Enlightenment Essay, Research Paper

The enlightenment period in England occurred most prominently in the eighteenth century and helped mold our current thoughts and values into what are accepted by our society today. Besides criticizing religion and broadening the range of science, enlightenment thinkers provided new points of view on society, politics, law, economics, and the overall course of history. The enlightenment period tried to replace a religious worldview with a view more associated in human reason. Many of the older values in England were replaced by human reason in order to combat ignorance, tyranny, and superstition in efforts to build a better world.

However, not all of these enlightenment thinkers would agree that a better world was being attained by this period. Underneath of the silver lining that the enlightenment period presented, sat the rest of the society, which was not making progress. The rest of society was actually regressing. The rights of women were non-existent, the middle class (Bourgeoisie) was paying taxes to support a fabulously expensive aristocracy, and the poor were multiplying at alarming rates, leaving more and more empty stomachs on the streets. As the rich were getting richer, the poor suffered while still trying to serve their country as best as they could. There were writers of this period that are less celebrated for their work, yet these writers had important messages of warning that could be heard very clearly because they spoke of the harsh truth s of this period.

Sarah Stickney Ellis wrote a piece called The Women of England, in which she depicts the role that woman played in England during the enlightenment period. Women in the middle class were seen as the moral backbone of the English society. The middle class was seen as having the moral power and intelligence of the country and was also designated as the pillar of England s strength. Ellis writes that the middle class woman receives the notion of the highest tone of moral feeling because they don t have to be worried about the pressing needs of poverty and labor that plague the poor. The middle class woman can achieve a higher intellect and is free to fully disperse the energies of her female character. Ellis s writing is in an upbeat tone that praises the work of the middle class woman, however, I believe that she is at the same time writing about the strength that women possess and is making a point to show that they are an important part of society in which they need to be taken more seriously. Ellis repeatedly states that women possess certain powers that men lack, by her writing this I began to feel that she is trying to get women to realize their powers. Not long after the enlightenment period women started to realize that they to had rights and they began to fight for these privileges. I like to think that this piece by Ellis and others like it helped to give women a sense of self-dignity and pride that they used as a focal point in their quest for women s rights. Repeatedly Ellis uses the words moral power in the piece and I believe that to be the backbone of her argument that women are a necessity to man and maybe even more important to society than man. She writes that women are essential to man in that they hold the key to the home by keeping a clear focus on life during any crises that should arise. Ellis states that a woman s character makes man a wiser and much better person because of her tough mental state.

In another writing that proves to be vital to enlightenment period, Matthew Arnold composed a piece called Culture and Anarchy, which focuses mainly on the poor and the working middle class and the hardships that they must endure in order to survive and please the aristocracy. During the enlightenment period it was expected that the poor would work for the rich and also be taxed in order to support the wealthy. Arnold suggested that maybe as an incentive to the poor doing the brunt of the labor that they might be taxed less, making the necessities of life such as food more accessible and also more attainable. The wealthy accepted the growth of the poor and drained them of their money and labor. The more that the population was to increase meant that production was also going to increase. This meant that the poor had more jobs, yet they were able to get away with paying the poor less because as supply went up, demand went down. The poor and the working middle class had built many of the great inventions of this period, the railroads as well as the manufactories. The wealth s pursuit of free trade was suggested to be according to Arnold as being too mechanical. Arnold stated that the production of wealth and the increase in manufactures, population, and commerce through free trade was pursued much too staunchly and mechanically. Arnold sees a pattern that worries him and I believe that was his basis for writing this piece, He notes the poor being oppressed and the middle class working to support the aristocracy and paying high taxes in order for them to live luxuriously. Anarchy is an evident event waiting to happen if these actions continue as followed and Arnold does not want to ignore this problem like many of his colleagues. His best quote of the piece is very powerful in summing up the potential for anarchy culture is the most resolute enemy of anarchy, because of the great hopes and designs for the state which culture teaches us to nourish. Arnold knows that anarchy was immanent if his culture did not did not change it s ways and treat the laborers much better, there was so many precious things in which it endangered.

In Ellis s piece, she writes of something, which was good about the enlightenment period and used the writing as a call for a brighter and more powerful future for women. She wrote of all that was right in the women of the enlightenment period. Arnold on the other hand wrote as a precaution to his culture and their way of life being lived in the wrong way. He knew that in spite of all the great events that were happening at this time it could all be threatened by anarchy and that was where the oppression of the less gifted in life was going to lead. Both writers had very good purpose in writing their respective piece s and each one made their own special connection with their readers. These were two of the more important, yet under-appreciated pieces of the enlightenment period. Ellis and Arnold should both be commended for their efforts and each writes in a powerful way that interest s and touches the reader s emotions.