

Coming of age in mississippi analysis



Released in the 1960s, the book *Coming of Age in Mississippi* presents Anne Moody's lifetime experiences in the era of Jim Crow laws in the rural South. In the 1960s, African American civil activists had made tremendous successes and losses in equal measure as far as the civil rights war was considered. Here, it is important to note that the civil rights movements, led by the non-violent iconic leaders such as Martin Luther King and other more militant leaders including Malcolm X, had succeeded in getting the federal government to sign various anti-discrimination legislations into law. However, nothing much can be said about the passage of anti-discrimination laws because society was not ready for new changes (Moody 10).

Being a student leader, Anne Moody is recognized for her efforts in leading the Woolworth's lunch-counter sit-in and representing the voice of the oppressed African Americans in rural Mississippi. Through her memoirs, Moody presents a clear picture of the situation in the South, whereby the federal government had stopped enforcing the newly amended legislations including the rule of law. This gave way to the emergence of Jim Crow laws, which the whites used to segregate against blacks. In fact, through the Jim Crow laws, the whites succeeded in barring blacks from voting and accessing any public facility. Therefore, throughout the book's production and release in 1968, the Jim Crow laws were in effect and many blacks were denied the opportunity to vote for failing the voting tests and through the use of outdated voting requirements (Moody 140).

Just like the other African American families who lived during the era of the Jim Crow laws in the rural south, Moody's family was involved in tenant farming. This form of farming, whereby the farmer was required to rent land

from the white landowners by paying a certain percentage of the amount of crops sold, represented a more crude form of slavery, in which whites owned almost all of the land and all the blacks were their servants. Therefore, most African American families were living in abject poverty during this period (Moody 28). Besides highlighting the level of suffering the blacks endured during the era of Jim Crow laws, Moody discusses the effects of racial distinctions, disunity among blacks, and prejudice. However, the most outstanding theme in this book involves white oppression through the Jim Crow laws. This essay examines the theme of white oppression as captured in Anne Moody's book.

Throughout the book, one can notice several instances of white oppression in the form of discrimination and segregation against blacks. In fact, from the beginning of the book, Moody notes that most blacks were considered genetically inferior to their white counterparts, and this formed the basis for discrimination and segregation. More specifically, Moody presents anecdotal evidence throughout the book, and this serves to highlight a number of oppressive experiences of African Americans, particularly the sharecroppers (tenant farmers). As noted earlier, the whites owned almost all of the land and their black counterparts were left with no choice but to rent the land on which they planted their crops and remitted a significant amount of their earnings to the white landowners. According to Moody, sharecropping was not the most enjoyable event that could ever happen to blacks at a time when they had been stripped of their basic civil and human rights (20). The conditions in the farms were harsh and deplorable, considering that the farmers, including pregnant women, were not allowed enough time to rest.

Besides, the harsh conditions of sharecropping destabilized the family structure among the African American families in many ways. For instance, Moody notes that Anne was left under the care of an eight-year old uncle, while her parents went to work in the farms. The situation was so difficult that Moody's parents decided to divorce due to the strain of poverty brought about by sharecropping (24).

Therefore, by all means, sharecropping was a more direct form of white oppression of their black counterparts. In fact, the condition of sharecroppers, particularly black women, was not any different from the conditions during slavery, when there were no anti-discrimination legislations in place. According to Moody, black pregnant women were not allowed enough time to rest after giving birth (26). She notes that, a woman "...did not stop working until a week before the baby was born, and she was out of work only three weeks..." (Moody 26). This shows the level of white oppression in which blacks were forced to work extra hard in order to ensure that they produced enough to pay the white landowners besides feeding their families.

Sometimes sharecropping could not favor the farmers at all, and thus, most women were forced to work as maids in the homes of whites so as to provide food for their starving children. In the same way, instances of oppression followed them everywhere since the only food they could afford were leftovers from the homes of whites. Thus, Moody notes that, " Sometimes Mama would bring us the white family's leftovers. It was the best food I had ever eaten. That was when I discovered that white folks ate different from us" (29). Such situations opened Anne's eyes since she started to explore

the question of race in greater detail. She indicates that, “ Now I was more confused than before. If it was not the straight hair and the white skin that made you white, then what was it?” Here, she wanted to know why the white people were different and more important than blacks.

However, as Anne came to realize, the issue of color was not the only factor driving white oppression of blacks. In fact, there was disunity among blacks, which fuelled white oppression, considering that most African Americans were unwilling to join other blacks in the fight for their civil and human rights for fear of being kicked out of their homes. Actually, Anne writes that, “ But I also hated Negroes. I hated them for not standing up and doing something about the murders...Anyway, it was at this stage in my life that I began to look upon Negro as cowards” (Moody 136). This implies that blacks were willing to accept injustices leveled against them instead of banding together to fight for their common civil rights.

Therefore, it can be concluded that oppression thrived through different means such as racial inequalities and discrimination, which were not only perpetuated by the whites but also blacks themselves. In fact, Anne notes that even the lighter-skinned African Americans were participating in oppressive activities against their black counterparts despite sharing common forms of oppression from whites. Ultimately, oppression is a theme that is evident throughout the book, and the author manages to articulate it effectively by providing a number of personal and anecdotal evidence, as shown in the foregoing discussions.