

# Unveiling Rural Realities: Exploring Inaccessibility Among Rural African American Communities In Literature and Mental Health

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# **Trigger Warning:**

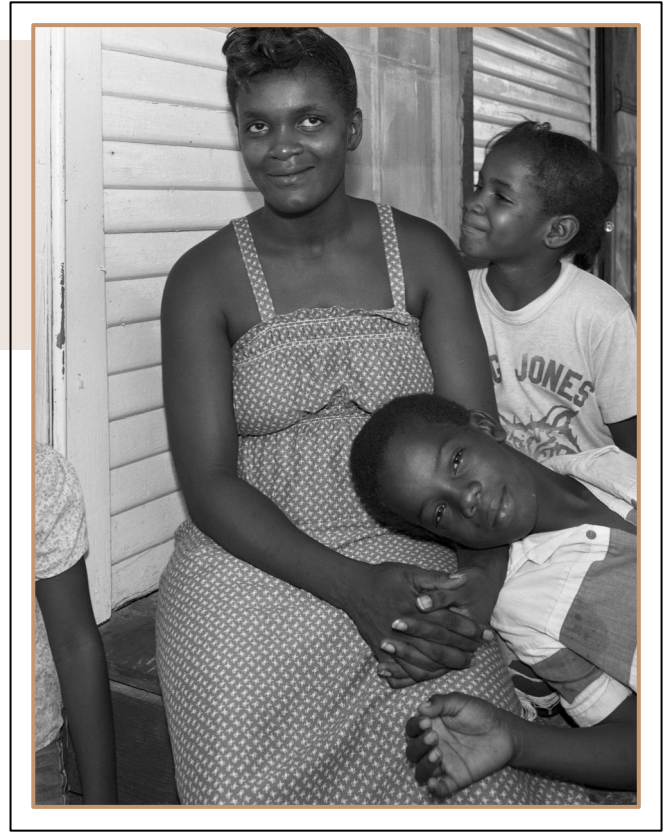
**Topics like sexual assault and abuse**

# Historical

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Between 1900 and 1950, the conditions of African Americans living in rural communities throughout the United States were pitiful. Housing, for the majority, was poor, wages were low, and educational opportunities were small for black children living in the rural south.

Rural african american communities face employment discrimination, disparities in the criminal justice system, disparities in health outcomes, and disparities in the education system.



# Where and what is the Mississippi Delta?

ARKANSAS

East Carroll Parish




Yazoo City  
ALABAMA

## MISSISSIPPI

### POPULATED PLACES

- 100,000 – 499,999 • **Jackson**
- 25,000 – 99,999 • **Tupelo**
- 24,999 and less • **Indianola**
- State capital ★ **Jackson**

### TRANSPORTATION

- Interstate; limited access highway 
- Other principal highway 
- Railroad 

### PHYSICAL FEATURES

- Streams 
- Lakes 
- Highest elevation in state (feet) +806

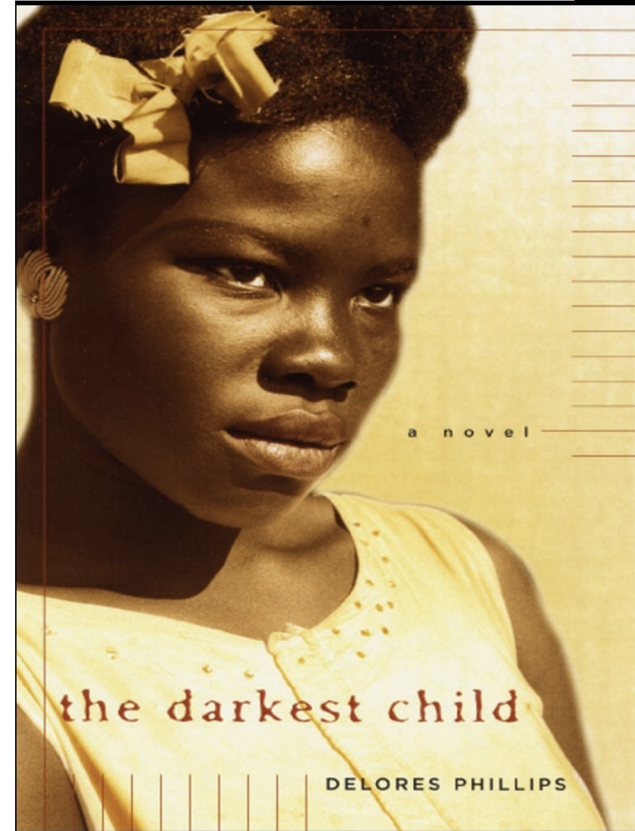
The lowest elevation in Mississippi is sea level (Gulf of Mexico).



# What Literature Specifically?

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- ❖ The Darkest Child by Delores Phillips
  - Tangy Mae Quinn



# Let's Get Into Definitions

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What is Inaccessibility?

The fact of being very difficult or impossible to travel to or to reach

What does inaccessibility look like for rural communities?

- Restricted access to quality healthcare.
  - Geographic isolation.
- Lack of public transportation.
  - Poor infrastructure.
- Poverty and unemployment.



# What Two Factors Impacted Tangy Mae & Family

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## Education

- The transmission of knowledge, skills, and character traits and manifests in various forms.
- Brown v. Board of Education (1954)



## Housing

- Adequate housing refers to the provision of safe, secure, and suitable living conditions for individuals or families.
- Fair Housing Act of 1968

# Quotes From the Text

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Our house stood alone on a hill off Penyon Road, about half a mile outside the city limits. It was old, crippled, and diseased— an emblem of poverty and neglect. Nature had tried to cure it by embracing the rear frame with herbs, roots, and a jumble of foliage which spilled over from the surrounding woodland. Nature had failed, and in frustration she sought to destroy the house by eroding the very foundation on which it stood.

Erosion had left the house slanted at an odd angle, held up on the east side by thick, round poles lodged into tilted, unstable earth. Occasionally, huge chunks of brown earth shook loose, skirted around the poles, and rolled down the slope into a waiting gully.

All of my life home had been these three drafty rooms under the same rusted tin roof. The house swayed in the wind but stood. It absorbed its fill of rainwater and stood. It groaned under the weight of celebrations and sorrows and did not crumble. But for how much longer? I thought we might wake up one morning—or not wake up—in the rocky, muddy gully below. Or maybe we would simply blow across the dirt road and get lost in the overgrown field of weeds. I could not predict what would happen, but I feared we were destined for disaster.

Tangy Mae said, “At the age of twelve, my mother’s children were expected to drop out of school, get a job, and help support the family.”

I retreated to the front room. There I settled and wrote a most convincing letter of suffering, pain, and impending death. I begged Mushy to return to Penyon Road. Mushy, whose real name was Elizabeth Anne, had been gone for four years. One summer evening, just after her eighteenth



- **Rural Americans experience higher rates of depression and suicide than people who live in urban areas.**
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- Among all severe mental disorders, schizophrenia exhibits the most pronounced connection with poverty
- People living in socially underprivileged and poor city areas suffer more often from mental health conditions like depression, anxiety and psychosis

- Poverty has been consistently linked with poor health and increased risk for psychological disorders in children and adults that can persist across the life span. If psychological disorders and mental illness is left untreated

he was there. She had been isolated in her room. We had heard her in there screaming Sam's name, or crying, or mumbling to herself, and we had tried not to disturb her. She would do that sometimes— hide away in her room—but she never allowed more than a few days to pass before she would come out with a new plan of how she could get Sam out of jail.

I wanted to believe him, but the finger he had used to wipe my tears away began to pry between my hand and the breast it hid.

"Don't fight against me," he said impatiently.

But I did fight. Forgetting about my nakedness, I struggled against him until he dumped me to the floor and swung a sock-covered foot onto my belly to still me. His body shifted on the chair, and the chair gave a squeak, then he was on the floor beside me, his hands deep into my hair.

"Don't make me hurt you," he whispered against my ear. "Think about your brother. I can have him free by tomorrow."

Wallace went for the tub while I went for water. We returned to witness our mother snatching bugs so hard and fast that she was abrading the skin on her face and arms.

"Rosie!" Miss Pearl shrieked. "What's the matter wit' you?"

Tarabelle leaned against the wall and watched, and I could not tell if she was satisfied or sorry for the distress she had caused. Mama rushed toward her room, snatching and slinging bugs as she went.

"What's going on?" Miss Pearl wanted to know.

"Bugs, Miss Pearl," I answered. "Sometimes Mama acts like bugs are crawling on her."

only a hint of last night's warmth. My right side, from the waist down, was soaked with urine, and my gown clung to my legs as I crawled up from the floor. My teeth chattered in the morning chill, and I cursed Laura for her weak bladder, or kidney, or whatever caused her to routinely ammoniate my body.



## Themes

- Sexual Abuse
- Blatant Racism
- Physical Abuse



## Reactions

- Frequent Bedwetting
- Isolation
- Psychosis
- Substance Abuse

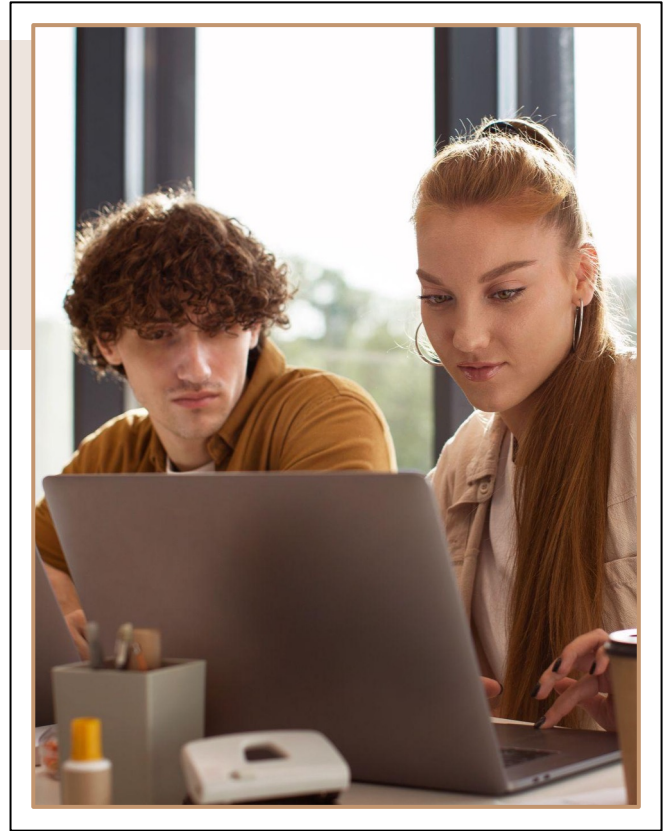
# Why is this important?

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There is a negative stigma surrounding mental health in African American communities which discourages people from seeking mental help.

The silent struggles of mental health in particularly African American rural communities often go unnoticed.

Through literature, we can shed light on the inaccessibility of mental health resources and start important conversations. This presentation aims to explore the impact of these struggles.



# What did I Learn?

Literature is a powerful lens that we can empathetically use to delve into the lives of people living in rural communities. Ensuring that their experiences and humanity are not only seen but also cherished in our understanding of social issues.





# Thank You!

- Jordan Williams  
Trauma She Wrote