

American Democracy Condition in 1950's as Reflected in Allen Ginsberg's *America*

Indah Fajaria

indahfajaria@teknokrat.ac.id

STBA Teknokrat

Abstract

This article discusses the American Democracy in 1950's as reflected in Irwin Allen Ginsberg's America. In order to reach the goals, this thesis uses Mimetic approach to explicate the problem statement clearly and the library research. The data used in this research are, obviously, all lines of Irwin Allen Ginsberg's America. The poem is treated as the source of primary data. I also employ several corresponding references from books and internet sites as secondary data sources. The supporting reference, especially about the concept of democracy and the review of American Democracy in 1950's are concluded as secondary data. After I analyze the problem in the fourth chapter, then I take some conclusions of the analysis. I found that the content of the poem focuses on what America is doing to itself and its people through the decision that it makes. Here Ginsberg speaks the mind of Americans who were at the time isolated from the mainstream society. He expresses the collective fear of the imminent threat of nuclear war. He also elaborates on the feeling that the entire country was run by the media.

Key Words: American democracy, imminent threat.

Introduction

America in what is now also called the United States is run into "melting pot" which consists of Pluralism Ethnicities from many lands around the world. Most settlers who came to America were English, but there were also Dutch, Swedes, and Germans in the middle region, a few French Huguenots in South Carolina and elsewhere, slaves from Africa, primarily in the South, and a scattering of Spaniards, Italians and Portuguese throughout the colonies.

My concern here is with the deeply understanding of American Democracy Government in 1950's that is constitutional Government which is influenced by Western democracies. Set by The democratic constitution as a body of fundamental rules which the government of the day cannot change of its own free will, and which is, at the same time, a censor of governmental actions. It can be also called as constitutional democracies.

Democracy in fifties is an issue that becomes so interested after I read an amazing poem that was an outspoken of Civil Right to get the Great Service of Government's leading. A poem entitled "America" by Allen Ginsberg reveals his democratic vistas. "America" was made by World War influence, either World War I or II. Here Allen Ginsberg picture out the American democracy icon in 1956 which give him special inspiration in appearing his new literary work.

Allen Ginsberg as one of American authors in the fifties shows that on that period all of them are very uncomfortable in the post-war world. The new political fears and government system (of communism and the Bomb) are less important to them than their own psychological problems in the New American Society that absolutely influence their democracy system.

One of the most widely current phrases of the Second World War was the designation of the countries in arms against the axis at the "Freedom-loving Nations." (Danielson, et.al. 1990:70)

From all explanation obtained, I decide to analyze American democracy condition in 1950's as reflected in Allen Ginsberg's *America* as my thesis.

Theoretical Framework

Concept of Democracy

Americans have organized their government as a kind of democracy. Democracy is not an American invention. Ancient Greek-city States used democratic procedures. In fact, the world itself has Greek origins: *demos* mean people and *kraits* means authority. Literally, democracy means the authority of the people.

Democracy is a system of government by all the people of a country, usually through representative whom they elect, thought as allowing freedom of speech, religion and political opinion. (Hornby, 1995:344).

Review of American Democracy in 1950's

At postwar including in 1950's there is a crack in the mass consciousness of America – sudden emergence of insight into a vast national subconscious netherworld filled with nerve gases, universal death bombs, malevolent bureaucracies, secret police system, drugs that open the door to God, ships leaving Earth, unknown chemical terrors, evil dreams at hand. America is having a nervous breakdown. (Ginsberg: 2004).

In the middle of those condition above American democracy has been already in long process to be better. American democracy in 1950's is about indirect democracy or a republic assumed people control their representatives. Set by constitutional government. Government is an essential instrument of man in society for ensuring an adequate measure of stability in society.

American conception of democracy in fifties that the people of the World fall into two categories those who love freedom and those who do not have as a simple matter of moral choice that has caused Americans to hope falsely that other countries will embrace democracy as they understand it, and to misconstrue badly the reason for their failure to do so.

Method

I use mimetic approach to support my analysis here. Since my thesis focuses on the reflection of American democracy condition in 1956 as the referential and inspires Allen Ginsberg to write *America*.

Plato stated that mimetic in a literary work is a reflection that becomes the representation from the reality. In the other side, Aristotle argued that mimetic is not only an imitation, not only the portrait of reality, but it already passed the personal awareness of the author (Aminuddin, 2000: 115). I applied the definition of mimetic approach based on Abrams stated that :

“The mimetic orientation – the explanation of art as essentially an imitation of aspect of the universe – was probably the most primitive aesthetic theory, but mimesis is no simple concept by the time it makes its first recorded appearance in the dialogue of Plato. The arts of painting, poetry, music, dancing and sculpture, Socrates says, are all imitations. “Imitation” is a relational term, signifying two items and some correspondence between them”. (Abrams, 1976 : 8).

Discussion

America is a model and an image-making work for its readers; it does speak to the people and in a sense, speak for them. The work addresses issues of Democratic Vistas, cultural acceptance, war and peace and the powerlessness of the people, the dominance and control of the media and the motivation of Americans toward self-action. (Wright, 2004).

Democracy Condition in People side

During the 1950's, a sense of uniformity pervaded American society. Conformity was common, as young and old alike followed group norms rather than striking out on their own. Though man and woman had been forced into new employment patterns during World War II, its atmosphere still influence the social life as seen for example in these lines:

*America I've given you all and now I'm nothing.
America two dollars and twentyseven cents January 17, 1956.
I can't stand my own mind.
(Stanza 1, lines 1-3)*

Ginsberg begins his vistas of American Democracy in 1950's in the middle of the issue I have explained above he tried to revealed out his thought, express his voice to the nation. “America I've given you all and now I'm nothing” this statements as a mode of reaching the masses and conveying a message of self-expression.

He feels nothing to be an American so by this poem he tries to reveal out his voice to government. Then he emphasizes that only “...twenty seven cents...” he survives in January 17, 1956 the time when he wrote the poem, miserable things at the moment as American ones.

Lines 3 emphasize the stream of consciousness, his confusion of being an American at that time, he does not know whether or not doing the next to do for his existence. Through the concept of political equality reveals how an American get the Political rights to express their opinion even by the poem as the only way.

The new constitution shows the impact of democratic ideas. None made any drastic break with the past, since all were built on the solid foundation of colonial experience and English practice. But each is also animated by the spirit of Republicanism, an ideal that had long been praised by Enlightenment philosophers.

Democracy Condition in Political side

Government officials and many other Americans discovered the connection between racial problems and Cold War politics in Post-World War. As the leader of the Free World, The United States sought support in Africa and Asia. Discrimination at home impeded the effort to win friends in other parts of the world. The war-actions never end in getting world's sympathetic. Through that condition Ginsberg stated :

*America when will we end the human war?
Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb.
I don't feel good don't bother me.
I won't write my poem till I'm in my right mind.
America when will you be angelic?
When will you take off your clothes?
When will you look at yourself through the grave?
When will you be worthy of your million Trotskyites?
America why are your libraries full of tears?
America when will you send your eggs to India?
(Stanza 1, lines 4-13)*

Lines 4-6 emphasizes that Ginsberg existed and perceived the wrongdoings of the American Government policy, he represents the voice of the oppressed. As an American at that time he refuse of war-actions in getting world's sympathetic in facing the world's problems. Nevertheless personally how his voice can be heard by the government if the concepts of democracy process through the politic in the social life do not run well.

Economic difficulties after the war prompted calls for change. The end of the war had a serve effect on merchants who supplied the armies of both sides and who had lost the advantages deriving from participation in the British mercantile system. The states gave preference to American goods in their tariff policies, but these tariffs were inconsistent, leading to the demand for a stronger central government to implement a uniform policy. (Cincotta, 1994:84).

The mission of the government is to train communities through all their grades, beginning with individuals and ending there again, to rule themselves so here the concept of democracy should be clearly in running the nation.

"I don't feel good don't bother me" here Ginsberg argues the government to change its policy and laws about the problem I have explained above that he thinks unfair for American and abroad and hopefully the concept of political equality can be restored.

While Lines 7 emphasizes that he was writing his poem whether he was in the right mind or not in arguing the government. Then being angelic was the ideal mission of socio-life through the states so Ginsberg asked why it was only in theory of the government policy, in fact America was so far for being angelic of entire aspects.

Lines 8-13 elaborate the arrogance of being American as though its powerfulness could not be destroyed. America should realize that by its uniformity of being an American could not always guarantee to win everything in this world eternally.

Conclusion

America which was written by Irwin Allen Ginsberg in 1956, consists of three stanzas and seventy three lines. Irwin Allen Ginsberg, one of the Beat known contemporary poets in recent history presents "America" as the reflected of American Democracy Condition in 1950's through his democratic vistas.

Ginsberg badgers America like a parent scolding a child, blaming the nation for ignoring want and war and for forcing Ginsberg to "want to be a saint." his insistence on run-on sentences creates a peevish atmosphere, which suits a boyish confession, "I smoke marijuana every chance I get."

The second stave jerks at the lapels of Ginsberg's homeland with a curt, "I'm addressing you." in rebellion against the vision of America published in Time Magazine, the poet makes his discovery, "It occurs to me that I am America." by pairing self and country, Allen considers national enemies his personal foes. To remind the nation of its blunted purpose, he trivializes contemporary concerns over marijuana, sexuality, and censorship in the opening line of the third stave, which accuses America of fostering a "silly mood."

References

- Abrams, M.H. 1976. *Mirror and the Lamp*. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winstons.
- Aminuddin. 2000. *Pengantar Apresiasi Karya Sastra*. Bandung: PT Sinar Baru Algesindo Bandung.
- Cincotta, Howard. 1994. *An Outline of American History*. US Embassy Jakarta: United States Information Agency.
- Danielson, et.al. 1996. *Modern American Democracy Readings*. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston Inc.
- Hornby, AS. 1995. *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary*. Oxford University Press.
- Ginsberg, Allen. 2004. *Allen Ginsberg's Independent Day manifesto*. www. Google.com/articles. 20th August 2006.
- Sarah Wright. 2004. *Poetry Analysis*. www.gradesaver.com/Poetryanalysis/essay. Assessed on August 20, 2006