Slims Table, Sociology Paper Essay, Research Paper

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Sociology 100 Dr. Spraggins

Slims Table:

An Honest Look Into The Life Of A Working Class Black Person

Slims Table, written by Mitchell Duneier has been called a ?true stereotype buster? due to its content in which it truthfully examines the lifestyles of working class black men. The book is designed to break the common misconceptions imbedded in a majority of peoples minds over how a black man lives his life and why he in a sense ?does what he does,? ?thinks what he thinks,? and ?acts the way he acts.? Prior to the writing of this book by Duneier, there were many common stereotypes of a working class black man, which often caused negative attitudes towards them. Although many of them are still existent and quiet prevalent, Duneier sought to try and break these misconceptions in hopes to try and bridge the gap, which has for so long been expanding between blacks and whites.

Slims Table, appears to be written in a two-fold manner, in that Duneier tries to explain and debunk two different, yet equally important ideologies that have long since been associated to the black working class. Duneier tries to show the solidarity of the black working class with the way he presents the book, however, there is an underlying tone in which he is trying to show that the black race, in particular the struggling working class, ?Is in no way hopelessly wrecked by the power of ?white privilege? or racism.? He tries to debunk the unfortunate and yet demoralizing caricatures that for so long have been placed upon the heads of the black working class, with such associations as poor, uneducated, unskilled and probably the most negative of all, useless. Yet, it is the manner in which he manages to bring all of this out, which is most impressing. He remains quite unassuming and appearingly non-subjective, yet he is stating his points and supporting them all the way through the book.

The setting for Slims Table primarily takes place in a cafeteria on the South Side of Chicago. There a character, known as Mitch, whom we can conclude is the author finds himself, a white man in a predominately black area, studying the lifestyles of many of the black men he encounters. The title of the book is derived from a group of people that Mitch meets in a cafeteria and befriends. He often refers to them as ?the regulars? because as a routine they always meet in the cafeteria to discuss the days that they have had. Mitch later finds out they?ve been gathering there for over 10 years. As Mitch observes, the apparent ?leader? of the group is a man named Slim, who is a black mechanic that works down in a back alley garage in one of the ghetto areas of Chicago. However, Mitch notes that he is one of the best mechanics he has ever known, which serves to try, right in the beginning of the book to debunk the stereotypes that have been attached to the black working class. Mitch does interact with many of the people he meets in the cafeteria, however, much of his observations are done from the ?outside,? a pseudo-objective, observant point of view. He is constantly observing how these men interact with each other, how they act on their own and more importantly, what kind of values and morals they uphold and believe in.

The book is filled with many different stories involving the men Mitch meets in the Valois Cafe, which is what the cafeteria was known as, as well as many commentative asides, which Mitch uses to speak directly to the reader. He often times tries to surmise what has occurred in the particular excerpt that he has just told. There has been some criticism given to this due to the fact that often times, the character ?Mitch? has restated what the reader will surely have concluded after reading the particular excerpt told from him his point of view; whereby losing the flow of the story and possibly the interest of the reader. However, it is these excerpts and mini-stories which allows Duneier to facilitate his argument against the forbearing stereotypes.

In the beginning of the book, one story he recounts is how Slim befriends an older white man names Bart. At first, Slim simply gives the man rides home, after all, it would be typically wrong for a black and white man to be friends with the prevalent beliefs in race relations. Or is it? This is one of the questions ?Mitch? observes as he recounts the story. We see that over time, Slim and Bart actually develop a sort of unspoken friendship, something that could be seen between them. Bart eventually dies, and one can see that Slim did feel a bit of pain for his death. In another one of his observances, Mitch recounts a story about how he notices that over time, he always finds the same people gathering together in the cafe. This seemed to interest him, so he studied it further. He found that it wasn?t because these black-working men had no home to go to, no job to work at, or anybody to care about. But rather they felt a sort of homeliness and family-style atmosphere in the cafeteria. As Mitch interviews a police officer he finds that many people are happier going to a place where they have people to talk to you and relate with. Here another stereotype can be debunked. Surely a common thought would be that these black men attend the cafeteria because they are looking for a cheap meal, or because they have no place to go, when that actually isn?t the case at all. In fact, Mitch finds that they all have jobs, they all have homes and they all have at least someone to care about, even if that person is someone they met in the caf?. The reason they choose to attend the cafeteria is because it gives them a feeling of family and normality, something every person needs to have. Mitch goes on to debunk many other stereotypes throughout this book, however, there is one in particular, which seems to be quite empowering. He shows comparisons of the ?underclass? and the ?middle-class.? He tries to show the differences in beliefs that these two groups of people have about each other. He makes comments on how the students are bussed around the University of Chicago, because the surrounding area, where most of these men live, and is where the Valois caf? is located, is considered to quite dangerous. Here Mitch observes the pride and strong values these men had. He sees that these men are strong men, not physically but morally. They care about each other and have respect for each other, something the people sitting on the bus can?t see from behind the plexi-glass windows.

Slims Table, appearingly seems to be a book about a man who recounts various stories about the men he meets while he is on the South Side of Chicago. However, it is a book that encompasses so much more. The book recounts various stories about the men he meets; however, as it progresses the reader can see the book is really about trying to show what these men are all about. In those observations, it can be seen that these men truly debunk the conventional stereotypes associated with the black working class. They are strong-willed and contain aspiring values and morals.

As the book begins to conclude itself, the reader finds, the author reflecting back on his whole experience with these men in the Valois Cafeteria. Duneier states that these men that met at ?Slims Table? day in and day out, truly impressed him. He states that they truly try and embody the beliefs and ideas created about the black working man, according to Drake and Cayton?s Black Metropolis. These men try and live up to the standards set far back when the black ghetto wasn?t perhaps considered an area of desecration and violence. However, Duneier concludes his book by conceding to the fact that many of those beliefs still do exist in modern day society. He ends his book with a powerful quote. After completing a conversation with a man he knows in a bookstore, he states after some discourse, ?When we stop trying to feel good about ourselves, or to increase our power by asserting our innocence, we begin to look for answers by searching for truth.? Slims Table is all about this quote. Mitchell Duneier felt it was time to search for the truth in regards to the black working class. He wanted to try and address the long-term myths about them, and although he conceded that he may not have gotten the whole picture, after all it would be pretty hard to; he truly did feel that his work allowed people to see what the black working man, living in a ghetto, is all about.

Slims Table

Understanding The Life Of A Working Class Black Man

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M-W-F 9:30-10:30

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