

## *The Origins of American Republicanism*

### جذور الفكر الجمهوري الأمريكي

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**\*Dr. Houria Mihoubi**

**Mohamed Boudiaf University - M'sila**

**houria.mihoubi@univ-msila.dz**

#### **Abstract:**

*The topic of the present research paper revolves around the origins of American republicanism. The paper focuses on the first seeds of this political thought, which is the cornerstone of all the political and social transformations and developments that the American society has known throughout its modern history. The research concludes that American republicanism was the result of the impact of religion, philosophy, and history on the Founding Fathers of the New Nation.*

**Keywords:** *Origins, American, Republicanism, religion, philosophy.*

#### **الملخص:**

يتمحور موضوع المقال حول جذور الفكر الجمهوري الأمريكي، فالبحث ليس عرضاً لإنجازات هذا الفكر السياسي في المجتمع الأمريكي ولا هو قراءة لتاريخ الفكر الجمهوري بقدر ما هو تتبع لأصول هذا الفكر الذي يعتبر حجر الأساس لكل التحولات والتطورات السياسية والاجتماعية التي عرفها المجتمع الأمريكي عبر التاريخ الحديث للولايات المتحدة الأمريكية، ويخلص البحث ان لهذا الفكر الذي نتج عنه الفكر الديمقراطي الحديث جذورا تمتد إلى ما قبل تأسيس الدولة الامريكية الحديثة. الكلمات المفتاحية: جذور، الفكر، الجمهوري، الأمريكي.

**\*Author Sent: Houria Mihoubi**

**Introduction:**

*The topic of the present research paper revolves around the roots of American republicanism. In fact, the research is neither a presentation of the achievements of the republican thought in the American society, nor is a reading of the history of republicanism, but rather it is a tracing of the origins of this thought. In reality, republicanism is the cornerstone of all the political and social transformations and developments that the American society has known throughout the modern history of the United States of America.<sup>1</sup>*

*The Republican thought, paved the way for various radical movements, which all focused on the principles of justice, freedom, and equality, called for change towards everything that is better and to everything that is democratic in the modern sense. In other words, the republican is someone who aims to democratize everything in life.<sup>2</sup>*

*This study stems from the idea that republicanism is any movement or behavior that aims at reform that is often democratic, and here it can be said that any reformist thought can be considered radical, as republicanism is not necessarily extremism that may start with reform or change and may reach the point of extremism.*

*It is worth noting that in the present research, one can consider republicanism as any ideology that serves social and political reform, including radical ideology, which is considered in American history as the main pillar and original conduct of what is called today the democratic system. knowing that , and in the American sense, it is difficult to notice the difference between the republican system, as a political system that guarantees the values of individual freedoms in society, and the democratic system that guarantees the people to govern themselves <sup>3</sup>. So, what are the first seeds of the republican thought that gave birth to American democracy?*

**1-The American Republican Thought**

*History has proven that the republican ideology is what made the American people rise up and set off the American Revolution that liberated them from the grip of the British colonialists, thus adopting a liberating republican ideology based on clear foundations of justice, freedom and equality. Interesting is the idea that the t republican ideology did wane with the independence of America, but rather it continued its political and social achievements, liberating all American society under the banner of republican movements that called for uprising and achieving what is best*

for the American individual. For instance, the feminist republican movement helped women find a prominent and better - place within the American society.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to that, a group known as advocates of the abolition of slavery have emerged in American society, and they were from different groups of society, blacks, whites, men and even women. This republican movement had a great impact on improving the status of the black individual in the predominantly white American society. It is interesting to note that even the environment has benefited from the republican ideology that has been active under the banner of the so-called environmental movement and called for the protection of all living things, including animals and plants.

Therefore, it is necessary in this present paper to focus on the roots of this thought in American history. In reality, one can consider three main roots as sources of the American republican thought, which are historical, religious and philosophical roots.

## **2-The Historical Roots**

Because of the strong historical connection between Britain and the United States of America, one can never exclude the great impact of British radicalism on the American political thought. The Americans are, in fact, British who came to the New World, imbued with British culture and influenced by several social and political factors that the British individual lived and coexisted with .

Actually, one who looks into the history of the British political thought may conclude that prior to the seventeenth century, and precisely after the British Civil War that could put an end to monarchy in Britain, British society experienced an unprecedented democratic movement in British history. This movement was the result of the liberal reformist republican thought that prevailed in that era of British history and led to the emergence of reform movements calling for equality, justice, freedom of the press and most importantly, a demand for popular participation in the conduct of state affairs.

Among the popular radical groups that have emerged in British society, one can mention the so-called Levellers and Diggers who called for the drafting of a constitution for the country. Important is the idea that many of the principles of this British radical ideology had a great impact on the educated generation that led the American Revolution, which in turn adopted many of them and made them principles of the infant community, the United States of America. Among these principles is freedom of

political practice, the right to vote, the right of the people to participate in political life, freedom of expression and the press, and religious freedom or liberty of conscience.<sup>5</sup>

### **3-The Religious Roots**

The reader of American history will notice that one of the most important reasons that led large groups of British society to immigrate to the New World, i.e. America, is the search for religious freedom. Significantly enough, British society lived a period in the sixteenth century that historians called the period of great persecution. The regime at that time, which was royal and ecclesiastical at the same time, persecuted anyone who wanted to purify religion from the rituals that they considered corrupting the Christian religion.<sup>6</sup>

Significantly, these radical religious groups expressed their resentment at everything that is foreign to the Christian religion, and called for a great religious revolution. The Catholic clergy who saw in this thought a rebellion against religion had to find a solution to preserve the stability of the Church and the country at the same time. Among the most important of those who led the campaign of persecution was a cleric named William Laud, who led a war on anyone who expressed an objection to what the church was doing.

This religious radical thought was considered as an anti-Catholic thought, and; therefore, the kings of Britain at that time saw the necessity not to allow this group to penetrate into British society. For this reason, the advocates of religious reform in British society had to be active in secret and this is one of the most important characteristics of British political and religious radicalism.

It is no wonder that after this rejection by the religious and royal authorities in Britain, the religious reformers saw that they should immigrate to the so-called New World in order to establish sound rules for true Christianity, which in their view should abandon all complex rituals. Religion in their view should be based on simplicity and justice and Equality. They were convinced that Christianity had long been subject to distortion and fraud and it was time to right the wrong and purify the corrupt religious doctrines.

One must draw attention to the important idea that America as a newly settled land and was, therefore, the destination of many radical clerics who wanted to establish the so-called pious or godly society. Soon, many of them collided with the idealism of what they believed in, and the leaders of the young community in America, who are the main men of the

church, saw that religious freedom could not be achieved as strict laws must be applied to preserve the stability of society, and thus they controlled the church. This led to the emergence of protests and divisions in society.

It is worth noting in this context, that most of the residents of Massachusetts Bay, which is the colony of religious background in America, saw that there must be a radical reform to the church by giving the common people the opportunity to freely practice religion and read the Bible instead of making it the monopoly of the churchmen. They also saw that religion should not be centered in the person of a cleric or place, but rather a spiritual relationship between the Creator and his Lord and it is based on justice between people.<sup>7</sup>

Among the most important religious figures who have adopted liberal and republican thinking and reformers are Roger Williams and Ann Hutchinson, who have called for the separation of religion from the state and for the necessity of applying the principle of freedom of belief<sup>8</sup>. In fact, these two radicals are credited with Laying down the rules and foundations for modern radical movements in American society. The radical feminist movement that defended the rights of women to participate in public life goes back to what Anne Hutchinson called for in the seventeenth century. The radical movement calling for the rejection of racism, reminds us of what Roger Williams called for during his reign when he denounced the injustice of the American authorities - and behind it the Church - against the American Indians.<sup>9</sup>

Williams attacked the governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony, John Winthrop, for depriving the natives, who are the Indians, of their lands under the pretext that they were not Christians. He saw that there was no justification for racism and imperialism in a world in which all people were born free, and he considered that freedom and justice are considered among the natural rights of every human being on the face of the earth, including freedom of belief.<sup>10</sup>

#### **4-The Philosophical Roots**

In addition to its historical and religious roots, American republicanism had philosophical roots. Indeed, the generation of the American Revolution was largely indoctrinated with European philosophy, especially the philosophy of the so-called Renaissance and Enlightenment thinkers, the period in which the emergence of philosophers had a great impact on nourishing and strengthening republican thought not only in the Old Continent, but also in the New Continent.

*It is important to note that the political system in Europe in the pre-seventeenth century was royal. The church had a great role to play with the king, who believed that he had a divine mandate allowing him to control his flock as he pleased. the philosophers of the Renaissance, the first of whom was the Englishman Thomas Hobbes, could demonstrate that the theory of the divine mandate, which had long been adopted by the kings of Europe, was just a myth and had no basis in truth and logic.*

*Thomas Hobbes came up with the theory of the Social Contract that puts an end to the absolute monarchy that resulted in injustice and corruption in European societies. In fact, the Social Contract is a theory based on the fact that the political system is the result of a contract between the ruler and the ruled in order to put an end to the state of nature, which is the origin of societies.*

*Indeed, the Social Contract organizes the political life and establishes rights and duties, as well as the civil state. This political theory became one of the most important roots of the republicanism on which democracy is built as a modern system of government.<sup>11</sup>*

*For his part, John Locke contributed to laying the foundations of modern republican thought through the theory of revolution. In this political theory, Locke believes that it is the right and the duty of the convicted person to freely separate or change him.*

*As for Jean Jack Rousseau, the French philosopher who had always defended human rights, he had a great influence in pushing republicanism, simply because he adopted a republican liberation thought in defense of the values that could achieve a better life for the average person in society. Moreover, he was credited with laying the foundations for human rights in their modern sense.<sup>12</sup>*

*The generation of the American Revolution, among them Thomas Jefferson admitted that he had read John Locke's book *The Treaty of Government* twice and he admitted that he had been strongly influenced by the thought of the French Voltaire.<sup>13</sup>*

*In fact, the effect of the republican philosophy of the Enlightenment was evident in the principles upon which the American state was built. Thomas Jefferson, in the Declaration of American Independence, set forth the principles that the republicans have always adopted as self-evident truths and considered them as the basis of the American character that should be adopted by everyone who wants to bring about reform in society.<sup>14</sup>*

*The American movement, Transcendentalism, whose pioneer was the famous philosopher and literary man Henry David Thoreau, who enriched with his republican ideas what he called the right of the individual to civil disobedience against unjust authorities. Actually, Transcendentalism as a political movement known in the history of the United States America was nothing but an activation of the aforementioned principles of freedom and justice.*

*In the end, one can conclude by saying that the roots of American republicanism extend to pre-America. It is, in fact, an extension of a liberal thought coming from Europe. The European monarchy did not give it an opportunity to revive and appear on the surface because of the complexities of society and its components. By contrast, the American society - and due to its modernity - had a fertile climate for this thought in order to develop and grow to change society to a better one, and perhaps this is the difference between the old continent's political thought and the new continent's republicanism.*

*In line with this, it is worth noting that the republican ideology that has long suffered from persecution in the European continent has become one of the principles of the American society, which has adopted democracy as a political system based on freedom, justice, equality, and the rule of the people for themselves.*

*Perhaps, one of the most prominent objectives of this research is to shed light on the impact of the French republican philosophy represented by the thought of John Jacques Rousseau, which has always been absent from the study. In this context, one should stress the very important fact that the American Founding fathers who set forth the principles of American republicanism were not only influenced by British radicalism or political thought, but also benefited from French experiences with regard to the political and social struggle.*

### **Conclusion:**

*The present research demonstrates that in studying the American republican thought one should not eliminate the hallmarks of the reformist movements of the Christian religion, since the idea of the Promised Land that prevailed in past centuries still dominates the American republican thought, but with a new concept. The defenders of republicanism and democracy in America today want to make this land promised through guaranteeing the basic freedoms of the individual within society through their continuous and relentless struggle to guarantee and protect human rights .*

Perhaps, the American idea of exporting to all over the world is a clear evidence of a republican project with global features, because the radicals in America are striving to globalize American republicanism and democracy.

The exceptionalism of the American society is, therefore; the result of a purely republican and liberal thought that has its roots in pre-American times. It is not a purely American thought, but rather an extension of a thought that has always been fought in the Old Continent and finally found an outlet for it in a New World, the latter that opened up horizons for new ideas and revealed new facts about how society should be.

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