



# AMERICAN HISTORY RESPONSE PAPER

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Student's Name

Institutional Affiliation



# American History Response Paper

## MODULE E

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### The Ideals Put Forth by Revolutionary Generation

The Declaration of Independence, which was approved by Congress on July 4, 1776, became the embodiment of the Americans' desire to break free from the tyranny of colonial Britain and regain the rights granted by God that no government could restrict. One of the most valuable and absolute ideals that Thomas Jefferson, the father of the American Declaration of Independence, put forth was people's right to overthrow any ruling authority that intended to deprive the Americans of their natural rights. This statement confirmed the Nation's right for revolution against any display of tyranny or social injustice.

Natural rights of Americans, in accordance with the Declaration of Independence, were Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness (Foner, 2011). These rights were the fundamental and inalienable for every person.

The Declaration of Independence emerged as the urgent need for American colonies to reform their system of values and priorities. The British Constitution was the remnant of monarchical and aristocratic tyrannies that no longer corresponded to American vision of its future. New ideals of Liberty and Equity had never been dominant in the British constitution. Apart from that, American colonies had no right to trade freely with the rest of the world and were constantly involved in wars of the British Empire in Europe, which was economically exhaustive for America. The Americans were in great need of national doctrine that would proclaim new ideals for American colonies.

The basic notion of Declaration of Independence was American freedom. It

consisted in people's individual right to pursue their goals and fulfil their own life objectives. National Exceptionalism was built around American dream and it stated that America should fight against any form of tyranny and become asylum for anyone looking for a shelter (Foner, 2011). It was a new ideal of freedom and democracy that was designed not only for America, but also for all other colonies fighting to get their right for self-realization.

## MODULE F

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The Constitution has been described as a "bundle of compromises." Which compromises were the most significant in shaping direction of the new nation and why?

A number of compromises were crucial for adopting the US Constitution. Had these compromised not been reached, we would have never had the Constitution we know today.

In the first place, the greatest compromise in the history of adopting a new Constitution was called "A Great Compromise". The result of this compromised was designing a Congress as a two-house body. The choice had to be made between the Virginia Plan (a two-house parliament, where the population of a state would define the number of representatives) and the New Jersey Plan (a one-house parliament, where each state delegates one representative). Clearly, the Virginia Plan was not beneficial for smaller states. So, the compromise was that the Congress would have a House of Representatives formed on the basis of population of each state and Senate, where each state had two senators. The importance of this compromise is hard to exaggerate since it determined the structure of the main legislative, executive and judicial body of the country. At that, it made all the states equally represented in Congress.

Numerous discussions over the phenomenon of slavery and its existence in the new American society between the slave and free states led to another important compromise. A new Constitution put off resolving this dispute and even mentioning the word slavery until 1808. During a 20-year period, no amendments could be made to this law. Moreover, the question of slave trade and migration was left pending for 20 years for the next generation to resolve. This compromise was significant for the nation as it gave time to reconsider the institution of slavery, even though it did not resolve the problem itself.

The third compromise was distribution of power in Congress. A debate arose between those who wanted to have a powerful federal government and those who preferred to have more rights and freedoms left for each state and feared that a central government would restrict them in a number of ways. The compromise consisted in creating Congress with specifically defined powers. This way states received more rights to act on their own coordinating their activities with Congress. This was very important compromise as it laid the foundation of modern federal government of the United States (Foner, 2011).

## MODULE G

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Were all of reform movements really "reform" movements? That is, did all of these movements aim a substantive change in society or were they efforts to achieve a more uniform, homogenous society?

In the period between the American Revolution and the Civil War, the United States witnessed a great number of reform movements. Apart from abolitionism movements, the Americans fought to restrict alcohol consumption, establish public schools, found institutions to care for physically disabled people. Religious movements were widespread in the



North and many reformers chose to escape from the society and build their own communities.

The Shakers were a religious community that believed that God had a dual nature, that of a woman and a man. Mother Ann Lee, a daughter of an English blacksmith, founded the Shakers community. Men and women lived in separate dormitories. Even though the Shakers denied private property, they were engaged in growing herbs, flowers and crops, breeding cattle for sale, which ensured a steady profit for the community.

Another religious community that appeared in 1820s were the Mormons. Joseph Smith was a spiritual leader and founder of the Mormons. The Mormons did not separate the church and the state, which was alarming for American society at that time. The community also allowed polygamy (Foner, 2011).

These religious reform movements did not strive to reform the whole society in any particular way, they rather aimed to make it homogenous and uniform, but they failed to reach the aim due to secluded way of life.

The Owenties were secular community, founded by a British factory owner Robert Owen. Their doctrine proclaimed strict work rules combined with free public education and decent reward for work. The community assured equal rights for men and women, which influenced feminism movements. The Owenties had a strong impact on labor and human rights movements. However, the Owenties lasted only a few years. Contrary to the above-mentioned religious communities, the primary goal of Owenties was to improve social and economic standards.

It is also worth mentioning the Temperance Movement, founded in 1826. Its main objective was to dissuade people from consuming alcohol. The

movement reached this objective as the consumption of alcohol had drastically fallen by 1840. The American Temperance Society also held special meetings where drunkards could share their experience and keep many people away from drinking alcohol. Needless to say, the purpose of this movement was overall change of society and social habits (Foner, 2011).

## MODULE H

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**Enslaved African-Americans developed their own culture. What were different sources of this culture and how did they vary by region?**

African-Americans managed to develop and preserve their own culture that was quite distinct and self-sufficient phenomenon in the society of that time. The main two sources of the African-American culture were family and religion.

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Religion was another crucial factor in the life of slaves. They found some content in biblical stories of Jonah, who escaped from the belly of a whale, David, who defeated Goliath in an uneven battle, Moses, who drove the Jews from Egyptian tyranny. These biblical legends somehow reflected moods and desires of the slaves to break free from their slavery and become free. Every slave community had an African-American preacher. Even though it was prohibited to come together for slaves, a preacher could hold small religious gatherings (Foner, 2011).

Of course, these religious practices differed from region to region. In Upper South Christian rituals were mixed up with native African beliefs and practices. Slaves often escaped to swamps to hold Christian prayer service their way with dancing and shouts.

Religious services also varied throughout the South. In some regions they were used as an instrument of control over the slaves teaching them to obey their masters, in other regions there were no distinctions between people participating in a prayer service and color of skin, gender, social status did not matter (Zinn, 2003).

## MODULE I

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**Do we see racism, ethnocentrism, exceptionalism in westward expansion, and if so where? Are negative social phenomena such as slavery, Indian removal, WAR, etc. an integral feature of progress?**

It becomes obvious that ethnocentrism was the instrument of westward expansion if we take a closer look at Indian removal. Indian tribes were in the way of developing markets and manufacturing facilities, capitalistic economy behind the line of Frontier. Furthermore, in North Carolina, Chickasaw Tribe, who fought on the side of Revolution, were deprived of their lands even though they were granted the right to stay on their lands (Zinn, 2003). Andrew Jackson, even before his presidency in 1828, followed the policy of moving the Indians westwards. When he became the president, seventy thousand Indians had to leave their lands and move west. It was explained by Jackson administration as the necessary evil to make economic and cultural progress possible on the territory of the United States.

Even the Revolution and the war against the British Empire was the tool of expansion of the American Nation into Canada and Florida. The American exceptionalism that proclaimed the United States and an asylum for those fleeing from all kinds of tyranny and became all-nation doctrine as it was convenient to gather more territory under the 'powerful wing' of the exceptionalism theory.

Such terrible moments of the American history as slavery, the Revolution, Indian Removal seem shameful and indecent nowadays, but these were necessary and unavoidable mistakes that the United States needed to make. They shaped the history and public opinion of the most Americans and taught future generations of the Americans the lesson of democracy and mutual respect regardless of people's origin and color of skin.

## MODULE J

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Did the abolitionists, Black and White (including people like John Brown), really make a difference or were they just "spinning their wheels"? Did their efforts lead to the Civil War or was the war a result of other processes and the abolitionists just happened to be there? What were the reasons of the Civil War?

The slavery was very practical for the United States government as the slave power produced thousands of tons of cotton in the South in 1790. By 1860, the number grew to million tons (Zinn, 2003). This system was widely supported by the Government and the control was executed through numerous institutions such as courts, laws and police. The whole system was so widely rooted that the only way to break it was either to start a war or an

all-nation rebellion.

On the other hand, slavery was not just contradicting the main principles of the Constitution, it was evident threat to fulfilment of human rights and liberty. One of the biggest victories of the abolitionists' movement was convincing the American society that slavery institution ruined the main principles of freedom. The Grimke Sisters' inspiring speeches and Frederick Douglass's publications dramatically shifted public's attitude towards slavery (Foner, 2011). Black and white abolitionists together made the first movements to starting the Civil War.

Furthermore, numerous publications of the former slaves about deprivation and bitterness of a life of slaves, establishment of antislavery magazines such as the *Liberator*, Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* all together shaped public opinion and made the Americans rethink their public position.

The Civil War started not solely to destroy the institution of slavery. It was the War for the fundamental American values – liberty, equality and freedom of speech. The Americans understood that the institution of slavery slows down the economic, cultural and social development processes. It was impossible to build up democracy in the society where some people were inferior to others.

## MODULE K

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**How did Southerners attempt to limit the freedom of former slaves? In what did these efforts succeed and in what did they fail?**

Although, former slaves got cherished freedom, their rights were limited in many ways. In 1865, the land that was in federal possession in the South was



returned to its former owners. The African-Americans strived to get the land of their own, but because of the failure of land reform, no land distribution took place. The African-Americans often had to work on plantation for their former owners for miserable payments.

Another disputable point was the Black Codes. Those were the laws called to regulate the life of former slaves. On one hand, the Black codes allowed African-Americans to marry legally, possess certain property and have restricted access to courts. On the other hands, the African-Americans had no right to vote, testify against the white in the court or serve in police. The Black Codes also incorporated wishes of southern planters to have the freed slaves work on plantation. The failure to sign a contract with white planters meant arrest for freed people (Foner, 2011).

Some Southern states did not allow the freed African-Americans to apply for certain occupations and acquire land property, other states empowered courts to force the children of the freed people to work for their former owners without their parents' agreement.

However, some attempts of southerners to limit the freed people proved vain. It is worth mentioning the Freedmen's Bureau, which settled down many disputes between the freed people and the white, ensured a proper treatment of the African-Americans in courts, defended their right for education, etc. Moreover, the freed people could establish their own churches and conduct their services. Churches were often the places of public gatherings for the African-Americans, centers of education and cultural events.

What is more, the African-Americans got a chance to found their own colleges. These were Fisk University in Tennessee and Hampton Institute in Virginia (Foner, 2011).

## References

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Zinn, H. (2003). *A people's history of the United States*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.