The Silent Partner Essay, Research Paper

Critique of The American Dream

I think Michael Moore’s documentary Roger and Me can be compared to Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’ “The Silent Partner.” Perley, the fiancé of the owner of the mills visited a couple of poor families. The poor people in who visited, basically were in the same situation as the poor people in Flint, Michigan in Roger and Me. Maverick, the owner of the mills and can be compared to Roger Smith, because neither of them chose to listen to reason.

Sip Garth’s home was not a pleasurable place to live. It was described as “a damp house and she rents the dampest room in it; a tenement boasting of the width of the house, and a closet bedroom with a little cupboard window in it; a low room with cellar smells and river smells about it, and with gutter smells and drain smells and with unclassified smells of years settled and settling in its walls and ceiling.”(Phelps, 534) Sip is poor; this home was all she could afford. She had to work and take care of her deaf sister Catty. Perley experienced first hand the conditions in which Sip lived. She also visited the home of Bub Mell. Perley noticed that like Sip Garth’s home, Bub Mell’s home had a strong and unpleasant odor. There were holes in the steps and the walls were crumbling. There were six children, Bub’s sick mother and his father living in the house. The father did not work and basically depended on his children to work and support the family. Bub worked at age eight even though he was too young. These can be compared to the conditions presented in Roger and Me. The woman who slaughtered rabbits was very poor and lived in a run-down home. All she knew was that she could breed rabbits to sell for meat. In the film, we also saw the vacant homes. With that came a major rat infestation. The effects of the poverty in Flint was devastating. For instance, the deranged man who was causing a commotion in the street clearly illustrated what poverty did to him. It drove him crazy. Another example was when “Nightline” came to Flint to do a live broadcast, their satellite van was stolen. Finally, the man from the sheriff’s department who had to evict people due to them not paying rent on time, illustrated the conditions and the hard times people faced in Flint. Most people who did not pay their rent did not intend to be negligent in their priorities, but the economic situation or lack there of in Flint caused them not to pay rent.

Perley’s fiancé Maverick is similar in character to Roger Smith. Both of them were self- absorbed and refused to listen to reason. Perley told Maverick of the conditions that she saw at the two homes she visited and she suggested ways of improving the conditions and that she become a silent partner. Maverick arrogantly refused to listen to her and brushed her off. Referring to the factory workers, Maverick said, “Who doesn’t care a fig about them , you are right, who doesn’t care a fig about them-to settle.”(Phelps, 551) This showed Maverick’s disinterest about what Perley is trying to tell him. In Roger and Me, Roger Smith was similar to Maverick. Michael Moore tried diligently to convince Roger Smith to come to Flint to see the after- effects of the factory closings. He even went so far as to pose as a stock holder in order to see Roger Smith, but Smith refused to talk with him. When he finally got to talk to him face-to-face, Roger Smith decided that he did not want to go to Flint and refused to listen to Moore.

Although here was a one hundred year gap between “The Silent Partner” and Roger and Me, there were some points of comparison and a point of contrast. The conditions in both works, were comparable because they showed the effects of poverty. Maverick and Roger Smith were similar in their self-absorbed personalities. We saw from Roger and Me and “The Silent Partner” the devastation that poverty illustrated.