

Self Discovery In The American Renaissance

Art is like a mirror with which the society views itself. Art is influenced first by how a particular community of people view themselves. As a result the community uses this view to construct or advocate the kind of community they would want. American renaissance was a period in history which led to the discovery of various works of art by Americans; furthermore it led to the discovery of important philosophies and ideologies concerning the American society. One would then have the perception that these aspects of the society were non-existent before this period. On the contrary they existed but it required the society to go through a period of self-discovery in order for people to be confident enough to express themselves in various forms of art and literature. People view or consider themselves in very many perspectives and that is why the aspect of self identity is very important. Identity is viewed by many in terms of race, religion, philosophical and political ideologies among others. Self identity may serve both as a diving factor or a unifying factor depending on how the differences are perceived. In the American society self identity has led to has led to the development of various forms of art and literature that have influenced the American culture. There is no single particular period in American history that has led to the creation of different forms of art and literature like the American Renaissance. This paper will look at some of the most important aspects about American renaissance and how one of the most important influence of the art and literature of this period was the aspect of self discovery.

The work of art and literature during the renaissance had very significant effects in the lives of both African-American and American whites in the same sense. Some of the literal works were purely fiction borne out of imagination while others were narration of true events in form of biographies. However regardless of the genre the works of literature was significant in bringing out various aspects concerning the society. For African-Americans among the issues addresses during the renaissance by various writers included aspects such as the place and role of African-Americans in the society. The areas addressed included racism, slavery and culture. The extent of analysis of these works of literature awakened the thirst by many African-Americans to advocate for a better life for them. However it was important that they first became conscious of their current situation and this role was brilliantly played by various works of literature. For instance in the biographical book "Incidents in the life of a Slave Girl" written by Harriet Jacobs, Harriet (2001:8) explains that although she was born a slave it never dawned on her until she had reached the age of six years. Her parents, although working hard to purchase freedom for them also tried very hard to hide from them the fact that they were slaves. This shows how even parents hid the truth from their children giving them normal lives but in real sense they were slaves. Jacobs' father was a very skilled carpenter and was very treasured for his good work but even this fact could not grant him the chance of buying freedom for his children let alone himself. Most African-Americans lived in denial of the fact that they were still considered slaves even if they could be professionals in various fields. Others just did not care because after all they had been given the privilege of earning a living. The role of telling the truth was therefore left to the work of various writers and poets during the American renaissance so that at least self discovery could be nurtured in the hearts of African-Americans. Jacobs further brings out another aspect of slave life that apparently made many African-American slaves oblivious and ignorant of the fact that they could have better opportunities in life if they were free. Jacobs explains that slave owners thrived on the ignorance of the slaves to lie to them that other slaves who had tried to escape or abandon their masters were living miserable lives. Jacobs criticizes them strongly when she says that: "you would have small respect for their veracity," (2001:36) when she describes the extent to which the slave masters lied to the slaves. That kind of boldness expressed by Jacobs in her words could only have been motivated by self discovery and the realization that the conditions that the slaves were living in were utterly unfair. The aspect of self discovery was particularly important for African-Americans and it became materialistic during their fight for equal rights and also the abolition of slavery. In the perspective of literature self discovery led to the emergence of African-American style of gospel music, delivery of sermons and music such as rap. These aspects have played important roles in the enrichment of the American culture in general owing to the role played by various writers and poets in nurturing self discovery within the African-American community. It also gave American whites the chance to understand and appreciate African-Americans.

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