

Reflection Paper Example Formatted in APA Style

Between Anxiety and
Responsibility: Examining the Post-
War Era and Social Changes from
1945-1975

This example of a reflection paper, comprising 822 words from a History subject, offers students a foundational guide to formatting papers in APA Style.



The years between 1945 and 1975 marked a time of great uncertainty and transformation in society, as established social responsibilities were challenged and redefined. This post-war era saw the rise of new perspectives and changing cultural norms, which greatly influenced the way writers approached the theme of social responsibility in their works. From one author to the next, the focus and responsibility for social change varied, reflecting the complexity of the times. This paper aims to explore the different perspectives and authors that contributed to the evolution of social responsibility during this pivotal period.

From the end of World War II and into the twenty-first century, anxieties pervaded American life and literature. The 1960s and 1970s were particularly tumultuous, with Auden's poetic vision of an enemy hiding among us becoming popularized by Walt Kelly's comic strip character, Pogo, who famously declared, "We have met the enemy and he is us." Interestingly, this line was a rephrasing of a message delivered during the War of 1812 (Axelrod, 2008, p. 42). Gwendolyn Brooks (1917-2000) was one poet who approached these anxieties with different literary techniques and themes. Rather than relying on slogans, Brooks used deft characterizations, descriptions, implications, and a highly flexible verse form to convey meaning in works such as "We Real Cool" (Brooks G., 1959b) and "The Bean Eaters" (Brooks G., 1959a).

Brooks' poetry demonstrates a remarkable range of form, from traditional sonnets to experimental free verse, allowing her to express a wide range of ideas and emotions. Adrienne Rich, in a 1999 tribute to Brooks, noted the versatility of her work, which includes satire, lamentation, and apocalyptic meditations. Rich also praised Brooks' ability to elevate the experiences of African American women to heroic status while remaining deeply rooted in the broader community. Through her writing, Brooks holds a mirror up to the American experience, exposing its dreams, self-delusions, and nightmares with an inimitable voice.

Brooks' collection, *The Bean Eaters*, tackles a broader topic of the growing despair and alienation felt by African-Americans during the time of its authorship and publication, rather than focusing solely on personal subjects. The collection's title is said to be inspired by Vincent van Gogh's painting, *The Potato Eaters*, which also portrays despair and alienation among a group of people. However, in Brooks' work, the people in question are from her own race. The collection features several poems that delve into the black community's unsuccessful attempts to escape feelings of hopelessness, whether through racial integration, reckless living, materialism, or religion.

In addition to exploring personal stories, Gwendolyn Brooks also delved into national events and issues in her poetry. One such event was the murder of Emmett Till, a black teenager who was killed in 1955 for allegedly flirting with a white girl, who was 14 at the time (Tyson). Brooks continued to focus on social justice in her anthology *Selected Poems*, which included many pieces from her previous collection, *The Bean Eaters*, as well as new works. For instance, her poem *Riders to the Blood-Red Wrath* praises the Freedom Riders and other activists involved in the Black Civil Rights movement. This commitment to political subjects and a serious tone is a trend that continued in Brooks' later works, such as *In the Mecca*. As the first African American writer to win a Pulitzer Prize for her poetry, which she achieved with her second volume in 1949, Brooks remains a powerful voice for black Americans in the 20th century (Green).

During the same period as Brooks, Sylvia Plath emerged as a powerful literary figure, although their backgrounds and cultural influences differed greatly, as did their writing styles. Plath's poetry was known for its confessional form, where she often focused on her own emotions, including her struggles with depression. Perhaps her most well-known work is her

semi-autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar*, which explores the life of a young woman suffering from depression and her experiences with the world around her (Plath). Tragically, Plath's own struggles with depression led to her untimely death in 1963, when she committed suicide (Perkins and Perkins).

Betty Friedan's controversial bestseller, *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan), was published in 1963. It was described by one critic as "the book we have been waiting for - the wisest, sanest, soundest, most understanding and compassionate treatment of contemporary American woman's greatest problem...a triumph." This statement was included in many printed versions of the book. Friedan, who had a successful academic career, felt dissatisfied with the limited roles available to women. She used the term "mystique" to describe the sense of hopelessness women felt as they were repressed in society and dependent on their husbands for financial, intellectual, and emotional support (Eisenmann).

The works of Brooks, Plath, and Friedan reflect an emerging theme of mistreatment of women in society during the post-war period. Despite their different backgrounds and writing styles, all three women used their work to convey their dissatisfaction with societal norms. Brooks addressed civil rights issues for African Americans, while Friedan wrote about the burgeoning women's movement. Plath's struggle with depression was a more personal issue, but her writing still reflected larger societal anxieties about social roles. Overall, the post-war period was marked by a growing awareness of societal inequalities and a desire for change, which was reflected in the writing and popular thought of the time.

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