

“All Men Are Created Equal”

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One hundred sixty-nine years ago, on July 4, 1776, a group of men drew up the document which is known today as the Declaration of Independence. These men did not meet with that end in mind. Their primary purpose in having that historical meeting was to evolve a plan whereby they might, in some way, overthrow the severe restrictions they were suffering at the hands of the British Crown. Foremost in the minds of them all was a feeling that had motivated the colonization of this hemisphere; the feeling that had instilled within them a vivid will to perpetuate a free world for all men, a world founded upon the proposition that, “All men are created equal.”

In expressing the beliefs and theories held by the American people they wrote, and shouted to the world, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.”

Eighty-seven years later, in ten sentences, containing only a few hundred words spoken under the inspiration of a great and solemn assembly, Abraham Lincoln gave to the ages America’s noblest example of oratory. The occasion was the dedication of the National Cemetery on the site of the Battle of Gettysburg. The address was a masterpiece of logic, faultless in sentence structure, forceful in its choice of words. Above all, it breathed the purest patriotism — the kind which grips mens hearts and stamps immortal truths upon their minds. In the first sentence Lincoln said, “. . . dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”

Now it is for us to arrive at a conclusion as to the present validity of this

proposition. To do this we must recall the situations which first produced this statement, and the ideals which induced Lincoln to reiterate it in his memorial address. “All men are created equal;” these words struck few men in those days as novel or absurd. It remained for men of later times to ridicule the assumption of natural equality. Doubtless, they did not intend to assert that each man was as strong, virtuous, and competent as every other; nor were they desirous of announcing social, economic, or political equality. There were, however, certain great rights which man had in a state of nature — before there was government to which he must be obedient; of these rights, certain ones were not surrendered and could not be surrendered to any government. But this is not by any means the whole of the matter, for the main thesis is that governmental power is derived from the consent of the governed; government has not inherent or intrinsic authority, but only granted or delegated authority.

In a state of nature there was equality; no one had the right to say yea or nay to his neighbors, to bid his neighbor do this or not do that. But government and political order were established by consent, and the system of the original state of nature and of original equality disappeared. Men must continue to be equal in the possession of fundamental natural rights, or they would have not given up equality and freedom to put themselves under absolute, arbitrary, and merciless rule; but, as the result of compact, a superior came into existence. There existed one man or body of men with

authority to command, and those commands should be obeyed so long as government kept itself within the limits which the original compact implied. These men were not bent upon announcing to the people who were then engaged, or were soon to be engaged, in framing constitutions that they must provide for universal suffrage or must grant equality of either political or economic power. They were primarily intent upon presenting a basis for overthrowing the authority of the king. The critical question was how it came about that one man, a monarch, or one set of men had been placed above other men with power to issue orders, laws, and decrees. If governmental power was derived, if men had voluntarily and by consent surrendered their original equality, then, unquestionably, government was authoritative only when acting within the limits of the compact and when guarding the natural rights of life, liberty, and property. Before government was established, men were in a state of equality; after government was established, they were not; they gave up their equality and subjected themselves to a superior, but this superior must rule for the common good. This is the sum and substance of the philosophy of the Declaration of Independence; the essence of the proposition, "All men are created equal."

At the period in our history of the Gettysburg address, our nation was passing through an era of humanitarianism. Anything but complete freedom was a religious sin, incited by the churches. Our nation had been involved in a great war concerning human suffrage, a conflict between two fields of thought. The North was of the belief that it was a moral wrong to adopt slavery; the South was championing the exploitation and domination of the colored race. By sheer

force of arms the Union had been preserved and Lincoln had announced the Emancipation Proclamation which made the Negro equal to the white in this period of humanitarian causes.

We have set forth the basis and the motives which inspired the proposition at hand; however, our discussion has given us only the theoretical point of view. For us to apply this proposition to our environment we must relate it to the prevailing mood of today which is essentially skeptical.

The chief objection to the proposition that, "All men are created equal," lies in its impracticability economically. An artificial semblance of economic equality might conceivably be effected by allowing to each member of society an equal amount of wealth and an equal income. But the genuine equality of freedom would be vastly more difficult to obtain. To have equal freedom, it would be necessary for all men to be given the opportunity of developing their interests and powers to the same extent. Each must feel the same degree of latitude for free action. But men's tastes and powers vary between wide limits. There is no imaginable way in which they could be measured and allowed commensurate freedom for development and expression. A condition of life in which a street-sweeper felt no restraints whatever might be a most hideous bondage for an Einstein. Costly laboratories are necessary to the freedom of the scientist. A brush and canvas bring freedom to the artist. Banks are necessary for the financier. One boy finds freedom through years of leisure which he may devote in college libraries to research; another requires a carpenter shop for the expression of his powers. At most, economic equality could give us an equal amount of food, the same kind of

houses, and the same quality of clothing. But these are superficial things as compared with the opportunity for the equivalent exercise of the varying powers and qualities of soul which constitute our real being. Genuine freedom must extend to this latter realm. Equality of possessions would not establish freedom, however, would probably hinder it.

In conclusion let us then consider freedom other than in the economic category, namely in the world of social relationships; for in the growth of human experience there is no clear line of demarcation between the individual and society, with regard either to interest or to activity, but the two are related in

innumerable ways. The ideal of an isolated atomic individual on the one side, and of society on the other, is a product of abstraction, never discovered in actual experience. Within society, as from birth we find ourselves to be, we discover that we are in a position of equality with others. But a society between equals can exist only if the interests of all be regarded equally and every age sees some advance made toward an extension of this relation of equality to include everyone. In this very real sense the world of man shall forever be implicitly dedicated to the proposition, "All men are created equal."

Pragmatists And High School Latin

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One textbook used by first-year Latin students says in an introductory essay to the beginning high school Latinists:

. . . the chief reason why you are going to study Latin is to get a better knowledge of English. Most of the more difficult words in English are from Latin or Greek. In a few weeks you will know the meaning of *impecunious*, *emigrate*, *mandate*, *predatory*, and many others Your English spelling will improve.

The study of Latin will make English grammar much easier to understand. Then, again, there are Latin words, phrases, and mottoes Many abbreviations used in English are Latin, such as *i.e.* for *id est*.¹

Are Latin teachers and Latin texts justified in telling students that the study of Latin provides sound and practical training for understanding of the English language? Or are those modern educators correct who insist that "transfer value" for the classics is meager, that study of the Latin language has no practical value?

Some basis for the differences between the Latin advocate and the Latin malinger may lie in a confusion of terms. The latter speaks in contemptuous manner of Latin study as "halting, meaningless translations, rather trans-verbalisms," as "tearing literature limb from limb," and asks how such activities can help a student understand anything. Sincere Latin teachers, on the other hand, conceive of "the study of Latin" as a real effort to see the relationships between Latin and English in terms of English derivatives and spelling similarities, syntax, forms. Halting translation and too-often-repeated close grammatical analysis may be stages in the process of achieving the final goal. But what child walks without first creeping? How many great pianists would we

1 B. L. Ullman and Norman E. Henry, *Latin for Americans First Book*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1943, p. 2.