015 - 019 Charles Smith (old book 19-22)

Vincents text Norsk oversættelse Min nye bog

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| 15*Ship Ahoy! Ship Ahoy! Ship Ahoy!**As far as your eye can see,**men, women, and baby slaves**coming to the land of Liberty,**where life’s design is already made.**So young and so strong**they’re just waiting to be saved....**Lord, I’m so tired**and I know you’re tired too,**look over the horizon,**see the sun**shining down on you...**Ship Ahoy! Ship Ahoy! Ship Ahoy!**Can’t you feel the motion of the ocean,**can’t you feel the cold wind blowing by?**There’s so many fish in the sea,**we’re just, we’re just, we’re just**riding on the waves...**the waves... the waves...*16I’d thought that slavery was far back in history, but in Florida I met Charles Smith, who claimed to be 134 years old and to clearly remember being enslaved in Africa.*- I come to the United States, when I was only twelve years old.**- Were you sold as a slave to the U.S.A.?**- Yeah, wait let me tell you now. They brought me from Africa... That was in slavery time. I had never seen a white person in Africa. Well, I asked my mama, could I go down to the boat and see the white man. She said yeah, and I ain’t seen mama since. Grown people carried the children on hoard to see the “sugar trees” down in the hatch-holes. We felt the boat was moving, but thought it was the wind. He never did bring us back. We never saw the sugar trees. The colored wanted to throw me off. I remember it as if it was yesterday. Legree, the captain on the boat, didn’t want me thrown off. We got into this country, and were sold in New Orleans. Put up on a block and bid off. The highest bidder won...*A black social worker who’d picked me up and seen my pictures while I was vagabonding in Florida had told me about Charles Smith and brought me to his little house. Both he and other blacks in the area told me that Charles Smith is different from other blacks and in fact looks down on them. Smith had been too young to understand why the older Africans would throw him overboard, which according to historians was quite common in order to save the children from slavery. When he was bought by a Texas farmer in 1854, he was already too old to be brought up as a slave and suffering the inner scarring slaves do when they are forced to be submissive to avoid cruel punishment or death at the least sign of resistance.Although Charles Smith has probably adopted and retold his father’s story as his own, it’s poignant description of the fate of millions of other captured Africans. I discovered that this survival behavior still plagues black Americans, and it struck me that if slavery has left such deep psychic scars true freedom has not yet been achieved. Many of the things I remembered from the newspapers in my school days I now, in my journey, saw in a new light. I remembered how in the ’60s the United States finally became a democracy in which all its citizens had the right to vote and so was surprised to hear that Louisiana, for example, has more than 257,000 illiterate citizens. Is it not the duty of a democracy to educate its citizens?18Martin Luther King, and the Civil rights Movement he came to symbolize, changed the most overt and primitive forms of discrimination. But the most significant part of his dream went to the grave with him:*“I have a dream, that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream, that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged on the color of their skin, but on the content of their character. I have a dream, that one day every valley shall be exalted and every hill and mountain made low...”*Martin Luther King’s beautiful dreams are shared by me and most other whites. In my journey, however, I soon learned, and it was reinforced with the election of Trump, that the only one that came true may be that African Americans are no longer judged on their skin color but on their character. The sad thing is that the character traits blacks developed after centuries of oppression don’t live up to the norms of whites, whose character traits and economic “hills” are shaped by being oppressors. Seeing how much African-American character traits differ from those of both whites and black immigrants helped me understand the enormous subjugation of the mind that slavery and our continued exclusion are causing. Thus, in the optimism of the Civil Rights Struggle, I never dreamed that one of Martin Luther King’s “four little children” would one day become not only my competitor as a Black History Month speaker, but at the same time an ally in the fight against continued oppression. Or that one day I was to be invited to show my slideshow permanently on top of Martin Luther King’s grave, while his daughter Yolanda herself presented it to President Clinton and worked with me to “Stop the Violence.” To ostracize and marginalize other people is to commit violence against their humanity. That our language of violence today is not only understood but also spoken by those who have had to hear it for centuries should come as no surprise.19But when, like me, you come from Europe and have, for instance, never seen a pistol, you receive a shock you’ll never forget the first time you hear the tone of this language. After only a few days in this new country, I was held up by gunmen—a character type I’d never met. Similarly, the fear I felt was a fear I’d never experienced before: the fear of another human being. My journey afterward became to a large degree a journey into this human being. And the more I came to understand and like this human being, the more I began to see how I myself could have caused this anger in an oppressive system which from day one had forced me and other immigrants onto the side of the oppressor whether, as a Danish tourist, I’d wanted it or not. Could I, through my behavior, even be the cause of this anger? Could I ever myself end up harboring such anger? From the day I experienced that violent American reality, I began to understand the extent to which fear and anger characterize the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. |  | Skib ohøj! Så langt øjet kan se, mænd, kvinder og barneslaver der ankommer til Frihedens Land, hvor livets mønster allerede er lagt - så unge, så stærke - de venter kun på at blive frelst.... Herren skal vide, at jeg er så træt, og jeg ved, at du også er træt Horisonten rundt -se solen skinner ned på dig Skib ohøj! Føler du havenes rullen, den kolde vind, der blæser forbi? Der er så mange fisk i havet - vi glider kun på bølgerne...16Jeg havde troet, at slaveriet lå langt tilbage i historien, men i Florida mødte jeg Charles Smith, som hævdede at være 134 år gammel og tydeligt kunne huske, da han blev gjort til slave i Afrika. – Jeg kom til USA, da jeg kun var 12 år gammel. – Blev du solgt som slave til USA? – Ja, vent. Lad mig nu fortælle dig hvordan. Da jeg kom til USA blev folk solgt. Det var i slavetiden. De bragte mig over fra Afrika... Jeg havde aldrig set en hvid i Afrika før. Jeg spurgte min mor, om jeg måtte gå ned og se de hvides båd. Hun sagde ja, og jeg har ikke set mamma siden. De voksne bar børnene om bord for, at vi skulle se ”sukkertræer” nede i lastrummet. Så mærkede vi, at båden bevægede sig, men troede det var vindens skyld. Kaptajnen bragte os aldrig tilbage. De farvede prøvede at smide mig over bord. Jeg husker det, som var det i går. Legree, den hvide kaptajn, forhindrede det. Vi så aldrig sukkertræerne, heller ikke da vi kom til New Orleans. Vi blev smidt op på blokken og solgt for højeste bud. En sort socialarbejder, som havde samlet mig op og set mine billeder, mens jeg vagabonderede i Florida, fortalte mig om Charles Smith og førte mig til hans lille hus. Både han og andre sorte i omegnen fortalte mig, at Charles Smith var anderledes end andre sorte og faktisk så ned på dem. Charles Smith havde været for ung til at forstå, hvorfor de ældre afrikanere ville smide ham over bord, men det var ifølge historikere almindeligt for at redde børnene fra slaveriet. Da han blev købt af en Texasfarmer i 1854, var han allerede for gammel til at blive opdraget som slave med de indre ar, som mennesker i slaveri får, når de må udvikle underdanige karaktertræk for at undgå en grusom straf eller død ved mindste tegn på modstand. Selvom Charles Smith sikkert har tilegnet sig og genfortalt sin fars detaljerige historie, er den gribende ved at beskrive millioner af andre tilfangetagne afrikaneres skæbne. Jeg opdagede, at denne overlevelsesadfærd stadig præger sorte amerikanere, og det slog mig, at hvis slaveriet havde efterladt så dybe psykiske ar, er virkelig frihed endnu ikke opnået. Mange af de ting, jeg huskede fra aviserne i min skoletid, så jeg nu på min rejse i en ny belysning. Jeg huskede, hvordan USA endeligt i 60’erne blev et demokrati, da alle dets borgere fik stemmeret, og forbavsedes derfor over at høre, at f.eks. staten Louisiana har mere end 257.000 analfabeter. Er det ikke et demokratis pligt at oplyse sine borgere?18Martin Luther King – og borgerretsbevægelsen, som han blev symbolet på – fik ændret de mest iøjnefaldende og primitive former for diskrimination. Men denne mest betydningsfulde del af hans drøm gik i graven med ham: ”Jeg har en drøm om, at sønnerne af tidligere slaver og sønnerne af tidligere slaveejere en dag vil sidde sammen ved broderskabets bord på de røde bakker i Georgia. Jeg har en drøm om, at mine fire små børn en dag må leve i en nation, hvor de ikke vil blive dømt på farven af deres hud, men på deres karakter. Jeg har en drøm om, at hver dal skal udjævnes og hvert eneste bjerg flades ud en dag”. Martin Luther Kings smukke drømme deles af mig og de fleste andre hvide. På min rejse lærte jeg dog hurtigt, og det blev forstærket med valget af Trump, at den eneste, der gik i opfyldelse, måske er, at afroamerikanere ikke længere bliver bedømt på deres hudfarve, men på deres karakter. Det sørgelige er, at de karakteregenskaber, man har efter århundreders undertrykkelse, nu engang ikke lever op til de normer, som gælder for hvide, hvis karaktertræk og økonomiske ”bakker” er formet af at være undertrykkere. At se, hvor meget afroamerikanske karakteregenskaber adskiller sig fra både de hvides og sorte indvandreres, hjalp mig til at forstå den enorme underkuelse af sindet, som slaveriet og vores fortsatte udelukkelse forårsager. I optimismen efter borgerretskampen havde jeg således aldrig drømt om, at en af Martin Luther Kings ”fire små børn” en dag skulle blive ikke blot min vigtigste konkurrent i universiteternes ”black history month”, men samtidig allieret i kampen mod den fortsatte undertrykkelse. Ja, at jeg en dag skulle blive inviteret til at vise mit lysbilledshow permanent oven på Martin Luther Kings grav, mens hans datter Yolanda selv viste billederne for præsident Clinton og arbejdede sammen med mig i ”Stop volden” kampagnen. For udstødelse og marginalisering af andre mennesker er at udøve vold imod deres menneskelighed. At vores voldssprog i dag ikke alene forstås, men også tales af dem, som har måttet høre det i århundreder, kan derfor ikke undre.19Men når man som jeg kommer fra Europa og f.eks. aldrig nogensinde har set en pistol før, får man alligevel et chok, man aldrig vil glemme ved første gang at høre tonefaldet i dette sprog. Efter kun et par dage i det nye land blev jeg holdt op af pistolbevæbnede mennesker af en type, jeg aldrig havde mødt tidligere. Den angst, jeg følte, var en angst, jeg aldrig før havde kendt: angsten for et andet menneske. Min rejse blev siden hen i høj grad en rejse ind i dette menneske. Og jo mere jeg kom til at forstå og holde af det menneske, jo mere begyndte jeg at se, hvordan jeg selv kunne have forårsaget denne vrede i et undertrykkende system, der fra første dag havde tvunget mig og andre indvandrere ind på undertrykkerens side – hvad enten jeg som dansk turist havde ønsket det eller ej. Kunne jeg gennem min adfærd selv være årsagen til denne vrede? Kunne jeg nogensinde selv komme til at nære sådan en vrede? Fra den dag, hvor jeg havde oplevet den voldelige amerikanske virkelighed, begyndte jeg at forstå, i hvilket omfang frygt og vrede karakteriserer forholdet mellem undertrykkeren og den undertrykte. |