

Racism in "a lesson before dying"

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Life in the South during the segregation brought torment to the black people in the community. Racism was a way of life. The white people owned the plantations and lived in big houses, while the blacks were their servants, subject to their whims and caprices. In A Lesson Before Dying, the black man Jefferson was an innocent witness to a shooting that happened in a store.

He was just there at the wrong time. Being black, young and with little education, spelled his death. He was soon sentenced to an execution without a lot of deliberation from an all-white jury. He was jailed in a cell that was not fit for humans while waiting for the time his sentence will be carried out.

During this time, Grant Wiggins, another African American male, visited him in prison and helped Jefferson realize some things about his life and what was about to happen to him. The impact of the defense lawyer's words about Jefferson as a hog, which was not capable of being intelligent and moral, was great. As a result, the accused young man began to act like the animal. Seeing this, some concerned characters thought of a way to make him face his death like a man.

Jefferson wrote in his diary that he understood how his people, meaning the black in the community, view his life and death. He knew how his fate affected them. In understanding how his death would have a great impact on society, he knew that he should face his sentence with utmost dignity. In order to show the white community that he is not a hog, as what his defense lawyer claimed, Jefferson must show them that he is not an animal but a dignified person despite

his color. His noble actions would not only affect Jefferson but the entire black community. He asked his friend Grant to assure his friends and family that he died without being scared. That he died as a brave, strong man. Before his sentence, Jefferson was like most young, black men. He lived as a servant would, submissive and unthinking.

When he got his sentence, he soon felt anger and deep resentment to how his life became so unfair, and even thought that God only favored the white people. He stopped caring for himself, behaved like an animal, and generally moved in a stupefied manner.

After he met Grant, Jefferson started writing in a diary. In his diary, Jefferson began to wonder about the other prisoners. He asked why the poor people, who are mostly black, suffered more than the rich, white community.

He thought a lot about what Grant told him of his being better than an animal, like how the white people think of him. He wanted to believe this and wanted to be shown some proof that he was indeed a person with rights who could make positive contribution to the community. By beginning to ask and think, Jefferson realized that he had made little expectations and goals for himself.

When he began these musings and writings, Jefferson's self-worth gradually returned and he started to appreciate and be grateful for his family and friends.

He then became thoughtful and brave. He realized that being a man means knowing how to reciprocate care and affection. Jefferson also realized that he wanted more respect, and that he can also improve his lot by learning

how to ask for it. In the end, Jefferson shed his defeatist attitude and earned the respect of many by facing his death like a man with courage and dignity intact.

Work Cited

Gaines, Ernest J. " A Lesson Before Dying." SparkNotes LLC. 3 December 2007