step for the abolition of slaves from the United States.

- Emancipation Proclamation; biggest achievement of Lincoln's presidency.

Although President Lincoln I know as the person who saved the union, according to Lincoln, the Emancipation Proclamation was one of the biggest achievements that he achieved during the period of his presidency. While signing the declaration paper, President Lincoln said, "In my life, I have never felt certain about doing anything right, but while signing this paper, I know that I am doing something right. If my name ever comes in the history, it will be due to this act" (Brewster, 2014).

Conclusions

Thomas Jefferson is considered to be one of the most important political figures in the history of the United States. Being a leading political figure in the United States, Jefferson always believed that there should be a power balance between the states and the federal government. His efforts for the end of slavery, equality among all the citizens in the United States and his efforts for the fundamental rights of all the citizens not only make him popular in America but worldwide, especially in the African countries. For the abolition of slavery, the Emancipation Proclamation was declared by President Lincoln during the American Civil War. This not only helped to end slavery from the rebellious states

during the war but, with the passage of time, also helped to end slavery from the entire country.

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