



0. BLACK MAIDS and WHITE CHILDREN - Story Preface

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5. BLACK MAIDS and WHITE CHILDREN

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8. "WE SHALL OVERCOME"

J.H. Tarbell took this photo, circa 1897, of an African-American nanny with a young white girl. He called the picture "Christmas Morning in the Sunny South." Image online, courtesy Library of Congress; LoC Reproduction Number: LC-USZ62-64013.

In 1988, Susan Tucker published the stories of African-American women who served as "the help" in white Southern homes. The name of her book is *Telling Memories Among Southern Women - Domestic Workers and Their Employers in the Segregated South*.

Some of the interviews are with black women while others are with white. Such narratives - tales of real women with very different perspectives - are enlightening. The following are a few examples.

- Leaving their own young children at home - even when they were sick - African-American women cared for (and essentially raised) Southern white children. (Tucker, [page 35](#).)
- Caretakers of the community, these domestics played a key role as "mother" for blacks and whites. As such, "the help" connected Southerners - both white and black - to each other. (Tucker, [page 16](#).)
- It was an "odd way of life," according to one white woman. Black domestics, on the one hand, were completely connected to white families - helping to make their lives easier and knowing all sorts of secrets - yet, on the other hand, they were not connected at all. (Tucker, [page 100](#).)
- In the Jim-Crow South, whites required blacks to have separate facilities - such as rest rooms (Tucker, [page 184](#)) - yet they asked African-American women to "wet nurse" white babies. (Tucker, [page 100](#).) This dichotomy begs a question: If white people really believed that black people were disease-carriers, why have a black woman feed a white baby in such a personal way?
- Some white parents urged their children to be kind to "the help" (Tucker, [page 93](#)) and were willing to go "on the bond" (Tucker, [page 98](#)), loaning domestics money to buy homes or send their children to college.
- Black children, who lived in happy homes, didn't know they were poor until they went to college. (Tucker, [page 39](#).) It was not unusual for black families to make college-tuition payments with overflowing bags of dimes and quarters. (Tucker, [page 40](#).)
- Despite their low pay and lack of personal education, some black domestics were willing to "open your mouth to talk for yourself." If a woman didn't hold her own ground, and defend herself, she'd be more likely to "fear white people and do what they say." (Tucker, [page 89](#).)
- Sometimes white employers talked disparagingly about their domestic workers - even when the women were

in the same room (or within earshot). When that happened, "the help" did not appreciate the obvious disrespect. (Tucker, [page 23](#).)

- It was really hard for black domestics to understand how the white children they loved - and who loved them - "turned right around and acted superior" once they were grown. (Tucker, [page 16](#).)

- A key to unlocking that apparent dichotomy might be the way "the help" were instructed to refer to young white boys. They were required to call them "mister" - even before the child could talk. (Tucker, [page 21](#).)

Medgar Evers - an African-American working in Jackson, Mississippi for the NAACP - was striving to make life more fair for African-Americans living in the South, including black domestics. Knowing he was at risk, for his activities, Evers nonetheless pushed forward with his efforts.

He became a martyr for the cause in the summer of 1963.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/BLACK-MAIDS-and-WHITE-CHILDREN-The-Help>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/BLACK-MAIDS-and-WHITE-CHILDREN-The-Help>

Questions 2 Ponder

What Causes Children to Change Their Perspectives When They Grow Up?

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What causes white children who were loved and cared-for by black domestics—and who gave love in return—to "act superior" when they become adults?

If no one is pointing-out the difference in skin color, to young children, how do you think those children would react to people with different coloring than they have?

Do you think that cultural viewpoints help or harm how children react to people with skin coloring which is different from their color? What can we do to change those cultural attitudes?

Of the real stories by African-American domestics, referenced in the chapter "[Black Maids and White Children](#)," which is your favorite? Why?

Media Stream



[Black Woman Caring for White Child - Jackson, Mississippi](#)

Image online, courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH).

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Black-Woman-Caring-for-White-Child-Jackson-Mississippi>



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