

Separate pasts analysis essay



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Melton McLaurin, in his book, "Separate Pasts," recalls memories of growing up in his hometown of Wade, North Carolina. During this time, McLaurin works in his grandfather's store in the segregated South. McLaurin writes of his interactions with the black community and observes the segregated lifestyle of black and whites. In his book "Separate Pasts," McLaurin describes the black citizens of Wade that have influenced and changed his views of segregation and racism. The first person to influence McLaurin's racial views was a black playmate by the name of Bobo.

During this time period it was perfectly acceptable for white children to play with black children. In "Separate Pasts" McLaurin describes an event in which he had licked a needle that his black playmate Bobo had already previously licked. Upon this realization McLaurin has sudden conflicting and negative racial views against Bobo. He feels violated that the black child's saliva may have contaminated him yet; at the same time he does not want his friend Bobo to feel hurt towards his negative thoughts.

This memory shows that although McLaurin outwardly is friendly towards his black peers, he still views them inferiorly. Another figure who shapes McLaurin's view of the black community is Betty Jo. In this section of "Separate Pasts" McLaurin explores sexual fantasies and relationships between the white and black community. He had strong sexual fantasies about the black adolescents and young women that come into the store. However society prevents him from acting upon these desires.

Betty Jo, a young black girl who frequently visits the store, changes the way McLaurin feels about black girls. She was the first girl that McLaurin desired

emotionally as well as physically. This desire for her showed McLaurin that Betty Jo was just like the white girls that he had previously dated. This section of McLaurin's book shows the complexities of interracial sexual relationships and fantasies. Another memory that McLaurin recalls upon is an event that involves Vinny Love, a black single mother in need of aid, and his grandfather.

Vinny Love had come to McLaurin's grandfather asking for help in order to get on welfare to aid her ailing son. McLaurin's grandfather calls upon Wilson at the welfare office to go to Vinny Love. Wilson visits Vinny Love but he does not immediately help her. When Vinny Love goes back to the store McLaurin's grandfather is enraged that Wilson had not followed his orders. McLaurin's grandfather then sees to it that Vinny Love and her mentally ill child are helped. In this section of "Separate Pasts" McLaurin is greatly excited and inspired by his grandfather's willingness to help Vinny Love.

However, McLaurin soon realizes that his grandfather was so willing to help because his orders were questioned. Thus, McLaurin's grandfather was merely saving his reputation rather than wholeheartedly helping Vinny Love's cause. However in the end, no matter what McLaurin's grandfather's motives were, Vinny Love receives the help she is needed. The last people McLaurin writes about are Jerry and Miss Carrie. McLaurin describes them as Wade's most interesting couple. Miss Carrie is a retired schoolteacher and Jerry picks up odd jobs in Wade.

McLaurin seems to highly respect the couple and consider them more than just another black family. McLaurin explains that he has never entered the

house of a black family until one evening at Jerry and Miss Carrie's home. Miss Carrie invites McLaurin in for a slice of pie. Upon his entry into the house, he is filled with emotions of guilt. McLaurin realizes that he had no idea how black families lived and was appalled by how little Jerry and Miss Carrie had. In this last section of the book McLaurin finally realizes that even a respected black couple in Wade can be poor.

This realization helps him empathize with the black community. In the book "Separate Pasts" McLaurin writes about his youth in Wade. He writes of black people who have shaped his views of the black community. He writes of the first experience of racism with his black friend, his sexual fantasies he has of black women, and of the sudden empathy he feels when faced with the black plight of poverty. All of these experiences help shape McLaurin into the man he is and help him understand the segregated community of Wade, North Carolina.