

Imitation of life and the idea of racial identity

Literature



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Imitation of Life Sara Jane: A Study in Race Relations In the movie The Imitation of Life, Sara Jane is a person who is stuck between two worlds and yet is accepted in none. It is that confusion and struggle to understand her situation that serves as the heart wrenching backdrop of her story. First she was a child who resented her parentage and then later on, she was a young woman whose only wish in life was to be accepted in the world that she felt she belonged in. She was incapable of differentiating between where she was accepted and where she thought she truly belonged.

Her confusion and lack of direction in life because of her bi-racial heritage was not a problem lost upon other bi-racial children during that particular time of segregated America. For this was the time in history when the White men and women seemed to have the privilege to lead the good life. Times were good after the war and there was no real comparison between the life struggles of the White people versus the Blacks.

One cannot fault Sara Jane for being resentful of her mother. After all, anybody who looks at Sara Jane, who could easily pass for White because of her skin coloring, would ever be able to make the connection between mother and child. Having a black mother was, if you think about it carefully, the only reason that Sara Jane was being held back from accomplishing what any other White child of the time could accomplish.

During the time of segregation, a child born of bi-racial parents could be considered to not have any future. Although she was White for all intents and purposes, the secret that her mother is black served as a security risk for Sara Jane as she was taunted and beaten by the Whites who found out the truth about her. They made her feel ashamed of who she was because her blood was considered to be dirty. They failed to see that just like any other

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child, she merely wanted to be accepted into their circle. It was this taunting, ridicule and beatings that she received which made her resent who she really was.

Even though Sara Jane was black by birth, she did not belong among the Blacks either as they regarded her as higher than their station since she was fathered by a White man. The only potential suitor she could have had could not make his intentions clearly known because he did not know how to approach a mixed race person.

Owing to her experiences in life, it becomes quite understandable as to why Sara Jane resents any kindness shown to her by Lora and Susie. She sees them as the fulfillment of her dreams. The White and highly successful single mom with a White daughter who could have anything she wanted in life because all opportunities were open to those who were White. Deep within her, Sara Jane knew that even though Lora and her daughter were treating her and her mother as their equals, they could never be truly equal.

That is why I believe that Sara Jane cannot be blamed for the actions that she had taken in the movie. She equated becoming White and fulfilling her dreams with becoming emancipated from her Black mother. A move that proved to be detrimental to her mothers health and their relationship as mother and child. In the final scenes between Sara Jane and her mother, we see that Sara Jane is faced with an inner struggle of emotions. She truly loved her mother. However, she was not willing to accept that which her mother offered. The life of a Black woman engaged in servitude. She knew that she was worth more than that. But she had absolutely no idea how she could rise above the station that she was predestined for in life. And that, is where the true tragedy of Imitation of Life lies. Life in the end, could be <https://assignbuster.com/imitation-of-life-and-the-idea-of-racial-identity/>

blamed for the miserable condition that Sara Jane ended up in emotionally, socially, and physically. Could she have been helped by Lora in the end? No, because Lora would never be able to end the segregation that doomed Sara Jane to a life of misery and failures.