

The interesting narrative of Olaudah Equiano book review

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Compare the 18th century African slave trade to a game of checkers. Played on a checkered board of 64 opposing colors, the object of checkers is to capture or block all the men of an opponent. Careful planning of attack and defense are key elements to winning. The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano does more than just detail the experiences of a former African slave, it sets forth the play sequence between the various players engaged in the slave trade, the emotions involved, the effects and consequences on the players, and the future of the game if it were allowed to continue. Equiano experienced life as a slave on several continents.

He endured the torment of the Middle Passage and the various physical and emotional insults and tortures, which came as a result of bondage to another individual. These descriptions are important in establishing the primary players in the slave game. The first is the African player and the other is the White player represented by both Europeans and Americans. The beginning descriptions of Equiano's tribal life are instrumental in understanding the nature of the African player. Equiano perceives the difference in the African way of life versus that of the European as merely one of time.

The Africans have not had the time to learn and grow as the Europeans have. Equiano maintains the notion that existing in a different state of being does not give the European the right to take advantage of their situation in order to promote their own welfare. " Let the polished and haughty European recollect that his ancestors were once, like the African, uncivilized, and even barbarous. Let such reflections as these melt the pride of their superiority into sympathy for the wants and miseries of their sable brethren and compel

them to acknowledge that understanding is not confined to feature or color. Equiano uses scripture to support his idea that all men were created the same and merely existed in different states of progression. The majority of Europeans did not share Equiano's views. As a result the rules of the game changed for the Europeans who viewed themselves as superior to that of the African. These views were responsible for the horrors, which many Africans faced in slavery. Even those Europeans who tried to treat slaves with respect could not escape the economic benefits slavery provided them.

As a result the European was held captive by his own desire to win rather than to play fair. The European plan of attack was ruthless and he felt he had nothing to fear from the African. Equiano writes that these feelings on the part of the European ate away at the salvation of the European soul. Slavery affected not only the body of the African but also their hope. Equiano describes men in his company who would rather jump off a ship and perish in the sea than endure the atrocities of the Middle Passage. Even those Africans who were granted freedom still suffered the abuse of slavery.

After a horrifying incident aboard the London slave ship the Zong, Equiano, a free man at the time, wrote of the courts " he saw no help in them, nor by the law. " Not only was the incident aboard the Zong an example of the horrors that existed when people were treated as property but served as an example of how the ideas of superiority on the part of the English served to strike a blow at the hope of the African. The recurring theme of religion in Equiano's narrative is important in understanding that one's actions cannot escape the judgment and eye of God.

Equiano felt comfort and solace in the doctrines of Christianity. It was a force that comforted him when his duties of a slave almost destroyed him and his inability to be treated as an equal when free mystified him. In true Christianity Equiano also saw hope for the Europeans who were losing their souls to the slave trade. In an address of thanks to the Quakers in Grace Church Court, Equiano states that by lifting the burdens of the Negroes there might be in "some measure, be the possible means, under God, of saving the souls of many of the oppressors. In the checker game of the slave trade, the Europeans did not realize that their men were being lost. They felt they were winning the game in regards to economics. Equiano alerted the reader to the cost the European was paying for their grasp on wealth and prosperity. Equiano's notion that men can only be saved through a combination of faith, works and grace is important in understanding the effects of the trade upon the future of the game. Equiano recognized that there were no lasting winners in the slave trade.

The Europeans were losing the game because they failed to see the eternal consequences of their actions. Equiano believed that the European could still prosper economically without the slave trade if the right plan were to be put into effect. This plan would benefit all involved. Equiano fight for the abolishment of slavery was the tip of the iceberg in his quest. He called for a change of attitude in regards to race relations. He believed this would be the ultimate step in restoring the dignity of all involved.

Equiano had seen first hand that many Europeans still viewed Africans as property even when they were free and treated them as such. Equiano knew

that merely breaking the chains of slavery was not enough to make its effect disappear. Just as men needed all components of the faith - grace equation to be saved, those involved in the slave trade needed a change in attitude to prevail in order to restore hope and eternal relationships. Equiano wrote, "After all what makes any event important, unless by its observation we become better and wiser, and learn to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before God? . Equiano's narrative teaches us that in order for individuals to truly win they must not compete against one another nor capture or enslave based on the notion of race. Instead they should look for ways to work together to find and enjoy the treasures of wisdom and salvation Equiano believed were available to all. I believe in Equiano's message. It was one of powerful humility and quite visionary for his time. He was no ordinary man as he claims. His insights into his experiences and encounters with both players of the slave trade reflected a depth of understanding no money could buy.

His ability to shed light on the emotions of all players involved opened my eyes to the various sides of the slave trade of the time. His message is applicable not only to these aspects of slave trade of the 18th century but also to other concepts of World History past and present. It is important to recognize and understand the concept that when we fail to recognize the importance of others and try to dominate rather than cooperate the only winner of the game is disaster and heartache.