

Reflecting on Revolution: Seeds to Harvest

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Introduction

The examination of historical revolutions, revolutionary theory, and the definition of revolution itself is a complicated beast. Revolution is a noun, it is a verb, in some forms it can be an adjective. The word itself is an embodiment of its definition, making learning about it a complicated process. An analogy used in the American College of Education course “Revolution: Revolutionary Change in the Historical Record” provides a way to not only illustrate the meaning and action of revolution, but a skillful method for students of all ages to understand it as well. This analogy frames revolution as equivalent to a plant, with a life cycle that runs from seed to harvest, with roots resulting from various elements. This comparison not only aided in my own understanding of revolution at its core, but will prove a useful teaching tool as I progress through my career as a social studies educator.

Reflection

Summary of Learning

The analogy begins with the idea that revolution, or dramatic change, stems from countercultural roots. This counterculture usually is incited from one of these three things, or a combination thereof: political, economic, social, or religious factors (Demarkis, 2021). Take the 1960s, for example: the counterculture movement wanted to break away from the status quo, challenging the “Establishment” (Mettler, 2015). Activists were driven to break away from the way society expected them to act and start new efforts to change their future. These roots encouraged them to start planting seeds of change.

The seeds in the analogy have much of the same makeup as the roots. They are made of the base ideas that drive the revolution and incite people to desire change. The spread of the

seeds is how momentum for revolutionary ideas grow and gather support. A charismatic leader can fertilize the seeds as they are spread. Take Che Guevara. The Marxist Cuban has been dead for fifty five years, yet he is still seen on t-shirts, murals, and other iconography around the world (PBS, 1997). He continues to be admired for his daring, his faith, his youthful ideology-while his executions and “anti-Yankee” convictions are overlooked (PBS, 1997). Che planted the right seeds and used his talents as a leader to gain a legion support that continues to romanticize him and his cause decades later.

From these seeds the revolutionary cause germinates, and just what variety of revolutionary action it will produce becomes evident. The activities that take place during a revolutionary event can vary widely, but generally fall under one of two categories: peaceful protests, such as marches, or violent protests and riots (Demarkis II, 2021). Clear examples of both types can be found over the centuries, and even within the same change-making periods, such as during the Civil Rights Movement. During the Civil Rights Movement, the U.S. observed the peaceful encouragement of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. juxtaposed with the urgings of Fred Shuttlesworth and Malcom X. (Nimtz, 2016).

Once revolution has come to fruition, there are harvests to be made. The end goal of the revolutionaries is always the target, but rarely the only result. Sometimes these reap rotten fruits, such as in the case of the Russian Revolution, where millions were killed by hunger, violence, and preventable disease in a few short years (Carey, n.d.). In other situations, fruits can benefit the perpetrators of the action, or the masses at large, like the feminist movement, which has promoted equality between men and women and advanced the position of women in leadership roles over the decades (Schniedewind, 1987). Harvests might be made in the moment, or may be

continued to be enjoyed as years continued, such as rock & roll music in its evolution from the counterculture movement to continued progression today.

If revolutions are successful, even to an extent, over time they become the “new normal”. They are no longer counterculture, but common culture, and the scene is set for the next radical change on the horizon. A key element in the “next step” is youth. Young people have played the role of gardener many times over history when we think about who is growing from the roots; spreading, planting, and harvesting the seeds of revolution. Youth have driven social change numerous times over human history (Hamza & Pierce, 2019). This is why it is essential to share information about revolution to today’s students-not just information about revolutionary events of the past, but revolutionary theory and outcomes.

Application

The roots to harvest analogy comparing revolution to a plant was not only excellent to improve my own understanding, it would be a superb instructional tool for my middle school classroom. While at the middle school level, my students will not be deconstructing revolution on the same scale as my classmates and I, it is important for them to gain a foundational understanding of why revolutions happen, how they spread, and what results they have on populations. An example of how the plant analogy can be applied to my curriculum would be to invite students to apply it to a historical event they are studying. They can break it down piece by piece, determining the roots of the revolutionary ideas, the seeds of counterculture and who is spreading them, what directions the events of the revolution take, and what fruits result. Determining these elements will improve students’ comprehension of what revolution means while they learn about impactful events in history.

In my role as a middle school history teacher, part of my job is to prepare my students for their transition to high school (Mac Iver & Ruby, 2022). Introducing students to skills that enable them to interpret and analyze revolution progresses them towards this goal. Another target of my profession is to prepare students to be productive and informed citizens as they age.

Unfortunately, there is a lack of basic civic education among the American populace (i.e. only one in four can name the three branches of government) (Winthrop, 2020). Therefore, civics education has become an essential part of education from elementary through secondary school. Learning about revolutions and revolutionary theory offers middle schoolers a unique perspective on a variety of political and social landscapes, and in turn, opportunities to deepen their understanding of civics topics.

Conclusion

Though the study of revolution seems intimidating and convoluted at first, there are ways to break the components down for comprehension, such as the roots to harvest analogy. Not only is this analogy helpful for the advanced student, but it can be applied at all levels of learning, such as for my middle school learners. Revolution has long been an integral part of society, and will continue to be. As a result, it is essential that as productive citizens, we gain a comprehension of the process and its theories, and pass this knowledge on to the next generation of revolutionaries.

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