Declaration Of Natural Law For Eternity Essay, Research Paper

Declaration of Natural Law for Eternity”… equal in certain inalienable rights among which arelife, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness This they said, and this meant.” (Lincoln). In June 1976 Congress appointed a committee of Five to draft a statement to the world presenting the colonies case for independence. The committee consisted of John Adams of Massachusetts, Roger Sherman of Connecticut, Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania, Robert R. Livingston of New York and Thomas Jefferson of Virginia. The committee assigned Jefferson the task of writing the original document. After minor alterations were subsequently made by Franklin and Adams, the document was submitted to Congress. Jefferson later said: “it was intended to be an expression of the American mind”. Through the two centuries that the Declaration of Independence has been in existence it has seen many different interpretations, and it probably will see many more. The document is one of the most important pieces that based this country and hence the principles we stand for today. We have to agree that the ideals and message of the Declaration of Independence is eternal and unchangeable. Any other view makes the country a shaky leaf floating on a wavy ocean, making it possible to turn this country into a tyranical state, because of the lack of set ideas. We can see that different ideas are prevalent in interpretation of Declaration of Independence. For the purposes of this paper I have divided the different views into two main categories: First the people who hold the Declaration of Independence to be in the past with a different meaning or not clear to understand, and second the interpretations that give a universal, eternal meaning to the text. Many people in high positions that have had the responsibility to interpret the Declaration of Independence have not done it justice. They have given false meanings to this document. These personal interpretations based on prejudice and political ties have had tremendous impacts in Politics of these united states and also the behavior of the people who make this nation. People like Chief Justice Taney, Justice T. Marshall, Judge Douglas, and others through their false interpretations have helped keep prejudices, and feelings that might have not lasted so long. They have pushed the natural evolution of this great nation back by their actions. We can see a sample of different views that seem to be more in accord with the founders in the writings of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglas. By carefully dissecting the different views, we can come to the conclusion that it seems more plausible to hold the interpretation of Lincoln and F. Douglas as more logical. One of the important interpretations was made by Justice Taney in the case of Dred Scot V. Sanford. To Judge Taney convention is man made, and what ever the law makes it to be. He wanted to say that slaves do not have any rights other than the ones given to them by the government. Therefore the words “All men are created equal ” to him did not mean all humans. He saw the slaves excluded since they were not full citizens when the Declaration of Independence was written. He writes, “The words people of the United States and citizens are synonymous terms, … They both describe the political body … sovereign people “. Judge Taney saw as his duty to ” inquire who, at that time, were recognized as the people or the citizens of a State, whose rights and liberties had been outraged by the English Government”. He then argues that Africans were not recognized because they were just property, and “… the public history of every European nation displays it in a manner too plain to be mistaken”. Negroes were seen as a separate class of persons and they were not intended to be understood as included in the meaning of the words of the framers. Taney writes that the above is evident since they added the “right to import slaves until the year 1808″, and maintained the right of property of the slaves, ” by delivering up to him any slave who may have escaped from his service”. Abraham Lincoln in his speech at Springfield , Illinois replies to the Dred Scott ruling. He indicates that first of all the blacks were very much part of the people who made the Declaration of Independence. “Judge Curtis in his deserting opinion, shows that in five of the then thirteen states, …, free Negroes were voters. Therefore the Dred Scott case was based on false assumptions. Also regarding Justice Taney s comment that the public held a lower opinion of blacks compared with today Lincoln says: “Chief Justice does not directly assert, but plainly assumes, as a fact, that the public estimate of the black man is more favorable now than it was in the days of the revolution. This assumption is a mistake… Their ultimate destiny has never appeared so hopeless as in the last three or four years. In the two of the five States-… -that gave the free Negro the right of voting, the right has since been taken away, and in a third … it has been greatly abridged. It is greatly incorrect to say or assume, that the public estimate of the negro is more favorable now than it was at the origin of the government”. In addition, Taney himself agrees that ” … language of the Declaration is broad enough to include the whole human family, but he and judge Douglas argue that the authors of that instrument did not intend to include Negroes, by the fact that they did not at once, actually place them on an equality with the whites”. Mr. Lincoln further adds that the assertion that all men are created equal was not even necessary for the purposes of the separation with Britain. By just looking closely at the mentioned above one can see the weakness of Judge Taney s argument. It was not based on fact, and practically it is amazing that a judge who is trained to look at just the facts, can come up with a conclusion such as he did. Justice Thurgood Marshall in his interpretation of the Declaration of Independence argues that it along with the Constitution of the US have changed. The meaning of the works in his view are not fixed. He said: “I do not believe that the meaning of the constitution was forever fixed at the Philadelphia Convention.”. He adds that “Men in Philadelphia could not have imagined these changes”. In his eyes it was just politics, and people with morals, and against slavery compromised. Frederick Douglas a former slave writes that there is a difference between the government and the constitution. He goes through the constitution and shows that there is no mention of slavery. He makes a very important distinction that how we govern ourselves is wrong not the ideas of the founding fathers . He finds that nothing can support the fact that the founders wanted to keep slavery, or that they were in favor of it. There are only a few mentions of the institute and one was to set a date for the end of the importation and trade of more slaves. It is even more important to look at the people who wrote the Declaration of Independence, and the principles behind the revolution. This country was found on the principles of natural law, and equality. Wrong interpretations are always going to be with us, but what is important is that we keep the true ideals with us constantly. The founders were idealist people who were dedicated to liberty. These people were not after money or power. In fact they already had everything, and the only thing they had to gain is to lose everything. Thomas Jefferson, the major author, thought that slavery was bad for the human passions, and also in a economical view destroys industry. He understood that you do not want to create a faction in the society, and also he knew that when you trample the rights and liberty of one group it is not possible to keep liberty for all. You have no safeguard to stop tyranny from spreading to different groups. If the “all men” only refers to white men, or white British men, what will stop us from making exceptions to other people, or Jefferson says: “Of liberty I would say that, in the whole plenitude of its extent, it is unobstructed action according to our will. But rightful liberty is unobstructed action according to our will within limits drawn around us by the equal rights of others. I do not add ‘within the limits of the law,’ because law is often but the tyrant’s will, and always so when it violates the right of an individual.” (Thomas Jefferson to I. Tiffany, 1819.). It is evident that he was a man that believed in liberty for all. It is often thought that because they did not act on the slavery issue immediately they did not mean all men . We have to consider that the political air at the time did not permit them to act swiftly. Many people depended on slaves, and these were important people. Also people s prejudices made it impossible for them to implement such a great change. Thomas Jefferson to J. Heaton in 1826 said that “The revolution in public opinion which this case requires is not to be expected in a day, or perhaps in an age; but time, which outlives all things, will outlive this evil also.”. Jefferson and many others knew that their dreams would take many decades, or even centuries. After two hundred years we are still trying hard to reach that perfect state. Not ending slavery, or making other drastic changes by no means changes the meaning or intentions of the founders, they were only planting the seed of a beautiful tree as Lincoln said: “They meant to set up a standard maxim for free society, which should be familiar to all, and revered by all; constantly looked to, constantly labored for, and even though never perfectly attained, constantly approximated, …”. They implemented something set as a “… a stumbling block to those who after time might seek to turn a free people back into the hateful paths of despotism.”. Even though not every one that signed the Declaration of Independence believed in every aspect of it, by signing it they compromised their small difference for something great, and made the creation of a great nation possible.

In conclusion it I would like to include the faith of the persons who signed the Declaration of Independence. We can see by the price they paid they were strong, idealist people dedicated to their cause. (The following essay was obtained from a Teenage Republican (TAR) publication). “Five signers were captured by the British and brutally tortured as traitors. Nine fought in the War for Independence and died from wounds or from hardships they suffered. Two lost their sons in the Continental Army. Another two had sons captured. At least a dozen of the fifty-six had their homes pillaged and burned. What kind of men were they? Twenty five were lawyers or jurists. Eleven were merchants. Nine were farmers or large plantation owners. One was a teacher, one a musician, and one a printer. These were men of means and education who launched the Ship of State which you and I have inherited. Yet they signed the Declaration of Independence, knowing full well that the penalty could be death if they were captured. When these courageous men signed, they pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor to the cause of freedom and independence. In the face of the advancing British Army, the Continental Congress fled from Philadelphia to Baltimore on December 12, 1776. It was an especially anxious time for John Hancock, the President, as his wife had just given birth to a baby girl. Due to the complications temming from the trip to Baltimore, the child lived only a few months. William Ellery’s signing at the risk of his fortune proved only too realistic. In December 1776, during three days of British occupation of Newport, Rhode Island, Ellery’s house was burned, and all his property destroyed. Richard Stockton, a New Jersey State Supreme Court Justice, had rushed back to his estate near Princeton after signing the Declaration of Independence to find that his wife and children were living like refugees with friends. They had been betrayed by a Tory sympathizer who also revealed Stockton’s own whereabouts. British troops pulled him from his bed one night, beat him and threw him in jail where he almost starved to death. When he was finally released, he went home to find his estate had been looted, his possessions burned, and his horses stolen. Judge Stockton had been so badly treated in prison that his health was ruined and he died before the war’s end. His surviving family had to live the remainder of their lives off charity. Carter Braxton was a wealthy planter and trader. One by one his ships were captured by the British navy. He loaned a large sum of money to the American cause; it was never paid back. He was forced to sell his plantations and mortgage his other properties to pay his debts. Thomas McKean was so hounded by the British that he had to move his family almost constantly. He served in the Continental Congress without pay, and kept his family in hiding. Vandals or soldiers or both looted the properties of Clymer, Hall, Harrison, Hopkinson and Livingston. Seventeen lost everything they owned. Thomas Heyward, Jr., Edward Rutledge and Arthur Middleton, all of South Carolina, were captured by the British during the Charleston Campaign in 1780. They were kept in dungeons at the St. Augustine Prison until exchanged a year later. At the Battle of Yorktown, Thomas Nelson, Jr. noted that the British General Cornwallis had taken over the family home for his headquarters. Nelson urged General George Washington to open fire on his own home. This was done, and the home was destroyed. Nelson later died bankrupt. Francis Lewis also had his home and properties destroyed. The enemy jailed his wife for two months, and that and other hardships from the war so affected her health that she died only two years later. “Honest John” Hart, a New Jersey farmer, was driven from his wife’s bedside when she was near death. Their thirteen children fled for their lives. Hart’s fields and his grist mill were laid waste. For over a year he eluded capture by hiding in nearby forests. He never knew where his bed would be the next night and often slept in caves. When he finally returned home, he found that his wife had died, his children disappeared, and his farm and stock were completely destroyed. Hart himself died in 1779 without ever seeing any of his family again. Such were the stories and sacrifices typical of those who risked everything to sign the Declaration of Independence. These men were not wild-eyed, rabble-rousing ruffians. They were soft-spoken men of means and education. They had security, but they valued liberty more. Standing tall, straight, and unwavering, they pledged: “For the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of the Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other, our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.”They gave us an independent America. Can we keep it?” (TAR). The exerts, sources and quotations used in this paper unless specified otherwise are form:Declaration of IndependenceC. J. Taney: “the Opinion of the Court” in Dred Scott v. Sandford. Abraham Lincoln: Speech at Springfield, June 6, 1857. Speech at Chicago, July 10, 1858. Frederick Douglas, The Constitution of the United States: Is it Pro-slavery or Anti slavery?, March 26, 1860. T. Marshall, Remarks at Maui, “Race and the Constitution” 1987. Teenage Republican (TAR) publication. A Declaration of Natural Law for EternityPolitics