Pal Shah

English 103

18 October 2022

Born a Crime

Trevor Noah’s Born a Crime is a heartfelt and funny recounting of his experiences growing up in South Africa as an oppressed person. Noah expresses his feelings and thoughts during these tough times in a facetious way. Stories of Noah’s life are interspersed with insights into South Africa’s culture, systems, and history.

Noah mixes comedy and sadness to keep the audience on their toes. It gives an insight into a young boy’s head experiencing adversity, change, growing up between eras, and trying to blend into a society that doesn’t accept colored people like himself. It doesn’t take Noah long to realize that he is the outcast, and very different from the people around him. Yet he still tries to make the best of every situation by challenging it head on. In chapter two, Noah stated “if an interracial couple got caught, the police would kick down the door, drag the people out, beat them, and arrest them” (Noah 22). Noah uses his experience to recall the discrimination laws that disallow interracial relationships. In truth, police would take people who break the law to jail. Nevertheless, Noah asserts that the police treated innocent people like criminals because interracial relationships were illegal. Furthermore, Noah and his mom faced a lot of injustice. He states, “Rather than being free to use your skills and education to move forward, you lose everything just trying to bring everyone behind you back up to zero” (Noah 66). Their white supremacist government was built from racial segregation to keep nonwhites poor and dependent on the government. Another quote is “If the police showed up, she would have to drop me and pretend I wasn’t hers, like I was a bag of weed” (Noah 29). Around that time having mixed kids or being in an interracial relationship was illegal, showing that people did want to mix race and not be segregated. The police were treating people that wanted to mix race like criminals. Nevertheless, she would have to disown her child in public for not only his safety, but hers as well.

Noah states, “I’m not laughing because it’s funny. I’m laughing out of relief. I thought you’d been beaten up. I thought this was blood. I’m laughing because it’s only mulberry juice.” (Noah

Along with her faith, Patricia’s sense of humor is one of her many survival mechanisms. When Trevor comes home from the mulberry tree covered in juice in Chapter 9, she immediately jumps to the worst conclusion. After all, it is not uncommon for kids to get beat up and bloodied in their neighborhood. Once she realizes that Trevor is only in emotional pain, Patricia is able to move on quickly and encourage Trevor to do likewise. When Abel returns, Patricia tells Trevor not to tell him what happened. She knows that Abel’s survival mechanism is violence

In chapter four of Born a Crime Noah uses this quote “pick a side. You can try to hide it, you can say, oh I don’t take a side, but some point, life will force you to pick a side” (Noah 56). This quote demonstrates the overstatement of taking a side in life. The reason to pick between white and black. He couldn’t be both even though he is half of both races. This exaggeration of the word “side” shows some of the important decisions Noah had to make at a young age that will impact his future. He states, “where most children are proof of their parents love, I was the proof of their criminality” (Noah 28). This gives an insight about some of Noah’s feelings. From a young age he had to realize because of him his parents are criminals, but because of them he is a crime. His parents made a difficult decision bringing a child into a world that only accepts one color.

Even though Born a Crime is portrayed as emotional, it still challenges the mind of the reader as well as the characters in the story. He quotes “at that time, a black woman learning how to type was like a blind person learning how to drive” (Noah 23). Very few black people could read and write. So, a black woman able to type was one in many, it was astonishing. While many people were busy fighting each other, others were trying to fight the system.

Born a crime by Trevor Noah, gives the audience a good mix of humor and emotions. Despite all that Trevor and his mother went through they still manage to stay positive; they use humor, faith, and language to get them out of any tough situation. No matter what just happened they always manage to look on the bright side “My child, you must look on the bright side. “What? What are you talking about, ‘the bright side’? Mom, you were shot in the face. There is no bright side.” “Of course, there is. Now you’re officially the best-looking person in the family.” She broke out in a huge smile and started laughing. Through my tears, I started laughing, too.” (Noah 281). Trevor was seen as the “other” whilst growing up in a country that was being decolonized, the whole world was pretty much against him, yet he persevered and worked hard and was able to make it where he was today.

Works Cited

Noah, Trevor. Born a Crime Stories from a south African Childhood. Cornelsen, 2020.