

Impact of slavery on a child



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Life of a Slave Child

It is hard to imagine growing up in the slave era. With the luxuries that even the poorest of children have in current times, makes the life a slave child even more unbelievable to say the least. A child that grew up as a slave suffered a very brutal, harsh childhood on a number of different levels. Not only was the suffering physical it was also psychological. The psychological far outweighing the physical, in my opinion. From birth to the end of many slaves' lives, they often felt powerless, inferior, shame, and perhaps the most damaging psychological effect was the sense of not having family ties and fearing separation from family. Physically, slave children suffered from physical labor at young ages, poor nutrition and sanitation. Often times this conditions lead to many serious if not fatal diseases. Slave children were valued assets to slave owners and were given a monetary value and while some young toddler aged children lived in the masters' homes, there lives were far from luxurious. Toddler aged children were often held responsible for taking care of infant children of the master. As they got older, they were responsible for domestic chores, such as, housekeeping, fanning their masters, cooking, etc. and eventually were sent to the fields to work as young teenagers. Growing up in the 1990's and early 2000's this world seems so far from what I ever knew as a child.

During play, slave children would create games that would help them deal with their surroundings. They wanted to feel they had some control over the things that were going on around them and teach them how to be adults. Games such as " Hide the Switch" and " Auction" were just a couple of the games slave children played to prepare them for the actual beating or selling

of a family member. They also did not have manufactured toys. They would create balls to play with out of yarn and old socks. Games also were used as learning tools for slave children that were deprived of education. For example, Hide and Seek was used to learn to count. Several other games were used to enhance verbal usage and ring games were a way of release of emotions a child may be feeling by allowing them to make rhythms. Slave children often hunted and fished as competitive sports, which also allowed them to make their families a little better off, they tended to stay away from games that required someone to lose. Older children would be on “ watch” to notify the younger children that a master was approaching by singing a song. This is also something children in modern times do, they look out for someone of authority coming but the roles are reversed, the younger children are usually the one “ watching’ out.

Slave children looked forward to being able to work in the fields. They were at that time allowed to receive some of the same benefits as the adults, such as rations of food and more clothing. This usually happened at around the age twelve. Again, it is hard to image as a child of twelve that I had to go work to receive a full meal or clothes. At twelve, my parents made sure that I had better clothes than them and was never denied food when I was hungry.

Not only was it hard being a child during the slave era, it was as equally hard, if not harder, being a parent. While in today’s world becoming a parent, regardless of age, is one of the best moments of your life that was not the case with slave parents. Slave parents would deliver their children with bitter sweet emotion as they knew what suffrage lay in wait of their children. This was especially the case with female children. Female children

were sexually exploited starting as a very young age. The sexual assaults physically were brutal, not to mention the emotional and mental effects sexual assaults had on female slaves. Children that were conceived in the manner of sexual assault by slave masters and considered “mulatto” were mistreated on an entirely different level than other slave children and were most likely separated from their mothers because the mistress of the plantation didn’t want them around. Fathers had a hard time dealing with being able to protect their families from the harshness surrounding them. When a father did attempt to protect his children, they or he was sold to a different plantation, so in an effort to keep his family together he would stand by and watch injustices done to his family. In my opinion, being able to keep his composure in certain situations made him a better father than by not keeping his composure. Slave owners in justification of working pregnant women in the field and lowering their rations of food where in fact one of the biggest reasons that the slave child mortality rate was so high. I do not believe that slave owners actually thought that working the fields actually made delivery of a child easier nor do I believe they thought not feeding the mother would lower birth weight of the child.

It has often been said that children were resilient and this is proven over and over again with slave children. Children born into slavery learned to deal with these conditions on away no other child has ever had to do. They rose above these transgressions by learning how to read and write, learning racial etiquette, taking personal responsibility for themselves and looking to a higher power to end their suffering. At the onset of the Civil War, women and children slaves sought refuge with the Union while boys as young as ten

joined the military to fight in the war. Others such as Frederick Douglas escaped slavery, became educated, and fought for rights of slaves on a national level.

The hate slavery generated between black slaves and white slave owners over 150 years ago was so I posit that even after 150 years have passed it is still one of the causes of racial tension in the world today.