

An image of africa: racism in conrad's heart of darkness by chinua achebe

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Summary of critical essay "An image of Africa". Achebe without mincing any words calls one of the greatest novelists not only in English Literature but of world literature, Joseph Conrad, a genius on all accounts, a racist. This contention by the author of the article is hard to digest by a lover of great literature, but Achebe's researched view is sound and the arguments he puts forward and the pricking questions he asks are true.

Achebe is specially disturbed by the fact that Conrad's novel "The Heart of Darkness" completely dehumanizes Africans and treats them as brutes, savages and mere props to give his novel a convincing touch in complete disregard of the sublime and enlightened values an author of his stature is supposed to espouse.

He is also against this novel to be a part of syllabus in the English Departments of many universities in Europe and America as it further reinforces his contention that the Western culture and civilization has still not been able to come to terms with the fact that the "niggers" are as civilized a people as them, and therefore, he considers it criminal that a novel

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portraying and in ways perhaps sub-consciously, though Achebe is convinced that it is intentional and conscious advocating racial discrimination is the part of curriculum in centers of education and learning. Going by his arguments the whole edifice of these institutions is built on the foundations of ethnic and racial discrimination.

Achebe is of the view that how can a piece of fiction which clearly promotes discrimination can be called a great novel, when in essence it lacks the

quintessential qualities of broadening, accommodating and enlightening the world view of the reader. In fact this novel in complete opposition fans and gives weightage to the baser human feelings which promote hate instead of love.

In the opinion of Achebe through the character of Marlow, Conrad presents the essential white man with the vision of a ruthless colonist rather than a representative of a altruist society. Achebe being an intelligent and well educated individual does not put the whole blame on Conrad, instead he holds the whole Western culture responsible for nourishing and fostering hate against Africa in general and the Africans in particular.

According to him the surprising and the alarming fact is that this condescending attitude and the racial discrimination that goes with it did not wither away or fade out by the death of a generation with the sick colonist mind-set but is prevalent today in the 21st century America.

The author laments the historical and cultural atmosphere where a people with their centuries old customs, traditions, norms, values and developed language are belittled by the ignorant and clichéd ridden West__ the same West which prides itself on being the guardian of not only human but animal rights, as well..

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Achebe ends his essay on a pessimistic note because after the passages of centuries and of peaceful co-existence unfortunately still the liberal West harbors petty notions of ethnic and racial superiority, though time and time again this obnoxious notion has proved absolutely wrong. He is right to criticize Conrad because if a man of letters has not been able to overcome

these petty notions what can be expected of the common man.

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Work Cited

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