

EXISTENTIALISM IN BOOKER T. WASHINGTON'S *UP FROM SLAVERY*: A REALISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Racial Identity, African American Inheritance.

Existentialism is more than just a progression and method of trying to exist in this cosmos. More than that, it is a process of framing a meaningful life in this space-time. Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery* is undoubtedly a story of the saga of existentialism in the Jim-Crow America. This article speculates the existential angst of a slave-born mulatto in the heart of a country which has one of the most racist histories. Furthermore the present article tries to relate the authors struggle to have a decent education so that he can formulate his scattered educational dimensions to put them to a unified source of inspiration to innumerable people of our generation.

Keywords: - Existentialism, Colour Discrimination, Non-Conformational Approach,

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"Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does. It is up to you to give [life] a meaning."

-Jean-Paul Sartre [1]

As we know existentialism the most important philosophical theory which accentuates the existence of a human character as a liberated and conscientious instrument of determination of their own progress through thoughts and acts of the free-will. Existentialism in the broader sense is a recent philosophy that is centered upon the scrutiny of existence and human predicaments existing in the cosmos around him. The idea is that we humans first try to exist only to spend a lifetime to subsist first and then each of us individually spends a lifetime changing our essence of nature.

In other words this theoretical aspect tries to find an identity of the self and its encounter with the choices of responsibility. In this philosophy, the human knowledge, viewpoints, and references are vital aspects for determining human dimensions. And hence we can say that individual choices become the frames-of-references to formulate the interactions between the individual and universal outlines of truth. A number of black autobiographies have tried to reveal the aspects of existentialism in its discourse. And Booker T. Washington's' *Up From Slavery* is probably the finest example for that.

Washington in his autobiography ponders upon his familiarity with his American-self when he comes to know that racism is an enormous impediment in the procedure of inheriting a tradition. The same experience he got in the USA where various different tribes

like Red Indians and Latinos were looking down upon at each other. Thus he understood that the tunnel-visioned citizens will never be able to know the significance of inheritance. In this very work the author is trying to explain that the existentialism is more than just a method of trying to exist in our larger universe. He tried to use existentialism to value the greater African American heritage.

To this unreasonable arraignment, Washington answers that African Americans have a long convention of rich history, but the racial supremacy destroyed the existential traits of blacks. In that phase of time blacks were not treated like other races and hence the record of their existence was considered of supreme insignificance. Washington says:

I was born a slave on a plantation in Franklin County, Virginia. I am not quite sure of the exact date of my birth... I was born near a cross-roads post office called Hale's Ford, and the year was 1858 or 1859. I do not know the month or the day. (Washington, *Up From Slavery*, 1)

Washington gives a hint about existentialism that it being more than a philosophy is a course of framing a momentous and consequential life in this inherently meaningless space-time. Washington's *Up From Slavery* is undoubtedly a story of the saga of existentialism in the Jim-Crow America. This article speculates the existential angst of a slave-born mulatto in the heart of a country which has one of the most racist histories.

Furthermore the present article tries to relate the author's struggle to have a decent education so that he can formulate his scattered educational dimensions to put them to a unified source of inspiration to innumerable people of our generation. In his autobiography, Washington gallantly hits white supremacy for engineering the stereotypes about African Americans. He confidently states:

No white American ever thinks that any other race is wholly civilised until he wears the white man's clothes, eats the white

man's food, speaks the white man's language, and professes the white man's religion. (Washington, *Up From Slavery*, 47)

Washington sturdily disparages racism and slavery for discarding the egalitarianism of human society. Slavery treated other fellow humans as no more than a piece of the property. Hence slaves were seen as brute animals and were exchanged with a viable product costs. Unfortunately, the American courts of that time had turned a blind eye towards this inhuman practice and acted as a protector to defend, maintain and preserve racial apartheid. Hence Washington was claiming that the existence of one human being is intricately attached to the existence of other human beings. Thus he tried his level best to advocate for overall enhancement of Blacks while accommodating white majority with the latter's interest.

Washington deems that he has comprehended the futility of reason and rational after the heart of racism. He claims that illogicality and absurdity of racism is harming the instincts of existentialism. Hence he resolutely believed in widespread impartiality and took spirited steps against racism and racial supremacy. Thus in a nutshell we can say Washington used the ethics and methods of existentialism to survive in the colour-prejudiced cosmos.

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