

Argumentative Essay: Kaffir Boy

“Abhorrence of apartheid is a moral attitude, not a policy” (Heath). This quote explains a moral complication that an apartheid government system and people all the people in it are example of our failing society. In the book, *Kaffir Boy* by Mark Mathabane, this argument of controlling and containing an ethical society versus keeping the white man’s elitist lifestyle is shown through the depiction of Mathabane’s early childhood. Mathabane shows the world his view on apartheid and how it needs be abolished. There exists a balance between the whites who are banded together to keep blacks oppressed and the blacks who are splintered by their ethnic identities and indigenous languages. What is sad is the tactics that are practiced by government officials exploited and encouraged by the white race. The strongest and emotional cord that Mathabane hits is in the heart of the reader. The sympathy for the black race empowers people to move towards a peaceful world, the rage that moves the soul towards change in government tactics, and the love for a small and helpless child who didn’t decide if he wanted to be born into this life. From the direct influences in poverty, religion, and legal discrimination the white man can be linked to all problems.

No human on this earth should live in poverty. It does not have a name, nor a face, and no giving heart, yet it brings any person to their knees begging for redemption from this unseen evil. This relentless drought of joy in a person’s life drives the mind to the brink of mental and physical death. The apartheid reign on regions like South Africa, where Mathabane grew up is an example of the terror that these people had to endure. Where work for the average man depended solely on that of the white man. *“I had sense enough to know that there were white residential areas, where black maids and garden boys worked, and firms like the one where my father worked; but, in the main, I was fully convinced that somewhere in the white world, the events depicted in the movies were everyday occurrences”* (Mathabane 8). This shows firsthand how the white people provide jobs for the natives but the kicker is that the payment for their

work is so minimal that a working man cannot even provide the basic necessities for his own family. The white people set up this apartheid society to suppress the natives (blacks) and do so without them knowing it. The white people know that they have the resources to give more but they choose not to due to a fear of the natives gaining too much wealth and becoming equal to them. The barrier that the white race set up for the natives is so cruel and what is sad is that the natives blame it on themselves. This is seen when a father feels like a failure to his family and because he cannot provide he is a burden on his ancestors. To tie it back to the apartheid, when the whites set up a society up in this manner, they didn't think about the effects this would on the people. Without that steady income, the families are driven to sacrifice the essentials of life, like cleanliness, biological needs (Food) and mental security. The white race deliberately denies a person from living life to the fullest extent just because of racial insecurities, is wrong on so many levels. In the absence of food, the children of a working man's family hurt the most. As described by Mathabane, the effects of having no food when his father had little money are graphic and reach out to any sane soul for a helping hand.

"A few weeks later George and Florah came down with a mysterious illness, which left them emaciated and lethargic, their stomachs so distended that I thought they would burst. Their bodies were covered with sores, which punctured and oozed puss, and their hair turned to a strange orange colour. There were times when, while fanning off blowflies with a piece of cardboard from their filmy, half-closed eyes, mucus-covered noses and bruised mouths, while they lay writhing with pain on the damp cement floor, I thought I could see their tiny, empty intestines. Seeing them like that made me cry. Occasionally, they excreted live worms with their bloody stools. Their tearing coughs kept everyone awake at night. Each time my mother gave them a morsel of food, whenever she could get it, she vomited. Their suffering made the days and nights unbearably long and gloomy. My mother did not have the one hundred cents to take

them to the clinic, and no witch doctor, our last resort, was willing to treat them on credit. My brother and sister fought with the tenacity typical of African children to stay alive, but I wondered for how long.” (Mathabane 36-37).

This is why I think no soul, in my opinion, should feel this constant fear of death that is caused by the preference of racial customs. No white man should decide if a child should eat today or not, yet the effects of apartheid and organization of a country, with the whites at the top and the native like Mathabane at the bottom, is the foundation of this unneeded pain.

What makes this situation worse is the forced nature/lifestyle that the whites pressure the natives to undertake. The whites say that apartheid is a blessing for natives who are able to have everything they ever wanted. Mathabane's account of the evangelical's arrival shows just this. *“I watched the evangelist bring in equipment in mud-covered jeeps, while pondering on what could have possibly made my mother say so positively that my father would take us to the tent to listen to what he called “white man's nonsense and lies.”* (Mathabane 15). Yet the real tribal believer in the family gives in to these white men even though he is the strongest believer in his tribal religion. Whatever these people say to push people over to their white side is what influences them the most. Have it be the promise of riches or savor. That manipulation and devotion that these white people pull from the heart of the people is what they, in the end crush with no thought. With the so called benefits of the white race in providing jobs and security to their once isolated and barbaric tribal oppressed, the natives relieve some of their trust and security that they have left to these white people. Not knowing that, really what got them in this truly hardening situation is the one who you think is helping. Well, in benefiting, they mean forcing someone into a life style that the whites see as fit. That's why when Mathabane described the influence of forced religion on their region, it pointed to me another point where the whites are pushing or molding the pre-established natives into a society that they want them to live. *“At that a Zulu woman in tribal garb stood up and shouted: “We don't need Christianity.*

We have our religions of a thousand years. We don't need to worship a white man's god when we have our own." (Mathabane 29). This shows that the natives see the influences that the whites try to bring into their society. They are scared that more of the tribal followers will fall into the trap of these in their minds "False Gods". This is where the apartheid affects the people's daily life. The way they live and what they do every day is being set for them and they have no power to get out of this death cycle of lies and manipulation. False thoughts like *"But I need a job," my mother insisted, "and haven't you noticed that all the Christians have jobs"* (Mathabane 27), flow throughout the minds of the natives. The thought of having a better life, one that tries to shield the hurt and be like the white man lives and thinks as he does. This is not the way to change a society by forced manipulation on the one thing that these people have left to believe in.

By reading this book I can strongly state that apartheid equals Governmental rule and purposeful hardships to keep the oppressed tyrannize. In looking at the governmental system that is in place where Mathabane grew up, I can clearly see that the lives of both blacks and whites in apartheid South Africa were regulated by a very rigid system of rules and laws that dictated where each race was allowed to live, work, play, and travel. Whites had far fewer restrictions, since they were only prohibited from entering the small portions of land that had been set aside for the large population of black South Africans. Black South Africans, on the other hand were regulated heavily. Like in the use of a "Pass". Throughout this novel Mathabane states a pass system that every African was required to have. As Mathabane asked his mother, *"What's a pass, Mama?" I knew vaguely what a pass was, but not its reality. "It's an important book that we black people must have in order always, and carry with us at all times."...There was something about it which made me fearful, helpless. But I could not figure out what about it made me feel that way. It seemed a mere book. Yet it was, I was to later find out, the black man's passport to existence.*" (Mathabane 17-18). The passes blacks were

required to carry were difficult to keep in order, and officials made it more difficult than necessary. Mathabane claims that as he grew up, he recognized that if he stayed in South Africa, his future would be dominated by arrests and punishments at the hands of unsympathetic white officials. All this yet again caused by the apartheid super power that pre-dominated the law making system. This system directly regulated and humiliated the native people. By having a physical item that showed the dissent of a family, the economic status of the family, and if it was not in order, it could be a ticket that deports them to a land they worked so hard to escape. The rules governing the lives of black South Africans were so restrictive that it was nearly impossible not to break them at some point or another. So when there is this system where a person must work against all odds to live a life and survive the quality of life is at an all time low. When a person works so hard to abide by all these rules and not be caught in that set trap, they don't live. Their life becomes a constant struggle to live at all. With this apartheid, founded government that Mathabane lived in you can see some struggles that he and his parents had to face with a smiling face every day. The notion of going against this super white power was unthinkable and the thought of death was around every corner. When there is this very strict system in place, it leaves room for constant corruption and bribery. For example, the Pur-Urban are a police force that controlled the people of Alexandra. These people were brute oppressors who made sure you were in line and forced the governmental hand of power with an iron fist. When incidents like this one where Mathabane's house was raided, it can be seen how this governmental system works.

"Hurry up, old man!" the interrogator said, as my father fidgeted with his overalls, "we haven't got all day. Do you have it or don't you?" he said, trying to wring a bribe out of my father. "Nkosi, I beg you," my father whimpered, dropping his bony shoulders and letting the overalls dangle limply at his side. "I have no money," he sighed. "Nothing," the

policeman cried, astonished; the black policemen were used to getting bribes. "Nothing, nkosi," my father said, slowly running his right hand through his kinky hair. "Not a cent. I have no job. I just applied for a permit to look for a job yesterday." "Well," frowned the policeman, closing the bulky book in my father's face, "I gave you your chance. You refused it. Now hurry up and put on your clothes and come with us." (Mathabane 83-87)

The people are physically punished for not following the law and rules set up by the white people. Yet when they do follow their rules they are still punished by forced bribes to this system that directly mar their economic situation and deem them unable to provide and survive. These two forces efficiently work against themselves to create a system that is impossible, except for the creators, to live in.

This whole novel's underlying meaning of showing the world outside of South Africa the extent of suffering of human being and the treatment that isn't appropriate for a dead animal. The extent of apartheid on any society will result in the above feelings and emotion in whatever form. Race was the most important aspect of individual identity in apartheid South Africa. Yet it, due to its apartheid settling, determined where you lived, who you married, and what kinds of education, job, and housing was available to you. With this balance between the Whites and the blacks, there only the white came out on top where as they were systematically oppressed at every turn; their lives were controlled by an unsympathetic government that saw them as inferior beings. The majority of social, legal, educational, political, and religious organizations worked to keep the apartheid system in place and to prevent blacks from escaping poverty and ignorance and gaining a position of equality with whites. Under apartheid, whites banded together to keep blacks oppressed, while blacks were splintered by their ethnic identities and indigenous languages, a practice that government officials exploited and encouraged. For some history review, it wasn't until the Soweto school riots in 1976 when blacks began to unite on a wide scale and fight against their common oppressor, the white race. Why the people of this earth

must undergo THIS is beyond myself and individuals around me. As a group, this evil can be stamped out like the thousands of lives it has already taken.