

The price of equality essay sample



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In the story "Harrison Bergeron," equality among citizens in the year 2081 became universal for the American society. What price was paid to achieve this, and is it really as good as it seemed? As revealed in the story, we discover that equality comes at a terrible price. Is it a price we could be forced to accept in our lifetime? Kurt Vonnegut provides us with the combination of conflict and symbols, along with the characters of George and Hazel Bergeron, to reveal the theme of the dangers that total equality presents to a society that foolishly accepts the forced control of their freedoms by the government. By understanding details and parts of Vonnegut's life experiences, "Harrison Bergeron" becomes a refreshing story, with a deeper meaning beneath the surface. Vonnegut is successful in achieving the theme of this story by relating to his own horrific experiences as a prisoner, and also his freedoms which were stripped of him as a youth, much like that of that character of Harrison. In the biography about Kurt Vonnegut, William Rodney Allen writes that Vonnegut was an avid spokesman during the 80's and 90's for retaining our constitutional freedoms.

Perhaps, when writing this story, Vonnegut felt a real threat, much like that of "Harrison Bergeron," that our freedoms are in jeopardy. Vonnegut is also able to unify the conflict between the characters of this story, and the symbol of handicaps, which lead to equality for all people, at the hands of the government. As their son Harrison is taken away, Vonnegut begins to describe the handicaps in detail, which further intensifies the restrictions placed on the citizens. "The transmitter would send out some sharp noise to keep people like George from taking unfair advantage of their brains" (par.

3). The characters of this story are in conflict with the rules placed upon them. Vonnegut uses this example to identify the consequences of a weak society that allows anything without question. " If I tried to get away with it," said George, " then other people'd get away with-and pretty soon we'd be right back to the dark ages again, with everybody competing against everybody else. You wouldn't like that, would you?" (par. 29).

This statement in the story reflects upon Vonnegut's personal beliefs about freedom, and how people with above average intelligence are still willing to let government control their every thoughts and actions. The true dangers of total equality are displayed frequently throughout this story. As each handicapped character is described, they all have accepted that they are no longer able to use their gifts or talents. The tragedy does not take place at the end of the story when Harrison is shot. The tragedy lies in the actions of the characters that mask their personal abilities. " She must have been extraordinarily beautiful, because the mask she wore was hideous" (par. 40). If Vonnegut had not experienced being a prisoner of war, or the loss of his own blessings in life as a child, this story would not have conveyed the deeper message of protecting our freedoms, and he possibly would not have had such a following at the time of his death.

Works Cited

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