

Social movements and literature essay example

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



Social concerns are often expressed through different forms of media and literature. These avenues provide a way to analyze both popular and unpopular opinions about social interests. Many authors strive to put forward new viewpoints and better understand the psychology of the public. Some hope to make changes in the future, while others may only want to entertain an audience or make people remember events in a truthful manner. The truth is something that is very subjective to each reader, the truth is often clouded by opinions and social influence, literature and media gives people a chance to analyze issues and come to their own conclusion based on a multitude of information available. There are a few great works that I feel really personify this message of truth, by analyzing these works I believe we can gain new understanding about the duality of the human mind regarding social discord.

The Things They Carried

In "The Things They Carried" by Tim O'Brien, the social movements associated with the Vietnam War are explored. He states, "A thing may happen and be a total lie; another thing may not happen and be truer than the truth" (p. 83). This quote is poignant because it exemplified the idea that what is reported as history and what is experienced by individuals are not always told from the same perspective. Social concerns of the time are the basis of O'Brien's novel.

This novel speaks of the deep seated fears associated with social conflicts. Fear is both a motivator and a burden for the characters throughout the story. The inability to decipher the truths about war from the glossed over version presented to the public causes distress for the characters. Often they

question what they are fighting for and if it really fits with their personal viewpoints. One of the character's distress becomes so great that he ends up taking his own life as a result(O'Brien, 2005).

“ Dreamer”

In the novel “ Dreamer” by Charles Johnson, the civil rights movement is explored. Johnson dives into the heart of the civil rights movement in the heart of Martin Luther King's time of leadership. He looks closely at the issues at hand to try and understand the cultural divides that was so a part of the nation at that time. He explains that the struggle between perception and reality in a dangerous form of dualism within one's mind.

Johnson takes this idea of dualism and explores the effect it has on societies' thought patterns. Johnson states that this duality is essential for learning and that Martin Luther King was especially adept at understanding how the human mind worked and how to best appeal to humanities desire for equality and also humanities' desire for violence (Johnson, 1998). Johnson states that the human mind is in a constant battle between the desire for life and the desire for death (Johnson, 1998).

“ Dreamer” is an instrumental work in explaining how the human mind works and how this perception is reflected in the way society treats different groups. It examines how a good leader can train their own mind to lead more effectively and inspire others through their wisdom. The theme of the book is duality and the effect it has on the human consciousness in perceiving truth.

“ The Handmaiden’s Tale”

In the book “ The Handmaiden’s Tale” by Margaret Atwood takes a look at how women fit into political agendas. Atwood describes a world where women have no rights and whose only purpose in life is to procreate. These women are unable to vote and are subservient to their husbands. Atwood describes these women as “ less than human”, people who are treated as lesser being and valued only for their reproductive organs.

Atwood also takes a look at the role of language in the perception of self. In order to acknowledging women as workers, the women are called by a system of titles such as wives, handmaidens, and marthas (Atwood, 2004). Those that speak out against injustice or do not produce healthy children are shunned from the society and poorly treated. Atwood describes a distinct form of persecution against an entire gender within this novel.

This story also shows that how if a person continually is told that they are less all the time, they will eventually perceive this as the truth about themselves. To only be valued for their bodies, shows how women can be dehumanized and the ability to think for oneself diminished over the course of time. Some of the women within the novel do realize this injustice, but when society as a whole is against a group it is quite a difficult ordeal to be recognized.

The irony of the book is that the women in the book do provide a very important role in society. It is their responsibility to ensure that their lineage carries on and they also serve as dutiful wives, and industrious workers(Atwood, 2004). They are just unable to perceive their worth for themselves. They also seem to have a difficult time dealing with the realities

of life as expressed in the quotation, “ I would like to believe this is a story I’m telling. I need to believe it. I must believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance. If it’s a story I’m telling, then I have control over the ending. Then there will be an ending, to the story, and real life will come after it. I can pick up where I left off.” (Atwood, 2004)

“ Born on the Fourth of July”

In the film “ Born on the Fourth of July” starring Tom Cruise, the synopsis also includes a Vietnam War veteran and his struggle to distinguish between the civilian perspective and the soldier perspective of War. The main character Kovik, grows up thinking that all soldiers are heroes, he wants to be one from a very young age (Stone, 1989). To Kovik, soldiers are the ultimate heroes and he desires to earn the respect that he sees soldiers earn. Kovik is drawn into going the service in hopes of becoming braver and earning glory for himself, however not soon after he enlists he is sent to war and learns the harsh realities. He accidentally shoots one of his own team members resulting in his death. The death of his comrade make Kovik question himself, in his quest to be a hero he committed a very dishonorable act (Stone, 1989). He is unable to forgive himself and struggles with his understanding of war’s social injustices.

Like “ The Things They Carried” this movie is from the point of view of a soldier whose beliefs are turned upside down once he experiences the truths of war. Kovik is later badly wounded (Stone, 1989). He suffers greatly both physically and mentally throughout the film. The film illustrates that the suffering of soldiers and citizens does not end after the fighting stops the

effects continue long after the end of the war. Often the public perspective is that when the war ends everything will go back to normal, this movie proves that that is not the case.

A different viewpoint is also presented in the film in the form of Kovik's brother. Kovik's brother is very anti-war (Stone, 1989). His views reflect those of many at the time that felt that entering into a war with Vietnam was a mistake. This event caused a lot of social discord. It is ironic that both a soldier and an anti-war protester came from the same family. As Kovik suffers he begins to rethink his own views about war throughout the course of the film.

Conclusion

In conclusion, these books and films represent a small fraction of the many works that analyze social concerns and seek to find truths about society. They all discuss different aspects, but they all present information to the viewer or reader so that they may better understand the truths within our society. It is important that people understand the duality of the human mind, they may either agree or disagree with the views put forward in the work but at least they receive more than a single biased account of events. O'Brien and the film "Born on the Fourth of July" both tell about war from different perspectives, that of soldiers, that of the general public, and that of anti-war protestors. The book "The Handmaid's Tale" tells of a theoretical event in hopes of warning people not to forget their importance in society. "Dreamer" seeks to better understand the psychology of why people think like they do and how a leader can reach a group of people or not. All of these

are issues that could affect our own society if they are not brought to our attention and serve as a warning to be aware of our thought processes.

Works Cited:

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