

# Criticism of "desiree's baby"



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

"Desiree's Baby", by Kate Chopin, is the tale of a young woman who, despite the fact that her familial origins are unknown, is adopted as a baby by a prominent family. She grows up to be a lovely young lady and is courted by Armand Aubigny, the son of one of the "oldest and proudest" families in Louisiana. The two were quickly married, and a child was born to them. Desiree had eyes only for her baby, and so she did not notice what was becoming clear to her mother, the house slaves, and eventually her husband.

The child was obviously partly black. When Desiree finally noticed this, she was thrown into a tailspin. Her formerly loving husband accused her of tainting the family with black bloodlines, and he told her to leave. Her adoptive mother pled with her to come home and bring the baby with her, but she was so distraught that she took the baby into the bayou, and was never seen again. Armand had all of Desiree and the baby's things burned, but he also burned a few personal letters.

Most were from Desiree to him during their courtship, but one was from his mother to his father. In it the terrible truth is revealed: Armand's mother was black. Kate Chopin's short story tells the reader a lot about what was going on during this time in history in a very few pages. The culture of 1800's Louisiana was based on a few strong families who had definite ideas of who was to be accepted and who was not. The families claimed to have pure white bloodlines, but just by reading the story it becomes obvious that this claim is highly unlikely.

Most of the slaves mentioned in "Desiree's Baby" are indicated to be at least half white, and some are as little as one quarter black. It is also clear that there is quite a double standard when it comes to mixed blood being in the immediate family, and mixed blood being among the slaves. It is probably no coincidence that Armand seemed to spend time at La Blanche's cabin, and that La Blanche's children are "quadroons." Slaves being slaves could easily be sold and so could easily be dismissed as not being part of the family bloodline.

The true dishonor came when a black child who could not be "passed off" was born into the family line. No man would accept a visibly black child as his own heir. Armand was simply lucky to have been born looking sufficiently white. It is also obvious that this society is highly male dominated. The proper women have been raised to obey their husband's every whim and cringe at the thought of making him unhappy in any fashion. The strongest female figure is that of Desiree's adoptive mother, Madame Valmonde.

She took on the job of raising an abandoned child of whom no one truly knew the origin, thus risking her family's pure bloodline. When it began to appear that Desiree might well be mixed, Madame Valmonde offered to take her and the child in once more. She obviously put more value on the person than the color. Desiree, on the other hand, is portrayed as extremely weak. She is unable to stand anything going awry and depends on her husband's mood for her every happiness. It is often mentioned in the story that she feels "miserable enough to die" when things go badly and her husband is unhappy.

In the end she simply could not stand his rejection and carried her child off into the wild for an uncertain end. Did she go and find a new life, or did she simply go to pine away and die? It would seem the latter would be more probable since she seems to have no sense of self without her husband. In conclusion, "Desiree's Baby" can be seen as a sad commentary on the emphasis of color and the value of women in this society. Females were expected to produce children who were worthy heirs, or in the slave women's position, more strong backs for the service.

They were dominated by men who did not keep their best interests in mind and would toss them to the side for infractions, whether their fault or not. This reader's response to this short tale is to see how the past bleeds over into the present. There are still groups of people who would not dare to admit they have any mixed blood in their family and would go to great lengths to cover any evidence. Women are still often treated as property and considered to be baby makers and not worth much else. There are still so many who depend on men for their every happiness and cannot handle rejection.

If we can take just one thing from this tale, perhaps it would be to take pride in yourself, not someone's opinion of what you look like or their estimation of your worth. It would be nice to believe that Desiree and the baby found a new place to live and went on with their lives, but it is not likely. Perhaps by knowing the truth of the story we can apply that to our own lives and have the strength to go on through hardship, seeing that the people who would hold us down often have greater burdens than we.