

Abstract

From the time of the establishment of American society till now, themes of self-reliance and freedom belong to the most recognized values of the U.S. Studies have shown that the values of American society, even though they adapted to political and sociological changes, share a common base with their original form. This thesis researches specifically the role of self-reliance in relation to an American essayist, writer and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, and his direct influence in establishing self-reliance along with freedom and individualism as one of the main values of American society. This study aims to determine how Emerson's theory of self-reliance and his ideology influence the thinking of modern America, and whether the values cultivated by him are still present in modern U.S. society. The focus of this research lies primarily on how Emerson's ideology has implanted into the minds of Americans from the time of the changing nineteenth century American society, and the birth of this ideology, to its present-day significance in modern-day America.

The main source of Emerson's thinking and refinement of his theory of self-reliance is his essay entitled "Self-reliance," in which he defines his theory. His other works, primarily his other essays, *Nature*, "History," and his sermons and journals serve to expand and support the ideas presented in "Self-reliance." For the purpose of explaining Emerson's theory further, literature analyzing Emerson's ideas like George Kateb's *Emerson and Self-reliance*, David Lee Robbins's, "Emerson the Nihilist, Redux Atque Resartus," and Robert D. Richardson's Jr., *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*, was used. To create a picture of the U.S. society and mentality, in addition to Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, which offers an extensive account of the U.S. society in the 1830s, books on American sociology like Claude S. Fisher's *Made in America: A social History of American Culture and Character*, were used. Books on U.S. history, mainly George B. Tindall's, *America: A Narrative History*, were used to give background for the most influential changes of the American society, and offer more information about U.S. culture and development of American character.

The first part of the thesis is dedicated to analyzing Emerson's thoughts while describing the background of the development of U.S. society and character. Second part of the text contextualizes Emerson's theory of self-reliance and his thinking with the mentality of modern America, and U.S. society. Surveys and polls from recent years, mainly surveys conducted by Pew Research Center and the Atlantic/Aspen Institute, together with literature on American sociology and mentality served to create an image of the modern U.S. society, and to determine the influence of Emerson's thinking on modern America.

Based on a review of literature on American society, and surveys and polls conducted in recent years, analysis of the respondents' answers demonstrates the rather great amount of impact that Emerson's thinking has had on the modern U.S. society. The values of self-reliance, individualism and freedom, greatly developed and encouraged by Emerson, are still supported by many Americans. Many Americans also see self-reliance, individualism and freedom, as core values of the society, and as values which make up the American character. The values are deeply embedded in American mentality, and they influence a number of decisions Americans take, both in private and public life.