

America as an Historical Advance in Political Ethics

Guest post by Spencer Morgan.

As an advocate of stateless human organization, or voluntaryism, I've often been faced with the dilemma of how to evaluate America in light of that ethical position. **Is there any amount of reverence or appreciation warranted** or does the nationalistic mythology about freedom need to be entirely discarded? Below are some of my observations and conclusions.

Throughout all of human history a person born into the world would be likely to find herself in a condition of coercive control by other humans. This subjugation could take whatever forms and extent determined by those designated to wield that control without any consent of the individual upon whom it was to be imposed. One important understanding (popular during the era of America's founding) about this condition of servitude was that it is not evident in anything about man's condition in nature. The philosophers of this era described man's condition as one of having been "created equal". Rather than being a situation arising from nature, this subjection into which we are born is an *artificial mental construction* of the society, or the collection of individuals around us.

Once this understanding spread, the previously-cited justifications for European monarchic nation-states came to be rejected. Locke's writings served to undermine the "divine right of kings" as a justification for rule. Even Hobbes acknowledged such a notion's rational absurdity with his attempts to find other justifications for monarchy arising from natural rights. Thomas Paine's "Common Sense" applied this understanding to the problems of colonial communities ready for a reason to resist the impositions of a distant monarch and the well-connected opportunists operating under pretext of his rule. The author of the Declaration of Independence of the thirteen united British colonies in 1776 articulated very clearly this principle of consent saying,

*"governments are instituted among men, **deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.**"*

This statement articulates much more than the simple numerical reality that governments can only operate while their subjects choose not to resist. **It contains a moral determination and moral criteria for deciding the justness of any exercise of power by rulers.**

Despite this shift forward, the principles of individual natural rights arising from our evident

condition of birth, and government by consent of the ruled, have yet to be fully implemented in American society. Whether a ruling cadre cloaks their actions in political rituals and democratic auspices, or whether they are less effective at obscuring the threatened force upon which their ventures depend, **such an undertaking of rule is inherently at odds with the ethics of self-ownership, property and the limits on individual aggression which individual rights imply.**

It's always important, however, to view past developments in their proper historical context instead of imposing backward on history our modern notions and understanding. **The history of man's political evolution is a litany of his failed but gradually improving attempts to apply his most noble concepts.** Many ideas in history have been recognized, articulated and then only partially applied. This is especially true when an application outpaces the widespread shift in understanding necessary for it to be enduring. As is evident in the movements that ended institutional slavery, segregation and subjection of women, these enduring advances depend on widespread changes in individual understanding as their catalyst and not political enactments. It was not the politicians who determined that these abuses would end, but the masses of individual people who responded with empathy to the spectacle of the bus boycotts and other oppressions, and who had the courage to use their influence with others until the cultural climate was altered.

The current rulers of America are still feeding on (and rapidly exhausting) the individual motivation and economic prosperity enabled by these earlier, more extensive applications of liberty. **While the American state as presently constituted is a highly-evolved engine of collective parasitic control wrapped in "freedom" mythology, the need for it's increasingly contradictory attempts to disguise this fact gives reason for optimism about the future.** If we are to reject or repudiate the philosophical ideals surrounding the formation of the American Republic because of the failures of implementation and hypocrisy on the part of many of its proponents, we would nullify all progress toward their achievement. This is a goal which these very criticisms themselves presuppose as desirable. I choose to celebrate and acknowledge the American experiment for the great advance that it was, and as what will hopefully be seen later to have been the "beginning of the end" for coercively imposed rulership.