

January 9, 2025

Dear Kathryn Stockett,

As a high school student in the twenty-first century, I've spent half of my school experience learning about American history. The 1950s and '60s were deeply rooted in my curriculum in fifth grade when I read the book *The Lions of Little Rock* by Kristin Levine as part of a book club. I found it eye opening to the horrendous discrimination faced by Black Americans, but as it was written for a younger audience, I found that I was only able to understand the impact to a certain degree. However, when I began reading your book, *The Help*, I was able to grasp the part of history I had been missing.

From as early as chapter five, I was able to connect with Eugenia Phelan. As another awkwardly tall, overly ambitious girl, I immediately saw myself in her, despite our time difference. I understood her distaste for the housewife lifestyle and her frustration with the harsh racism and sexism that continues in the United States. Similarly, I share some of her naivety.

While reading your book, I realized just how little I truly knew about the topic. The stories I had been told as a kid were the heroic ones- the protests led by Martin Luther King Jr., the acts of resistance by Rosa Parks, Katherine Johnson's trailblazing mathematical assistance at NASA; the success stories were the stories I was told. I was told that even ordinary people could make a difference, but while reading your book, I began to question how true this really was.

In theory, your everyday Joe could make a difference if they were in the right place at the right time, but the wrong circumstances could lead to disaster for Black Americans. A young man like Treelore with so much potential could be killed due to gross oversight and paucity of appreciation for the black workforce. Another, like Robert, could be blinded simply for walking into the wrong bathroom, through no fault of his own.

I was also exposed to the truly awful treatment of Black maids in America. Before I read *The Help*, I had certainly never considered the great divide between white women and their black maids. The grueling hours, the meager pay, and the insensitive treatment faced by the characters in your book had never fully entered my mind, even after my multiple years of learning about American history. I had never put myself in the shoes of the everyday people who were affected by the racism that is rooted so deeply in American society. I was not exposed to the untold stories. This book helped me see into their lives and I was shocked by how heartless people can be.

Though America still struggles with persistent racism today, I couldn't imagine living in a time where people would spend their life savings building a separate bathroom for their colored help. For me, the 60s were glorified by Pinterest and my privilege; I saw it as a time with bell bottoms, polka dots, and puffy dresses rather than daily life consisting of Black Americans being treated as though they were diseased. Your book was incredibly eye opening, and I am glad to have read it. Not only was I able to receive a new perspective on the ugly history of the country where I live, but I realized just how fortunate I am to be in my situation.

Thank you for writing this book, for opening my eyes, and for making me reevaluate today's society.

Sincerely,

Carrington Long