

American Revolution and Impact on Atlantic World Revolution

Two general debates surround the origins of the American Revolution which began with open warfare in April of 1775. The seeds of dissent leading to this initiation of overall open hostilities evolved over a time period of almost two decades. In general the debate centers around the influence of economic and social factors which were the proposed primary sparks leading to conflict vs. the political and intellectual environment which led to open warfare. The arguments posed by those historians who espouse economic and social factors include the economic pressures (taxation, and economic distress from tight trade policies), mob activity in colonial cities, and contest between various groups for local political and social power. On the other side are historians who acknowledge that there were some economic factors, but the over-riding force which led to revolution was a collective individuality, that one man was not the subject of another, not a pawn of some monarch or autocrat, not subject to the whims of a king. This developed from the concepts and writings of men who established a concept of individuality for each man, and the idea of government espoused by them, that people should and could control their own lives and collectively society.

Concepts derived from writings during the period of “The Enlightenment” led men to question the current order of the political environment which generally centered around a powerful monarch, autocrat, or aristocracy. The concept of the power of the individual as presented by the writers of the Enlightenment period beckoned societies to throw off the yoke of imperial rule and seek to govern themselves collectively for the common good, not subject to the desire for profit, power and whims of a monarch. The American Revolution inspired and demonstrated that a people could cast off the bondage of an aristocracy or monarch even if it appeared more powerful than the people. Revolution amongst the many nations demonstrated the power of the concept of “consent by the governed”.

The American Revolution and subsequent revolutions involving other Atlantic World nations resulted from a combination of concepts derived from The Enlightenment and to smaller degree economic considerations. The success of the American Revolution inspired others subject to monarchs and aristocracies to rebel against their autocratic rule and to embrace the concept of “consent of the governed”. The power of the individual, and a collective society of individuals could govern themselves successfully and provide for the defense and general welfare of a nation. The concept of “the consent of the governed” which helped lead to the American Revolution, and the subsequent government created had much in common with ideas first established in ancient Greece. Worries of “mob rule influences” led to the development of a representative democracy rather than direct democracy. Again influences from the period of The Enlightenment influenced concepts developed for the creation of this representative democracy. Americans started thinking of themselves as “Americans”, not as Englishmen. They were subject to no man. Each one individually and collectively saw themselves as a part of a new

nation. The American Revolution and this concept of “the consent of the governed” has shown some 235 years later that it still inspires today by events which still evolve. Known as the “Arab Spring”, it started in Tunisia in December 2010, and to date has involved 17 countries with the downfall of 3 governments (Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya) with a fourth still in contention (Syria). Great concepts embodied with demonstrable results have a perpetuity all their own.