

Desiree's baby by kate chopin essay



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In *Desiree's Baby*, Kate Chopin shows how over valuing of white race and status can destroy a relationship and a family. Race and status are intangible ideas humans make up to segregate one another and should not be valued higher than a human life, but this is not the case in " *Desiree's Baby*. "

Destructive behavior begins when the child is three months old; rumors of the baby's race spark Armand's imperious exacting nature. He notices the baby appears to be of mixed race. At first he deals with the issue by avoiding the baby and Desiree.

Then one day as Desiree was watching over her child, she looked at the child, comparing his skin color to that of the slave child who was fanning the baby. Gasping with uncertainty, she notices that something is not right. In a disquieted state, Desiree says to Armand, " Look at our child. What does it mean? Tell me" (244). He replies, " It means that the child is not white; you are not white" (244). Immediately, Armand jumps to the conclusion that it is her to blame for the child's mixed race. Desiree attempts to defend her race, but she does not have a solid argument to persuade him.

Armand knows that she was adopted so there is no way to know her true race, unlike his knowledge and reputation of his own personal background. Because Armand values the white race higher than a mixed race, he cannot accept the baby or Desiree because it will ruin his reputation. In his dissatisfaction he shuns Desiree and the baby. Armand's idea that Desiree is to blame for the mixed race of the baby will destroy her. By her appearance she knows that she is white. She only needs someone to persuade Armand, so Desiree writes to her mother. She states, " My mother, they tell me I am not white. Armand has told me that I am not white.

For God's sake tell them it is not true. You must know it is not true. I shall die. I must die. I cannot be so unhappy and live" (244). Madame Valmonde writes back in request that Desiree and the baby come live with her.

Madame Valmonde does not know the exact race of Desiree because she was adopted, but Madame Valmonde does not value race over love as Armand does. Unfortunately, Armand's over value of race rubs off onto Desiree. Not knowing her true race, Desiree cannot live with the dissatisfaction of herself, her husband's disgrace, nor that fact that he does not love her or the baby anymore.

She cannot awake from the nightmare that her life has turned into. She takes the baby and wanders out into a deserted field where she and the baby perish. Thus Armand is to blame for destroying his family because of his obsession with status and the white race. With Desiree and the baby gone, Armand decides he must destroy the rest of their belongings. He tells the slaves to burn anything that belonged to Desiree and the baby. The last thing to go was letters that Desiree had written to Armand before their marriage.

While gathering those letters, Armand discovers a letter his mother wrote to his father. It read, " I thank god for having so arranged our lives that our dear Armand will never know that his mother, who adores him, belongs to the race this is cursed with the brand of slavery" (244). Armand's parents knew what they were doing to the family name, but they did not care because they truly loved one another, so much so that they kept Armand's race a secret as to keep up the family's reputation. But Armand could not do

the same for his own family because he valued his status and white race so highly.

After all that blame and torture Armand put Desiree through for bearing a mixed child, it was he who is actually is to blame for the child's race. He should be mortified. He had everything, yet because of his high value of white race and status, he through every good thing he had away. Now he has to deal with the shame and embarrassment of himself and shunning his wife and child away. Even if he tried to win them back he cannot get them back now because they have perished. Now all that he was so proud of before is lost. He knows the truth of his mixed race. He can no longer be a plantation owner from society's point of view.

He has pushed everyone away and unintentionally self-destructed all because he values race and status so highly. In putting his values into intangible ideas, it leads to destruction; in Armand's case he destroyed his family and his own name by placing a higher value on race and status than his own wife and child. If Desiree did not buy into Armand's high value of race and status, her and the baby might have went to live with Madame Valmonde instead of killing herself and the baby. Chopin uses Armand as a lesson to teach society how one should be more careful about what is valuable.