

# Untold history: how gender impacted slavery 'kindred'

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The history of mighty using the weak for their own gain is as long as time itself. However, within the last few centuries the scale at which this forces can operate especially when dealing with Europeans to non-Europeans. With this new found power the Europeans were able to enslave and conquer on a scale never before seen. Although the field work done by enslaved African American men was tenuous and often came with brutalization, the novel *Kindred* By Olivia Butler demonstrates that women enslaved work worked the households also faced their own hardships such as sexual violence, direct servitude, and gender degradation. Firstly, it is important to talk about the conditions that the so-called ' field slaves' had to go through before it can be demonstrated how the ' house slaves' had a different yet rough job to perform. The people who worked the field in the pre-Civil War south were only able to be worked when they had sunlight over the fields as a non-flammable artificial light was not invented yet. This would mean that the hours the master would try to have them working was ideally twelve hours a day, but in practice, the total hours of hard labor when factoring in the time to set up, eat and shift from task to task was about ten to eleven hours.

In, American English there is a phrase called ' picking cotton' which referred to how the harvesting of the cotton was carried out. However, there was more to do with the tending to farm plant then planting and waiting until harvest. Indeed the slaves would face hard labor year round to ensure that the profit margins were at the highest when it came time to sell their cash crop. Lastly, one may be forgiven for thinking since crops like tobacco and cotton are tropical crops they cannot grow in winter and as such the slaves would have it easier to live in the winter. However, the master still worked

these people to do hard labor elsewhere and to prepare the field for next year. Also, the slaves were given very minimal housing throughout the year to avoid the cold. It is for these reasons that the work of the field has earned the reputation that it has currently. Next, we need to talk about the work that those who tended to the house performed during their time of servitude. The first two misconception that needs to be dispelled is that the 'house slaves' loved their master and that a lack of hard labor means they had it easy. Firstly, how much anybody liked their master is mostly based on how they were treated on a daily basis. It wasn't like there was a class of mostly black women who magically loved their white master while another class of mostly black men hated their master. Put simply if the master was kind then he was like by many and if he was cruel he was hated by many. It is a common theme throughout slavery that treatment of slaves varied wildly and how living conditions were going to be like can only be predicted by dice roll.

Another misconception is that 'houses slaves' were treated well, loved their master, and were safe from abuse. This idea is mostly false however, they were formally treated better than other slaves as they were given nicer clothes, could properly bathe, and in *Kindred* it is referenced many times that Alice had her own cabin by the line "Alice told me one day as I was hiding out in her cabin". This seems to suggest that slaves like Alice were treated better than the average slave how would need to share their cabin with three or four families at a time. This also kills the idea that the house slaves collectively slept in their master's house. Though there are some reports of that happening to some slaves. However, the idea that these

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people were at all times safe is a very dubious claim at best. Although many 'house slaves' would not have been whipped that does not mean that they would not find other ways in which to toy with somebody who steps out of line. For example, in *Kindred* there is an instance of abuse against a woman of color which reads as follows, "That, she made painfully clear to me the day she threw scalding hot coffee at me, screaming that I had brought it to her cold". This passage shows the causal violence against helplessly enslaved women of color. The idea that they ever had it easy is simply disgusting. Lastly, no enslaved person was ever safe from the master's darker desires. These people are nothing more than cattle to prod at will. The prevalence of sexual violence amongst enslaved women was truly terrifying. As the master can have sex with any women married or not as this passage explains, "So You'll be rid of the man and have possession of the women just as you wanted," I said with disgust. 'Rape rewarded". As you can see the way in which enslaved women were vile and common as the master is not always kind to his servants.

So although the men who worked may have faced toils and the whip the lives of these women were not as the happy and warm picture many would have you believe. The history of slavery is a long and complicated, and all who were subject to its grasp were torn from their homeland and brutalized in over a thousand different ways and angles. As such we should be mindful to remember the history for what it was and not for what politicians and half-baked conspiracy theories about how some of the lived experiences were not as bad as some would it seem. The past of hatred will live on and as such we should remember it for what it was.

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