

American Romanticism

- The ideas that became Romanticism began in England and Germany
- In time, what became known as Romanticism would dominate European and American art and literature and thought throughout the 1800s.
- Romantic thought dominated the American arts up until World War I.
- Romanticism was not an organized movement, but all Romantics shared a number of attitudes:
 - They valued imagination and feeling over intellect and reason.
 - Some celebrated individualism and freedom; they believed in the basic goodness and equality of human beings and their right to govern themselves.
 - Others took a darker view of human nature and were fascinated by disease, madness, death, the supernatural, and the destructive power of nature (think: Edgar Allan Poe)
 - Many believed in the spiritual power and importance of nature.
During the 1700s, nature was seen as something to be conquered, but the Romantics celebrated the beauty, power, and wonder of the natural world, stressing the value of nature as a spiritual and moral guide for humanity, even going so far as to claim that divinity could be reached not through scripture or priests, but through being in tune with the natural world.
 - Optimism is the belief that the world around us is always improving. Some Romantics presented an optimistic view of the possibility of human progress, based in part on the democratic confidence in the ability of ordinary individuals to better themselves, their political system, and society.