

The theme of slavery in the interesting narrative of the life of olaudah equiano

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There are many things that people can learn from the lives that a few intellectual people have lived. Biographies are excellent ways of preserving history and learning points as the experiences of a person expresses a lot about the true nature of live events. The current generation faces many challenges, especially in societal issues brought by diversity. The race has become a concerning matter in every corner of the world, and black people have been affected as they experienced discrimination and harassment since the establishment of industrialization in Europe and the discovery of the Americas (Bugg 1431). Slavery led to the exploitation, suffering, and deaths of over 30 million people who were forcefully shipped overseas to offer free labor. Such historical injustices require a unique perspective of a story to be told to the society for such wrongs to be avoided (Bugg 1438). Olaudah Equiano successfully establishes such a perspective of telling the true nature of historical injustices, especially slavery in his autobiography entitled ' The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano. This paper discusses how the theme of slavery has been portrayed throughout Equiano's text.

Presence of Slavery in Equiano's Early Life

Equiano expresses the issue of slavery in almost every aspect of his experiences as he starts his narration by expressing the presence of slavery in Guinea and his presence in his father's and other judges' condemnation of a person caught kidnapping a child. It is fascinating how, with no prior history to white people, he is still able to acknowledge the presence of slavery (Simmons 76). As upper-class individuals in society, Equiano and his family were already entitled to possess slaves. He, at one time, even looked

back on his village's utilization of slavery as decent and inhumanely as the one in West Indies (Smith 768). According to him, the slaves were treated almost the same as everyone since they were provided with similar types of clothing food housing (Equiano 41). He says that the slave in his Benin home did not do more work than the other members of the community, and it was tough for anyone to notice the difference between them and the rest of the society (Equiano 41). In their nation, some slaves could even have other slaves under them, but not in the new lands where he had been taken. Through such an early depiction of slavery, the reader can understand the theme and its play in the narration. In this way, both a sense of class order and humanity affected his early impression of slavery.

Equiano's Linkage of Slavery with Life Class

In the slavery days, Africans captured fellow black men and sold them to white men who took them overseas like commodities waiting for buyers. The linkage between social class and the aspect of slavery never ran in Equiano's mind until he found himself as a captive of his fellow black men waiting to be sold like a domesticated animal (Bugg 1431). In his view of the people who had captured them, Equiano sees uncivilized individuals with backward norms of life and is irritated by how they behave (Equiano 52). He has even to go ahead and make a comparison of how much people were fellow Africans but had a too much backward culture than his community. He notes that the capturers' women were not well mannered as the ones from their community since they ate, slept, and drunk with the men (Equiano 52). Such behaviors and others made Equiano consider himself of a better community, which at least had manners in its culture.

Knowledge's Influence on Slavery

When Equiano first saw the white men, he thought them of being some beasts that would have eventually eaten him (Dias 5). Nevertheless, the fears eventually subdued when he arrived in the new land as his interest in education gave him a new perspective about life. At first, he did not like the idea of white people, but with the education, he started feeling more of being part of the European community as he was amazed by their type of society and the way they behaved (Simmons 77). He narrates how he developed a stronger drive of trying to look like the white people who had captured him, be able to imitate their way of life, and also imbibe their spirit since he saw them as superior men (Equiano 72). This is a different point of view for any person who has been under the harsh treatment of white masters. The new knowledge is the leading facilitator to his involvement in religious matters, especially reading the Bible and forming a friendship with white people (Smith 767). Somehow this new knowledge changes how he felt and viewed the institution of slavery and how he viewed white people's involvement in it.

Conflict of Religion and Slavery

Whether direct or indirect, it is essential to accept the fact that religion had a significant impact in the slave institution. From the expeditions of missionaries into Africa to the final halt of the trade, religion shaped different aspects of the progress. Equiano conflicts a lot with himself when it comes to choosing between the white man's religion and the abolition of the slave institution (Simmons 78). One may note that Equiano's contradicting views about slavery may perhaps be because of his higher class distinction, which

makes him not to be against all sorts of slavery in the new region (Smith 768). Equiano sets it clear that God is against those who inflict pain and misery on slaves but still sees it as God's actions, not his owners intended actions when he sells to a new owner (Equiano 86). His point of view seems to be in support of the slave owners' view that slaves do not deserve God's love and compassion. This somehow makes him to be in contradiction with his main drive of trying to put an end to slavery. But on the whole, this part of the Narrative does put his fight against the slave owners in more jeopardy, as he does plan again to escape (Simmons 76). He eventually goes ahead to illustrate some of the cruelest slave treatment he has witnessed in his life. He even goes ahead to quote that, " Jesus tells us, the oppressor and the oppressed are both in his hands; and if these are not the poor, the broken-hearted, the blind, the captive, the bruised, which our Saviour speaks of, who are they?" (Equiano 108). This helps him to create the essence of moving away from the bondage created by the cruelty of slave owners and their actions on the slaves. From such a perspective, there is much contradiction in his belief of the slave owner's religion and his stand against their actions on slaves.

Conclusively, Equiano offers a more in-depth look at how the international slave trade was conducted and showcased the presence of slavery in the continent, even before the appearance of white slave owners. Through his life journey, one can be able to know the factors that enhanced the practice and also what made it dormant. The religious point of view on slavery is not left out in his analysis and so creating an overall point of view on all events of the slavery era.