

# Early national period (1750-1820)



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\*Benjamin Franklin\*(1706-1790)

\*Bio:\* See his autobiography

\*Style:\* Very influenced by the Enlightenment. The practice of spiritual self-reflection, meditation, and journal writing was very important to Protestant colonists. Self-examination and metaphorical writing were mainstays in seventeenth-century writing; however, due in part to the Enlightenment, the autobiography genre changed dramatically. Because individual reason trumped collective theology, readers became more interested in the travels and travails of the ordinary individual. Beginning with Franklin, writers focused on securing happiness and vocation in this world, rather than the next. He was not interested in the state of the soul but more in the state of human relationship.

\*Major Work:\*

" The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin"

" Poor Richard's Almanac"

Elizabeth Ashbridge(1713-1755)

\*Bio:\* Born in England. Rejected her parents Anglican beliefs for a theology more accepting of women in leadership roles. First husband died, lived with a Quaker relative in Dublin. Immigrated to New York, and after a stressful marriage, became a Quaker minister.

\*Style:\* Spiritual autobiography

\*Work:\* Some Account of the Fore Part of the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge"

### Thomas Paine(1737-1809)

**\*Bio:\*** Born in England, immigrated to America and spent much of his energies advocating for American independence. Joined the Revolutionary Army, and served as a personal assistant to high-ranking officers. Still remains one of the most popular statesmen who committed his writings to plain style in order to reach the common American.

**\*Style:\*** Plain style, pamphlets.

**\*Works:\***

" Crisis" -series of 16 pamphlets (reinforced America's resolve for independence)

" Rights of Man"

**\*Major:\***-

" The Age of Reason" (contends against hereditary monarchy)

" Common Sense"

### John Woolman(1720-1772)

**\*Bio:\*** Born into a Quaker family in New Jersey. Adopted many Quaker beliefs that at once put the Quakers at odd with their Puritan brethren. Very against slavery due to Quaker beliefs.

**\*Style:\*** Like a spiritual autobiography, but differs because of his commitment to marry his spiritual convictions with his earthly activities.

**\*Work:\*** " The Journal of John Woolman"

### Samson Occom(1723-1792)

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**\*Bio:\*** As a Christian convert, Ocum, a Mohegan Indian, ministered to several New England Indian tribes, including the Montauks of Long Island. 1st Native American to publish lit. in English. Presbyterian preacher, Mohegan Indian. Fought against white man's injustices toward Native Americans. Educated at Eleazer Wheelock's missionary school. Never paid the same salary as his white preacher peers. After preaching throughout England to raise money for Wheelock's proposed Native American school, he was disillusioned when Wheelock instead used the money to begin Dartmouth College which was established to educate white men. Edited " Choice Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs." He also wrote the 10-page pamphlet " A Short Narrative of My Life" and " Sermon at the Execution of Moses Paul."

**\*Style:\*** Autobiography

**\*Major Work:\*** " A Short Narrative of My Life"

**\*Summary:\*** Originally written as a ten-page manuscript, and details his life as an Indian minister.

J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur(1735-1813)

**\*Bio:\*** Born in France under the name of Michel Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur. Immigrated to England and Canada before settling in New York. Traveled back to France where he eventually remained. Contributed two important concepts to the American consciousness:  
1) The American Adam - the idea that there is something different, unique, special, or new about these people called " Americans."

2) The melting pot - that America's unique identity transcends ethnic, cultural, or religious backgrounds.

**\*Style:** Autobiography

**\*Major Work:** " Letters from an American Farmer"

Most anthologized section-

" What is an American?"

Olaudah Equiano (Gustavus Vassa)(c. 1745-1797)

**\*Bio:** When and where he was born is up for scholarly debate. According to his book, he was born along the Niger River in an Ibo Village in Africa.

Although raised to be a chief leader of his people, slave traders captured him and his sister when they were young and took them to America. Recent scholarship suggests a different story. According to naval records and baptismal records, he was most likely born in the Carolinas and sold to a British navy officer and taken to England. Critics point out that any " storytelling" on Equiano's part was done in an effort to narrate the African's plight as cargo upon the Middle Passage.

His history beginning in America and England is fully confirmed by historical evidence. Master, Michael Henry Pascal, renamed him Gustavus Vassa. Educated in London, served in the navy, sold back into slavery. Next master, Robert King, allowed him to purchase his freedom. The rest of his life was spent speaking and writing on behalf of slaves. Christian convert and used Christian sentiment to persuade people to give up slavery.

**\*Style:** Autobiography, slave narrative (same thing)

**\*Work:\*** " The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equino, or Gustavus Vassa, the African"

Philip Freneau

(" Poet of the American Revolution")(1752-1832)

**\*Bio:\*** Born into a wealthy NY family. Well-educated and well-traveled. His love for the sea, sent him to the West Indies in 1776 where he saw firsthand the atrocities of slave labor. After several years at sea, he returned to America where he continued his love of writing poetry. Gained recognition as the " Poet of the American Revolution" through his satirical poems that opposed the British.

**\*Style:\*** Worked as a journalist, satirist, and translator in Philadelphia where he honed his poetic and rhetorical skills. After the Revolutionary War, his poems became more politically and socially aware; however, his love for lyric and the pastoral is still evident in many anthologized poems.

**\*Works:\***

Poetry of Philip Freneau-

" The British Prison Ship"

" The Wild Honey Suckle"

" The Indian Burying Ground"

" To Sir Toby"

" General Gage's Soliloquy"

" General Gage's Confession" (both satirize the British)

Books of Poetry-

" The American Village"

" Poems"

\*Phillis Wheatley\*(1753-1784)

\*Bio:\* Masters John and Susanna Wheatley treated her as a daughter, saw to her superior education. Under 20 when her first book of poems was published. Since American publishing houses would not print a book written by a young, black, female, slave, her master's son took her manuscript to England.

What was most remarkable about the works that were printed besides the actual works was the preface attached to it. Wheatley was required to defend that she actually wrote the poems in front of an official court in Boston comprised of powerful and highly respected Americans. A letter of authentication was placed upon the first book published by a black woman. Married a freedman named John Peters.

First poem that made her famous was an elegy for George Whitfield.

\*Style:\* Many poems were dedicated to individuals who influenced her in various ways. discussed politics, religion, and even the ills of slavery. Contain poignant attacks on hypocrisy and avarice.

Reflected the style of classical British poets such as Pope and Milton and the influences of ancient Greek and Roman poets such as Homer and Virgil

\*Works:\*

Collection published in England-

" Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral

Poems of Phillis Wheatley-

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- " On Being Brought from Africa to America"
- " To the University of Cambridge, in New-England"
- " On the Death of Rev. Mr. George Whitefield"
- " To S. M. A Young African Painter, on Seeing His Works"
- " To the Right honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth"

Susanna Rowson(c. 1762-1824)

**\*Bio:\*** Grew up in Massachusetts, but moved to England. Worked as governess for several years and published first novel. Then married William Rowson. Wrote several other works including her greatest. Went on the stage w/ her husband. Wrote numerous plays and musicals. Retired from the stage and opened the Young Ladies Academy in Boston. Wrote some other stuff.

**\*Works:\***

Novels-

- " Victoria"
- " Mary; or The Test of Honour"
- " Rebecca; or The Fille de Chambre"
- " Charlotte's Daughter; or The Three Orphans"

Other-

- " Poems on Various Subjects"
- " Slaves in Algiers" (play)
- " A Spelling Dictionary"
- " Biblical Dialogues Between a Father and His Family"

**\*Major:\*** " Charlotte Temple"



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