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Engl 3317

Dr. Mazella

Rationale

For the quotes I picked for my rationale, I picked many revolving around a similar theme. The theme that I chose was bring religion over to a country and thinking of those that don't follow their religion as some type of savage. Whilst also thinking of these people as savages, not teaching them the religion or word of God in fear that this type of knowledge gives these "savages", some type of power over you. This whole semester I was very interested in this parallel that many a slave owner or European thought of the African people as lesser of being both spiritually and intellectually but at the same time feared giving them religious text and knowledge in the fear that it would give them an intellectual advantage.

One of the quotes I would like to reference is the quote "And these people represented to me an absolute idea of the first state of innocence, before man knew how to sin", said by Aphra Behn, the author of Oroonoko. I found this quote quite interesting as I agree to the fact that sin is something perceived and laid out thus forth by men. Essentially Africans were just living their lives before European religions came along and taught them what was right and what was wrong, which did not always fit into there already perceived perception of reality and what they knew how to be how the world works. They seemed to be often taught by Europeans not to behave in a

certain manner as it was commanded by God, but a lot of the behaviors only fit their European way of living and was crafted in way to fit their lifestyles.

I believe this can also be tied into the quote by Equiano in which he says “I believe there are few events in my life which have not happened to many; it is true the incidents of it are numerous, and, did I consider myself an European, I might say my sufferings were great; but when I compare my lot with that of most of my countrymen, I regard myself as a particular favorite of heaven, and acknowledge the mercies of Providence in every occurrence of my life.” One those brought from Africa began to get a grip on the teaching of the bible from the peoples of Europe of the Americas they began to spin the teaching such a way that befit their situations. I believe there is a type of selfishness that comes along with prayer, when the Europeans took the slaves, they often justified it to themselves as they were blessed to do so under the gaze of God. When Equiano due to his age was allowed better living conditions and the ability to grasp books eventually learning to read, he looked at this as him being more favored in the eyes of God than his fellow countryman which are the fellow Africans that were brought over along with Equiano.

I would also like to go further and talk about the implications of justifying actions through religion. There is a quote in *The Woman of Color* said by Augustus Merton in which he says, “Prejudices imbibed in the nursery are frequently attached to the being of ripened years and to eradicate them as they appear, is a labor well worth the endeavor of the judicious preceptor.” I really enjoy this quote as I believe it surmises the notion that racism and prejudice is something that is taught and carried on through birth rather than justifying it as a birthright itself. I believe this is all so relevant today as a lot of prejudice and racist ideologies are passed down through generation to generation in which they placate through the calms of religion. This shows that even though Africans were equals this notion that Europeans or those from the Americas are

better than everyone else is taught from birth and for an African descendant to prove that would be quite the challenge as it was an idea engraved into them from the time that they were little.

Going further the same religious rambling that justified prejudices can be flipped on their heads to befit the one spouting the words. An example of this is when Olivia Fairfield says “The same God that made you made me...the poor black woman [Dido]—the whole world—and every creature in it! A great part of this world is peopled by creatures with skins as black as Dido’s, and as yellow mine. God chose it should be so, and we cannot make our skins white, and more than you can make yours black”. This was the exact knowledge of religion or education that Europeans feared the Africans to obtain as common sense tells oneself that these people are my equals or at least my earthly brethren but cruel and unjust treatment were often not dealt by people considered by their counterparts to be cruel and unjust but rather the pinnacle of their societies such as preachers, lawyers, and politicians. Here in this quote though I quite enjoy how Olivia states that Black people were made black by the same god that made them white, meaning they were equally made as gods creatures, and just as a black person cannot make themselves white, a white person cannot make themselves black. This quote flips the argument of who is favored in the eyes of God but also shows a lack of power in terms of the spiritual on the part of European descent.

The final quote that I would like to reference is a quote by William Earle in his book *Obi or the story of the three-fingered jack*. In this quote he says “Their lives were but of short duration; for, untutored to the method of arms, or each fearful of the other, they owned no leader, and left themselves open to the attack of their implacable foes.” What is stated in the quote is that this cruelty, this malice, this prejudice, and this violence using guns to achieve their goals was something distinctly European. Rather than saying that it was a right bestowed upon by God,

every creature has their quarrels, but the manufacturing of weapons that would give them the edge to conquer lands and people were an evil that was culminated by the Europeans then spread amongst other peoples.

Works cited:

<https://www.litcharts.com/lit/oroonoko>

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