

Venture smith and olaudah equiano

Philosophy



Venture Smith and Olaudah Equiano: The Slave Trade. Slavery is very much an accepted part of the United States of America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is sanctioned by the U. S. Constitution and remains legal until it is abolished in 1808. The economy of America, from plantations and orchards to mines and docks, is largely dependent on slave labor. The fact that “ The slave system was one of the principal engines of the new nations financial independence” (The Drop Squad History Channel), is the principal reason for the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Africa is the source of cheap labor. The workings of the slave trade and slavery are documented in various forms. Of these, it is the personal testimony of Africans which are most poignant and informative. The first-hand accounts of Venture Smith and Olaudah Equiano vividly illustrate the capture of Africans, their shipment across the Atlantic and their transformation into slaves in America.

Venture and Olaudah narrate similar experiences about their early lives in Africa and their capture. Both belong to tribes living in villages in Guinea in interior Africa. It is evident from their narratives that Africans possess a rich and unique culture much before the advent of colonialism. Venture and Olaudah belong to noble families and are captured as little boys. It is tragic to see that the system of slavery has its roots in African society itself: both writers describe the custom of warring tribes making slaves of the vanquished. This system is exploited by the white men who arrive on the African coast. Olaudah states that “ When a trader wants slaves, he applies to a chief for them, and tempts him with European goods” and Venture says that the marauding Africans “ were instigated by some white nation who equipped and sent them to subdue and possess the country.” It is the warring natives who facilitate the slave trade.

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The captured slaves are pinioned and haltered and driven like cattle across vast tracts of the country to the coast. Here, the white slave ships wait and traders buy the kidnapped and captured slaves. It is a mark of the cheapness of slaves that Venture is purchased “ for four gallons of rum, and a piece of calico.” The authors describe the horrors of being flogged and confined to the hold of the ship like cattle and the stench of the over-crowded, non-ventilated space. They recount the heavy toll as people die of suffocation and diseases like the small pox. Olaudah narrates how the miserable conditions goad some slaves to prefer death: they jump into the sea. The horror of the trans-Atlantic crossing is graphically illustrated in Amistad. The Africans are transformed into bondsmen on their arrival in America or the Caribbean. Venture and Olaudah document the ruthless separation of families. The slaves are confined in pens and sold as lots in auctions. The writers’ accounts show that they “ could be bought, sold, tortured, rewarded, educated, or killed at a slaveholders will” (The Drop Squad History Channel). Olaudah’s description of the “ iron muzzle” on a slave woman is particularly chilling in its horror.

The readings give an intimate glimpse into the workings of the slave trade and make it real. The narratives of Venture Smith and Olaudah Equiano constitute a testimonial to the evil of slavery. However, it is the viewing of the Amistad clip which truly brings home the horrors of the slave trade. The clip enacts the true-life experiences of slaves like Venture and Olaudah in graphic detail. It is ironic that the origins of the slave trade can be traced to the warfare between the African tribes. It is clear that the white slave traders exploited this situation. It is a joy to realize that the barbaric slave trade has been confined to the pages of history.

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