



Sample: History - A Very Mutinous People

Writing Assignment

Noeleen McIlvenna's work *A Very Mutinous People: The Struggle for North Carolina, 1660-1713* is a book that describes a very important passage in the history of the U.S.A., the one that deserves to be known and understood by everyone who wants to know American history. The author demonstrates profound knowledge and insightfulness required for analyzing such a complex and multifaceted layer of historical experience of the nation. Painstakingly, McIlvenna unfolds for the readers a panorama of life of people in North Carolina in the late seventeenth-early eighteenth centuries, with its many hazards, challenges, and hardships and, on top of these, the heady air of freedom. Courageous attempts of North Carolina residents to construct their own political and social system of administration based on equality and justice and develop the egalitarian society were the first example of pursuing the ideals later implemented by the American Revolution. The author of the book demonstrates how a small part of what would be a great American nation spared no effort in establishing a just social system and fair representative governments, the antipode of the rigorous hierarchical governing system imposed by the British government and its Virginian and South Carolina advocates. The portrait of North Carolina's society of that period represented in the book is a story of the first steps taken by those who wanted a government by the people and for the people, believed in its feasibility and were ready to give their lives for that goal. Although crushed by the stronger system that favored unjust social relations based on cruel exploitation and slavery, the North Carolina's historical experience remains a model of the social ideals that later became the basic part of the American national identity.

The two parts of the book, *The First Generation* and *The Second Generation*, tell the story of North Carolina's historical experience in the years 1660-1713 in a consistent and



detailed manner, against the political background of that period. This historical and political landscape enables readers to get a comprehensive view of the complex conditions and circumstances that brought about various events and resulted in developing controversial trends. The book starts with the analysis of the life in different colonies along the American Atlantic that were greatly dependent on events taking place in England. The author's references to the English Revolution and events in its aftermath that were instrumental for English policies towards its colonies in the New World give readers an extra benefit of learning more about the historical trends of the period and the relation between social, political and cultural features that jointly shaped the historical reality.

The author of the book demonstrates how “more than a century before wealthy Virginia slave owners debated the meaning of liberty, the Dismal Swamp country sheltered the most free society in the European purview” (McIlvenna 5). People who flocked to the Great Dismal Swamp area in North Carolina made their conscious decision to settle down in the most inaccessible Atlantic coastline of North America pursuing the goal of founding the society free of rigorous social hierarchy so much disdained by them. These people who differed in their views and experience – misfits, social outcasts, pirates, smugglers, religious dissidents, Quakers and others shared something that united them, which was the quest for a free and just social order, basically different from the social practice of the neighboring Virginia and South Carolina. Many of North Carolina's residents were indentured servants and other people who escaped the cruel oppression of Virginian landlords and plantation owners whose personal interests were deeply rooted in the socially unjust hierarchical society. Therefore, the story of the mutinous people of North Carolina is the story of the fight of the free people against the tangible strategies



developed by southern planters to counter resistance to their social order and to fortify their wealth and privilege based on slavery and cruel exploitation.

McIlvenna takes the readers of the book, step by step, from the history of the first generation of settlers in 1660s to the second generation and the final defeat of those mutinous people who were forerunners of the egalitarian society but had no chance of maintaining it at that time. The author demonstrates how different participators of that remarkable period and experience contributed to the process. The role of Quaker ideology and practice was instrumental for North Carolina's colony; it was integrated with actions against Navigation Acts introduced by the British Empire and Culpeper's Rebellion that followed. Quakers' worldview and religious principles worked against the policies of governors who implemented the imperial administering instruments and also pursued their own interests of land owning and speculating. The story of how "people of Albemarle united across race, gender, and class lines" (McIlvenna 70) goes into the next century, featuring Cary's rebellion, clashes with Native Americans and how, eventually, the system run by appointed governors managed to suppress the free society of North Carolina.

The two aspects of particular interest that the author relates consistently and conclusively are the negative role of the Anglican Church as the British Empire's and large landowners' tool of suppression and the relations of white residents of North Carolina with Native American population. The fact that for decades white settlers and Native Americans lived side by side without conflicts is yet another proof of the humane and progressive stance of the North Carolina community. Later conflicts and clashes with American Indians were instigated by the avaricious governors and gentry focused on land speculation and expansion of their property and possessions.



McIlvenna's book is a thorough and insightful exploration of the sphere that requires more attention on the part of historians and experts. As a piece of historical literary scholarship, this book demonstrates a comprehensive analysis of a certain historical period against the background of major political and social events and trends of its time, the feature that helps the reading audience to develop a deeper understanding of history, with its complex and often controversial events. The author's ability to reconstruct events considering the lack of historical records of the period is yet another positive feature that makes this book a valuable reading.

The impact of this work on me can be best summarized as the realization "that two generations [of North Carolina residents] successfully built a society of free and equal people – government of, by, and for the people – peacefully coexisting with Native Americans" and that this great historical experience "should proudly enter the annals of North Carolina history" (McIlvenna 160). I would only like to extend this statement by saying "to the annals of US history", for it makes me feel proud of common people who, 250 years before now, undertook the great social task and bravely fought to put it into life. The book helped me to get a better understanding of the origin of the American national identity and the objective laws that underlie the historical progress of human civilization.



Works Cited

McIlvenna, Noeleen. *A Very Mutinous People: The Struggle for North Carolina, 1660-1713*.

Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009. Print.