

Term paper on gender relations and the experience of african american women under...

[Sociology](#), [Slavery](#)



Gender relations and the experience of African American women under slavery

The period of slavery is perhaps one of the hardest periods that ancestral African American women ever faced. The hardships that African Americans faced as a result of slavery raise the question of why their white masters treated them with such cruelty and violation of human rights. This paper seeks to analyze some of the hardships that African American women faced under slavery. The analysis of the gross violation of human rights and freedoms will be analyzed critically to highlight the importance of respecting the fundamental rights of women and humanity in general.

In an effort to understand the hardships that African American women faced during historical times of slavery, it is important to understand all the roles that women played at that time. For example, women were supposed to act as laborers and field hands during the historical times of slavery. It must be noted that, white masters did not appreciate the fact that women were physically weaker than men. Some white masters did not differentiate between work that was supposed to be done by men and that which was appropriate for women. Many women, therefore, found themselves providing labor to hard jobs that were initially supposed to be done by men such as construction of houses and other forms of infrastructure¹.

A critical analysis of the role that African American women played in providing hard labor brings out the fact that slavery violated their human rights by overworking them. It is common knowledge that women were naturally not meant to provide hard labor. The use of women to provide forms of labor that were initially supposed to be provided by men was,

therefore, inhuman. In my view it amounted to some form of torture since forcing women to provide hard labor compelled them to complete tasks that their bodies could not handle comfortably.

It could be argued that those African American women who were forced to become maids and servants for white women had an easier life when compared to those who were used as field hands. African American women who were used as maid servants were tasked with a variety of household responsibilities. For example, maid servants were supposed to ensure that the homes of their masters were clean. They were also supposed to prepare meals for their masters. African American maid servants were also used as messengers and personal assistants for their white women².

In my view forcing an African American woman to work for a white woman against her will amounted to demeaning her personality. All humans, whether black or white, are equal in all aspects. It was, therefore, disrespectful and unfair for white men and women to view African American women as slaves just because of the fact that they were black. The notion that black women were inferior to white women must have reduced the self-esteem of black women. Compelling African American women to act as maidservants for white women, therefore, reduced the ego, confidence and respect that black women had³.

African American Women were also used as nannies during the historical times of slavery. Many of the children who were born in rich families were raised by African American nannies. African American women who had responsibility of being nannies must have grown very close with the children they raised. The close bond that nannies made with the children they raised

must have motivated them to raise white children with a lot of love and care⁴.

In my view I believe that it was painful for African American nannies to observe and experience the white children they had raised with so much love and care oppressing other black people when they grew up. It must have seemed so unfair to African American women to witness white men treat their family members and relatives with cruelty while they had treated the white men with so much love and care when they were young⁵.

A major role that African American women played during the historical times of slavery is that they were used as breeders. At some point during the slavery years, the practice of slave trade was declared illegal. In a bid to compensate for the reduction in the number of slaves that would be available to provide different forms of labor, white masters encouraged and on several occasions forced women to give birth to as many children as possible. The new born babies of the African American women would be used as slaves when they grew up.

The use of African American women as breeders was inhuman in several ways. For example, the desperation that white people had to ensure that there were slaves to provide labor for them forced them to compel very young girls to give birth. White men encouraged and at times forced girls who were as young as 13 years old to give birth. African American women were supposed to give birth repeatedly without having a break. The use of African American women as breeders was, therefore, unfair due to the fact

that it introduced very young girls into motherhood, denying them the opportunity to enjoy their youth⁶.

It was also inhuman to force women to give birth almost every year since pregnancy is not an easy period for a woman. It was, therefore, very unfair to make women undergo the challenges and hardships of pregnancy yearly instead of allowing them to give birth at their own volition. It was also difficult for African American mothers to witness the many children they had given birth to being taken away and forced to start lives of slavery. No mother ever intends to see their child suffer. Many mothers also experienced several periods of sadness as they saw their children die or being incapacitated as they were carrying out slavery activities⁷.

Many white men also used African American women as concubines. It was common for white men to select beautiful African American women as their concubines. In most cases, white men took African American women to be their concubines without receiving consent from them. It must have, therefore, been very cruel and unfair for black women to be denied the opportunity to select men of their choice to become their husbands. It was also degrading for white men to take African American women as concubines instead of actual wives⁸.

It is also crucial to note that, while women African American women were carrying out their activities of slavery, they were also expected to take the full responsibility of being wives and mothers. It must have been very difficult for African American women to meet all the responsibilities that their husbands required from them. The children of African American women, who

were slaves, must have also lacked proper motherhood since their mothers had a lot of responsibilities to handle. It must have been painful for African American mothers to see that they were unable to become good mothers to their children.

After analyzing the different roles of slavery that African American women had to play during the historical times, it is important to discuss the different ways in which the women suffered⁹. Many of the African American women were mistreated in a number of ways. Some of their white masters did a variety of inhuman acts to women as discussed below.

The first example of how African American women were treated in a harsh manner can be seen by analyzing some of the cruel ways in which their white masters punished them. Many of the white men and women who were masters of the African American women used cruel methods of punishment such as whipping and shackling. Other inhuman methods of punishment that were used by white masters included beating, hanging and even burning African American women who served them as slaves¹⁰.

An analysis of the methods used for punishing black women reveals that white masters subjected their female slaves to inhuman treatment. On many occasions, the cruel modes of punishment were subjected to slaves who had committed very minor offences such as working slowly or performing tasks in the wrong way because of lacking the knowledge to complete such tasks.

Many people will agree that the cruel methods of punishment used to punish African American women were wrong and inappropriate¹¹.

African American women were also subjected to all forms of sexual violations and harassment by their white masters. There are many occasions whereby

black women were raped. Many African American women also died as a result of resisting attempts by white people to rape them.

The negative effects that African American women suffered after being sexually violated by their white masters were very serious. For example, the women who did not die from a rape ordeal were left with serious physical injuries. However, it can be argued that the worst negative effect that African American women experienced after suffering sexual violations arises from the fact that most victims suffered serious psychological trauma. For most women, a violation of their sexuality has a huge negative impact on their emotional and psychological welfare. The emotional and psychological trauma that resulted from sexual violations caused African American women to have a low self-esteem¹².

White masters also subjected African American women to very harsh working conditions. In cases where women acted as field hands and laborers, they were supposed to work throughout the day in labor intensive jobs. On many occasions, women were not fed well regardless of the fact that they had been working all day. Most women worked in fear as they were afraid of being punished or reprimanded for committing minor mistakes. Some of the working environments that women worked in had a negative effect on their health. Other working environments were dangerous, and many women lost their lives¹³.

In addition to the poor working conditions that African American women were subjected to under slavery, their white masters paid them little or no wages for the labor they provided. African American women, therefore, found it had to buy some of the essential commodities that they required for both

personal and family uses. It was also difficult for the female slaves to provide basic necessities for their families. This made African American women poor. White people could, therefore, be said to have been inhuman by subject black women who were their slaves to a life of poverty and mistreatment¹⁴. African American women were also denied access to proper maternal and other forms of healthcare. The fact that black women were poor also made it more difficult for them to access specialized medical care. Many cases of women who died while giving birth were reported. The numerous cases of death occurred when African American women experienced complications when giving birth but lacked specialized medical care. The rate of death of infants was also very high. Many young children died since their mothers were unable to get them proper medical care. The denial of specialized medical care for women by white men was a serious violation of the human rights of women slaves.

In a bid to prevent women empowerment, white people prohibited African American women and their children from accessing education. The white people feared that black women would revolt or challenge their authority over them if they became educated. It was very wrong for white people to condemn black people to a life of illiteracy and ignorance. It was inhuman to deliberately hinder black women from accessing education to prevent them from liberating themselves. All human beings, whether black or white, were equal during historical times of slavery. African American people including women, therefore, deserved to be educated so as to gain knowledge on how they would empower themselves¹⁵.

It was also gross violation of human rights to force African American women

to live a life of slavery because it denied them their right to freedom. White people's actions of enslaving African American women broke several freedoms they were supposed to have. For example, slavery contravened the right of women to have the freedom of speech and expression. Slavery also denied women the freedom of movement. All human beings have an equal right to enjoy several freedoms, and it is very wrong to deny a specific class, race or gender of people, the right to enjoy their freedoms¹⁶. African American women who were slaves were also prevented from exercising their cultural practices and beliefs. Slaves were also prohibited from following their traditional religions. Some of the white masters forced African American women to adopt their religious practices. It was very unfair for white people to prohibit African American women to follow their religious beliefs and practices. The prohibition of black women slaves from exercising their cultural and religious beliefs was unfair since the white people also had their own culture and religious beliefs that they practiced without prohibition.

Conclusion:

It is, therefore, evident from the above essay that it is very wrong to enslave fellow humans who are our equals. The practice of slavery should not be allowed and any person who tries to enslave other people should be prosecuted by the law.

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