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Modern Revolution

Around the world today, especially in the year 2011, we see, and have seen, societies unite to overthrow oppressive regimes. Many of these examples of political revolutions were unsuccessful even in their attempts to overthrow their rulers. Amongst these many, many historical revolutions, the ones considered, will be those political revolutions that are considerably successful. This means that as important as the study of unsuccessful political revolutions is to the subject of political revolution; the sheer number of them makes this a feat of mass proportion of which will not be undergone here.

There are a couple of reasons for this choice: (1) in an attempt at proving the imminence of a global revolution or even suggesting the inevitability of such an event, rationale on the subject changed as research was uncovered and studies began. (2) In failure people can only learn possible downfalls of any given effort, --possible being the key word. (3) The final and most important reason, however, is the underlying presence of failure that can be seen throughout even the most successful revolutions, given the right perspective.

There are a plethora of revolutions that do not meet the definition or criteria used in the planning of this paper. For instance, the Industrial Revolution, the Technological revolution, the Egyptian Revolution and any other “revolutions” that do not—in the end—overthrow a political power in a particular place and time, where and when it was needed; as prescribed by the majority in that place/time. Even this gives me trouble as I consider the possibility that even some of the revolutions that are considered could have been ignited by a less-than-majority group’s actions. Nonetheless, this format will likely give me the ability to deliver a clear presentation of what the underlying effect of revolution is; in *any* case – failure.

It is 1750 AD and the British have laid claim to its territories that were run by the East India Company; Barbados and Jamaica along with other sugar producing islands and territories. On the other hand, the Native Americans; the Shawnee, Iroquois, Miami, and other native’s to the land were in possession of the colonies that the British was trying claim as their own (Allison 1). Meanwhile the French was slowly trying to colonize the America’s at the same time that the British were running things behind the mask of East India Company. The American colonies began to become “essential to the sugar economy” of the British, although not as profitable to them as the other sugar-producing islands and territories (Allison 1). The British that were in America at that time were those trying to escape religious persecution and they were doing well with trading in the area. They were making money and providing for the colonists despite the influence of British law and the exasperating British Tax. The reason they were doing well was

the ability to more freely run things the way that they chose, as opposed to being under the watchful eye of the British crown.

The way the colonies were being run was passed down to the British by the Dutch after they took New York from the Dutch in 1664 (Allison 2). The Iroquois were the most powerful and influential of the North American native's; the Dutch had set up an extensive trade economy with them that was later ran by the British colonists, they also left alone the fathered-in style of rule; by "landholding elite" (Allison 2).

Attraction to the freedom from the British rule that American colonists were perceived to have, led to the immigration of migrants from all around the world, --Scottish, Irish and some German. This is when New York began being referred to as the "melting pot" due to the extreme diversity in cultures that was emerging in 1750 (Allison 3). These migrants were soon used in labor forces from Philadelphia to Rhode Island.

Still officially under British rule, the colonists of early America began to feel the tensions rise as a struggle for power had broken out between the elite ruling class of the colonies and the British crown. One of the main problems that the colonists had with the British was that they were paying exuberant taxes and not having a member of their group, whom shared the same interests as the colonists, representing them in Parliament. The term "no taxation without representation" was coined during the up rise of the colonists in America to clearly state the

driving force of the soon to be Revolutionary War which was, at this point, a civil war between the British crown and the elite American colonists, all of which were members of the British Empire (Britannica “American Revolution”). Not only were they not being treated as equal to the mainland citizens by the British crown, mainly they were upset by the unfair laws placed into action by the parliament that held no representation from the Americas. One example of such unfair laws imposed on the colonists was the trade regulations, forcing the colonists to trade with and only with England. Forced trade with the British left the colonists susceptible to the whims of British imposed taxation.

The British, stricken of all monetary resources by the French and Indian wars during the period of a decade from 1750-1760, were dependent on the colonies for their taxes. This was not enough for them though; they started taxing the mainland citizens to the point destruction of their own country. The Grenville Acts, imposed by Prime Minister George Grenville, included the Sugar Act of 1764, passed solely with the purpose of fund raising for the crown from within the colonies (Allison 5) (Foner “Revolution”). After being rejected and demonstrate against by the American colonists, the Sugar Act was removed from the books and replaced shortly after by the Quartering Act of 1765.

The Boston Massacre occurs in 1770 and William Pitt issues an ultimatum; “I maintain that the parliament has the right to restrain America and our power over the colonies sovereign

and supreme. England is the mother country, they are the children; they must obey” (qtd in “Independence”). The British then sent thousands of troops to the American colonies and imposed a new “Tea Tax.” This, with the help of Samuel Adams and the Sons of Liberty, severely raised the tensions between the colonies and the crown leading, eventually, to the Boston Massacre on the 5th of March, 1770 (“Independence”). The Sons of Liberty were responsible for the Boston Tea Party which caused the closure of the Massachusetts legislature and the Port of Boston. “Freedom” and “liberty” were now the terms used to drive the colonists to a full out war with the British rulers they once respected.

This push was necessary to overcome the fear of war with England that the colonists held. Paul Revere setup a light signal with a spy from within the British encampment that let him know which path the British were taking on their path to march through Concord, Massachusetts. On the night of April 18th 1775 Revere was signaled that the British were in route to march; he warned all of the farmers and townspeople that “The British are coming! The British are coming!” (qtd in “Independence”) The colonists with arms that night were dubbed the title “minutemen” for their timely response to any warning. That night the American Revolution had officially begun as the British open fired upon the minutemen which finally resulted in twice as many deceased British soldiers as Colonial ones.

After the “shot heard round the world” in mid-April, 1775, King George III proclaimed that there was a rebellion in the colonies and it needed stopping. A congress was delegated by John Adams in Philadelphia’s future “Independence Hall” where Benjamin Franklin and George Washington amongst many other delegates were introduced to government. George Washington soon took control of the American troops and the battles for American freedom had begun.

In 1776 John Adams convinced the delegates to declare independence from the crown. At this point Thomas Jefferson draws up the *Declaration of Independence*, what is now possibly considered the greatest achievement in any revolution.

“When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation” (US Declaration Ind. 1776).

From there, the Americans started an entirely new society based democracy and self-government, completely separate and unique from the British monarchy that still remains in 2012. This point of view was spread throughout the colonies and formed what is the basis and

goal of the American Revolution, which is why it is considerably successful; because it was achieved.

The problem lie therein the fact that shortly after that historical success, more strife, need, disparity and inequality stir up the same emotions those colonists who fought for freedom from the crown had, but this time they were the butt of the anguish. A civil war is right around the corner, one that claims so many American lives that it is questionable whether the original fight was valid or not. Was Independence really better than interdependence? And, of course we still have interdependence with societies around the world, but would the loss of life have been as tragic? Would, the violence and inequality that America is so rich with be so overpowering? There is really know way to know without turning back the hands of time, as any rationale being can see, but the point is that things are back to the way they were; people are upset and requests for major reform can still be heard, read or even felt while walking down a busy street of almost any town in America.

The latter half of the 18th century, is a time when revolution is in the air; the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783) and immediately following that comes the French Revolution (1789-1794), both taking place across the sea from one another. The French Revolution is one of the most defining pieces of history, let alone that of revolutionary history. A historian of the French Revolution, with extensive studies and works in the matter, by the name of John Bosher

gives an extraordinary perspective view of the French Revolution in his book *The French Revolution*. A reviewer of this book named Jack Censer explains:

“The Revolution did not result or advance from the clashes within...the powerful king Louis XVI fell largely because his enlightened good heartedness prevented any sort of repression of hostile public opinion... ideologues in the National Assembly then successfully remade France into a liberal regime with many positive features” (540).

This is opposed to the popular belief that it was started due to “clashes within the elite,” which is also pointed out in the same review (Censer 542). The French Revolution was a major one that has been recorded in history books and will continue to be remembered by many people. It also can be viewed as a tool to predict the effectiveness of certain types of revolutionary tactics. But, the truth of the matter is that France’s economic situation left the most as peasants and poverty stricken due to the damage done to the economy by the French involvement in the American Revolution just a couple of years prior. The majority of French were struck by the dream that had just been recently realized across the Atlantic Ocean, with French troops and a French alliance for support of course. They desired the same things; democracy in France and an end to the powerful rule of the church. Their goal was to bring in a self-governing and

democratic France, despite the costs. Although, the costs of a loaf of bread had been as high as a week's pay right before the revolution began.

In a letter from Colonel John Winslow (American Revolutionary War officer from Massachusetts), September 5, 1775 writes the following:

This revolution took Europe by the horns and sent waves across the seas. Blood filled the streets. Heads rolled. Even the king and queen were not exempt from the judgment of their subjects. The French truly overthrew their government in one of the most violent revolutions of world history. The violence imposed on the elites of France and their ruling class by the revolutionaries was very extreme and swift; the way they went about their revolution shook every monarchical government to the core. Fear of beheading surely filled the dreams of kings around the world, especially those ones who knew that they employed the same techniques used by the French ruling class.

The French Revolution is considered a success comparable to that of the success of the Americans a few years prior. They achieved the short-term goals that were the original purpose of their conflicts, democracy and self-government. As of 2012 the difference between the two revolutions' success is more apparent; the French were able to keep their leaders in check for longer. Today, the French have free college, free medicine, a year and a half off with 6 months paid for a pregnancy, and a vote; it is more than can be said for poor Americans today.

China has some of the richest history in the world. This history includes the rule by Dynasties dating as far back as the 3rd century BC with the Xia Dynasty, so picking out one particular revolution or event that caused this revolution is harder to see than any of the other revolutions previously considered. The Chinese were at war with each other when the revolution had actually begun. There was an obvious split in belief throughout Chinese history as well as the class inequality that has been experienced by nearly every other (successful) revolutionary group in history.

The difference between the Chinese's success and the American's success almost 200 years prior was that the goals of the Chinese "cultural" Revolution is somewhat unclear. It can be said that the Chinese were influenced by the Mao after he saw and seized the opportunity to gain trust and control over the riled-up youths and those with left wing ties to politics. They did, however, claim to want democracy and self-governing but the way they started and continued to ruthlessly murder right wing party members with Mao (after elected) condoning the violence and seemingly encouraging it as well.

There was a great diversity of atrocities that took place in China. The "cultural revolution" in China began in 1911 and continued until around 1949 ("China: Through Mao's Eyes"). Elizabeth Perry in *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance* beautifully describes the situation that China has gone through over almost fifty years of revolution; "social

and political obstacles, including instability and demoralization born of the failures of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution” were some of the major driving forces and obstacles that eventually led to China’s shocking rise in the global economic system during the latter half of the twentieth century (Perry 1).

The Chinese people went through some of the most violent and painful social changes in the history of revolutions and/or civil wars. The people were drunk with the idea of change and a man saw this and took advantage, --his name was Mao Zedong. This man eventually led the impressionable revolutionary generation into committing some of the worst crimes against their own people. Mao allowed the students that were having what they called protests to have safe sanction in school campuses across the country by ordering the police and military to refrain from arresting suspects on college campuses (“China: Through Mao’s Eyes”).

The success of this revolution is not to be scoffed at, although, it is incomparable to those of the Americans or the French. This is due to the fact that today China’s people are not doing much better than they were then. They are not being ruthlessly murdered without cause in mass numbers as they were decades and centuries prior to the Chinese Revolution, but they are still living in very confined spaces (due to overcrowding) under much government restriction and with many Chinese wishing that things were different once again. This is the similarity that the Chinese Revolution shares with the previously mentioned conflicts; they met their short-term

goals and failed (miserably in this case) to satisfy the long-term goal of democracy and self-government.

The Russian Revolution is a good example to look to because it displays the power and weakness of the peasant communities, --attributes that may help us understand more about today's social conditions and how we could deal with them (Kopriva 897). The other great driving force of the Russian Revolution was the agricultural problems that they were experiencing. Many historians believe that the main cause of the civil war in Russia was the separation of people from state; neither "the elites nor the crown addressed popular social problems" (Kopriva 898). In March 1917, the situation for the Russians had become desperate; there was a strong vibe of discontent amongst the people. The goal of the Russian Revolution, which is, indeed, a series of revolutions that took place in 1917, was that of equality. Like in the Chinese Revolution the Russians did not want democracy but were more wanting of the end of autocracy and the rise of socialism.

The climate in Russia is cold and harsh, making trade very difficult and sometimes even impossible. Russian workers wanted political changes as well as food and fuel. In St. Petersburg (which was renamed to avoid any German connection), 40,000 workers went on strike for higher wages and the people along with troops overthrew Tsar Nicholas II, as he was an autocrat absolute ruler. Between 1861 and 1917, Russian society had undergone many changes. Nearly

every aspect of that society had been somehow modified. These changes led up to the Bolshevik revolution in November of 1917. The emancipation of the serfs in 1861, by Czar Alexander, freed 44 million peasants. The Edict of Emancipation caused many problems for these uneducated peasants. The land now assigned to them was considerably smaller than the plots they were using as serfs.

Despite giving the serfs their freedom, (“the liberator”) Alexander's actions caused more problems than they solved. Sergei Witte’s efforts almost single-handedly made industrial advances from 1892 to 1910. Between 1880 and 1914, Russia had a growth rate of 3.5% surely putting them into a better rung on the world’s economic ladder. When the revolution took place in November 1917, the Czar lost the support of his police, as they refused to fire upon the crowds. The people were just fed up and would not stand for what was happening in their country anymore (Hugh 27).

Anti-Jewish prejudices, long traditional in Christian Europe, intensified, especially as Jews left their ghettos to pursue education and professions long closed to them. As anti-Semitism, in the form of terror attacks, increased in Russia and Eastern Europe, thousands of Jews fled, mostly to the United States, where some became active in socialist movements. In France, the 1894 court-martial and deportation of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a French-Jewish army

officer who proved later to be innocent of treason, revealed persecution of Jews amid rising nationalism.

After sweeping away the Provisional Government in November 1917 the Bolsheviks faced widespread opposition both within and outside Russia. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918 ended the war with Germany but led to a civil war in which the Entente Powers initially supported the "Whites" (anti-Bolsheviks) against the "Reds" (the Bolsheviks)(O'Brien 221). Admiral Kolchak formed an Eastern Front in Siberia and in 1919 advanced beyond the Volga. In the south, resistance was led by Denikin but he was brought to a halt short of Orel. In the north, Yudenich led his troops to the suburbs of Petrograd, but was then driven back. Wrangel, taking over what was left of Denikin's forces, defended the area around Sevastopol for some time but was finally forced to withdraw in November 1920.

Meanwhile, the Poles were attempting to gain as much as they could of Lithuania, White Russia (Byelorussia) and Ukraine.

They got as far as Kiev but then had to withdraw as the Red Army advanced in turn towards Warsaw. When the Poles regained the initiative Lenin decided to sue for peace and, under the Treaty of Riga in October 1920, 10 million Ukrainians and Russians were assigned to Polish rule. By the end of the year military operations were over and the communist (Bolshevik) government was in control of what was left of Russia (O'Brien 222).

Eventually, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was born out of the Russian Revolution which entitles the Russian revolution to be one that is considered successful. But, like all of the other revolutions discussed, this has not brought long-term happiness to the people who fought so hard for their rights and equalities. The people were not treated with much more equality than before, when autocracy was still the ruling thumb in Russia. The Russians today share in their success of overthrowing their government and having a new rule installed with their own ideas and values. They also share in the feeling that more change is necessary and that they met their short-term goals and failed to satisfy their long-term desire, mainly equality.

In the early 1950's, Cuba is on the brink of revolution. Severe social and economic problems have led to much dissatisfaction in society and a desire for change. Due to this heated atmosphere, a figure like Fidel Castro is able to gain support, as well as fuel, which ultimately accelerated the revolution. He became a prominent figure after Fulgencio Batista's coup of 1952 and is now deemed to be a major cause of the Cuban revolution (Chomsky 32). However, it is evident that Fidel would not have been as successful in conducting the revolution if it wasn't for the underlying long-term social and economic problems, which essentially paved the way for revolution.

Relations between the U.S and Cuba were one of the underlying economic problems affecting Cuba. Following the Spanish-American War of 1895, the United States emerged as both Cuba's protector and primary trading partner. By the mid 1950's American business

interests controlled about 40 percent of Cuba's sugar production and over 90 percent of Cuba's utilities, such as electricity and communications (Chomsky 33). Ties between Cuba and America brought prosperity to a limited segment of Cuba's population though they did so at the expense of Cuba's national potential and economic independence. The U.S control of the economy added to the gap between the rich and the poor which exacerbated social problems and led to the emergence of a society in need of revolution.

Historians argue about who the "hero" of the revolution was. Some look upon the students as heroes, yet others see Castro as the person most affiliated militarily with the Cuban Revolution. Guevara was also considered the most affiliated philosophically. If we look closer, we can see how Castro is the one who made the revolution possible in the first place. Without his actions and ideas, the revolts in Cuba would have both failed. Fidel Castro organized guerrilla warfare in Cuba, which helped bring a decisive beginning to the end of the Revolution. His general presence, one of determination and results, also fueled the Cubans. The minds of the so-called heroes did share a certain ideology. In the summer of 1958, Castro signed the Caracas Pact, which would formerly restore the Constitution of 1940. The ideals in the constitution focused on a democratic nation over a military dictatorship. Guevara believed that having a "jefe máximo" was necessary. This translates in English into "maximum boss" (Chomsky 36) Fidel Castro was chosen to fill this position for the rest of Cuba's history. Castro also envisioned a moral society in which everyone acted humanely with respect to others. He believed in freedom

of press (without television and radio, the revolution would have never gained support from the middle class in Cuba) and direction of justice through the courts. After working with the peasants, Guevara thought of himself as an agrarian revolutionary. He wanted farmers to have more rights with their land and political power.

During 1958, guerrilla warfare in rural areas and also urban movements increased. The Batistan rule weakened until its collapse on January 1, 1959, when Batista fled to the Dominican Republic (Chomsky 1). The "power vacuum" created was filled by the 26 of July Movement, led by Fidel Castro (Chomsky 181). He brought change and gained Cuba worldly prestige and power. The six-year revolution was finally over with influential results. Changes in Cuba have been made that reflect democracy, agrarianism, and a humane society. The Cuban Revolution, both intellectual and physical, has lived up to its prestige and will alter history forever.

Revolution; it is a statement in itself. The question is what is the statement it makes? To answer this one must consider from a certain perspective the ideals of revolution. They can be seen in the historical references made out of research for this project. As I stated previously, the reason I wrote this paper was to try to show what I had once thought was the inevitable outcome of all of the world's atrocities and inequalities; a global revolution. The definition of "global revolution" as used here outlines the property of a revolution that has no borders or separations.

A global revolution would require every country and every society throughout the world to, in unison, overthrow the ruling powers of the world itself, even human nature.

Through the systematic process of researching for this paper I have changed my standpoint on this subject, not to mention the changes in topics, sources, introductions...etc. The most important thing that I learned while doing this reading and research was that a global revolution is *not* inevitable; it may not even be suitable. After all of the exclusions and criteria used to choose subjects for this project, one would think that finding a “successful” revolution would not be a problem. But, as is pointed out in context with every revolution discussed in this essay, all of them have failed in the end. The only successful revolutions were those of short-term success. So, why is this important? It is important because it is important to try and make the world a better place; it is important to try and be happy; it is important to help others; it is important to do what you consider to be right; it is also important that we (as a human race) realize that as a whole we may have a chance at bettering our way of life and/or length thereof.

To avert back to my original intentions, I must say that still after all of this research and new information, I find that global revolution would *probably* lend a hand to furthering the cause revolution and developing more rational means to define long-term goals of a revolution.

Another thing that has changed since the beginning of this project is the definition of political revolution. At one time, in my mind, a revolution was the forced removal of an

oppressive regime. Now, my definition is that for an uprising to be considered a revolution, it must have clearly stated short and long-term goals that can actually be met. This eliminates humanities entire history of revolutions off of my list of successful ones. These things seem to work in cycles as do the needs of the people. In the closing out of this document, I would like to leave you all with the same question that I have been pondering for the last eight weeks. That question is this: what does it take? What would it take to make everyone happy? Is a successful revolution even possible?

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