
Issues of Equality In America as Discussed in Sue Monk Kidd's *The Invention of Wings*,

In America, according to the Declaration of Independence, “all men are created equal”. Unfortunately, this previous statement was not completely accurate in many ways concerning American citizens. The term “equality” is reserved to a specific social class, this remains the truth even today. But despite this inconvenience, the lower social classes had aspirations for a better living standard. Sue Monk Kidd, the author of *The Invention of Wings*, properly depicted the longing of freedom among pre- civil war slaves.

In *The Invention of Wings* the term wings symbolizes the feeling of freedom and liberty. According to the book, wings were invented by captive black slaves in order to create a sense of purpose and hope. During the time period before the civil war, slavery among Africans was nearing a climactic point. Slaves were constantly looking for an escape from their captive life styles. This escape could be both mental and physical depending on the individual slaves and the slave’s state of being. In *The Invention of Wings*, the wings represented the freedom that slaves longed so much for. Handful’s mother told Handful about the physical “wings” that the slaves possessed back in Africa. Handful’s mother stated that “When we came here, we left that magic behind” (Kidd 3). This is a representation of how much freedom the Africans lost when they became captive slaves. Handful’s mother seriously wants handful to believe these old fables to give handful a sense of freedom, despite not being free at the moment. “hose skinny bones stuck out from my back like nubs. She patted them and said, “This all what left of your wings. They nothing but these flat bones now, but one day you gon get’em back” (Kidd 3). Handful’s mother, along with several other slaves felt that freedom could one day be obtained. The complicated lives of slaves was for a moment liberated in the form of “wings”.

As this reading of Kidd's narrative indicates, wings were a symbol of freedom. But this freedom was not isolated to one social class individually such as the slaves; after all, freedom is a property that all human beings want to possess. In fact, in the book Sarah Grimke was under a similar force of oppression. This oppression was not anything physically binding such as a chain or a whip. Sarah’s oppression was inflicted upon her by her mother and other family members as well as a majority of the southern population. The status quo of the time period before the civil war made Sarah feel like a victim of social ridicule. When Sarah rejected the ownership of Handful the backlash upon Sarah was extreme. As a result Sarah stated “I was sent to solitary confinement in my new room and ordered to write a letter of apology to each guest. Mother settled me at the desk with paper, inkwell, and a letter she’d composed herself, which I was to copy” (Kidd 16). Sarah’s father himself was a victim of oppression as well as Sarah. As a

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judge, Sarah's father was socially required to uphold a code of conduct suitable for the southern upper class. As an example, when Sarah tried to release Handful from her captivity, Sarah wrote a manumissions document and put it on father Grimke's backgammon set. Sarah later got a response on her actions, "The manumissions document I'd written lay on the floor. It was torn in two" (Kidd 21). Oppression is a feeling that knows no boundaries, whether it be race or social status.

Historically, the original inventor of wings was a man that existed in Greek mythology. But according to the book *The Invention of Wings*, "wings were invented by captive black slaves. By doing this, the slaves would be reminded of their previous freedom and their lives back in Africa. But from a philosophical standpoint, wings can be developed by anyone that feels they need to be free. Freedom can always be obtained as long as there are individuals who strive to reinvent themselves, or create wings to carry them away. No matter what social class there is, someone is always being oppressed. If they utilize their wings, nothing can contain them, unless they "fly too close to the sun". Possibly the most liberated creatures on earth are birds. Unless they are caged, they are free to fly as far as they wish. Slaves understood this and wanted to be free more than anything else. The "American Dream" is a concept that American individuals have developed to exercise their freedom. Unfortunately, without wings no dreams can be achieved. Slavery is not only a physical concept, but a mental restraint as well. The true inventor of wings is anyone who wants to gain freedom from whatever is keeping them captive. To gain freedom would be the ultimate "American Dream."

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