

Survey of American Literature  
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THE NEW LAND OF NEW IDEAS

The 18th century Americans turned their backs on the old ideas of the Puritans. The Puritans believed in the population acting within the religious ways of the times. The 18th century population turned their lifestyles to a lifestyle of self interest. This lifestyle was dedicated to the goal of obtaining wealth and prestige among the community. DeCrevecouer writes:

He is arrived on a new continent; a modern society offers itself to his contemplation, different from what he had hitherto seen. It is not composed, as in Europe, of great lords who possess every thing and of a herd of people who have nothing. Here are no aristocratical families, no courts, no kings, no bishops, no ecclesiastical dominion, no invisible power giving to a few a very visible one; no great manufacturers employing thousands, no great refinements of luxury. The rich and the poor are not so far removed from each other as they are in Europe.

In the old mother land, one could work all day and still not produce very much. However, in the new land there was more opportunity for entrepreneurship. This led to a increase in the self-interest principle and a decrease in the principles of religion. In Old England, it was believed that the few that had the wealth were blessed. Even the King was viewed as the Lord's representative on Earth. In the new land one had to work to gain wealth. Wealth that the individual created was viewed as being faithful to the Lord. The new America gives birth to a true entrepreneurship among the races, if they are going to have anything at all they are going to have to work for it. DeCrevecouer explains this:

Men are like plants; the goodness and flavour of the fruit proceeds from the peculiar soil and exposition in which they grow. We are nothing but what we derive from the air we breathe, the climate we inhabit, the government we obey, the system of religion we profess, and the nature of our employment

This was not the land where wealth would be left to you in a will, this was the land of sweat labor. This passage indicates that a man is only as good as the product that he produces. This means the wealth that his tract of land created. Furthermore, it holds meaning for how his family was taking care of. Also, the community enters the picture here. If man is not active in his community the community is nothing. We are only as good as what we put in. The 18th century Americans moved to these principles of increasing self-interest and that has carried over to today.

