

American literature exam question



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At the end of the book, Linda says that she is still waiting to have her greatest dream fulfilled - that of creating a real home for herself and her children. This aching desire for a comfortable and safe home runs throughout this book, but Jacobs still does not present the domestic sphere as a safe retreat. Rather, it is a distorted vision of dehumanization and deformed human relations, because slavery affects the family in the most horrible of ways, resulting in fractured family ties. We witness Aunt Martha struggling to keep her family together, but her children get sold. Linda is denied the right to raise her own children, as are many other black women. Slaves are not allowed to marry whom they choose, and a black husband and wife sometimes are not allowed to live together. White men father children with black women, but lack absolutely any kind of parental obligation towards the children, and in some cases, like with Mr. Sands, may be tempted to sell them to get out of financial trouble. We see that the hatred slavery enforces distorts the most basic of all emotions: that of a parent towards his child. The lack of freedom and basic human rights does not affect only individuals, but all social structures. Normal human relationships inside and outside of a family cannot survive the devastating influence of the slavery system which deliberately dehumanizes black people, shamelessly stripping them off their dignity and rights as human beings.