

Participation in Democracy  
Kailua High School  
Social Studies Requirement  
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Mr. Wilson

### The Impact of Renaissance Art on the Capitol Building, Washington D.C.

Renaissance style art guided both the appearance and interior of the Capitol Building. The shape of the Capitol Building was influenced by Renaissance style architecture and its exterior was adorned with Renaissance style sculpture. The interior of the Capitol Building also was decorated with Renaissance style paintings, sculptures, and design. In addition to the unique style of architecture, sculpture, and paintings, the Capitol Building, topped by a statue of Freedom, was built by slaves.

The design of the Capitol Building was based on the Roman Pantheon, which at one time was the largest domed structure in the world. The rotunda was designed by William Thornton. (Capitol Rotunda, wiki) The rotunda is used for important national ceremonies. (Capitol Architect)

The exterior of the Capitol building was decorated with sculptures called *The Discovery*, *The Rescue*, and *The Enthronement of Washington*. Horatio Greenough sculpted *The Discovery*. The statue was made to symbolize Christopher Columbus and the expansion of America and its future, and was unfortunately removed due to the Capitol Building's Expansion and was put in storage never to be restored again (Discovery of America wiki). Horatio Greenough sculpted *The Enthronement of Washington*. When completed, the

statue was controversial because Washington was bare chested. In spite of his nudity, Washington is “handing over power to the people after the Revolutionary War.” Therefore, the gesture of the statue tells its viewers that he entrusted the people of the United States to govern themselves (George Washington, wiki). *The Rescue* was also created by the artist Horatio Greenough and was assembled in front of the east façade of the Capitol Building. This statue was created not only to show a symbol of our past, but also how we are meant to move forward beyond our mistakes, and also to show our struggle to get this far. The statue also was meant to serve as a memorial for the American Indians. However, *The Rescue* was removed in 1958 due to the public finding it in a sense “savage”, also keeping in mind that America now has American Indians as Citizens (The Rescue wiki). Although some sculptures have been removed, others have been added. For example, Hawaii has donated two statues unique to her history: *King Kamehameha I* and *Father Damien*.

The interior dome of the Capitol is painted with *The Apotheosis of Washington*. *The Apotheosis* is “a huge fresco painted by Constantino Brumidi in 1865.” The deified Washington is surrounded by Roman Gods of War, Science, Marine, Commerce, Mechanics, and Agriculture. These gods are the personification of national concepts that have made America a great and powerful nation (“*Apotheosis of Washington*.” Wiki).

The Capitol Building has been influenced by Renaissance art in several ways: The first way that the Capitol Building was influenced by Renaissance art is its unique design—the architect of the Capitol Building used the Roman Pantheon as a model. The

design of the Capitol building has served the nation well as the Capitol is the site of important national ceremonies. Another impact of Renaissance art were the styles of sculptures that were used to decorate the Capitol: *The Enthronement of Washington*, *The Rescue*, and *The Discovery*. Although these “embarrassing statues have been removed,” all fifty states have contributed to the Hall of Statues. Hawaii’s contributions are statues of *King Kamehameha the Great* and *Father Damien*. Inside the Rotunda, a giant fresco called *The Apotheosis of Washington* depicts Washington as a god! Ironically, the Rotunda was constructed with slave labor and topped with a statue called Freedom, which also was made possible by a slave named Phillip Reid.