

The impact of the renaissance history essay



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In a short span of time, the world flourished. Rediscoveries of classical manuscripts lead to a new and improved period of art works. This period was responsible for the transformation between the medieval west and the modern western civilization, and in creating some of the greatest pieces of art that the world has ever witnessed. This period was known as The Renaissance, and as historian Paul Johnson explained it in his book *Renaissance, A Short History*, “ The Renaissance was primarily a human event, propelled forward by a number of individuals of outstanding talent, in some cases amounting to genius.” From Dante, to Da Vinci, Gutenberg and others, they made The Renaissance a true historical phenomenon. The overwhelming emphasis on God started to deteriorate and people’s lives felt freer and less limited. Technology, education and expand of knowledge and ideas, medical science and the living environment excelled those of the Middle Ages. Life in The Renaissance thrived.

In the Middle Ages, God and the church played a very important role in the medieval lives. God was the center of people’s lives, they worshipped him greatly. The pope was like God’s puppet, leading the church and running things through the ideas of God . The Church ran almost everything in the society and affected the way people lived. They believed God created the world and their main goal in life was to land in heaven. As the Middle Ages ended and The Renaissance began, importance started shifting from God to man and science, art, and humanism became the new main ideas. The Catholic Church’s influence and power over the people started to decline and individualism was emphasized. According to historian Jacob Burckhardt, the Middle Ages was a society where people were part of a class but the

Renaissance saw a society change to one where individualism was stressed. He expresses this thought in his book *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* where he stated:

“ both sides of human consciousness – the side turned to the world and that turned inward – lay, as it were, beneath a common veil, dreaming or half awake. The veil was woven of faith, childlike prejudices, and illusion; seen through it, world and history appeared in strange hues; man recognized himself only as a member of a race, a nation, a party, a corporation, a family, or in some other general category. It was in Italy that this veil first melted into thin air, and awakened an objective perception and treatment of the state and all things of this world in general; but by its side, and with full power, there also arose the subjective; man becomes a self-aware individual and recognizes himself as such.”

He is basically saying that the idea of individualism started off in Italy, where The Renaissance began, and people started to view the world in a different way, while in the Middle Ages, everything was viewed ridiculously to him (childlike prejudices, illusion, world appearing in strange hues) and faith was very important. And it was, but as the Church's importance faded, the lives of people saw more freedom in the centuries ahead.

An improvement of education, spread of Humanism, and expanding of knowledge took place in the Renaissance. Back in the Middle Ages, the Church played a major role in the education of the people. Boys were taught by Bishops and Monks, while girls were practically ignored when it came to education. The boys sat on the floor and scribbled notes onto wooden

tablets. The teachings during the Middle Ages were based on scholasticism. They taught what the Church wanted them to teach (how the Church sees the world), it related to theories and faith, not by real facts or evidence. For example, they believed and taught that God created the world, and people's ideas are born with their soul, it doesn't come from anywhere else. When The Renaissance began, education became more important and popular. The opportunity for more to be educated was aided by the printing press. Education improved a little for girls, high class girls could go to school or they could receive some private tutoring. People started unearthing old manuscripts. People like Petrarch told that people shouldn't be following Christ, they should be educated about the truth and facts written in the manuscripts. Humanism played an important role in the education of men, as opposed to the Middle Ages where the ideas of the Church did. It was the philosophical idea that concerned the life and values of human beings. Historian Bertrand Russell described this change of knowledge by saying " A good world needs knowledge, kindness, and courage; it does not need a regretful hankering after the past or a fettering of the free intelligence by the words uttered long ago by ignorant men." Math and accounting improved during the centuries, from children being able to learn the skills of being a merchant, to Fibonacci combining the rules of arithmetic and algebra in 1202. Not only that, knowledge of geography expanded more too during the Renaissance as America, the " New World" was discovered in 1492 by Columbus. Astronomy experienced some breakthroughs during the late Renaissance. In 1514, Nicolaus Copernicus discovered that the Earth revolved around the sun and published his idea of the solar system in his

book *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*. Education and knowledge prospered in the minds of the Renaissance people.

The lives of The Renaissance civilians changed dramatically as new technologies were invented. There was an invention in The Renaissance that is considered the most significant. It was the printer press, which was invented in 1445 by Gutenberg. During the Middle Ages, monks had to copy the books by hand. It took months and years to complete a single book; as a result, books were really expensive back then. Most of the books were written in Latin and since most of the population wasn't educated, they couldn't read the books. Quantities of the Bible printed in The Renaissance were massive and it helped greatly in the spreading of religion. Middle class people could afford the books now, and they wanted them to be written in vernacular and with a more variety of topics. With increase of purchase in books, book trade and industries started to bloom, such as the paper making companies. With more people able to afford and acquire books, literacy rate increased gradually. Before The Renaissance, about 5-10% of the population could read or write, as The Renaissance progressed, the literacy rate went up to about 20-30%. The printing press helped tremendously in the spread of the new philosophical idea developed in The Renaissance, Humanism. The printing press was surely one of the biggest highlights of The Renaissance that leaves its mark here in the modern world still. Without it, writings weren't able to be produced in such a short amount of time and money.

Living life in both eras was a huge difference. The Middle Ages followed a system called Feudalism. It had a pyramid of power, which ranks from King all the way to the peasants. Life for the peasants were harsh, death was very

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common. A child who survived childhood was considered lucky and most parents were grateful to end up with one grown up child after many births. Children in the Middle Ages followed in their parent's footsteps as soon as possible: peasant children doing labor, merchant children studying trade, and noble's children training to be warriors or good wives. Feudalism started to decline in The Renaissance and cities and towns started to rise. This helped many merchants because as more products were demanded in shops, the product's trade increased. For example, when the demand for expensive accessories increased, the trade increased too which made the merchants rich, and with their wealth, they buy other expensive accessories. During the Middle Ages, the Church adopted the ideas of Galen about the human body which were proved to be wrong in The Renaissance because dissecting human was banned during that time. Some of his errors were that he said the blood moved from the left side of the heart to the right by going through pores, when it is actually because of the pumping of the heart. He even said that the blood was produced from the liver. These theories and others he came up with were approved for over 1, 400 years. It took centuries later in The Renaissance that his errors were corrected and medical science advanced. Understandings of the circulation of the blood in the body, invention of surgery equipments and the approval of dissecting bodies lead to new discoveries and treatments. From 1533-1536, Paré served as a French military surgeon, where he mastered surgery techniques, and he developed new treatments and equipments. In 1543, Andreas Vesalius's book *De Corporis Fabrica* was published with accurate details of the human anatomy. And in 1628, William Harvey published his book *De Mortu Cordis*, explaining the circulation of the blood throughout the body.

The church had trouble stopping these new discoveries (which disproved their beliefs) because of the printing press. Medically improved, The Renaissance provided a healthier and safer life for the people.

With all the developments, advances, and improvements, hardly anyone can deny The Renaissance wasn't a better time to be living in than the Middle Ages. The 14th century just rocketed off from the centuries before, spiraling into a new universe with great educations, technologies, medicines, and lifestyles. The brilliant minds that made this era an era to remember will always be remembered. Their minds decorated and purified the world. They recovered the lost lives of people and left us to remember a rebirth that marked its place in history as one of the three greatest centuries of all time, The Renaissance.