Late victorian holocausts critical thinking example

Countries, England

The famine in India and West Bengal

The phenomenon of famine in India is not something which can be taken lightly. According to this book, there was a concerted policy by the British of laissez faire economics to starve the people of Bengal into complete submission. Davis argues how colonialism and capitalism in British India killed millions of natives with policies which destroyed their ability to continue subsidizing themselves and their families. Naturally Davis feels rather emotionally about this issue although he is circumspect and matter of fact with relating the stark details.

New Imperialism is a theme often referred to by Davis in his book. Here he argues that through drastic increase in quota production of grain for exports, the people of West Bengal were left with nothing for themselves creating a situation where millions died without any care or concern by the colonial governments. Controlling vast swathes of territory, the British perhaps knew that their policies were having disastrous effects on the nation's populace but they did not really care as long as demands for consumption by Western economies were being met. Davis continues to harp on this point several times and the whole issue is occasionally dramatized beyond proportion.

But why were Indians treated in this manner? One has to accept the fact that the Indian Mutiny of 1857 had a profound psychological effect on how the country was to be administrated in the future. Notwithstanding all this, the British policy towards Indians in the famine was absolutely unforgivable and cannot be expected to be condoned as Davis rightly argues. He is circumspect about some policies which professed ignorance on the situation actually indicting the British for perpetrating a holocaust on an unimaginable

scale and which can never really be forgiven.

One also has to make allowances for the changes in climate brought about by the El Nino Southern Oscillations which caused many of the famines and which is dealt with rather extensively in the book. However, on a personal note, one has to say that the laissez-faire economic system practiced by the British undoubtedly exacerbated a situation which was already bad and made it much worse. King argues that the incompetence of certain governors and the theological applications of luminaries such as Jeremy Bentham spelt the seeds of a total disaster. Bentham's economic principles and sense of righteousness was thrown out of the window in the whole famine issue.

Davis is very thorough in his analysis and his thesis is that these famines brought about the beginning of the Third World as we now know it. This is arguably the finest theme of the book and as it concludes, one is left not only with a sense of hopelessness but also one of anger at the wanton and largely unnecessary waste and cruelty of such a famine.

At the end of the day, the famine was a disaster on an unimaginable scale and its effects could have been prevented, Davis argues. That it was not remains a huge indictment on British and particularly Victorian society who left untold millions to starve to death without any hope or redemption. The capitalist philosophy employed by the British was not only wrong but was also morally reprehensible as it brought about suffering which can never be condoned. The book is a good example of this disaster and does attempt to come to terms with what happened in those times although it does have some tedious points in some stages.

Works cited:

Davis Mike; Late Victorian Holocausts; London , Verso 2002, Print