

On slave narratives and phillis wheatley



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Slavery has been one of the most cruel and inhuman ' economic' systems, and alleged necessary evils to plague the course of our nation's history; affecting in particular, the African American population. A great extent of African American history relates and documents the struggles of the African American people to overcome the oppression brought about by the forced labor system and attain the fundamental right to freedom, to liberty, and to the pursuit of the respective happiness, which every human being is entitled to, regardless of race and skin color. Phillis Wheatley, dubbed ' America's first black poet' is among the number of people who were able to write of their experiences as a slave coming to America and document the struggles surrounding the slave labor system. She was the first African American to have published a book.

Her poetry and narratives on slavery serve as remembrances of a time when mankind's capacity for cruelty was largely evident. The preservation of instances which occurred in that era affirms us that humanity can prevail and that goodness and kindness, or equality at the very least, can ensue. And that more than anything, attaining equality and freedom is possible, and that it is here now. Although, as a memoir, Phillis Wheatley's writings of her experiences on slavery naturally doesn't echo the racial equality and freedom which African Americans are being afforded today, the documentation of her experiences nonetheless hold great significance to our histories, which reminds and advises us not to repeat ourselves and commit to the same mistakes.

Wheatley, who was born in Senegal and was brought to America in 1761, despite writing from personal experience, was able to give voice and

encompass the collective experiences of Africans in the slave exodus to America, which is embodied, for instance, in her poem “ On Being Brought From Africa to America” (1770). In the poem, Wheatley talks of her journey from her native land to a country which distinguishes the apparent importance of race and the color of one’s skin. She also writes, ironically, of being introduced to the existence of God, and the redemption afforded by the said savior to people like herself, who come from the ‘ pagan’ country that was Africa. Her writings, as well as that of other African American writers at the height of slave trade and the slave labor system, contributes to the shaping not only of our histories, but of the present system, and correspondingly, the future as well.

The narratives and personal experience of the writers who lived at a time when civil rights and equality for every individual wasn’t recognized affords its readers more than a brief glimpse to the struggles of African Americans at the time. And more importantly, an ideology which ultimately appeals to the instance of humanity, and the preservation of it.