

The social and economic hardships of women and blacks

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



The 19th century was a difficult time for many women and blacks because of the domination of white men over them. The social and economic hardships they faced in day to day life was a constant reminder of this domination. The social ideology in the story " Desiree" s Baby" was powerful and dangerous and held no escape for any character. A woman with small children who lost her husband would face extreme hardships without the support of closefamilymembers. One who happened to be down on their luck would not find much sympathy among their peers even with children.

Kate Chopin was one of these individuals who was down on her luck with six children. But fortunately had the support and comfort of her mother for a short period before her mother passed away. A friend advised this mother of six children that writing was a way to solve her problems concerningmoneyand help deal with her grief. Maternal love and all the grief from losing loved ones were to be an attribute to the writing proficiency of this literary artist. This period in Louisiana was not tolerant for mixed ancestry and one found to be non-white would be ostracized from the white community.

There were some whites in Louisiana who was not racist but they would still have to follow a strict code of segregation and social guidelines or risk social or bodily death. Kate Chopin was born fourteen years before slavery was abolished so must have had strong feeling on the subject. She no doubt saw mixed ancestry in the black communities and realized the cause of it. This story crosses the line into the covert world of mixed ancestry and the

problems it produced. The racism in the story is not discussed openly but is prudently mixed in with Armand's atrocious character and his evil soul.

Armand's evil was deep as he forsakes his loving wife, infant son, and God.

The story some proclaim contributed to Chopin's early success was "Desiree's Baby"

in this story she mixed many feminist emotions from maternal love, to a wife's love and devotion to her estranged husband.

During this period, some found it tolerable to leave a baby on the doorsteps of a family to provide a chance at a better life. This was an important point in the story when the Monsieur found the baby Desiree near the front gate, it would mean that Desiree would probably never be aware of her biological parents ancestry.

The chance a baby with both parents would be dropped off is not logical but was probably a single mother. A single mother knew there was little help to be found and the child would be hard pressed for a descent upbringing socially and economically speaking. Desiree grew into a beautiful and gentle-hearted young woman and soon found a wealthy suitor asking for her hand. This young suitor had known of Desiree's past but was in love and did not care of this seemingly innocent unknown factor of her past. This suitor, Armand Aubigny was racist and wretched but the young bride was in love and looked past his flawed character.

The concept of young Armand falling instantly in love after seeing Desiree standing by the gate is a bit suspicious and sounds more like infatuation. The evil in Armand did not come from his parents and the black employees were

cheerful when he was growing up so it is an open question concerning his acquired hatred. The blacks were cheerful while his father was alive but was not during Armand's strict management of the L'Abri. Armand had changed to a kinder man after his marriage and the birth of his son and it may have been the only time in his life he was truly happy.

The death of his mother while living in France when he was eight years old may have had a precarious effect on his character. The way Madame Valmonde described the L'Abri as "a sad looking place, which for many years had not known the gentle presence of a mistress"(1), may have been a hint at Armand's evil nature being tied to having no maternal influence during most of his boyhood. Madame Valmonde noticed the baby's mixed ancestry immediately when she went for a visit, exclaiming out loud at first sight of him "this is not the baby"(2), Desiree thought she was referring to how big the baby had grown.

Madame Valmonde looked closely at the baby and knew that it was indeed of mixed ancestry but did not mention it to her daughter, this I believe was her way of hoping for the best. Madame Valmonde was wealthy but knew her influence would not be enough to help if anyone found out the baby was black. This would also mean certain social destruction for Desiree having given birth to a black child. The environment changed quickly on the L'Abri and Desiree was not aware of the circumstances that had changed it. Her husband had recognized that the baby was not white and had turned into his old malicious self and was ignoring his family in vain.

One of La Blanche's quadroon boys was near the baby when Desiree noticed the resemblance of the skin color between the boy and her baby. Desiree confronted Armand and asked him to explain what the baby's color meant and how it happened, Armand immediately and harshly accuses Desiree of not being white like the baby. The quadroon boy is one quarter Negro ancestry and so his mother La Blanch is also of mixed ancestry. This is important to know because Armand compares Desiree with that of La Blanch when he tells her she is not white.

Armand was quoted as hearing the baby crying from "as far away as La Blanch's cabin"(2), the reason he was at the cabin could be he was using La Blanch sexually. This would explain the quadroon boys. The practice of raping a slave or employee in those days was not uncommon. Desiree compares her skin color to that of Armand who is much darker than she is but he is not bothered by this inconsistency in his reasoning. Desiree begged her mother Valmonde for help in explaining to everyone that she is indeed white. Valmonde did not respond to Desiree's cry for help but just offered a place to stay for Desiree and the baby.

This was a strong blow for Desiree who felt she was now isolated in her fight for justice against Armand's unjust allegations. The struggle Desiree was trying to overcome was a losing one and mainly because of the dominance of men over women at the time. Armand did not relent in his persecution of Desiree and the baby. This demented individual's main goal was to crush the soul of Desiree and to punish God for what he feels was his unjust treatment. Desiree finally went to Armand one last time hoping that his psychotic

episode would be over but Armand did not deviate telling her he wanted her and the baby to leave.

The Crushed and broken Desiree finally made the fateful decision that there was no other life for her and the baby. This decision led to Desiree's suicide and the baby's infanticide alone in the bayou. There would be no social life or chance of a second family for a white woman with a black child during this time period. Armand's psychotic episode continued and he burnt everything belonging to Desiree and the baby or that reminded him of them. Fear was something Armand did not know because he always had domination over everything around him, but with the baby being black he had social rejection to fear.

It was during this episode that he discovered a letter from his mother to his father that revealed that it was indeed he who was black. God did enact the final revenge with the appearance of the letter. The story touches on several social issues that would not be talked about in specific places and times. The interracial conceiving of children, man's dominance over his wife, and white's dominance over blacks were all depicted in the story. In conclusion, the struggle for women and blacks continues and with changing social attitudes some things are improving for them but hatred and bias will be around for a long time.