

Community in beloved essay sample

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In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the community has a very significant and complex role. At times the community has a very helpful presence and at other times harsh and harmful. This is a community of former slaves in post-Civil War era; they have been deeply scarred emotionally, psychologically, and physically by slavery. And it is through the community's relationship with Baby Suggs and Sethe that Morrison demonstrates the slaves' emotional and psychological scars. The former slaves do not like pride because it is the common characteristic the dominant whites that had enslaved them.

The community sees pride in Baby Suggs and Sethe and therefore feels justified in punishing them. And just as the community first punishes Sethe, Morrison makes emphasizes the point that they must unite to help her in the end by exorcizing the ghost from 124. The community serves a very critical and involved purpose, playing the 'hero' and 'semi-villain' in *Beloved*. For the majority of the novel, the community is very harsh and unforgiving toward Sethe. After Baby Suggs' elaborate welcoming feast for Sethe, the community is so ashamed of their own gluttony that they blame the excessiveness on Baby Suggs.

After the feast and *Beloved's* murder, the community turns its back on Baby Suggs and Sethe for years. They want to punish Baby Suggs and Sethe for what they see as extravagance and pride. The day after the feast Baby Suggs noticed a "... scent of disapproval lay heavy in the air," and she soon realized that " Her friends and neighbors were angry at her because she had overstepped, given too much, offended them by excess. (162-3)" They feel

that it is their responsibility to punish Sethe and Baby Suggs to, as they see it, humble them.

The dramatic transformation in the atmosphere of the community is seen at Baby Suggs' funeral: " So Baby Suggs, holy, having devoted her freed life of harmony, was buried amid a regular dance of pride, fear, condemnation and spite. (202)" Although the community acts as a ' semi-villain' throughout the majority of the novel, they also have ' hero' moments. In the beginning of the novel, the community is seen as a caring and helpful people. When Sethe comes to the Ohio River with her newborn, Stamp Paid feeds, clothes, and transports the two to safety.

There she meets Ella who gives Sethe shoes to walk in, helps her breastfeed the baby, and takes her to Baby Suggs. Much later in the novel, the community helps Denver by giving her food to take care of herself and Sethe. And most importantly the community exorcizes the ghost of 124. And with this, Morrison shows how ultimately the community is nourishing and caring. The community does exhibit ' hero' and ' villain' characteristics but more importantly is what influences their actions.

The effects of slavery make up the underlying and most significant founding for their feelings of anger and frustration, also for their inability to comprehend these feelings. The community cannot understand the psychological effects and cannot act out against the whites so they displace their anger and frustration for slavery and whites onto Baby Suggs. They choose Baby Suggs and Sethe as the scapegoats because they are jealous of the two and they feel that they exhibit prideful behavior.

The community is envious that Baby Suggs had been bought out of slavery by her son, given a two-story house by white people, and that Sethe escapes Sweet Home with all of her children. Firstly, the ties between slaves and their children were usually severed very early; the fact that Baby Suggs was able to share twenty-plus years with her son is incredibly shocking. While most of the slaves had to escape and Baby Suggs had been bought out and peacefully taken to Ohio also triggered envious feelings.

Also the houses in the community were shabby and only one-level and they had worked extremely hard to obtain it. On the other hand, Baby Suggs' house was previously owned by white couple who gave it to her. The community feels as though Baby Suggs and Sethe act like white people because they act prideful. One way Sethe supposedly shows her pride is when she kills Beloved. The community feels that Sethe is proud of what she does because she is still able to hold her head up without shame: “ She climbed into the cart, her profile knife-clean against a cheery blue sky.

A profile that shocked them with its clarity. Was her head a bit too high? Her back a little too straight? Probably. (179)” Therefore they feel justified to punish Sethe because she is self-righteous about something shameful. They also are hurt because she kills one of her children when they would do anything to have their children back. Because of all these emotions “ Just about everybody in town was longing for Sethe to come on difficult times. (202)” Still as the community deserts Sethe and Baby Suggs, they must once again unite and help Sethe in the end.

Morrison emphasizes the fact that only the community can help Sethe in the end. The ghost of Beloved represents the evils of slavery by demonstrating what a mother would do to keep her child from being enslaved. And in order to put the past behind them and move on from slavery the former slaves must unite to heal themselves. Earlier in the novel, Paul D tries to expel the ghost from 124 but the ghost just returns to the house in another form. With this, Morrison is saying that not a single person can expel the ghost; it will take a more powerful force to banish it- the united community.

The community must completely understand the issue at hand and confront it together in order to finally move on from it. Morrison feels that the black community still has not fully healed from the effects of slavery. She believes that, as a whole, black people have internalized the oppression by whites that continue to affect their lives and decisions today. In her views, blacks still have the psychological effects of slavery and racism in how they view their status in the American society.

One issue in the black community is that many still feel oppressed by whites; they feel that they still do not have the same rights and opportunities allotted to whites and therefore they are still not on the same level. Morrison encourages the black community identify the origins of these feelings. The community must first fully understand the issue and finally they must unite together to confront it and find a solution. The role of the community in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is incredibly significant, playing both the 'hero' and the 'villain'.

The former slaves are unable to deal with their emotions due to the devastating psychological effects of slavery, so the internal issue becomes an external one as they displace their anger and frustration onto Baby Suggs and Sethe. But the community must rise above their anger and jealousy to help Sethe and Denver. It is only the united community that can save Sethe as Morrison points out. And parallel to the feelings of the black community in the post-Civil War era, the same issues of white dominance continue in the modern black community.