

American Radicalism: an Endless Search for Democracy

Abstract

The United States saw the emergence of various radical movements throughout its history and the Principles that are often associated with American radicalism are: liberty individualism, equality, democracy, and community Radical persons who tried to foster a social change often held those principles and worked to strengthen them in society in order to foster democracy.

Keywords:

American, radicalism, endless search, reform, democracy

Résumé

La personne radicale est souvent défini comme quelqu'un qui détient les vues les plus avancées de la réforme politique sur les lignes démocratiques '. Les Etats-Unis a vu l'émergence de divers mouvements radicaux long de son histoire et les principes qui sont souvent associées au radicalisme américain sont: la liberté l'individualisme, l'égalité, la démocratie, et de la communauté. les personnes radicaux qui ont tenté de favoriser un changement social ont souvent travaillé pour renforcer ces principes dans la société afin d'établir la démocratie.

Mots clés :

Radicalisme, américain, la recherche contenue, la reforme, démocratie

ملخص

الراديكالية هي أي إيديولوجية إصلاحية و قد تكون معتدلة تهدف إلى الإصلاح، أو متطرفة تهدف إلى التغيير الجذري. و مفهوم الراديكالية متغير فما هو راديكالي اليوم قد لا يكون كذلك غدا. عرف المجتمع الأمريكي حركات راديكالية مختلفة كحركة تحرير السود و الحركة النسوية و غيرها من الحركات التي طالبت بتعميم مبادئ الثورة الأمريكية و التي تعتبر من أهم نتائج الراديكالية الأمريكية على جميع فئات المجتمع، و نقصد بذلك مبادئ الحرية و المساواة و كذا العدالة. و جسدت الراديكالية مبدأ البحث اللامتناهي عن الديمقراطية في المجتمع الأمريكي.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

الراديكالية، الأمريكية، بحث لا متناهي، الإصلاح، الديمقراطية

Introduction

The term *radicalism* is nowadays used to refer to the desire to change society for the better in all the domains since radicalism as an ideology is often defined as “a tendency towards social reform according to democratic lines”.¹ History shows that the American people have always been haunted by the desire for change even before founding their independent state. No wonder to say that Among the first people who found in the New World a safe refuge were the British radical religious groups who struggled to carry

out a religious change and who sought to change England from a protestant to a puritan nation.

One is not likely to miss the important fact that it is thanks to radicalism, which rejected racial discrimination, that the United States of America is now headed by a black man. Indeed, the arrival of Obama to power can be considered as the latest achievement carried out by American radicalism. This drastic change in the American public opinion was not sudden, but it was the result of a long radical struggle. So how did the Radicals in the USA struggle to change public opinion about several issues? And how some of them went beyond that to severely criticize the social, economic, and political inequality? Before tracing the radical struggle in the American society, we need to clarify what is meant by radicalism and demonstrate how the term has evolved throughout history.

1- Radicalism: Definition and History

Among the adjectival definitions of that term radicalism that *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary* gives and which seems to be the most relevant is “relating to or affecting the fundamental nature of something; ... “advocating thorough or complete political or social reform; politically extreme.” Perhaps, the relevant and more appropriate noun definition is “an advocate of radical political or social reform”². The radical person is therefore, “anyone who supports and exercises an extreme or fundamental change in existing institutions or in political, social, or economic conditions”³.

We should further note that if The COED adjectival definitions of radical thus stress the characteristics of completeness and extremity, another reading of the meaning of the term *radical* in its second edition of *the Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), tells us however, that whereas the notions of *extremity* and *completeness* associated with the term are more recent connotations, “the notion of fundamentals, or going to the root nature of a thing, go back to the earliest usages of the term”⁴.

Indeed, tracing the first uses of the term *radical*, we can say that the earliest uses, which are listed in OED, go back to the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th centuries and refer to “the humour or moisture naturally inherent in all plants and animals, its presence being a necessary condition of their vitality.”⁵ It is worth mentioning that by the 16th century, the term had come to refer, more generally, to fundamental qualities inherent in the nature or essence of a thing or person. In connection, OED provides the

following example from Richard Hooker published in 1597 in Book V of a book series entitled *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie*: “They intimate the radical cause out of which it growth”.⁶ Nowadays, it would be more common to refer to the “root cause” of the relevant phenomenon.

Later in the 18th century, the meaning of the term began to change so that it not only referred to traditional and fundamental qualities of an entity, but began to also refer more and more often to all practices, forces, or processes that might directly or indirectly contribute to change those fundamental and original qualities. This is in line with what in 1735, Henry St John, 1st Viscount Bolingbroke wrote in *A Dissertation upon Parties*, “Such a Remedy might have wrought a radical Cure of the Evil, which threatens our Constitution”⁷. One can observe that here a radical cure means the one that can bring a change to the traditional constitution.

In connection, according to The *Britannica* in England, the adjective radical was used to describe the parliamentary Charles James Fox⁸ who was dismissed from the Privy Council in 1798 merely because he dared to publicly advocate the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people in a public speech.⁹ This is the reason why fox deserved the term *radical*. In reality, he was the kind of the reformist who did not show conformity to the system. For this reason, his radical action did not appeal to the British authorities and therefore was not welcomed in the absolute monarchical system of the United Kingdom of the era simply because it marked a real departure from the then known political tradition and was considered as a challenge to the system.

In this regard, there is another detail worth mentioning here. The word *radical* was first used in an ideological sense in the 18th century Great Britain in reference to all those who sought social or political reform¹⁰. What is noticeable is that at first, it was confined to the upper and middle classes, but in the early 19th century "popular radicals" brought artisans and the "laboring classes" into widespread agitation in the face of the harsh repression exercised by the government and this made them deserve the term.

By the end of the 18th century and even till the early part of the 19th century, the concept of *radical reform* came to be known in English politics to refer also to a thorough or sweeping political change.¹¹ For example, in 1830, Gen. Thomas Perronet Thompson

wrote in *Exercises, Political and Others*, “The actual agent...will be a radical reform in what is called the commons house of parliament”.¹²

By the end of the 19th century and into the 20th century, the term *radical* started to be widely used to refer to “representing or supporting extreme sections of a political party”¹³ ; or, more generally, to that which is “characterized by independence of, or departure from, what is usual or traditional; progressive, unorthodox, or revolutionary in outlook, conception, or even design”¹⁴ For instance, in *Radical Man* (1970), Charles Hampden-Turner ,in an attempt to distinguish between what is conservative and what is radical , writes, “While Conservative Man is caused to behave, Radical Man imagines and reasons autonomously”.¹⁵

It is noticeable that the majority of those who are interested in studying radicalism have confirmed that it was hard for scholars to agree on one definition to the term *radicalism* simply because its meaning differs from one person to another and from a historical context to another .About the fluidity of the concept, Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John Campbell explicate:

“Radical” has always been an elusive adjective, a contested, and fluid concept that owes no allegiance to any particular movement, ideology, or period .Radicalism must always be understood, therefore, within a specific historical context. It is also a painfully subjective concept: One person’s radicalism is often another person’s reform.¹⁶

Perhaps ,this is the reason why that, in this direction, one has to observe that the meaning of the term *radical* has evolved from one that emphasizes what is fundamental to one that emphasizes what is extreme, particularly in relation to social or political traditionalisms. In this respect, it is interesting to note that, nowadays the term *radicalism* started to have much wider than the above limited definitions .For instance, it is often used to refer to “any political and social movements and ideologies that aim at fundamental change in the structure of society”.¹⁷

Still, it is necessary to clarify here that, generally, the elusive and fluid nature of the term *radicalism* allowed it to have negative connotations and positive ones. Radicalism as a pejorative term might mean “extremism, evolutionism, and even utopianism in its negative sense that means the impossibility of a social vision and the *dangerousness* of the

attempt to realize it”.¹⁸ Indeed, the word *radical* is sometimes popularly used negatively to refer “to individuals, parties, and movements who support great social and political change and wish to change any existing social system in politics”.¹⁹

Interesting is the idea that among the positive connotations of *radicalism* is the positive social and political reform because the term is often associated with any activism that leads society to a positive change towards better living conditions at all the aspects of life. Taken from this perspective by recent scholars, who often bear in mind its positive connotations, the word *radicalism* is often associated with “progress or progressivism; that is the endeavor to achieve a change for the better in society and other domains”.²⁰

It needs to be stressed here that part of what this article is trying to approximate is that the most modern sense of the term *Radical* might mean “any individual or party upholding leftist views”.²¹ In reality, this meaning originated during the French Revolution where those who opposed the king sat in the national Assembly at the far left and those who supported the king at the far right.²²

But in an important sense, *radicalism* can be positively “associated with innovation”²³ because the radical attitude often “implies the desire to revolt against tradition to seek the emancipation of people from mystical obligations to dead generations releasing in them the full recognition of the boundless potential for change and innovation that is inherent in human nature”.²⁴ But in an American context, radicalism is all that leads to a more democratic society.

2- Radicalism: the Path Towards Democracy

Indeed, it would be very interesting now to know how the American radical struggle paved the way for a more democratic society. In fact, the American republican system, and since it is based on guarantying the natural rights of individuals, allowed radicalism to survive and act inside the American society. American radicals saw a contradiction between republicanism as a system and some governmental practices of the American political regime that sometimes led to the marginalization of some sections within the American community such as blacks, women and workers, and the like who according to the radicals should struggle to get their rights. So radicalism in the United States had to act in favor of all those who suffered from injustice or marginalization. In

describing the radical nature of the American nation, Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John Campbell declare that:

The United States has always been a protest nation from the political unrest that gave birth to the Declaration of Independence to the recent mobilization against unbridled corporate greed and war, the United States has boasted rich traditions of resistance and dissent.²⁵

Indeed, having a look at the history of radicalism in the American society, one can easily observe that radicalism gave birth to the United States and continued to shape life in the American society. But what is remarkable is that the term *radical* did not gain a widespread political usage in the USA until the pre Civil War era when the American Republican party was divided into different factions. Among the republicans, there were men who had been Whigs, Anti-Slavery Democrats, and Abolitionists. By the outbreak of the war, these fragments became three basic factions: conservatives, moderates, and radicals. The most radical and, eventually, most influential of the three was the Radical Republican faction.

Despite the fact that all republicans were against slavery, Lincoln and his followers were viewed as the most "radical" political group in that era. Their radicalism implied their opposition to slavery and call for the immediate emancipation of all the American slaves more than that they insisted that the rights of Freedmen in the south should be protected²⁶.

By contrast, the conservative faction of the era called for the gradual emancipation, while moderates defended emancipation but with reservations. In the meantime, radicals favoured immediate eradication of slavery because for them it was a crime, and they waged the war for "abolition". "Whenever I hear anyone arguing for slavery, I feel a strong impulse to see it tried on him personally."²⁷ Lincoln once claimed. As radicals, Lincoln and his followers advocated the war against the Southern rebellion because they were convinced that, "Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves."²⁸

But it is important in this regard to stress the fact that the eradication of slavery as a racist social institution had never meant the end of the radical struggle and ambition of drastically changing the American social and political thought along more democratic

lines. With Lincoln's assassination and Andrew Johnson's succession, the Radicals' domination of the party and Congress increased. These committed politicians would shape the reconstruction of the American society. And they would continue struggling for a more democratic American society through securing a better social status for the African Americans.

Most important of all, the radical change after the Civil War was when the term *radical* started to be used to refer to all the Republicans who fought to reconstruct the post Civil War American society. Their policies gave more social and political rights for the emancipated slaves, and they opposed the return to power of former Confederates and members of the former slaveholder-planter class. The Radical Republicans impeached President Andrew Johnson for his opposition to their Reconstruction policies. Moreover, and in an unprecedented attempt in the USA, they supported the redistribution of millions of acres of plantation land to the former slaves.

Here, one cannot miss the important fact that the post Civil War era was also characterised by the growth of the capitalist greed. This is the reason why political radicalism from the end of the Reconstruction to the beginning of the Cold War was generally associated with radical calls and activism that aimed at fundamentally reform or even change the capitalist economic and social system in the American industrialised society²⁹. Generally, the radicals of the era shared the belief that radical changes in property relations became necessary and that it was time to achieve what they called economic levelling; the latter that was one of the fundamental tenets of radicalism. Because of this non conformism to the prevailing system, this radical wave was called leftism.

In this respect, the era saw the birth of many radical groups often described as “leftist” who were for a wide variety of social and political reform; among them were the Knights of Labour³⁰. They called for more democracy in politics, government ownership of railroads, and antitrust legislation to protect skilled workers, and small businessmen threatened by the economic instability and political corruption that characterized the capitalist society.

But, despite the strong radical impulse often associated with the workers, one should not miss the one of the farmers. In 1890 the level of agrarian distress was almost

high in the USA, but the first serious, organized effort to address general agricultural problems was the Granger Movement that emerged in 1867 and was led by employees of the USA Department of Agriculture .It is important to note that the farmers' alliances were political organizations with elaborate economic programs. The American farmers tended to work within the Democratic Party in order to acquire a political power .They saw the political system as corrupted by the interests of the industrial and the commercial trusts. They announced:

We are met in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral ,political and material ruins .corruption dominated the ballot box ,the legislatures, the congress ,and touches even the ermine of the bench(the court)....From the same prolific womb of governmental injustice we breed the two great classes –tramps and millionaires.³¹

It is quite interesting in this regard to note that the farmers' movement, which started to be called the populist movement, was viewed as “the last phase of a long and perhaps a losing struggle –the struggle to save Agricultural America from the devouring jaws of industrial America”.³² In describing the radical activism of the nineteenth century Noam Chomsky wrote:

In the late 19th century there was a major union organization, Knights of Labor, and also a radical populist movement based on farmers. It's hard to believe, but it was based in Texas, and it was quite radical. They wanted their own banks, their own cooperatives, their own control over sales and commerce.³³

Later, radical activism continued to shape the American social economic and political scene but this time through another more radical movement: the Marxist socialist movement, an ideology and a system of life brought by refugees from the European revolutions of 1848. In 1901, a number of socialist organizations and factions joined to create the Socialist Party of America. This party adopted the radical goal of promoting the working-class movement and allowing a successful socialist thought and ideology to creep into the USA.

Furthermore, during the Great Depression; they made great success by leading struggles to organize unions, and fight for social reforms. About the potential success of

socialism in the United States, Norman Thomas; the Socialist Party presidential candidate in 1940, 1944 and 1948 declares:

The American people will never knowingly adopt socialism. But under the name of Liberalism, they will adopt every fragment of the socialist program until one day America will be a socialist nation without knowing how it happened.³⁴

In addition, during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s, Martin Luther King Jr. as a radical saw non conformism as a solution not only for the problems suffered by the black minority in the United States but by all the oppressed groups and individuals; This is in line with what King thinks:

This hour in history needs a dedicated circle of transformed nonconformists. Our planet teeters on the brink of atomic annihilation; dangerous passions of pride, hatred and selfishness are enthroned in our lives; truth lies prostrate on the rugged hills of nameless cavalries; and men do reverence before false gods of nationalism and materialism. The saving of our world from pending doom will come, not through the complacent adjustment of the conforming majority, but through the creative maladjustment of a nonconforming minority.³⁵

What is certain is that the civil rights activist worked against and even challenged the whole system of segregation in order to right the wrong traditional American view of the blacks in the American society. As a radical king, for example, was convinced that “The wrong thing with America is white racism. White folks are not right...It’s time for America to have an intensified study on what’s wrong with white folks”.³⁶

In more practical terms, those radical campaigns resulted in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which ended the system of segregation and marked a turning point in the history of blacks in the American society, an achievement often considered as one of the most important achievements of the radicals’ struggle for a better society for all the Americans.

Still, one has to note that radical activism in the USA produced also the beat cultural movement³⁷ which paved the way to what the American sociologist C. Wright Mills called *a New Left*.³⁸ In fact, it is hard if not impossible to exactly define the phrase

new left. But Wright used it to refer to “a group of people dedicated to bringing about a violent change in the American society and government”³⁹. Indeed, Wright considered all activists, educators, agitators and others who struggled to implement radical reforms on issues such as “gay rights, abortion, gender roles and drugs as new leftists”⁴⁰.

There is a need to clarify that though both deserved the term *radical*, the New Left is different from the Old Left in that the first is more willing to use violence in order to bring about change, and membership in the New Left consists of people who are younger than those in the Old Left⁴¹. In contrast to earlier leftist or Marxist movements that had focused mostly on labor unionization and questions of social class⁴² in the USA, the new leftists rejected involvement with the labor movement and Marxism's historical theory of class struggle. Their goals included racial equality, de-escalation of the arms race, non-intervention in foreign affairs, and other major changes in the political, economic, social, and educational systems of the United States.

In reality, the New Left included organizations such as the Students for a Democratic Society which called for a radical change in the structure of the American society, either through social revolution, or by, as the writer Timothy Leary put it, “turn[ing] in, turn[ing] on, [and] drop [ping] out.”⁴³ soon the beat movement developed into what became known as “the hippie” counterculture, which adopted “alternative” living arrangements and philosophies of life : “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed individuals can change the world, indeed it’s the only thing that ever has”⁴⁴, Margaret Meade, the American anthropologist and a hippie activist wrote. This quotation of Margaret Meade that was adopted as the motto for hundreds of organizations in the entire world marks the global influence and legacy not only of Margaret Mead but of the Hippie movement as a whole.

What is certain is that the hippie radicalism produced one of the most influential cultures not only in the United States but in all over the world .In the American society; its adherents were viewed as one of the most nonconformist groups in American history. Shaping the face of music, culture, and politics in the 1960s and beyond, their wave of protest and strange, radical ideas have become a standard for youth not only in the United States but all over the world.

It needs to be stressed that the hippies' radical impulse basically stems from their strong belief in the imperativeness of social change and in their eloquence and capacity to argue persuasively for this extremely radical philosophy of life. For instance, about the power of the individuals to change life around them, the hippies were strongly convinced that any change in society must start with the individual first. In this context, Jim Morrison strongly defended the idea that "there can't be any large-scale revolution until there's a personal revolution, on an individual level. It's got to happen inside first."⁴⁵ And about the nature of the change sought by this radical group Morrison announces:

I am interested in anything about revolt, disorder, chaos- especially activity that seems to have no meaning. It seems to me to be the road toward freedom... Rather than starting inside, I start outside and reach the mental through the physical.⁴⁶

Interestingly, the status of women in the American society has also been the topic of hot debates among American radicals who sought and struggled for a better place for American women by calling for more social and political rights so that women could participate in the public life instead of being excluded from the public scene. In 1963, the radical Betty Friedan's famous book *The Feminine Mystique* criticized and even challenged the exclusion of women from all areas of work and sought to change the role of women in the domestic sphere. When the book was first published in 1963, it was a completely revolutionary text. It is credited with starting the second wave of feminism and changing the way people view working women; as a radical feminist, Friedan observes that:

Over and over again, stories in women's magazines insist that women can know fulfillment only at the moment of giving birth to a child. They deny the years when she can no longer look forward to giving birth, even if she repeats the act over and over again. In the feminine mystique, there is no other way for a woman to dream of creation or of the future. There is no other way she can even dream about herself, except as her children's mother, her husband's wife.⁴⁷

It was, perhaps, this radical libertarian impulse as it is clearly expressed in the above excerpt that motivated more radical feminist writers like Shulamith Firestone and organizations like Red Stockings to join with liberal feminists to fight for more rights for women⁴⁸ through achieving an authentic departure from the traditional conception of

woman .Basically; they struggled for achieving affirmative action policies in employment, and the passage of an Equal Rights Amendment. In this context radical feminists affirm that:

Women, because of their colonial relationship to men, have to fight for their own independence. This fight for our own independence will lead to the growth and development of the revolutionary movement in this country. Only the independent woman can be truly effective in the larger revolutionary struggle.⁴⁹

One can observe that the radical impulse is quite obvious in this quote because the radical feminists directly express their challenge to the then patriarchal society and call for a revolution against the social system that according to them gives man supremacy over women and enables him to colonise woman and consider her as a second sex.

No less interesting is the idea that even environment was present in the American radical program of reform. The American social radical activism of the 1960s and because of the tremendous development of industrialism at the expense of environment took the responsibility of protecting the environment. Consequently, the decade saw the birth of what became known as the radical environmental movement. In fact, Environmentalism can be defined as a broad radical philosophy, or ideology and social movement “regarding concerns for environmental conservation and improvement of the health of the environment”,⁵⁰ particularly “as the measure for this health seeks to incorporate the concerns of non-human elements”.⁵¹ Environmentalism advocates the preservation, restoration and improvement of the natural environment, and may be referred to as “a movement to control pollution”.⁵²

In connection, the environmentalist Ralph Nader inspired and led a generation of activist researchers to expose and challenge the destructive practices of corporate power. Nader explicates:

I advocate the immediate cessation of commercial logging on US public lands and the protection from road-building of all 60 million acres of large forest tracts remaining in the National Forest system. National Forests produce less than 5% of total volume of timber consumed in the US. I would veto all bills that might include provisions to dismantle any aspect of this National Forest protection policy. I consider it

crucial to pursue public and legislative support for such a plan to endure.⁵³

One is likely to find out from Nader's words that the environmentalists as radicals have a radical vision of environment and that they show readiness to challenge any bill that might go against their ideology that calls for the protection of environment from all the manmade problems. This environmentalist voice reveals that democratic sphere in the American society does not only allow radicals to defend the natural rights of the humankind but it goes beyond that to give them the opportunity to call for the same rights for the fauna and flora, and this is one of the most important achievements of the radical struggle in the modern world.

Having advanced the major areas and issues of American radicalism, we can now establish the fundamental fact that the American radicals could, to a great extent, carry out significant achievements. In stressing the gains brought by radical activism, Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John Campbell note:

Our modern understanding of free expression stems not simply from the Bill of Rights but from the struggles of the labor, birth control and civil rights movements throughout the twentieth century to overturn the laws and governmental practices that restricted the dissemination of ideas deemed radical, obscene or socially dangerous. In many other ways, radical movements have made American society a better place.⁵⁴

But it is noticeable that despite the great achievements of American radicalism at the political and social level, the radical activists did not stop their struggle for the consolidation of democracy and human rights in the United States .The last decade of the twentieth century saw the emergence of many radical organizations and issues inside the American society, but there were no clear coherent radical outlook to struggle for a far reaching social and political radical change.

There is a need to note that during that era, despite the fact that the American society did not see the birth of radical movements like abolitionism, socialism, and feminism, and the like which were radically active in the twentieth century, we cannot say that the American society ceased to search for change. Radicalism continued in the American society and the radicals did not disappear from the American political and social

scene. Perhaps, the most recent radical faction in modern America is what became known as Wall Street Radicals which we can consider as among other intriguing and possibly problematic features of the modern American society.

In reality, Occupy Wall Street is a protest or radical movement that began on September 17, 2011 in Zuccotti Park, located in New York City's Wall Street financial district. The Canadian activist group, Adbusters were the first to initiate that kind of protest, which has led to Occupy protests and movements all over the world. The main issues are “social and economic inequality, greed, corruption and the undue influence of corporations on government”.⁵⁵

Indeed, recently, we often hear in the American political life of calls for what the radicals call “the necessity of renewing the American radical tradition”.⁵⁶ For the first time for many decades, radicals in the USA have recently started denouncing professional politicians for their hypocrisy, excessive partisanship, and adverserialism. In addition to this, “they have derided special interest groups for their corrupting influences, and they demanded that citizens be provided more direct access to decision- making processes”.⁵⁷ About this important development in the American radical attitude Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John Campbell note:

Today it is almost common place and as they expanded their field of inquiry and sharpened their intellectual tools, they also began investigating alternative expressions of democracy-the sun dry forms of protest and dissent that have challenged the exclusions and inequalities that have always existed.⁵⁸

More than that, it is worth noting that when Barack Obama run for presidential election in January 2007 , he insisted that “what the United States needed was not a new set of policy programs but a wholly kind of politics .It is time for American democracy to be renewed”⁵⁹.This debate about democratic reform emerged in the American society in the early 1990s as a reaction to the prevailing democratic practice which according to many radical activists was corrupt especially by the power of money and special interests and ,therefore it needed reform .This radical vision might bring a new kind of politics to the American life as it might allow the Americans to continue their struggle for a better society void of injustice and monopoly of power and wealth.

Conclusion

From the previous discussion and in line with what this article tries to demonstrate, we understand therefore that the American radicals in their struggle to secure a better life for the Americans allowed the American individual to develop a specific conception of the role of the state which is different from both that of the anarchists and that of the classical liberals, who often support a minimal state, and from conservatives, socialists who advocate a strong and more or less authoritarian state.

In a general American context, one can notice that what is radical in the political sense springs from the mainstream. Part of what the present article tries to demonstrate is that radicalism in the American society lies between the real meaning of democracy and the available opportunity and the reality of life inside the American society. The radicals' desire for struggling stems from their conviction that their function is to challenge conformism in all its forms, allow or even compel society's mainstream to change and develop, and why not break all the traditional norms and bypass the limits put by the system.

Finally one should mention that what is striking about radicalism in general and American radicalism in a more particular sense is that it is tightly linked to social, political, cultural, and even economic changes; whenever society changes, the meaning of radicalism also changes. And this that explains how ideas and issues once considered radical in the American public view such as equal rights for minorities and women are now considered to be totally normal and no longer radical. This leads us to sustain that it is thanks to the changing nature of radicalism that the struggle for a more democratic society endless and innovative inside the American society.

Endnotes

¹ Richard Bellamy, *Political Constitutionalism: A Republican Defense of the Constitutionality of Democracy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007), p.78.

² *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford Dictionaries, 2012).

³ *The Concise OED*, *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989), p.1120.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

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- ⁶ See definition 2. a. of entry “radical, a.” in OED, (1989).
- ⁷ See definition 3. a. of entry “radical, a.” in OED, (1989).
- ⁸ Fox did not accept the notion that the property would be safe in a democratic society in which the property-less voters would obviously be in a majority.
- ⁹ *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2006), p. 365. p.1184.
- ¹⁰ <http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radical>. Accessed March 4, 2014.
- ¹¹ <http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radical>. Accessed April 3, 2014.
- ¹² See definition 3. b. of entry “radical, a.” in OED, (1989).
- ¹³ See definition 3. e. of entry “radical, a.” in OED, (1989).
- ¹⁴ See definition 3. e. of entry “radical, a.” in OED, (1989).
- ¹⁵ See definition 3. e. of entry “radical, a.” in OED, (1989).
- ¹⁶ Timothy Patrick McCarthy, John Campbell, op.cit., p.3
- ¹⁷ *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2006), p. 365.
- ¹⁸ Paul McLaughlin, *Radicalism :a Philosophical Study* (Palgrave Macmillan:2012),p. 22.
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- ²⁶ Nelson, Robert. “Society of Souls: Spirit, Friendship, and the Antebellum Reform Imagination.” Ph.D. dissertation, (William & Mary university,2006),p.69.
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- ²⁹ Jentz, John B. *Artisans, Evangelicals, and the City: A Social History of the Labor and Abolitionist Movements in Jacksonian New York*, Ph.D. dissertation, City (University of New York, 1977), p.123.
- ³⁰ Other titles: KOL; Noble Order of the Knights of Labor knights of Labor (KOL), first important national labour organization in the United States, founded in 1869. Named the Noble Order of the Knights of Labor by its first leader, Uriah S. Stephens, it originated as a secret organization meant to protect its members from employer retaliations.
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- ³² Howard Cincotta, *An Outline of American History*, (United States Information Agency, 1994), p.86.
- ³³ <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/populist.html>. Accessed November 12, 2014.
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- ³⁵ James H. Cone, *Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Orbis Books), p. 234.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 236.
- ³⁷ It is a radical leftist political movement that was active especially during the 1960s and 1970s, composed largely of college students and young intellectuals.
- ³⁸ See Daniel Geary, *Radical Ambition: C. Wright Mills, the Left, and American Social Thought* (University of California Press, 2009) and A. Javier Trevino, *The Social Thought of C. Wright Mills* (Pine Forge Press, 2011)
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- ⁵¹ Ramachandra Guha ,*Environmentalism: A Global History*, (Longman, 2000), p .16.
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- ⁵⁴ Timothy Patrick McCarthy, John Campbell,op.cit., p.xi
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- ⁵⁹ Ibid., For more details , see Barack Obama, *The Audacity of hope :Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (New York :Crown,2006).