

Introduction for the
colonies as well as



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Introduction

American literature refers to the body of written or literary works shaped in the history of the United States and its former colonies (britannica. com).

Tracing back America’s history, America was once under the rule of Britain as part of the latter’s colonies therefore its literary institution is associated to the expansive tradition of English literature.

However, American literature is now considered a separate course and institution because of its one of a kind American characteristics and the production of its literature. This paper aims to present an extended definition on the meaning of the term American Literature. The paper will discuss the background of American Literature and how it has come about, the writing style of American authors and what makes the American text different and unique from other national literatures and lastly the paper will present arguments which explore the concept of American literature.

Background

Before Columbus and other European colonizers discovered the Americans, the native peoples of the continent have no written alphabet but they expressed their artistic talents and passed on knowledge of their traditions in the form of chants, songs and spoken narratives. Contrary to the popular Western understanding of literature that they must be principally a result of written words, scholars considered these verbal genres which include trickster tales, jokes, naming and grievance chants, and dream songs, among others as “ literary” because they embody the creative and arousing

retorts of the people to their Native culture (Baym, Franklin, Gura, Krupat and Levine).

When the Americas was colonized by different empires namely the Spanish, French, Portuguese, Dutch, German and English kingdoms, the primary role of writing was to pressure policy makers at these overseas colonies' home base to rationalize actions taken without their precise consent, or bearing witness to the straight and unintentional cost of European invasion of the Americas. Writing also documented the dreadful effects of European colonization of the Americas where the unintentional contamination of Old World diseases such as small pox, measles and the like to the Natives and the enslavement of the latter for plantation labour gave strong reactions toward from the public. Also during the early occupation of the Americas, writing gave opportunities to people who were not born to a life of privilege but were in favour of merit, talent and effort to reshape the possibilities of their life such as Diego del Castillo and John Smith.

In the 15th century New England had a publishing edge over other colonies with Boston's size in terms of population driven in producing Puritan literature together with the establishment of Harvard University in 1636 which operates with an independent college and printing press. Though with these efforts the initial state of the English language supremacy was barely evident, political events eventually changed the course and made English the main language for the colonies as well as the choice in writing literature. From 1696 to 1700 the state of American literature consisted only of about 250 published works. These works were mostly about religious, security and cultural concerns of colonial life (Baym, Franklin, Gura, Krupat and Levine).

Style

The war of 1812 which was a quarrel between the United States of America and the British empire because of trade restrictions (Hickey 56-58), forced recruitment of American merchant sailors into the Royal Navy, British support to American Indian tribes against American expansion (Hickey 101-104) and uphold national honour in the face of British insults (Risjord 196-210), paved way to the American's growing aspiration to create a unique American literature and culture separate from that of the English. The pioneers wrote humorous works about the American frontiers while some wrote romantic and nature inspired poetry which developed away from the early English origins.

Short stories which investigate earlier concealed levels of human psychology and move forward the limits of fiction towards mystery and fantasy were written. The movement of transcendentalism which was a protest to produce a state of culture and society was formed in response to the growing desire of American literary uniqueness. Through this formation radical writings towards individualism in the American character emerged.

Native American autobiographies were also developed and minority authors begun to publish fictions. Allegories and dark psychology became the focus of literary romances sated with philosophical assumptions. Dark Romanticism became popular in American writings presenting the characters as prone to sin and self destruction. “ the Dark Romantics adapted images of anthropomorphized evil in the form of satan, devils, ghosts, werewolves, vampires, and ghouls” (Thompson, 6).

Argument

American literature has been developed through the various influence of Native American's traditions before writing was introduced coupled by the influences brought about by European conquerors. Initially American literature was composed of reports and documentations of complaints and status quo of the people in the New World. Writing and literature served as a means of influencing policy makers in developing the civilization, exploring the natural resources and understanding the traditions and cultures of the Native Americans. Over time American literature evolved into various forms with fiction and non-fiction categories illustrating writers' sentiments on matters concerning politics, economy, culture, social statuses using artistic imagery or factual resources.

American literature further developed into its own form, growing away from its initial sphere of influence, English literature, during the 17th century creating a unique American characteristic and promoting individualism. It developed writers of different genres experimenting human emotions, philosophy and psychology. It also gave way to the dark romanticism subgenre which portrays human beings as individuals prone to sin and self destruction. American literature pushed the boundaries of human imagination and creativity with their constant experimentation of emotions and thoughts which can be attributed to the contemporary writers' attitude of artistic expression and freedom.

Conclusion

Examining literary works from class in understanding the meaning of American literature through different literary works by early writers we can

<https://assignbuster.com/introduction-for-the-colonies-as-well-as/>

define American literature initially as a body of works chronicling the discovery and acquisition of the Native Americans in its early beginnings.

In relation to the events taking place in the American society, literature in the continent slowly evolved with time influencing its writers and readers the socio-economic norms coupled with the author's artistic expressions during that specific time of writing. American literature can be considered a mirror of America's history, well being and characteristic. It is considered a part of the American culture for it details not only the history of the American people but also reflects the peoples' creative thoughts and imaginations. American literature is the product of influences brought about by the colonizers from Europe and the subtle native traditions of the early settlers of the United States. It is also a powerful defining tool of American characteristics such as liberalism and individualism.

Works Cited

- Baym, Nina, Franklin, Wayne, Gura, Philip, Krupat, Arnold and Levine, Robert. Norton Anthology of American Literature. 7th ed. Boston: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007. Print. Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc.
- American Literature. Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 2011. Web. 12 Dec. 2011. Hickey, Donald.
- The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989. Print.
- Risjord, Norman. " 1812: Conservatives, War Hawks, and the Nation's Honor." William And Mary Quarterly 18. 2 (1961): 196-210.
- <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-for-the-colonies-as-well-as/>

Print. Thompson, Gary., ed. Gothic Imagination: Essays in Dark Romanticism. Washington: Washington State University Press, 1974. Print.