

**UNIVERSITY OF PARDUBICE**  
**Faculty of Arts and Philosophy**

**BACHELOR PAPER**

**AFRICAN-AMERICAN SLAVE CHILDHOOD**

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UNIVERSITY OF PARDUBICE  
FACUTLY OF ARTS AND PHILOSOPHY

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Univerzita Pardubice  
Fakulta filozofická  
Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky  
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## ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

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Jméno a příjmení: **Barbora MORAVOVÁ**  
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Název tématu: **African-American Slave Childhood**

### Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

1. Studentka s využitím relevantní sekundární literatury stručně uvede do historického kontextu – nastíní situaci dětí-otroků, především na velkých plantážích amerického Jihu v době krátce před Občanskou válkou.
2. Metodou kulturní a literární analýzy zpracuje otázky související s dětstvím černošských otroků, především problematiku ne/možnosti vytváření rodinných vazeb, získání vzdělání, osobní nsvobody, násilí, rasismu a jejich dopad na sebe-úctu, apod. Studentka bude analyzovat způsob zachycení těchto otázek v životopisných románech, především *Up from Slavery* Brokera T. Washingtona a *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself*.
3. Závěrem studentka shrne své vývody a porovná je s viktoriánským ideálem chráněného dětství (protected childhood).

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this bachelor paper is to analyze childhood of African American children living in slavery, on the large plantations during the nineteenth century in the Antebellum South. It focuses on issues affecting the slave children throughout their childhood in bondage, such as separation from their families, punishment, early labor, racial views held by white people, lack of educational opportunities and the struggles to become literate. It also describes the attitudes of the children towards their parents and their siblings and the attitudes of slaveowners towards the children born in slavery. Furthermore, this paper also examines slave children's leisure time. To illustrate the opinions and experiences of former slaves, the paper is based on the comparative study of slave narrative works *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* by Frederick Douglass and *Up from Slavery* by Booker T. Washington with quality secondary sources.

## **Abstrakt**

Cílem této práce je popis dětství černošských otroků, kteří vyrůstali na velkých plantážích amerického Jihu v devatenáctém století krátce před Občanskou válkou. Práce je zaměřena na problémy související s dětstvím malých otroků během zajetí, především však na odloučení dětí od rodičů, násilí, rasismus, práci v ranném věku a na problémy se získáním vzdělání. Popisuje vztahy dětí k rodičům, sourozencům, ale také vztahy mezi otrokáři a dětskými otroky, jejichž byli vlastníky. Práce se rovněž zabývá volným časem dětí, který byl určen ke hraní. Práce je založena na skutečných výpovědích bývalých dětí-otroků, jejich zážitků a zkušenosti, jak je popisují v životopisných románech *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* od Harriet Jacobs, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* od Frederick Douglass a *Up from Slavery* od Booker T. Washington ve srovnání s relevantní sekundární literaturou.

## CONTENTS

<b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. BIRTH OF A SLAVE.....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1 New life.....	5
2.2 Naming of a slave child.....	8
2.3 Slave Marriages.....	8
2.4 Separation by division.....	10
<b>3. YOUNG CHILDREN.....</b>	<b>13</b>
3.1 Finding out the cruel reality.....	13
3.2 Early miscellaneous duties.....	13
3.3 Clothing and food.....	15
3.4 Parents upbringing.....	17
3.5 Family ties.....	19
3.6 Leisure time.....	22
<b>4. YOUTH YEARS.....</b>	<b>25</b>
4.1 Punishment.....	25
4.2 Separation.....	26
4.3 Education.....	28
<b>5. COMPARISON OF SLAVE CHILDHOOD WITH THE VICTORIAN CULT OF PROTECTED CHILDHOOD.....</b>	<b>30</b>
5.1 The idea of protected childhood.....	30
5.2 The reality of childhood for both black and poor white children.....	31
5.3 Loss of innocence.....	33
<b>6. CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>RESUMÉ.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>41</b>

# 1. INTRODUCTION

American slavery began in the year 1619 when twenty black Africans were sold by a Dutch slave trader to the governor and a merchant in Jamestown, Virginia. Africans were kidnapped from their families and villages by white sea captains who ferried them across the Atlantic in the slave ships. “By law, slavery was defined as a system that deprived slaves of their essential identity as human beings and denied them the sanctity of marriage and family.” (Harrel, 2005, p. 344) Almost one million Africans were brought into the United States before the Atlantic slave trade ended in 1808. As it was banned to import more Africans, the only way to increase the number of slaves was through the birth of children. The slave population sustained itself through reproductions and increased rapidly to 3,952,760 by 1860. The rate of slave children under twenty years of age was 56 percent of the fore mentioned number (King, 1995, p.1). At that year Abraham Lincoln “felt compelled to declaim with distress and foreboding that almost one-sixth of the people then living in the so-called “land of free” were in fact slaves.” (Mellon, 1988, p. 1) The Emancipation Proclamation came into effect in 1<sup>st</sup> January 1863 and freed slaves in the Confederate states. The Proclamation declared, “All persons held as slaves within any States, or designated part of the State, the people whereof shall be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.” (Murphy, 1995-1999) Although slaves were legally set free they were still considered to be less equal to the white people and would always have subordinate roles in society. “Yet black Southerners remained prisoners within a society controlled at every level by whites whose racial attitudes were unaltered by military defeat and proclamation of liberty. To them, blacks were inferior and must act appropriate.” (Illick, 2002, p. 43) However, the Emancipation Proclamation did not free all slaves in the United States and it was not until the mid-1930s when slavery ended. During this time African American children were born into an unstable environment.

The slavery system in the Antebellum South could not have continued without the slave children who were born in bondage. These children ensured the perpetuation of slavery in consequence of hard labor and profit to the owner. The world in the nineteenth century into which slave children were born was full of poverty, punishment

and physical labor from early ages. Furthermore, slave children were extremely vulnerable to separation from their parents, community and home plantation. The childhood of these children were also affected by an ideology and perception of the black people as being inferior and that was believed by majority of white Americans in the South. They were not only believed to be inferior but also had subordinated status. “As grave as the physical dangers posed by slavery were the psychological: that children would internalize a sense of dependence, inferiority, and subordinate status.” (Mintz, 2004, p. 103)

For many slave children the plantation where they grew up was the entire world of their personal experience. “I do not think any of us had been very far from the plantation, and the taking of a long journey into another state was quite an event.” (Washington, 1965, p. 42) The children only knew the plantation, its surroundings and people who lived there. The housing conditions of slave families on the plantations were poor and highly unsuitable for children to live in.

On the large plantations, slave families lived in villages called slave quarters. The quarters consisted of many cabins that were usually built in single or double rows. The size and quality of cabins depended on the size and wealth of the plantation. Many wealthy planters provided cabins for their slaves, which were almost as comfortable as the overseer’s cabin (Leanne, 1999). However, most slave cabins were small, unpainted, badly furnished and dirty. While some slave families had their cabins furnished with beds made of straw-covered boards and a blanket, others had only corn-shuck mattresses. Slave cabins usually consisted of a single room of about sixteen by eighteen feet, or two rooms of the same size that were separated by a hallway or “dogtrot”. Fireplace was usually placed in the middle of the cabin. In each cabin lived one or two families. Unmarried men and women usually lived in dormitories. Building materials of the cabins varied according to region. Most of the time slave cabins were made of logs, bricks, clapboards or shingles. Typical slave cabin was set of the ground, had chimney, fireplace but some did not have windows. Instead of windows, they had only holes which were filled in to keep out the cold in winter time (Genovese, 1988, pp. 149-150). Master’s house so called “Great House” was usually situated in the distance further from the quarters. Most of the slaves wanted to be out of sight and hearing from the “Great House”. Beside the slave cabins the quarters contained a nursery, a wash house



and a sick house. According to Webber, such quarters gave the appearance of a “thriving little village”. (Webber, 1978, p. 8)

The condition of the slave cabins and its surroundings did not exceed the minimum requirements for survival of slave children. The living conditions were unsanitary due to the fact that slaves’ families lacked sanitary disposal of garbage so they were surrounded by decaying food and they also lacked lavatories so they were forced to urinate and defecate in the cover of nearby bushes. Moreover, domestic animals lived next to the slave quarters and contaminated the area by their faces. These unsanitary living conditions caused that many of the slave children died at early ages of tetanus, lockjaw, dysentery, typhus, diarrhoea, hepatitis, typhoid fever and intestinal worms (Mintz, 2004, p. 97).

The aim of my bachelor paper is to analyze the childhood of African American children in the nineteenth century in the Antebellum South. The paper focuses on slave children’s issues which have occurred throughout their childhood in bondage. The paper contains four main chapters. Three main chapters are dedicated to different childhood stages and the final chapter examines the Victorian cult of protected childhood. It is important to mention the Victorian idealized version of childhood as its ideology was in large contradiction with the harsh childhood of slave children.

The first chapter of the paper discusses the birth of black slave children and mullato slave children, the importance of naming slave children, slave marriages and first separation of mothers and the newborns.

The second chapter focuses on children’s first recognition of their slave status connected with their first duties for the master, description of poor clothing and food, parents education, children’s relationships with their mothers and their siblings. Furthermore, the last part of this chapter is devoted to slave children’s leisure time and it examines the types of games they played.

The third chapter examines the worst fears of slave children, such as separation from the families and any form of punishment, especially whippings. This chapter also focuses on slave children’s lack of educational opportunities and their struggles to become literate.

The fourth chapter deals with comparison of slave childhood with the Victorian ideal of protected childhood. The first part describes the concepts of childhood throughout the centuries. The second part compares the real harsh childhood of slave and poor white children. The last part of this chapter examines slave children's innocence.

The most significant sources of the African American slavery in the Antebellum South are the slave narratives by former slaves. These narratives were mainly written to document events and experiences of slavery and also acted as a key for abolitionist. The research of this paper is based on a comparative study of the narrative works *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* by Frederick Douglass and *Up from Slavery* by Booker T. Washington and quality secondary sources. The narratives of these authors provide detailed description how children lived during slavery and their experiences with violence and racism. According to Taylor, Harriet Jacobs was the first female slave to write her own autobiography which is perhaps the most intimate and emotionally compelling slave narrative of all. (2005, p. 117) Jacobs's narrative was published shortly before the Civil War under the pseudonym Linda Brent. Due to the fact that Harriet Jacobs wrote under the pseudonym she was able to describe more closely the forbidden topic of the sexual exploitation of the slave women on the plantations. Frederick Douglass was the most famous African American of the nineteenth century and his first book, *the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, has become the most widely studied slave narrative. He later extended the narrative and republished it under the name of *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Unlike Jacobs and Douglass, Washington was freed as a child from slavery at the end of the Civil War by the Thirteenth Amendment. He gained education and became leader and educator of African American community at the turn of the century.

Besides the three narratives my project also benefited from the most recent studies of slave children in the nineteenth century *Stolen Childhood* by Wilma King and *Born in Bondage: Growing up Enslaved in the Antebellum South* by Maria Jenkins Schwartz.

## **2. BIRTH OF A SLAVE**

### **2.1 New life**

During the 19th century many slave owners viewed the birth of slave children as a necessity. The birth of a slave was not only considered a profit to the owner but it also assured continuation of their slave trade. During the birth of a slave child, the female slaves were accompanied by midwives, mothers, women friends and other family members. "Pregnant women were often ignorant of their body functions and needs. They did not own their persons, nor did they have the resources to assure healthy pregnancies and safe deliveries." (King, 1995, p. 4) The unpredictability of the delivery date caused that many of the fathers, who did not live on the same plantation, were not present at a child birth. Slave owners did not call in the doctors because of the extra expenses and many of the midwives were not paid for their services unless they belonged to another slave owner.

Slave owners celebrated the birth of a slave child for many reasons. The slave owners viewed the child as a new financial asset, a contributor to the new labor force, and as an asset of future profit of sales. Jacobs's master often reminded her that "These brats will bring me a handsome sum of money one of these days." (Jacobs, 2001, p. 66) Therefore, many slave owners celebrated the birth of a slave child by giving material gifts and time off from the labor in the fields to the mothers. These gifts were meant to encourage the mothers to have more children and as a gesture of the masters' appreciation.

Although slaveholders and slaves joined together to celebrate slave child's birth, they each had different reason. Owners applauded the mothers fecundity, her contribution to a growing labor force, and her role in helping to perpetuate slave society, as well as what they thought of as their own enlightened management, which supposedly made family life possible for slaves. (Schwartz, 2000, p. 20)

Slave children were considered an inheritance. An act passed in 1662 mandated that the new born baby instantly became the property of a slaveholder due to the slave status of his mother, regardless of the color and condition of the father (Stevenson, 1996, p. 222). Children born to slave parents who belonged to different owners became

the property of the mother's owner. Even if the parents were freed later, the children were still the owner's property. Thus it enabled the owners to continue slave ownership trade and sales. This process ensured the slaveholder a life long profit.

A child's birth made the mother's daily life more complicated than that of the father. Slave owners required physical labor from both the pregnant and non pregnant women during and after the pregnancy. The mothers were also responsible for their children due to the fact that the fathers often lived on different plantations. Therefore the children had to follow their mothers everywhere.

Women nearing delivery term were forced to work in the fields because some masters adopted the view that hard labor made for an easier birth. Half of all slave newborn babies were born premature and weighed less than five and half-pounds. The main contributors of the high death rates were the physical conditions, heavy work loads and poor nutrition of slave mothers (Mintz, 2004, p. 96). "When my babe was born, they said it was premature. It weighted only four pounds-but God let it live. I had often prayed for death-but now I did not want to die unless my child could die too." (Jacobs, 2001, p. 52) The majority of women breastfed the babies but the mother's milk did not keep many of the infants alive or healthy due to poor prenatal and postnatal diets of their mothers. The mother's milk lacked enough nutrients that are necessary to support life and prevent babies from diseases (King, 1995, p. 9). Slave owners showed only little concern for slave mothers during and after pregnancy and did not provide them any extra food allowance. Many of the slave women returned back to work as early as thirty days after giving birth. The lack of postnatal care not only affected the infant but also the mother. "For a year there was scarcely a day when I was free from chills and fever. My baby also was sickly. His little limbs were often racked with pain." (Jacobs, 2001, 52)

Some mothers felt guilty for bringing children into the cruel world of slavery because they were aware of what the future held for their children. Giving birth to a girl was even more stressful for mothers because they were aware of the sexual abuse of young slave women on many large plantations. Slave women were abused not only by the slave owners but also by the other slaves. At birth of Harriet Jacob's daughter she wrote:

When they told me my new-born babe was a girl, my heart was heavier than it had ever been before. Slavery is terrible for men, but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own. (2001, p. 64)

Bringing a child into the life of slavery was very harsh and to give birth to a mullato child with light skin was even more difficult. Children of mixed race were often the result of forced exploitation by masters, master's son or other white men who visited or lived in the neighborhood. Both Douglass and Washington were said to be children of their masters.

My father was a white man. He was admitted to be such by all I ever heard speak of my parentage. The opinion was also whispered that my master was my father, but of the correctness of the opinion, I know nothing, the means of knowing was withheld from me. (Douglass, 1993, p. 40)

Many mullato children were considered to be “outcasts”. Darker skin slaves treated the mullato slaves differently. Some children were humiliated knowing that their mothers were raped or consented to sex with white slave owners. Many mullato slave children were confused about their race, whether to consider themselves white or black.

Revealing who is the father of the mixed-race babies could prove dangerous for both, the child and the mother. By remaining silent, mothers hoped to protect themselves from angry mistresses. The master's wives were unable to prevent their husbands from sexually abusing slave women in the quarters and often took out their frustration on the slave women. Mullato children were generally accepted into the slave family and were usually ignored, sold or leased from their white father's presence (Schwartz, 2000, pp. 45-46). Jacobs master was father of many slave children and he sold them all. “He never allowed his offspring by slaves to remain long in sight of himself and his wife.” (Jacobs, 2001, p. 47)

## **2.2 Naming of a slave child**

If the slave newborn baby was still alive after a few days, the naming of the child was considered the second most important activity in the slave community. Most often slave babies were named by their parents but occasionally slaveholders wanted to name the new born baby themselves. Slaveholders chose Greek or Christian names but also names of popular Heroes (King, 1995, p. 7). Slave parents' choice of names usually referred to their ancestors and close relatives or they associated them with slave community. It was most common to name children after parents, grandparents, family members who passed away or any other relatives. Jacobs named her son after her uncle Benjamin who was sold and never seen again. (Jacobs, 2001, p. 65) "Owners objected to the close-knit ties that developed among slaves as reflected in these naming practices. They believed that the slave's most important relationship was with his or her owners." (Schwartz, 2000, p. 169) Some masters changed the names of the slaves they purchased or gave them nicknames but the majority of slave children usually had only first names. They did not use middle names or last names. Slaves were sometimes called by the surnames of their masters so that everyone knew to whom they belonged. Booker T. Washington did not know his last name when he went to school so when his teacher asked him for his name, he thought of one and he answered "Booker Washington". Since that time he has been known by that name. (Washington, 1965, p. 47)

## **2.3 Slave Marriages**

Slave marriages were not acknowledged by law in the Antebellum South. Although many masters supported slave marriages on account of expanding their "property" there were also owners who did not want slaves to get married for various reasons. Many masters prohibited slave marriages across the plantation so that it was difficult for many slaves to find husband or wife. "On the largest plantations, nearly twenty percent of the slaves who reached adulthood remained single throughout their lives." (Mintz, 2007) Jacobs once overheard conversation between her mistress and other slave women asking about permission to get married. Her mistress angrily replied:

“Do you suppose that I will have you tending my children with the children of that nigger?” The mistress said that she would have the slave woman “peeled and pickled” if she ever asked again. (Jacobs, 2001, p. 34)

Sometimes slave women were not allowed to marry men of their own choice but were forced by their masters into the marriage with men that were chosen for them for “breeding purposes”. In some cases the masters just simply did not allow the slave women to get married because of their own sexual desire for them. Jacobs wanted to marry her childhood sweetheart. However, her master opposed this marriage due to his own sexual intentions and when she asked for his permission he replied:

Never let me hear that fellow's name mentioned again. If I ever know of your speaking to him, I will cowhide you both, and if I catch him lurking about my premises, I will shoot him as soon as I would a dog. Do you hear what I say? I will teach you a lesson about marriage and free niggers! (Jacobs, 2001, pp. 35-36)

Even when the slave women got married, it did not mean that they would be shielded from the white men’s abuse. The slave women had no rights of sexual exclusivity to retain to their husbands so the masters kept abusing them. These sexual exploitations did not only affect slave marriages, the slave families’ emotional and physical well-being but also white families. As slave marriages were not legally accepted and the Southern law did not recognize or protect slave families ties, slaveholders were allowed to sell any member of the family at any time.

Birth mothers could not therefore expect to be mothers in the legal sense. Legally these children were chattel and therefore motherless. Slave states passed laws to the effect that children of slave women no more belonged to their biological mothers than the young of animals belonged to the females that birthed them. (Hill, 1999, p. 4)

Moreover, slaveholders did not acknowledge the fathers as part of a family. When the slaveholders wanted to sell a slave family, they meant only the mother and the children. Although the marriages were not legal, slaves considered themselves as wife and husband and took the commitment seriously. In many cases husband and wife lived apart on different plantations. “On the large plantations, one slave father in three

had a different owner than his wife.” (Mintz, 2007) The father’s attention to the family depended on many factors, including if the father belonged to the same owner as his wife, if he was a slave or a white man. This situation caused that many slave children grew up without their father. A high percentage of slave women often became pregnant through forced cohabitation or rape, so in such cases it was unrealistic for women to expect any support and help from these men. “About a quarter of enslaved children grew up in a single-parent household (nearly always with their mother). Another tenth grew up apart from both parents.” (Mintz, 2004, p. 97)

Slave parents did not have equal influence on the daily activities of their families. The fathers worked such long and hard hours in the fields and the plantations were at great distance from one another which made it almost impossible to visit daily. Fathers were only allowed to visit their family with a written permission from their master and usually after work or on Sundays. Sunday was the only day off for all slaves. Some slave fathers preferred to live on different plantation because they could not watch the maltreatment and sexual abuse of their wives by the masters.

## **2.4 Separation by division**

Slave women had to return to work usually one month after childbirth. Early separation of mothers and infants was one of the most unsettling events in the lives of slaves. Slavery took away from many babies a nurturing and safe childhood. This early separation caused infants to depend on people other than their parents. Frederick Douglass was separated from his mother when he was an infant and he only saw his mother four or five times in his life. Each time was very short in duration and always occurred during the night after the performance of his mother’s work (Douglass, 1993, p. 40).

In agreeable weather, babies accompanied their parents to the fields. The majority of the time, mothers strapped the smallest children to their backs and the infants were usually put into a basket, a box, on a quilt or a pallet. Sometimes an older child was taken to the field to keep an eye on the younger children. In this case mothers could nurse their babies whenever they wanted. While in miserable weather, women had to leave their babies in the cabin alone or with the older siblings. Owners sent other



slaves to check on the babies or sometimes they rather checked on them themselves so that all the slaves could remain at work. When mothers were working in the fields, close to the quarter where their babies stayed, they were allowed a certain period of time to return and breastfeed their newborns (Schwartz, 2000, p. 61).

Workdays usually lasted eleven to twelve hours. Both women and men were required to work in the fields six days a week. During the busy period, planters required their slaves to work thirteen to fourteen and even up to sixteen hours every day. Such long hours made it impossible to carry out basic child care, household chores and cultivate their garden plots. New mothers did not usually have to do difficult farm chores. They worked as a separate group in the so-called “trash gang”. Trash gangs usually appeared only on the large plantations and its members were not only pregnant women and new mothers but also children, elderly and disabled slaves. It was not required from them to do heavy labor and they could work in slower pace (Schwartz, 2000, p. 135).

Keeping mothers and babies close to one another did not always occur. On the large slaveholdings, mothers were not usually allowed to leave the field. Therefore they were unable to return to the quarters to breastfeed or care for their children. The owners objected to this practice because it required much time and the mothers would not fulfill their daily working limits. Mothers who worked at far distance from their cabins had to leave the babies with some other supervisor. It was usually in the presence of an older slave woman who no longer had the strength or health to be productive in the field. So to keep the mothers working in the fields and also having their children cared for, the master established a nursery for infants. The nursery was available only during the winter time or when heavy demand for labor, such as picking season, was necessary. (Alston, 1992, p. 211)

Elderly slaves were left in charge of infants but they also had to perform domestic chores such as gardening, cooking, sewing, or spinning thus the supervision in the nurseries tended to be minimal. Given the few number of elderly slaves, owners also used those slaves that were disabled, unable to perform physical labor or the ill. In many cases the brothers and sisters, who were slightly older but old enough to walk and talk, helped care for the babies. “Children as young as two and three years rocked babies or protected them from wandering off or getting too near to fires.” (Schwartz, 2000, p. 71)

While this allowed the owners the ability to keep the mothers working and the children supervised, it was a very unsafe environment. Harriet Jacobs's toddler Ellen wandered outside and fell asleep under the great house that was raised two feet above the ground. Jacobs learnt afterwards that there was a large snake that the master killed later that day (2001, p. 71). The masters' main concern was keeping the slaves working as long and as much as possible and cared very little about the safety and supervision of the children.

On some plantation, mothers were only allowed to breastfeed their babies once a day. Therefore, duty of caretakers was to provide meals for children at midday, sometimes also in the evening. The varieties of nourishment for infants were not suitable. "The infants were fed cow's milk, thin porridge, "potlicker" (the broth left in a pot after greens were cooked), a mixture of mashed and skimmed milk or bread mashed into gravy." (Mintz, 2004, p. 96) The caretaker's duty was also to oversee the children's health. Caretakers were dispensing various concoctions to prevent or cure disease such as warms (Schwartz, 2000, p. 87).

By establishing a day nursery for infants, slaveholders shifted responsibility for child care from parents to caretakers. This situation worried slave parents because owners could put pressure on the caretaker to teach children different attitudes than parents. Some parents preferred to leave their infants in the cabin with older sibling to look after them and come to check on them during their noon break (Schwartz, 2000, p. 82). Many children received the same attention from the caretakers as they did from their mother working in the field or their sibling looking after them at home due to the fact that caretakers had to perform so many domestic chores.

The fortunate slave babies had their grandparents to take care of them. Slave grandparents played important roles in slave children lives. Both Douglass and Jacobs speak with affection about their grandmothers who were responsible for raising them. "Grandmother and grandfather were the greatest people in the world to me." (Douglass, 2000, p. 38) Most grandparents were also ready to stay in place of mother and father if needed. Jacobs's grandmother not only brought up her and her brother William but also cared for her great-grandchildren Benny and Ellen.

Some grandparents lived in their own cabin their whole life but most single grandparents were forced to move in with one of their married children after they

became too old to work in the fields. However, one of the most common functions of grandparents was to care for children while their parents were working. Grandparents often helped provide material comforts for their families. They also provided their families information about their ancestors. It was usually grandmothers who transmitted songs, stories and the folklore of Africa in the family (Webber, 1978, p. 174).

### **3. YOUNG CHILDREN**

#### **3.1 Finding out the cruel reality**

As the children grew older, they began to realize that not only the houses they were living in were not owned by their parents but they themselves were the owner's property. Slave children lived a "happy childhood" the first few years of their life. Afterwards, their life was full of physical labor, shame, suffering and punishment. In the words of Harriet Jacobs, she was born as a slave and did not know it until she became six years old and her "happy childhood passed away". "When I was six years old, my mother died, and then, for the first time, I learned, by the talk around me, that I was a slave." (2001, p. 10) Both Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington had similar experience. Washington realized his slave status when he woke up and heard his mother praying for Lincoln and his army to be successful and "that one day she and her children might be free." (1963, p. 32) Some slave children began to notice their slave status after watching their parents being whipped and unable to defend themselves. They wondered who would help them if and when they were to be whipped.

#### **3.2 Early miscellaneous duties**

Most of the slave children did not realize their slave status until their slave training began. On many large plantations, slaveholders gave slave children miscellaneous chores or some children were made to assist their parents with their tasks. As the slave children were too young to do heavy physical work, they did whatever

little jobs were needed to be done. Generally, it depended on the master whether and how much slave children had to work. Furthermore, it was the master's decision at what age he will send the young slave children to do the heavy physical work to the fields. While some masters waited until the children got to their youth years and were strong enough, others had the children labor long before their teenage years.

Once on the plantation, children as young as six years old had to perform many tasks. Only the youngest children were exempted from work. During the day, the slave children would work for their masters and in the evening they helped their parents. Some of the slave children did light work assignments around the plantations, while some worked as house slaves. This meant that the children were allowed to work and live in the "Great House" which kept them separated from their parents. One of the most common tasks was to look after master's children. But they were also made to help with the cooking, cleaning, washing clothes or any task that the mistress found necessary. Most of the house slaves were young girls. Harriet Jacobs became a house slave when she was six years old. After the death of her mistress, she was bequeathed to her master's five years old niece, where she remained until her teenage years. (2001, pp. 10-11) Not all of the slave girls who went through the training in the "Great House" became house servants. Some slave girls were assigned to the field work as soon as they were strong enough because they were not enough conducive. Some masters made exceptions and allowed young boys to work as house servants but their chores were much different than those of the young girls. Washington did not live in the "Great House" but he had to be present at every lunch time "to fan the flies from the table by means of a large set of paper fans operated by a pulley". (1965, p. 33)

Many slaves thought working as a house slave was better than working in the fields because house servants did not work under the strict supervision of a cruel overseer. They were fed better food and received the old clothes of the master's children.

It was associated in their minds with greatness. A representative could not be prouder of his election to a seat in the American Congress, than a slave on one of the out-farms would be of his election to do errands at the Great House Farm. (Douglass, 1993, p. 45)

However, their experiences differed; some were abused daily by the master or the mistress. Often times they did not get enough food or slept on the floors. An example of the cruel treatment of house slave is described in Douglass narrative where he talks about his neighbor's slave girl who was underfed and beaten by her mistress every day. "The head, neck and shoulders of Mary were literally cut to pieces. I have frequently felt her head, and found it nearly covered with festering sores, caused by the lash of her cruel mistress." (1993, p. 59)

Slave children who worked around the plantation mostly fed animals and cared for the animals. They tended sheep, milked cows and fed pigs. Children also carried water and supplies to the field hands, shelled corn and helped prepare meals. Many slave children assisted at the nursery and ran errands. They were also responsible for chasing birds away from newly seeded fields by waving arms, ringing bells, rattling grounds, shouting and throwing stones (Webber, 1978, p. 21). Douglass, not yet old enough to work in the fields, spent most of his leisure time accompanying his slaveholder on hunting trips and searching for shot birds. He was also responsible for driving up the cows, keeping the fowls out of the garden, the front yard clean and running errands for the old master's daughter (Douglass, 1993, p. 54). At the end of the day young children also helped their parents with domestic chores while their mother was preparing dinner. Young children had to complete various chores as gather fuel for the fire, sweep yard and bring in water from the well. Slave children, mainly girls, also helped their parents with washing, sewing, spinning and boys with repairing furniture or working in the garden. Otherwise, slave children work was not gender specific (Webber, 1978, p. 15).

### **3.3 Clothing and food**

The treatment and living condition under which slave children had to live were not suitable. Slave children suffered from lack of food and proper clothing. They were underfed and hardly ever were served meat. "Children's meals were simple and consisted of cornmeal mush served with molasses, crumbled bread, peas or buttermilk." (Mintz, 2004, p. 101) Slave parents received eight pounds of pork or fish and one

bushel of corn meal each. As slave children did not work as field hands, they were not counted into the family's allowance. Children would receive sufficient amount of food and clothing equal to that of an adult worker when they were put to work in the fields. However, the varieties of their meals did not change. "On countless farms and plantations, the laborers never tasted fresh meat, milk, eggs, or fruits, and rarely tasted vegetables." (Stamp, 1956, p. 285)

Children were fed out of wooden trough, like animals. They were also forced to eat without proper utensils. "Like so many pigs they would come and devour the mush, some with oyster shells, and others with pieces of shingle, some with naked hands and none with spoon." (Douglass, 1993, pp. 44-54)

Almost all slave children were given only minimum of clothing. They did not have any trousers, jacket or shoes. Slaveholders issued children only one or two garments made of varying types of cloth which fitted like a long coarse shirt reaching to the ankles. There was not much difference in the clothing of girls and boys just that the garment was called a "shirt" if worn by boys or a "dress" if worn by girls. When children wore out the garments, they went naked till the next allowance day (Douglass, 1993, p. 44). "It was common to see older boys "of about Fourteen and Fifteen years Old" with "their whole nakedness exposed"." (qtd. in: Mintz, 2004, p. 100) "Lucky" slave children sometimes received "new" clothes which actually was the old clothes of the master's children. It usually happened when children worked as house slaves. Douglass describes that he often suffered from cold.

In the hottest summer and coldest winter, I was kept almost naked – no shoes, no stockings, no jacket, no trousers, nothing on but a coarse tow linen shirt, reaching only to my knees. I had no bed. I must have perished with cold, but that, the coldest nights, I used to steal a bag which was used for carrying corn to the mill. I would crawl into this bag, and there sleep on the cold, damp, clay floor, with my head in and feet out. My feet have been so cracked with the frost that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes. (Douglass, 1993, p. 54)

As Schwartz states, children wore out their garments quickly. Mainly because they were made of cheaper, less durable fabric than the clothes of working adults but also because children dirtied and tore the garments while playing and working. At some plantations, slave mothers received only cloth so they were occasionally excused from

work to sew new clothing, mend or wash (2000, p. 83). Washington recalls that the garments were made from part of flax that was “largely the refuse”. It was the cheapest and roughest part that made it feel like “dozen or more chestnut burrs”, or a “hundred small pinpoints” scratching his skin. Washington compares putting on the new flax shirt to pulling of a tooth as an equal torture. (1965, p. 34)

Slave children on the large plantation did not usually have shoes. Slaveholders gave shoes only to the children old enough to work in the fields. They were barefoot much of the year even though in the South there were a few months in a year in which shoes were needed. Some slaveholders had the shoes made on their plantation. Some children had shoes that their fathers made from animal hides or they had just rags wrapped around their feet.

Hats were also not a part of slave children clothing. Hats for children were usually made by a skillful family member from any leftover material. Booker T. Washington felt uncomfortable by not having hat at school because all the other children wore one. His mother helped him with his difficulties by sewing together two pieces of “homespun” (1965, 46).

### **3.4 Parents upbringing**

As children grew older and started to understand the circumstances surrounding slavery, the parents started to prepare them for the cruel and harsh reality they would face in the future. Parents could not prepare their children for the first humiliation, first feeling of degradation but tried to prepare them for the crucial moment of separation. They taught their children the basic survival skills to cope with the possibility of being sold away from the plantation.

Mothers taught their children how to cook and obtain food or ingredients from the natural resources. Children often learned many useful skills such as making coffee from parched potato peelings, brewing tea from an assortment of herbs and leaves, procuring baking powder from red corn cobs, fashioning salt from sea water or the dirt from under the smokehouse meat. Additionally, children also learnt how to distill whiskey, wine or bear from any available vegetables. Fathers taught their children

hunting, fishing, cultivating plots and making furniture or various other household articles such as baskets, brooms or mats (Webber, 1978, pp. 161 – 169).

Parents were forced to start teaching their children at a very young age how to behave around white people, what they were allowed to say and what was forbidden. Slave parents taught the children the importance of keeping secrets from the master, not to talk about certain topics and how to be loyal to the slave community. “All children had to learn that some activities were to be kept “in their sleeves”. Learning such lessons was a part of growing up for slave children.” (Schwartz, 2001) When children told what they were not supposed to, disobeyed, broke the plantation rules or did not work, they were whipped by their parents or by master. While owners whipped the children as punishment, parents did so out of concern for their children. They whipped their children in order to teach them manners and loyalty so they stay out of trouble and avoid the cruel punishment of the master or the overseer.

It was important for the parents to teach their children how to preserve their self-esteem but also be submissive workers for their masters. The situation was very difficult for the parents because on one side they had to teach their children how to be good slaves to prevent them from being punished by the master but at the same time, they wanted to teach them self-respect. Slave parents had to teach their children to behave according to the owners standards. They taught them the importance of performing their duties in timely matter and in a way that would satisfy the master. The parents understood that if the children behaved and the master was satisfied with their work it decreased the chances of them being sold or whipped. “Incorrigible youths were more likely to be sold than those who proved tractable.” (Schwartz, 2000, p. 99)

At times, parents felt that owners were competing with them over the children’s affection and loyalty. Children had to learn how to live in “two worlds” where they had to please two sides with completely different expectations. Jacobs states in her narrative that her brother Willie got into situation where he was not sure who he should respond to. His father and master called him at once and he decided to go to his master which made his father angry. Jacobs’s father said “you are my child and when I call you, you should come immediately, if you have to pass through fire and water”. (2001, p. 12)

According to Alston, slave owners could afford to give slave children treats and other privileges that parents could not. Every treat that children got in form of sweets or



extra food made some children think that the master liked them and cared for them. Moreover, owners preferred not to punish children at early ages themselves but left this responsibility to their parents. In this way, owners hoped to build better relationship between them and slave children (1992, p. 212). Owners rarely carried out the tasks of child rearing directly but demanded from slave parents to teach the children right manners and discipline them. Owners expected children to become dutiful and submissive servants. Occasionally, owners gained the loyalty of slave children until they were old enough to understand the circumstances.

However, treats or privileges could never compensate for the cruelties of enslavement. All too soon, children reached an age at which they recognized that for the enslaved, treats were rare, punishments harsh and family separations possible. (Schwartz, 2001)

As slave children spent most of their time without parent's supervision, the parents taught them the importance of looking after each other. Additionally, they also used scary stories with characters like Raw Head and Bloody Bones to frighten the children from wandering around. (Mintz, 2001, p. 106) The songs and stories played a great importance in African American culture. Parents also taught their children songs, stories and folklores of Africa. Many of these stories had informative content so children learnt about their family history. It also helped them to understand the values, attitudes and beliefs of their family and community. Parents hoped that it would help the children to remember their kinship ties once being separated. Children were told about their ancestor's childhoods in Africa and how slave traders stole Africans and transported them to America. "Slave parents taught their sons and daughters that owners were the real thieves because they stole people, which no one had the right to do." (Schwartz, 2001)

### **3.5 Family ties**

In all three narratives, the authors speak lovingly about their mothers, even though they all spent only a little time with them. The relationships between slave

mothers and children were very important. Douglass states that slave children were separated from their mothers in order to “hinder the development of the child’s affection of the mother for the child”. (Douglass, 1993, p. 40)

As fathers were not usually present due to the fact that they lived on different plantation or were not acknowledged, it was the mothers who had to take the role as teacher, provider and protector. Many mothers tried to provide their children extra food, clothing and protect them from whippings and other punishments from masters. Washington remembers his mother waking him up in the middle of the night in order to give him chicken to eat. He did not know where his mother got the chicken from but he assumed that the chicken belonged to his master’s farm. (1965, p. 31) He realized this was a sacrifice for his mother because she could be severely punished for stealing. Although Douglass did not get a chance to spend much time with his mother, he remembers one special occasion when his mother took his side when she found out that Aunt Kathy did not give him anything to eat all day. Douglass recalls that his mother threatened Aunt Kathy to tell the master about the incident. “That night I learnt the fact, that I was not only a child, but somebody’s child.” (Douglass, 2000, p. 57) He knew that by telling the master, his mother would be punished by the slave community but she was willing to be ashamed rather than to see her child starved. Slaves as a community stayed together and it was not common for one slave to tell on the other to the master.

Slave mothers taught their children the proper way to interact with white people and to avoid being abused physically. Mothers told their children to run and hide when they see unknown white people. They taught them to be careful what they say when they are forced to talk to both white adults and white children. Many slave mothers were “whipped nearly to death” because white children told their parents what their black playmates told them while playing together (Webber, 1978, p. 164). Most of the slave mothers were willing to do anything to protect their children from the harsh burden of slavery. To prevent her children from being forced to work in the “Great House” under the supervision of her cruel and sexually abusive master, Harriet Jacobs describes how she hid for seven years in a loft which was nine feet long, seven feet wide, and three feet high above a storeroom right next to her grandmothers house. From the inside of her hiding place, Jacobs secretly and painfully watched her daughter and

son growing up. She drilled a one-inch hole with a gimlet and through it she watched her children suffer from her absence and being exposed to the danger of her master. After all the years of hiding her master believed she ran away. The master sold her children and she also gained freedom for herself and reunited with her children.

Nevertheless, many slave children were forced to grow up without their mother's presence or she was inaccessible most of the time. Children being raised under these conditions did not usually get an opportunity to establish bonds with their mothers. Douglass did not feel any emotional pain after his mother passed away. "I received the tidings of her death with no strong emotions of sorrow for her, and with very little regret for myself on account of her loss." (Douglass, 2000, p. 60) Jacobs experienced both sides of relationship between mother and daughter. Jacobs describes her life in the narrative from the view as daughter who lost her mother and later also as mother who lost her both children. Unlike Douglass, Jacobs spent her first six years of her life around her mother so she grieved for her at her death and was broken-hearted.

The narratives also give examples of relationship between brothers and sisters. Some siblings became attached to each other during childhood so the bonds between them were strong and in most cases lasted until adulthood. Due to the fact that their parents were not around, young children were forced to look to their older brothers and sisters for protection, special favors or advice. On several occasions Washington's older brother John wore new flax shirt for him till it was "broken in". Washington claims it was "one of the most generous acts that he ever heard of one slave relative doing for another." (1965, pp. 34-35) Jacobs's brother was put in prison with her both children after "she ran away" and was supportive to them and her. However, not all slave brothers and sisters were so fortunate to grow up together. Separation through death or sale could make it impossible to form bonds between siblings. Frederick Douglass did not grow up around his brothers and sisters so when he met them for the first time he did not understand how his sisters and brothers could be attached to him. He claimed that "slavery had made us strangers". (Douglass, 2000, p. 52)

### 3.6 Leisure time

Slave children began to work at very young ages which did not allow them very much time for playing. Instead of playtime, the children often turned their daily chores into playful games which would help contribute to their family living. For example, they made games out of hunting, fishing and gathering nuts and berries. “They realized a much needed feeling of self-worth by adding delicacies to the family table.” (Wiggins, 1985, p. 176) To contribute to their family living, slave children also played games that involved pilfering from fruit orchards and henhouse. When slave children stole food from the masters, the parents never questioned them on how they received it. “Southern law defined slaves as chattel, or moveable property, and slaves recognized the absurdity of defining theft as the consumption of an owner’s property by the owner’s property.” (Schwartz, 2001)

Slave children did not possess the typical toys as white children. Among the toys they owned were mainly homemade toys, such as dolls, hobbyhorses, marbles and jump ropes (Mintz, 2004, p. 107). Children were only allowed to play after all of their chores were completed for both master and parents. If the master caught the children playing during their working hours, they were given extra assignments. Some slave children remember only work. Washington claims that there was no period of his life that was devoted to play.

From the time that I can remember anything, almost everyday of my life has been occupied in some kind of labor, though I think I would now be a more useful man if I had had time for sports. During the period that I spent in slavery I was not large enough to be of much service, still I was occupied most of the time in cleaning the yards, carrying water to the men in the fields, or going to the mill, to which I used to take the corn, once a week, to be ground. (1965, p. 31)

Slave children games consisted of games that were handed down from generation to generation and games that children devised in the quarters. Slave boys and girls often played together but some games were more suitable for girls than boys. Girls often played with dolls and jumped rope. As slave girls did not own any real dolls, they often played with rags or corn cobs and used their imagination to pretend they were dolls. Boys mainly modeled marbles of bits of clay. “The collection of marbles was one

instance in which they could acquire objects of material worth, no matter their monetary value.” (Wiggins, 1985, p. 180) Both boys and girls played ball games, ring games and hopscotch. Ring games were often accompanied by singing, dancing and clapping which showed their African origin. Parents often played ring games along with their children. The ring games were accompanied by songs or riddles that allowed slave children to express their feelings that they were forced to repress:

My old mistress promised me;  
before she dies she would set me free.  
Now she's dead and gone to hell.  
I hope the devil will burn her well. (Mintz, 2004, p. 107)

A favorite game among slave children was playing “grown ups”. Girls dressed like their mothers wearing aprons and pretended to cook food, wash dishes and care for babies. Boys pretended to be fathers and went fishing or hunting. One of the most common role plays that children enjoyed playing together were weddings and also funerals because they were used to witnessing and hearing about death. “This probably commanded their attention because of the high mortality rates at that time.” (King, 1995, p. 49) Playing helped slave children to escape reality and become someone else for a short period of time. The freedom of these games allowed them to gain a sense of independence. “Representative play which did not take children from a real to an imaginary world was hardly worth playing.” (King, 1995, p. 48)

Some of the games mirrored incidents that happened in the slave quarter and expressed slaves’ status. The most common games were “Hide and switch”, “No Bogey-man tonight” and “auction”. According to Webber, slave children played these games “in order to cope with two of their greatest fears-whippings and evil spirits”. (1978, p. 184) The game “Hide and Switch” involved slave children whipping each other. The game “No Bogey-man tonight” was based on slave child being an evil spirit or Devil chasing the other children and during the game “auction” were children selling each other.

Children also played games where they could compare their strength and skills, such as jumping contest and foot races. The winners did not receive any prize but

elevated themselves in the eyes of competitors and that was their reward. They also, often played “hide and seek”, which was based on the same rules as nowadays. (King, 1995, p. 46)

A slave child’s first experience of subordination could occur while playing games with their white playmates. Many times, slave children were forced to call their white friends “Young Massa” or “Young Misses”. (Wiggins, 1985, p. 188) White children as young as three years old could not differentiate the social status. But as white children grew older their attitude towards slave children began to change. The white children began to develop prejudices and when playing “role play” games, black children always played the subordinate roles. While playing these games many slave children came to realize that they were servants and their white friends would always occupy superior position in the plantation community. However, through the playing of games, some slave and white children developed friendships that lasted lifetime. These relationships usually existed between master’s children and slave children who later became their own servants. Jacobs describes in her narrative the relationship between her mother and her mistress. “They played together as children, and when they became women, my mother was a most faithful servant to her whiter foster sister.” (2001, p. 10)

The slave children also devised competitive games where there were rules, winners and losers. While some of the games seemed to be cruel, children did not tend to make “the losers” feel ashamed or leave the game. Not eliminating children out of the games was one of the most significant features about the slave children’s play and was caused by their fears that members of their family could be sold or hired out at any time. (Wiggins, 1985, p. 181)

It is vital to mention that the introduction of slave children into the world of work put an end to their childhoods. Many slave children realized their slave status, were forced to understand the circumstances that surrounded them, lost most of their free time to play and some children were also separated from their families due to master’s decision. Thereafter, slave children were exposed to the harsh life of slavery system.

## **4. YOUTH YEARS**

### **4.1 Punishment**

Generally, there were two main reasons why slave children were afraid of the owners. Firstly, they were afraid of the owner's willingness to punish them and their loved ones. It was very painful for young children to see their parents and friends being whipped. Secondly, the owners had the power to separate them from their parents, family and community. Many children were fearful and suffered from knowing of the possibility of separation and the idea of never seeing their families again. The suffering and the experienced trauma had lifetime consequences for many of them.

Mostly, slave owners used corporal punishments for both adult slaves and children. The whip was the most common instrument of the punishment. While some owners used "rawhide" or "cowhide" others used leather strap. The former was made out of three feet of untanned ox hide, an inch thick at the end, and tapering to a point which made it "quite elastic and springy." The latter was eighteen inches long and two and a half inches wide, fastened to a wooden handle. Many slave owners preferred to use the leather strap because it did not lacerate the skin (Stampp, 1956, p. 176). Prior to children's first whipping by master, they often heard of or witnessed these actions. As children watched their parents or members of their community being whipped and humiliated, they started to think who would help them, when their parents could not save themselves. Frederick Douglass described in his narrative the first time he witnessed the whipping of his aunt Hester. The horrible incident terrified him to the point where he hid and was afraid to come out for a long period of time. He described his state of mind as "terrified and horror-stricken". The "bloody transaction" had scared him for life and he feared it would be his "turn next". (1993, p. 43)

When punishing slaves, some slaveholders were more brutal than others. While some slaveholders wanted to punish slaves themselves, others gave the right to punish slaves to overseers or drivers. Most slave children were not spared from the harsh punishments. They were the most vulnerable because of their lack of size and strength, which made their physical resistance nonexistent. "Such examples were more graphic when weak helpless children were beaten severely." (King, 1995, p. 94) Slaveholders

also used punishment of a single slave as a way to control the behavior of the group; sometimes they whipped a slave to set an example for all the other slaves. These whippings were usually very brutal because the slaveholders viewed it as a forewarning to the other slaves. Many slaveholders believed that if not for the fear of being whipped, the slaves would do little if any work. Generally, many slaveholders believed that slavery would be undermined without the power to punish slaves. Not only were the children punished by slaveholders but also by the wives of the slaveholders. Slaveholding women and the wives of slaveholders supported whippings and the general idea of punishment as much as the male slaveholders.

I do not know that her master ever whipped her, but I have been an eye-witness to the cruelty of Mrs. Hamilton. Mrs. Hamilton used to sit in a large chair in the middle of the room, with a heavy cow skin always by her side, and scarce an hour passed during the day but was marked by the blood of one of these slaves...Added to the cruel lashings to which these slaves were subjected, they were kept nearly half-starved. (Douglass, 1993, p. 59)

Only a few white women did not punish slaves themselves. They were willing to risk their husbands' anger in order to protect their favorite slaves from the whippings. Whippings also depended on the relationship between owners and the slaves. On rare occasions, masters established better relationships with some slave children, genuinely cared for them and treated them nicely. Douglass claims that his Master Daniel "became quite attached to me, and was sort of protector of me" and also "would divide his cakes with me". (1993, p. 54) Jacobs states in her narrative that her first mistress was so nice to her that she was "proud to labour for her as much as my young years would permit". (2001, p. 11)

## **4.2 Separation**

To raise the value of slave children, the owners had them working in the fields along side their parents while also training them in the Great House as servants. Slave traders expected the children to have some specific skill and be excellent at it. "Speculators, who purchased children solely to profit from their resale, sometimes



taught them work skills before putting them up for auction.” (Schwartz, 2000, p. 160) The slave demand began to increase for the children as young as eight years old. The reason for buying young children and not older slaves was to have more efficient and effective workers who would bring the owners money in the future. The prices for the children differed because it depended on their health, physical development, strength and ability to perform chores. While for some females, their beauty played a major role in the trades. “Slave girls who were deemed pretty according to slave holder standards could be sold as prostitutes or “fancies”. “Fancies” were usually of lighter skin and sold at higher prices than other slave women.” (Schwartz, 2000, p. 162) These young women were mostly sold for sexual exploitation and were considered of great value because of their fertile years. They were also sold at younger ages than the males because they tended to mature earlier. However, many slave owners viewed the ownership of lighter skin slaves as risky due to the fact that they had better chance to escape. Jacobs’s uncle Benjamin managed to escape from his master because of his nearly white skin. “For once his white face did him a kindly service. They had no suspicion that it belonged to a slave, otherwise, the law would have been followed out to the letter, and the *thing* rendered back to slavery.” (Jacobs, 2001, p. 23)

Slave children were usually separated from their families as a result of owner's debt, relocation to a new plantation or by sale. The children could be leased for a period of time, usually one year, to cover a debt or sold for life. In either case, the parents suffered, but the latter was more painful, knowing they will never see nor hear from their children again. “Those who lost a child through sale occasionally compared their emotional pain to the sorrow associated with a child's death.” (Schwartz, 2000, p. 163) Slave children were viewed as property and were sometimes given as gifts to newborn babies or newly married couples. Separation could be also caused due to death of the master so that slave children were bequeathed to someone else. If there was no will left, valuation of the property was necessary. “There were horses and men, cattle and women, pigs and children, all holding the same rank in the scale of being, and were all subjected to the same narrow examination.” (Douglass, 1993, p. 64) Parents tried to prevent the sales by threatening not to work or to run away. Slave holders were familiar with this practice and therefore sold the children while their parents were in the fields and in many cases, the parents did not have a chance to say goodbye.

Once children were leased out or sold, they had to go through many difficulties. Not only getting used to being without their parents but also get familiar with new environment, different work routines and try to establish new relationships with people who surrounded them.

The leasing and selling period usually started at New Years Day. Therefore, it was not a happy day for slave families. Jacobs speaks in her narrative about a woman she witnessed on New Years Day. The woman was leading her seven children to the auction block. As she was going there she knew that some of them would be taken from her but they took them all. “Gone! All gone! Why don’t God kill me?” (2001, p. 17) The leasing period usually finished at Christmas time so Christmas was the period of time that slave families looked forward to the most. They could be reunited with their family members and they were also allowed to relax from labor. Slave families cherished the relaxation due to the fact that they did not spend much time together during the year. In general, masters gave slaves only one or two days off but some gave a whole week of vacation between Christmas Day and New Years Day.

### **4.3 Education**

It is not known how many slave children could read and write while being in bondage. Teaching slaves to read and write was forbidden. While the majority of slave children learned to read and write after the Emancipation of Proclamation was issued, some children were fortunate to learn during slavery. On rare occasions, masters took interest in the education of their slaves and taught the children themselves. “While I was with her, she taught me to read and spell, and for this privilege, which so rarely falls to the lot of a slave, I bless her memory.” (Jacobs, 2001, p. 11)

As young children, both Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington had a strong desire to learn. Slave children’s educational opportunities were very low during that time but their ambitious, patience and eagerness helped them to achieve it. Douglass expresses that as follows: “Though conscious of the difficulty of learning without a teacher, I set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read.” (1993, p. 58) In similar way Washington also describes

his longing for becoming literate. “I determined, when quite a small child, that, if I accomplished nothing else in life, I would in some way get enough education to enable me to read common books and newspapers.” (1965, p. 43)

Generally, slaveholders did not support the education of slave children but some of them encouraged slave literacy only for Christian reasons. A small minority of slave children learnt to read and write even though they knew they could be punished by their master. Many of the children were threatened and whipped when the master thought they were trying to learn. “A number of former slaves reported whippings by owners for simply holding or looking into a book.” (Schwartz, 2000, p. 153) In most cases, slave children were even taught how to read and write by white children, usually their masters’ children. As Schwartz says, law governing the education of slaves did not apply to children who “played school”. (2000, p. 151) Douglass started to have a strong desire for learning when he heard his mistress reading the Bible aloud. She was responsible for teaching him the alphabet and short spelling words of three or four letters. When his master found out about the teaching practice, he forbade his wife in continuation. Douglass expresses that his master said:

“If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master-to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world. Now,” said he, “if you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him.” (qtd. in: Douglass, 1993, p. 57)

Many white people did not want slaves to become literate. They were afraid that slaves would start to question their status and spread the knowledge among the rest of the slave children and community. The owners were also aware that once slaves become literate, they could also write the pass and escape from slavery. However, Douglass viewed education as “the direct pathway from slavery to freedom”. (1993, p. 58) The master’s determination to keep him ignorant made Douglass even more determined to learn. He made friends with poor white boys who taught him how to write individual letters in exchange for bread. “Lacking paper and a pen and ink, he practiced writing on a fence or a brick wall or pavement with a lump of chalk.” (Mintz, 2004, p. 109) While also using his little master’s old Webster’s spelling book, he began to learn larger words. After all this effort he succeeded in learning how to write. Washington’s desire

to learn to read and write occurred when he was carrying books for his young mistress to the school. This occasion allowed him to see girls and boys studying. He compared the chance of him going to school to “about the same as getting into paradise”. (1965, p. 32) Some parents did not see a need for the education of their children. Those parents who could read and write did not always teach their children. But there were some parents who supported the idea of their children being literate. “In all my efforts to learn to read my mother shared fully my ambition and sympathized with me and aided me in everyway that she could.” (Washington, 1965, p. 43) The slaves who were literate were held in the high esteem in the slave community. Many times the slave community required from the literate slave to read newspapers or the Bible aloud and help them to become literate also.

## **5. COMPARISON OF SLAVE CHILDHOOD WITH THE VICTORIAN CULT OF PROTECTED CHILDHOOD**

### **5.1 The idea of protected childhood**

Prior to the 1860's, childhood could be characterized as brutish and nasty human life itself. One of the views on childhood was that it was considered as virtually non-existent for the majority of these children and they were not considered to be pure and innocent. (Wilson, 2002, p. 260) “The crucial dimension of the pre-Romantic notion is that the child is born into sin and gradually learns to become pure and righteous. Moral purity is attained, not something one is born with.” (Najafi, 2002) The concepts of childhood radically changed between seventeenth and eighteenth century. During that period a notion of childhood was reconsidered and children were depicted as pure and innocent human beings, highly vulnerable and as someone who needed the protection of adults. “Childhood for the first time became the most privileged, perhaps the most enviable, phase of life.” (Cunningham, 2006) By the nineteenth century, people who speak about childhood defined it as a “golden innocence before the shadow of adult sin.” (Najafi, 2002) It came to be thought that children should be protected from the adult world of work and responsibility. “Some of the most effective reforms of the

judicial system in the 19th century are demands for a separate justice system for children and for adults.” (Nafaji, 2002) During the Victorian era, the cult of childhood innocence was believed to have peaked. They emphasized a child-centered ideology of the family and the idea that a child’s childhood was a period in which the children were in need of protection. (Dvořáková, 2006, p. 130) However, there was a large contradiction between this idealized view of childhood and the brutal reality of most children lives in the nineteenth century.

## **5.2 The reality of childhood for both black and poor white children**

The attitude of Victorian society towards childhood was far from the idea of protected childhood. The ideal family life consists of one with father, mother and children. A child’s childhood should be a very special phase, a happy and carefree period of life. Nevertheless, it was not the case of the nineteenth century children, both black and poor white. Slave children were not the only ones living in such harsh conditions. Many white families existed in the horrible economic situation so that the poor white children lived in conditions that were to an extent just as cruel as that of slaves. The poverty situation of the white children is also described in Douglass narrative where he talks about his encounters with the poor white boys and how they were willing to teach him to read and write in exchange for bread. “I generally paid my *tuition fee* to the boys, with bread, which I also carried in my pocket. For a single biscuit, any of my hungry little comrades would give me a lesson more valuable to me than bread.” (Douglass, 2000, p. 155)

The poverty caused that both slave children and white children were forced to work at very young ages. While black children worked in the fields or in the “Great House”, white children worked at mills, factories and coalmines. These places were both unhealthy and dangerous for the children and many of them died due to the devastating conditions. Yet they both contributed to their families through their hard work. While white children made a major contribution to the household incomes, slave children worked most of their lives for the master without compensation. Nevertheless, once the slave children were sold, the parents endured hardships economically because

they were dependant on their children to help them obtain more food by fishing and hunting or cultivating their gardens. Not only were the slave children forced to work while being enslaved, they were also forced to work when the slavery was abolished to help contribute to their poor families. While being happy to have their freedom, former slaves came to realize that they did not have any financial resources or homes of their own. This implied that many of the former slave children were forced to go to work to the factories as the poor white children. After being freed, Washington's family moved to Virginia and due to the poverty, nine year old Washington was forced to take a job in a salt mine. His work began at four in the morning and he had to pack salt for long hours every day. (1965, p. 43)

The Victorian society placed very large expectations on the children. Children were taken as "little men and women" and were forced to behave like adults. Their lives were characterized by work not play, hard labor not school and by many adult responsibilities. Due to this fact can be both black and poor white children characterized as "children without childhood". However, according to Mintz, the African American children experienced "the most extreme version of unprotected childhood." (2004, p. 94) For slave children it was not only a world of poverty, early physical labor but also harsh punishment and separation from families. Moreover, the base for the dramatically different experiences of black and white children was the racial status. Unique to slave children's childhood experience was also the lifetime of bondage. While white children looked forward to becoming adults and being "free" from their parents, slave children remained slaves for the rest of their lives and that thought made it hard for them to see a bright future. Douglass remembers he often talked about the matter of slavery with his poor white friends. "You will be free as soon as you are twenty one, but *I am a slave for life!* I was now about twelve years old, and the thought of being a slave for life began to bear heavily upon my heart." (1993, p. 60)

The only children that experienced "the dream of a romantic childhood" were those of middle class and upper class families. (Cunningham, 2006) These children were considered the exceptions because they were allowed to have a proper education, the freedom to play and furthermore their parents provided them with a protective childhood.

### 5.3 Loss of innocence

Children in the nineteenth century were presented as pure and innocent. However, slave children began to lose their innocence within the first few years of their childhood. This was due to the fact that they began to realize the difference in race, class and gender. They soon recognized their subordinate status in consequence of the cruelties and maltreatment of them and their communities. Slave children were forced to witness the harsh treatment and the bloody whippings of their parents or other adult slaves. They also began to notice that they were treated inferior. To witness these horrific whippings, the bloody straps and hearing the screams of pain at such a young age was very disturbing for the young children and it had a life long effect on them. Jacobs illustrates in her narrative hearing a whipping of a slave. “Never before, in my life, had I heard hundreds of blows fall, in succession, on a human being. His piteous groans, and his “O, pray don’t massa,” rang in my ear for months afterwards.” (2001, p. 15) The fact that they witnessed their community being treated as inferior and that they were also taught to view themselves as inferior to the master’s children, robbed them of their childhood innocence and destroyed their self-esteem.

One quality of childhood innocence is inexperience. Children are innocent because they tend to listen and do everything that others say rather than follow their own judgment. (Woofenden, 2001) However, slave children were forced to act like adults in many aspects. They had to rely on their own wisdom and judgment in many complicated situations to precede whippings or protect their family. After hearing a cough, Jacobs’s son had a feeling that his mother was hiding in a shed at his grandmother house. He began to fear that someone else would also hear her cough, so to protect her, he made sure to make his little sister and her friends play away from the shed area. He also “kept a close lookout” for the master and if he sensed that something unusual was happening, he was quick to inform his grandmother.

Such prudence may be seem extraordinary in a boy of twelve years, but slaves, being surrounded by mysteries, deceptions, and dangers, early learn to be suspicious and watchful, and prematurely cautious and cunning. (Jacobs, 2001, p. 12

Not only did this reality cause them to lose their innocence but it also forced them to lie, cheat, steal and do whatever necessary for survival. At a young age they were taught how to behave in peculiar situations, how to keep secrets from white people and the importance of loyalty to the black community.

Children's innocence embody in not knowing about the seamy side of life and seeing only the good in all human beings. This is due to the fact that the parents protect their children. Most of the slave parents were absent from slave children's lives the majority of the time due to the long working hours in the fields. This lack of parental care of physical and emotional needs and guidance would also affect their childhood innocence. In many cases the slave children were being raised by strangers. According to the fact that it was the slaves' job and they were also caring for many other children at the time, they were not very affectionate towards each child.

Some slave children lost their innocence when their parents passed away and they were informed of their slave status. "The fall from the innocence to the orphan state usually causes political, religious or personal disappointment and disillusionments." (qtd. in: McKay, 2001, p. 242) Jacobs fall and the beginning of the orphan state begin at the age of six when her mother died and she was introduced to the world of slavery. Till that time, she lived in familial love and the illusion of parental protection. (McKay, 2001, p. 242)

Children's innocence also consists of the sexual purity. Many of the slave young girls experienced the full impact of slavery due to the fact that they were also sexually exploited. The harsh reality of slave master's sexual exploitations and their sexual vulnerability robbed many of the young female slaves of their innocence and purity. Jacobs expresses in her narrative that "whether the slave girl be black as ebony or as fair as her mistress" she is sexually vulnerable. She defines puberty as a "sad epoch in the life of a slave girl." When slave girls started to reach puberty, mothers tried to forewarn them about the potential sexual abuse from masters, any white men on the plantation or other slaves. Jacobs did not have her mother to consecrate her into these problems and she did not dare to tell her grandmother about the "foul words" her master whispered into her ears. (Painter, 2001, p. 306)



No children in the nineteenth century experienced harsher childhood than the African American children. All of the three narratives recounts moments of despair when the authors had no longer strength and will to live under the burden of slavery. “I often found myself regretting my own existence, and wishing myself dead.” (Douglass, 1993, p. 62) “I had often prayed for death.” (Jacobs, 2001, p. 52)

There is not, beneath the sky, an enemy to filial affection so destructive as slavery. It had made my brothers and sisters strangers to me; it converted the mother that bore me, into a myth; it shrouded my father in mystery, and left me without an intelligible beginning in the world. (Douglass, 2000, p. 60)

## 6. CONCLUSION

During the nineteenth century, slave children were born into a world full of poverty, punishment and physical labor. The living conditions of slave families were unsuitable and thus caused the death of many slave children during infancy. Those children who survived were later exposed to hunger, a lack of parental care, education, medical care and adequate clothing. Moreover, slave children were extremely vulnerable to being separated from their parents. As slave children got older, they began to live in constant fear of being punished and whipped by their masters or overseers. The owners viewed slave African-American people as inferior and this greatly affected the childhood of children born to slaves.

Immediately after birth, slave children became the property of their masters and since then the children's fate was in their master's hands. Slave children grew up in families where their parents made no decisions about their lives themselves but functioned under the supervision of the owners. It was master's decision whether and how much slave children had to work, at what age young children had to start doing miscellaneous chores and what age they started with heavy physical labor in the fields of the plantations. Both the parents and the children worked for the master without financial compensation and they also did not benefit from the products of their labor in any form. Furthermore, the slave parents had only small if any right to decide about their children's upbringing. They were allowed to bring up their children only marginally and according to the owner's rules and whims.

The separation of slave children from their families at a very young age robbed them of their family heritage. The lack of parental protection and the presence of both parents to support their physical and emotional needs left a major void in the slave children childhood. There was very little time for the slave children to play any child like games and enjoy being carefree. The fact that the majority of children were sent to work in the fields or to work as house slave in the Great House at a young age robbed them of their childhood development and their innocence. The harsh conditions of a slave childhood bore no comparison to the Victorian cult of protected childhood that was idealized by the Victorian society.

## RESUMÉ

V bakalářské práci je zpracováno téma dětství černošských otroků, kteří vyrůstali na velkých plantážích amerického Jihu v devatenáctém století krátce před Občanskou válkou. Práce se zabývá převážně problémy, které souvisí s dětstvím otroků během zajetí a které jsou zachyceny v životopisných románech bývalých dětí-otroků. Jedná se o díla *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* od Harriet Jacobs, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* od Frederick Douglass a *Up from Slavery* od Booker T. Washington s použitím relevantní sekundární literatury.

Otroctví v Americe začalo roku 1619 dnem, kdy bylo dvacet Afričanů prodáno jistému obchodníkovi ve městě Jamestown ve státě Virginia. Otroci byli dováženi na lodích z Afriky a prodáváni, a tento tzv. „atlantický obchod“ trval až do roku 1808, kdy byl zakázán. Jediným způsobem, jak i nadále zvyšovat počet otroků a uchovat tak systém otroctví, byla reprodukce stávajících otroků, často také vynucována násilnou cestou. Děti, které se narodily v otroctví, tedy zajišťovaly pokračování tohoto systému. Dětství otroků, dá-li se takto nazvat část života těchto jedinců, bylo kruté. Černošské děti musely bojovat o svůj život již od narození. Úmrtnost novorozenců byla velice vysoká, polovina dětí se narodila předčasně a většina z nich vážila pouhých dvě a půl kilogramu. Z velké části byla také úmrtnost zapříčiněna nedostatečnou péčí a pracovní zátěží matek během těhotenství a po narození dítěte a také nedostatečnou výživou matky, která by zajišťovala kvalitní mléko pro kojence.

Ined po narození dítě získalo stejný status jako jeho matka a stalo se majetkem otrokáře. Na postavení otce vůbec nezáleželo, i v případě, že byl běloch nebo svobodný afroameričan, dítě získalo status otroka. V případě, že se dítě narodilo rodičům, kteří byli ve vlastnictví dvou otrokářů, dítě vždy zůstalo tomu otrokáři, který vlastnil matku. Novorozené dítě nemělo pro otrokáře velkou finanční hodnotu, ale v případě, že přežilo a vyrostl z něj silný jedinec, jeho hodnota se několikrát znásobila.

Otroci, jak děti tak dospělí, neměli žádná práva a byli bráni jako majetek. Podle zákona manželství otroků nebylo právoplatné, z čehož vyplývalo, že otrokář mohl nakládat s otroky podle svého vlastního uvážení. Otcové nebyli v mnoha případech uznáváni jako součást rodiny. Když se otrokář rozhodl prodat rodinu, myslel tím pouze matku a děti.

Většina dětí byla odloučena od svých matek v prvních měsících života. Matky byly již měsíc po porodu nuceny jít zpátky pracovat a péče o dítě zůstávala na otrocích, kterým byla tato práce přidělena, nebo na starších sourozencích. Díky této skutečnosti si mnoho dětí nedokázalo vytvořit silné pouto k matce a v některých případech, jak uvádí například autor Douglass, neměli k matce žádný vztah. Rodiče museli pracovat šest dní v týdnu více než dvanáct hodin denně a během žní dokonce šestnáct hodin denně. Mnoho dětí často vyrůstalo bez svých otců, kteří většinou bydleli na jiných plantážích, v horším případě se jednalo o samotné otrokáře, kteří své potomky neakceptovali. Jelikož však tyto děti vyrůstaly v blízkosti svých prarodičů nebo jiných příbuzných, většina z nich považovala toto dětství za „normální“ a šťastné, aniž by si uvědomovaly, že jsou něčí majetek a tedy patří někomu jinému než své rodině.

Děti většinou zjistily tuto skutečnost, až když byly nuceny začít pracovat. Jak můžeme vidět ve zmíněných životopisných románech, žádný ze tří autorů si neuvědomoval, že je otrokem do svých šesti let, kdy byl nucen začít pracovat a také byl odloučen od své rodiny. Od té doby se jejich život radikálně změnil a jejich „radostné“ dětství skončilo. Když se tedy děti blížily tomuto věku, byly nuceny začít pracovat v domě otrokáře jako služebníci, nebo pomáhat při pracích na plantážích. To bylo pro tak malé děti fyzicky velice náročné protože jim to zabíralo velkou část dne. V průběhu vykonávání prací byly děti pod dohledem buď samotných otrokářů nebo dozorců, kteří jejich špatně vykonanou práci „odměňovali“ výpraskem nebo bičováním. Když děti splnily práci pro otrokáře, musely pomáhat s domácími pracemi svým rodičům, kteří díky svému vyčerpání neměli dostatek času, který by věnovali rodině a chodu domácnosti. Jejich dětství bylo tedy převážně zasvěceno práci a ne volnému času.

K dětství neodmyslitelně patří hračky a hry, avšak děti-otroci si mohly hrát pouze po vykonání všech povinností. Hraní bylo pro děti-otroky velice důležité, protože představovalo jednu z mála věcí, kterou dělaly dobrovolně. Některé hry jim přinášely zábavu a způsob, jak se vyrovnat s jejich těžkou životní situací, jiné jim umožnily na okamžik předstírat, že jsou někdo jiný. Mnoho her zobrazovalo události, kterými byly děti obklopeny, jako například aukce, kde si děti hrály, že se draží a prodávají, a hry, při kterých se děti navzájem bičovaly.

Děti v otroctví byly vychovávány rozdílným způsobem díky sociálnímu statusu

rodiny, z níž pocházely. Jejich výchova byla již od útlého dětství směřována k tomu, aby přežily v otroctví a v budoucnosti se dokázaly co nejlépe postarat samy o sebe. Rodiče si byli vědomi, že děti od nich mohou být kdykoliv odloučeny a tak začínaly s výchovou velice brzy. Rodiče učili děti správně plnit pracovní úkoly, aby je vyvarovaly fyzickému trestu od otrokářů nebo případnému prodeji. Děti byly vedeny k úctě k otrokářům, jejich dětem a bělochům všeobecně. Rodiče své děti dále vedli k tomu, aby vždy chránily zájmy komunity a byly obezřetní, když mluvily s otrokáři nebo v jejich blízkosti. V případě, že si malí otroci hráli s dítětem otrokáře, bylo nezbytné, aby jim rodiče vysvětlili, o čem se se svým kamarádem bavit mohou a co je zakázáno.

Malí otroci vyrůstali v chudobě a ve velice špatných životních podmínkách, které byly nevyhovující pro jejich zdravý vývoj. Černošské rodiny žily v malých dřevěných příbytcích, které byly velice stroze zařízeny. Děti musely spát na zemi nebo na slámou vycpaných pytlích, často trpěly nedostatkem jídla a postrádaly řádné oblečení. Základní strava dítěte se skládala z kukuřičné kaše s kousky chleba, hráškem nebo podmáslím. Maso se v jejich jídelničce vyskytovalo minimálně a mnoho dětí nikdy nezkusilo mléko, vejce, ovoce nebo zeleninu. Sladkosti děti obdržely od otrokářů výjimečně. Většinou malých otroků bylo jídlo podáváno v dřevěných korytech, z nichž jedly rukama nebo za pomoci mušlí. Rodiny byli závislé na příjmu potravy a oblečení od otrokáře, ti jim však poskytovali pouze nezbytné minimum. Rodiče obdrželi pro své děti pouze dvě lněná trička dlouhá až ke kolenům ročně a žádné boty. Pokud děti tyto úbory zničily, musely chodit nahé. Díky nedostatečnému oblečení děti často trpěly zimou a chodily špinavé.

Nejobtížnější dětství měly míšené děti se světlejší pletí a mladé dívky. Míšené děti byly většinou potomky zotročených žen a otrokářů nebo jiných bělochů, kteří žili na plantážích. Z tohoto důvodu byli tito malí otroci často týráni hladem, nebo tělesným trestem manželkou otrokáře, která si byla této skutečnosti vědoma. Ve většině případů tito otcové nejevili žádný zájem o své děti a co víc, snažili se je prodat co nejdříve. Dětství mladých dívek bylo negativně poznamenáno sexuálním obtěžováním ze strany bělochů, většinou otrokářů a násilím žárlivých manželek. Autorka Jacobs prohlásila, že pokud se dívka v otroctví narodila krásná, bylo to její prokletí. Krásné dívky byly také

často prodávány jako konkubíny. V některých případech nechávali otrokáři dívky znásilňovat jinými otroky, aby otěhotněly a rozrostl se tak jejich majetek.

Další faktor, který silně ovlivnil dětství otroků, byl zákaz jejich vzdělávání. Děti nemohly chodit do školy, ale ani se doma sami učit. Když otrokář zjistil, že se děti pokoušejí učit, okamžitě je potrestal výpraskem, v mnoha případech k tomu stačilo pouhé podívání se na knihu. V některých případech však ani tato hrozba neodradila malé otroky od učení, mnozí z nich využívaly jako učitele ke svému vzdělávání potomky otrokářů. Mnozí otrokáři k tomuto vzdělávání malých otroků nic nenamítali, protože v tom neviděli žádnou hrozbu, ale spíše dětskou hru, kde měl jejich potomek vedoucí roli.

Jednou z nejtěžších chvil v životě dítěte-otroka bylo odloučení od rodiny. Když se z dětí staly efektivní pracovníci, získaly daleko větší hodnotu pro svého majitele a ten je mohl prodat za vysokou cenu. Děti však nebyly od svých rodin odloučeny pouze za účelem prodeje, ale také mohly být přemístěny na vzdálenější plantáž, pronajaty na určité období jinému otrokáři, darovány jako svatební dar nebo dárek novorozenému bělošskému dítěti. V mnoha případech tedy děti opustily svou rodinu a už se s ní nikdy nesetkaly.

Přechod z dětství do světa dospělých tedy nastal pro malé otroky velice brzy. Děti netrpěly pouze pracovním vytížením, hladem a zimou, ale také vědomím, že jejich rodiče jsou bezmocní jim jakkoliv pomoci od výprasku otrokáře nebo prodeje. Zjištění, že se rodiče sami nedokáží ochránit, vyvolalo v dětech pocit bezmoci, strachu a obav, kdo tedy ochrání je samotné před krutým otrokářem.

V devatenáctém století se prohlubovala ideologie Viktoriánského pojetí dětství. V tomto období bylo dětství zobrazováno jako část života, která by měla být bezstarostná a děti samotné by měly být nevinné, naivní a nezkušené. Tato ideologie se však neslučovala s reálným životem, ve kterém nejen děti otroků, ale také děti z chudých bělošských rodin, vyrůstaly. Díky okolnostem, které je obklopovaly, byli děti-otroci prakticky připraveni o své dětství. Mnoho těchto dětí, jimž bylo často pouhých šest let, museli začít pracovat v podmínkách života nebezpečných a většinu svého dětství žily v obavách z odloučení od rodiny a výprasku od otrokáře.

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