

Student Essay on The Impact of Literature on American History

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Essay

Since the discovery of our country, many influential and reflective American writers have inspired and molded American culture and history with their literary works. One will encounter that both Washington Irving and Samuel Clemens captures the culture of America at the time of their writing careers, while the Declaration of Independence was influenced by a work of Thomas Paine, and strong encouragement to separate from England was enraged by Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Literature has the power to take a snapshot of a time period with great detail. In his tales entitled Rip Van Winkle and The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, Washington Irving mimics American culture of the beginning of Romanticism in the Hudson Valley. Although the tales were of German descent, Irving Americanized the tales to capture the American way of life in the early eighteen hundreds. What makes his writings so adept is a remarkable plot woven with opposing feelings and opinions of the country during the transformation. During the time period of Conflict and Celebration, Clemens manages to reproduce his earlier years in a memoir, Life On the Mississippi. Using colloquial language, local dialect, and local color, a story particular only to American was created.

Beside capturing the culture of American, literature over the years influenced the course of American history forever. In 1776 during the Revolutionary Period, Thomas Paine created a pamphlet entitled Common Sense. This literary work was full of desire for separation from England which was a growing demand of the time. The Declaration of Independence was inspired by this work. Another work that inspired change was Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay, Self-Reliance in 1841. Once Emerson stated, "We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds." This quote along with Self-Reliance influenced the people of the New England Renaissance period to free themselves from European models.

America, therefore, is not only influenced and reflected by politics and pictures, but also literature, especially that of Irving, Clemens, Paine, and Emerson. Without literature as part of the American history, a personal view of the culture of American would not be documented. America might also still controlled by England and we may have no Declaration of Independence. Literature gives much more than entertainment to the reader and money to the author, but creates a lasting effect on the future generations.