

Black like me analysis black history

Business



Jacalin De La Rosa Dr. Forss 31 October 2011 Black Like Me “ In the flood of the light against white tile, the face and shoulders of a stranger- a fierce, bald, very dark Negro- glared at me from the glass... All the traces of the John Griffin I had been were wiped from existence. ” This is just the start of the transformation John Griffin had to go through to create the ultimate sociological experiment in the 1950’s.

Within the book Black Like Me, by John Howard Griffin, it can be argue that discrimination truly existed amongst the white citizen and black citizens, segregation existed beyond true realization, and persecution was wrongly institutionalized. The narrative writing of John Griffin goes into great depth of these very points revealing the life of a black man in the south. Black Like Me is a book placing John Howard Griffin, the author in the deep south with one question running around in his head. “ If a white man became a Negro in the Deep South, what adjustments would he have to make? John sets out to answer that question, going about the medical transformation of changing his skin color to black and dumping himself into the south with no knowledge of what was to come. John Griffin’s writing is filled with interesting information showing different struggles that black men and women dealt with at the time within society. Black Like Me takes place in Texas where Griffin talks about his plans to become this white man in a black mans body.

For six weeks the author, hitchhikes, walks, or takes busses through the streets of four other Southern States; Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana and Georgia.

Griffin sets out on a sociological quest to discover what it is really like to be a Negro and what he discovers is that many freedoms and rights that he had

<https://assignbuster.com/black-like-me-analysis-black-history/>

had as a privileged white were now forbidden to him while he dwelled within his newly black skin. Griffin also encounters much discrimination that existed between whites and blacks. This was part of the book that John finds out that the discrimination between the white and black citizens is harsher than he would have realized while he was still living a white life.

The things that he is put through are an eye opener for him, showing him the other side of the discrimination. Such as name calling, the “ hate stare,” and at one point taunting and threats.

Black Like Me shows that people, specifically whites, in those days did not know how the Negro’s struggled. Even for the author, he was in a state of shock when he saw how he was being treated as a black man. Griffin had left his family to go out and see what it felt like to be a black man, and he found that he had nothing but hard times the whole six weeks of his experiment.

The most important part of the book I believe was when Griffin finally comes upon the segregation, encountering buses where he had to sit in the back, where he was not able to use a restroom or to buy food in some restaurants even though he had the right amount of money and maybe even more. Griffin encountered many common Negro men and women, who showed him much politeness and kindness even though they were total strangers and who also told him of the dangers of where he chose to travel and how he chose to travel there.

One such person is the Negro shoeshine man Sterling Williams, the author’s first Negro friend who is one of the only blacks who knows of his true experiment. Then he also meets a few strange Negro men in Atlanta, who let

him know how they have made it through much of the discrimination and segregation put upon them by the white people. Many readers of Black Like Me might decide that what Griffin wrote was a whole big crock and that segregation did not exist to the extreme that John explains it to be.

There are many books though that show this segregation, one book being Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison stating “ I went on to the corner and got on a bus and went automatically to the rear. “(Ellison 193) This clearing shows that segregation truly existed and though within this book, Invisible Man, he does not completely talk of segregation he states it there while not even meaning to, showing that segregation and discrimination was a main part of a black man’s life then.

Briefly spoken of in this book is the wrongly institution of persecution with in the court.

In one point a case in Mississippi is spoken of “...an accused man was deprived of a fair trial, kidnapped and murdered by a lynch mob from a Mississippi jail...” in the book Griffin has decided to go to Mississippi almost due to this entirely. A book called Blood Justice: The Lynching of Mack Charles Parker by Howard Smead goes in depth of this case. Smead explains that Parker had been accused of raping a white woman and had been arrested. In his book Howard goes from the night of the accused rape to the trial and lynching and the case after to the after effects.

This case alone shows that the persecutions of black men especially were more often persecuted wrongly than rightly just due to the fact the man was black .

The book *Black Like Me*, by John Howard Griffin, can argue that discrimination really existed amongst the white citizen and black citizens, segregation lives beyond true realization, and persecution was wrongly institutionalized. The narrative writing of John Griffin goes into great depth of these very points revealing the life of a black in the south.

As I have explained throughout this paper the experiences that John Howard Griffin went through while he had transformed himself from the white successful man to a black man with the same everything and still went through every hardship any other black man went through. Bibliography Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. New York: Random House, 1980.

Print. Griffin, John H. *Black Like Me*. New York: New American Library, 1989.

Print. Smead, Howard.

Blood Justice: The Lynching of Mack Charles Parker. New York: Oxford University, 1986. Print.