The Compromising Of Principles Essay, Research Paper

The Compromising of Principles

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Perhaps the most powerful words ever written by who scholars refer to as the greatest enlightened mind in early American politics, Thomas Jefferson. Thomas Jefferson was a philosopher of sorts, a man of great ideals and values, yet at the same time, a contradictory man. Here was a man who very clearly stated that all men are created equal, but at the same time, he was a large slaveholder. Nonetheless, Jefferson is a man remembered for the vision of what America was to become, an independent and expanding nation. The question then lies in what was to become of this independent and expanding nation? Was it to fall like other failed attempts at a republic as history had demonstrated before?\* Or was it to grow into a thriving nation? Thomas Jefferson is as much a part in what the nation grows into as he was in creating it. In the 1790s, amidst great turmoil in the nation, Jefferson was a man of strong values and opinions. He believed in a strict interpretation of the Constitution and was very much opposed to the idea of the government having the right to interfere with the people s everyday lives. Here was a man whose opinions and beliefs were so strong that he caused a separation in political ideals, which later led to the creation of political parties, his which was later to be known as Republicans. In fact, Jefferson s name became so intertwined with that of the word Republican that to be a Jeffersonian was to be a Republican. Jefferson was an outspoken critic of the nation in terms of the government and the direction it was heading. He made it very evident during the Federalists rule of the government that he was dissatisfied with the policies being implemented, many of which were designed to keep men from the Republican party down. Although Jefferson met many obstacles nothing stopped him from gaining momentum and in 1800 he reached the pinnacle of his political career, the United States presidency. Finally he would have his chance at how he believe the country should be ran. But in becoming President he soon realized that he could no longer hold on to his beliefs as strongly and vigorously as before when he was a part of the opposition. Now he was a part of the system and, as such, had to play by the rules the game had set. He soon discovered that he had to learn to compromise in an effort to at least get part of his ideals across. Ultimately, that is what Jefferson became. A man forced to compromise his values for the sake of a young nation trying to survive.

The United States the dream versus the United States the reality were two different concepts. Prior to and during the Revolutionary War, the biggest concern the United States had was gaining independence from Great Britain. Although it had in mind in establishing a government that would run the country, they really had no clear cut way as to go about it. Thomas Jefferson was in the center along with other great figures such as George Washington and Alexander Hamilton at the time the nation s greatest minds were trying to formulate a government that would work. During the War they established the Articles of Confederation . Although it worked sufficient enough during the War it was not enough to carry the nation once they had gained their independence. It was not until the Constitution that a true government would be built that could carry the country. Although the Constitution was the document to which the government would abide it had no clear measures on how it should be interpreted. Enter Thomas Jefferson.

Thomas Jefferson was a child of the Enlightenment. He was a wealthy educated man who had been greatly influenced by the thinkers of his time such as Montesquieu. He believed that government should stay small and local and even though he had no say in the creation of the Constitution he believed it should be strictly interpreted. Jefferson s greatest contribution prior to his taking office was his input on the Declaration of Independence, a work he considered his own. That document showed the many aspects of Thomas Jefferson the public figure and Thomas Jefferson the man. In the Declaration of Independence he was a champion for the common man, a believer in liberty but Thomas Jefferson the man would have never considered the common man his equal although he had stated so in the Constitution. One is to suppose that was one of the alterations his fellow authors made on the Declaration. Once the United States had defeated Great Britain, Jefferson had some strong ideas on how the government should be run, ideas that would clash with those of the ruling party, the Federalists. Jefferson was to be later called an Anti-Federalist but as time evolved his thoughts and beliefs and the men who thought the same way he did came to be known as republicans. Even though Republicans did not like the way the Federalists were running things, the Republicans had yet not organized themselves to be in a position to take power when George Washington left office, leaving the Federalists to continue being the ruling party. The Federalist began levying taxes on the people such as the Whiskey tax and imposing unfair but Constitutional policies like the Alien and Sedition Acts. These would make the common man and the immigrant untrusting of the Federalists and by that same token give Republicans more supporters. At the end of the Federalists run they tried to make the rise to power of the Republicans difficult but their efforts in the end were futile.

Jefferson was the first President to get elected into the White House and upon his inauguration he claimed that all were Federalists and that all were Republicans. Jefferson did not like the two party system and wanted to revert to the one party system. He did not at all consider himself a Federalist for he was a strong voice for the Republican. This was just another example of the two sides of Thomas Jefferson.

Thomas Jefferson s greatest triumph in office was the Louisiana Purchase. He had always longed to expand westward but more importantly he had always wanted the United States to have control over the New Orleans port. When he sent James Monroe and Robert Livingston to France to negotiate a deal to buy the region of the New Orleans what he got was a much better deal. A desperate Napoleon in need of money offered to sell all of the Louisiana region. Monroe and Livingston dared not refuse. After Livingston signed the treaty he rose and said, We have lived long, but this is the noblest work of our lives. The purchase of Louisiana almost doubled the size of the nation. But before they could finalize the deal it had to go through Congress. The Constitution said nothing of purchasing land and this is when Jefferson s own ideals of a strict interpretation of the law were turned loose. At the same time Munroe and Livingston were in France Jefferson authorized a great expedition westward led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. Their explorations laid down the foundations for travel westward. On westward expansion and Indians, Jefferson believed that Indian tribes would either have to assimilate into American culture by becoming fathers and abandoning their seminomadic hunting or they would have to move west of the Mississippi River. One other of Jefferson s accomplishments in office was the cutting down of the national debt. In order to do so he slashed both the navy and the army and left a skeleton of both. He also was successful in doing away with the Whiskey tax and the Alien and Sedition acts. The Alien Act increased the waiting period for naturalization from five years to fifteen years but Jefferson returned it to five. The Sedition Act allowed the government to arrest you if you spoke out against it, an act which Jefferson also revoked. Jefferson s goal of one party rule seemed at hand by the time of his re-election but the war hit Europe and his dreams fell. Jefferson did not want to go to war and instead ignored public consensus and imposed an embargo. This embargo was devastating to the United States economy and also to the chances of Jefferson getting re-elected. He did not run for a third term.

Jefferson was a man of great ideals but once in power he did not turn the government into a Republican one instead of a Federalist one. He added to what the Federalists had done and cemented the foundation upon which American politics stand today. But in order to accomplish this great task Jefferson had to let go of his beliefs and compromise in a way that was more beneficial to the people, a way that was more beneficial to the nation.