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The Racial Discrimination against African American Women as Depicted in Kathryn Stockett's The Help

The case study of Kathryn Stockett's novel "The Help"

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Dedications

I dedicate this humble work to my deceased parents may Allah have mercy on their souls.

To my beloved family who gave me love.

To my supporting friends who have been there for me when I struggled.

To every English teacher that taught me anything during my school years from middle school
till university.

Lastly to myself because I never thought I would actually make it.

To Mebarka Fekih my ultimate role model and savior.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the theme of racial discrimination against African American women in the 1960s in Kathryn Stockett's *The Help*. The study sheds the light on the oppression and racism that black women had to face from white housewives and black men at the same time. This study will go back to the history of the most influential events in the African American history, presenting their fight for equal rights. The three approaches that are used to conduct are the Black Feminism, Womanism and Critical Race Theory. The analysis showed that black women of the early 1960s were profoundly discriminated by their white employers in numerous ways in order to keep them under their dominance.

Key words: Racial discrimination, African American, The Help, Black Feminism, Womanism.

List of Acronyms

MLK Martin Luther King

KKK Ku Klux Klan

CRM Civil Rights Movement

WPC Women's Political Council

USA United States of America

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ملخص

General Introduction

General Introduction

In the early 1960's America history, several challenges faced the African American people, due to their tragic history from slavery to segregation. Many obstacles opposed this race, which resulted in the awareness of the African Americans of their natural rights as humans, and their legitimate reasons as citizens of the United States of America. Racial discrimination against African Americans led to the emergence of many civil movements and activists who tried to change the situation gradually. Gender is not excluded from the appalling treatment of the whites against the black, and *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett portrays the most significant ways of racial discrimination against the black males in general and the black females in specific. Most females in the novel are regarded as less than human beings.

African Americans' discrimination means the wrongdoing of white people against black people. The African Americans perception is not only apparent in one aspect but also in many aspects of life that are seen in public services, such as housing, bus or public transportation, hospitals, library, education, and justice.

The novel has a value judgement on the readers; therefore, it tells a story from three people's perspective, two of them are black, and one is white. It tells the story of how white females of Jackson, Mississippi, treated their help in the wrong way. Aibileen and Minny started telling their stories with the help of Skeeter, the white girl, and sooner many maids joined in voicing their experiences with racial discrimination. Stockett's depiction helped in changing racist and anti-racist attitudes is always perceptive and sensitive—by turns comic, tragic, and shameful. Her novel is all too true a picture of a community in which racism corrupted not only many of those for whom the prospect of equal opportunity seemed to pose an economic threat, but also some of its victims (Gaston 494).

The issue discussed in this research is the racial discrimination practiced against black females by their employer, and the society of the American South including their race, which is considered as a double discrimination.

In *The Help*, black maids experience many discriminatory acts when they work for white families. Those acts are revealed through the characters of Aibileen Clark and Minny Jackson, in addition to other African American domestic maids, also Eugenia Skeeter Phelan, a white young lady who sympathizes against cruelty of her race toward black women. The discriminatory acts revealed in the novel most likely occur on grounds of race and ethnicity.

The novel also highlights the oppression and abuse black women receive from their husbands in addition to their struggle in a white society of being treated as less than human, not being paid enough salary compared to the hard work they perform and the verbal abuse they receive from their white masters also the fact that they have to raise their master's babies instead of their own, however, this sacrifice is rewarded with physical abuse by their husbands.

The Help shows the beautiful bonds between black and white women even if they are not as many that does not change the fact that some people are willing to break boundaries set by hateful souls to spread and share kindness and coexistence, in a society where skin color and prejudices that define what a person from the surface without digging deep to discover their true selves.

The aim of this study is to reveal how is racial discrimination against black females in Jackson, Mississippi, of the early 1960s is depicted in Kathryn Stockett's *The Help*. In addition, to show the double standard discrimination faced by black characters in the book. The type of relationships between black and white people will also be shown and how they affect the flow of events in the novel.

The southern states of the United States created a vast gap between the two races putting the whites on top of society, which made it hard for black people to have a decent, proper life. Kathryn Stockett's *"The Help"* portrays racial discrimination against black females of the early 1960s, and the challenges they live through every day to earn their living and cope up with the hate they receive.

They were isolated them in all means even in the bathrooms, claiming that they have different diseases that would infect white people, they pushed them to live in the shabby side of the city away from any necessary facilities to reach. The problem that is discussed in this thesis is how Kathryn Stockett's novel depicts the cruel racial discrimination against black female characters in the story alongside with to the challenges the domestic maids face who are living in a society that glorify the white and despises the colored.

The purpose of the study is to show how Kathryn Stockett portrayed the discrimination against female African domestic maids by their white employers, and how did they live through that for years without changing or revolting against that humiliating treatment. The study will show how they are discriminated from both sides; their white employers and also by their husbands. The purpose of the study also is to show some relationships between African American domestic maids and their white employers.

Since this thesis provides clear information on racial discrimination against African American women in the early 1960s, the study is of benefit to readers interested in further knowledge of racial discrimination practiced in the United States of America. It also demonstrates how a white writer told the story of the other race as if she was one of them.

Since this thesis provides clear information on racial discrimination against African American women in the early 1960s, the study is of benefit to readers interested in further knowledge of racial discrimination practiced in the United States of America. It also

demonstrates how a white writer told the story of the other race as if she was one of them.

Hence, this research will try to answer the following questions:

- How is the racial discrimination against African American women depicted in Kathryn Stockett's *The Help*?
- What kind of relationship that white and black women share in the novel?
- How is the treatment that black women receive from black men described in the book?

In order to answer these questions the theories of Black Feminism, Womanism and Critical Race Theory will be used in order to highlight the racial and gender discrimination in the novel. Therefore, this research will be divided into three chapters. Chapter one is about the historical background of the period of time during which the events happened in the novel, the second chapter is the literary background which presents the plot summary, the key characters and the theoretical framework. The third chapter is about presenting the themes found in the novel.

Chapter One

Historical Background

1. Introduction

The first chapter of this dissertation will be about the historical background of the segregation era in which it is related to some events of the story that we aim to study. It is important to understand the Mississippian history of segregation, Jim Crow Laws, and how they affected the white society of the North to change their behavior toward the other race and grant them their right to live freely among them. Also, we will overview the reaction of black people by launching the Civil Rights movement in order to gain their constitutional rights as American citizens.

1.1. Historical background of the Segregation Era

Several years ago, black people in America suffered severely from the abuse of slavery and segregation. The Southern states of America were the place where slavery and domestic maids exist and work for the white race.

1.1.1. Mississippi's History of Segregation

Segregation and racism were not only in Mississippi, but in the whole Southern States of America which has its roots back from slavery, which was brought to Mississippi via the colonial French and later on by the English and the Spanish (Dawahare 22).

The evolution of slavery and the presence of slaves in the state caused some concern for the white Mississippians. Undeniably, black people were of need for the growth of the plantations; however, their number increased against the whites; therefore, the white population needed to keep slavery to work for their economic and security needs. As a

consequence, Mississippi was the second state to withdraw from confederacy in 1861 and played an essential role for the Union during the Civil War (1861-1865). After the triumph of the Confederacy, Reconstruction took effect until 1877, during the same time when the Republicans fought to stop Democrats from re-establishing white race control in the southern states (Meibom 4).

In 1867, throughout Reconstruction, federal military rule was implemented in most of the South that forced the currently occupied states to adopt the fourteenth and fifteenth Amendments into their Constitutions. These Amendments state that, every American voter together with the previous slaves get the benefit from “equal protection of the laws” and also the right to vote. Thus, till the edge of Reconstruction in 1877, the black population benefitted from treatment and rights adequate to those of their white fellows. However, the federal troops continued violence and hostility against black people; in addition to the creation of a set of the unjust segregation law the Jim Crow Laws (Meibom 5).

Moreover, in 1890 a convention was enacted to create a new state constitution to forbid black people from voting. However, the 15th Amendment blocked this, and so a specific number of voting restrictions were created such as literacy tests, taxes and the 'grandfather clause, which permitted automatic registrations to anybody whose grandfather were authorized to vote before the Civil War. These restraints excessively disadvantaged the black population; most of them were former slaves, poor and illiterate (Meibom 5).

Furthermore, it was tough for black people to vote because the people who were in charge of administrations to grant voter registration were white and highly biased. Indeed, a large number of qualified black men were prevented from voting, while many illiterate white

men could vote easily. Hence, by 1940, less than 1% of the black population of Mississippi was registered to vote, and so they barely had any political or social participation (Meibom 5).

In the 1950s, the Civil Rights Movement started with the goal of reclaiming the natural citizen rights of black people. Today segregation does not exist in the constitution, but the tension between the whites and the blacks is still there, and it is shown in many aspects of society such as education (Meibom 5).

1.2 Jim Crow Laws in the South

The term “Jim Crow” refers to a series of laws and ordinances passed by Southern states and municipalities between 1877 and 1965 legalizing segregation (the physical separation of individuals based on race, gender, religion, or class) within their boundaries (Tischauer 1).

From the late 19th century to the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, a considerable number of Southern States implemented racial segregation laws that came to be known as “Jim Crow laws”, many of these laws determined segregated public spaces; others detailed social opportunities that would advocate white supremacy, while purposely blocking black progress (Finkelman 327).

1.2.1 The Beginning

The Jim Crow laws were first enacted in the Southern states of United States in the late 1800s which supported and advocated racial segregation. The end of slavery had created concerns for white people’s lives because of their freedom. White people disgusted the idea

that black people would share with them the same social facilities, if those unlikable people access the same healthcare, education and work. White people were already unsatisfied with the reconstruction gains that some black people made (Alexander 45).

As a result, black people became second class citizens with the creation of these laws, which were made only to control black people and limit their social progression to stay under the white control forever.

1.2.2 The Components of Jim Crow Law and its Originality

It is known in American history that Florida was the first state to pass Crow laws since 1865. 1887 was a full year of regulations that obliged racial segregation in both public transportation and other community facilities. Those set of laws was by Florida State. The south of America became completely segregated in 1890s. Every social facility became separated between the two races. Black people had to use separate bathrooms, restaurants and buses (Alexander 50).

Also, black people had to drink from separate water fountains from the white. Even in theater, it was forbidden to have the same access or to stay under one roof; each one of them had their theatre. In addition, education unfairly separated schools. Moreover, even people lived in separate neighborhoods far from the city (Alexander 50).

The name Jim Crow came from a song and dance routine performed by an actor in one of the very popular minstrel shows touring the country from the 1820s to the 1870s. In one of the travelling shows, Thomas Dartmouth "Daddy" Rice, a white actor, portrayed an elderly black slave, Jim Crow. Rice appeared on stage in "blackface." He darkened his face and

hands with burnt cork, wore shabby overalls, shuffled across the stage in bare feet, and carried a banjo. His routine included jokes and a song and dance number performed in a white version of black dialect titled “Jim Crow.” The complete song had at least 44 verses. The first verse began:

Come listen all you gals and boys,
I’s jist from Tuckyhoe,
I’m goin to sing a little song,
My name’s Jim Crow.

And during the chorus the all-white actors in front of the all-white audience would dance around the stage, shuffling and singing in the black dialect of slaves they had heard:

Chorus
Weel about and turn about and do jis so,
Eb’ry time I weel about and jump Jim Crow (Tischauser 1-2).

Rice said he first heard the song while walking down an alley in Louisville, Kentucky. The singer, an elderly black slave, worked in a blacksmith’s shop and was called Jim. Rice picked “Crow” because crows are black (Tischauser 2).

1.3. The Civil Rights Movement

The Civil Rights Movement was a combined effort of whites and blacks in the mid-1950s till the late 1960s to accomplish as equal civil rights for black people as whites, which includes equal job opportunities, housing, education, in addition to the right to vote, fair access to public facilities, and to be liberated from racial discrimination. No legal political

movement that existed in the 20th century has had a profound impact on the United States institutions (Klarman 170).

This movement needed to regain the rights of citizenship guaranteed by the 14th and 15th Amendments to the black people, which have been destroyed by the segregationist Jim Crow Laws in the South. It essentially changed relations between the federal government and the states, as the federal government was compelled to impose its laws and protect the rights of black citizens many times (Ownby 230).

The Civil Rights Movement in the United States culminated in the 1950s and 1960s. The peaceful protests broke through the racial segregation system to ensure equal access of chances for the essential advantages and citizenship rights for African Americans. Black domestic workers role in boosting the civil rights of black people was admirable and had rarely existed in scholarly works (Bracey 194).

Afterward, as depicted in the film *The Help*, the focus was on their personal lives more than their work experience and activism and resistance. Many people are aware of the efforts made by the sharecropper and domestic worker Fannie Lou Hamer from Mississippi who confronted and assisted achieve voting rights for Black Mississippians (Blain).

This has been clear due to a large number of studies documented concerning women's engagement in grassroots mobilization. The systematic analysis of the patterns of their participation and the ways that built rejection has not been given, such as gender, the shape of development of leadership in addition to the organization of social movements. Gender created a form of rejection that helped to promote a strong grassroots level of leadership that

played a critical bridge between formal organizations and supporters and future divisions (Robnett 1661).

Martin Luther King, Jr. assisted in arranging the celebrated "March on Washington" in 1963. More than 250,000 people attended this march to show the value of civil rights legislation, and it was during this march that Martin gave his speech "I Have a Dream" to continue fighting for equal rights. Martin Luther King Jr. called for dissolution to racism in the United States in addition to civil and economic rights (Branch 875-76).

In 1964, Congress passed the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which officially banned discrimination based on race as well as sex, and on August 6, 1965, another law called the Voting Rights Act was passed. This law said citizens could not be banned from the right to vote based on their race (Abjorensen 12).

1.3.1. The Role of Women in the Civil Rights Movement

When thinking about Civil Rights Movement the only name that come out to mind is the African American Baptist minister, who called for desegregation and his name was Martin Luther King Jr. The civil rights movement was based around one thing, equality but the question was equality for whom?, as African Americans boycotted and fought relentlessly for their rightly deserved equal rights, women were fighting a similar war and within these two wars was an incredible amount of irony as African American women were supporting African American men and their fight for racial equality, they were discriminated. Women worked and fought for rights which were denied to them by both black men and white people, as African American women they were unfairly endowed with the disadvantages of both being a female and being African American. The oppression from both African American men and

white people that African American women faced made them fight not only for racial equality but also for their equal rights as women, playing an integral role in both movements (Barnett 162-182).

The fight for racial equality was a long and a difficult task causing many deaths and riots, the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) became stronger than ever, the Aryan tension was evident everywhere. It is hard to believe that the African American men who fought so hard for their equality and believed so passionately in their messages, thought it acceptable to oppress women (Saunders 189).

The sexism that was present in the civil rights movement was a continuation of the oppressive mentality that existed in the USA culture, which was and is a white male dominated culture. Bernard Lee said "Martin Luther King was absolutely a male chauvinist. He believed that the wife should stay at home and take care of the babies while he'd be out there on the streets" (Olson 143). This meant that a woman's primary role is a homemade gear, and this thinking is not limited only to MLK but to the rest of the black leaders in the civil rights movement and the black community. Women had to fight for equality in every aspect of their lives, women specifically African American women were treated unfairly (Tieck 18).

The Hierarchy of society during the 50s and 60s went from white men, white women, and black men and last on the tier black women. African American men had little to no power, but to be an African American woman was a completely different battle. In 1963 for example, Betty Friedan, founder of the national organization for women, published *The Feminine Mystique* which exposed a strict and confining general in the U.S society (Holladay).

In the 1950s and the 1960s, the Feminine Mystique revealed how girls were expected to marry and then live vicariously through their husbands, without establishing their own identities or interests. The book identifies the ways in which society justifies the idea of male domination, mainly through reinforcement and assumptions about gender through media, schools, churches and many others (Holladay).

"Women who 'adjust' as housewives, who grow up wanting to be just a 'housewife', are in as much danger as the millions who walked to their own death in the concentration camps... they are suffering a slow death of mind and spirit" Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (qtd in Mason and Turner 199). Black women are meant to do more than just become a housewife; she needs to participate in the course of the change in the world that is she living in, black women needed to secure their social and political places in order not to be marginalized.

In the core of the fight for civil rights, marches were being organized, speeches were being made and everyone was beginning to take notice of this one thing which was racial equality and the question still remain how did these men who believed so strongly in racial equality could also believe in oppressing the women who were just trying to help and support them.

The nation listened as its leading moral prophet spoke in rhythmical and memorable cadence about his dream, while several women were still fuming including the usually demure Rosa Parks. Rosa Parks the woman who set in motion a social revolution that would in less than a decade turn the country upside down, did not agree with what Dr. King was saying, she recognized that he in fact was oppressive to women as he forbade her to speak and did not mention the equality of sexes during his speech. Women who were advocates for the

movement were all denied the right to speak and share their ideas; some of these women include Ella Baker, Edith S. Simpson, and Diane Nash. Ella Baker was described as the greatest organizer the civil rights movement ever knew. She was denied by black men her right to publicly share her thoughts during the marches and gathers (Wills).

This oppression that women faced from both the white people and the African American men, eventually led them to fight for two different civil rights movements, these African American women played an integral and influential role in the African American civil rights movement even though they were not permitted to advocate their beliefs and the men were (Robnett 1663).

Long before Martin Luther King was enlisted to lead the Montgomery Improvement Association which called for boycott of the Montgomery bus system. Joan Robinson the head of the Women's Political Council and its other members had been advocating for a boycott protesting the segregation of buses. Robinson a professor at the historically black Alabama state college in Montgomery became an activist after being verbally attacked by a white bus driver in 1949 (Parker).

After becoming president of the Women's Political Council, the organization focused on the abuses and degradation endured by black bus riders on a daily basis. Faced with opportunity to organize around Rosa Parks' arrest, the WPC immediately went to action calling for a bus boycott and for the year that the boycott continued the WPC did the difficult and sometimes dangerous work of organizing alternative means of transportation for Montgomery's black workers (Parker).

Parks credited her mother and grandfather for giving her the spirit of freedom that she should not feel because of her race or color inferior to any person, that she should do her very best to be respectful person, to respect herself and to expect respect from others and to learn what she possibly could for self-improvement. Parks life reveals her life history of being rebellious as she liked to explain it. Rosa Parks is one of the well-known women activists in the civil rights movement but there were many others that taught her, cheered for her and sat beside her. When Rosa was 13 she was enrolled in Miss White's school for young black girls, teaching young black girls to be popper Christian women by tutoring them in academic subjects, such as English, Science and Geography (History.com Editors).

The school stressed the dignity of all people, these teachers outlined the freedom set in the constitution and the responsibilities of all citizens, Parks learned that she was a person with dignity and self-respect, and should not set her sights lower than anybody else just because she was black. She was taught to be ambitious and to believe that she could do anything she wanted to reinforce the messages of pride she learned at home (Theoharis 8).

These women educators played such and influential and crucial role in this movement, they were the ones who empowered others to go out and fight for their freedom, they were the ones who educated African Americans on their constitutional rights and educated them on the movement itself. Women such as Ella Baker played the most crucial roles in this movement, Ella was one of the first African American civil rights and human activists in the 1930s, and she mentored young civil rights leaders such as Rosa Parks, Diane Nash and Bob Moses and many more. Ella not only educated African American women but also African American men such as Martin Luther King and Thurgood Marshall (Wills)

Septima Poinsette Clark was an influential educator during this time; this eventually led her to work alongside with Martin Luther King and other African American activists. She was called the “Mother of the Movement”. As literacy tests prevented black citizens from voting, Clark found educational programs to teach African American community members to help learn how to read and write. She thought that education is necessary in order to vote and gain more rights. Her idea for "citizen education" became the backbone of the CRM and she continued her service for the civil rights cause until her death (Blakemore).

The whole story of the civil rights movement must be told in a way that includes everyone who contributed in it, this way we can truly understand how they achieved the progress over the past 60 years, these African American women influenced leader such as MLK, Rosa Parks, W. E. B Du Bois and many others, the determination and selfless acts of these women is what made the presence of the movement so influential (Civil Rights History Project)

1.4. Significant feminist figures

The National Museum of African-American History Culture (NMAAHC) defines other honorable figures that also helped supporting the cause of CRM, here are some of them:

1.4.1.1. Dorothy Height (1912-2010)

Dorothy Height was known as the “Godmother of the Civil Rights Movement” because of her extensive involvement in the fight for civil rights since the 1930s. Early in her activist career, Height met Mary McLeod Bethune at a New York Young Men's Christian Association and became her protégé. Height would come to help organize events during the

CRM, such as the 1963 March on Washington. She influenced leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and John Lewis. She was a pioneer in the use of political organization, and strongly advocated for women's rights in the United States and worldwide (NMAAHC).

1.4.1.2. McCree Harris (1934 – 2000)

McCree Harris was part of the Civil Rights Movement in Albany, Georgia. As an educator at Monroe Comprehensive High School, she urged young people to get involved in the CRM. She was also part of the Freedom Singers. The Freedom Singers used music fundraises for SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and educate about events during the CRM (NMAAHC).

1.4.1.3. Thelma Glass (1916 – 2012)

Thelma Glass was a geography professor at Alabama State University, and part of the Women's Political Council in Montgomery, Alabama. The council was critical in organizing the Montgomery Bus Boycott (NMAAHC).

1.4.1.4. Georgia Gilmore (1920 – 1990)

Georgia Gilmore used her talents in cooking and as a restaurateur to help support the movement in Montgomery, Alabama. She participated in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and was fired from her job because of her participation. She opened a restaurant in her home, which became a safe space for local civil rights leaders. Also, she formed the Club from Nowhere, which consisted of African American women cooking and selling cakes and pies to

black and white customers. The money went to support efforts in the bus boycott (NMAAHC).

1.4.1.5. Shirley Sherrod (1948 –)

Shirley Sherrod became active in the MCRM after her father was shot to death by a white farmer in 1965. She was an organizer for the SNCC Southwest Georgia Project along with her husband, Charles Sherrod. Through the Southwest Georgia Project, she strongly advocated for African American land ownership and land detainment (NMAAHC).

1.4.1.6. Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons (1944 –)

As a student at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, Gwendolyn Simmons became active in the Student NonViolent Registration Committee despite warnings from her parents and the college. She participated in the Freedom Summer of 1964 by building schools in Mississippi. During the 1960s, she worked in Mississippi, Georgia, and Alabama to get African Americans registered to vote (NMAAHC).

1.4.1.7. Ruby Bridges (1954 –)

At six years old, Ruby Bridges was the first African American child to integrate schools in Louisiana. On her first day, Ruby and her mother, escorted by U.S. Marshals, endured taunts and threats as she approached Johnson Lockett Elementary in New Orleans. Only one white teacher was willing to teach Ruby, and she was the only child in her

kindergarten class due to racism. Ruby was unable to eat lunch in the cafeteria or go to recess alone because of the danger of violence toward her. Ruby Bridges never missed a day of school (NMAAHC).

1.4.1.8. Claudette Colvin (1935 –)

Nine months before Rosa Parks, 15-year-old Claudette Colvin resisted giving up her seat on a crowded Montgomery bus for a white passenger. Her actions were the inspiration for the planned protest conducted by Rosa Parks later that year. Claudette Colvin's testimony in the *Gayle v. Browder* (1956)-which was about the segregated Montgomery buses- helped to end the segregated transportation issue in the state (NMAAHC).

1.4.1.9. Josephine Baker (1906 – 1975)

Josephine Baker was a famous film and Broadway actress of the 1920s. In 1925, she continued her success on the stage when she moved to France. Baker became a resistant fighter in France during the Second World War (1939 - 1945). After the war, continued to live, travel, and perform between Europe and the United States. Baker refused to perform in front of segregated crowds or where she was refused hospitality. She worked with the NAACP during the MCRM. She was the only female speaker at the March on Washington in 1963 (NMAAHC).

Conclusion

The African American History is full of life-changing events, which changed their lives and the American society upside-down. The fight against slavery and the unlawful discrimination by using the law to degrade and dehumanize black people were major challenges that faced them on a daily basis for decades; however, the Civil Rights Movement demanded their constitutional rights and called for racial equality and racial discrimination that was preventing the black people's progress as workers, students, citizens and humans above all.

Chapter Two

The Help

A Literary background

Introduction

The second chapter is about the literary background of *The Help*, a general plot summary about the story will be given; also, the setting of events in the book, according to the era that the book mentioned. In addition, the main characters, their background stories, and assessments to the flow of events in the book will be mentioned. The main theories used in the book to describe and understand the use of each element that has importance to the ideas of the book will also be highlighted in this chapter.

2.1. Plot Summary

The Help is a book about life stories and struggles of three women of different races and backgrounds in their Southern society. The book starts by introducing the characters Aibileen, Minny, and Miss Skeeter Phelan to their stories. Aibileen is a maid and a nanny at Miss Leefolt's house, and Miss Skeeter graduated from college in New York and came back to her hometown Jackson to try and achieve her dream of becoming a writer. Minny, on the other hand, is a maid like Aibileen; however, she loses her job because she disobeyed her master Miss Hilly by using her bathroom.

Miss Skeeter, who is of the white race and has a strong relationship with the black maid Constantine, came up with an idea about writing a book that provides the point of view of the black domestic maids, in order to help them to change the society's view of black females specifically maids.

Miss Skeeter asks Aibileen to help her write a book that tells the relationship between the help and their employers. At first, Aibileen refuses because she was afraid that if anyone

learns about their relationship, it may endanger her life. However, after several tries from Miss Skeeter to convince and trust her, along with the unfair treatment she was having from her employer Miss Leefolt, she decides to help her despite the dangerous situation. However, she agrees on a condition that Miss Skeeter changes her name into a fake one and keep the book a secret from everyone, even her family.

Aibeleen and Miss Skeeter start meeting in secret to work on the book; at the same time, Aibeleen talked to Minny about the book to help them by adding her story as well, but she thought they were crazy to think of doing it. However, she came around and began helping them.

Miss Skeeter's publisher in New York asked her that two maids' stories are not enough and that she needs more maids to make the book more convincing and reliable. Therefore, Aibeleen and Minny start asking other maids to join them; they refused at first because it was not easy to trust a white woman not to betray them and endanger their lives. It did not take them long to change their minds due to the assassination of Medgar Evers and the arrest of their fellow maid Yule Mae.

Miss Hilly's initiative to build a separate bathroom for the help, made Miss Skeeter more eager to write her book. She wanted to reveal some of the hidden stories and truth about these maids work experience, who are cleaning houses and raising white people's children for less than their minimum wage, and receive lousy treatment from their employer in most of the cases. She also wanted to share her experience with her nanny Constantine, who taught her many things about life, when her mother did not pay enough attention to her.

Eventually, the brave work of Miss Skeeter, Aibeleen and Minny along with the other eleven maids to reveal the truth paid off with publishing the book that was a remarkable success that sold many copies at different selling points in New York and even Jackson, Mississippi.

2.2. The Setting

The setting in which events of the novel take place is the early 1960s, during the Jim Crow Laws and the Civil Rights Movement, in Jackson, Mississippi. At the time, black people started marching for their constitutional rights, a march for freedom and equality. The events in the novel covered those critical historical events and how each character reacted to them, despite the fact that the novel is fictional. However, those events exist in it, for the reason that black people were oppressed by society and the government during that period of time.

It was a hard time for the black people because they were treated as inferior in terms of accessing decent jobs with a minimum wage to provide decent lives for their families or to enjoy using health facilities, transportation, education or decent accommodations. Life was hard for both black men and women; however, the latter suffered more.

According to the novel, black women had to drop out from school at an early age to help their parents afford living expenses; an example can be mentioned, when Minny was unemployed, and everyone in town refused her services, because of the racist rumors Miss Hilly spread about her, she found herself in need to send her daughter to work instead of sending her to school.

The novel also shows that blacks' and whites' neighborhoods are drastically different. The white's part of the town is secured, clean and close to every important institution in town; meanwhile, the black's part of town is shabby, old, and far away from important facilities, which they had limited access to most of its services. Also, they find many legal obstacles to purchase piece of land to build a house because their population keeps increasing and end up having have nowhere to move out to. Aibeleans' description to this situation helps us understand more about this discrimination:

"So Jackson's just one white neighborhood after the next and more springing up down the road. But the colored part of town, we one big anthill, surrounded by state land that ain't for sale. As our numbers get bigger, we can't spread out. Our part of town just gets thicker". (Stockett 17)

The book also talked about the murder of Medgar Evers, who portrayed the ray of hope to black people because he was fighting to free his kind from the unfair discrimination, fear of speaking up for their legitimate rights as American citizens and granting them dignity and respect to live a decent life. His murder added to the existing fear from the KKK cruel massacres against black people.

The characters Aibeleen and Minny were interested in the cause Evers was fighting for, and getting the news of his death made them fear for their lives, especially Aibeleen, who was helping Miss Skeeter writing her book about the change they hope to make in Jackson. The death of Medgar Evers increased the racial tension in Jackson because he was an important man for black people during the Civil Rights Movement.

2.3. Key Characters

The main characters of the novel are three women two of them are black Aibeleen Clark and Minny Jackson who work as domestic maids and nannies for Jackson white housewives, and a white girl Eugenea Skeeter Phelan who recently graduated from college and dreams of becoming a journalist.

2.3.1 Aibeleen Clark

Aibeleen is a wise, calm and big-hearted lady who loves reading and is passionate about writing. She is also proud to have helped raise seventeen white children in her lifetime. "Taking care white babies, that's what I do, along with all the cooking and the cleaning. I done raised seventeen kids in my lifetime. I know how to get them babies to sleep, stop crying, and go in the toilet bowl before they mamas even get out a bed in the morning." (Stockett 1).

The narrator of eleven chapters is a 53 years old black woman who works as a maid and a nanny at the same time, at the Leefolt household. She lost her son in a tragic accident which caused her to grow a bitter seed inside her heart which made her feel less tolerant to racist housewives like her employer Miss Leefolt, and her mean friend Hilly Holbrook.

Aibeleen has a special bond with her employer's child Mae Mobley. She wants to teach her how to love herself, be confident and smart. "And then she say it, just like I need her to. "You is kind," she says, "you is smart. You is important" (Stockett 373).

While doing her job at the Leefolt's, Miss Leefolt's friends were having their bridge club meeting as usual. Suddenly Miss Hilly suggested that she is willing to work on an initiative that requires each house to have a separate bathroom for the help, claiming that black people have different germs that will harm white people when using the same bathroom. This suggestion was not something pleasing for their friend Miss Skeeter to hear, because she thought it was extremely racist.

On that day Miss Skeeter thought of a question to ask to Aibileen "'Do you ever wish you could... change things?'"she asks"(Stockett 16). Aibileen was shocked to hear about this and dismissed her question immediately, saying that she is fine the way she is with her employer and wish for nothing to change.

Miss Skeeter proceeded in convincing Aibileen to help her write a book that tells stories of her working as a maid for several white families; however, it was tough for Aibileen to accept such dangerous offer that could end her life.

Eventually, she agreed to help her under the condition that her name must be replaced by another, which she picked to be Sarah Ross. She started her journey to help writing the book that will tell the hidden stories about black women that need to be heard by the white society.

2.3.2 Minny Jackson

The character of Minny is a mixture of strength, vulnerability and courageousness. She is known for her hard work and astonishing cooking skill all over Jackson and is married to an abusive husband and a mother of five children. Her fearless personality always gets her

in trouble with her white employers. She is the best friend of Aibeleen; they share everything from sadness, struggles to happiness.

She worked for the Holbrook family until her employer Hilly fired her because she dared to ignore her orders and use the main bathroom. Hilly suggested passing a bill that requires each white household to have an extra bathroom for the help, claiming that black people carry diseases that can harm white people if they share the same bathroom.

Therefore, Minny disobeyed her order because of the terrible weather condition outside where her bathroom is. Hilly did not only fire Minny, but she spread rumors about her in all of Jackson that she is a thief so no one can hire her again. After being fired from her job, Minny found herself forced to drop her daughter Sugar off school to help her with house expenses since no one will hire her in Jackson.

Miss Celia Rae Foote, who lives far from the city with her husband Johnny Foote, decided to hire Minny. Because she has no friends from Jackson, hence she did not hear about the rumors of her being a thief, in addition to her need for a maid for the reason that her house is too big for her to handle alone, and she does not know how to cook.

When Aibeleen first told Minny about the book, she refused; however, after several unfortunate events that happened to her because of white people, especially her previous employer, she decided to share her stories. She did not want any political change in Jackson, but for her children to have a better future and not to be judged by their color. "But truth is, I don't care that much about voting. I don't care about eating at a counter with white people. What I care about is, if in ten years, a white lady will call my girls dirty and accuse them of

stealing the silver” (Stockett 187). Minny wanted nothing from white people but respect to keep her dignity as a human.

2.3.3. Eugenia “Skeeter” Phelan

Miss Skeeter’s character is a contradictory one; she comes from white society, educated; her parents are wealthy; they own a cotton plantation, yet she is not like the rest of Jackson girls, and her best friends are Miss Hilly and Miss Leefolt. Her family’s maid Constantine mainly raised her. They had a special bond because she taught her love herself when she was called an ugly girl, “Now you look a here, Eugenia”—because Constantine was the only one who’d occasionally follow Mama’s rule. “Ugly live up on the inside. Ugly be a hurtful, mean person. Is you one a them peoples?”(Stockett 58), and not to believe the wrong ideas white society spread about race and black people.

After Skeeter has finished her college education, she came home to find that her family’s maid is no longer working for them, Skeeter felt disappointed because she thought Constantine abandoned her, but little did she know that her mother fired her. Constantine was a precious person in Skeeter’s life; she helped her when her mother was busy for her because Skeeter found in Constantine everything she needed when she felt down and neglected.

She finished her college with the hope of finding a journalist job at her local town newspaper; however, she got a small job, a column about cleaning pieces of advice, and that is how she got closer to Aibileen. Skeeter thought she knew everything about how employers treat their maids, but after spending some time with Aibileen, she learned that her knowledge about this matter lacks much information.

Skeeter thought that it is necessary to write about the experiences of the help, to share their stories and points of view about their employers. After several tries to convince Aibileen, she agreed to help her despite the dangerous situation they were living through at that period because they saw that there is a need for such a daring move in a society like Jackson, to voice the struggle of the help.

The stories and interviews that Skeeter wrote along with Aibileen and Minny provided her with a new awareness about the help issues that she thought she knew and understood completely. However, their aim to publish the book that tells the stories of black maids sharing their thoughts about their white employers was not to make a political or social change in Jackson or anywhere in America, but it was to point out that racism and inequality still strongly exist in the South especially toward women.

The time Skeeter, Aibileen, and Minny spent together writing the book made them build a relationship, a rare thing to happen in a place like Jackson, Mississippi. Skeeter could not tolerate the racist thinking and attitudes of her white society, especially her best friends Miss Hilly and Miss Leefolt; it was one of the reasons that made her write this book to expose their ugliness that is hiding behind their beautiful, elegant white facade (Meibom 12).

2.4. Theoretical framework

This section will highlight feminism, black feminism and Critical Race Theory; hence it is necessary to explain these theories because the case study *The Help* is written by a white author about African Americans working in white households.

2.4.1. Feminism

Feminism is the fight of women for an equal society against the patriarchal system that men created to limit the role of women in society. Her role was to be a housewife and a mother only, therefore, not to participate in any important decision making activities that voice her needs and to show her abilities to work and be independent to break the traditional norms and stereotypes that labeled women as weak and dull-witted creatures (Faris 1). Zara Huda Faris explained this idea as: "...women have traditionally been dehumanized by a male dominated society, which they call patriarchy; and that has been always better to be a man..." (Faris 1).

The term feminism first appeared in France by Hubertine Auclert in her journal *La Citoyenne à La Feminité* in the late 1880s, where she criticized the male domination and that women should claim their rights in addition to the emancipation promised by the French revolution. However, the following decade, feminism spread widely in England, America and the Arab world as NISWA (McCann et al. 15-16).

Feminism took different paths and waves in defending women's rights since it first appeared until the present day. The first wave of feminism dates back to the First World War. At that time some women called for their rights and initiated a strike against the undemocratic practices in the United States, they assembled to change the marriage laws, obtain voting and open employment (Hansen 369). Some of the famous figures that forwarded and impacted the wave were Sojourner Truth, Mary Wollstonecraft, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan Brownell Anthony and Emmeline Pankhurst (Fisher and Sanchez).

The second wave began in the 1960s and continued to the 90s. This wave appeared in the middle of the anti-war and civil rights movements, along with the growing consciousness of different minority groups around the world. The main issues of the wave at that time were reproductive rights, sexuality and the focus to pass the Equal Rights Amendment to the constitution that guarantees equality regardless of sex (Rampton 1).

This wave was easily marginalized because it did not have a powerful impact as other movements, such as Black Power or efforts to end war in Vietnam during that period, however, second wave feminists created women only organizations such as National Organization for Women (NOW) and publications like "Sisterhood is Powerful" to call for social change and women liberation by that to give more equal employment opportunities for women (Rampton 2).

Nevertheless critics of this wave stated that they did not do enough to address the differences of all women, that is by ignoring those from lower social class, minority ethnic backgrounds or LGBTQ women (Gelling 00:27-10:44). The most famous women of the second wave are Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Bell Hooks, Germaine Greer and Gloria Steinem (Fisher and Sanchez).

Third wave feminism began in the mid-90s; it was influenced by the post-colonial and postmodern thinking, during this period many constructs were destabilized, involving the notions of "universal womanhood," body, gender, sexuality and heteronormativity (Rampton 2).

This wave examines the different experiences that face women all around the world, while in Europe third wavers focused on changing social understanding of women. In some

developing countries the wave focused on giving women reproductive rights and to work on issues such as female genital mutilation and forced marriage (Gelling 2:39-10:44). The most famous figures of this wave are Naomi Wolf, Oprah Winfrey and Madonna (Fisher and Sanchez).

2.4.2. Black Feminism

Feminism is about defending women's rights and claiming their rightful role in society, as more than just a mother or a wife but as a leader that can speak louder and voice her sufferings and struggles. However, this movement did not speak for all women in equal. Black women were marginalized from voicing their experiences and struggles in society, and how they are not recognized as women; this is why Black Feminism movement emerged to defend and represent the rights of black women, even though black men were active at that time demanding for equal political and economic rights for black people, black women were completely neglected and ignored.

Black women offered nothing but help, support and knowledge to the feminist movement, however, white feminists did not acknowledge their contribution to the cause and did not try to help them to solve their problems, in addition, white feminists lacked enough knowledge about their struggle and suffering as black individuals in the white society and as females in their own society, such as gender discrimination by black men (Houk 251).

Black Feminism's goal is to empower African American women inside the context of social injustice continued by intersecting oppressions (Collins 39). In her book *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, Bell Hooks emphasized that black women suffer from multiple oppressions from different sides and is degraded to the lowest position in society.

Just like black men they were abducted from Africa and brought to America as slaves and suffered rape, physical abuse and hard labor, therefore, no one recognizes their suffering and also marginalize them when they defend their beliefs, ideas and rights.

In 1973 the national black feminist organization was created and their request was political, social and economic equality for black women. The emergence of this organization came from the gatherings of black female lawyers, welfare rights workers and even housewives. They set up workshops which studied problems such as children care, the church and education, work and violence. The members were Alice Walker, Margaret Sloan, Shireley Chishlom, Eleanor Holms Norton and Flo Kennedy (Wada).

2.4.3. Womanism

Alice Walker created womanism to center black women in a feminist movement that largely benefited middle class white women, while black women also benefited from the feminist movement their contributions were not acknowledged, therefore, womanism was created, because white women are often seen as the only victim of sexism. Feminism tends to be very "white" and rarely considered how black women deal with being black and female; this often means that black women who participated in large feminist movements tend to feel that they have to choose between fighting against racism or sexism, often because of the elimination of black women within the feminist movement. Black women participating in feminism sometimes feel like they have to fight against the racism among feminists, who do not see the need to include critiques of white supremacy in their fight against gendered oppression. (Collins 11)

These feminists are referred to as "white feminists", not because they are white, but because their feminism only seeks to serve white women while actively overlooking black

women, and that has been consistent through the history of feminism where black women were often asked to stand at the back of the line while white women asked for their rights first and considered the goals of black women as negative to their own. (Collins 12)

Alice Walker defines a womanist as a black feminist, or feminist of color. A woman who loves other women, sexually or non-sexually and sometimes individual men, sexually or non-sexually. She is committed to the survival and wholeness of all people, male and female, she is not a separatist except periodically for their own health, she loves music, dance, the moon, the spirit and loves love and food and roundness. She loves struggle, her people and loves herself. (Walker 7)

It is important to know that while womanism is about loving and appreciating black women and critiquing the classist and racist aspects of white feminism, it is also about supporting and empowering black men, who are often essential parts of a black woman's life and family.

2.4.4. Critical Race Theory

The Critical Race Theory movement combines a set of activists and scholars interested in studying and changing the relationship among race, racism and power. The movement regards many of the same problems that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses place them in a large perspective that involves economics, history, setting, group and self-interest, emotions and the unconscious (Delgado and Stefancic 18).

This movement questions the foundations of the liberal order including, legal reasoning, enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law, unlike the

traditional civil rights discourse which lay emphasis on gradualism and step-by-step process (Delgado and Stefancic 18).

Critical race theorists believe that racism is an ordinary topic, "normal science" the usual way society does business. Meaning that society views it as something common, therefore, it is hard to address or cure because it is not recognized as an issue that is causing white people any worries that may make want to change their view to this matter (Delgado and Stefancic 20).

They also believe that the system that is ruled by the white elite over other races which serves their psychic and material purposes. Material determinism adds another stress because racism pushes the interests of both white elite materially and white working class physically, therefore, large segments of society have little incentive to exterminate it (Delgado and Stefancic 21).

Another theme that Delgado and Stefancic discussed is the social construct and that race and races are products of social thought and relations. They are not objective, hereditary, or fixed, they conform to no biological or genetic reality; instead, races are categories that society invents, shapes, or retires when needed (Delgado and Stefancic 21).

In addition, since CRT supports the idea to pay attention to different elements that shape individual identity, it offers a way for scholars to comprehend how race interacts with other identities such as gender and class. Scholars like Kimberlè Crenshaw and Patricia Williams have demonstrated, CRT scholarship can and should be willing to adopting and adapting theories from similar fields like women's studies, feminism and history (Purdue Writing Lab).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter focused on the setting in which the events of the book occurred, to give clarity to the reader about the period of time the events of the book talked about, in addition to the description of the main characters that had a huge role in telling the story through mentioning their background stories. The theories that were mentioned are important to help understand the use of each element of the story to give more sense about the characters' behaviors and beliefs.

Chapter Three
Analysis of the Novel

Introduction

The third chapter tackles the racial discrimination as a main theme which represents how the black female characters in the novel try together to fight against it with some help from white people. In addition to showing the relations that bond the characters with each other and the unusual attachment with the other race. This chapter is also going to highlight the oppression that black women have to go through from both their black and white societies.

3.1. Racial Discrimination against Black Maids

Female black characters of *The Help* face racial discrimination constantly and in many ways. From separating the two races in education, transportation, work and accommodations, the ones who were affected the most were black females because according to the society they were at the bottom of the social chain, hence, their existence is necessary to work and housekeeping only.

It is obvious when reading *The Help* that white characters such as Miss Hilly are in control of the society's thinking and attitudes, because of their high class in society and their race superiority. Miss Hilly talks about a bill that she is trying to make pass it, that requires each white household to have a separate bathroom for the help "A bill that requires every white home to have a separate bathroom for the colored help. I've even notified the surgeon general of Mississippi to see if he'll endorse the idea. I'll pass." (Stockett 32).

She also claimed that they might infect white people with their viruses if they continue using the same commodes as black people, so it is necessary for them to build a far separate bathroom for the help as a disease preventing measure "All these houses they're building

without maid's quarters? It's just plain dangerous. Everybody knows they carry different kinds of diseases than we do. I double." (Stockett 14). The Home Help Sanitation promoted that black people carry their disease in the urine, that white people can become disabled if they are exposed to such diseases and the same with black people.

This initiative demonstrates the "Separate but Equal" statement that has more discrimination in it than equality. Hence this separation is and has always been in favor for the white people because they are the only to benefit from every life necessities and they have more access to their constitutional and civilian rights, while it is limited for the black people under a set of restricting laws under the legitimacy of the previous statement "Separate but equal," Miss Hilly says back to Miss Leefolt. "That's what Governor Ross Barnett says is right, and you can't argue with the government." (Stockett 161).

Black people had to keep their distance from their white masters and all white people and made sure their children follow and understand some rules to prevent them from being fired from their jobs specifically women. Minny had to drop her daughter Sugar out from school because she was fired from her job at the Holbrook's family and her husband Leeroy was not making enough money from his job. Minny too had to leave school early when she was 15 years old, at that time her mother taught her some rules that she passed down to her daughter when she was going to start her first job as a maid at a white family's house. (Meibom 12)

"Rule Number One for working for a white lady, Minny: it is nobody's business. You keep your nose out of your White Lady's problems, you don't go crying to her with yours..." (Stockett 39) Minny's mother warned her not to share her problems about her daily life and work to her white master because no one wants to hear about black people's struggles and

issues. She also warned her not to use the indoor bathroom that the white masters use no matter how urgent her need to use it is, because white people think that black people are the disease. “Rule Number Two: don’t you ever let that White Lady find you sitting on her toilet...” (Stockett 39)

“Rule Number Three: when you’re cooking white people’s food, you taste it with a different spoon...Rule Number Four: You use the same cup, same fork, same plate every day...” (Stockett 40) Minny’s mother also told her daughter that she needs to separate her spoon, dish and cup from the rest of the white’s dishware and to make a special spoon to mix the food with it when cooking and another one to taste the food with.

“Rule Number Five: you eat in the kitchen... Rule Number Six: you don’t hit on her children. White people like to do their own spanking...” Keeping a distance from white people’s matter even in eating is always necessary to follow to not risk losing their jobs. Raising white children is a crucial part of being a maid; therefore, Minny’s mother explained to her that she should never beat her master’s child because it is their job to discipline their children.

“ Rule Number Seven: this is the last one, Minny. Are you listening to me? No sass-mouthing.” (Stockett 40) Minny is known for her talking back to people who mistreat her or mock her and her mother knows thing would get her in trouble with her white master in the future so she taught her not to talk back to her master otherwise she will get fired.

Every black maid had to teach her daughter the very same rules when they have to start working at white’s household. Separation was engraved in the minds of both races at that time because it was necessary for them to co-exist in a southern society like Jackson, Mississippi. Minny’s mother made sure to teach her daughter that meddling with white

affaires, talking to them about life struggles or building any kind of relationship with them would only harm her and cause her to get fired or worse killed.

Black women had no alternative choice at that time but to work as maids with lower than minimum wages to support their families. Black people's educational facilities were narrowed in options such as libraries which had limited set of books for black people whereas white people had access to more books. "I look up from the typewriter, wait. It took Aibileen vomiting on herself for me to learn to let her take her time.

"I's thinking I ought to do some reading. Might help me with my own writing."

"Go down to the State Street Library. They have a whole room full of Southern writers. Faulkner, Eudora Welty—"

Aibileen gives me a dry cough. "You know colored folks ain't allowed in that library."

(Stockett 135)

3.2. Double Standard Oppression against Black Maids

Black women experienced the exact suffering as black men, from being forced shipped from Africa to America to work in no human conditions for white people's plantations and households to being second-class citizens; however, women had to cope with the oppression from their racist white masters and the cruelty of the white society because they were poor, black and females and on the other side their husbands and their unjustified domestic abuse against them.

Black female characters in *the Help* are treated poorly because of their skin color and race identity, and because they are at the bottom of society they have no choice but accept the continuous humiliation and the lower wage so they can make living in order to survive. In a

southern society, white women with high status like Miss Hilly make it hard on black people to have basic rights like education and decent job opportunities.

For instance, when Minny got fired from her job at Miss Hilly's house, she made sure that she would suffer for her mistake which was using the indoor bathroom rather than her own separate bathroom on a stormy night, she started rumors about her being a thief so she can never find a job in Jackson, even though Minny is well-known for her delicious cooking and perfect cleaning. "I want to hear what Miss Hilly said about me. Hearing your maid's a thief is like hearing your kid's teacher's a twiddler. You don't give them the benefit of the doubt, you just get the hell rid of em." (Stockett 256)

The need for money to black maids gave white housewives of Jackson on led by Miss Hilly to humiliate their help because they know they cannot quit their jobs. The maids work from day long and don't get paid enough for their hard work, for instance Aibileen lives alone and cannot save a dollar till the end of the month because life is expensive even for a woman living on her own explained Aibileen, "I work for Miss Leefolt eight to four, six days a week except Saturdays. I get paid forty-three dollars ever Friday, which come to \$172 a month. That means after I pay the light bill, the water bill, the gas bill, and the telephone bill, I got thirteen dollars and fifty cents a week left for my groceries, my clothes, getting my hair done, and tithing to the church. Not to mention the cost to mail these bills done gone up to a nickel. And my work shoes is so thin, they look like they starving to death. New pair cost seven dollars though, which means I'm on be eating cabbage and tomato till I turn into Br'er Rabbit." (Stockett 21)

The other maid Yule May was also saving every dollar she earns from working to send her twin boys to college but could not afford to send both of them, despite the fact that she

was working so hard with her husband, they could not reach the amount of the tuition fee “For ten years, my husband and I have saved our money to send them to Tougaloo College, but as hard as we worked, we still didn’t have enough for both. My boys are equally as smart, equally eager for an education. But we only had the money for one and I ask you, how do you choose which of your twin sons should go to college and which should take a job spreading tar? How do you tell one that you love him just as much as the other, but you’ve decided he won’t be the one to get a chance in life? You don’t. You find a way to make it happen. Any way at all.” (Stockett 214)

Women have been working to provide for their families since the beginning of slavery. They play major roles in their families despite the fact that they get paid very little; however, they raise their children to be good, educated and disciplined, they also provide for them to live a decent life and to pay for their education, health fees until they find a job and be independent. (Wilkinson 130-131)

Black women were not only treated as the lowest and weakest chain of the society, they had to be obedient and submissive to everything they are told to do in addition to the physical abuse they face. Aibileen had an abusive drunk husband who left her for another woman after he took all of her money, leaving her with a child to raise “Kind a man I like ain’t the kind that stays around when he done spending all you money. I made that mistake twenty years ago. When my husband Clyde left me for that no-count hussy up on Farish Street, one they call Cocoa, I figured I better shut the door for good on that kind a business.” (Stockett 26)

Black men transfer the pressure of the discrimination and racism that the white society puts on them to their wives, they become drunk and blame everything on their women.

Minnie's husband Leroy abuses her physically for pleasure "Minnie had that big bruise on her arm cause that's what Leroy do when he come home from work. He push her around." (Stockett 159) She was working so hard to provide for her children especially the sick ones in addition to the bottles of liquor that her husband buy, for that reason she became terrified of the idea of getting fired from her job because Leroy will kill her, however, whenever she is pregnant he does not harm her in any way and she knows that "Leroy, he don't hit Minny when she pregnant. And Minny know this so I spec they's gone be a lot more babies after this one." (Stockett 334)

When Minny was fired from job at the Hoolbroks', Leroy did not know after a while he got fired from his own job because of Minny's misbehavior with Miss Hilly and told Minny that when he gets home he will lock her in the house and burn it with her inside "He throw the kids in the yard and lock me in the bathroom and say he gone light the house on fire with me locked inside!" (Stockett 369)

Bell Hooks explained in her book "Ain't I a Woman", how black men normalize the oppression that black men practice on black women "Black leaders, male and female, have been unwilling to acknowledge black male sexist oppression of black women because they do not want to acknowledge that racism is not the only oppressive force in our lives. Nor do they wish to complicate efforts to resist racism by acknowledging that black men can be victimized by racism but at the same time act sexist oppressors of black women. Consequently there is little acknowledgement of sexist oppression in black male/female relationships as a serious problem. Exaggerated emphasis on the impact of racism on black men has evoked an image of the black male as effete, emasculated, crippled. And so intensely does this image dominate American thinking that people are absolutely unwilling to admit that the damaging effects of

racism of black men neither prevent them from being sexist oppressors nor excuses or justifies their sexist oppression of black women.”(Hooks 122-123)

3.3. The Relationships between Women Characters

Relationships between characters in *the Help* are formidable and delightful at the same time. Black and white people had a clear line that no one should cross over otherwise they shall pay the price of that relation. Aibileen and Minny are the most significant females of the book; hence they share a miserable and lovely relationship, each one of them is suffering from the struggle of being a female in a white society that is a subject to hate, racism and discrimination.

Aibileen and Minny took care for each other in times of need; for instance, when Aibileen’s son Treelore died she lost hope in life and stayed in her house for three months, so Minny took care of her until she recovered from her trauma and decided that mourning will not bring her any good “She always been a strong woman, always fighting. After Treelore died, she carry supper over to me ever night for three months straight. And ever day she say, “Nuh-uh, you ain’t leaving me on this sorry earth without you,” but I tell you, I was sure enough thinking about it.” (Stockett 30) Aibileen even feels lucky that she has a strong friend like Minny “Old lady like me’s lucky to have her as a friend.” (Stockett 18)

Aibileen is there for Minny as well when her husband abuses and mistreats her, she stand by her side and gives her strength through wise words and her book of prayers; “Rumor is you got some kind a power prayer, gets better results than just the regular variety.” (Stockett 27) she also was the reason Minny agreed to help writing the book that Skeeter suggested to Aibileen. She encouraged Minny to tell her stories with the white ladies she

worked for since they were not looking to change anything about Jackson because they cannot trust white people either "... truth is, I don't care that much about voting. I don't care about eating at a counter with white people. What I care about is, if in ten years, a white lady will call my girls dirty and accuse them of stealing the silver." (Stockett 187)

The relationship between white and black females had many tensions, however, that did not stop some of them to form relationships that were full of love, care and loyalty. One of the most effecting stories that are mentioned in the book is the incredible bond between Skeeter and her family's maid Constantine; Skeeter loved Constantine very much because she raised her ever since she was a baby, she cared for her as if she was her own child. Constantine taught Skeeter how to love herself and feel better about her appearance when people criticize her for her hair or her height, while her own mother was trying to hide her because Skeeter was an unusual girl unlike the Jackson girls and they criticize her appearance all the time and tell her to do better to look good which made her feel bad about herself "It was having someone look at you after your mother has nearly fretted herself to death because you are freakishly tall and frizzy and odd. Someone whose eyes simply said, without words, You are fine with me." (Stockett 60)

Constantine provided Skeeter with the confidence to face the world and judgments of her society to her as a female just because she was a little bit taller than other girls in Jackson. She used to tell her the following "Ever morning, until you dead in the ground, you gone have to make this decision." Constantine was so close, I could see the blackness of her gums. "You gone have to ask yourself, Am I gone believe what them fools say about me today? " (Stockett 58) Constantine made Skeeter feel safe, loved and free to behave or think the way she wanted, she wanted to make her a strong, confident woman that cannot be budged by silly comments about her appearance because what mattered the most was from the inside "Ugly

live up on the inside. Ugly be a hurtful, mean person. Is you one a them peoples?" (Stockett 58)

The unexplained leave of Constantine hurt Skeeter deeply since she was a precious person to her heart and the only one who felt most comfortable with at home "The house felt vast, empty. Outside, a combine whirred in a cotton field." (Stockett 64) She questioned the reason behind her sudden quit and neither her mother nor anyone would tell what actually happened or how to reach her, all she knew is that she left to live in Chicago with her family, so she gave up looking for her "No one seemed to know a thing or how I could reach her. I finally stopped asking people why Constantine had left. It was like she'd simply disappeared. I had to accept that Constantine, my one true ally, had left me to fend for myself with these people." (Stockett 64)

When Skeeter started writing the book with Aibileen and Minny, she learned about what happened with Constantine that lead to her disappearance. The truth that she was fired by Mrs. Phelan because of her daughter showed up in a white people event that was held in the Phelan household, Skeeter then found out that Constantine had a daughter which she had to give up for adoption because of her pale almost white skin color "When Lulabelle was four years old, Constantine . . ." Aibileen shifts in her chair. "She take her to a . . . orphanage. Up in Chicago." "An orphanage? You mean . . . she gave her baby away?" (Stockett 303) After few years Constantine regretted her decision of leaving and wanted to get her daughter back but it was too late because a family had already adopted her, Aibileen opens her mouth to disagree, but then she closes it, looks down. "A few years later, Constantine wrote the orphanage, told em she made a mistake, she wanted her girl back. But Lula been adopted already. She was gone. Constantine always said giving her child away was the worst mistake

she'd ever made in her life." Aibileen leans back in her chair. "And she said if she ever got Lulabelle back, she'd never let her go." (Stockett 304)

When Skeeter confronted her mother that she wanted to know the truth behind Constantine's sudden quit, Mrs. Phelan finally told her that she had to fire Constantine because of her daughter's Lulabelle's behavior with white people and how she spit on her face when she asked her to leave to prevent a scandal from happening at the event that she as hosting since Mrs. Phelan was a famous figure in society "That girl—" She shakes her knobby finger at me. "She showed up here. I had the entire DAR chapter at the house. You were up at school and the doorbell was ringing nonstop and Constantine was in the kitchen, making all that coffee over since the old percolator burned the first two pots right up." Mother waves away the remembered reek of scorched coffee. "They were all in the living room having cake, ninety-five people in the house, and she's drinking coffee. She's talking to Sarah von Sintern and walking around the house like a guest and sticking cake in her mouth and then she's filling out the form to become a member." (Stockett 307)

The relationship that Skeeter had with her black maid Constantine shared went beyond all the strict rules of the white and black society, they found serenity in their companionship. Skeeter felt love and respect for Constantine despite the fact that she was black and Constantine loved Skeeter as if she was her daughter that she had to give up because of the cruel society she lived in "I just want to show that Constantine's love for me began with missing her own child. Perhaps that's what made it so unique, so deep. It didn't matter that I was white. While she was wanting her own daughter back, I was longing for Mother not to be disappointed in me." (Stockett 305)

Another beautiful relationship that is told in the *Help* is between Aibileen and her employer's little girl Mae Mobley Leefolt. When Aibileen started working at the Leefolt's it has not been long time since her son Treelore died, she became fond of the little girl and noticed that her mother does not give her enough attention, so that little girl became so important to Aibileen because she helps her feel good about her job.

Mae Mobley herself is attached to Aibileen as well because she treats her real good she reads for her and tells her that she is a smart, kind and beautiful girl, when her mother is busy worrying about what her white friends are thinking and occasionally hit her, so the little girl even thought she was her real mother "Aibee, you're my real mama." She don't even look at me, just say it like she talking about the weather. I kneel down on the floor where she playing. "Your mama's off getting her hair fixed. Baby Girl, you know who your mama is." But she shake her head, cuddling that doll to her. "I'm your baby," she say. "Mae Mobley, you know I's just teasing you, about all them seventeen kids being mine? They ain't really. I only had me one child." "I know," she say. "I'm your real baby. Those other ones you said are pretend." (Stockett 242- 243)

Aibileen decided to devote the time with Mae Mobley to help her grow up loving herself and others despite their color "You is kind," she say, "you is smart. You is important."(Stockett 373) and to give her enough affection and warmth to stay a happy child "I give her a good hug. I reckon she don't get too many good hugs like this after I go home" (Stockett 11), to protect her from the mean comments she receives from her mother's friends about how she is a fat "Miss Hilly say. "Why, Mae Mobley, don't you look like a little butterball in that bikini." (Stockett 176)

When Mae Mobley entered pre-school she started to learn that there are white people and black people and that color black is dirt, however, Aibileen told her in a fun way that there is no difference between black and white people, skin color is only on the outside what actually matter is what lies within the person "Once upon a time they was two girls," I say. "one girl had black skin, one girl had white." Mae Mobley look up at me. She listening. "Little colored girl say to little white girl, 'How come your skin be so pale?' White girl say, 'I don't know. How come your skin be so black? What you think that mean?' "But neither one a them little girls knew. So little white girl say, 'Well, let's see. You got hair, I got hair.'"I gives Mae Mobley a little tousle on her head. "Little colored girl say 'I got a nose, you got a nose.'"I gives her little snout a tweak. She got to reach up and do the same to me. "Little white girl say, 'I got toes, you got toes.' And I do the little thing with her toes, but she can't get to mine cause I got my white work shoes on." 'So we's the same. Just a different color', say that little colored girl. The little white girl she agreed and they was friends. The End." Baby Girl just look at me. Law, that was a sorry story if I ever heard one. Wasn't even no plot to it. But Mae Mobley, she smile and say, "Tell it again." (Stockett 173)

Aibileen tried her best to open Mae Mobley's eyes on the lies that is told by her own people so she would not turn on her and treat her like the rest of the racist white people, she wanted to plant a seed of love in her and let her figure out what is right and what is wrong, not by teaching her about hate "I want to yell so loud that Baby Girl can hear me that dirty ain't a color, disease ain't the Negro side a town. I want to stop that moment from coming—and it come in ever white child's life—when they start to think that colored folks ain't as good as whites." (Stockett 86)

Miss Hilly accused Aibileen of stealing from her as an excuse to fire her from her job because the book that she wrote with Miss Skeeter and Minny along with the other twelve

maids, mentioned the humiliating story of Minny's pie that she ate, thus they used that story as a guarantee so Miss Hilly would tell every woman at city that the book is not about Jackson "What if we put the Terrible Awful in the book," Minny asks. "We can't, Minny," Aibileen says. "It'd give us away." "But if we put it in there, then Miss Hilly can't let anybody find out the book is about Jackson. She don't want anybody to know that story's about her. And if they start getting close to figuring it out, she gone steer em the other way." (Stockett 311)

Eventually Aibileen was separated from Mae Mobley because of the things she shared in the book, she felt so sad that she will not be able to see her grow to be a good woman and continue raising her to be confident and loved. Aibileen hoped that what she taught her during her time with her would stay with her for the rest of her life and that she would remember it whenever she is feeling down about her life.

On the last chapter, when Aibileen was about to leave she took Mae Mobley in her arms and made repeat everything she taught her "Baby Girl," I say. "I need you to remember everything I told you. Do you remember what I told you?" She still crying steady, but the hiccups is gone. "To wipe my bottom good when I'm done?" "No, baby, the other. About what you are." I look deep into her rich brown eyes and she look into mine. Law, she got old-soul eyes, like she done lived a thousand years. And I swear I see, down inside, the woman she gone grow up to be. A flash from the future. She is tall and straight. She is proud. She got a better haircut. And she is remembering the words I put in her head. Remembering as a full grown woman. And then she say it, just like I need her to. "You is kind," she say, "you is smart. You is important." (Stockett 373)

Conclusion

Racial discrimination played a major role in shaping the way white people behave and treat black people, however, black females stood by each other's side and lived through it even though some of their own people treated them badly they never lost hope and continued fighting in silence. In addition to the remarkable relationships that brought the two races together in the name of love and humanity, to break the racist rules of society and prove that color is merely a color.

In her book Stockett showed that black females in the early 1960s were severely discriminated by their white employers in different ways in order to keep them under their control, however, they found their own voice with the help of a curious white girl. Stockett also demonstrated the unusual bond that did not stop some black maids and white people to grow feelings on each other, especially the babies, such as the strong relationships that were portrayed with Skeeter and Constantine, Aibileen and Mae Mobley, and Minny with her master Celia Rae Foot. On the other hand, the cruel oppression of black men toward their wives is depicted in the person of Minny's husband Leroy who abused her as revenge on the injustice that the society casts on him.

General Conclusion

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This thesis explores the themes of racial discrimination against African American females in the early 1960's as depicted in *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett. In this novel, Stockett raised the issue of how the domestic maids are struggling in their jobs, in addition to the unfair treatment they receive from their white employers and how they are portrayed as less than human. The main three characters, Aibileen, Minny and Miss Skeeter who collaborate together to write a book about the experiences that black maids face while working for their white employers, and how they are treated as if they are a disease. The book describes some relationships between white and black people specifically females.

The main object of this study was to discuss how black females are discriminated by their white employers for being black and by their own people for being females. To highlight more on the issues we chose to apply Black Feminist Theory and the Critical Race Theory to analyze the events and relationships between the characters in the novel, which helped us understand the cruelty that black maids faced during the flow of events.

To be able to do, it was essential to provide the reader with a brief historical overview of that period of time the early 1960's, which many events happened during that time that reflected on some events of the story. In addition, it was necessary to give a summary of the novel to deliver a general idea about the main developments of the narrative. We also mentioned the main characters of the novel, because the novel was narrated by three females, which the story revolves about their life experiences in a white racist society that forbids having relationships with black people.

In her novel Kathryn Stockett addressed the social issues that the southern society had in the early 1960's of the African American history, themes of racial discrimination against the black maids showed the control of the white dominance on the lives of the black minority,

who had to suffer verbal abuse and low income to live. Double standard oppression theme discussed that black females are abused by their employers and their husbands, destroying them from inside and outside. The relationships between black and white female characters played a major role in proving that there is a special bond that links both races through shared struggle as females in a patriarchal society, also the kindness that white babies receive from the black maids.

Through *The Help* we learned that what is seen as beautiful and attractive can be deceiving no matter what statue that person holds. That skin color is merely a color which does not define a person's personality, intelligence and competence, and that what lies on the inside is way deeper than superficial assumptions that a race creates about another race just because they are superior in number, will dehumanize people and break their souls. In the attempt to understand one another, one learns many traits about people who are stereotyped as evil, dirty and unintelligent, and discovers that people judge and refuse people who are different because they are afraid of them and their differences.

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ملخص

تتناول هذه الأطروحة موضوع التمييز العنصري ضد النساء الأمريكيات من أصل أفريقي في الستينيات في كتاب "عاملة المنزل" لكاترين ستوكيت. تسلط الدراسة الضوء على القمع والعنصرية التي تواجهها النساء السود من قبل ربوات البيوت البيض والرجال السود في نفس الوقت. تتطرق هذه الدراسة إلى تاريخ الأحداث الأكثر تأثيرًا في تاريخ الأمريكيين من أصل أفريقي، حيث تتعرض لنضالهم من أجل المساواة في الحقوق. وتقدم خلفية أدبية حول الشخصيات المهمة في الرواية بالإضافة إلى البيئة التي وقعت فيها الأحداث. النظريات الثلاث المستخدمة لإجراء هذا البحث هي: الانثوية السوداء، النسوية، و النظرية العرقية النقدية. يصف تطبيق هذه النظريات معاناة النساء السود وكيف يحاولن التعبير عن قصصهن المخفية حول نضالهن في المجتمع الأبيض غير العادل. بالإضافة إلى العلاقات المختلفة التي تربطهن معًا والدعم والعطف الذي تقدمنهن لبعضهن البعض، وكذلك الروابط غير العادية بينهن وبين النساء البيض. أظهر التحليل أن النساء السود في أوائل الستينيات تعرضن للتمييز الشديد من قبل أرباب العمل البيض بطرق عديدة من أجل إبقائهن تحت هيمنتهم. ومع ذلك، أظهرت الرواية أن العلاقة صاحب العمل الأبيض / الخادمة السوداء ليست دائمًا علاقة إضطهاد، فبعض الأشخاص البيض يعاملون خدمهم على أنهم بشر مثلهم. تم تصوير ذلك في الروابط الخاصة بين سكيتر و قسطنطين، ايبيلين و ماي موبلي، وميني مع رب عملها سيليا راي فوت.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التمييز العنصري، أمريكي من أصل أفريقي، عاملة المنزل، الانثوية السوداء، النسوية.