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12 Years a Slave essay #1

Even the lord of the underworld had his queen, so too do the wicked moral being amongst us. The men of the plantation have their own role to fulfill, and the women fulfill their own not too dissimilar position. The role of the white women on the plantation was to stand in for the man as the authority when he wasn’t present and to be the trusted second in command. Unfortunately, because of this level of power combined with the potential for jealousy and as such the black female slaves were abused, sometimes twice if they were already receiving it from the man.

The women of the plantation were the go-to authority whenever the man was not present on the plantation or were otherwise preoccupied. With this authority, they performed the same tasks as their partners, from the average dealings of the work to the punishments that the slaved would endure. Since they grew up in the same environment as the plantation owner, they would often adopt the same methods as well. In Miss Ford’s case, the mistress was very much like Mister Ford resulting in how Solomon behaved, “It was a source of pleasure to surprise Master Ford with a greater day's work than was required…” unprompted for such courteous behavior (SLAVE pg98).

While that example showed the positive side, there were certainly instances of the worst behavior being shown. As was seen when Solomon was on the Epps plantation where he was consistent in his punishments for even the slightest infractions, intentional or otherwise. This spread to his mistress who participated in equally repugnant behavior, though her ire was directed specifically towards a slave girl named Patsey. As Solomon described, “She shrank before the lustful eye of the one, and was in danger even of her life at the hands of the other, and between the two, she was indeed accursed” to show the torment of not only the male of the plantation, but the woman as well (SLAVE pg189).

This insidious behavior could also come solely from the pursuit of the joy experienced when dealing out punishment. It might stem from jealousy if the male owner was sexually exploiting slave women, where it would be a form of revenge in their minds. Other times it was from the superiority they it afforded them, where their lives were dictated by another, and they would revel in the power they had. This seems to be a product of the male dominated society that that was present at the time of the slave trade and only seemed to fan the fires of such behavior.

In conclusion, the white plantation women were as complicit in the institution of slavery as the white plantation men. They had their responsibilities not too dissimilar to that of their male partners. One could not inherently be expected to receive good treatment from either in the slave trade as the gender was not an indicator in any way to the temperament of the authority figure.

12 Years a Slave essay #2

To be torn away from what you most love, it isn’t just the physical separation, but the tearing of the soul to see them torn away from you that causes pain in anyone who holds someone dear. The idea of not having our family close, or to be forcibly removed from us is something that is universally able to be associated with both north and south. As such, this was the most likely reason that Solomon Northrup chose to refer to family and children quite frequently though his memoir.

The use of children in the novel is something that every parent can relate to. Since his readers would likely be parents themselves, they could quickly associate the situation that slavery puts any child into with their children. As Solomon continually speaks of, “Thoughts of my family, of my wife and children, continually occupied my mind” keeping the reader’s attention on the poignant attitude as the novel progresses (SLAVE pg47). The idea that they had to endure such hardship, something that even adults have a difficult time dealing with, creates a picture of inescapable unfair hostility that stabs at the reader whenever Solomon brings it to light.

Solomon’s use of family though the novel is kept in close ties with his use of children, as they are closely associated with, not only his emotional loss at the time, but with the average reader’s primary concerns as well. Everyone has a family that they will protect and wish no harm to, and Solomon uses this as an associative branch from someone who had to endure the loss, if temporary, to most who have never experienced such a catastrophe. When he recounts, “I think of him with affection, and had my family been with me, could have borne his gentle servitude, without murmuring, all my days” when thinking of God as to associate the faithful and the need for family together, two things that the average reader of the time can closely associate with (SLAVE pg104).

Of the topics that Solomon brings up in his novel that don’t pertain directly to slavery, children and furthermore family are two of the most common. While this does recount his thoughts at the time that would be natural for someone in his situation, it is also an intentional method to ensure that the readers in the north could more closely associate his troubles and concerns with his own. This was likely the best approach to take, as though the north was certainly aware of the practice of slavery, and no doubt of the horrors that the institution creates, it can be difficult to imagine the hardships if it was not related so directly to their lives.

In conclusion, Solomon was a man who was torn away from what he held most dear in his life, his children and family, and as such felt that this pain would be the best way to get readers to understand the terrible calamity the befell him. Though he was not wholly successful in ensuring that everyone knew his story and took to action at the time, his poignant writing lasted and touched readers not only in his time, but in many years afterwards as well.

SLAVE. Northup, Solomon. *Twelve Years a Slave*. William Collins, 2014.