

Colonial Period 1750-1810

Rationalism / "Age of Reason"/ Enlightenment

*The belief that one can understand the world around them by using one's reason rather than relying on:

authority of the past

religious faith

institutions (*universally accepted patterns of behavior*)

*Truth may be arrived at by what is seen and proven, not by what someone else tells you.

*Departure from Puritan thinking, which focused more on faith than on empirical knowledge.

The Age of Reason emphasized:

- Reason over Imagination
- Societal needs over the personal needs
- The common interest over the individual
- Logic over "eternal truths"

*Rationalists would never go with their intuition, emotion, or gut instincts. If it was to be believed, it must be proven.

Puritan

vs.

Rationalist

God controls the universe
universe-Period.

God created the laws of
nature, which control the
universe.

Man is essentially evil

Man is essentially
good

Humans are perfectible

Humans are always
imperfect

Bible contains all truth

We should seek
further truth

American Thinkers:

Benjamin Franklin~Inventive, Curious, Creative mind

Thomas Jefferson~Sought to improve living conditions,
the individual mind, forms of
government

Thomas Paine~Rational appeal for the struggle for
independence ("Common Sense", "The Crisis")

Phillis Wheatley~1st African-American poet, 1st African-
American woman to be published

Patrick Henry~Fiery orator who helped sustain the
revolutionary spirit that ultimately led to
independence

Literature in the Age of Reason:

- Was rooted in reality rather than imagination
- Emphasized clarity, order, balance, self-knowledge
- Highly persuasive: used anecdotes, aphorisms, figures of speech (rhetorical questions, etc)
- Mostly political in nature
- Evidence is presented using strict, rhetorical structure:
 - Identify a problem
 - Identify its cause
 - Propose a logical solution

"We hold these truths to be self-evident..."

Genres:

Newspaper articles

Letters

Pamphlets / "Broad­sides"

Speeches

Poems (a few, not many)

Narrative stories / Novels (virtually none)

Rationalist writers composed virtually all of America's most sacred documents:

The Declaration of Independence

The Constitution

The Federalist Papers

The Bill of Rights

*These writers were highly intellectual and highly educated statesmen.