

ABSTRACT

The works of the nineteenth-century American thinker Ralph Waldo Emerson continue to be inspiring particularly due to their empowering effect on the individual. It is especially Emerson's concepts of the sovereignty of the individual, the importance of self-definition, the view of life as a transitory flow, and the relationship between freedom and fate which can be practically and usefully applied in the life of an individual. It is possible, then, to understand and evaluate Emerson's works through the practical effects of his concepts, in other words through the prism of pragmatism. Emerson's empowering philosophy can be of use especially to disempowered groups such as African Americans. The Emersonian themes which are to be found in the works of various African-American non-fiction writers such as W.E.B. Du Bois, James Baldwin, Martin Luther King Jr. and Cornel West testify to the relevance of Emerson for this minority group. In Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Richard Wright's *Native Son*, two African-American novels, Emersonian principles are shown to be of utmost importance for the positive development of the protagonists.