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March 7, 2018

Regional Autonomy

Divisions within society are caused by numerous things, however a major contributor to a conflicting community is the combining of cultures. Diversity of cultures has recently increased significantly because of the ease of travel. The increase of cultural diversity and ultimately cultural differences, in turn, has made it easy for conflicts to arise in these communities. Therefore, regional autonomy has grown popular because of the increase of conflict in cultural differences. Autonomy “refers to the capacity and right of a country or other jurisdiction to govern itself.” (Rolando Y. Wee) Regional discusses how the geography or environment plays into the area of the community. Regional autonomy ultimately is how many cultures today wish to liberate themselves from oppressive governments that don’t let them achieve their cultural independence.

The history of America offers a prime example of a melting pot of cultures. Early in the 1600s, as people first settled North America, they could be separated by geography. Pilgrims went north for religious tolerance, while entrepreneurs went south for farming. However, the colonies separation wouldn’t last forever. Times changed, and a unified United States was needed to bring several different cultures together. Their ideals clashed for decades until finally, one American said enough and their differences would have to be finally settled. Abraham Lincoln led the charge to unify America under one cultural belief. The Civil War and the years of

struggle for equality after demonstrated how differences in cultural beliefs can lead to division within society. It also showed how these differences rose up in different geographic regions. These regional differences play a major role in conflicts which is why a majority of cultural differences occur between geographically separated cultures.

The United States also had a large increase of immigration in the late 1800s and early 1900s due to economic opportunity. Many Europeans came to America in search of a better life, and they brought along their own personal beliefs and ideas. This diversity of ideas forced immigrants to be adverse with American citizens and their ideals. This was a different reason and situation in which cultural differences led to conflict. People from different backgrounds were coming all across America in search of a job that forced them to blend their cultural differences. If they had not done so, society wouldn't accept them as their own.

A more local and personal issue of regional autonomy is the idea of Calexit. The California Freedom Coalition says "It is the intent of the People of the State of California that California become a fully-functioning sovereign and autonomous nation, whether within continued association with the United States of America or as an independent country, peacefully through negotiation with the federal government of the United States". (Jason Le Miere) Calexit would include California separating from the rest of the union and making its own government. Supporters of this feel that they are being misrepresented at the federal level of government. However, the Calexit proposal has been recurring for several years and has taken many shapes. In 2016, it took the shape as the State of Jefferson where the northern and eastern side of California wished to separate because of political views. Calexit shows how cultural differences are not the only reason why regional autonomy has become popular in recent years.

Although the United States, specifically California has been a breeding ground for cultural and political conflict, there are numerous places around the world that have had similar conflicts. Spain has been the center of attention on this issue recently. A region in Spain known as Catalonia has been petitioning for its independence for years. Its desire to be autonomous is rooted in the formation of the country, however the cultural aspects of Catalonia aren't the only dividing factor between itself and the rest of Spain. "It's one of the wealthiest regions of Spain - it accounts for 19 percent of Spain's GDP, equal with the Madrid region." (Harriet Alexander) The wealth of the region makes citizens feel as if they are carrying the rest of the country economically. This division has led extremists to argue for regional autonomy from the rest of Spain.

Regional autonomy is an idea based on people's cultural backgrounds, and how they believe the area they are from should contribute on how they are governed. Throughout history, autonomy has been an influential factor in how nations are formed. From the example of the thirteen colonies and their independence from Great Britain, to the europeans coming over into the US and being forced to adopt; all show the division that can be created from people merging together from different backgrounds. More recently, Calexit and Catalonia show how time does not solve the issue of regional autonomy. Spain has been fighting over its land since its creation, until finally in 1715 when all the states were united under one government. Regional autonomy brings out divisions with society because the right to rule yourself, is a right everyone wishes to have.

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