

Sean Walters

2/15/18

CSB

Critical Response - Kaffir Boy

Aliens in the Land of Their Birth

Drawing on specific examples from Kaffir Boy, explain why apartheid was a damaging system that dehumanized Africans and prevented them from leading productive, happy lives.

Introduction

The strict laws of apartheid in South Africa were first enforced in 1948 and truly dehumanized the African race. Countless examples can be found in the book demonstrating and emphasizing this horrid problem. Here are just a few of those problems that I found myself through reading.

Difficulty getting papers in order

One of the main problems that the Africans faced in white-driven South Africa was getting their papers "in order". They would get these "passbooks" at around age sixteen and it would include a lot of vital information that they needed to fulfill. At the beginning of the story, it was shown and underlined that the parents of Johannes did not have their papers in order, which meant that, if they were to be caught, they would be punished. In short, punishments included prison, work, and "deportation" from the area. Now, everything would have been fine for them if they had just got their papers in order right? Well, the white people over there did not make it very easy for them to do so. They would delay them, tell them that they were missing something or needed something else entirely, or just stated that they were not eligible for a certain thing they needed to fulfill in their passbook. "Why does he get arrested so much?' 'Because his pass is not in order.' 'Why doesn't he get it fixed?' 'He can't.' 'Why?' 'You're too young to know.'"

Police constantly asking for papers and conducting violent raids

This was another big problem that was constantly emphasized at the beginning of the story because, as the story went on, it still went on in the background while new problems were introduced to the reader of the family. It is implied that the raids kind of stop and are put on pause because Johannes' mother would start to wake him up at early hours in the morning for something and he would jump up, asking "are they here? I didn't hear any noises," and his mother replying, "No, get the police off your mind child!"

Punishments for not getting papers in order

"My father spent two months doing hard labour on a white man's potato farm for his pass crimes." This sentence tells one of the many strict punishments that the Africans had to face when found with their papers not in order. When Johannes' father, Jackson, got arrested his third or fourth time, he spent almost a year in prison. He came back a very changed man. He went from a father who loved his kids and worked hard to pay for them to an ignorant man who got drunk, gambled, and beat their mother. This shows that not only are the punishments that they had to undergo a terrible thing but that the punishments just affected the people even more negatively, possibly ruining the whole family with this. "After almost a year in prison, he was so changed that I hardly knew him."

Difficulty getting a work permit in order to get a job

When Johannes' father, Jackson, first got laid off, he began to search for a new job but found it very difficult to do so. Many offices said that he required more papers or different papers or papers in another order. It seemed like the white government there in South Africa just wanted to make it practically impossible for them to get anything done and even be legal there in the first place so that they could just constantly have the Africans think that they

owed them something and were largely in debt to the needs of the white people. Johannes' mother tried to get a job for a very, very long time in the first half of the story and the task seemed impossible for her to accomplish because she had no skills in reading or writing. That's the other things I was meaning to say! A lot of the jobs there in Alexandra required that the person knew how to read or write. Johannes' mother did not know how but she had always wanted to learn. With a lot of jobs requiring reading and writing you would think that every African had the same opportunity as a white person to attend school but no, it was not so easy for them. The white people had made it almost impossible for them (at least the family focused on in the book) to get into school. And she did not want her son to go through the same treatment she had and so she wanted to enroll him in tribal school. I cannot find any specific examples currently but there are a couple points in the book where Johannes' mother goes out to find a job and comes back unsuccessful.

Difficulty getting enough food and money to raise a whole family

I am going to assume that the laws of apartheid also made the income of Africans significantly less than the white people. I think that the father only earned about 10 rands each week. Six rands had to be spent on rent, some more for the bus and other things, and the last of it on their food. This seems absolutely crazy because that is very little to spread out on things for a whole family, but they made it. This surely broke a lot of families there because some just could not handle this treatment, preventing them from having happy and productive lives because they could not get jobs, receive good pay, and cover everything for their family in them.

Difficulty getting papers to attend school

This is nearly where I stopped reading (I read ~130 pages the night before writing this). Johannes' mother wanted her children to have the opportunities in life that they deserved and required to live more successful lives than hers and her fathers. But getting little Johannes' in school was one of the biggest obstacles she had to overcome in achieving this wish of hers. They first went to the superintendent office I believe, which took them hours to get into due to the lines, and then they were asked to go to the clinic by the *baas*, but the mother stated that she had already gone to the clinic multiple times to try and get Johannes' birth certificate. The situation caused the mother and son to travel back forth over a period of months until finally, by the grace of God, a white woman who worked at the clinic was going inside just as the family was there. The mother asked the woman for help and so the woman did. They finally got their birth certificate and enrolled Johannes' into school. This whole thing showed that the system they had there was either very uncoordinated or just very unwilling to help the Africans in any way. Maybe they didn't want them to get an education and grow their knowledge out and become as powerful as they were, so they just made it incredibly difficult to get official things done for the Africans who applied and fit all the requirements. It seemed a terrible society and way of life for the Africans.

Overall "cause and effect"

Apartheid was an extremely damaging system to the Africans in South Africa because of these examples from the story. The white people in power there made it immensely difficult for the Africans to get anything that they wanted done. There were things almost like loopholes with them getting arrested for not having a job but they couldn't get a job in the first place because the government wouldn't get them a work permit by making up several excuses that just did not end. There was no way through. It was a punishing system that made no opportunities for Africans and simply just took advantage of them. The Africans couldn't lead happy and productive lives because of the system constantly denying them and smashing through their doors of privacy asking for something that they already know the answer to. "Are your papers in order?" "No." "Of course not." The strict laws of apartheid simply made it 99% impossible for the Africans there to solve their problems with the government. I believe they were just being taken advantage of the Africans, giving them the illusion that they were living like they should have been but were not at all. Johannes' didn't even know what equal rights were until he was around nine or ten years old. It makes me sick but that is just how it was back then. I only hope it gets better for them with time. That is really all I have to say on this matter. Thank you.