

One of the most important insights of our Founding Fathers, men who created an exceedingly revolutionary country, was that a democracy should never make changes hastily. They feared mob rule, which was soon to be demonstrated in the hideous French Revolution.

They deliberately separated the governing powers: the presidency, Congress, and the Courts, who were all to function as checks and balances on the others. Even the Congress was divided in two: one branch to represent population numbers of the various states, the other to represent a "cooling mechanism," one in which every state was equal in power because each had two Senators.

They warned against something that we are seeing today around the world: referendums. Our founders knew what that system was like. The ancient Greeks had popular voting (all native male citizens) determining even such issues as war. This system turned out to be a terrible error when popular clamor voted to punish one of their colonies, Sicily, asking for more autonomy. The resulting war broke the Athens treasury and paved the way for a weakened Athens to lose its freedom to invaders.

We have seen a recent example of referendum damage when the British held a popular vote to exit the European Union, one of the most important institutions for internal peace that Europe had ever known. Another disastrous example was in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution, the clerics ordered a spot moratorium with two choices: Yes or No to the Islamic Republic. The public did not realize what that would mean for their future freedom. They know now.

Something never discussed by the Founding Fathers but tacit in their creating a written constitution (something that Britain did not have) was that the constitution could not cover all contingencies in a future that might have changes that needed to be recognized. They did not want knee-jerk changes, but they did mandate a slow, thoughtful, process that would be deliberated by future presidents, Representatives, Senators, and the courts. The Press was considered as an essential institution that could provide both information and debates to the benefit of the public and legislators. The press was never a government institution, so that it was the only public forum without direct access to political power.

Whenever change happens in a society, there will be some forward looking enthusiasts and some who fear or resent any change to the existing system. This is why if change is to happen, it must take years of back and forth debates and legislation to sufficiently change public opinion and their governance to mandate these changes.

For example, Abraham Lincoln's emancipation of our slaves seemed revolutionary to the South, which rejected it by seceding from the union itself. However, from the very beginning of our country, there were some (including Southerners) who knew that slavery was America's great sin. The British led the way, thanks to a group of Quaker aristocrats, to abolish slavery in Britain and its colonies. In America, this issue simmered and grew ever hotter until it finally erupted in 1860. President Lincoln paid the price (an assassination) for his valor.

The law permitting women to vote seemed revolutionary in 1920, but it had a long, painful history of women fighting for justice peacefully, never causing a harm or death to any men. The men opposing this were not as gentle. Despite the vote, women still struggle for recognition as human, and not "other." The long struggle of women to control their own bodies is not yet resolved, as we can see in a passionate minority trying to reverse even Supreme Court law.

Ending judicial punishment of homosexuals and people sexually wired differently is not a brand-new revolutionary idea. The unjust treatment of such people made many Americans think again; but this was an old prejudice and still roils in the less-developed world. It has taken a very long time for the public majority to recognize the injustice of such treatment, but it has at last.

Change comes, but must be carefully pursued so that the majority can buy in. Change takes time.

682 words

Laina Farhat-Holzman is a historian, lecturer, and author of God's Law or Man's Law. You may contact her at Lfarhat102@aol.com or www.globalthink.net.

