I Know Why The Caged Bird Sing Essay, Research Paper

Three primary problems cage Maya Angelou in her autobiographical book I Know why the Caged Bird Sings. The most pressing of these issues was probably the fact that Maya lived in the highly segregated south. Another factor of her imprisonment was because Maya, also known as Marguerite, was a social outcast, with very few friends other then relatives. Finally, the main character was entrapped because of her unusual sexual exposure. Over all, the highly segregated life she led, her exclusion socially, and her sexual experience caught Ms. Angelou.

At the time, racism was predominate amongst southern citizens, this caused Maya s displacement because she was a young black girl. Throughout the book Maya faces prejudice, and is constantly fighting this outrage, yet is not always winning. When Marguerite Johnson, nicknamed Ritie, was sixteen she became the first black streetcar operator in San Francisco, yet she had to fight incredibly hard to get her job. Even after she did her work schedule was impossible, and the free feeling she got from her job was turned against her at school, when she realized that her and her fellow classmates were, on paths moving diametrically away from each other, so even though Ritie had gotten the job she wanted, which she could have gotten easier had she been white, she was still an outcast. Furthermore, Marguerite, being Black, was denied certain necessities, such as not getting her toothache treated by the nearest dentist because he d rather stick my hand in a dog s mouth then a nigger s, or have a white man imply that none of the black children were good enough to amount to anything on there graduation day. All in all, one reason Ms. Angelou locked up was because she was Black and lived in a time of segregation.

Although Marguerite loved what few friends she had, she was a misfit, the fact of which contributed to her confinement. On page four Johnson says, If growing up is painful for a Southern Black girl being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat, despite the fact that Ritie could admit it or not, being a social pariah is situation that would make any girl feel as though the walls were closing in on her, and with Angelou this feeling was especially significant. Maya often wished the she would wake up as her true self, a beautiful white girl; on page two Angelou writes, Wouldn t they be surprised when one day I woke out of my ugly black dream, and my real hair, which was long and blonde, would take place of the kinky mass that Momma wouldn t let me straighten? This quote shows that Ritie never thought herself pretty, and simply ached to be beautiful, to simply fit in. Maya was obviously entrapped by her being an outcast because she so badly wanted to be something else.

Finally, Marguerite was imprisoned because of her unfortunate sexual experiences as a child. It goes without saying that when Maya was rapped she already been caught, and not talking to anyone and blaming Mr. Freeman s death on herself just made it worse. Furthermore, Ms. Angelou had a rather odd situation on her hands when her older brother, Bailey, was playing house with girls from the neighborhood; Ritie understood what they where playing at and told Bailey to stop, all this resulted in was the girls yelling at her and giving her reasons to leave. Lastly, Maya never thought herself very attractive, therefore she figured she must be a lesbian, and when she decided that she had to have sex with a boy from up the street to prove to herself her homosexuality she ended up getting pregnant. Over all, Ritie was a caged bird because of unusual her sexual experiences.

In conclusion, Maya Angelou, author of the autobiography I Know why the Caged Bird Sings, was caged for three main reasons. The first of these reasons being that Ritie was Black and lived during a time of segregation. Second, Marguerite was a misfit, with very few friends outside of her family. Finally, Ms. Angelou was imprisoned because of the odd sexual events that took place in her life. In retrospect Maya Angelou was a caged bird for the three main reasons of being Black, a pariah, and having an unusual sexual past.