

# Harriet jacobs essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In the stories expressed by Harriet Jacobs, through the mindset of Linda Brent, some harsh realities were revealed about slavery. I've always known slavery existed and that it was a very immoral act. But never before have I been introduced to actual events that occurred. Thought the book Linda expresses how she wasn't the worst off. Not to say her life wasn't difficult, but she acknowledged that she knows she was not treated as bad as others.

Linda's life was without knowing she was a slave until she was about six years old. Her father was skilled craftsman and so he was allowed to work for his profit as long as he gave half to his master. Linda's mother died when Linda was young, so her maternal grandmother took care of her and her brother William. Her grandmother had been freed by an elderly white woman. Aunt Martha, as was known, was very loved by many including whites and blacks especially by Linda. As soon as she realized her fate in slavery her grandmother became her only female figure of who she really loved and trusted.

As slavery became more and more a part of Linda's life began to soon change as she learned that she was owned by a white master and his mistress and that she was to do exactly what they asked of her without exception or question. Black slaves were not seen as humans but merely as property who served as servants. They could not accumulate property or belongings or authority because they too were property often compared to "chattel". No man or woman had any value except for the price tag placed on them when they entered the bidding block. However, the destiny was different for a man than for a woman in slavery. For a black man, slavery meant long hours everyday, having a family

But not having any authority amongst it, dealing with the constant reminder that he as a slave could not protect his wife or children from any harm done by the master, and that if he ever disobeyed he would be beat or killed and there would nothing that could be done in his defense. His long hours worked would never provide money for the benefit of his family. His family was supported by the masters and therefore their primary duty was to obey the masters. For women, slavery had other heart wrenching aspects. "Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women." (Jacobs, 85) Such as having to see their own children sold and separated as soon as they would become profitable. Not being able to stop the monster she called "massa." Regardless who the slave girl was she still was doomed to the same fate as any other. "No matter whether the slave girl be as black as ebony or as fair as her mistress. In either case, there is no shadow of law to protect her from insult, from violence, or even from death; all of these are inflicted by fiends who bear the shape of men." (Jacobs, 27) These same "men" or "massa" were the ones for who the black women attended to. The slave girl was to wait hand and foot for anything the master or mistress should assign. Unfortunately a major crime against these slave girls was the immoral acts bestowed upon them by their masters behind the mistress' back. It was taboo to talk about the rape that went on in the lives of the slave girl. She was not to talk or even complain about it because it was wrong to accuse her master of any wrong doing. Since in the minds of the slaveholders, they were only helping of the blacks. So these girls would remain quiet about what had occurred. But once the offspring arrived it was only obvious that an ebony colored girl could

produce such fair skinned babies. " It was a crime for a slave to tell who was the father of her child." (Jacobs, 11) The one who suffer most from this crime against the slave girl

would be the babe. Because the babe would grow up to become a slave. "

The child shall follow the condition of the mother and not the father."

(Jacobs, 84) Not to say that the new mother would not suffer. She would have to realize that her baby will be brought into a world of slavery. But that would not be all the new mother of the mulatto baby would endure. With all of the master's promiscuous acts, the mistress would eventually discover that her husband has been sharing himself with property. " The mistress, who ought to protect the helpless victim, has no there feelings towards her but those of jealousy and rage." (Jacobs, 27)

From the overpowering done to black women by their white masters, the white women became enemies of slaves. And instead of punishing the husband's acts, the slave girl would be punished by her mistress for seducing the master in devilish ways. No punishment existed for the maltreatment of slaves.

When a master bred with a slave girl, the child became property of the master, therefore adding profit to his pockets because he could later sell him or her. The breeding became very profitable for the master but painful for the slaves. This caused many young black mothers to suffer knowing that their babies were conceived through rape and not love. Linda Brent describes how she " once saw a young slave girl dying soon after the birth of a child nearly white." (Jacobs, 11)

The simple aspects of childbirth amongst slaves are good indications of the roles and status of the black woman. " Whether mistress or slave, both women were

wretchedly branded as inferior to the man." (Jacobs, ix) It is obvious that the master held the control and authority in his palm when it dealt with the slaves on his plantation. But when it was about something more intimate such of the slave house hold, the lives of slaves were more centered on the mother or grandmother.

Deborah Gray White felt that the status of women in slave homes was more important than those of their counterparts: men. According to Gray White " the negro woman as wife or mother was the mistress for her cabin, and save for the interference of the master and overseer, her wishes in regard to mating and family matters were paramount." (Gray White, 22) She also includes works from Kenneth Stamp and Stanely Elkins in which they believe that " slave men had been emasculated and stripped of the paternity rights by slave masters who left control of slave households to slave women." (Gray White, 22) This is somewhat evident in the incident when William was called on by his father and his mistress at the same time. William was then faced with the decision to obey his father or his mistress. He chose the latter. When his father discovered to whom William reported to first he was angry. He said " you are my child, and when I call you, you should come immediately, if you have to pass through fire and water." (Jacobs, 6)

Using the reading as evidence, I do feel that the mother was the center of the slave family. Throughout the reading of Jacobs, the main women to whom everyone goes for help is the grandmother. She is respected and even on a number of occasions has the courage to speak up and defend her family from the Dr. Flint, the master, and he would not strike her even though he knew he could. She was a bold woman who provided

Linda with a shelter during her hiding. " The issues of freedom vs. slavery, white vs. black, and men vs. women are interwoven" (Jacobs, v) but still Aunt Martha proved to be against it all. She was an ex-slave who was a black female. Linda Stern says that " I do this for the sake of my sisters in bondage, who are suffering wrongs so foul, that our ears are too delicate to listen to them" (Jacobs, xx).

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