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English 2

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The Ole South

Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* describes the struggle of African American women in the Twentieth century and focuses on such themes as strong relationships between women and the inferiority of women to men. . The setting of *The Color Purple*, during the generation after slavery had just been Abolished by Abraham Lincoln, gives many hints to the meanings behind the story. Place, time, and social environment are important because they create the conditions in which characters interact. With the exposure of sexism and racism that was abundant in early twentieth century America, it made way for the resulting conflicts that Celie faces throughout the novel that occurred in *The Color Purple*

It was a hot sunny day on the field when Celie's oldest stepson, Harpo, came across the field to see her.. Harpo had been having problems with his wife, Sofia, problems that were very uncommon during that era of time. Sofia was a very strong and independent woman and didn't act as a wife should. In Harpo's eyes, Celia was an example of a perfect obedient wife. So when he came to her with the problem she explained, "Well how you expect to make her mind? Wives is like children. You have to let 'em know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating"(19.5-12). Even though Harpo is happy with Sofia, his marriage isn't fitting his expectations. Love isn't enough to make his marriage satisfying to him. He always saw his father controlling his wives, so now he wants the same. The reason for this was because

during that era of time women weren't thought to have a voice of their own. At a young age, girls were taught to be silent and without question so when they are married off, they will adhere to their husband's every wants and wishes. They were drilled to have no mind of their own; everything that came out their mouth was no knowledge of education. Respecting her husband wasn't requested, it was demanded of her, if not then it was her spouse's job to beat her senseless until she obeyed.

While in Africa, Nettie is exposed to a whole new different life. Living with the Olinka, Nettie questions their way of life and wants to commence a new way for the girls in the tribe, only to find that her plans have already been destroyed. Confused why Tashi wasn't allowed to attend school, Nettie approached her mother. This is how the conversation played out, "The Olinka do not believe girls should be educated. When I asked a mother why she thought this, she said: A girl is nothing to herself; only to her husband can she become something. What can she become? I asked. Why, she said, the mother of his children. But I am not the mother of anybody's children, I said, and I am something. You are not much, she said. The missionary's drudge.(62.3-7)" Through this interaction, Nettie learns that women are not thought of very highly in Olinka culture. To the Olinka, a woman's only importance is with respect to the men in her life. By this, it teaches girls to be an amenable dog rather than a human being. It ensures them that their life is not their own and never will be. And to make them stuck, they take away an essential aspect in a person's life, education. Because with education people have the means to do anything in their power. With education, a person can excel and succeed in life, but without it they have nothing. Without this part in someone's life, they are the dirt under a person's shoe, and that's what men today want women to feel and be

Furthermore, *The Color Purple* showcases the way women were valued and treated during that time. While reading this book, it gives insights and points out factors in the book that relates to today's society. And that was the equality of women to men. Reading Celie's life story, it exposed its reader to the concepts of sexism and racism. It provided a disturbing and realistic account into the life of Celie, a poor southern black woman with a sad and abusive past and Sophia, another poor southern black woman with a sad and abusive past. Sexism in this book was used as a form of discrimination towards women of the South and mainly targeted African Americans. With such attitudes being based on beliefs in traditional stereotypes, and with the help of racism, women were taught to think of this oppression over them as normal. Racism in this book was a manipulation. It steered the minds of these women to believe that they had no destiny in accomplishing anything without their husband leading. It taught them to stay silent even in midst of being physically and mentally abused. This is important because it teaches who don't live in a diverse area and aren't really exposed to the concept of abusing a person simply because the color of their skin.

Works Cited

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