

Miyako Jones

February 24, 2004

Ms. Milne / Mr. McHugh

American Social History Project

I wake up early and bid good morning to the other men and women who serve the Master's house. Old Claire, the cook, is half blind and nearly ready to spend the rest of her days relaxing in the sun and imparting the wisdom of the ages onto the children coming up. She stirs simmering pots in the kitchen, fragrant steam rising to collect in a cloud of delectability. Even without the full use of her vision, her hand never wavers while creating.

Cleaning is my designated task. I sweep and scrub the floors, dust shelves and various knickknacks imported from foreign shops across the sea, and remake the beds with clean sheets. My work often leaves me isolated and alone unless the Lady of the House requires my services. Housework is not difficult, but I hate it just the same. I dream of having my own home to clean, and of filling it with little wooden animal figurines, the smells of warm food, and the sounds of children's voices.

Neither the Master or his wife treat me harshly, but still I hate them. I think often of the land my grandfather barely remembered in his stories, a land of deep green jungles, of close community, and of FREEDOM. That basic human right — denied.

No longer are we people deserving of rights, but property to be used, abused, and later sold on a whim. Our lives are carefully regulated by Masters, our bodies savagely beaten in ways even the most dangerous of animals need not fear. The slightest grievances bring out the Darkness in the Master and more than one field hand had experienced the pain of Punishment.

I came previously from a small plantation in Georgia. My family tended the fields from sunup to sundown six days a week. The Master there allowed no sass, no mistakes, no time to yourself so that you may rest weary body and mind. Nothing could be done for the worn down soul that waited anxiously for Eternal Rest. Each day it grew nearer, but still danced elusively out of your reach. Often I longed for Rest, longed for Peace to descend over me. Often I felt the blinding, burning, maddening pain that renders me incapable of coherent thought for the duration of my punishment, and for some time after. He made my mother watch, made my brothers and sisters, aunts, uncles, and cousins witness what happened to "disobedient niggers who don't know their place." Each time afterward my mother cradled my bleeding body gently against her own and whispered to me, "Don't do this, Jenny" and each time I answered, "I have to."

Living in bondage is not really living. I admire the attempts fellow men and women have made to ease their suffering and misery. In the fields there is a great sense of community, one born from fear, hopelessness, and loneliness. For many there is a overwhelming need to share the burden of living as we do, to find a reason to keep going day after day. The People are strong together and resist the Master's pressure to abandon our culture more successfully than alone. They keep tradition alive through stories and song, ritual and ceremony. These are things we will not put aside for any reason.

While it can be much worse, I still hate it here at the plantation in Maryland. I dream as I do my work, of a family and a house of my own. I imagine a life in the North where freedom is plentiful, where there is no "Master" dictating or Punishment looming. I dream the dream of many, of the young and old alike. I hope and pray for that shining moment when the laws that make the North desirable are adopted in the South. Because, when they are, I will run until all traces of my enslavement are left behind.

And never look back.