

Mark twain's thoughts on conformity essay sample



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In his essay, Mark Twain discussed how a person's point-of-view over another person or towards a particular event can be altered through influences surrounding that person. He arrived at this conclusion after he observed an African-American slave whom he referred to as "Jerry" in the essay. Jerry was very vocal about his opinions and beliefs. But eventually, he had changed because many people around him believed that since he was both a slave and an African-American, he is not entitled to have his own beliefs and opinions about certain events and people during Mark Twain's time. In order for him to keep his job and his reputation among those of his kind, he had to think and feel like everyone else (Nordquist 1).

Mark Twain contented in his essays that initially, people would have their own personal opinions and beliefs. He called these as "first-hand opinions." People would initially have their respective first-hand opinion about a particular person or event based on the facts presented and not by the opinions of other people and by the person's emotion.

However, these external influences slowly influence the personal beliefs and opinions of an individual. Because it is human nature that people conform to the norms and beliefs of society in order to be accepted and gain approval from those surrounding them, people would eventually succumb to what is considered the popular belief and opinion. People believe that if they do not, then they would be isolated and looked down by society (Nordquist 1-2).

Even though this essay has been written centuries before, the position Mark Twain presented still remains true. We all have to conform to what others think and believe because we all want to be accepted by those around us,

especially our peers. We are all afraid of being left out and being isolated and rejected.

The best place to see this is in the local high school. Students who belong to the same group would have the same likes, the same kind of clothes, the same hobbies, similar hairstyles and even the same points-of-view about their fellow classmates. Teenagers resort to this because they are at the stage where acceptance and belonging are very crucial to them, making them succumb to peer pressure more easily.

At the start, a new person in the group may have his or her personal opinion about someone or something being discussed. Most often than not, these personal opinions are more accurate than what his or her peers believe. Hence, the presence of the first opinion that Mark Twain had mentioned in his essay. But over time, because of vocal disapproval from his or her peers, a student will change his or her personal opinion to coincide with what his or her peers believe in. In other words, peer pressure had prompted many students to conform to the opinion of the majority, in this case, his or her peer group.

Mark Twain's essay on social pressure had made me realize that peer pressure is not something relatively new to society. In fact, it has long been a part of society. However, many of the sad events that had happened in our history have been a result of the need for conformity and belongingness. Those who belong to gangs, for example, are often tested by the senior members and even founders of these gangs regarding their loyalty to the gang. Most, if not all of these loyalty tests would include

causing harm to members of rival gangs that some would even have to kill rival gang members just to prove their loyalty.

In closing, conforming to the popular belief of a group within a society can be beneficial. However, people would need to still keep a sense of their own identity and their own personal beliefs and opinions in order to decipher as to whether the popular belief is still right or wrong.

Reference

Nordquist, Richard. "Corne-Pone Opinions," by Mark Twain. 2008. 17 June 2008.

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