

# The kitchen house research paper essay



The Kitchen House is an accurate portrayal Of indentured servitude and the brutality inhumane slave conditions pre-civil war. Kathleen Grooms clearly portrays how African Americans were not respected as equals and were forced in undignified work settings fearing for their lives on a daily basis. The slaves would wake up and go to bed every night in fear for their life. The protagonist of the book, Laving, is white and raised by black slaves. Throughout her childhood, she has a difficult time understanding the difference between white and black people.

Unexposed to the hatred and emergence that was prevalent of this time, Laving believes she is the same as the slaves who raised her. When Laving asks Papa George if she could be his daughter, regardless of her skin color, he replies saying, “ Bambina...

You look at those birds. Some of them be brown, some of them be white and black. Do you think when they little chicks, those mamas and papas care about that? ” (Grooms 26). Papa George, a black slave treated as property, loved Laving regardless of her skin color.

Even though he is treated cruel and unfairly by other white people, he respects Laving and treats her as an equal; something cost white people do not do for him. Marshall represents the common outlook that slave owners had. He is extremely cruel to them and thinks of them as subhuman. Laving does not have that view. When they were younger, Marshall said to Laving, “ Don’t start talking like that. You’re not one of them.

They’re not like us. They’re stupid” (103). Marshall tells Laving to not speak like those that raised her because white people are superior to them.

Both of them were young, and white; however, only Marshall held such hatred in his heart.

Miss Martha describes the slaves to Laving by stating “ They are not my friends. They are my servants. They look out for themselves” (107). All these statements and prejudice was very confusing to Laving because she thought of the slaves as simply her friends. She did not view them as property or see them for just their skin color; she saw them as human beings. She saw no difference between herself and the slaves.

Later on Marshall says to Laving, “ You are never to buy gifts for the servants without my approval. They are your servants! For God’s sake, Laving. Try to elevate yourself to your new station! ” (253). She does not understand that she is expected to act superior to her servants.

It appears that Laving will never understand the difference between her and the servants. Marshall tries to force her to call the servants by their names, not “ mama” or “ papa. ” Laving, however, does not see them as anything other than her parents, skin color aside. Laving also does not understand segregation.

She was forced to sit with white people while at church for the first time. She did not understand why her black friends were standing in the back. During a conversation with Mama Mae, Laving said, “ Mostly it seems like I’m part of this family, but In church I have to go up front and sit with the white people. I want to sit with the twins, and they can’t come up with me, and can’t go back by them” (149).

The events that occur at the Church are a perfect portrayal of the segregation of this time period. Events like that were very common pre-civil war and throughout the 1 sass.

Whites and blacks were separated in many aspects of life, including at church, school, in bathrooms, on buses and so much more. Water fountains and benches were specified for whites and blacks. Grooms does not touch on a lot of segregation because the majority of the novel takes place on the plantation. However, segregation occurs on the plantation tenet the white owners and black slaves.

They each live in separate houses on the estate. It takes a while but eventually Laving realizes that there are different expectations for slaves than there are for white people.

Slaves are expected to act one way while white people have a separate set of expectations. While Marshall was hurting her, Laving looked to Mama Mae for help and suddenly realized for the first time the true extent of her helplessness” (259).

In that moment, Laving realizes how Mama Mae cannot speak up to help and protect her because it is not within her rights to do so. If he did, she would have been beaten or even killed for her actions. Throughout history, many slaves had been punished for speaking out or refusing punishment.

Later in the novel, Mama Mae refuses total subordination, and therefore is beaten and hung for doing so. Laving describes the death of Mama Mae by stating, “ our massive old oak tree stood near the top of the hill, its lush

green leaves shading the thick branch that bore the weight of a hanging body' (Grooms 358). That moment in the novel is heart breaking and serves as a prime example of the inhumane and dehumanizing treatment slaves endured.

Sakes wrote, " Like permanence, violence was a universal characteristic of slavery' (Sakes 6).

On a daily basis slaves feared the physical violence they could possibly endure. If a slave acted out of place, it was expected that their punishment would be of a violent manner. There is a caste system within slaves; some have more food, nicer clothing, and better housing. In The Kitchen House a caste system was well portrayed. The slaves who served the residents in the big house had more food, better living accommodations and treatment.

The slaves who lived in the quarters and worked the fields experienced horrible treatment from their nasty overseer, Rankin. Michael C.

Robinson described slavery conditions by writing, " Days filled with endless, backbreaking toil; barely adequate food, clothing, and shelter; the breakup of families; and the ensuing psychological damage" (Robinson 5).

On many occasions, Rankin sold a lot of their food so he could buy alcohol to self-indulge. The people of the quarters were much thinner and always appeared tense, as if they were waiting for something terrible to happen, and were treated worse than animals. Harold Holler wrote, " In some cases, slave owners kept their ' people' in worse settings than they kept their animals" (Holler 10).

Laving spoke about the people of the quarters by stating, “ Our clothing was different, certainly more substantial than theirs, and they studied our feet as though they had never seen shoes” (Grooms 41 The house servants were seen as superior to the field workers. They received better clothing and materials to make clothing.

There was a noticeable difference between the servants in the kitchen house and the slaves living in the quarters. When at a celebration, Laving said, “ After the Women had eaten, the children were called back and given the little remaining food.

On seeing their excitement, I realized this was a rare happening and was embarrassed to think that Belle had to tell me to finish the meat” (42).

Laving was used to having sufficient meals and kinder treatment than those that lived in the quarters.

That was an eye-opening experience for her on the horrors and realities that some slaves experienced. Miss Martha was speaking about Rankin and his duties on the plantation. When she saw one of her servants tied up and another one being pushed around she said, “ He is employed to keep order in the fields, where utilizing some of this treatment might be necessary.

It is however unnecessary to do so with my house servants” (1 13). This proves that a caste system exists within slaves. In this case, the house servants received much better treatment and accommodations than the field workers.

Slaves were treated horribly and often beaten for no valid reason. Robinson wrote, “ Enough blacks experienced inadequate care, physical and sexual abuses, and other forms of mistreatment to make them all aware of the uncertainty and insecurity they commonly faced” (Robinson 5). The people at the quarters were treated horribly and sometimes killed for no reason at all.

Even the servants in the kitchen house sometimes faced unnecessary torment.

Belle stated, “ Four men jump Ben when he comes out of the pig barn. They tie him and ride off before Papa or Jimmy get there to stop them” (Grooms 71). Rankin and other men believe that Ben is responsible for killing a little white girl named Sally; even though it is evident he did not do it. They spoke harshly to him saying, “ Amiga, you confess or we goanna kill you. ” Ben has no idea what they are talking bout and tries to tell them that, but it does no good.

When a slave does something wrong, they nail an ear to the tree before they cut it off (71). The men were doing that when the captain put an end to the unnecessary and cruel behavior. It was too late, he had not died but he would never fully recover. His face became deformed, he lost an ear and it was a terrifying event that will remain with him forever.

His ear was pouring blood and he was running around frantically looking for his clothes. Robinson wrote, “ The despotic control of the owners led to serious abuses, especially because lacks were viewed as subhuman” (Robinson 5).

Belle was raped by her unaware; brainwashed half-brother, Marshall. During the rape, Belle thought to herself, “all I know is, I’m goanna die, I’m goanna die” (Grooms 154). There was nothing she could have done. If she tried harder to fight them off it could have ended worse, perhaps resulting in her death.

After the Thirty Year’s War, Rupee’s economy was left depressed. A lot of people were left without work and were looking for a fresh start. Indentured servitude became very attractive; an owner would pay for someone’s passage in return for four to even years of service.

If the servant could survive those years, they were promised some land and freedom.

One-haloo two-thirds of immigrants who came from Europe to America Were indentured servants. Unfortunately, those men and women received little education. Even if they managed to survive those years, it was very difficult for them to survive on their own. Thomas C Wheeler wrote, “ Of Ireland she rarely spoke, save to recall that she was often hungry there and that for her main meal she often ate cress out of the brooks on oaten bread with a bit of lard” (Wheeler 20).

People in Europe ere hungry, and living in poor conditions.

They were looking for any way out of the poverty they faced and that is why many chose indentured servitude. For the most part, conditions were not as bad as the conditions slaves faced. That is, if they could survive the journey over. Albanians parents were not as fortunate as she was.



Her mother and father both did not survive the journey from Ireland to America. Her older brother, Cardigan, was easy to sell off. Laving was harder to find a place for because she was younger and looked ill. Demand for workers grew and so did the price of an indentured servant.

That is when people began buying African American slaves. Sakes wrote, “ Unlike indentured servitude, enslavement did not end after five to six years. Prisoners never bequeathed their status to their children, whereas a substantial proportion of slaves throughout human history inherited their bondage” (Sakes 6). Landowners began to realize the long term benefits of buying slaves instead of paying for an indentured servant. It was cheaper, and they had them for life instead of for a few years.

Kathleen Grooms writes about what inspired her to write this novel and how she wrote it, at the end of the novel.

She said, “ I tried on a number of occasions to change some of the events (those that I found profoundly disturbing), but the Story would Stop when did that, so I forged ahead to write what was revealed” (Grooms 368). Her story matches other writers descriptions of slavery and the pain those people dealt with. The owners and the overseers had a great deal of hatred in them to be able to treat other people as less than human. People are not born with this kind of hatred; they are raised to have it. In *The Kitchen House*, Grooms is able to portray those differences through Marshall and Laving.

Kathleen Grooms accurately orators the horror of being enslaved or in indentured servitude pre-civil war in *The Kitchen House*. It is evident that she did intense research in order to accurately portray the horrific conditions that

slaves and indentured servants faced. The Kitchen House exhibits the harsh reality of undignified working conditions along with the disrespect those men, women, and children faced everyday. When comparing her work to historians' work on slavery conditions and injustices proves that The Kitchen House was written in the proper context.