Celie’s Rise Above Oppression Essay, Research Paper

Celie?s Rise Above Oppression

From the year 1910 to the year 1945 the United States had undergone some of the most significant hardships. Within this time, the Great Depression took place leaving many people unemployed and many people left without food or proper necessities. There was also World War I, and the influx of foreign peoples to the United States. In the south, the major problem was racial tension. Although there was an emersion of African American culture, there were also serious problems such as segregation, the development of the Ku Klux Klan, and the invention of the Jim Crow laws. Another issue facing this time was sexism. Most of society believed that a wife was owned by her husband and she must obey and follow his rules. 1910 to 1945 were also the years in which The Color Purple, by Alice Walker took place. Celie, the main character, is an African American woman with great wealth, but of little importance due to the color of her skin. However, in this novel the racial and sexual hardships the oppressed (Celie) faces only makes her stronger.

The way Celie was treated as a child is a prime example of sexism. Her father had raped her several times infesting her with an incestual pregnancy. He did this as her mother was dying. This shows how the father saw women as an object, rather than human beings with a right to live, and live healthily. If this had happened this day and age I am sure that it would not have gone unnoticed. Consequences of such a disgusting crime would be harsh. As if this was not bad enough, her father gave her to Albert without any consent of Celie herself. He claimed that he would not give up Nettie, and that he better take Celie because she knows how to cook, clean, and take care of children. Albert therefore takes Celie without any wish of love, but with the prime consideration that she would be his property willing to take care of his land and children. This is absolute sexism.

Throughout the novel it is apparent that Celie is searching for love. It seems as if love would cure all her pain. She never finds love through the men in her life. Men in the south during this time period do not treat Celie as a woman to cherish, but rather a woman to be beaten when bad, and beaten when good. Men held a great superiority over woman during the entire duration of the book. The times in which women are stronger than men result in tragedy. For instance, when Sophia battles Harpo she apparently stands as the stronger one. She eventually ends up in jail for the same strength that made her superior. In the South during the years 1910 to 1945 there is no way to go around the sexism that presides. Walker does a nice job presenting this actuality. She shows it dominantly through Sophia?s tragedy. Sexism defines the time period, and although Celie is a main subject of this oppression, this helps her to find real love and the actualization of herself. In the end, it works out for her rather than lead her to a life of unhappiness.

It is a common saying that ?what doesn?t hurt us makes us stronger,? and in the case of Celie I find that to contain great truth. In the beginning of the novel Celie has a great lack of self-esteem and a huge guilt for the incidents that take place with her ?father.? She takes on this huge guilt because society?s beliefs have ingrained into Celie?s mind that it is always the women?s fault, and that men will always be superior. Toward the middle of the novel, the sexism gets stronger and Celie?s esteem drops even lower. Albert treats Celie as a possession and beats her consistently. She envies the strength of Sophia, and envies the strength of Shug. She also envies the love between Shug and Albert. She has always been a subject of emotionless sex, and an emotionless marriage. However, she has to face this because both her father and Albert have controlled her to the utmost point. As time goes on, Shug teaches Celie how to be strong, but mostly, how to love. This love gives Celie the strength to rise above the oppression. It is the one thing that Celie has been looking for her whole life. She uses this newfound love, and the oppression of the men in her life to rise above the sexism. She then becomes superior to Albert and holds the ability to not let the setbacks of the time interfere with her happiness. Walker uses sexism as a major theme in the book, and overall a major theme of Celie?s development.

Another main factor of oppression that faces Celie in this novel is racism. Segregation is apparent throughout the South where the novel takes place. In this time, the whites were at an extreme superiority. It didn?t matter how much money you had, or what your respectable standing was in the community. When it came down to it, if you were black you had less rights than a white. Walker gives a prime example of this in The Color Purple. In so many words we learn that Celie is of high standing in the community. She has a great deal of wealth, obtains the most valuable plantation in Georgia, is somewhat educated, and works with the church in town. Another African American character in the book, Corin, is a well-dressed, well-mannered, educated, respectable, and wealthy woman of the North. However, when both Corin and Celie go into the shop where there is an uneducated, young, white clerk, they become inferior. He treats them as scum of the earth just because he was a Caucasian man. Also, as a young man of the white race he just assumes that the black women are uneducated and will not argue with him seeing as they are lower than him. This is incredibly ironic because the store that the white clerk is working in is owned by Celie. Perhaps Walker, as an African American herself, is mocking this behavior and time period. If this is what she is doing, than she is doing it rightfully so, and is doing it successfully.

During this incident, it is evident that Celie has accepted these conditions. She has been so used to this oppression that she has become accustomed to it. She neither challenges it nor disapproves of it, she simply accepts it. As the novel goes on, Celie eventually begins to act different. Both the sexism and racism she has faced has led to the rising strength within her. Shug was simply a catalyst for these changes, but the built up oppression is what the main cause was. After catching Albert hiding Nettie?s letters, after finally finding love that neither Albert nor her ?father? gave, and after coming to the realization that her father wasn?t really her biological father, Celie gets the strength to move past these past oppressions and rise above them. She moves to Memphis with Shug and Squeak and starts a brand new life. She starts her own business as a pants-maker. She becomes very successful as an African American woman, and at last she feels that she is above it all. She is content with her life and no longer lives in repression.

If there was one word to sum up Celie in this book it would be ?survivor.? Celie has faced many obstacles throughout the book. Although Walker doesn?t present the problems Celie?s faces as an outward expression of oppression, if you look into it, it becomes apparent that the cause of these problems was exactly that. Perhaps we don?t come to instant realization of this because Celie accepts it as her way of life. Maybe we don?t see it because Celie often saw these obstacles as her own fault. However, the roots of oppression run deep throughout this book. In the end however, Celie conquers them and becomes a human being who realizes her own worth, rather than being the ultimate subject of racism and sexism. She gains strength, and survives.

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