Like A Winding Sheet Essay, Research Paper

In Ann Petry?s 1945 short story "Like a Winding Sheet". Johnson is a black male struggling with racism and societal pressures. Johnson faces many challenges. As one reads, one cannot help but feel his anger, frustration and tenseness. Petry tells it in the following way, "The knowledge that he had struck her seeped through him slowly and he was appalled but he couldn?t drag his hands away from her face." Petry goes on further to tell us, "He had lost all control over his hands." This rage Johnson is experiencing is described as a "winding sheet".

Johnson?s everyday routine causes anger and frustration to build up inside him. Get up, go to work and come home; get up, go to work and come home. The routines of standing in line to punch a timecard, to pick up his paycheck or even get a cup of coffee are frustrating. Walking steadily up and down the aisles pushing a cart day after day watching the women bicker among themselves seemed to make him tense. Johnson complains to his boss that his legs ache from being on them all day and he is not able to get enough rest to make his legs feel better. The hustle and bustle of trying to catch a long subway ride home was almost unbearable.

As Johnson?s character develops throughout this short story, some key events push him to his limit and cause him to lose control. First, an incident with his white female boss, his so-called "forelady", in which she called him a "nigger". Second, Johnson is standing in line for a cup of coffee. As soon as he is at the coffee urn to receive a cup of coffee the white waitress says, "No more coffee for awhile." Third, Johnson arrives at home and his wife Mae has the radio turned up extremely loud. She is obnoxiously chewing her gum and accuses Johnson of picking on her. Further, she yells at him for sitting in his chair and wrinkling her overalls lying over the back of the chair. Giggly, she goes on further saying, "You?re nothing but an old hungry nigger trying to act tough and?." This is enough to drive him to his limit and strike Mae uncontrollably.

Johnson?s struggle with his job and society makes it easy for him to blame racism, when in fact, these event may not have anything to do with him being black. I believe Johnson does not know how to deal with the stress he faces. Giving the time era Johnson lives one can?t blame him for the racist thoughts he acts out.