

Review of The Life of Olaudah Equiano  
African History  
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After reading The Life of Olaudah Equiano a few questions arose. First, what was the author's main objective in writing his autobiography? Second, how can this autobiography help others understand African history? Third, why did slavery and colonialism occur? Fourth, what can one learn from this autobiography? And lastly, what does this autobiography mean to me? In answering these question one can better understand The Life of Olaudah Equiano.

The first main question one should ask when reading The Life of Olaudah Equiano, is why did the Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa write about his life, what was his main objective? In writing his autobiography Olaudah was not thinking only about himself, but his readers. He wanted to everyone to see what type of hardship he endured in his life and how he made the best of them.

Taken into slavery at the age of fifteen, Olaudah was very native about the outside world. Olaudah life before slavery consisted of mainly playing with the children in his village and practicing his village's traditions. Olaudah clearly states some of the traditions of his village people. One tradition was the practice of circumcision and the naming of children, which was very important to the village that Olaudah lived in. As in the one of Ali Mazrui's videos The Africans, Ali shows how circumcision and the naming of children is still practiced in many African villages, and how it is a major part of many African's lives. Olaudah also stated in his autobiography that many of the

practice his village people did were part of their religious values. Olaudah's African religious values had some to do with his desire for learning the Christian religion.

Even through Olaudah hardship as a slave he still tried to live by Christian values and beliefs. Olaudah was taught Christian in England, by being taught how to read out of the bible. One of Olaudah's prized possession was his bible. Even though Olaudah struggled to understand many of stories and meaning in the bible, he still tried to base many of his decisions on it.

I feel that Olaudah would not have been able to get through many of his hardship of slavery without his faith in Christianity. Olaudah wrote a lot about his hardships he endured in slavery, but he also wrote about many of his joys in life. He mainly wanted to allow other people to feel the struggle slaves endured and what he did about it, in his autobiography.

The second question one should ask when reading about Olaudah's life is, how can his autobiography help understand African history? As we have discussed in class. to understand African history we must understand the change and continuity and also the diversity and commonality. Africa is made up of many diversities and cultures, so to understand African's one must look at all the different cultures and groups of people. Olaudah's life in Africa was very limited, so his autobiography only has minimal knowledge of the African people and his knowledge is from only one major group of people, the Igbo. Also, African's history can not be looked at in one time period. The development of Africa has happened over a long period of time, through many different era's. Again in Olaudah's autobiography, he only lives through a short period in time of African's history. To answer the question: can his autobiography help understand

African history, no it can not be used to understand African's full history. The autobiography can be used to understand a short period of African history, and maybe the most influential part of African history, which was the affects of slavery on the continent.

The next question one should approach when reading The Life of Olaudah Equiano, is why did slavery and colonialism occur? Without slavery or colonialism, this book would not exist, so one must understand why it occurred. Slavery and colonialism occur hand in hand, slavery occurred because of colonialism. The Europeans tried to justify invading Africa, by instilling the Christian faith. Olaudah was taught the Christian faith at a young age, but Christianity was not only a main part in Olaudah's life it was also introduced in Okonkwo's life in the book Things Fall Apart. When Okonkwo was in exile from his village, Christianity was introduced by the white man. Christianity lead to the destruction of Okonkwo and his village. Christianity lead to the destruction of Okonkwo and it can also be said that it lead to the destruction of Africa, through slavery.

Along with invading Africa the Europeans invaded the Americas. Slaves were needed and used to help develop the Americas and Europe into the countries they are today. In Olaudah's autobiography he talks about his many voyages to the Americas. Olaudah was used and helped in transporting goods and new slaves to the Americas. He tried to make the best of it, by selling his own goods that he would acquire from different stops. Olaudah was treated fairly well compared to many other slave accounts. Even though slaves were treated horribly they were considered necessary to colonialism.

One of the last question one should ask when reading this autobiography is, what can one learn from this autobiography? There is a lot one can learn from this autobiography. One thing that can be learned from this autobiography is the harsh

treatment of slaves. In the autobiography Olaudah recalls several instances when he was beaten severely. One account Olaudah was beaten so badly by a drunken man, that he was near death and was unable to work for several weeks. Another thing that can be learned from this autobiography is the different relationships between slaves and slave owners. Olaudah may have been considered lucky for having several masters that were kind to him. He was able to make some lasting relationships with his masters and his master's families. One of the last things that can be learned from this autobiography is the struggle slaves had for freedom. Not only did Olaudah struggle to buy his freedom, he also struggled to gain freedom for other slaves. There is more that can be learned from this autobiography, but I feel that these are the main points given throughout the autobiography.

The last question to answer when reading The Life of Olaudah Equiano is, what does this autobiography mean to me? This autobiography made me see the harsh treatment of slaves becoming more real with the first hand accounts of Olaudah. Olaudah gave many examples of his harsh and cruel treatment and also gave accounts of witnessing cruel treatment of other slaves. This book also made me feel angry at the slave owners and masters. No human being deserved the treatment slaves were given. Even though slavery was a very negative thing, Olaudah gave some examples from his life when he was given some positive treatment. Olaudah was taught navigation, which was looked down upon by other men. He was also given many responsibilities for a slave and he was trusted more than other slaves may have been. In conclusion, this book means to be a cruel realization of slavery and the effects on the African slave.

After answering these questions one should be able to better understand the

autobiography of The Life of Olaudah Equiano. Many more question could be asked when reading this autobiography. I feel that these were the most important ones to help understand this autobiography.