

The Language of Liberty Series



An Experiment in Self Government and Tyranny

By Laine Norton, CSG Student

As a sophomore in high school, I am required to take American History for my history credit. I have always loved history, and especially the history of our nation, but this class completely changed my view on government and human nature. On the very first day of class my teacher, Mrs. Denton, made it very clear that period 4B history was now under what she called “Teacher’s Rules”.

As part of the curriculum, Mrs. Denton developed a simulation replicating the struggle for American independence. She was the queen and we were her royal subjects, divided into colonies. Mrs. Denton appointed a parliament and started establishing simple classroom rules with strict consequences. I was fine with these rules because they kept a focused learning environment. Soon, these rules became unreasonable. At first these rules just bothered me, but then one day I fell victim to one of the outrageous laws. These laws added injustice and were established so the government would be feared by its subjects.

As our class studies approached the signing of the Declaration of Independence, I got really tired of these rules. I decided to rebel, but in a peaceful manner. My plan was to get the colonies to declare our independence. Soft-spoken people who I never imagined would disobey the class rules were willing to help, but people who I thought would jump on board in a second were afraid of their grade dropping. I started to get many people from other classes on board, but I was missing the support from my class. So, I asked Andrew Teague to help me. Andrew is very well respected, and he helped our class on our road to independence.

I sent an email to Mrs. Denton declaring our independence and stating that I had been chosen as an ambassador to keep peaceful relations between our new country and her majesty’s kingdom. She responded saying that she would be happy to talk to us about independence.

The next class period, Mrs. Denton explained that we could be free if we wrote and unanimously signed a declaration declaring our independence and completed an in class assignment. Both Andrew and I were nominated as the chairman of the convention. Andrew won, which I was fine with me because I felt like we had built a relationship and he would listen to my ideas.

To divide the work and do it efficiently, Andrew divided the class in half. Half worked on the Declaration and half worked on the class assignment. He purposefully assigned me to the class assignment and himself to the declaration. Trusting in his judgment, I helped with the class assignment. My group finished early so I started listening and watching what was happening.

Andrew started to become what he hated most: a tyrant. He shut down people’s thoughts, told them that they were stupid, and made people conform to his ideas. After many long and tedious discussions, we got our class declaration of independence signed unanimously.

As a new country, we needed to establish a constitution. A president of the class constitutional convention needed to be chosen. I was elected as this president. As we started to have discussions, I noticed that the class was getting really crazy and talkative. Then I realized

why. Just like the Founding Fathers did when writing the Articles of Confederation, I was leaning too far towards anarchy.

When coming out of an oppressive circumstance, in fear to keep freedom alive, it is natural to fall towards the opposite extreme. I realized that I was looking for special privileges and wanting everyone to acknowledge that I was their leader. I could feel that tug of wanting more control, just like Andrew felt. When given just a little bit of control, it is easy to start to assume more control.

Within about two weeks, the Constitution was signed and ratified by everyone in the class. Within a couple of class periods, it became obvious that some amendments needed to be made. Self-government is always a work in progress, and a self-governing society will never be created in one attempt.

For a couple more months, the amended Constitution helped our class to run smoothly. John, a close friend of Andrew, was elected as the class president. Soon after, Andrew proposed an amendment to the Constitution abolishing the states.

One day in class, Andrew was grading an assignment that was worth 10% of my final grade when he told me that if I wanted to get an A, that I had to join in on the plan to make John the supreme dictator. As someone who cares a lot about their grades, I wanted to get a good grade on this assignment, but I also did not want to join in on this tyrannical plot. So I decided to say that I would join them in their plan, but work against it behind the scenes.

Andrew, John, and I went around to the states discussing Andrew's plan. Instead of convincing people to make John the king, I told them that this plan would defeat what we had worked so hard towards - a republican form of government.

Regardless of my efforts to convince them otherwise, Congress passed the proposition to make John the "supreme ruler". John appointed Andrew to be the chancellor of this monarchy, and immediately got rid of the states. Without the states, no one would be able to interfere with the control of John and Andrew.

I wish that I could say that this experience in 4B American History ended with everyone living happily ever after in a republic. Instead, we ended up with a monarchy that no one was really happy with, except for those few who benefited from it. I learned that a republic is hard to keep.

Thomas Jefferson wrote, *"The qualifications for self government in society are not innate. They are the result of habit and long training."* Today, Americans young and old are accustomed to living in a passive democracy and many do not participate in true republic-keeping actions. Just like John, Andrew and I felt the tug of wanting more control.

This class exercise taught me that the human inclination to dominate and control others interferes with our desire for America to be a republic, and we fall back into the natural tendencies of a monarchy or the mob-rule mentality of a democracy.

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