

READING

## Black Help in a White World...



Kathryn Stockett invites us back into the early 1960's where the "nigra" women of Jackson, Mississippi work for the elite white women as the help; a job that requires tough grits, a sound mind, and no sass-mouthin'.

In 2011, "The Help" movie earned \$169,708,112 in the box office and the book was a New York Times Best Seller for more than 100 weeks. While the movie covers the main plot to the story, there are many details omitted that helped make the book what it is.

"The Help" revolves around the lives of Skeeter Phelan, Aibileen Clark, and Minny Jackson. Skeeter is a young white woman

returning home to a mother who wishes nothing but for her to find a husband and get a fashion sense. She aspires to be a writer but for now has to start with the Ms. Myrna column at the Jackson Journal. After enough racial nonsense going on in Old Miss, Skeeter Phelan introduces the plan to write "The Help".

Aibileen Clark is 53 year old African American woman who works as a maid in the Leefolt residence. She is the woman with a direct line to God and the one with a voice that needs to be heard above all. When Skeeter proposes her idea to Aibileen to write a book of interviews with the point of view from the help, she dismisses it immediately; much too dangerous. But even she, knowing the dangers this could

possibly bring upon her and the lives of others, knew that it was time for a book like this to be written and agrees to help Skeeter.

Minny Jackson is an African American mother of 5 struggling to raise her children with an opprobrious, alcoholic husband. She has been fired from 19 jobs for talking back to her white employers. She's best at being the no nonsense woman with a mouth too smart to keep shut, but this is also her worst quality. After hard coaxing, Minny also takes part in the writing of "The Help". Together these three women help share a story that many people would fear to have written.

The dangers of writing a book during this period of time in America were extremely high, in Mississippi especially. This was the time where..... (Continue Pg.2)

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colored people were deprived of their eye sight just for entering a white bathroom by accident, as mentioned in the book. Had anyone found out that the “negro” maids were writing stories about the white families of Jackson they would have already signed their death sentences. The book shares a very person to society conflict throughout the story.

As I read the Help, I made my own personal connection best with the character Minny Jackson. She’s needle point sharp afraid to say nothing no matter how blunt or insensitive. That is something I do myself quite often. I also admire and aspire to have her courage and fearlessness in a moment’s notice.

I think any reader at the end of this book should be able to take off their color goggles and truly appreciate the boundaries that have been broken for us by people no matter the color of their skin; be it Martin Luther King or JoAnn Gibson Robinson. They’ve paved a path for us and opened so many doors that were locked shut. This book helps emphasize this with every story shared by the women and every tragedy touched upon. Most of us will never know what it felt like to be looking over your shoulder every second, or feeling forced to stare down when a white person walks by. “The Help” gave me that message above all, to appreciate those who spoke up about what they thought was right.

As you’re reading “The Help”

you must always expect the unexpected. Cliché, I know, but there are times when you’ll think you know exactly where the book is headed and something completely different happens.

A disappointment about the book was how Hilly Holbrook, the main nemesis in the story sounded more like she was 55 than Skeeter’s age. The way she could so easily ruin anyone’s reputation in a such an instant made her sound much older in the end than she actually was. I don’t see it highly probable that someone in her early twenties was so high up in town.

A strong point of this book was how the tragedy is what helped pull me in as a reader. I felt as if there were times where the book had trouble kicking off in certain places. This would be replaced by heartbreak, tragedy, or surprise. Emotional connections are a huge part to any book. If a reader can feel pain, happiness, remorse, and hilarity right along with the book, then the author has done something right.

The way that Kathryn Stockett kept touch with the real world events throughout the book helped guide me as a reader to where Jackson was at during the Civil Right’s Movement. It would help out any reader confused on setting, time, and place. She touches on Bombingham, Rosa Parks, the Medgar Evers assasination, the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. march, etc.

Ms. Stockett has a nice way of showing the personal growth each character has earned in the end of the story. Skeeter learns to show both her inner and outer beauty

and bravery above anything. Aibileen is a strong writer who at 53 has finally found her true self, purpose, and meaning. Minny will always be the boss and speak as thinks, but in the end she makes a life changing decision for both herself and her family, something she was never strong enough to do. If not for Minny’s leadership, ‘The Help’ would have never happened.

Overall with a few minor misconceptions along the characters, perspective, and how it took some time for the book to pick up, I give it my thumbs up.

Kathryn Stockett spoke from the point of view from her own maid Demetrie whom she was raised by. She herself had a walk out mother. Her female role model was the one that raised her. What better perspective to write by then one you witnessed yourself? Her ability to bring out emotion into the reader helped give her book life whether it was a good laugh, a heart breaking cry, or a victorious smile. She knows best how to bring us back in time and change our views on what we thought were the simplest things. It’s the type of book that you have to stop and reflect upon the second you put it down. Aibileen said it best herself, “Once I told the truth about that, I felt free. And I got to thinking about all the people I know. And the things I seen and done.”

Sometimes we all have to stop and reflect on what we see and what we know. Share our stories with someone and let it change life just a little.



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