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## **Philanthropy, History, and Freemasons**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article aims to analyze in more detail the role of evangelism throughout US history, especially during the revolution. In this article, which aim to provide an overview of the intersection of history, religion and philanthropy in the United States, the case study design, one of the qualitative research designs, was used. The data of the research were analyzed using descriptive analysis technique. The data obtained in the descriptive analysis technique are summarized and interpreted according to predetermined themes. As a result of the research give an overview of the United State's history as illustrated by Tocqueville. It was elaborated on the role of religion in establishing the new country that had been colonized by Britain which in turn committed genocides against Indigenous peoples. In addition, it was emphasized that some prominent figures who signed the Declaration of Independence in the USA were members of the Freemasonry fraternity, which raised questions about the course of politics in the country. Besides these discussed the role of Freemasons in philanthropy in the US and some opposing views that see otherwise. It was shown how the society appeared as a religious society but later turned into a secular one, connected by many to conspiracy theories.

**Keywords:** Philanthropy, history, freemasons, evangelism, evolution.

### **Introduction**

The evolution of philanthropy in each country is historically specific as each has its own historical development that impacts that. In this paper, I will focus on the context of the United States, a country that was under the colonial rule of Britain. One should also note that the US is a settler state that came into being after genocides and hideous crimes committed against Indigenous peoples who have inhabited North America for thousands of years. European settlers then revolted against Britain, the colonial power, that was ruling, and gained independence in 1776. Therefore, one cannot ignore the formidable role of Britain in the US history and the formation of philanthropy there. Many of the laws and regulations in various American states today are impacted, partially or fully, by English laws and legislation. Similarly, philanthropy being an area of study that requires legal regulations is impacted by such laws. That is not to say that philanthropy in the US is identical to that in Britain as both have their distinguished features with some intersections as I show in this paper.

In terms of the historical epoch, this paper highlights the First Great Awakening of the American revolution which started in the 1730s. We will see how critical this period was in American history and the impact it left upon the future of the United States of America as a country as well as the future of philanthropy. The Great Awakening came at a time when people's interest in religion was

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declining versus their increasing interest in secular rationalism, which was seen as a huge threat to the church's role. The movement sought to emphasize the centrality of religion in various life aspects by preaching about the gospel and promoting enthusiasm for Christianity.

For religion, it will attempt to shed light on Evangelicalism, particularly Freemasonry, and its role in promoting or shaping philanthropy in the United States. Evangelism as well as Freemasonry held and promoted the new poor laws and enhanced people's awareness to help one another, especially those in need. It was motivated by great values such as improving righteousness and fighting vices. One of its key achievements is that Evangelism played a historical role in the campaign to abolish slavery in the US (Kidd, p. 72). Christian movements also contributed to the establishment of many colleges and universities in the US by making consistent donations. This shows the centrality of such religious movements in US history and their role in philanthropy.

This article aims to analyze in more detail the role of evangelism throughout US history, especially during the revolution. Is Evangelism still a key player in philanthropy or is it fading away in the midst of a secular society?

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

In this article, which aim to provide an overview of the intersection of history, religion and philanthropy in the United States, the case study design, one of the qualitative research designs, was used. Case studies are based on 'how' and 'why' questions and allow the researcher to examine in depth a phenomenon or event that he cannot control (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018, p.73).

### **Data Analysis**

The data of the research were analyzed using descriptive analysis technique. The data obtained in the descriptive analysis technique are summarized and interpreted according to predetermined themes. Direct quotations are frequently used to reflect the views of the people interviewed or observed (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018, p.239).

### **Data Collection Process**

This paper seeks to give an overview of the intersection of history, religion, and philanthropy in the United States. In this article on the role of religion in establishing the new country that had been colonized by Britain which in turn committed genocides against Indigenous peoples.

### **Validity and Reliability**

In this study, the opinion of an expert who had knowledge about the subject of the research and qualitative research was sought in order to ensure validity and reliability.

## **Findings**

### **The United States**

The 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries were a time when Europeans started their colonization of much of the world. This included not only Britain, but Spain, Germany, France, Portugal, Holland, and others. However, one can say that Britain and France were the most ambitious colonial powers who managed to colonize many parts of the world (see Steinberg, 2006, p. 33). While there was a huge rivalry between France and Britain over North America, one can say that Britain prevailed with the exception of some parts in the upper side of the continent such as Quebec in Canada that remained French. One of the key works that shed light on US history is Alexis de Tocqueville's classic Democracy in

America. Tocqueville was sent along with Gustave de Beaumont by the French government to the US to study the American prison system, but much of his focus was on American society. For him, the US offered the most advanced example of equality in practice. He was an admirer of American individualism with some reservations. Tocqueville, as a sociologist and political theorist, warned that an individualistic society can quickly be dismantled and disfigured. Such as society lacks essential intermediate social structures, that existed in traditional societies, to mediate relations with the state. This, in my opinion, is the biggest threat to democracy and equality that Tocqueville advocates. Besides his focus on the prison system, he studied the religious, political, economic, and social aspects of American society. According to Tocqueville, religion played an active role in the establishment of the US as a country, especially Puritans whom he thinks planted the seeds of democracy and equality in the newly emergent country (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 53). Puritans were one of the first emigrants to the US, mainly because they were not allowed to practice their religious doctrine where they came from. According to Tocqueville, it was more than a religion as it 'mingled with most absolute democratic and republican theories' (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 54).

Tocqueville dedicates the fourth chapter to addressing the notion of sovereignty as it is given special importance in American society – he calls it the 'dogma of the sovereignty.' This idea had been generative and common among people in most of the English colonies of America (Tocqueville, 2004, pp. 91–99). This principle was one of the moving forces of the American Revolution that caused its breakout. All classes took risks for its cause, they fought and triumphed in its name, it became the law of laws (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 93). One can link that with other concepts discussed by Tocqueville such as the political association of individuals and their right to practice their political will. Sovereignty, freedom, and political will were all driving forces that led to the breakout of the revolution. These ideals were central to the Puritan movement. The writing of the Federal Constitution that took place upon the end of the revolution was highly influenced by these principles or one can say puritan religious ideals.

Some make connections between puritanism and Freemasonry, a society that is discussed in detail below. Many Freemason leading figures were influenced by the ideals of puritanism such as freedom, tolerance, and reasoning. What many people ignore is that many founding fathers of the United States were Freemasons including George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Paul Revere, John Hancock, and others who also signed the Declaration of Independence, and this explains some references to conspiracy theories by many scholars and writers as we will see below. This also shows the interconnection between the establishment of the US as a country and the impact of various Christian groups.

### **The First Great Awakening**

The American revolution was another central event in US history. This was transformative because it impacted the formation of American society and the flow of future historical events. The great awakening which challenged the power of government over religious matters gave politics a spiritual dimension by legitimating resistance to political tyranny (Steinberg, 2006, p. 35). It came at a time when the idea of secular rationalism was being emphasized, and passion for religion had grown stale. The Awakening's stress on the liberty of conscience led many people to break away from the religious establishment, embracing the new evangelical creeds being preached (Steinberg, 2006, p. 35). Many historians underscore the importance of the Great Awakening and the lasting impact it had on various Christian denominations and the US culture at large. The religious establishment did that mainly because it wanted to protect its prerogatives. This movement, as most historians agree, was fathered by Jonathan Edwards.

In the early 1700s, the European Enlightenment was making its way across the Atlantic Ocean to the American colonies. Much like Enlightenment ideals in Europe, Enlightenment thinkers emphasized the logical view of the world, while underestimating and disregarding the role of religion. This caused a religious divide among the 13 colonies as most of New England was affiliated with congregational churches. There were Anglicans, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Quakers. The Great Awakening came to reinstate religion back into public life and emphasize that all people are born sinners and that salvation and forgiveness should be sought from God. It also emphasized that religion should not be formal or institutionalized but rather personal and casual. A key feature of this era is that charity as well as philanthropy became more individualistic actions.

One of the lasting impacts of the Great Awakening is the emphasis on an unmediated charity that should be handled by individuals and not churches. Instead of churches taking care of charity, now individuals are in full control of that. And it is not only the rich or the clergy who can give but almost everyone who is able to. Jonathan Edward as well as George Whitefield had key roles in the dissemination of Christian philanthropy in the United States. Edward always preached the indispensable duty of people to give bountifully and willingly to those who need it. They both repeatedly spoke about the importance of Christian charity and the importance of giving, especially to those who have less. One of the most famous preaches for Jonathan Edward was “The Duty of Christian Charity: Explained and Defended.” He associated heaven and hell with caring for the poor and giving them considered that as one of the highest duties of the Christian. He always called on people to be generous when giving to the poor. Similarly, George Whitefield, who was a Freemason, was preaching in many states in the US, called on people to take care of each other and collected donations in each preach to use for good causes. Such donations were used to relieve victims of disaster, and orphanages, release debtors from prison, and fund educational institutions such as Harvard and Dartmouth.

### **The Freemasons**

The Freemasons were a fraternal society that promoted Enlightenment principles of inquiry and tolerance. The movement originated first in London in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, and Masonic lodges soon spread throughout Europe and the British colonies including North America. Benjamin Franklin was one of the prominent and first Freemasons in British America. Some argue that Franklin, who became one of the founding fathers of the United States, ended up joining the Quakers of Philadelphia. This religious group has beliefs that each human being possesses “inner light” or that people are innately good. This religious group historically supported philanthropic projects and called for criminal justice reform in the United States as well as other human causes. However, one should note that Franklin was a man of wisdom who had extensive knowledge in philosophy, and politics and was an astute writer who questioned many things around him including Christianity and the divinity of Jesus. In 1743, he founded the American Philosophical Society to encourage critical thinking and the spirit of inquiry.

As mentioned earlier, the first lodge for the movement was in London where all actions and instructions came from. The movement’s founding rules and principles were printed in America in 1734 by Franklin, which instructs affiliates to hold an annual communication and feast (Hackett, 2015, p. 20). Between 1733 and the American Revolution, the movement opened more than one hundred lodges in the British colonies. By the early 1770s, the movement had more than five thousand members most of whom came from the most prestigious and highest-paid occupations (Hackett, 2015, p. 21). The movement had a huge impact on American culture and lifestyle as it brought European lifestyles and customs to the upper reaches of 18<sup>th</sup>-century American Society. The religious group was

part of the Anglicization of colonial life. By embracing the freedom of thought and religious toleration, the movement contributed to the rational religious discourse emerging in the public sphere.

The Anglican movement honors the Saint John's Day sermons that date back to the medieval heritage of divine worship. Freemasons who are heavily involved in philanthropic activities select a popular preacher on that day and support the event by ensuring large attendance among its members. This often results in large donations for the poor, the needy, and the sick. George Whitefield, the well-known evangelist that I briefly talked about earlier, preached the first American Masonic charity sermon on Jun 24, 1738 (Hackett, 2015, p. 44). He preached to raise funds for orphans and the poor. These sermons called for mutual love and bonds, the importance of charity, and the need for virtuous behavior and solidarity among humans. According to these preachers, the purpose of society is to encourage innate love among human beings and caring for each other, transcending divisions and differences. Uniting together in a brotherhood, Freemasons introduce themselves as a cultivated elite coming together for the common good of humanity. Though the fraternity's charity was intended for group members, in times of community distress and crises, Masons extend financial aid to those who need it most such as the donations made for those who were subject to a citywide fire in 1740 (Hackett, 2015, p. 45).

Seen from an anti-Masonry perspective, the fraternity is viewed as a secret group of politically connected, secularizing, affluent people deeply threatening the common man of evangelical Christianity. For instance, David Icke states that people only see the "good works" of the organization. He argues that Freemasonry is like a school building that one can see its innocent walls from the outside, but once people join that school, they realize that it is designed to misguide and mislead its members. The information that would reveal the truth to them is withheld. Who goes on to further say that the movement is linked to Satanism and that the US government is controlled by this secret society brotherhood? Ed Decker (1994) takes a similar stance in his book *The Dark Side of Freemasonry* where he exposes the society and shows their conspiratorial role in the United States and across the world. Decker also argues that the charities and financial contributions made by society work as a cover to their pursuits to control global politics. He stresses the secrecy, the vagueness, and the hierarchical nature of the group. Others such as Jessica Harland-Jacobs (Harland-Jacobs, 2013) makes a link between Freemasonry and the expansion of the British empire. Harland-Jacob does not take a conspiratorial stance and rather examines the fraternity's role in various colonial settings and the impact of the empire on the group.

## **Conclusion**

This research give an overview of the United State's history as illustrated by Tocqueville. It was elaborated on the role of religion in establishing the new country that had been colonized by Britain which in turn committed genocides against Indigenous peoples. According to Tocqueville, it was religious groups such as the Puritans that the seeds of democracy and equality in the newly emergent country. In addition, it was emphasized that some prominent figures who signed the Declaration of Independence in the USA were members of the Freemasonry fraternity, which raised questions about the course of politics in the country. The second section explored the historical epoch of the First Great Awakening. This Christian awakening came at a time when the idea of secular rationalism was being emphasized, and passion for religion had grown stale. The Awakening's stress on the liberty of conscience led many people to break away from the religious establishment, embracing the new evangelical creeds being preached. It also showed how some figures of this awakening were Freemasons. The last section discussed the role of Freemasons in philanthropy in the US and some opposing views that see otherwise. It was shown how the society appeared as a religious society but later turned into a secular one, connected by many to conspiracy theories. However, what

one cannot ignore is the formidable role of society in US history as well as its central role in the evolution of philanthropy.

### **Research and Publication Ethics**

In this study, all the rules specified in the Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive were complied with.

### **Ethics Committee Permission**

The study does not require ethics committee approval.

### **Authors Contribution Rate**

The study is single-authored.

### **Conflict of Interest**

There is no conflict of interest.

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