The Mackey Family: The Socialization of Hattie Mackey

Hattie Mackey was the only daughter of Sampson and Mattie Mackey. She was born in Erie Pennsylvania City, Pennsylvania. Her mother and father were both successful, hardworking people who were well assimilated into the Anglo-Saxon culture of America. Though there is not much information about Hattie, but because of the success of her parents, this leads me to believe that she was also successful. The time period and culture can be seen through the jobs she had which were very stereotypical “women jobs”.

Some questions that I have about Hattie have a lot to do with how her family and culture shaped her as a successful, contributing societal member. The first question I have is: Did Hattie Mackey most likely have an education? Since there is not a lot of information on Hattie, it is important to infer that she is similar to her family. One of the most significant agents of socialization happens to be family. With that being said, yes, Hattie Mackey more than likely had an education. It was during the Great Migration when many African Americans moved from the South to the North. “Ninety-two percent of the black people in America lived in the South” (Whitaker 369). It is through the Great Migration that African Americans gained the rights of the constitution. African Americans moved to the North for social, political, and economic gain. Though African Americans were still discriminated against in the North, they were still able to get an education, vote, and get jobs. Sampson Mackey was fortunate in that though he was born to slaves in Richmond, Kentucky he was able to overcome adversity when his eldest sister moved him to the North after his parents died. It was in Greenville, Pennsylvania that he moved to where he got the opportunity to experience higher education at Theil College. He went on to become Superintendent of the Telegraph of the Colorado and Northwestern Railway Company. With Hattie’s parents knowing the importance of education, I believe that they would strongly encourage her to also get a good education.
In reading about Hattie Mackey and her parents, it seemed like they were unattached from the African American culture. This made me wonder about the jobs of many African American men and women who worked as barbers or hairdressers. So my question relating to the most significant career field for African Americans at the time is: Was Hattie Mackey involved in the African American beauty culture? With knowledge of Hattie’s family and the African American beauty culture, I was able to infer that Hattie Mackey is not said to have been involved with working at a beauty salon, but thinking about the significance that a beauty salon had when she was in the workforce is interesting. Hair plays a very large part in American culture. When Hattie was young, which seemed to be in the late 1920s and early 1930s, she was working. Hair in the workforce can explain the type of job one has, how prestigious that job is, and the social and economic status of the person who is holding that job. Along with hair straightening came skin-lightening cream. Having straight hair and lighter skin were ways to assimilate to the highly Anglo-Saxon culture of America. Hattie, though there is no proof that we was a beautician, most likely was involved in the African American beauty culture as a way to maintain her status and her somewhat classy job in the Anglo-Saxon culture as an assistant, clerk, and bookkeeper.

I firmly believe that Hattie experienced being part of a minority group. Hattie grew up in somewhat unusual circumstances. Her father, Sampson Mackey, was educated and 56% of African Americans (Snyder) (who were born around the same time as him) were not literate. This information suggests that other kids who were born of African American parents did not have the same opportunities and home life that Hattie had and vice versa. Another key concept that goes along with this is ascribed status. Hattie was fortunately born into a family where education was significant. She was born into a house that had plenty of money considering Sampson Mackey’s job as a General Manager of the Pittsburgh, Shenango & Lake Erie Railway and as a Superintendent of the Telegraph of the Colorado and Northwestern Railway Company. Being a black, literate, educated, and having money was not the group a majority of people were in.

Marginality most likely played a large role in Hattie’s life. Hattie was clearly different from a lot of other black people her age. She probably had to figure out how to blend in with society despite her skin color and physical features in a dominant Anglo-Saxon culture, which she seemed to be highly culturally assimilated to. In addition to proving herself to the white
people, she also had to blend in with the blacks who did not have the same opportunities as she had growing up.
Works Cited


