Differences between medieval and renaissance period

History, Middle Ages

Firstly, I think it's important to note the inevitable semantic debate that must be had here before you can properly address the question. 'Middle Ages' and 'Renaissance' can't be compared directly. They aren't two things that followed each other. 'Middle Ages' is a tag much like Antiquity, middle ages, early modern period, modern period. It is used to refer to a specific time frame. 'Renaissance' isn't used to refer to a period of time. It was a cultural movement. Now it did take place in the 14th to, arguably, 17th centuries (ish), but it wasn't a period of time as such. it was a movement. This can be shown in the fact that often you hear historians discussing different 'Renaissances'. For instance, whilst the Renaissance as most of us know it today began in Italy in the 14th century, those ideas did not really spread into northern Europe - and England is classed in alongside those - until the end of the 15th century and the beginnings of the 16th. So the cultural movement of the Renaissance impacts different areas of Europe at different times. Whereas the 'Early Modern period', or the 'Middle Ages' don't affect places at different times, they are roughly the same time period across the whole of Europe. I hope that helps to show the semantic difference between the two? However, that cultural movement did take place in the late Middle Ages and the early modern period, and spanned the two. The ideas that came about during the late-Middle Age period of the Renaissance are one reason that modern historians would say the Middle Ages ended at around the turn of the 16th century, when the early modern period began. The reasons for this are largely related to antiquity and classical sources. The Middle Ages are, or at least were, often referred to as the Dark Ages. The reason for this is that the period between the fall of Rome and the onset of

Renaissance thought was that the lights of classical antiquity - the works of Aristotle and Cicero, architecture, artistic conventions etc. - had been 'blocked out'. Humanist critics and so called Enlightenment 'philosophes' would later claim that the Church had blocked out those sources in order to solidify their authority and control. The Renaissance period though saw a return to those things. The classical period came back into vogue. Even the 'Church' (Catholic Church if you want to call it that, although at the start of the Renaissance, there hadn't been the protestant split yet) adopted the ideas of people such as Aristotle and, later - in the early modern 'Counter-Reformation' period - Cicero's ideas and rules about oratory were key influences for new Catholic ideas about their preaching methods. You also see a return to sculptures and wider art that was influenced by classical sources, political thought began to be more influenced by classical authorities etc. etc. Later, the Enlightenment would again move away from classical sources and authorities towards a sense of reason and personal experience, rather than relying on sources written 1700 years previously. So, to sum up, you can't really compare the Middle Ages and the Renaissance directly. The Renaissance began in the Middle Ages and moved on into the early modern period. However, if we are to take the basic differences between pre-Renaissance Middle Ages and the Middle Ages of the Renaissance, then the main difference would be, to put it simply, the focus on classical sources and inspiration from antiquity that was present in the latter of the two, but absent in the former.