

# The methodology of female slavery: jezebel and mammy



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Talking about black's slavery we have to admit, that female slaves had to cope with and face both: the myth of a woman and the myth of the Negro. It was a difficult situation for women as they were standing at the crossroads of two ideologies, which affected them. Whereas men could escape only the stereotype of the Negro, woman had to escape both - stereotype of the Negro and stereotype of the woman at all. As a result both blacks and women were characterized as infantile, irresponsible, submissive and promiscuous. Moreover, in political and economical aspect they were dependent on white men. What more they have in common is that both groups were subservient, powerless in relations with white males. They were also considered to be a kind of outsiders and inferiors.

Looking at the era of slavery we can point out two types of African-American women: Jezebel and Mammy.

As far as the Mammy's is concerned, we can think about Hattie McDaniel, the Mammy in "Gone with the Wind". What we see is overweight black woman dressed in a long robe, a head kerchief and a big smile which follows her all the time. In the American history, Mammy was a woman who took care of white's family, especially looking for their children. She was in charge of domestic management and a house servant. She has a strength, experience and willing to do her duties. She was the main house servant and other people were subordinated to her. Mammy was a woman who could do almost everything, and did it even better than anyone else could do. She was often indispensable. What is also important about Mammy, is that she was also a in-home psychologist who often had to serve as a friend and advisor. She was where white women could not be, including playing with children,

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cooking and cleaning. Most of us think of a Mammy as a maid, who had to work because of her slave status, but the truth is that she was more than that. Of course, she was doing all the things which maid usually does, but also she was like a family member, taking care of white family's personal issues.

She was very protective, giving her care and love towards the white children. She was totally devoted to the family because she often did not have her own family and children. Also her interactions were limited due to her obligations. What is more Mammy normally was on the call at all hours, she almost did not have private time, she was often tired and exhausted, being under the scrutiny of the white family.

There were some advantages for Mammy like leaving the plantation as waiting maid for their traveling mistresses, or learning to read and write by family members.

Nowadays we can see the stereotype of Mammy in the movies or in the pictures, which show us fat, middle-aged, nonsexual and smiling black woman, but it is not how we should imagine and perceive Mammy.

According to historical facts, they were not fat, because they did not eat a lot. They were rather young, they rarely passed the 50 limit. Furthermore, not always they were totally black, because they were very often daughters of women raped by white men. The sexual exploitation of black women by white men was unfortunately frequent situation during the antebellum period. In other words, black women were sexually exploited by rich whites, middle class whites, and poor whites. Sexual relations between blacks and <https://assignbuster.com/the-methodology-of-female-slavery-jezebel-and-mammy/>

whites - whether consensual or rapes - were taboo. However they occurred often. All black women and girls, regardless of their physical appearances, were vulnerable to being sexually assaulted by white men.

Summing up, Mammy was really taking care of the children she was raising them and she was very important member of family. But we still have to point out that she was a slave and did not have much choice, so somehow she had to accept her fate. However if we compare Mammy's duties with these of the field worker, we can admit that her situation was far way better. It was also less physically demanding. Comparing to the field worker Mammy could expect better treatment in terms of providing her with food, clothing, medical treatment and sometimes education.

The Second type of black woman in times of slavery was Jezebel, who stood in the opposition of the Mammy's image.

Talking about Jezebel we should imagine young beautiful, sexual free, promiscuous woman, who was often governed by her libido.

The perfect example of Jezebel was shown by actress Nina Mae McKinney in a movie "Hallelujah!". In those days Jezebel completely stood in opposition not only to Mammy, but also to all white women who were portrayed as self respected with sexual purity. Jezebel was a woman who knew what she wanted, very seductive with lots of emotions and not ashamed of her sexuality.

Black men after raping white women were castrated or hanged, whereas white men had no problems with law after raping black slave. Legally they

could not do it so easily, because slave women were properties. White men often encouraged the slave women to have a sexual relation by giving them gifts. But also Jezebel made agreements with white men. Sometimes they had a choice to work on the field or to be a sexual attraction for a white male, what made her more independent than her hard working friends. Also black women agreed voluntarily for having sex with white men, because they knew that if they refused they could be forced to it and raped, beaten or even sold. By giving themselves to white masters they gained the chance for some advantages. If they were liked by them they were often awarded. This is one of the reasons why black women were called lust and promiscuous. Jezebel was the object of disdain, hate and envy from the side of white women. During those times white women were covering all of they bodies with lots of clothes, because nudity was perceived as a lack of civility, morality and sexual restrain. They considered them to be immodest and sexually aberrant. As I have mentioned before, being Jezebel had many disadvantages, one of them was possibility of rape. As a result she often got pregnant. The owner benefited from this situation, because he had supply of next slaves. Sometimes slaves even got a prize for being pregnant, for example - they were given a pig.

Then according to those facts, we could call a Jezebel as a 18th and 19th century prostitute. Actually the truth is that this image continues till today. The half naked, pretty and hot image now looks good and contemporary African-American women very often want to be a Jezebel.

However this image shows us not a slave and prostitute but an independent woman who is confident about her sexuality, her race and look. I think that <https://assignbuster.com/the-methodology-of-female-slavery-jezebel-and-mammy/>

nowadays the Jezebel's image has replaced Mammy's as the dominant image of black woman in pop culture. We can observe it in movies, video clips, even on the streets. Black women want to be Jezebel nowadays.

They like to show sexual purity, talking about women's needs and sexual abilities. However some of them may even do not know about the origins of the Jezebel image. On the other hand I think that we can also find lots of Mammy's images among black women. Except of what had been said above, Mammys were also presented in commercials. Mammy image was very often used to sell household items, food, detergents or beverages. She was presented as the overweight black woman, cooking or doing house-works and of course smiling. To sum up, there is no denying that the images and stereotypes of the slave women during the times of slavery definitely had an impact of the look and behavior of the contemporary African- American woman.