



American Soul: The Contested Legacy of the Declaration of Independence

Justin Buckley Dyer

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The Declaration of Independence has been the subject of competing interpretations since its adoption by the Continental Congress on the Fourth of July 1776, and for nearly two and a half centuries the political ideas expressed in its preamble have inspired reform movements both at home and abroad. From the early debates on the nature of the American Republic to abolitionism, progressivism, the civil rights movement, and contemporary debates about American economic and foreign policy, the Declaration is, as it has been, a vibrant and dynamic, though perennially disputed, source of American ideals.

The present volume brings together a variety of speeches and writings related to the contested meaning and legacy of the Declaration of Independence, and the various documents assembled together demonstrate how competing interpretations of the Declaration have shaped, and been shaped by, political conflict in America. The Declaration is perhaps our "national soul," as Charles Sumner wrote in 1860, but Americans have rarely spoken of it with one voice. *American Soul: The Contested Legacy of the Declaration of Independence* paints, with broad strokes, a picture of the debates that have shaped a nation.

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