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American Enlightenment Influence to the World

Right after the end of the Renaissance, spreading all over Europe came the age of Enlightenment from 1650 to 1800. This era, also known as the Age of Reason produced numerous books, essays, scientific discoveries, laws and revolutions demonstrating that humanity could be improved through rational change. The American Revolution was a key result of the Enlightenment which became influential to three other main events: the impact it had on the French Revolution, its influence over Haiti’s Revolution and the demand of rights Ireland made to Britain. Through investigating the relationships between these three key events after the American Revolution, one finds that the Enlightenment ultimately determined a new direction for Western Civilization and world history, while having growing democratic influence coupled with scientific advance and a belief in human progress over time.

**1. The American Revolution**

The American Revolution was the consequence of the Enlightenment concepts of natural rights and the equality of men. Since 1650, the beginning of the Enlightenment, many philosophers came to new ways of thinking. One of these philosophers, John Locke (1632-1704), criticised absolute monarchy and favored the idea of self-government. Locke argued that all men are born equal with three natural rights: life, liberty and the right to own property. Locke also stated that the purpose of the government was to protect these rights, if not, the people had the right to overthrow the government (Comparison of Marx and Locke : Views on Government, Property and Labor). The English political philosopher, John Locke died nearly a century before the American Revolution, but his parliamentary democracy was in its infancy, these ideas were not given a serious thought until American revolutionaries started to take note of some of these ideas and transformed them into their own . Locke’s Enlightenment ideas went on to inspire American revolutionaries to revolt against Britain for independence.

England had long come to the east coast of North America and populated it, forming the 13 original colonies. For many years these colonies were under British control. The population grew from 250,00 in 1700 to 2,150,000 in 1770 when King George III became king in 1760 (McDougal Publishing Staff). By then, it had been about 150 years since colonists had been living in America. Each of the colonies had their own government and their economy thrived on trade with the nations of Europe. Change was to soon happen when Britain had to pay off a huge debt due to the Seven Year’s War. Since American colonists benefitted from the victory, Britain expected colonists to pay the cost. Parliament passed the Stamp Act, a new tax imposed on American colonists requiring them to pay a tax on every piece of printed paper they used. Meanwhile, a new sense of identity had began to flow in the mind of many colonists by then from the Enlightenment and colonial lawyers argued that the stamp tax violated colonists’ natural rights and accused the government of “taxation without representation,” (McDougal Publishing Staff). The citizens in Britain paid taxes to the Parliamentary government, but colonists had no direct Parliamentary representation despite Parliament’s attempt to represent the colonists with virtual representation. Therefore, colonists argued they could not be taxed. Bit by bit, time went on as complaints piled towards both England and King George III, soon American colonists had to take action.

Under the influence of Enlightenment ideas, colonists asked for the same political rights as citizens in Britain, but the King and Parliament refused. Colonists were justified in rebelling against a tyrant who had broken the social contract. This idea, of a social contract, was significantly argued by the English philosopher and - arguably - first modern political scientists, Thomas Hobbes (1588-1678). Hobbes asserted in his literary piece of work, Leviathan, that in order to escape a bleak life, people must hand their rights to a strong ruler. In exchange, they gained law and order, he called this a social contract (Enlightenment). Another Enlightenment philosopher from France, Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) expresses, “Others again, beginning by giving the strong authority over the weak, proceeded directly to the birth of government, without regard to time that must have elapsed before the meaning of the words *authority* and *government* could have existed among men,” (Internet History Sourcebooks). He talks that government has naturally arisen from the strong governing and protecting over the weak, but the government has to be fair and equitable in order to be sustainable, so in order for a government to continue for so long, it must be fair. The growing idea rising was that people needed to rise and say what is needed in their society in order for the government to listen and make the change when necessary and adjustable according to their needs (Comparison of Marx and Locke : Views on Government, Property and Labor). Growing leaders in America started to use Enlightenment ideas for justifying independence. Through the start of liberal freethinking, many came to realize the identities and relationships of what it meant to be human with certain rights that everyone naturally has and as to how to improve their ways of living in pursuit of happiness as pointed out by the philosophy inspired by John Locke. Many of these freethinkers came together in 1774, where each colony except Georgia sent representatives who gathered in Philadelphia to form the First Continental Congress to protest to the king. When the king of England paid little attention, the colonies formed the Second Continental Congress (The Influence of the Enlightenment on The Formation of the United States). On April 1775, British soldiers and American military exchanged gunfire on the village of Lexington, Massachusetts. Under the command of George Washington, the American Revolution had begun. Using the Enlightenment principles of freedom and reason , colonists declared taxes unfair and stood up against oppression, demonstrating that such ideas were now much more and were being taken under action, properly working. In 1776, the Second Continental Congress issued the Declaration of Independence, written by Thomas Jefferson, who was a true figure of the Enlightenment. The Declaration of Independence was firmly based on the ideas of John Locke and the Enlightenment. Locke asserted that people had the right to rebel against an unjust ruler and the Declaration of Independence included a long list of King George III’s abuses. The document reflected those ideas in argument for their natural rights, “ We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” (Jefferson). Louis XVI of France had sympathy for the ideals of the American Revolution and was eager to weaken their rivals, the British. With help from the French, America trapped a British army commanded by Lord Cornwallis near Yorktown, Virginia (The Effects of the American Revolutionary War on Britain). Cornwallis surrendered. America shocked the world as the first to gain independence from their European masters.

The American Revolution was a fulfillment of Enlightenment ideals. This clearly implements the orientation of space and time of an important event marking a turning point of human history. By declaring independence, America demonstrated that the ideas of Enlightenment were not mere utterances and that it was possible to overthrow “old regimes.” This was the first time that a colony had rebelled and successfully asserted its rights to self-government and nationhood. Later, America continued to shape their country in the Bill of Rights that had ten amendments protecting basic rights such as freedom of speech, press, assembly and religion. The United States had created a new social contract in the form of its Constitution, which was realized in the ideas of the Enlightenment (Impact of Revolution on Other Nations). The natural rights of man and ideas of liberty, equality and freedom of religion were no longer unrealistic utopian ideals. The writers of the Constitution distinguished their proposed system of a representative democracy, framers of the Constitution absorbed ideas of Locke, Montesquieu (1689-1755) and Rousseau which influenced with regards to separation of powers (Checks and Balances) to prevent tyranny. Everything seemed like a bright future for America. Without the Enlightenment Philosophers and ideas, there would be no United States of America. The era had marked a new change in humanity where the culmination of all these factors were evident in the French Revolution a few years later and other parts of the world.

**2. The French Revolution**

The American Revolution was an inspiration to liberals and nationalists through Europe so much, it came to greatly influence France. French were inspired and sought to reform their own country. Before the French Revolution though, there were many problems within France. In the 1700’s France was considered the most advanced country of Europe; it is actually believed to have been the center of the Enlightenment with great philosophers such as Rousseau and Voltaire (1694-1778). Through this though, there was a great unrest in France caused by bad harvest, high prices and disturbing questions of Enlightenment ideas. Before the radical change occurred, there was an old order that governed France with a social political system that divided the country and its people into 3 large social classes, or estates (Political Impact of the American Revolution). The first was the privileged estate, with the Roman Catholic Church clergy forming the First Estate, who owned 10% of the land in France. They had access to high offices and had the exception of paying high taxes. The Second Estate had rich nobles which formed 2% of the population, owned 20% of the land in France and almost paid no taxes. Majority of the Second Estate scorned Enlightenment ideas as radical notions that threatened their status as a privileged person. 97% of the people in France where part of the Third Estate. The first group of the Third Estate, known as the bourgeoisie were the middle class, they were well educated and believed in the Enlightenment. Some of them were rich as nobles, but had to pay high taxes and like the Third Estate, lacked privileges (McDougal Publishing Staff). The second group was formed by the poorest people who worked in the cities of France. Already, most people were waiting for a change to occur fast and fix their social structure.

There were many economic problems that France faced. Especially in the 1770’s and 1780’s, the French Government sank deeply to debt. Part of the problem was the spending of King Louis XVI and his wife, Marie Antoinette, in addition, he inherited debt from previous kings (15 Minute History). The king had also borrowed heavily in order to help the American revolutionaries against their rival. With a bad structured government and economic problems that had been piling over France for so many years, it was evident that a change ought to happen. A strong leadership could have solved problems, but Louis XVI was very indecisive and allowed matters to drift (15 Minute History). He paid little attention to his advisors and received poor advice from his queen. His wife and him did not seem to show much care for the government they were responsible for and just went on to waste money on themselves. Louis started to deal with emergencies only after he practically had no money left. His solution was to impose a tax on the nobility. The Second Estate forced him to call a meeting of the Estates General, an assembly in which a representative from each Estate had to approve the new tax. The meeting was first held since 175 years on May 5, 1789 in Versailles (Impact of Revolution on Other Nations). Everything was about to change in France because by then, there had been many new ideas circulating the country.

While France faced many problems, at the same time, there were new views about power and authority on government spreading through the Third Estate. French Officers captivated their fellow citizens from their personal encounters of the war they helped to fight against Britain. They told of the Declaration of Independence which quickly circulated and was admired through France. Enlightenment ideas spread rapidly through France which demonstrated their personal and cultural expression of spreading ideas through newspaper journals, societies’ reports, public lectures, coffeehouses, songs and pamphlets (Lasting Impacts the American Revolution Had on Other Governments in Europe). In Paris and everywhere in France, wealthy women held salons or informal gatherings where writers, musicians, painters and philosophers exchanged ideas. For a while the American Revolution had influenced the topic of many of these salons. The French saw that colonists in North America had broken away from powerful British rulers and put the ideas of Enlightenment into practice (Lasting Impacts the American Revolution Had on Other Governments in Europe). The new country’s Declaration of Independence and Constitution were great models. By exchanging new points of view in salons, citizens grew more strongly united in the decision for a new government. Enlightenment thinking is demonstrated by Rousseau, “I conceive that there are two kinds of inequality among the human species; one which I call natural or physical, because it is established by nature, and consists in a difference of age, health, bodily, strength, and the qualities of the mind or of the soul: and another, which may be called moral or political inequality, because it depends on a kind of convention, and is established, or at least authorized by the consent of men,”(Internet History Sourcebooks), the great philosopher seems to embed his views of equality among humans in both by nature and and social status, spreading his ideas. Through salons, people began to question the long-standing notions of the structure of society and began quoting quotes such as this one spoken of just now by Rousseau and Voltaire, then began demanding equality, liberty and democracy, direct influenza from the American Revolution. Comte D’Antraigues, a friend of Rousseau best summed up their ideas on what government should be, “The Third Estate is the People and the People is the foundation of the State; it is in fact the state itself; the… People is everything. Everything should be subordinated to it… It is in the People that all national power resides and for the People that all States exist,” (Schama). By admiring America, the forming revolutionaries of France soon formed their own slogan, “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.” The start of their own revolution had just begun.

When the Estates met with the king, the Third Estate members of bourgeoisie had Enlightenment ideas and were eager to change the government. A leading spokesman named Emmanuel Joseph Sieyes suggested that the Third Estate should be the National Assembly through a dramatic speech to pass laws and reforms in the name of the French people (Schama). The Third Estate delegates agreed to Sieyes’ ideas by an overwhelming majority. In June 17, 1789, they established the National Assembly, in effect proclaiming end of absolute monarchy and the beginning of a representative government. “I move that before everything else the Assembly take a solemn pledge not to separate until it has given the French people a government established on the foundations of liberty and equality,” (National Convention), the quote from the National Convention Debate shows how readily justified the Third Estate had been on overthrowing their government for a better one. Their vote was the first to deliberate act of revolution. Three day later, the Third Estate was locked out of their meeting room, they broke down the door to an indoor tennis court pledging to stay until a new constitution was drawn. The pledge became known as the Tennis Court Oath (Schama). Soon nobles and members of clergy favored reform to join the Third Estate. In response, Louis stationed a mercenary army of Swiss guards around Versailles, but revolutionaries won. The “old regime” was overthrown by the National Assembly. Noblemen in August 4, 1789 made speeches of their love for liberty, equality and making commoners equal to nobles and clergy. This shows a new era marking globalization and sustainability in France, where the National Assembly adopted the statement of revolutionary ideas, the Declaration of Rights of Man and of the Citizens, reflecting influence of the Declaration of Independence (Avalon Project - Declaration of the Rights of Man - 1789). The document guaranteed citizens equal justice, freedom of speech and freedom of religion. This great impact of the French Revolution was due to the decision-making on humankind and the environment of the American Revolution which continued to influence other parts of the world.

**3. Haiti**

Success of the American and French Revolutions encouraged the French colony called Saint Domingue to gain freedom from their European masters. The colony now known as Haiti occupied the western third of the island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean Sea. Over 500,000 enslaved Africans worked on French plantations. They were harshly terrorized by the French plantation owners to be kept under control since the land was very valuable to France because it was the richest European colony in the world and was the main source of the sugar and coffee that was indispensable to “civilized” life in Europe (15 Minute History). Clearly, France was not going to let go of this island very easily. For so many years, slaves were kept under the power of France, but slaves soon realized that they had the right to equality too. Under American influence, France immediately proclaimed that “men are born and remain free and equal in rights.” Slaves wondered, did this apply to France’s overseas colonies? This question was really important and soon spread throughout them. The United States proclaimed that men have “inalienable rights,” which served motivation for slaves in Haiti who considered to revolt against France (The Haitian Revolution 1791-1804:  A Different Route to Emancipation).

The slaves of Haiti were divided among groups. The most misfortunate were the slaves owned by plantation owners who had to work hard all their life until they died. There was another group called the *gens de couleur*, who were interesting because they were the products of white plantation fathers and slave mothers. They had their freedom and were recognized by their fathers who sent them to be educated in France (15 Minute History). Then, they would come back to Haiti and own slaves and plantations of their own. The *gens de couleur* had a good life, but they still wanted the rights and privileges of their planter parents. *Gens de couleur*  also viewed a chance for citizenship and equality because they could not practice certain professions and had to be separate in public spaces. Due to this, there was hope within them to have those freedoms while most whites were against slaves. In early 1791, some of the *gens de couleur*  tried to use force to get their citizenship and equality rights. Two representatives were sent to France and when they returned to Haiti, they were beaten to death in the town square (15 Minute History). Slaves wanted change to happen and the American Revolution started to heavily influence Haiti’s freedom fighters.

While the French Revolution in 1789 began with a cry for Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, slaves in Haiti paid close attention to what was going on in France. In August 1791, 100,000 African slaves rose to revolt. The French Revolution may have provided the opportunity for a successful slave revolt. France could not devote too much attention to the colony as they were experiencing conflicts within themselves. Haiti was able to successfully revolt at first due to lack of attention granted by France (Haiti). A leader soon emerged, Toussaint L’Ouverture, he was a former slave and had been a coachman for the manager of a plantation. In 1793, he arrived taking leadership position. He sent a letter to slaves all over Haiti introducing himself, in the letter, he emphasized to be fighting for liberty, equality and fraternity, not only influenced by the American Revolution, but picking up concepts from the French Revolution (15 Minute History). The slaves organized and called for a meeting where they called for liberty. By 1801, Toussaint L’Ouverture took over the entire island and freed all enslaved Africans. In January 1802, French troops landed on Saint Domingue to remove Toussaint from power. In May, Toussaint agreed to halt the revolution if the French ended slavery. Despite agreement, the French accused him of planning another uprising. He was seized and sent to prison in the French Alps, where he died in April 1803. Toussaint’s lieutenant, Jean-Jacques Dessalines took up to fight for freedom (The Haitian Revolution 1791-1804:  A Different Route to Emancipation). Napoleon sent an extraordinary force to fight the revolting slaves, but under the scientific and technical innovation of Haiti, they were able to adapt and train well enough with new armor from the French to crush Napoleon’s men. The slaves revolted for their liberty and managed to defeat the greatest European military power (Haiti). On January 1, 1804, Haiti declared its independence and in proclamation, they used the expression “Live free or die,” which they had taken from the American Revolution. Likely encouraged by the American Revolution, slaves agitated for an end to racist legislation and greater access to political rights. The Haitian Revolution was a major event in world history, it posed the question of what it means if people of color insist that promises of freedom made by the American and French Revolution also applied to them.

**4. Ireland**

There were many in Ireland opposed to British rule and saw the American Revolution as a lesson to be followed. Ireland did not have a parliament which could make decisions, only the Protestants had the ability to vote to the Parliament of Great Britain and the British were the ones in control (The Effects of the American Revolutionary War on Britain). Ireland had experienced the same restrictive trade laws as America, only they were enforced much more easily on Ireland because of the close geographic proximity to the mother country. Due to this, Ireland had been subject to Britain for almost 800 years (Political Impact of the American Revolution). The Irish and Americans both wanted more independence, but Ireland did not want to part from Britain, they just wanted more autonomy within the empire. Therefore, America set an example for Ireland to follow and the independence movements occurring was advantageous to Ireland, “the American War was the Irish harvest” (Political Impact of the American Revolution).

America ignited Irish resistance to British rule and culminated in the demand for more independence from Britain. This gave Ireland a chance to demand concessions from Britain and obtain them. Irish “patriots” were now willing to challenge British rule, especially during the American Revolution, but they could only go so far because they were struggling for political rights, not rights of Irish people in general (Ireland and the American Revolution). This began due to pressures placed on Ireland resulting from the American War. The Irish paid close attention to events occurring in America with the idea in mind that American actions used to pressure the British could be used in Ireland to gain the same objectives. What Ireland lacked was a vocal leadership and a responsible middle class that could give leadership to various towns and villages. As a result, opinions of John Adams and others inspired Irish leaders such as Henry Flood to demand concessions from the British (Political Impact of the American Revolution). They realized that Britain could not contend with two rebellions at a time and so they started a series of demands upon the mother country, culminating in legislative independence. The influence of the American Revolution can be seen through speeches of Henry Flood and like the French, numbers of soldiers who had fought in America returned to Ireland with stories to tell the countrymen of the success that America was having (Ireland and the American Revolution). The stories served to ignite demands for some independence. Through this Britain was forced to act under the circumstances to keep Ireland from turning into another catastrophe so then changes in fairness and development began to happen for Britain to keep the Irish on their side (The Effects of the American Revolutionary War on Britain).

The British were afraid a revolution would emerge in Ireland and so they acted conciliatory. Britain then relaxed its trade on Ireland. They repealed the Irish Declaratory Act while granting full legislative independence. Ireland remained part of the British Empire. The Irish had been given a momentum from America to pressure Britain fro more autonomy, with a small group of leaders and a growing number of Irish population behind them. As the war with America worsened for Britain, Irish demands increased. The Irish were suspicious of the British as the Americans were and did not feel that the Declaratory Act was sufficient (The Effects of the American Revolutionary War on Britain). In 1783, they forced England to pass a Renunciation Act that formally renounced any claim that Britain to legislate either externally or internally for Ireland. The ideas of the American Revolution influenced the Irish to demand more rights and pushed Britain to give Ireland the independence that they rightfully deserved.

The Enlightenment was influential to a number of great events, within these was the American Revolution. Enlightenment ideas and this war continued to influence other parts of the world. France was inspired to a great degree and decided to take some of those ideas and put them to action. Haiti similarly did the same thing, becoming the first Latin American country to gain independence from Europe after the United States. Ireland looked up to America, deciding that they were going to stand up for themselves and demand more rights from Britain. To conclude, after an analysis of the relationships that the war had with the French Revolution, on Haiti and Ireland, it is evident that the Enlightenment shaped a lot of history. Everything that is now and exists was influenced by that time period leading to today.

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OPVL Analysis

Primary Source: Declaration of Independence

The Declaration of Independence is a published document from July 1776, published by The Continental Congress, in Philadelphia, United States. The purpose of this document was to announce and explain the separation of of the sovereign states from the British Empire. The Continental Congress wanted the British rulers to know of their official separation from them. With reference to the origin and purpose of the source, its value is that it is an official document from the Continental Congress, which was in agreement with the thirteen original colonies of its rebellion against England for their own independence and recognition as a separate country. An historian can view from this document the situation in which the thirteen colonies were under while they were under British control in order to demand justice of their rights influenced by the Enlightenment. Within its origin and purpose, one limitation that the document holds is that it only represents the viewpoints of demanding independence from the thirteen colonies in America. Another limitation present is the absence of England's response to the colonies’ actions of rebellion.

Secondary Source: Comparison of Marx and Locke : Views on Government, Property and Labor

Comparison of Marx and Locke : Views on Government, Property and Labor; is an online article from Article Myriad, the online website, which is an authoritative source containing original and insightful articles and ideas based on topics related to humanities. This online article was written and published in December 7, 2011 by Nicole Smith in North America. The purpose of this article is to compare and contrast the viewpoints of John Locke and Karl Marx on government, property and labor. In addition, it is intended for all audiences who search for the points of views of the two philosophers, Locke and Marx. With reference to the origin and purpose of the source, its value is that while comparing and contrasting Locke and Marx, the author has background reference from two books, *Second Treatise on Government,*by John Locke and *Communist Manifesto,*by Karl Marx listed on the works cited page, which she takes in order to analyse the two literary pieces of work. A history student studying either John Locke or Karl Marx is able to contend the ideas of both philosophers, including a comparison of their ideas with reference to the two books written, one by Locke and the other by Marx. With reference to its origin and purpose, one limitation that the article holds is that it is only comparing and contrasting the similarities and differences of Locke and Marx through their own written books, but not extending furthermore. Another limitation is that it may show biased interpretation and analysis of *Second Treatise on Government,*by John Locke and *Communist Manifesto,*by Karl Marx. While the books were intended to be interpreted in one way, the author of this article, Nicole Smith, may have not interpreted them the way they was intended to be.