

# The lost childhood assignment



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The Lost Childhood BY 250 Book Review King, Wilma, Lost Childhood: Slave Youth, Indiana University Press, December 1995 Lost Childhood: Slave Youth The lost childhood: Slave Youth, was written by Wilma King in 1995, and as the title of the book indicates, it is a detailed study of the experiences shared by slave children during the 19th century. This book takes a much closer look at the lives of slaves all over the Unites States.

Although I was skeptical about this assignment, I was astonished at some of the things that I learned in this book The author does not cake her information from outside sources only, but actually gets stories directly from the slaves themselves. This book has opened my eyes to the horrifying situations that slaves had to endure during the 19th century. There were certain parts of the book that drew me more than others, such as the chapters about slave infamies, and the chapters about leisure, and labor.

Wilma King takes on a personal role I interviewing former slaves herself, as well as using certain documents as proof, and assessing information from former slave autobiographies. Wilma King made a huge contribution to the understanding of slave history. Slaves in the 19th century were living basically in poverty. Their homes were unsanitary, their work long, and harsh, and malnourished. What was really bad for adults to deal with was absolutely horrible for the little ones to go through as well. But what about new born, what happens to them? How do infants cope with such ghastly conditions?

Well according to King, the rate of infant survivals at that time was basically slim to none. In one such instance, Henry Bib, a former slave, vowed he

would never father children as long as I am a slave Thomas, H Joneses wails were arcing King writes as he first saw his baby girl for the very first time. Jones cried for the future of his children, and the harshness they must endure in order to live. Disease and exhaustion plagued the lives of all slaves. Premature births and deaths occurred frequently. Pregnant mothers were usually malnourished and exhausted from their labors, which had a negative effect on their babies.

If the mothers were lucky enough to give birth to a healthy baby, that would have been the least of their worries. Children that are born are usually underweight and battling malnutrition at a very young age. Those who do make it through infancy have a long hard life awaiting them. Most parents are anguished when their children are bought into the world. Some mothers however see it as an opportunity to become pregnant, therefore having less exhausting labor and being fed a little more to support the fetus. Some women even started to act sick and tired just so that they may be excused from work.

Being pregnant was hard on slave women of the 19th century, but what can make it or break it were the slave owners. If slave owners were compassionate, they would take care of the pregnant woman in order for her to have lath issues and subjected them to the same amount of work.

Whether the baby was born healthy, or died, it suffered regardless Another of the more interesting aspects of the book, were the chapters about how children spent their time after their work day was done. Although all slaves have an enormous amount of work during the day, they are free to do what they please at night. At night let the Negroes employ themselves as they

please till the bell rings,” read an Alabama slaveholder’s instruction.

Everyone needs leisure time and freedom to relax in order to function normally. Leisure time was the time used for creation, imagination, and entertainment. They also used their free time to dedicate themselves to religion, by having church services, and religious gatherings. As adults attend social gatherings, children are free to play and entertain themselves. Children at a very young age equally played with both genders, but as they grow older, choose to spend their time with gender specific activities.

For example, older boys prefer to spend their time doing sports that test their strength and endurance. They tend to lift heavy objects and compete in strength endurance with their fellow playmates, while girls prefer to play with dolls and engage in domestic activities. Girls are more tinned down and prefer the quiet play time and are interested in learning new things about a home. This shows that children grow up basically strengthening themselves in the lifestyle they have to live. Children choose activities that are similar to what they will grow up to work in.

Another aspect of this book that surprised me was the fact that slaves didn’t compete with each other to gin benefits, but lent a hand to one another in their time of need. King writes “ it is likely that slaves shared experiences rather than competed against each other in any meaningful way. ” John Washington for example, offered to break in his little brother’s new shirt before he wears it although he knows the fabric is so stiff and painful, that it feels like sandpaper rubbing against the skin. I also read about the actions of slave owners towards their slaves.

Some owners were surprisingly compassionate towards their slaves and cared for their health and their wellbeing. They made sure to feed the properly and gave them appropriate wages in order to be able to live. Some plantation owners even gave their slaves wedding presents. South Carolina planter McDonald Farman gave his slaves Jim and Ellen a Enoch table, 2 iron pots, a Dutch oven skillet, 2 tin buckets, 4 cups, 2 pans, 3 spoons, and a bedstead as their wedding present. While some owners try to make sure their slaves are living somewhat comfortably, other owners are indifferent about the treatment of their slaves.

Some owners are cruel and even go as far as bating their slaves for the smallest mistakes. “ As a youngster, Delia Garlic incurred the wrath of her owner, who whirled” on her and grabbed a hot scalding iron, and ran it all the way down her arm and hand. The owner burned the skin off Deli’s arm and hand scarring her for life. Another instance was a young girl who was severely beaten because her owner believed she was careless with a child in her care” writes King. The girl, who was under the age of 14 at the time, was falling asleep and not waking up to the baby’s wails.

As a child herself, she would not be physically able to take care of a baby day and night without being exhausted and eventually having her body give out. As a result of her exhaustion, the girl wasn’t able to hear the baby’s cry. The owner became abusive and beat the little girl with an oak stick till she died. Could not do anything about it. A different instance was when Fanny Moore, a South Carolina slave couldn’t even attend her own child’s burial, but had to watch from afar while she continued her days work. Slave owners determined therefore, what conditions their slaves lived in.

Slaves were also sometimes separated from their families, if the parents were owned on 2 different plantations. As children usually go to the mother, fathers usually had to go to great measures to see their children and make sure that they are alright. In one instance, a father crosses a river to his wife's plantation to spend some time with her and his children, and drowns on the way back to his rice plantation. If owner allowed the father some time with his wife and children, he wouldn't have gone to such extreme measures to see them in the dead of night.

Such incidents also reflect upon what type of owner a slave has, and how they take into consideration other parts of the slave's family. Wilma King was a professor of History in the University of Missouri. Ms. King is one of the biggest contributors to the study of African American slavery in the 19th century. There is very little amount of study of the actual experiences of young slaves in the 19th century. Ms. King shed some light upon the subject by writing a very detailed study of young slave experiences in her book *Lost Childhood: Slave Youth*.

As an African American herself, Ms. King took on a fresh perspective in her study by including the experiences of slave women as well as men. Slavery as a subject was understudied, but there was very little information about slave women and their life experiences. Ms. King not only based her book on very credible sources such as WPA slave narratives, plantation records, family records, and slave autobiographies. Not only does King use those documents for credibility, but she also makes an effort to interview former slaves and ask them directly about their childhood experiences.

King writes her story including all the stories included in her interviews, as well as using all the information from the documents she gathered throughout the years. There were aspects of her book that were written brilliantly, while other aspects she could've done without. In general I thought her book was very educational, and truly made me understand what it felt like to be a child slave. I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in learning about slavery, as well as to anyone who is interested in a good book. I believe that King was bias in the writing of her book just as any other compassionate human being would.

It is natural for someone to find out all the atrocities and hardships that someone went through and not to sympathize with them. As an African American herself, Ms. King was able to understand the impossible lifestyle that African American slaves faced on a daily basis, better than most people who have never really been associated with slavery. I believe it is basically impossible to write a book about slavery and not be bias about it. There are two sides that people can take with slavery. You were either against slavery or pro slavery. There is no intermediate side where someone couldn't care less whether there was slavery or not.

Anyone coming from either side will have a strong opinion that will definitely reflect on their writings. I believe anyone who will read this book will also be bias because you simply cannot go about reading such a book with such detail and not feel a certain way. We may not have information about most of the slave owners, but in our minds, we do not need to know anything about Whether the owners feel like they had a right to do so, or had an explanation for a retain action, we do not wish to hear the argument since

our compassion has already made a decision on what is right and wrong.

Although Ms.

King uses amazing sources for her book, I do believe that interviewing former slaves was one of the best, and the worst things in her book. On the one hand having the stories come from people that actually went through the experience themselves is a great resource for her book. Going deep down and personal allowed us, the readers to have insight to what slaves really were going through, and not base our knowledge of slavery on kooks that barely touch on the matter. On the other hand, interviewing the former slave would have certainly allowed for embellishments in their personal stories.

Some people might have not meant to change their stories, but it would be pretty hard for an elder to remember the exact experiences they went through when they were very young. One man states “ I don’t remember ever playing or nothing” which means he never remembers a time where he was not doing labor for his plantation. Although we may be sure, he had at least played something once on his life, being at such an old age, he was unable to remember such a time. Psychologically, that would be impossible!

If a person thinks of something hard enough, the brain could be tricked into believing certain things happen in a different way than reality. If Ms. King were writing this book a while back in the sass’s then interviewing the children themselves would have been a fantastic idea, because she would be directly at the main source! Ms King kept repeating the same analogy of slavery with war. I felt like it detracted the impact of her material. Comparing



the hardships of slavery on a daily axis to that of a soldier going through war doesn't really do justice to the slaves who dealt a lifetime of suppression and poverty.

War may last a few years, but eventually war is bound to end, and the soldiers are aware of that. For a slave, they are born a slave and die a slave, with little to no chance at freedom at all. Soldiers do at least have the choice of fighting for their country, which is something they truly believe in. Slaves on the other hand have absolutely no choice in their life style and are at the mercy of their owners. Soldiers are treated with respect and dignity, while slaves are treated like possessions. The fact that King repeats that analogy throughout her book lessens the impact of her book on the reader.

Ms. King also states that children didn't have time to be children and be completely idle at that time. Although that is absolutely true, it wasn't only enslaved children that had to work, most middle class children had to start working at a very young age to help support their families at that time. It was the era of child labor. She should have focused on the type of work the children had to do, rather than the fact that they were working. By comparing the type of labor enslaved children were doing to the labor free children were doing, it would have further empowered her book to her readers.

One of the last aspects of her writing that I felt King should have gone without was the fact that King was comparing the plight of slave children to 20th century diarists like Anne Frank for example. Anne Franks story was in completely different circumstances than slavery, although it was still a heart

wrenching story. Once again bringing war into the subject of slave experiences didn't help in the influencing of her readers. Anne Franks story revolved around war and religion, while Kings story has little to do with Anne Franks diary at all.

I believe that family separation through slave trade, and the labor force children faced was enough material to engage the readers, and made a monumental impact on the history of African Americans. This book has given me such a different outlook on what I thought slavery was. Although I knew slaves were treated harshly and with disrespect, I never really knew to what extent. I was absolutely shocked at some of the stories in the book and especially since former laves were the does telling the story.

For example the story of the little girl being beaten to death because she couldn't stay awake to take care of a baby, although she was practically a baby herself, repulsed me and put anger in my heart that I never knew could exist. It also made me think that if I were alive at that time, what would have I done? Certainly not stand around and do nothing while so many people suffered!!! This book will certainly change the outlook of many people on slavery, and what it really was. I would recommend this book to everyone know!

It was a delightful dead, although quite honestly I was skeptic when I bought the book. Although we do not have slavery now a days, seeing people in poverty will remind e of similar circumstances that slave children faced as they were growing up. No one deserves to live a life of pain and anguish, not then and certainly not now. I just really hope that American can take a look

at this book and realize that although slavery has been abolished, not everyone in the US is truly free. King has done an amazing job on her book, and I believe that it will provide great insight to anyone about the life of slavery.

The book paints vivid images of what children really experienced during slavery, and captures the reader's hearts. What I loved the most about her book was that it made me feel like I was actually there listening to the people tell their stories. The book makes you feel like you are experiencing the pain and destitution of every single slave, whether it be the mother, father, or child since they are all entwined in their pain. As adult and child encounter gut wrenching catastrophes, we can only share our sympathy, knowing that they have survived one of the most dreadful eras in US history.