

Sugar cane alley essay



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A Compound Life Sugar Cane Alley was filmed during the summer of 1931 in Martinique a time after the abolishment of slavery. This film parallels a time in Southern Rhodesia where there was a compound system that controlled the mining workers Just as the overseers in the cane fields controlled the cane workers. Every aspect of daily life is in some way controlled. Sugar Cane Alley is an insightful film that shows how no matter your environment, if you want to succeed you can with a lot of hard work, but there will be hurdles to jump on the way.

In Southern Rhodesia there was a system called the compound system. In this compound system the goal was for total control, but they figured that was to far, so they attempted to control every aspect of the migrants that were rounded up by the RNLB. Unlike Sugar Cane Alley, the compound system was made of a three-tier system where there was the local population, migrants, and the forced laborers. In Sugar Cane Alley people are not forced to work, they work to live, and its just two rows of shacks full of people who can leave go as they please. But in Southern

Rhodesia they wanted to lengthen the labor cycle and prevent mobility so they don't move north for higher wages so they create laws within the system. As Van Onselen writes, the stores available were partially or fully company owned where making a tab was a trap and food rations were so low that they had to supplement by going to the high priced company store. He goes on further to say that because everything was so far away, the company succeeded in the miners leaning on the company store, but some would walk as far as twelve miles to another store for lower priced food.

This is how Sugar Cane Alley and the compound system in Southern Rhodesia compare. Both have stores that their overseers partially or fully own where prices are too high so tabs and credit is invented so that some are forever indebted. In both areas wages are low, work is hard and long, and slavery is overall aspect of it all; they just can't let it go completely. Jose, the main character, was different from the other children in the alley. He extremely bright, lives with his grandmother, and is the only one who believes education is his ticket out of the cane fields.

The summer was a time to relax and have fun for the children while their parents are hard at work in the cane fields. During the day, the kids are left in the shacks where lots of mischief and disorder occurs. One day in certain, the children were running around in fields, watching animals fight, and feeding each other. When it came time to eat, all the children wanted to go into Jose's shack, the shack his grandmother had told him earlier to keep clean. He fought to keep them out until an overseer came by and they all ran in and closed the door.

This exemplifies how even in their own little community, Blacks still live in the shadows and slavery has not faded away, but merely changed its shape and form. As the children begin to share and eat the food they brought together, they demand sugar from Jose. They begin a search of the shack to figure out if Jose's grandmother has hid it somewhere. During the search, someone knocks over a glass and some others begin to hyperventilate because what will he tell his grandmother. One girl tells him what to do so that his grandmother would be angry, but not beat him.

The practice of symbolism to defer the problem and getting nervous because the bowl broke, underlines the fact that poverty is at a high in this small area. Every little thing matters and everything makes a difference. After the leisure time of summer, kids are back to school to see which path of life they will take. Depending on final exams, those who excel will go on and further their education in the capital, Fort-de-France. Those who may not have done as well as those others will walk down a path that has been walked before by their parents.

They will enter into a life of back breaking and low wages in the cane fields. But M'an Tine, Jose's grandmother, will not have him working out in the fields. In one scene of the film, the children in one of their mischief moods are running around in the fields and tampering with the animals. While playing around in a hens coop, they find an egg, something they had never seen or eaten before. In order to cook the egg, they needed matches to light a fire, so in went the youngest of the group. There was a store entwined with the shacks that allowed people to put things on a tab or credit just as they did in Rhodesia.

But in Rhodesia, the store was ran by a mining overseer here the prices were so high that the miners couldn't eat respectively. So the youngest went into the store and mischievously put a bottle of rum and matches on her mothers tab. As the children all drink the rum, they all became intoxicated and carefree. As time moved on, the children were so oblivious of anything, they set a section of sugar cane on fire and laughed as if it would end all hurt and pain. To ensure that nothing of this capacity ever occurred again, the

overseers condemned the children to the cane fields to work where they could be supervised.

Jose was eased for not being able to work and make money like the others, but his grandmother just would not allow it. She made it clear to him and everyone else that he would not be stuck in the cane fields, education was his way out. Another person who influenced Jose's education was Mr. Mdeouze. He told Jose about the history of Africa and his life in stories that later inspired Jose write about in school. Mr. Mdeouze served as Jose's spiritual father or guardian who let him see life and the world through his eyes and his stories.

Jose was such a brilliant young man; he not only saw the world through Mr. Mdeouze but also through his strong willed grandmother, both of his teachers, and a friend he met named Leopold. When school began after summer, Jose grandmother didn't want him to hang around with the kids from the shacks anymore because education is a serious matter and he needs no distractions. In doing so, Jose met a new friend, Leopold who was a mulatto whose father was one of the headmen in charge. Leopold's father told him not to associate with anyone from Sugar Cane Alley because he believed he was above them.

But even his son of his own flesh was not granted to have his last name because he was a mulatto and his family name has been a strong white name that goes back for centuries. Leopold represents how even if you're born to a white father, you're still black, and those things that don't pertain to those who are full black don't pertain to you either. No barrier has been

broken, just reconstructed. Jose saw the world through him as well as Leopold through Jose because their worlds were so different. Slavery is said to be over, but whites still want control over blacks.

Their intentions is to have total control but that's an impossible task because there are and always will be different forms of resistance. All of these things mentioned both Sugar Cane Alley and Southern Rhodesia have in common. Jose in the alley was a different case. Through living in poverty and seeing his most inspirational beings go back to Africa, in a sense, he jumped over the hurdles and made education his get away plan. He, nor did his grandmother, let Jose become a product of his environment. They both knew he was significantly brilliant and did not let any circumstance block his pursuit of success