

All souls book review essay sample



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In his autobiography *All Souls: A Family Story From Southie*, Michael Patrick MacDonald discloses on the adversities his family experienced while living in the projects of South Boston. One historical force present throughout the book is social movement. This is seen when the African American schools of Roxbury were being integrated with the schools in Southie causing a response of chaos and rallies. The government was a major social structure or institution involved in the MacDonald's lives. This governmental influence is seen through the family's dependence on welfare and also through Whitey Bulger and his relationships with the politicians.

Another social structure seen in the book was religion. The whole project was Irish Catholic and not afraid to represent that as part of their identity. MacDonald tells the detailed story of his family by tracing through his memories of growing up in Old Colony, a customarily Irish Catholic project of South Boston. Southie, as it is referred to, was a working class community typically populated by families similar to that of the MacDonald's. The majority were fatherless, Irish Catholic families who relied on the welfare system and were living in the poorly kept projects.

Despite this, the people of Southie were a tight-knit community who were proud not only to be Irish, but to be from Southie. "There was always this feeling that we were protected, as if the whole neighborhood was watching our backs for threats, watching for all the enemies we could never really define. No 'outsiders' could mess with us" (p. 2). The author grew up the middle child among many siblings and observed a great deal of the racial hatred and gang violence that was taking place in Southie during his most impressionable years.

He recalled vivid memories of the anti-busing riots of the early 70's and the chaos that occurred before his very eyes. Among various other life-altering events, MacDonald was forced to experience the untimely and unfortunate deaths of his brothers, sisters, and friends. Growing-up over the years MacDonald began to realize that Southie was not actually “ the best place in the world”. Instead of a stand-up guy, he now appreciated Whitey Bulger for who he really was, a heartless gangster who callously sacrificed his city's children in order to attain his own selfish benefits.

The dealings of cocaine, alcoholism, and suicide dictated the lives of Southie's youth whilst a code of silence and a sense that nothing was wrong (denial) continued to function as blinders to their parent's eyes. As an adult looking back it is easier for MacDonald to distinguish amongst these connections, still he clearly remembers how it felt to be part of Southie; “ Sure, bad things happened to my family, and to so many of my neighbors and friends, but there was never a sense that we were victims. This place was ours, it was all we ever knew, and it was all ours” (p. -6). Leaving Southie and everything he ever knew was one of the hardest and most important decisions MacDonald has ever had to make, and one that most likely saved his life.

The historical force of social movement is seen during the anti-busing riots. During this time the people of Southie clung even closer to one another to boycott the busing and the integration of the Southie and Roxbury schools. The people of Southie did not know why the blacks thought they were getting any better of an education than they were. When it came down it, they were all poor. Neither side has a pot to piss in and now they want us to

fight over who can piss in what alley” (p. 76). The reason this had such an influence on the lives of the MacDonald children is because now many of the older kids, who could not get into the Catholic schools to avoid busing, were dropping out of school (with their parents approval) to avoid the stresses of attending the integrated schools. Thus, the kids were now in the streets all day, slowly getting more and more intertwined with Whitey Bulger and the dangers and violence of Southie.

The government plays as an important social structure throughout the book. First off, the reason the MacDonald family lived in Old Colony was because they, along with all their other neighbors, were on welfare. Also, politicians overlooked things that happened in Southie because of Whitey Bulger’s connections to people. Bulger’s associations were the main reason why wrongdoings that took place in Southie seemed to stay quiet. The MacDonald’s lives were influenced by this because it was only perpetuating other problems, such as drugs and violence in Southie.

Still everyone managed to overlook these evils, which only enabled the worst to continue on a daily basis. The other social institution that influenced their lives was religion and their Irish American heritage. The fact that practically everyone in Southie was Irish Catholic is a crucial factor. It is what gave all the MacDonald children, and everyone else from Southie, a sense of self and immense pride. People from Southie were proud to be from Southie. They embodied this by sporting green hats with shamrocks on them or having a shamrock tattoo.

As uplifting as they were, the same green shamrock was also the instigator of violence between rival ghettos. It is important to understand how historical and social forces connect to individual lives because every action, or lack there of, has an affect on someone else. Ever since President Bush was initially elected into office (I say he cheated his way in) more Americans have come to realize how significantly these forces can and do affect their individual or personal lives.

Eventhough we often think of ourselves as insignificant in grand scheme of things, social movements, the government, religion and many other areas have a major impact on what takes place in our everyday lives. These are the same things that gave MacDonald the strength to stand-up and bring change to overwhelming circumstances. He became something other than just another casualty in Southie, MacDonald has taken his knowledge and experience and turned it into something that will help and be positive for others.