

Crèvecoeur 's letters from an american farmer:rhetoric to define a new american l...

[Parts of the World](#), [Europe](#)



Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, the author of *Letters from an American Farmer*, was born in Normandy, France in 1735; he lived and traveled throughout America from 1759 to 1780, when he returned to Europe (22). He and his wife spent the latter half of their time in America on a farm on Orange County, New York (22). Because of his travels and experience in America, he had an excellent idea about the many ways the immigrants to America from Europe were conducting life and business in contrast to what they had experienced before as poor, landless people across the ocean. Crevecoeur's time in America saw the beginnings of the American Revolution, something for which he did not have sympathy. Crevecoeur successfully utilizes form, tone, rhetoric, and content to show that America has both positive and negative qualities that could make it a great place if its leaders and people make good choices.

One of the most notable aspects of *Letters* is the form that Crevecoeur selected for his writing, a letter format. The letter form of the writing allows him to discuss America from a voice of personal expertise and also in an intimate tone that allows the reader to feel as if the words are written to them. This means that the author does not need to stick to a strictly formal tone or style of writing, but can express thoughts and opinions that might not be appropriate in other forms. Crevecoeur's farmer's words are based in the facts of Crevecoeur's experiences; though the actual communication of the letters is a fiction, the information contained within are based on the author's own experiences. Therefore, because of his own experience in America, Crevecoeur enjoys a great deal of credibility.

Though Crevecoeur is not sympathetic to the American Revolution, he still

sees much positive in America that offers opportunities to many poor European countries that their home countries cannot. About the settlers, he writes that the settler should have national pride in the new world because America is a creation of fellow European countrymen who brought along with them the innovative ingenuity they learned back in their motherlands (23). Letters is written before America entered the Industrial Revolution, so the growing settlements that Crèvecoeur describes as so idyllic are primarily rural. To Crèvecoeur, the simple American way of life is ideal and works well to promote a profitable and moral way of life for its citizens. Crèvecoeur attributes this positive American nature of industry to the fact that the people do not have to work for anyone but themselves (23). Crèvecoeur appears to believe that the downtrodden people of Europe benefit from the large amount of American land still available as well as light governance from the distant mother country of the 13 colonies, England.

Crèvecoeur introduces a new rhetoric in his vision of what an American is, one that has lasted for centuries. Even though he states that the settlers come a variety of European countries from England to Sweden, he also states that many of these new immigrants did not have a country they could really say they came from (24). He does not mean that they literally came from nowhere, but follows this remark by questioning whether these downtrodden people who come from Europe can really be said to have a home country when these home countries appear to have not valued them at all and treated them very badly. After a description of how the poor of Europe have found success in America, he answers the question of what this new American is. He describes Americans as people who have left behind

their old European countries and America as a place where people's origins are intermixed to make a new people (25). This striking metaphor of the melting pot has lasted even throughout modern times. The idea of people coming together from many backgrounds to work for themselves rather than to support nobility and to make a better life for themselves and their children is the foundation of the American dream..

However, Crèvecoeur's goal is not to present America as entirely a paradise of perfect people, but as a place that has the possibility to be great if the right choices are made by its founders and its settlers. He renews his criticism of monarchies and kingdoms by stating that these types of systems of governments that gain power by using violence and fraud continue to use violence and fraud to expand their power until they are destroyed either by the long-term negative effects of using these tyrannical means to rule or by other, similarly tyrannical nations (26). He explains his need to make this criticism by recounting an experience in which he found a black slave who was being punished by left hanging in a cage to die; the slave's eyes are graphically described as having already been plucked out by wild creatures (27). This vivid description using personal testimony to relate an American scene of injustice against humanity is contrasted with the farmer's meeting with the owners who told him that in order to maintain order, they were forced to perform this kind of punishment on slaves (27). However, after the description of the cruel nature in which the slave is executed, by a slow and torturous death, the slave's owner's words have a false ring to them. When Crèvecoeur's criticisms are coupled with this description of slavery, it is clear that the author's intent is to show that a great nation cannot be founded on

the persecution of one group of people to support another. To him, there is no difference between the treatment of slaves in America as there was to the treatment of the settlers back in their home countries under the rule of monarchs.

Crèvecoeur's use of form, tone, rhetoric, and content offer an early view of America and the people who settled it to demonstrate to the world that a new and better way of life was possible even for the most downtrodden of individuals, if the evils of subjugation could be avoided. His own experiences give credibility to the opinions and descriptions provided throughout his letters. The positive aspects of Americans, such as their work ethic, ingenuity, and unobtrusive government, form the background to describe who Americans are and what the American dream is that have lasted even into the present day. Letters from an American Farmer is an interesting and influential piece that provides a thoughtful picture of American life as a nation just beginning to form.

Works Cited

Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur. " Letters from an American Farmer (1782)." Classic and Contemporary Reading for Composition. Ed. Igor Webb. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2008. 22-27. Print.