Kathryn Howes

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4B

The American colonists believed that their rights were being disregarded and that this was a heinous crime on the part of the British. This lack of democracy seen by these people inspired a new attitude in the late 18th century of protecting those rights and having a greater democracy. This attitude carried over fairly well: United States was for the most part more (or at least equally) democratic, so was only to some middle extent undemocratic by the standards of the time. This trend can be seen in looking at the areas of freedom of religion, servitude, and relations with Native Americans.

Religion is one area in which the United States certainly was not undemocratic—it was, in fact, the opposite. Freedom of religion was a huge part of the lives in the colonies, which is especially evident in the Great Awakening period. One sermon from this period, Jonathon Edwards’s “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” shows such freedom of religion. Unlike the religions original to the colonies (such as Puritainism), the Great Awakening brought freedom in the way of emotional rather than intellectual beliefs in religion. This freedom translated to later times, when freedom of religion was made law. Such laws of these freedoms show up in the Northwestern Ordinance during the time of the Articles of Confederation, as well as later as part of the Bill of Rights and state statutes, such as those of Virginia shown in document K.

The United States wasn’t very much undemocratic by standards of the time in the subject of servitude but there were areas in which it was. As stated in document G, there were several groups from which people in a state of servitude came. The group towards which the most undemocratic (by the time) actions were taken against were the indentured servants. The basic terms of an indentured servitude, as described in the particular contract of document H, is that a person would have paid passage to America, then would work for the person who paid the passage until the debt is paid. After the work they would get some land from the person they served. The undemocratic element of this social and economic institution is that the former indentured servants often were taken advantage of by those they formerly served: when granted land it would be of the unproductive and undesirable areas, therefore leaving them in a not-so-good economic situation.

Relations with the Native Americans don’t fit on either absolute of democratic or undemocratic for the time. The United States tried to be somewhat democratic towards them: the Northwest Ordinance, after all, made mention that ‘the utmost good faith shall always be observed towards the Indians;’ and that their lands would be left to them and that they would not be disturbed in property and rights. However, determining that ‘their lands’ wouldn’t be taken away was in itself undemocratic towards the Native Americans since they were considered sovereign as well as that the culture of the Native Americans was that there wasn’t land belonging to anyone—so determining certain lands to be dictated as theirs, as is done in document B, is undemocratic. Also, such keeping of good faith was difficult, for conflict with people of such a different culture is inevitable. These conflicts were often resolved less than fairly.

Such conditions of freedom of religion, servitude, and relations with Native Americans, as evidenced by the documents, show how the United States was somewhat, though not extremely, undemocratic when examined by the standards in place in the late 18th century.