Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself Study Guide

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself by Frederick Douglass

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Introduction

In 1838, at the age of twenty, Frederick Douglass escaped slavery and settled in the North. He quickly became involved in the campaign against slavery, known as the abolitionist movement. Seven years later in 1845, he published the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, in which he told the story of his life under slavery. His moving account of slavery and his eventual escape lent a certain authenticity to Douglass' speeches and writings against institutionalized slavery that white abolitionists did not have. His use of vivid language in depicting violence against slaves, his psychological insights into the power dynamics between slaves and slaveholders, and his naming of specific persons and places made his book a powerful indictment against a society (both in the North and South of the United States) that continued to condone slavery as a viable social and economic institution.

More than a story about the evils of slavery, the *Narrative* touches on basic issues and themes important to all Americans. These include the value of freedom, social justice and equal rights, and condemnation of violence against those who do not have the legal power to protect themselves. Written in a lucid and passionate style, the *Narrative* uses a variety of rhetorical and literary devices. Teachers use it as an example of a historical document and a literary work. The *Narrative* has taken its place in the American literary canon as a precursor of a rich tradition of African-American autobiographical works, from Richard Wright's *Black Boy* to Malcolm X's (with Alex Haley) *The Autobiography of Malcolm* X and Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

Author Biography

Born on a plantation in Talbot County, Maryland, in February 1818, Frederick Douglass is best known as an orator and writer who campaigned and fought against the institution of slavery and its dehumanizing effects on African Americans. His remarkable first work, entitled *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, was published in 1845. It chronicles his life as a slave and his dreams of, and eventual escape to, freedom.

As a young boy, Douglass experienced and witnessed the brutal consequences of slavery. At birth, he was separated from his mother, whom he saw only a handful of times until she died when he was seven. As a young boy he was sent to Baltimore to work as a house slave. There, he was fortunate to be taught briefly how to read until his master ended his lessons. For years, Douglass continued by surreptitious means to learn how to read and write through establishing relations with Anglo society. After his master died (a man rumored to be his father), Douglass returned to rural Maryland, where he became a field hand, enduring physical and mental hardship under several different slave masters. However, he continued to educate himself and other slaves by setting up a Sunday school where he carried out lessons.

Douglass' first attempt to escape with several of his fellow slaves was foiled. After being jailed briefly, through fortunate circumstances Douglass ended up in Baltimore, where he worked as a caulker in a shipyard. At the age of twenty, Douglass again attempted escape and this time succeeded. On his arrival in New York in 1838, he married his fiancée, Anna Murray, a free woman who worked as a domestic servant in Baltimore, and they moved to New Bedford, Massachusetts.

Douglass quickly became involved in the abolitionist movement, first in the African-American churches of New England and then among Anglo-American society after his anti-slavery autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, was published. Because of the narrative's tremendous popularity, Douglass feared that he might be in danger of re-enslavement. He traveled to England and Ireland and remained there for two years, eventually buying his freedom before returning to the United States.

On his return from the British Isles, Douglass settled in Rochester, New York, and started his own anti-slavery paper, the *North Star*. He also lectured around the country, continuing to publish anti-slavery tracts and to write his autobiography. Some of his other publications include the speech ' 'What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July" (1852), a novella, *The Heroic Slave*, and his autobiography, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1892). During the Civil War, Douglass tried to convince the Union government that the abolishment of slavery should be its main goal. He also encouraged and helped the U.S. government recruit African Americans to fight for the Union.

After the Civil War, Douglass continued to campaign for African-American rights as well as women's rights. His move to Washington, D.C., in 1872 placed him in close proximity

to the seat of the U.S. government. He took a number of different governmental positions (under a number of different presidents), including marshal for the District of Columbia and consul general to Haiti in 1889. Afterhis wife, Anna, died in 1882, he married Helen Pitts, a white woman who worked for him. They spent a few years traveling in Europe and northern Africa in the 1880s. In 1895, Frederick Douglass died of heart failure in Washington, D.C., on February 20. He was buried in Mount Hope Cemetery, Rochester, New York.

Plot Summary

Preface

Before the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* begins, the reader is provided with a preface, written in 1884 by the famous abolitionist leader William Lloyd Garrison, that sets the tone of the book. Garrison notes how he first met Douglass at an antislavery convention in Nantucket, Massachusetts. He then goes on to describe Douglass' impassioned and unforgettable speech that eventually led to writing this book. His thoughts echo those of many who saw Douglass speak that day when he writes,' 'I think that I never hated slavery so intensely as at that moment." Garrison explains how he encouraged Douglass to become involved in the abolitionist movement and how Douglass feared that he would do more harm than good. However, Garrison persisted and Douglass became one of the most eloquent and persuasive promoters of slave independence. Garrison notes that' 'As a public speaker, he excels in pathos, wit, comparison, imitation, strength of reasoning, and fluency of language."

In his preface, Garrison mentions a number of abolitionists who were well known in the antislavery movement. These include John A. Collins; Charles Lenox Remond, an African-American free man; and Daniel O'Connell, who fought for Irish independence in the mid-nineteenth century. These men have all argued passionately and eloquently for the end of oppression, yet Garrison claims that none is as forceful a speaker as Douglass because none has ever been a slave. Douglass' statements ring true because he has lived and breathed the tales he tells.

Garrison's purpose in writing this preface seems twofold. He wants to make a special plea to readers of Douglass' narrative that what they are reading is the real and true thing. Garrison focuses on how Douglass does not shy away from recounting names,places, and dates of events that occurred. On the other hand, Garrison wants to lend credibility to Douglass by promoting him as more than a former slave□as someone who excels in oratory and argumentation and who is fully capable of writing this book.

Letter from Wendall Phillips, Esq.

This letter written to Douglass by Wendall Phillips, a well-known Massachusetts abolitionist, also attempts to provide credibility to Douglass' narrative by referring to the length of time the two men have known each other and the feelings Phillips had when Douglass first told him his story.

Chapter One

In his opening chapter, Douglass recounts his birth into slavery in Tuckahoe, Maryland. His claim that he does not know his age other than a rough estimate of twenty-seven or twenty-eight is based on a common assumption by many slave owners that such

information was unnecessary. Douglass goes on to explain his parentage. His mother is a dark-skinned slave named Harriet Bailey and his father is a white man. In fact, many believe that the master of the plantation is his father, a man whom Douglass calls Captain Anthony.

Douglass does not remember much of his mother, because they were separated at birth. He recalls several nights that she walked twelve miles from the plantation to which she had been sold to sleep by his side. Unfortunately, she dies when Douglass is seven. Douglass examines the implications of being the offspring of a slave owner.

The master is frequently compelled to sell this class of his slaves, out of deference to the feelings of his white wife; and, cruel as the deed may strike any one to be ... it is often the dictate of humanity to do so."

The offspring of slaveholders are often punished cruelly by both masters and masters' sons, who are slaves' half-brothers. Douglass claims that slavery cannot last under such a system of interracial relations, where brothers are pitted against brothers, sons against fathers.

Douglass discusses the two masters he had in his lifetime and goes into some detail about Captain Anthony, his first master, who manages the Lloyd plantation. The overseer for Anthony, Mr. Plummer, is a particularly cruel man who beats Douglass' Aunt Hester for disobeying his command not to go out at night. Douglass ends the chapter by recounting his experience at a young age of witnessing his aunt being tied up and whipped by this overseer.

Chapter Two

In this chapter, Douglass continues to describe the conditions of being a slave on a plantation owned by Colonel Edward Lloyd, who owns a large estate in eastern Maryland. His master, Captain Anthony, runs the estate for Lloyd which, in Douglass' words, "had the appearance of a country village." Douglass gives details of what the slaves wear, where they sleep, and what they eat. He also describes several overseers that lord over them. One is Mr. Severe, who is unjust and cruel, and later arrives Mr. Hopkins, who dislikes dispensing physical punishment to the slaves.

In his famous passages about slave songs found in this chapter, Douglass describes the effects that their singing has on him, how despondent he felt and still feels when he thinks of those songs. They remind him not of inner joy as many northerners think but of deep and unbearable sadness. As he says, "Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy."

Chapter Three

Douglass describes different aspects of Colonel Lloyd's plantation. He begins with a description of Lloyd's garden, whose tasty fruits tempt slaves to eat from it. They are

soundly punished for their transgressions. He discusses the unwarranted punishments that the slaves who take care of Colonel Lloyd's stables must undergo. He ends the chapter discussing the number of slaves Colonel Lloyd owns□close to one thousand□and how slaves must be careful about expressing any discontent they have with their owners. These comments may have severe repercussions. Douglass describes how slaves from different plantations often quarrel with each other on the merits of their owners.

Chapter Four

This chapter recounts a number of cruel and dehumanizing punishments that plantation slaves suffer at the hands of overseers such as Mr. Austin Gore. What is most disturbing about this chapter are Douglass' accounts of the numerous slave murders that occur. These are ignored by local judicial systems because the institution of slavery denies slaves basic human rights and legal protection. Douglass sums up this horrific disregard of the law by relaying a common saying among slaveholders ' 'that it was worth a half-cent to kill a 'nigger,' and a half-cent to bury one."

Chapter Five

Here Douglass provides details of his treatment while living on the plantation of Colonel Lloyd. Because of his young age, he does not have to take on many of the responsibilities that come with adulthood. However, he suffers from hunger and lack of decent hygiene, clothes, and sleeping conditions. A sign of hope comes in the form of an opportunity to work for Hugh Auld, the brother of his old master's son-in-law. Douglass departs for Baltimore via ship and is introduced to his new mistress, Sophia Auld, and the Auld's young son, Thomas. Sophia is the first white person to treat him with warmth and friendliness. He views his move to Baltimore as a sign of providence that God is looking out for him, and that one day he will be free.

Chapter Six

Sophia Auld is described as being a kind and generous woman who never has owned a slave. She is a weaver by trade. Unlike most women of that era, especially in the South, Auld ran her own business until she married. She treats Douglass in a respectful and courteous manner, going so far as to teach him how to read. Unfortunately, her husband discovers this and forbids these lessons to continue. In thinking about Auld's harsh reaction, Douglass realizes that slaves' illiteracy allows the white man to retain power over slaves. As he states,' 'From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom." Douglass sets himself the task of teaching himself to read and write. In this way, he hopes to become a free man. Douglass ends the chapter by comparing city and plantation slaves, noting that city slaves have the appearance of being free. They are better clothed and fed. Yet, ultimately, injustices and physical harm continue under slavery regardless of where the slave resides.

Chapter Seven

In this chapter, Douglass tells the reader that he lived with his master and mistress in Baltimore for seven years. Early on he realizes that Sophia, the mistress of the house, is falling under the spell of being a slave owner. In other words, her kind countenance is replaced with a stony one. She actively attempts to thwart his continued efforts to become literate. Douglass finds ways to learn to read from the white boys he talks to on the streets. He also finds books to read, such as *The Columbian Orator* that contain famous speeches. By reading these speeches that touch on questions of emancipation, Douglass engages himself in debating the arguments for and against emancipation. Yet as he becomes more learned, he also becomes more painfully aware of his dire circumstances□he is no better than a beast. This compels him to contemplate suicide. However, his growing literacy impels him to think of freedom as attainable. He makes an effort to teach himself to write in a variety of ways that avoid Sophia Auld's keen eye. Writing becomes an act of survival.

Chapter Eight

This short chapter covers significant changes in Douglass' life, as he tries to cope with his unstable position of a slave. Soon after moving to Baltimore, Douglass discovers that his former master's son, Richard, has died; three years later, Captain Anthony dies, leaving the estate to his only living children, Andrew and Lucretia. Douglass has to return to the plantation for a ' 'valuation of the property" so that Anthony's property, including his slaves, can be divvied up.

Douglass discovers the horrors of being subjected to a thorough physical inspection and being parceled out to one of the two heirs of Captain Anthony's estate. Fortunately, Douglass is portioned to Lucretia and is allowed to return to Hugh Auld. Lucretia dies soon after his return to Baltimore, and soon thereafter Andrew also dies, leaving their slaves to the hands of strangers or abandoned. In particular, Douglass' grandmother is unable to be sold due to her old age and is left to die in the woods. This tragedy more than anything, Douglass states, "served to deepen my conviction of the infernal character of slavery, and to fill me with unutterable loathing of slaveholders." The chapter ends with Douglass being sent to work for Lucretia's husband, Thomas Auld, who has remarried and lives in rural Maryland. Once again, Douglass' future is uncertain and his hopes for escape appear bleak. Yet he plans on running away.

Chapter Nine

In March 1832, Douglass leaves Baltimore to live with Thomas Auld, whom Douglass knows from Colonel Lloyd's plantation. Auld and his new wife are cruel and unlikable people who keep their slaves always yearning for more food. Worse, Auld does not know how to treat his slaves in a consistent and respectful manner. ' 'In all things noble which he attempted, his own meanness shone most conspicuous." Auld is also a pious man who participates in religious revivals and church goings-on, yet he is capable of

great wrath and cruelty toward his slaves. Douglass mentions that Auld's preacher friends break up a school meeting set up for slaves by throwing sticks and missiles at them. Auld and Douglass do not see eye-to-eye. Eventually, after nine months of working for Auld, Douglass is sent to Mr. Covey, known as a 'negro-breaker,' to work for a year. Despite the horrors he has heard about working for Mr. Covey, Douglass looks forward to at least getting enough to eat.

Chapter Ten

In the longest chapter of the narrative, Douglass reveals some of the most distressing and empowering moments of his life as a slave. He begins the chapter illustrating how unfit he was to work as a field hand after having lived in the city for seven years. Douglass describes an incident where he has to drive a pair of unbroken oxen into the woods for some firewood. Because he takes too much time due to the surly nature of the oxen, Douglass gets whipped by Mr. Covey. Douglass goes on to describe the many ways in which Covey catches his slaves off guard by sneaking up on them. ' 'He was under every tree, behind every stump, in every bush, and at every window, at the plantation.'' Because Covey is a poor man, he finds a way to double his slaveholdings by buying a female slave, who is then coupled with a hired hand to produce twins. Covey, Douglass claims, makes life miserable for every slave who comes in contact with him. Even on Sunday, his day off, Douglass can do nothing but bemoan his fate of being held hostage by Covey's emotional and physical torture.However, Douglass and Covey have a confrontation that changes the power dynamic and provides Douglass with new energy for planning his escape. Douglass returns to Hugh Auld's home because of Covey's harsh treatment when Douglass fell ill. Douglass returns to Covey, due to his former master's lack of support and sympathy. Covey is so angry that Douglass runs back to the woods. This time he runs into a fellow slave, Sandy Jenkins. Jenkins gives Douglass a root that Jenkins claims will protect Douglass if he wears it on his right side. On Douglass' return, Covey acts kindly towards him. Several days later while Douglass is in the barn, Covey attempts to tie him up for a whipping. It is then that Douglass begins to fight back. A tremendous battle ensues that lasts for two hours, and eventually Covey retreats. For the next six months, Covey does not lay a finger on Douglass.

Douglass then discusses how slaves are free from Christmas to New Year's Day. They are encouraged to drink excessively by slaveholders so that on returning to work, the slaves are relieved that they do not have to indulge again. Encouraging slaves to drink is done, Douglass explains, so that freedom is perceived in its worst possible mode.

After Douglass finishes at Covey's, he goes to work for Mr. William Freeland, who turns out to be kinder than most slaveholders. While there, Douglass begins to teach Freeland's two slaves, Henry and John Harris, and many other slaves in the area how to read and write. Among these slaves Douglass makes some very close ties, and with several of them, he begins to plot out a way to escape to the North. However, their plans go awry when someone betrays them and they end up in jail.

A week later, Douglass is sent back to Baltimore, where he again takes up residence with Hugh Auld. While there, Douglass begins to work for Mr. Gardner, who runs a shipbuilding yard. After eight months he is subjected to racial slander and prejudice by four carpenters, who attempt to beat him to death. From that time on, he begins to work as a caulker in the shipyards. He makes a great deal of money but has to hand it over to Hugh Auld. Douglass sets his hopes on escaping to the North, where he can work and keep the wages that he earns.

Chapter Eleven

In his last chapter, Douglass achieves his goal of attaining freedom in the North. Working as a caulker provides Douglass with a number of advantages he never had working on a plantation, but he is still very troubled by his lack of freedom. Although Douglass has achieved an ideal situation for a slave, he wants what his masters have: the ability to do what, and go where, they please, answering to nobody. With this in mind, Douglass continues working in the shipyards. He bargains with Hugh Auld to keep his wages and promises to pay Auld for his own time as well as his food and lodging each week. The bargain creates conflict between Douglass and Auld; Auld thwarts Douglass' attempt to be independent of him. Douglass escapes to the North and reaches New York on September 3, 1838. The reader is not given many details of Douglass' escape, as he does not want to endanger the lives of other slaves seeking freedom in a similar way. In fact, Douglass makes it clear that others have spoken too openly about the underground railroad, the famous escape route that many slaves use to reach the North, and have jeopardized slaves' and abolitionists' lives because of this.

Arriving in New York, Douglass is overwhelmed by his new status and surroundings. His initial enthusiasm is tempered by fear that he may be sent back to Baltimore if caught. After a few lonely days, Douglass is introduced to David Ruggles, an African-American journalist and abolitionist, who helps Douglass plan to settle in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Douglass and his fiancée, Anna Murray, marry. Afterwards, they set off for New Bedford, where they stay with Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Johnson. The Johnsons suggest that Douglass change his name, currently Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey. He decides on Douglass after the character Lord James of Douglas in Sir Walter Scott's poem ' 'Lady of the Lake." After living in New Bedford, Douglass notes that his expectations of the North contrast with what he sees around him. Not only do people seem happier and healthier, but those who are not wealthy seem to be well fed and well housed. Even African Americans who had been slaves appear to live better than many slaveholders Douglass has known. Douglass soon finds work, though he runs across prejudice when he tries to work as a caulker.

Douglass ends this chapter with his discovery of the abolitionist newspaper (published by William Lloyd Garrison) called the *Liberator*, which he devours. ' 'The paper became my meat and drink." By reading this paper, Douglass educates himself and soon becomes involved in the antislavery movement. The narrative ends with Douglass giving a speech at an antislavery convention in Nantucket, Massachusetts, where he first begins to recount his misfortunes and fortunes as a slave.

Appendix

In this important appendix to his work, Douglass attempts to explain his harsh condemnation of Christianity as practiced by southern slaveholders. As he explains it,' 'Revivals of religion and revivals in the slave-trade go hand in hand together." Douglass points out the un-Christian lack of awareness that slaveholders have in understanding their participation in a system that condemns a group of people to a despairing and inhumane existence. He makes his point clear when he explains how many of the pious slaveholders are more than willing to donate money and pray for those who live in other parts of the world. However, they do little to bestow any spiritual or material generosity on those whom they own. He ends the appendix with a parody of a church hymn. It depicts in gruesome fashion the incongruity of southern Christians who appear to be pious but have little moral courage or stamina to end an elitist system that benefits only slaveholders.

Preface

Preface Summary

This preface, being one of two prefaces to this piece, was written in 1845 by William Lloyd Garrison, a well-known abolitionist. Mr. Garrison was best known for publishing an anti-slavery newspaper called *The Liberator* from 1831 to 1865, before, during and after the Civil War. In this preface, Mr. Garrison describes a speech he heard at an anti-slavery convention he attended in August of 1841, four years earlier, in Nantucket, Massachusetts. The speech was given by an escaped slave by the name of Frederick Douglass, who wrote a narrative of his life as a slave, which follows this preface. Garrison describes the emotions that were provoked among the crowd at the convention by Douglass's speeches, including Garrison's own hatred of slavery which was stirred by seeing Douglass and realizing what slavery has done to him.

Garrison goes on to describe the demeanor of Douglass as he spoke at the convention, as well as Garrison's own comments to the convention crowd after Douglass concluded his speech. Those comments made to the crowd focused on the eloquence with which Douglass had spoken, the risks that Douglass had taken, and a stirring call for the crowd to support the fight against slavery.

Next, Garrison describes ongoing efforts by himself and others to encourage Douglass to become an active participant in the anti-slavery movement and Douglass's transition from being uncertain and self-doubting to becoming a confident, eloquent public speaker against slavery.

Garrison then departs from the subject of Frederick Douglass and focuses momentarily on a discussion of the evils of slavery, including his quotation of a story from another abolitionist, Daniel O'Connell, describing in detail the life of an American sailor who was ravaged by being held as a white slave in Africa for three years.

Garrison returns to the subject of Douglass again, with observations about the credibility of Douglass's written narrative of his life, in light of the fact that it was written without assistance and with very little education. He also refers to the horrors of slavery experienced by Douglass as referred to in the narrative. Garrison takes this opportunity to launch into a sermon on the evils of slavery, and a description of some of the specific atrocities inflicted on Douglass and other slaves. He then concludes his preface to Douglass's narrative with his own call to arms, to ignite passions to the fight against the evil slaveholders.

Preface Analysis

Garrison's preface to the narrative of Frederick Douglass is unusual in that the substance of the preface is larger in scope and importance that the work it precedes. Typically, a preface shows deference to the related literary work. Although Garrison

praises Douglass throughout, it is made clear that the escaped slave, Douglass, is just one of many participants in the fight against slavery. In fact, in later years, Garrison and Douglass actually developed a permanent rift between them concerning the effect of the Constitution on slavery, and were never again reconciled.

This preface must be considered against the historical backdrop in which it is stated. At the time it was written, Garrison has been at the anti-slavery effort, including publication of this anti-slavery newspaper, for about 18 years, but it will be another 16 years before the Civil War starts. His utter dedication to the anti-slavery cause will become evident as he continues to publish over 1,800 issues of his anti-slavery newspaper, *The Liberator*, during the course of 35 years.

In his preface, Garrison builds up Douglass as a bigger-than-life icon of the abolitionist movement. His eloquent public speaking style shows through in the sermon-like qualities of his writing. In the first part of the preface, he attempts to whip the reader into a religious fervor as he uses punctuated repetition to drive home his points.

Throughout the preface, Garrison demonstrates the heavy-handed use of complicated language which was common to public speaking of that period, for the purpose of adding an air of eloquence and sophistication to what was written. He refers to the slave's "thraldom," the reader's "unfeigned diffidence," and the "calumniators of the colored race." However, even today when such language is outdated, his words are still effective in stirring one's emotions against the atrocities of slavery.

Garrison's preface effectively builds Douglass up in the mind of the reader, so you feel he is bestowed with almost a saintly integrity before you read the first words of his narrative. Garrison accomplishes this by relating his own emotions as he stood there in the convention and observed Douglass before the crowd, a man with "commanding stature," rich intellect, natural eloquence, and "created but a little lower than the angels."

He then slaps the reader in the face with the ugly contrasting effects of slavery, which has caused such a person to become a fugitive, trembling in fear for his safety, without hope of finding a single friend among the white race.

Garrison also must have been acutely aware that many people of that period would be offended by any apparent arrogance or outspokenness on the part of a former slave. He counteracts such preconceived notions by going to great lengths to describe details of Douglass's demeanor and presence at the convention, demonstrating Douglass's humble nature and lack of self-centeredness. He takes care to describe how Douglass was hesitant and embarrassed as he approached the speaking platform, and refers to his apparently sensitive mind.

Overall, Garrison's preface takes on the style of a religious sermon, referring to how he stirred the convention crowd to exhortation in response to his rhetorical questions. You can almost imagine the shouting mass of people at the convention as he asks in a loud voice if they will protect their "brother-man," and they scream "YES" in reply. Garrison continues his sermon-style exhortation against the evils of slavery in the present tense

by asking the reader for sympathy for the "down-trodden victims" of slavery, balanced against fear of otherwise becoming a "foe of God." He brings his sermon to a final climax by screaming in all caps, "NO COMPROMISE WITH SLAVERY! NO UNION WITH SLAVEHOLDERS!"

Although today we see right through the heavy-handed style and overstated emotionalism that was common to literature of Garrison's day, you can still sense the religious fervor with which he pursued the fight against slavery. He was successful in painting Frederick Douglass as a monumental icon representing the abolitionist movement. In this, his preface to Douglass's narrative successfully achieves its purpose.

Second Preface

Second Preface Summary

This second preface to the Douglass narrative, following the Garrison preface, is actually a letter which was addressed to Frederick Douglass by Wendell Phillips, who was a famous anti-slavery orator (speaker) of the day. Phillips begins by pointing out that the public has mainly heard the story of slavery from slaveholders, and that it is good that they are finally hearing the truth from former slaves like Douglass.

Phillips then sidetracks into a description of the type of character required for someone to be an abolitionist. He mentions the fact that some people, before deciding to support the emancipation of slaves, wanted to be satisfied that the slaves would be productive if they were emancipated into society. They wanted to see the results of the "West Indies Experiment," which was an experiment to see if freed slaves were just as productive as captive slaves were. Phillips points out here that, although the experiment showed that freed slaves were just as productive, these results did not cause a large number of people to join the anti-slavery movement. He makes the point that a person who is to truly become a lifetime abolitionist, must not base their position merely on whether slaves can be productive when freed, or on the physical horrors of slavery. A true abolitionist must base his position on a greater foundation.

Phillips clarifies what this foundation must be, by turning to the perceived thoughts of Frederick Douglass himself. Phillips observes that Douglass saw the primary wretchedness of slavery, not in the obvious deprivation and abuse of slaves, but more so in the spiritual "death which gathers over his soul."

At this point in his letter, Phillips stops to point out how remarkable it is that Douglass has revealed that slavery is just as ugly and evil in places like Maryland where Douglass came from as it is in states further South. This is apparently in contrast to the common perception at the time: that the conditions of slavery were worse in the southernmost states.

Next, Phillips attests to the credibility of Douglass and his narrative. He points out that Douglass is believable because Phillips and others have come to know his character over many years, and his descriptions of slavery are clearly fair and unbiased, since they do not consist solely of complaints. At the same time, Phillips points out that the atrocities described by Douglass in his narrative are not the exception, but are the norm for slavery.

Phillips reminds the reader of the dangers involved in openly exposing the truth about slavery. He reveals that when he first read the writings of Douglass years ago, he was frightened and did not even want to know Douglass's name or birthplace, for fear of reprisal. Even now, he indicates that it is still risky in Massachusetts for someone to

speak his or her true mind about slavery. He compares Douglass to the original drafters of the Constitution who also took great risks to stand up for what they believed in.

At the same time, Phillips assures Douglass that there are many abolitionists who are willing to protect him and hide him, even if it means breaking the law. He reflects at what a shame it is that doing the right thing is against the law. Eerily, he seems to accurately predict the Civil War by speculating that anti-slavery statutes will become reality. He encourages Douglass to keep up his efforts until the day when escaped slaves will no longer have to hide, and their freedom will be openly proclaimed, turning Massachusetts into a refuge similar to that which was sought by the Pilgrims when they first came to this continent.

Second Preface Analysis

This letter from Wendell Phillips is truly remarkable. He was handsome and imposing; a successful lawyer; and the son of the mayor of Boston. One wonders why such a man, with the whole world at his feet, would risk it all by openly preaching anti-slavery at a time when such views had caused many to be shunned by society, and even worse - murdered. With this in mind, the reader is left with no doubts about Mr. Phillips's abolitionist convictions.

In the opening lines of Phillips's letter (preface), he effectively uses the analogy of comparing slaves in reality to lions in the fable of "The Man and the Lion." The obvious meaning is that the condition of slaves has not been accurately represented in history, because the story has been written by the slaveholders. Likewise, the lion in the fable points out that the reputation of lions may have been quite different if history was told by lions rather than men. However, Phillips's analogy is also remarkable because it makes another less obvious comparison, comparing slaves to animals. This tends to underscore the view of slaves that was typically common to slaveholders.

Phillips's description of the characteristics required of an abolitionist might seem at first like a job description for someone wanting to join the cause. However, it is more than that. It's an insight into Phillips's own passions and motivations that drive him through a lifetime of anti-slavery support. You can sense his spiritual fervor as he refers to the slaves as "God's children." He paints an impression with his words of the contrasts of good and evil, as he reminisces about how Douglass, as a child, must have observed the big, beautiful white sails of sailing ships leaving the Chesapeake Bay, with white symbolizing goodness. The reader is left with a sickly feeling here, realizing that those beautiful white sails, like a twisted perversion of goodness, were carrying the slave ships that would capture black children like Douglass from their homeland, to imprison them and bring them back to a life of despair and hopelessness in slavery. The spiritual foundation of Phillips's anti-slavery convictions are punctuated by his comparison of the Mississippi Valley to the "Valley of the Shadow of Death" referred to in the Bible.

The battle lines of the anti-slavery movement, which would soon turn into actual battle lines in the Civil War to come, are drawn by Phillips here. He refers to the "twilight" of

civil rights found by escaped slaves who reach the North, illustrating that freedom is there, although it is just starting to shine through the darkness. On the other hand, he describes the "noon of night" found below the Mason-Dixon Line, in the South. This dramatic visual carries an effective double meaning. "Noon of night" is an old expression referring to midnight; and midnight is also sometimes defined as "deep or extended darkness or gloom," a chilling reminder of the lifetime of hopelessness awaiting slaves in the Deep South. In fact, according to Phillips, the "pampered" life of a slave in the rice fields of the South is worse than the life of a half-free black person in the North. With the single term "half-free," Phillips quickly reminds us that even if a slave is "free" because he escapes to the North, his freedom is not statutorily legal and he won't truly be free until the federal laws are changed. As Phillips puts it, "The whole armory of Northern law has no shield for you."

When Phillips expresses the dangers and risks of openly expressing anti-slavery views, an understanding of the context of Phillips's experience can make the reader realize why Phillips feels this way, and can help the reader experience the full impact of Phillips's fears. His "trembling" he describes when he first read Douglass's open and honest descriptions of his life in slavery might at first be written off as overly dramatic. However, a study of history reveals that Phillips had every reason to be in fear of his life as an abolitionist. Phillips, as a Boston lawyer, once watched from his office as an angry crowd grabbed William Lloyd Garrison, while he was appearing for an anti-slavery speech, and dragged him away to be lynched (fortunately, he was rescued). Phillips then observed a local pastor who printed publications denouncing slavery having his offices and printing presses destroyed, and eventually being murdered in cold blood. Making matters worse, when Phillips decided to stand up against these atrocities, he was met by law enforcement officials who were determined to do nothing about it. When Phillips says he trembled while reading what Douglass had to say, it was no exaggeration. Being aware of this history, the reader suddenly views Phillips's letter not just as a simple preface to a narrative, but a bold act by a man determined to risk his own life to support an escaped slave who is willing to speak against injustice.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Frederick Douglass begins Chapter 1 of his narrative the same as many books, with some personal biographical details. He states that he comes from the city of Tuckahoe in Talbot County, Maryland. However, he points out that, like all slaves, he has been given very little information about his own age, and has had to guess it. He describes how most slaves merely know that they were born around certain seasons like "harvest-time." Douglass relates how awful it was to realize that all of the white children knew their exact ages and could discuss it openly, while he was kept ignorant of his own and wasn't allowed to even bring it up. He estimates that he is now 27 or 28 years old, from what he's been able to piece together from his master's statements.

Douglass states the names of his mother and her parents and the rumor that his father was a white man, and perhaps the very man who was his master. He describes the ruthless tradition he experienced, whereby slave children are separated from their mother before they are one year old, with the mother being sent away to a distant farm to work, apparently to destroy the natural bond between mother and child. Douglass reveals that he only saw his mother four or five times during his life, and only then at night when she walked twelve miles in the dark to see him under risk of a severe whipping. At about age seven, he learned of her death from illness after she was already buried. Sadly, having had no normal relationship with her, he felt little emotion.

Douglass confesses that not knowing whether his master is also his true father is not that important to him. Of greater importance is his disgust at the common practice whereby slaveholders satisfy their lust with slave women, bearing children with them, and thereby also enriching themselves with the additional slaves they've produced in the process. The problem that results for slaves born in this way is that the slaveholders' wives despise such children, for the obvious reason that seeing such children would constantly remind the wives of their husbands' adultery with the slave women. As a result, these children in particular were usually subjected to unusually harsh punishments and harassment by the slaveholder wives, and the husbands were faced with having to sell off their own children so they would not have to continue to witness their wives' torment and the physical abuse of their own flesh-and-blood. In an extremely intelligent observation, Douglass knows that this practice is gradually mixing black and white blood, and will continue to the point where the lines between white slaveholders and black slaves may become blurred and indistinguishable.

He moves into a description of his own masters and provides gruesome details of the torture they subjected certain slaves to. His first master, Captain Anthony, delegated responsibilities to an alcoholic, savage overseer, Mr. Plummer. Graphic descriptions are given of the splattering blood and horrible screams of the slave women as they are continually and violently beat by both men on various occasions. Douglass describes a particular beating of the slave Aunt Hester. Although she was allegedly beat for

disobedience, it is implied that the real reason may have been the master's jealousy at having found Aunt Hester with a male slave.

Douglass admits his shock at witnessing all of this, having been previously sheltered in an old woman's care at a far part of the farm, unaware of the atrocities that were commonplace nearby.

Chapter 1 Analysis

It is fascinating that Douglass, a slave who has been subjected to harsh conditions and cruel punishments, chooses something as simple as his age to be concerned about. In a way, the reader gets the feeling that his age is not what's really important here. Instead, his age is almost symbolic of a bigger void in his life. Not knowing his age is just one small example of his total loss of identity. He seems to be an observer on the sidelines of life, watching the white children who are confident in their own identities, and who can openly celebrate their own birthdays. The reader's heart aches for the youthful Douglass, as he stands bewildered at why he's any different from the white children. His observation that most slaves can only remember that they were supposedly born around times like, "planting-time, harvest- time, cherry-time, spring-time, or fall-time" underscores the sad reality that the slave's only personal identity lies in their work in the fields.

Like any good novel, Douglass's narrative begins with descriptions of his mother and her parents. However, unlike the round and dynamic characters of most novels, it soon becomes clear that these characters will remain flat and static, their true identities having been suppressed by the prison of slavery.

Douglass strikes a balance between telling the broader story of the plight of slavery, and constantly shifting to a narrower point of view by illustrating that plight with flashbacks to particular occurrences within his own family. For example, he bemoans the grotesque practice whereby slaveholders separate slave children from their mothers at birth. While the terrible effects of this are sensed by the reader, the wrenching emotional and spiritual devastation caused by destroying families in this way does not really hit home with the reader until Douglass narrows his point of view to a description of his own mother's longing for her child.

When he describes his mother walking twelve miles in the dark, and risking a bloody beating, just to lie next to her son for a short while, you can almost feel her tears welling up in her eyes as she realizes that she will never experience a normal mother-child relationship with her son. Her hopeless desire for the love of her son suddenly collides with the shocking reality of their alienation when the reader hears Douglass confess that he felt no sorrow upon learning of her death. The reader is left amazed at the fact that all of those late-night visits, when his mother lay by his side had no impact whatsoever on the young Douglass, as she had hoped. Apparently, her brief attempts to show him her love, at her own great personal expense, were sadly in vain.

Ironically, Douglass seems to move on beyond the mention of his mother's death without skipping a beat. In fact, he seems more perturbed at the fact that she failed to reveal his father's identity before her death than at the fact of her death itself. Once again, this brings the reader back to the consistent underlying theme of the slave's loss of identity as the primary travesty here, surpassing even the tragedy of death.

Douglass brings tension to his narrative as he describes the complications that entangle the slaveholder families as a result of their sins. Their lust and adultery result in a generation of children fathered by masters with black slave mothers. Their greed encourages them further, as they are able to profit financially from this new generation of slaves they have fathered. Further conflict then arises between masters and their white wives, jealous of their husbands' adulterous relations with the slave women. Inevitably, jealousy leads to violence against these mulatto (part black, part white) offspring. Ironically, the self-induced punishment for the masters is that they find themselves suddenly torn by multiple conflicts. They choose to silently watch as their wives abuse the master's own mulatto children, afraid to object because to do so would be an admission of their adultery. They choose to let their wives suffer silently, constantly reminded of their husband's lustful sins by the mulatto children around them. The masters heartlessly sell off their own children to abusive slave-traders, just to appease their wives and remove the problem from their sight. Whatever the choice, Douglass's narrative seems to describe a rising action toward a final sense of justice. The pain of the irreconcilable conflict that the slave masters have brought upon themselves seems the right price they should pay for the atrocities they have committed upon Douglass, the slaves, and the masters' own families.

This tension is also mixed with a sense of irony. Douglass points out that a justification used by some people for condoning slavery is that the Bible implies that the descendants (blacks) of the biblical character Ham were cursed by God. It could be argued, then, that they can be rightfully enslaved. Ironically, though, this enslavement has led to a generation of children with mixed black and white blood, making it impossible to distinguish the cursed descendants of Ham (blacks) from others who were outside the Ham lineage (whites).

Chapter 1 of the narrative reaches a climax with the suspense and sensationalism of Douglass's vivid and detailed descriptions of the physical torture of the slave, Aunt Hester, and others. The visuals are overwhelming, such as when Douglass says the master would not quit whipping the bloody back of his aunt, "...until overcome by fatigue, would he cease to swing the blood-clotted cowskin." He employs devices of sound to add to the horror of the scene, such as the "heart-rending shrieks" of his aunt. He rounds out the mixture of senses with tactile sensations, and you can almost feel the "warm, red" blood, as he describes it. Douglass, although he is a former slave, has done a remarkable job of pulling together all of these literary elements to help the reader experience his fear as he hid himself in a closet and, "dared not venture out till long after the bloody transaction was over."

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

In Chapter 2 of his narrative, Douglass turns his attention toward a detailed description of his first masters and the farms where he lived and worked during two years of his childhood. This was where he witnessed the atrocities described in Chapter 1. There were more than twenty farms which were all owned by the slaveholder, Colonel Edward Lloyd. He lived on the main farm, referred to by the slaves as the Great House Farm, which supplied all of the other farms. Each farm had an overseer, and there was a main overseer at the Great House Farm, Captain Anthony, who supervised all of the other overseers, and who was Douglass's first master. The place was on the Miles River, about twelve miles north of Easton, Maryland, where the slaves produced tobacco, corn and wheat which was taken to market in Baltimore on boats owned by Colonel Lloyd. The slaves who worked the boats were the envy of other slaves, because they got to see Baltimore on the frequent trips back and forth.

There were three or four hundred slaves at the Great House Farm, not to mention a lot of others at the outlying farms. Douglass describes how the Great House Farm served as the central location for the business management of all of the other farms, including circulation of advice, settlement of disputes, punishment of slaves and distribution of food and clothing.

Douglass provides a detailed accounting of the meager subsistence of the slaves. For food, adult slaves each got eight pounds of pork or fish and a bushel of corn meal to last them a month. Each working slave was given two shirts, two pants, one pair of stockings and one pair of shoes - this was their allowance for an entire year. Children who couldn't work yet were only given two shirts for the year, just to barely cover their naked bodies, and half-naked slaves were apparently a common sight.

Particular mention is made by Douglass of the suffering of the slaves caused by their lack of sleep. After working all day in the fields, there was barely enough time to wash and repair clothes and cook, especially since the slaves were given virtually nothing to do these things with. To make matters worse, Douglas explains that there were no beds, and the slaves had to huddle together on the floor to sleep, covered only by their "miserable" coarse blankets. After all of this, they were expected to jump up and run out to the work truck immediately when the overseer blew his horn the next morning, or they would be subjected to an immediate beating.

Douglass takes this opportunity to describe this overseer, known as Mr. Severe, including the pleasure he took in inflicting bloody beatings on the slaves, his evil cursing which lasted from morning to night, and his death, which was seen as a blessing to the slaves. Fortunately, his replacement, Mr. Hopkins, was less cruel.

At this point in the narrative, Douglass diverts his attention to the reputation of the Great House Farm among the slaves. It was very different from the other farms, with a more business-like air, as all of the mechanical operations serving the other farms were performed at this main farm. Douglass writes about the fact that the slaves actually held the Great House Farm in high esteem, and slaves would compete for the opportunity to work there.

Douglass also describes the significance of songs sung by the slaves on these farms. He points out how some people had mistaken the singing of the slaves as a sign of contentment, when it was really a way to ease their pain. So significant were these songs that Douglass admits that the emotional impact has stayed in his memory throughout his life.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter 2 starts with Douglass naming the members of his master's family. The reader must resist skipping by these references, thinking that it's just a simple recitation of names. A little more thought reveals some deeper significance here. Douglass has achieved two very important purposes by merely naming his master's family members. First, one must remember that his narrative was written at a time when being an escaped slave was a crime and when speaking openly about slavery was taboo. In this environment, a recitation of the true identities of members of a family associated with the atrocities being revealed by Douglass was a stunning act of public accusation by a slave. Secondly, and almost ironically, the fact that Douglass focuses on carefully describing the family relationships in his master's family, and naming the specific family members, seems as if Douglass was fascinated with analyzing the composition of a normal human family, wondering what it would have been like if he had one of his own.

Douglas mentions that his two years at this particular plantation were his first impressions of slavery. This makes the reader aware of an integral setting to Chapter 2, as the experiences he relates in this Chapter are cast against the backdrop of the particular impact such experiences must have had upon his innocent mind which had never been exposed to horrors like the realities of slavery before.

Once again, with this chapter Douglass invokes his preferred modes of expression, employing vivid sensory images to bring the reader into the plantation scene and make the reader touch, hear and see the daily hardships of slave life. He relates how the slaves, exhausted at the end of the day, would "drop" to the "cold, damp floor," and how the horrible cursing of the overseer could "chill the blood" and "stiffen the hair."

Douglass mixes odd contrasts within Chapter 2, highlighting the irony of slave existence. Amidst his illustrations of bloody beatings and intolerable sleep deprivation, he suddenly presents the reader with an unexpected view of the slaves' optimistic attitudes in anticipation of the enviable opportunity of working at the Great House Farm, as opposed to working at the other farms. It strikes one as odd that they would seek the approval of the very captors they despise, so they could gain the opportunity to work at

the Great House Farm and thereby they would be admired by their fellow slaves. It seems that Douglass's description of this competition mirrors a parallel, underlying theme. Perhaps the slaves, unable to experience the pride and self-esteem of achieving their dreams in a normal society, can at least experience the same pleasure vicariously by seeing themselves promoted into positions among the plantations which were desired by their fellow slaves. Sadly, this pride is only a momentary distraction from the reality that they are still slaves without freedom, in a world with no hope of real dreams ever coming true.

At the end of Chapter 2, the irony of this mixture of hope and hopelessness bubbles to the surface in the singing of the slaves. Douglas makes it clear that these songs are more than just simple music. What sounds like songs of contentment to the white slaveholders, are actually expressions of anguish and hopelessness to the slaves. In his early years, Douglass's lack of understanding caused him to assume the lyrics were just incomprehensible gibberish. However, with time, and with exposure to the evil face of slavery, he begins to understand, and the true meaning of the incomprehensible lyrics is finally revealed to him as the voice of the broken spirits of his black brothers crying out at the misery of their spiritual death. It's a sound that stays with him forever, and brings tears to his eyes even now.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

With this Chapter, Douglass shifts to a lesson on the luxuries of the slaveholder's life, beginning with the renowned garden owned by Colonel Lloyd. It was so big, and kept so "finely cultivated" that it required the services of a head gardener as well as four other men to maintain it. It contained fruits from across the country, and people traveled from all over the region to see it. The garden was so irresistible that the slaves were constantly caught stealing the fruit and were punished. The Colonel had tar put on the fence to mark and identify any slaves that tried to get into the garden.

Douglass goes on to describe the luxurious carriages, horses and stables belonging to Colonel Lloyd, and the father-and-son slave team whose full-time job it was to maintain these. So indulgent was Colonel Lloyd that he demanded perfection in the care of his carriages and horses, and the slightest imperfection or suspicion of imperfection resulted in the beating of the slaves. Douglass describes how the sons of Colonel Lloyd followed his example and were actually fond of frequently beating the slaves themselves.

Colonel Lloyd's wealth was also measured by Douglass's description of the number of slaves he owned, which was about one thousand, including his ten or fifteen house-servants. The Colonel had so many slaves, he didn't even know most of them, and was quick to trade any of them away like property when they unknowingly disrespected him in the slightest way. Because of this, the slaves learned to never say an unkind word to anyone about their masters. In fact, this practice even evolved into a competition among slaves, each demanding that their own master was better than the masters of the other slaves were.

Chapter 3 Analysis

In this chapter, it seems at first glance that the theme is the luxurious materialism enjoyed by the wealthy slaveholders at the expense of the slaves. However, there appears to be another underlying theme running through Chapter 3. In a unique twist of figurative language, Douglass presents a de-personification of the slaves. Whereas many literary works apply human-like characteristics to animals, Douglass's narrative applies animal-like characteristics to the slaves.

As Douglass describes the master's efforts to keep the slaves out of his garden, one is left with the feeling that the slaves are viewed more like wild animals or pests invading the garden, which need to be dealt with. Rather than motivating the slaves to stay away from the garden with a mixture of rewards and consequences, as might be used to motivate desired behaviors in most human beings, Douglas describes how Colonel Lloyd had tar put on the garden fences. He had slaves subjected to beatings who were

caught with tar on them, regardless of whether the tar actually came from the garden or not. This seems like an analogy to a farmer setting a wild animal trap, not caring about which animal might be caught or killed in the process. The slaves' response ironically serves to further the de-humanized character forced upon them, when they show the conditioned response of fear at the sight of any tar, whether it came from the garden or not. Such a conditioned response seems to be analogous to the conditioned response in science of Pavlov's famous dog, which begins to immediately drool at the ringing of a bell.

The theme of the de-personification of the slaves is continued in Douglass's description of the Colonel's obsession with the care of his carriages and horses by the slaves. Douglass tells of Colonel Lloyd's excessive focus on the minutest details concerning the appearance and performance of his horses, with severe beatings being doled out to the slaves when a horse may not seem to be holding his head high enough, or may not look just right. Describing how the Colonel placed his horses above the slaves in the order of priority in this way, Douglass shows us how the slaves were regarded as not only less than human, but also as less-respected creatures than even the domesticated animals.

When Douglass tells of the large number of slaves owned by Colonel Lloyd, and the fact that Colonel Lloyd had no qualms about trading any one of them away like a piece of property at his slightest whim, this underscores the de-personified view of the slaves portrayed in Douglass's narrative. At the end of the Chapter, the slaves are described as saying nothing but kind words about their masters, for fear of being traded away; and this practice eventually leads to an actual competition among the slaves, each claiming that their master is the best. Once again, their actions continue the theme of their own de-personification, and slavery has forced them to become like the master's dog which, being kicked for no reason, returns to the master with a loving, wagging tail. The reader is left with a realization of the true evil of slavery - the breaking of the human spirit, to the point that a person is de-humanized and made to live like an animal.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

At this point in his narrative, Douglass tells how the slaveholders were able to get away with just about anything in their mistreatment of the slaves, including murder. The Chapter begins with the less-onerous master, Mr. Hopkins, being replaced with the most-feared, heartless master, Austin Gore. Douglass makes the assumption that this change was due to the fact that Mr. Hopkins was not severe enough with the slaves.

Douglass describes Gore as being ruthless and violent in his punishment of the slaves. When he accuses a slave of something, the slave is not allowed to talk back, and is to be severely punished. If the slave is wrongfully accused, it's irrelevant to Gore. Gore is described as cold, heartless, and humorless, and he expects noting but strict and immediate obedience from a slave. Because of this, it is clear that he strikes fear into the heart of all of the slaves. In addition, Douglass describes him as ambitious and willing to do anything to increase his position in the eyes of Colonel Lloyd.

Douglass describes an occasion when a certain slave, Demby, ran away into the water while being beat by Gore. Gore ordered him to get out of the water on the count of three. When Demby refused, Gore counted to three and shot him dead. He told Colonel Lloyd that to do otherwise would lead to an uprising by the slaves, and Colonel Lloyd let the incident pass with no consequence. The legal authorities in the community did nothing either, especially in light of the fact that the only witnesses were slaves and slaves were not allowed to testify.

In another case of murder, Douglass describes how a certain Mr. Lanman killed two slaves, chopping one of them in the head with a hatchet. Once again, local authorities did nothing, even though Lanman was known to openly brag about the killing. Douglass also tells of a female teenager in his own family who was beat to death with a stick by a woman who caught her falling asleep while baby-sitting. An arrest warrant was issued, but it was never served, and nothing further was done. In another instance, a slave accidentally wandered onto the land of another nearby slaveholder, who proceeded to shoot the slave dead. The two slaveholder neighbors then got together and settled the matter privately between themselves, and no further action was taken. Douglass concludes this Chapter by quoting a saying passed along by white boys, trivializing the practice of murdering blacks in cold blood.

Chapter 4 Analysis

With this Chapter, Douglass seems to change his literary tone. So far, he has seemed like a fairly impartial observer of the atrocities committed by the slaveholders against the slaves. However, here his tone begins to show a hint of bitter disgust, which comes through in the form of sarcasm. In describing the arrival of the more brutal Mr. Gore,

Douglass facetiously describes Gore as, "a man possessing, in an eminent degree, all those traits of character indispensable to what is called a first-rate overseer." Douglass ridicules the two-faced nature of Gore, pointing out that, "He was just proud enough to demand the most debasing homage of the slave, and quite servile enough to crouch, himself, at the feet of the master." He also points out the contrasts in Gore's character, as he was able to violently injure slaves in one moment, and be cool and calm in the next.

Douglass turns his disgust also toward the local authorities who do nothing in reaction to the senseless murder of a slave by Gore. He places blame on them squarely when he says, "It was committed in the presence of slaves, and they of course could neither institute a suit, nor testify against him; and thus the guilty perpetrator of one of the bloodiest and most foul murders goes unwhipped of justice, and uncensored by the community in which he lives." Even as Douglass is now writing his narrative years later, he shows that the crime of this atrocity is still being perpetuated through continued inaction by the community. Douglass finally loses his temper and throws aside the inhibitions which have held him back from directly accusing local authorities of guilt in this matter. He states, "I speak advisedly when I say this,--that killing a slave, or any colored person, in Talbot County, Maryland, is not treated as a crime, either by the courts or the community."

Not only does Douglass change his tone with this chapter, but he also begins to repeatedly make use of a certain rhythm in his words which gives the reader the feeling of an ebb and flow, much like the tide going in and the tide going out. The effect is to underscore the inevitability of the consequences of any resistance by the slaves, just as it's inevitable that the coming in of a tide must be followed by the going out of it as well. For example, when the overseer Gore came into his new position, Douglass observes, "He was just the man for such a place, and it was just the place for such a man."

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

A change occurs with Chapter 5, where Douglass shifts from narrating as an observer to describing his own personal treatment as a slave. He didn't have to undergo the severe treatment that some slaves endured on the Lloyd plantation because he was still a child and, therefore, did not yet have to work in the fields. Instead, he merely had to tend some farm animals, do some yard work and run errands. He also performed as a retriever for Master Daniel Lloyd when he went bird hunting. This job was fortunate for Douglass because Master Daniel actually liked him, protected him and gave him food.

Although he didn't yet receive much beating, he did suffer from the bitter cold, especially since a child such as Douglass was only given a shirt to wear, and nothing else. With no bed, he slept on the clay floor in a corn sack, with his feet hanging out. As a result, the bitter cold left large gashes covering his feet.

For food, he was only allowed some mush, which was a mixture of corn meal and water. With no plates or spoons, he had to eat this mush from a trough, where he fought other children on the floor like pigs to get his share.

Douglass tells how he had an incredible stroke of luck when he was selected from among all of the children to be sent to live in Baltimore, to be assigned to the task of caring for a young child of Hugh Auld, a relative of his old master. Douglass was told that he must clean himself up before going to Baltimore. As he describes how he cleaned himself, the reader is told for the first time of the terrible condition of his body due to lack of hygiene. He describes scrubbing himself in the river where he had to scrape off "the mange" as well as his skin. He was elated at this point to receive his first pair of pants to wear. He felt no disappointment at all in leaving his home, and his own brothers and sisters with whom he felt no real relationship, his parents having both died earlier. He looked forward to going to Baltimore, his cousin Tom having described often how much better everything was there. Douglass knew he might still have to worry about beatings, but he really didn't care because it would be no different from what he would have to experience if he stayed behind at the Lloyd plantation.

It took about a day to sail to Baltimore, with a stop-off in Annapolis, the first big city he had ever seen. Upon arrival in Baltimore, Douglass had to first help drive some sheep they had carried with them on the boat, to a Baltimore slaughterhouse. Then they proceeded to his new home with the Auld family.

Douglass describes how he was uplifted and inspired when he met the Auld family at their home, especially by the sight of Mrs. Auld. Douglass had never had a white person be so kind to him, and he reveals that it caused a "rapture that flashed through my soul."

Douglass recognizes that this change in his life was the first step toward his freedom. He attributes his good fortune only to the divine providence of God, and admits that it was God's spirit inside him that always made him feel that he would one day break free of slavery.

Chapter 5 Analysis

From a literary perspective, Chapter 5 is obviously different from the previous chapters because of the shift in point of view from the third person to the first person. Now Douglass is focusing on himself, finally answering the nagging questions about his own personal conditions which the readers have carried in the back of their minds to this point. The chaotic nature of the slave life continues to be emphasized here by Douglass through the presentation of constant shifting contrasts. At one moment, he describes the unusual kindness of Daniel Lloyd, who protects and feeds him. In the very next sentence, the sense of momentary peace is disturbed by his statement that, "I was seldom whipped," implying with irony that just being whipped a few times was a good thing. Immediately, Douglass slaps the reader back to reality with the gruesome description of having to sleep half-naked in bitter cold without a bed, and he laments, "My feet have been so cracked with the frost, that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes." You can see that these memories are real to Douglass by the fact that he experiences a time lapse in his thoughts, as if he could take his writing pen in the present day, reach back in time and place it into the gashes that covered his feet back at the plantation.

Douglass continues his depictions of the de-personification of the slaves, as in earlier chapters, as he tells of fighting the other slave children at a trough on the floor like pigs for their daily allowance of mush.

Thankfully, a pleasing change of tone suddenly occurs at this point, when Douglass discovers that he is the lucky one who has been chosen to go to Baltimore to live, where he will care for the young Thomas Auld. In his excitement at the prospects of living in Baltimore, he excitedly scrubs himself in the river to clean off the disgusting filth that has accumulated on his skin. Here, Douglass claims that he scrubbed himself with great earnest, almost removing, "the skin itself," because he was anxious for his first pair of pants which Mrs. Lucretia had offered him if he got himself clean. But there may be a deeper, hidden meaning in the cleaning scene which Douglass himself does not even realize. His act of cleaning off "what would be called by pig- drovers the mange," could be seen as symbolic of his intense desire to wash away the filth of slavery that has accumulated over the years on his soul. Washing away the "mange" of a pig on his skin, may be his way of expressing that he was actually washing away the animalistic character that had been attributed to him at the plantation. In fact, when he admits almost being motivated to wash away "the skin itself," one has to wonder if he would have washed his black skin away, to have the freedom of a white person if he had the chance. All of this tends to foreshadow the freedom to come for Douglass and the fact that Douglass washing himself was not just an act of cleanliness, but was a significant transition into a new, promising life for himself.

Here, there is a sudden shift in Douglass's tone as he pauses to answer a question in the reader's mind, almost as if he sensed it must be there. Will he miss anything in his former life? His clear answer is "no." He describes his total lack of any emotional connection to either his brothers or sisters, or to the home where he has lived. The reader's heart sinks at the sudden realization of the true loneliness of slave life, where normal families are non-existent.

As Douglass sails for Baltimore, the astute reader becomes aware of a hint of flashback here. When Douglass, as a child, was imagined by Wendell Phillips in his preface to stare out at the white, billowing sails of the ships heading out the Chesapeake Bay, he was probably ignorant of the reality that those beautiful ships were setting out to capture more slaves and bring them to the plantations. Now, a new hope has emerged, as the white, billowing sails will instead carry Douglass to a life of new freedom.

As we leave Chapter 5, Douglass briefly points to a theme that is interwoven throughout his experience, although sometimes unmentioned - his belief that God has always protected him and encouraged him through the ordeals of slave life. The reader is left to wonder who instilled this belief in Douglas. Perhaps it was inspired by his mother before her death, or he learned it from the slave songs that were so inspiring to him. Wherever it comes from, these hanging questions leave us with an anxious desire to read on and learn more about the character of Douglass.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Douglass focuses here on the people and surroundings at his new home in Baltimore. He marvels at the kindness of Mrs. Auld, who goes as far as attempting to educate Douglass in the alphabet. She was uncomfortable if he acted in a servile manner toward her, as was required of slaves on the plantation, and she wanted him to look her straight in the eye. Douglass learns that this was all due to the fact that she had never had slaves before, since she ran her own successful business and never needed them. However, Douglass indicates that her kindness would soon be changed by the experience of owning a slave.

Douglass narrates how Mr. Auld scolds Mrs. Auld for trying to educate Douglass. Mr. Auld tells her that teaching a slave to read would cause the slave to become unmanageable and of no use to his master. It would also be unsafe, and against the law. Douglass saw this as a major revelation, and suddenly realized that keeping slaves from becoming educated was the white man's secret to controlling the black slaves. Realizing this, Douglass vowed from that point forward to do whatever he needed to do to learn to read.

At this point in Chapter 6, Douglass moves his attention to an observation of how different the treatment of slaves is in the city than it is in the country where he used to live. Slaveholders in the city would apparently be shamed if they were heard beating their slaves, or if they were observed not feeding their slaves properly. Douglass saw that city slaves were almost like free men. However, he did see exceptions, like the two female slaves across the street, who were always severely beaten, humiliated and starved, to the point that one of them would eat food in the street that was thrown there for the pigs.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Douglass may be enthralled by his mistress, Mrs. Auld, because she is symbolic of the elusive mistress of freedom, which he longs for. The mistress Auld had not yet had her soul polluted by the "fatal poison" of slavery that Douglass refers to, having been able to manage herself financially without slaves in the past. At first, she was a testament to the kindness that is natural for a human being who has not been tarnished with the taste of slave ownership. Unfortunately, this is short-lived, and Douglass foreshadows a coming change, when Mrs. Auld will be infected with the effects of slave ownership. He reveals that her cheerful eyes, sweet voice and angelic face, will soon be twisted into eyes "red with rage," a voice of "harsh and horrid discord," and the face of a demon. This foreshadowing leaves the reader with an anxious tension, wondering what this means, as Douglass moves on without providing further details at this time.

Suddenly, in a twist of fate full of irony, the solution that can finally free Douglass from his life of slavery presents itself. Douglass describes a seemingly innocent scene, in which Mrs. Auld is attempting to teach Douglass his alphabet. This would seem harmless at first glance, buy Mr. Auld becomes furious at learning of this and forbids Mrs. Auld to teach Douglass any further, stating emphatically that if she taught him to read, "It would forever unfit him to be a slave." Upon hearing this, Douglass realizes that being unfit to be a slave is exactly what he wants, because that is essentially saying he would be fit to be a free man. He is hit with the sudden realization that education is the answer to gaining his freedom.

The incredible irony here is that Mr. Auld, in seeking to stop the activity (education) that could lead Douglass to seek his freedom, Mr. Auld himself has actually taught Douglass that freedom is within reach, with education being the key. In a way, Mr. Auld has even already begun Douglass's education with this revelation. As Douglass put it, "I was gladdened by the invaluable instruction which, by the merest accident, I had gained from my master." With this key of education now being revealed to Douglass, a door to understanding is suddenly opened to him, and a flood of questions from his past life are now answered.

A parallel irony appears here in Douglass's description of how city slaves are treated differently than country slaves. The irony lies in the fact that the slaveholders in the city seemed to pride themselves in demonstrating to others that their slaves were cared for and well-fed, while they were blind to the shamefulness of the bondage they inflicted on their fellow human beings just because they were black. Douglass saw that, "[f]ew are willing to incur the odium attaching to the reputation of being a cruel master; and above all things, they would not be known as not giving a slave enough to eat." The implication here is that the city slaveholders exhibited a greater morality than the country slaveholders; while the ugly truth remains that they were all just as guilty of the sins of slavery. In contrast, another irony is that the most honest (although the harshest) of slaveholders seemed to be the Thomases who, rather than pretending, would openly torture and starve their slaves.

The reader is left with an overall conclusion in this chapter that the evils of slavery are always the same, no matter where they occur. The Baltimore slaveholders could pretend to have a higher morality as they maintained and fed their slaves. However, this is not enough to disguise the spiritual atrocities that slavery inflicts on its victims everywhere.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

With the revelation being made to Douglass in Chapter 6 that education was the key to his freedom, he then spends all of Chapter 7 describing how he proceeded to learn to read and write. Although Mrs. Auld had treated him kindly and had started to teach him the alphabet when he first came to live with her family, she had made a complete about-face after her husband had angrily warned her how dangerous it was to teach a slave to read. As Douglass tells it, Mrs. Auld did not just go along with her husband's wishes. She went a step further, and was even more aggressive in her efforts to prevent Douglass from learning to read, sometimes running at him to grab a newspaper or book out of his hands. Douglass describes how tenderhearted and generous she was when he first met her, but how "[s]lavery soon proved its ability to divest her of these heavenly qualities." Douglass points out that, although Mrs. Auld worked hard to prevent him from reading, it was too late - by having taught him the alphabet earlier, the first step had already been taken.

Determined to learn to read, despite the efforts of the Aulds to stop him, Douglass tells of various tricks he used to teach himself. He made friends with white boys in the street and began to learn words from them. He carried a book with him whenever he left the house to run errands; he would hurry to finish his errands quickly, to leave some reading time. Douglass would take bread from home and trade it to poor children in the street, in exchange for the words they could teach him.

Douglass was particularly intrigued by a couple of books he read, which presented both sides of the argument about slavery. He soon saw in these books, "the power of truth over the conscience of even a slaveholder." Douglass encountered a dilemma here because, the more he grew in understanding, the more he became incensed with hatred toward the slaveholders. This turned into an extreme discontentment, and Douglass began to see reading as a curse. As he puts it, "It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out." He almost wished that he was a blissfully ignorant slave again, and sometimes even contemplated killing himself.

Douglass mentions how he then became fascinated by hearing the word "abolitionist" mentioned whenever the topic of slavery came up. Soon he learned the meaning of this word, and came to realize that there were white men in this world who were willing to help slaves escape. However, slaves at the time could not travel without a pass from their masters. Douglass realized he would need a pass to escape, so he decided he would learn to write, as well as read, so he could write his own pass. As with reading, he began to devise various creative tricks to learn how to write. At the harbor, he studied the various letters marked on pieces of wood that were being laid out to build boats and soon, by practicing how to trace those letters, had learned to write several of them. He then used this knowledge to challenge other boys in the street to writing competitions, where he learned even more letters. Douglass would also practice with the spelling

copy-books which Master Thomas brought home from school, and which were left laying around the house while the family was away from time to time.

Douglass would practice by writing on fences, walls and pavement with lumps of chalk, in order to learn how to write. He concludes by confirming that he finally taught himself to write, although it had been a tedious process which had taken many years.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Douglass's use of irony throughout his narrative continues with Chapter 7. However, a sudden and permanent shift in the plot of his narrative has now taken place. The rhythm of his words in earlier chapters had shown the inevitability and hopelessness of the life of a slave. Now, although the momentum of Douglass's life towards a future conclusion is inevitable, that momentum has begun to move in his favor, rather than against him. This is the eventual inevitability of his freedom, which will be the direct result of his learning to read and write.

The continuing illustrations of irony by Douglass appear in several forms here. There is the hypocrisy of Mrs. Auld. She holds herself out as a caring and generous person. However, when she tries to keep Douglass "content" by keeping him ignorant, she is actually interfering with his ability to grow into a free and normal human being. The reader detects some sarcasm in Douglass when he gives Mrs. Auld a tongue-in-cheek compliment, pointing out that her mistreatment of him was not part of her natural tendencies, but had to be taught to her by her husband. In his words, "It was at least necessary for her to have some training in the exercise of irresponsible power, to make her equal to the task of treating me as though I were a brute."

Another of the ironies here is the fact that, when the efforts by whites to keep Douglass from reading were thwarted, it was mainly due to the assistance of the white families' own children, who were not yet schooled in the lessons of slavery. The very education that the white families had passed to their own children was the education that was passed on to the slaves as well. Likewise, the characteristics of caring for fellow men and generosity which the white families had taught to their children were the same characteristics which motivated the white children to help Douglass.

An irony that runs against Douglass in this chapter is the fact that the very education that he has sought for the purpose of gaining freedom has become a prison of torture for him. Now that his eyes have been opened by his new ability to read, it has only served to burden him with the painful awareness of his awful condition and the hopelessness of ever escaping from it. Fortunately, this suffering is only momentary, and he is saved from this prison by a single word - "abolitionist." The ironies shift direction in his favor once again. While the white slaveholders had printed articles about "abolitionists" in their efforts to keep the slaves imprisoned in their servitude, those same publications served to provide an education to Douglass about the efforts of abolitionists. Without this, he may never have realized that there was someone out there who might help him to escape.

With this knowledge, Douglass's hopes for freedom are once again renewed. The encouragement of knowing that there were actually white abolitionists out there who could help him escape, gave him renewed energy to pursue his freedom. This caused him to give willing consideration, when two Irishmen he met at the wharf encouraged him to flee to the North.

Throughout the chapter, the shifting plot as well as the ironies that work in favor of Douglas, then against him, then in favor of him again gives the reader a feeling of tension and uncertainty as to where the story will lead. Through these literary tools, Douglas effectively brings us to feel the real-life uncertainty he encountered moment-to-moment in his quest for education and the freedom that it would produce.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Douglass is caught off guard in Chapter 8 when he is suddenly called back to the place where he was born. This is due to the fact that his old master died without a will, so the master's property had to be valued so it could be split equally between the remaining heirs. Since Douglass was a slave, he was property, so he had to return to his birthplace to be valued with all of the other property. This made Douglass particularly angry, because he was more aware of the injustice of his confinement now that he was more educated. Douglass is now about ten or eleven years old in his narrative, and this was the first time he had been back to his birthplace since he was about five. Even so, he says he remembered the place very well.

Douglass says here that he saw the brutalizing effects of slavery more clearly at this point as he saw the slaves, young and old alike, were ranked at the same values as the farm animals. Then, the slaves were matter-of-factly divided for distribution to separate heirs, with no consideration for whether families were being torn apart by the division. To add to the slaves' trauma here, each of them was acutely aware that they were being divided to be turned over to one of two owners, with one of them being Master Andrew who was well known to be extremely violent and abusive, and a drunk who wasted his property away.

Douglass says he suffered more than the other slaves did at this point because he had known what it was like to be treated kindly, unlike the other slaves who knew nothing but mistreatment, and he had seen examples of Master Andrew's violence previously. Master Andrew had even implied to Douglass that he would treat him the same way if he ever gained ownership of him. Fortunately, Douglass was not turned over to Master Andrew, but to Mrs. Lucretia, so he ended up being sent right back to Baltimore to continue the life he had before, as if nothing had ever happened. His time away from Baltimore during all of this was about a month.

After Douglass returned to Baltimore, he notes that there were several subsequent deaths within the family of his old master, which caused the family's property, including the slaves, to eventually end up in the hands of strangers. Douglass describes the result as something that fueled his hatred for the slaveholders. As slaves were passed along as property by the slaveholders, there was no sense of any gratitude whatsoever for slaves who had devoted their entire lives to supporting and nurturing the slaveholder families. Douglass is especially troubled at the treatment of his elderly grandmother. He describes in great detail how his grandmother had raised and served the old master throughout his entire lifetime and her reward from the white slaveholders was to see her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren split apart and distributed away to strangers. To make matters worse, since she was too old to be useful any longer, she was relegated to a crude hut in the woods with a mud fireplace, where she would live out the rest of her years alone, bitter and heartbroken. Douglass illustrates her plight by

quoting a poem by Whittier, the slave's poet, which laments the anguish of the slaves as their loved ones are divided and traded away.

At this point, Douglass describes how he went through another separation. He was separated from Master Hugh when his brother Master Thomas had a disagreement with Hugh and decided to leave Baltimore and take Douglass to go live in St. Michael's. This separation was painful for Douglass. It was not so painful to leave Master Hugh, because he had become an abusive alcoholic and his wife was exhibiting the disastrous effects of slavery. Instead, Douglass was most pained by having to leave the white boys he had met in Baltimore who had helped teach him to read. Another regret he had in leaving Baltimore is that he had not yet had the courage to try to escape, and now that he was moving to the country, it would be harder to carry out. Even so, at the end of the chapter he states emphatically that he still intends to escape when he gets the chance.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Douglass transitions into a new theme with Chapter 8, which is the anguish caused among the slaves by the passing of generations and the realization that they are merely property to be handed down over the years, with no consideration for their contributions or value as human beings. Douglass finds himself unexpectedly thrown into a conflict of person-against-fate when he is suddenly whisked away from Baltimore to be inventoried as property in the valuation of a slaveholder's estate. Immediately, the reader realizes the tenuous nature of any hope in the slave life. It's disconcerting how easily the better life encountered by Douglass in Baltimore could be cut short at a moment's notice.

Within the overall theme here, we see a couple of other consistent threads of themes from previous chapters which continue to be intertwined in the narrative in Chapter 8. The de-personification of the slaves continues to be seen, as they are valued together with the farm animals, with the white slaveholders being oblivious to the fact that there could be any difference between them.

Another underlying theme which continues its thread from other chapters is the irony that Douglass's education is both a curse and a blessing. Here, as the slaves are valued and divided, Douglass's new-found education causes him to suffer even more with the realization of the injustice of what's happening. It seems as if he almost wishes he were blissfully ignorant again, like the other slaves, so the pain of the experience could be deadened. He had anticipated this while leaving Baltimore, as he thought, "I had now a new conception of my degraded condition. Prior to this, I had become, if not insensible to my lot, at least partly so." Likewise, Douglass's improved life in Baltimore would ironically now serve against him as another curse.

As he envisioned the cruel treatment he might receive if he ended up being given to the cruel Master Andrew, he realized that his Baltimore life would make him more sensitive to the pain of slavery than the other slaves. Douglass continually shifts between the theme of education and freedom as a blessing, and the contrasting theme of education and freedom as a curse. The effect is to inject the reader with the tension Douglass

must have felt as he was torn between wanting to be ignorant again, and wanting to be free. Perhaps he should give up, alleviating the increasing pain that his taste of freedom has brought him, or he should endure the pain as a small price to pay to be loosed from the bonds of slavery. As the tension builds, we see that Douglass's strong character shines through, and he resolves that he will not give up on his plan to be free.

Regarding the overall theme of this chapter - the anguish of the slaves as they are passed between the slaveholders - Douglass gradually narrows the point of view to take the reader into a magnifying-glass-view of the horrible suffering of the slave families as they are torn apart. He starts with a point of view in the corporate (group) first-person, when he observes the plight of all of the slaves as a member from within the slave group. As the slaves were divided, Douglass bemoans, "I have no language to express the high excitement and deep anxiety which were felt among us poor slaves during this time. Our fate for life was now to be decided. We had no more voice in that decision than the brutes among whom we were ranked."

Then, Douglass tightens the focus to his poor, old grandmother, as if to bring the reader in for a closer look at the heartbreak really occurring here. Douglass's desire for the reader to truly know the severity of his grandmother's pain causes him to pull the reader even closer still. His point-of-view slides from a second-party observation of her, into a first-person imagination of the suffering going on within her soul. He exposes her own thoughts, as he perceives them, while she lives out her days in her isolated hut. With this slowly narrowing point-of-view, Douglass has created a literary zoom-lens, forcing us to travel right into the thoughts of his grandmother, to the point that we feel her despair and almost have to look away because it's too painful.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Chapter 9 begins with Douglass living in St. Michael's, where he has just been taken to live by his latest new master, Thomas. Douglass indicates that he had been old enough to remember dates at this point in his life, because he's able to identify that he moved to St. Michael's in March 1832. Although Master Thomas had lived with Douglass when they were together on the old master's plantation, it had been over seven years since then, and they were now like strangers to each other. Douglass soon found that Master Thomas and his wife had turned into mean and cruel people over the years.

At this point in his life, Douglass begins to experience something new - extreme hunger. He reflects that he had times when he was hungry back at the old master's plantation, but now the hunger was ten times worse because he had gotten accustomed to being well fed when he lived with Master Hugh. As Douglass describes it, apparently one of the basic rules of decency among slaveholders was that no matter what, a slaveholder should always give the slaves enough to eat. Unfortunately, Thomas was one of the rare slaveholders that chose not to follow this rule. For four slaves, Thomas provided them only half of a bushel of corn meal per week (about the same quantity as a small mixing bowl). That was the only food they got. As a result, the slaves had to borrow and steal from neighbors to survive. At the same time, Master Thomas had plenty of extra food that was sitting around getting moldy in storage, and he didn't care if his slaves were starving.

Many slaveholders were mean like Master Thomas, but Douglass sees that Thomas is different. He's mean, but he's also a coward. Douglass can see that Thomas is acting out the part of a mean slaveholder, but it's awkward for him because he had come to own his slaves later in life, through marriage, rather than being accustomed to being a slaveholder since birth. As a result, he commanded the slaves to do things, but he didn't do it with consistency and firmness. The slaves sensed this awkwardness, and they lost respect for Thomas. Douglass writes that Thomas saw how the slaves lacked respect for him, but he wasn't sure what to do about it. The slaves wouldn't even call him "master"; he and his wife tried to force them to, but it was fruitless.

Douglass had some hope that things would get better when Master Thomas attended a Methodist camp meeting in August 1832 where Thomas "experienced religion" and supposedly had a spiritual conversion. However, Douglass's hopes were dashed when he saw that things just got worse. Douglass describes how Thomas became even crueler than before, because he was able to use religion to justify his cruelty in his own twisted way of thinking. Thomas became a religious hypocrite. He began an active prayer life, and even became a leader and preacher in the church. However, he continued to starve his slaves in the background while treating his church brethren to feasts. During this time, Douglass also describes how Thomas would tie up one of the young female slaves, beat her until she bled, and then leave her hanging like that from

early morning until late evening, when he would return and beat her again on top of the same wounds he had caused that morning. Douglass felt she was singled out because she had been crippled by a fire previously, so she wasn't as useful to Thomas anymore. In fact, Thomas eventually forced her to leave the plantation all alone, left to starve and die.

Douglass writes about how Thomas didn't like him, claiming that the city life Douglass had gotten accustomed to had ruined him as a slave. One of the worst things Thomas felt Douglass had done was when Douglass let Thomas' horse run away. However, Douglass admits to the reader here that he had let the horse go intentionally, because he knew it would go back to the farm of Thomas' father-in-law, where Douglass used to live and where he knew he would get plenty to eat when he went there to retrieve the horse.

Thomas finally got fed up with the problems with Douglass. He had whipped Douglass severely many times, but it didn't seem to change anything. Therefore, as Douglass writes, Thomas decided to lend Douglass for a year to a man named Mr. Covey who was famous for the ability to take an unruly slave and, after a year, break the slave into obedience. Douglass notes that this arrangement was a good deal for Covey because he was poor, and this allowed him to get the free use of a slave for one year to help at his farm. As Chapter 9 ends, Douglass states that he is less focused on worrying about being mistreated on Mr. Covey's farm, than he is on the hope that he might get more to eat while he is there.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Chapter 9, like previous chapters, continues the writing style of Douglass throughout his narrative, a style in which he has juxtaposed separate themes that run through his narrative simultaneously. For example, a new theme that we see for the first time in Chapter 9 is hunger. We have seen instances of hunger among the slaves in previous chapters, but it is not until Chapter 9 that hunger becomes the primary concern in Douglass's own life. It is almost as if Douglass's life story is a tour of the various forms of human suffering caused by slavery, and the latest stop on the tour in Chapter 9 is a close-up examination of the face of hunger. When Douglass describes the four slaves, with their specific names, and the fact that they were just given "half of a bushel of corn-meal per week" (the equivalent of a small mixing bowl), the reader can now imagine what little food that was, and can fully appreciate how bad the slaves' hunger must have been.

In addition to this new theme of hunger, another familiar theme is also seen to be continuing here from previous chapters - the theme of the poisonous effects slave ownership can have on good people. In Chapter 9, Douglass describes Master Thomas as one of the meanest and worst slaveholders of all, especially due to his practice of starving his slaves. The poisonous effect of slave ownership over the years on Thomas is clear.

Douglass displays some irony in his own opinions in this chapter. First, there it is ironic that Douglass has previously expressed an intense hatred for slaveholders and has accused them of stealing the souls of the slaves; and yet here in Chapter 9, he admits that they command a certain amount of respect in his eyes, a respect he finds lacking in Master Thomas. In a perplexing way, by pointing out the weaknesses of Thomas as a slaveholder, Douglass seems to be criticizing Thomas for doing a lousy job of abusing him. It's almost as if Douglass were saying, "If you're going to abuse me by making me your slave, at least do it right." The reader senses there that Douglass himself may be aware of the irony in his own attitude. Perhaps this is a self-revelation he is exposing intentionally to demonstrate how twisted his own thinking has become under the influences of slavery.

Douglass brings up another theme that has appeared previously in his narrative; the hypocrisy of the slaveholders. The hypocrisy in this scene is clear when Thomas goes through a religious conversion, and uses it as a justification to inflict even more abuse upon the slaves, starving and torturing them while he leads the church as a prayerful preacher and treats his church friends to bountiful meals. Douglass adds sarcasm for emphasis when he points out this hypocrisy. This occurs when Douglass describes how Thomas throws a young, disabled female slave off of his property to be left to starve to death, with Thomas stating that he had decided to, "set her adrift to take care of herself," instead of him having to continue her care. Douglass sarcastically mimics Thomas' opinion that he had provided care for the slave, describing it as an example of how his "benevolent master...was one of the many pious slaveholders who hold slaves for the very charitable purpose of taking care of them."

An irony that the reader can almost miss here is the religious connection with previous chapters. As Douglass describes it, slaveholders like Thomas apparently feel their actions are under the protection of God, even using specific Bible verses to justify themselves. Thomas quotes the Bible to say, "He that knoweth his master's will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes." This is reminiscent of Douglass's observation that slaveholders used the Bible to justify slavery when he wrote in Chapter 1 about their view that, "God cursed Ham, and therefore American slavery is right." The irony is that while the slaveholders feel God is on their side, slaves like Douglass feel God is actually on their side, blessing them and protecting them from the slaveholders. This is the case when Douglass, in describing his faith that he would eventually escape from slavery, remarks that, "This good spirit was from God, and to him I offer thanksgiving and praise."

Chapter 9 ends with the familiar elements of change-of-scene and surprise that are described by Douglass throughout his narrative. The scene changes as Douglass is sent to Mr. Covey for a "breaking" of his disobedience. Surprise occurs because the reader would expect here that Douglass would mostly be fearful of the cruelty to come in Mr. Covey's possession, but Douglass reveals that he isn't really concerned about it because he is overwhelmed by his hunger and the hope that he will be fed better at Mr. Covey's. This reminds the reader of the end of Chapter 5 when one would have expected Douglass to be fearful of mistreatment as he was taken away from the plantation to go serve the Aulds in Baltimore, but he surprisingly doesn't worry about

that because he is too focused on the better prospects that a new life in Baltimore promised. Just like that moment, Chapter 9 now ends with a sense of suspense, making it a certainty that the reader will want to know more.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Chapter 10 begins in January 1833 when Douglass goes to work for Mr. Covey. It was an awkward time for Douglass, because he was accustomed to living in the city, and now he was to work as a field hand on Covey's farm. Covey told him one day to drive a cart pulled by oxen into the woods to bring back firewood that had been chopped by Douglass. Because he had never used oxen before, Douglass lost control of the cart and oxen more than once. Although he was almost killed, he made it back with the firewood, but he damaged the cart and a gate in the process. As a result, he was subjected to a violent beating by Covey which left his back bruised and bloody. This became the first in a series of such beatings he was to receive while working for Mr. Covey.

Douglass now got plenty to eat with Mr. Covey, but he didn't get enough time to eat it. In fact, the slaves were sometimes required to work in the fields until midnight. To be able to supervise the slaves from early in the morning into the night, Covey would take a nap in the afternoon. However, the slaves couldn't slack off in the afternoon because sometimes Covey would sneak up and surprise them when they didn't know he was coming. In this way, he kept them working constantly because they never knew when he might appear. Douglass describes how Covey would even pretend to be leaving town, and then turn right around and come back just to keep the slaves off guard. Covey worked the slaves regardless of how bad the weather got. As a result of these conditions, Douglass admits that his spirit was finally broken, and he forgot all about his quest for freedom.

Not only was Covey deceptive about his whereabouts, but Douglass relates that he was also trying to deceive God. Covey would pray both morning and night, and would appear to be extremely devoted to God. However, at the same time he obtained a female slave and openly stated that he had her as a "breeder." Douglass observed that Covey committed the sin of adultery with the female slave to populate his farm with slaves, and he was apparently very pleased with the results.

The slaves were allowed to rest every Sunday, but Douglass admits that he was so exhausted he just spent most of his Sundays either sleeping or in a depressed stupor. Sometimes he would watch the sails of the ships on the Chesapeake and it just made him depressed because it reminded him of the freedom he couldn't have. He launches at this point into a quotation of his own poetic lamenting about his circumstances, as he would watch the ships in agony.

At this point in the narrative, Douglass goes to great lengths to describe the details of a series of events between him and Mr. Covey which were the turning point in his life as a slave, and the climax in his narrative. It began when he was "fanning wheat" with some other slaves and he suddenly became too sick to work. He was overcome with illness

and he fell to the ground. Mr. Covey found him, kicked and beat him, but Douglass couldn't get up, so Covey walked away and left him there bleeding. Douglass eventually managed the strength to walk seven miles to Master Thomas' farm for help, thinking that he was going to bleed to death along the way. Unfortunately, Master Thomas told him he would whip him if he didn't return to Mr. Covey's the next morning, so Douglass had to go back the next day. Douglass describes the details of his encounters at that point with Mr. Covey, which culminated in his fighting Mr. Covey for two hours straight and winning, so that Covey was unable to subdue him. Douglass saw that Covey was afraid of him after this, and he was never beat by Covey again over the next six months that he stayed there. In fact, this was a turning point in Douglass's entire attitude. His desire for freedom was newly energized by this victory, and no one dared to try to beat him again after this. Douglass was puzzled that Mr. Covey never complained about this incident to the authorities, but Douglass speculated that it was because Mr. Covey didn't want anyone to know a slave had beat him, in which case his profitable reputation as a slave-breaker would be ruined.

Douglass's term of service to Covey ended on Christmas Day 1833, when slaves were traditionally allowed to take a holiday from Christmas to New Year's. Although this seems like a kind gesture, Douglass ridicules this practice because he felt the slaveholders intentionally encouraged the slaves to stay drunk during this holiday, so they would only remember the holiday as a depressing time of drunkenness, and would almost be happy to return to work at the end of the holiday. Douglass describes it as a fraud perpetuated on the slaves, much the same as forcing a slave to eat molasses non-stop until he was ill, just because he asked for some molasses.

After the holiday, Douglass was hired out to a Mr. Freeland who lived about three miles from St. Michael's. Douglass describes Mr. Freeland as open and frank, and did not claim to be religious, which Douglass saw as a good thing since he felt that slaveholders simply used religion to cover-up the atrocities they committed. Friends of Mr. Freeland who claimed to be religious had the propensity to abuse their slaves. Douglass writes that working for Mr. Freeland was "heavenly" compared to working for Mr. Covey. He was given plenty to eat, with plenty of time to eat it, and work was limited to daylight hours. During this time, Douglass describes how he began to teach other slaves to read and began to teach a Sunday School for them. The slaves became the closest of friends as a result of this.

When the year 1835 arrived, Douglass finally decided to plan his escape from slavery along with the other slaves. They planned to take a canoe up the Chesapeake Bay and head north to freedom. Unfortunately, an unknown person leaked word of the plan, and constables arrived to arrest Douglass and others on the very day they were about to make their escape. Each of the slaves was released back to their owners and, although Douglass was afraid he might be sold to the slave-traders, his master, Captain Auld, suddenly showed up to take him and send him back to live with his brother, Hugh Auld, in Baltimore again. Captain Auld did this because he thought people in the area might try to kill Douglass because of the trouble he had caused among the slaves.

Douglass describes at this point, how Master Hugh hired him out to a ship-builder, William Gardner. Unfortunately, Douglass was assigned to assist seventy-five carpenters simultaneously, and he was constantly pulled back and forth by their demands. He tells how the problems climaxed when the carpenters suddenly went on strike, refusing to work with free blacks any longer because they were afraid they would take over their trade. A fight developed between Douglass and four white apprentices, with Douglass almost being beat to death. Master Hugh was furious at what had been done to Douglass, but he couldn't do anything about it because none of the witnesses would testify on behalf of Douglass. Therefore, Master Hugh sent Douglass to work at another shipyard instead, for a Mr. Walter Price. Here, Douglass describes how he did very well, learned new skills and made a lot of money for his master. Unfortunately, whenever things got better like this, Douglass points out that his longing for freedom would get worse. Douglass concludes this chapter with his observation that, even though his situation was much improved, it was still a travesty that his own wages which he earned through hard work all went to his master who did nothing to earn it. He compares it to being robbed by a pirate.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Chapter 10 is clearly the climax of Douglass's narrative, and is completely different than any of the chapters leading up to it. First of all, it differs greatly in volume of content. Chapter 10 uses more than 12,000 words to express that Douglass wanted to write, whereas most of the other chapters in his narrative averaged just over 2,000 or so words. This is not to say that the number of words is so important. The volume of writing in this chapter is simply significant because it shows that Douglass apparently needs to tell us so much in this chapter, it must be extremely important to him. Chapter 10 is the climax to Douglass's narrative, despite the fact that he doesn't escape to freedom until Chapter 11, because it is in Chapter 10 that Douglass's struggle with slavery reaches a head. Here, the person-against-fate conflict which he has lived with is brought to a breaking point, and he finally takes a stand and decides he is not going to take it anymore. When Mr. Covey continues his violent beatings of Douglass, Douglass starts to fight back and overpower Mr. Covey.

The reader will notice that previously Douglass has used certain chapters to focus on particular evils of slavery in detail, but he has always seemed to portray that the physical abuse of slaves was of secondary importance. For example, in Chapter 1 he focuses on the slaves' loss of identity, illustrated by the fact that none of them knows their true age. This seemed to take priority in his view over the physical abuse of slaves that is going on in the background. Likewise, in Chapter 5, Douglass describes how the terrible living conditions of bitter cold, and so little food that slave children had to fight each other for a turn at a trough of mush on the floor, were much more pressing than any fear of physical abuse. However, in Chapter 10 there is a significant change of theme because the physical abuse of slaves, which has been an underlying theme of secondary concern in previous chapters, now comes to the forefront as the primary conflict which finally forces Douglass to confront his oppressors. The severe beatings by Mr. Covey are the last straw that causes Douglass to fight Covey and set his mind to the

fact that he will never allow someone to beat him again. More importantly, this signifies a turning point as he has decided to actively rebel against slaveholders in general. He writes, "This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again with a determination to be free." This single thought is the climax of the entire narrative.

Even with the new theme in Chapter 10, Douglass still maintains the underlying theme of religious hypocrisy at the same time. As abusive as Mr. Covey is, he still maintains the belief in his own mind that he is devoted to God. Douglass observes that Covey was not only good at deceiving the slaves by sneaking up on them to surprise them, but Covey also, "seemed to think himself equal to deceiving the Almighty." As in previous chapters, Douglass points to the ironies of the slaveholders' religious beliefs.

Covey's religious hypocrisy is further displayed by Douglass when he notes that the slaves were given a holiday on Sunday, the Sabbath, as if seeking obedience to God while holding their fellow man prisoner at the same time. Another example appears when Douglass describes how Covey was out to beat him for running away, then acted nicely when it was Sunday, and then commenced again to try to beat him when Monday morning came. According to the consistent theme of religious hypocrisy which Douglass has woven through the stories of all of the slaveholders he worked for throughout his narrative, it is clear that this is one theme that pervades through all of a slave's life.

In Chapter 10, Douglass pauses for a fascinating flashback that serves to tie the latter part of this narrative with the earlier parts. This occurs when he once again stares out onto the Chesapeake Bay at the white sails of the ships heading out to open water. His feelings at this point are like a collage of the different emotions he has felt when pondering his dreams of freedom throughout the years. The reader will recall here the implication by Wendell Phillips in his preface to Douglass's narrative, that Douglass must have viewed the beautiful white sails of ships leaving Chesapeake Bay, not knowing the evil cargo they were to bring back. This contrasts with the images of Chapter 5 when an older Douglass saw the white sails on the Chesapeake as his salvation, when he sailed to a new life in Baltimore. Now, in Chapter 10, there is a stark contrast when he views the white sails with an agonizing sense of depression at the hopelessness of his dreams for freedom.

The effect of this flashback is to make the reader feel the anxiety caused by Douglass's uncertain dreams of freedom that have always been there, no matter what his circumstances. At this point, Douglass is so overwhelmed with emotion, he breaks into a poetic singsong that seems to spontaneously erupt from within him, and the reader is suddenly reminded of the slave songs he heard in Chapter 2.

When Douglass leaves Mr. Covey's service to begin the Christmas holidays, a period when the slaves were allowed to take a holiday from their work, Douglass pauses here to focus on the theme of the hypocrisy and irony of this holiday period offered to the slaves. At first glance, it would seem to the reader that it must have been an unusual kindness by the slaveholders to allow the slaves a holiday. However, Douglass reveals

the hypocrisy of the fact that the slaveholders simply used this time as a sort of relief valve to keep the slaves from revolting, and had no intention that the slaves truly enjoy their holiday at all. Douglass tells how the slaveholders encouraged the slaves to overindulge in alcohol so that their holiday was spent in a state of drunken depression, making it seem like a blessing to finally return to work at the end, thinking that their kind masters had given them some "freedom."

This idea, that the "freedoms" offered by slaveholders were no real freedoms at all, is the final concluding thought with which Douglass ends Chapter 10. At the end of the chapter, although his circumstances have improved greatly and he enjoys all of the trappings of a free man (learning a skill, working at a respectable job, earning a fair wage), he realizes the injustice that still remains in the fact that his wages must be paid over to his master.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

In Chapter 11 Douglass describes his final escape from slavery and the early months of his life as a free man. He makes it clear initially that he has no intention of providing too much detail about the exact way in which he made his way from the South to the free states of the North, because it might make it harder on slaves who still might be trying to escape. He criticizes others who are publicizing details of slave escape routes like the well-known Underground Railroad; he feels they are hurting slaves' chances of escape and putting slaveholders on the alert.

In early 1838, Douglass became so troubled by the fact that his master would take all of his hard-earned wages that Douglass decided to finally run away from slavery at his first chance. To improve his opportunities of escape, he got the idea to ask if he could hire himself out on his own, rather than his master deciding where he would work. Master Thomas refused, but when Douglass later asked Master Hugh, he agreed. He offered a hard bargain under which Douglass was required to pay him a fixed sum of money weekly, whether Douglass got work or not; but Douglass agreed to it, because he thought it was a better deal than what he currently had. Douglass began working hard, day and night, and continued this from May until August. Then, when he was a few days late on his weekly payment to Hugh one time, and failed to tell Hugh when he went out of town temporarily for a camp meeting, Hugh told him he was ending the arrangement. Douglass began to retaliate by not working, but then he decided to work hard and give Hugh his money each day so Hugh wouldn't be suspicious and Douglass would have a better chance of making his escape unnoticed. As he planned his flight to freedom, Douglass was overcome with the pain of thinking about leaving all of his friends in Baltimore, but he remained determined and finally, on September 3, 1838, he escaped to New York, a free state.

Douglass describes how he was elated to gain his freedom, but then became extremely insecure and lonely. He didn't know anyone in New York, and he couldn't trust anyone because there were lots of kidnappers who made money by catching slaves and taking them back to the South again. Fortunately, a kind abolitionist named David Ruggles took him into his boarding house, provided for him, and helped him plan to move on to New Bedford. Before leaving New York, Douglass met up with Anna, his intended wife, whom he had summoned, and they were married. They then traveled to New Bedford by steamboat with the help of strangers along the way. He and his wife were taken in by Mr. Nathan Johnson, who had been waiting for him to arrive.

At New Bedford, Douglass changed his name to Frederick Douglass from Frederick Johnson. He had previously changed his name to Johnson from Bailey, the name his mother had given him, but there were too many Johnsons in New Bedford.

Douglass was surprised to find that people in New Bedford were fairly wealthy and lived a comfortable lifestyle. He has assumed that they would all be poor since they didn't have any slaves. Nathan Johnson, for example, was a workingman but was better off than most of the Southern slaveholders. He was also surprised at how people worked quietly and cheerfully, without the sounds of cracking whips and cursing. The conditions of black people were a shock to Douglass, too, because they had accumulated some wealth of their own within a relatively short time.

Douglass found that blacks in New Bedford were vehemently determined to protect each other. When, as the result of an argument, one black man threatened to turn another black man over to the slaveholders, he was threatened with death by the blacks in the community and had to leave town.

Douglass found a job loading oil onto a boat after he had been in New Bedford three days. It was difficult work, but he didn't care because he was elated at the feeling of finally working for himself as a free man and not having to turn his wages over to a master. He took just about any job after that.

Soon Douglass learned of the anti-slavery newspaper, *The Liberator*, and subscribed to it. It was a tremendous encouragement to him with its anti-slavery articles. He became very familiar with the abolitionist movement and began to attend anti-slavery conventions. He was encouraged by some to speak at these conventions, but was at first timid about getting up and speaking in front of white people. However, as he describes in the final sentences of his narrative, after he spoke before the crowd at such a convention on August 11, 1841 in Nantucket, he gained confidence and thus began a career of pleading the case publicly for emancipation of the slaves.

Chapter 11 Analysis

This is the final chapter in Douglass's narrative, and in the first paragraph, we see the true character of Douglass. Now that he has gained the freedom, it would be expected that he would be tempted to share all of the details of his escape, especially since publication of his personal narrative could be very profitable for him. However, he shows us that another concern overrides his own possibility of profit -he does not want to do anything that might harm the chances of slaves who may still be trying to escape.

Even so, he uses this chapter to describe the events before and after his escape. In revealing the reasons that finally prompted him to make his flight to freedom, Douglass reveals a new theme that spills over from the previous chapter. This is the theme of his desire for self-determination. He complains that he must give the wages he earns to his master, when he writes, "I could see no reason why I should, at the end of each week, pour the reward of my toil into the purse of my master." He is focused on not being able to control his own earnings, but this is actually symbolic of his greater desire to be able to control his own destiny in general. This becomes the final straw that motivates him to run away, even though he had endured beatings, starvation and other atrocities which

weren't enough to finally make him flee. This shows the reader that one of the most important aspects of freedom is the determination of one's own destiny.

As Douglass draws closer to the moment at which he decides to make his final escape, he helps the reader to experience the intense conflict which is building within him. On one hand, he indicates that the pain of thinking about leaving his dear friends in Baltimore was excruciating. He writes, "The thought of leaving my friends was decidedly the most painful thought with which I had to contend. The love of them was my tender point, and shook my decision more than all things else." At the same moment, he struggled with the terrible fear of possible failure and the horrible consequences it could have on his life. The reader is relieved when Douglass resolves this conflict in favor of a decision to flee and he successfully escapes to New York.

Elements of surprise are interjected into the story when Douglass is suddenly faced with something he hadn't fully considered - what to do after he gains his freedom. He had thought about escaping for so long that he had failed to make plans for his free life. His relief of resolving his internal conflict just before escaping is now replaced with a new unanticipated conflict between his lonely desire to find someone he can trust for help, and his fear of falling into the hands of kidnappers who could return him to the slave life. The reader again experiences a sense of relief when this conflict is resolved by Douglass coming into contact with trusted friends in the form of the abolitionists like David Ruggles and Nathan Johnson who help him in his new life as a free man.

Here, it is symbolic that one of the first actions taken by Douglass as a free man is to change his name. More than being just a simple name change, the reader sees here that the new name is a symbol of Douglass's new identity, the identity of a free man who is now in charge of his own destiny. He has now found the lost identity which he lamented over early in his narrative, as he had described his pain as a child at realizing that all of the white children knew their ages and he did not.

The element of surprise continues as Douglass examines the new surroundings of his free life. He's astonished that Northerners are able to have a good life without slaves, and that people are able to actually work with a cheerful attitude, without being beaten or threatened. It is here that the reader suddenly realizes just how badly Douglass's understanding of human nature has been marred by the effects of slavery.

It is inspiring when the reader sees in the last paragraphs of the narrative how Douglass's newfound freedom finally blossoms. This occurs as his focus shifts from the narrow perspective of his own needs to the broader needs of slaves as a whole. He is at first intent on working hard at his job and earning money. However, he soon has his eyes opened further by reading the abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator,* and becoming more aware of the extent of the abolitionist movement. In the end, his quest for freedom produces fruit as he transitions from his personal concerns to a new life as a confident public speaker promoting the quest for freedom of his fellow blacks who are still held in the prison of slavery.

Characters

Master Andrew

Andrew is Captain Anthony's son, who is a wicked and merciless drunk that many slaves on Lloyd's plantation fear because he is so ruthless and cruel.

Captain Anthony

Captain Anthony is Douglass' first master and owns him until Anthony dies. Captain Anthony does not play a large part in the actual narrative, yet Douglass' life is thrown into disarray after Anthony dies, since he is bounced from one relative of Anthony to the next. Moreover, Douglass suggests early on that the captain may be his father. Douglass undergoes many hardships due to his owner's not providing for him, and thus he is at the mercy of Anthony's two children, Lucretia and Andrew, and their offspring.

Mr. Hugh Auld

Hugh Auld is the brother of Captain Anthony's son-in-law, Captain Thomas Auld. Beginning as a teenager, Douglass works for Auld for seven years in Baltimore, mostly taking care of Auld's son, Thomas. As slave masters go, Auld is less violent and more fair toward Douglass than many others he has worked under, yet Auld forbids his wife, Sophia, to teach Douglass how to read. He claims that education ' 'would forever unfit him to be a slave." Auld eventually and unwittingly provides Douglass the means of escape by hiring him out to ship carpenters.

Mrs. Sophia Auld

Mrs. Sophia Auld is a weaver by trade and married to Hugh Auld. She plays a significant part in Douglass' literacy acquisition by teaching him the alphabet. Unfortunately, she stops when her husband finds out and explains, "If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell." Afterwards, Sophia becomes cold and mean-spirited towards Douglass, treating him callously like other slave owners. Yet ultimately she proves to be the nicest of Douglass' many masters.

Master Thomas Auld

Thomas Auld is the brother of Hugh Auld, whom Douglass worked for in Baltimore, and the former husband of Lucretia, daughter of Douglass' master Captain Anthony. Because of a severe misunderstanding between the two brothers, Thomas Auld in spite takes Douglass to live with him for two years in St. Michael's, a rural part of Maryland.

These are the worst years of Douglass' life, as he endures extreme hardship, both physically and mentally. Auld is most known for keeping his slaves hungry.

Harriet Bailey

Harriet Bailey is Frederick Douglass' mother. Despite being separated from her son at his birth, Harriet attempts to see her infant son by walking twelve miles from the farm where she works as a field hand to stay with him for a few hours before walking back before sunrise. She dies when Douglass is about seven years old.

Edward Covey

Edward Covey was known as "a well-known negro breaker and slave-driver" in the St. Michael's area of Maryland, where Thomas Auld lived. His reputation in the area provides him with a steady supply of slaves who need to be taught who is master. Thus, Covey employs harsh and unrelenting physical work and punishment to break a slave's spirit and transform him into a brute. Ironically and hypocritically, Covey professes to be "a pious soul." Covey is known by the slaves who work for him as ' 'a snake" because he sneaks up on slaves when they least expect it. Douglass is sent to Covey for a year as a field hand, where he undergoes the worst trials his spirit has ever undergone. Yet having reached his lowest point, Douglass stands up to the man who has reduced him to merely an animal by challenging him on his own ground. After a grueling fight in which Douglass has the upper hand, Covey never again whips Douglass.

Frederick Douglass

Douglass is the narrator of his account as a slave and his eventual journey to freedom. Beginning from his birth, Douglass experiences and witnesses many hardships throughout his years as a slave in Maryland and is prone to misfortune due to his subjugated status. His attempts at liberating himself, first through self-education and then through his escape to the North, are a testament to the desire of humans to acquire freedom.

William Freeland

William Freeland is another slaveholder whom Douglass works for in the St. Michael's area of Maryland. However, he is far more open and prudent than any other slaveholder Douglass has known. He never professes to be heavily religious or pious, nor does he work slaves to complete exhaustion. Freeland also owns only two slaves, Henry Harris and John Harris. In the year that Douglass works for him, he never receives one blow.

Mr. William Gardner

Gardner is a shipbuilder who hires Douglass to work for him and whose shipyard is fraught with racial tension between black and white workers.

William Lloyd Garrison

At the beginning of the narrative, William Garrison writes a preface that is meant to lend credibility to Frederick Douglass' slave narrative.Because of the prejudice that many northerners had toward African Americans, Garrison felt it important to lend his own credibility as a show of support to Douglass.

The Grandmother

Although the reader never knows her real name, the grandmother of Frederick Douglass is an emblematic figure of the dehumanizing effects of slavery on women. She is born into slavery, has borne twelve children into slavery, and dies a slave, yet her numerous contributions to the plantation are rewarded with any number of cruelties. After taking care of Captain Anthony from the time he was a baby to when he died, as well as caring for her many children and grandchildren, the grandmother is left to fend for herself in the wilds of nature. Too old to work, she has been let out to die.

Henry Harris

Henry Harris is a slave of Mr. Freeland who, along with Douglass and others, plans to escape to the North. Douglass teaches him to read and write.

John Harris

See Henry Harris

Aunt Hester

Aunt Hester is a relative of Douglass who is whipped mercilessly by Mr. Plummer, an overseer. At a young age, Douglass witnesses his aunt being tied up and whipped until the blood drips to the floor for going out to meet a young black man on another farm. This is the first time Douglass realizes the horrors of slavery.

Sandy Jenkins

Sandy Jenkins, a slave whom Douglass meets in the woods after running away from Covey's farm, gives Douglass a root to carry on his right side that she says will protect him from physical harm.

Colonel Edward Lloyd

Colonel Lloyd owns the plantation on which Douglass is born in eastern Maryland. He is mostly mentioned in the *Narrative* in terms of what he owns and how he treats his slaves who take care of his horses. His plantation is described by Douglass as being as large as a village, and his slaveholdings are close to five hundred.

Anna Murray

Though she is mentioned only briefly in the narrative, Anna Murray is a domestic worker in Baltimore who moves to New York to marry Douglass soon after they arrive there. She is a free worker and helps fund Douglass' journey to freedom.

David Ruggles

An African-American abolitionist and journalist, David Ruggles befriends Douglass soon after Douglass' arrival in New York and helps him and Anna settle in New Bedford, Massachusetts.

Themes

An Argument Against Slavery

One of the most explicit themes of the *Narrative* is the oppressive effect of institutionalized racism in the form of slavery in the southern United States. Throughout the narrative, Douglass provides striking examples of how slaves are brutalized, mentally and physically, by the slaveholding system. His narrative provides numerous examples that add up to a powerful indictment of the dehumanizing effects of slavery. These include the physical abuse of women, as in the treatment of Douglass' Aunt Hester, and the separation of families. Douglass points out that slavery is not only harmful to slaves but affects slaveholders too. His greatest example of the damaging effects of slavery on slaveholders is that of Sophia Auld. Auld had never been a slaveholder and is at first kind to Douglass. By owning him, she retracts her generosity of spirit. As Douglass notes,' 'The fatal poison of irresponsible power was already in her hands, and soon commenced its infernal work."

False versus True Christianity

Another theme that runs throughout the *Narrative* is what it means to be a Christian in the South when slavery is at its core immoral. Douglass ingeniously sets up a dichotomy between two kinds of Christianity, as noted by scholars Keith Miller and Ruth Ellen Kocher in "Shattering Kidnapper's Heavenly Union: Interargumentation in Douglass's Oratory' ': "He constantly pits True Christianity, which he explicitly embraces, against the False Christianity of racism and slavery." This theme is found in the depictions of cruel masters. These masters beat their slaves to near death but appear pious by attending church regularly, giving to charities, and becoming ministers. The appendix reveals how Christianity, as practiced in the South, has slavery as its ugly accomplice. By juxtaposing images of slavery with religious piety, Douglass reveals how the two cannot be separated. ' 'The slave auctioneer' s bell and the church-going bell chime in with each other, and the bitter cries of the heart-broken slave are drowned in the religious shouts of his pious master."

Importance of Literacy to the Concept of Freedom

As a young boy, Douglass is taught the alphabet by his mistress, Sophia Auld. After she is prohibited to continue by her husband, Douglass finds ways to continue his education by interacting with Anglos. Literacy leads Douglass to see freedom as a goal that can be attained. For example, his purchase of *The Columbian Orator*, a book of political speeches written by ancient orators and Enlightenment thinkers, introduces him to the art of oration. He uses this skill later in life as an abolitionist activist. Reading such books makes him wonder why he was excluded from those rights granted to his white master. ' 'The reading of these documents enabled me to utter my thoughts, and to

meet the arguments brought forward to sustain slavery...." Douglass' education contributes to his understanding of the injustices done to him and all slaves. It fosters a desire inhim for freedom. His education leads to a restlessness that will not be quieted by physical beatings or hard labor. Eventually, his education leads him to escape slavery.

Achieving Selfhood

In many ways, the *Narrative* is a coming-of-age story that depicts Douglass achieving his freedom and acquiring a sense of self. One of the most powerful lines in the *Narrative* comes in chapter ten before the showdown between Douglass and Mr. Covey. Douglass directly addresses the relationship between slavery and the denial of manhood when he says,' 'You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man." Because slavery was bound up in denying full selfhood to both men and women, many slaves were denied the ability to perceive themselves as full human beings. Douglass' narrative shows how attaining control of one's life through freedom is necessary to achieving selfhood, or, in Douglass' case, manhood.

Style

Imagery

One of the most convincing devices that Douglass utilizes in the *Narrative* is animal imagery. Such imagery reveals the dehumanizing effects of slavery in both slaveholders and slaves, especially in the rural context of the plantation system, where slaves were chattel, similar to domesticated animals. These images include similes (such as describing the young children feeding at a trough as being "like so many pigs") and association (as in chapter eight, when Douglass describes the slaves' experience at the valuation as being ' 'on the same rank in scale" of "horses, sheep and swine"). Douglass makes it clear that slaves were not only viewed as being animals, but they also lived in conditions that reinforced that stereotype. However, Douglass, in a clever move, uses animal metaphor to suggest that slave owners were not exempt from being perceived as animals by slaves themselves. For example, Mr. Covey is known by slaves who work for him as "the snake." After Douglass' escape, Douglass feels like ' 'one who had escaped a den of hungry lions." The animal imagery Douglass uses is complicated by the system of slavery that produced bestial behavior regardless of race.

Tone

To many contemporary readers, Douglass' writing style in the *Narrative* may appear overly emotional and overwritten in its description of suffering and hardship. For example, in chapter ten, Douglass plaintively describes the ships sailing on the Chesapeake Bay as "beautiful vessels, robed in that purest white, so delightful to the eye of freemen" ' 'were to me so many shrouded ghosts." Yet Douglass was very aware of the popularity of a writing style in the mid-nineteenth century called "sentimental rhetoric," primarily used by middle-class women writers as a way of engaging readers directly with their subject matter. Douglass may havebeen able to engage readers not sympathetic with slavery's victims by appealing to their hearts for freedom and justice. In other words, as Steele in his article "Douglass and Sentimental Rhetoric" notes, in order to get white audiences to trust him as a narrator, Douglass used sentimental language as a means of representing himself "as a man of reason, moral principle, religious faith, and sentiment."

Slave Narratives

Douglass' *Narrative* was part of a growing literary genre. This type of writing, which used common conventions, came to be known as "slave narratives." The American-based genre grew out of the harsh conditions imposed by the slave society of the New World□the denial of freedom to African Americans. Once free, many slaves, rather than turn their backs on their past, fought hard to abolish enslavement by writing of their experiences. In his introduction to *The Classic Slave Narratives*, scholar Henry Louis

Gates provides a compelling history of the formation of this particular African-American literary tradition. Gates claims that' 'the black slave's narrative came to be a communal utterance, a collective tale rather than merely an individual's autobiography." Slave narratives were written primarily as a testament to the horrors of slavery and the slave's ability to transcend such hardships. Works of this genre, as noted in "Framing the Slave Narrative / Framing Discussion," by scholar Russ Castronovo, "seek to educate a largely white audience about the horrors of slavery by revealing what the fugitive has learned during his or her 'career' as a slave."

Historical Context

In the mid-nineteenth century, when Douglass wrote the *Narrative*, the United States was becoming divided over the issue of slavery. In the North, a growing abolitionist movement that had started in the late eighteenth century began to gather momentum as its leaders made every effort to spread their antislavery message. They held meetings, gave lectures, published antislavery newspapers, and traveled across the country to spread their message. Meanwhile, in the South, slaveholders rigidly held on to their view that slaves were useful only as laborers that helped sustain their agricultural economy. White people, in both the North and the South, continued to treat slaves as inferior beings, in most cases denying them any legal protection.

However, as more slaves found their way to freedom in the North, either through the assistance of the Underground Railroad or their own inventive methods, they began to write of their experiences under slavery. These 'slave narratives' became popular as adventure stories and a kind of protest literature. Although slaves had written of their experiences since slavery's inception in the United States (in the late eighteenth century), their stories were not widely read until the 1830s when heated political debates over slavery became widespread. Moreover, the abolishment of slavery in the British Empire in 1833 fanned the desire of many Americans for slavery to end.

Douglass' *Narrative*, published in 1845, contributed to the growing protest literature in the North that pleaded for the end of slavery. As a major African-American speaker in the abolitionist movement, Douglass became a central figurehead for the cause. Articulate, educated, morally upstanding, and self-possessing, Douglass dispelled many myths that both Northerners and Southerner held about African Americans. In his book *On Racial Frontiers: The New Culture of Frederick Douglass, Ralph Ellison, and Bob Marley,* scholar Gregory Stephens notes that "Frederick Douglass articulated most clearly, on an international level, what was at stake in the abolitionist movement(s)." Similar to African-American political leaders that came after him, such as Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. DuBois, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Douglass carved out a public space for African-American voices to be heard and for their rights to fought over and won.

In 1845, when Douglass published his narrative, African-American slaves did not have much representation legally or socially. They could not participate in public office nor could they vote. Their legal protection in the North was limited; in the South, nonexistent. Slave narratives such as Douglass' contributed to a growing literature base produced by African Americans that resisted negative portrayals and stereotypes through self-representation. Publishing antislavery documents in the North was one of the few ways that African-American voices could be heard. As Russ Castronovo claims, in his article, ' 'Framing the Slave Narrative / Framing the Discussion," "The slave narrative refutes the dominant cultural authority that insisted slaves could not write about... or rightfully criticize United States domestic institutions." In fact, argumentative narratives such as Douglass' were one of the few methods of non-violent resistance available. Although slave uprisings occurred in the southern United States, usually they

were quashed. During Douglass' time, an attempt to attack the slaveholding South took place in 1856 at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, when John Brown—a white abolitionist leader and friend of Douglass—along with twenty-one followers captured the U.S. arsenal. They were gunned down by the U.S. Marines. Brown, who survived, was hanged for treason not long after this attack.

Tensions mounted between pro-slavery and antislavery forces when a devastating law was passed in 1850 called the Fugitive Slave Law. It penalized those who assisted runaway slaves and allowed escaped slaves to be tracked down and returned to their ex-slaveholders. Some time later, in 1857, the Dred Scott ruling handed down by the Supreme Court decided that African Americans had no legalprotection under the Constitution. This climate only increased abolitionists' motivations to protest more vehemently and support politicians willing to promote the freeing of slaves. Though many years away when the *Narrative* was published, the election of President Lincoln in 1860, the declaration of Civil War in 1861, and the Emancipation Proclamation delivered in 1863 were all decisive events that formed a backdrop to the fight for political and legal representation undertaken by African Americans like Douglass.

Although its importance as an historical document that details the horrors of slavery cannot be denied, the *Narrative* has also become part of the American literary canon. It is taught widely in literature classes as an exemplary nineteenth-century American literary text and takes its place among others published at the same time, such as Thoreau's *Walden, Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Melville's *Moby Dick*, and Alcott's *Little Women*. However, its contribution to the growth of an African-American literary tradition and to the emergence of an African-American identity form a large part of its cultural significance today.

Critical Overview

Amazingly enough, slave narratives fell into obscurity towards the end of the nineteenth century, despite their testimonies to the cruel and unjust treatment of slaves by southern slaveholders and their enormous popularity. It was not until the mid-twentieth century that scholars began to investigate slave narratives as literature in their own right. The combination of personal testimony, cultural history, autobiography, antislavery rhetoric, and adventure story created a genre that marked the beginning of an African-American literary tradition. In their preface to the Norton Critical Edition of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, editors William Andrews and William McFeely write that ' 'The heightened civil rights militancy of the 1960s, along with the rise of Black Studies in the academy, helped resurrect the *Narrative* and elevate Douglass to prominence as the key figure in the evolution of African-American prose in the antebellum period." With the growth of a body of work defined as the African-American literary canon, Douglass' writings were again at the center of attention.

Douglass' adoption into the canon was the product of a growing body of African-American Studies scholars interested in investigating the origins of African-American political, cultural, and literary thought. For example, American Studies professor Albert E. Stone claims in ' 'Identity and Art in Frederick Douglass' *Narrative*" that the Narrative is the precursor to African-American autobiographies such as Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, Malcolm X's (and Haley's) *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, and Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

At the time of the *Narrative's* publication in 1845, the United States was becoming increasingly divided over the issue of slavery. Years prior to his writing of the *Narrative*, Douglass campaigned against slavery, often telling the narrative he eventually penned as part of his oratory. The *Narrative* made Douglass a celebrity nationally and internationally, selling 4,500 copies in its first five months of publication. Margaret Fuller, editor of the *Dial*, had this to say about its publication: ' 'We wish that every one may read his book and see what a mind might have been stifled in bondage."

However, not everyone was pleased or convinced by Douglass' depiction of his life as a former slave. His most vehement critics attempted to undermine his credibility as an author because of his racial identity as well as his former status as a slave. That an African-American ex-slave who had no formal education could write a book that was eloquent and stirring as well as logical and insightful was hard to fathom by many white Americans, both in the South and the North. The most famous attack came from A. C. C. Thompson, a slaveholder who lived near the home of Thomas Auld, where Douglass had been a slave for many years. In his accusatory letter published in the abolitionist paper *The Liberator*, Thompson disputes many of Douglass' claims about slavery as well as his personal accounts of Maryland slaveholders whom he labored under. Douglass, however, saw this attack as an opportunity to grant even more legitimacy to his narrative and wrote a reply several months later that uncovered the duplicity and lies of Thompson's letter. Thus, the *Narrative* had an exciting and controversial reception

that has been diminished over time but reveals the power of the word to incite action and change.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Piano is a Ph.D. candidate at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. In this essay, she investigates the complexity of Frederick Douglass' autobiography as a text that illustrates Douglass' ability to transform himself from an illiterate, oppressed slave to an educated, liberated free man.

Although Frederick Douglass wrote several autobiographies during his lifetime, none continues to have the lasting literary impact of the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*. From its publication in 1845 to its present status in the American literary canon, the *Narrative* has become one of the most highly acclaimed American autobiographies ever written. Published seven years after Douglass' escape from his life as a slave in Maryland, the Narrative put into print circulation a critique of slavery that Douglass had been lecturing on around the country for many years. Yet while the *Narrative* describes in vividdetail his experiences of being a slave, it also reveals his psychological insights into the slave/ master relationship.

What gives the book its complexity is Douglass' ability to incorporate a number of sophisticated literary devices that fashion a particular African-American identity. Literary scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in his introduction to *Classic Slave Narratives*, claims that "Douglass' rhetorical power convinces us that he embodies the structures of thoughts and feelings of all black slaves, that he is the resplendent, articulate part that stands for the whole, for the collective black slave community."Borrowing from a wide range of discourses that include slave narratives, autobiography, sentimental rhetoric, and religious and classical oratory, Douglass creates a testament not only to the horrors of slavery but to the power of the human spirit to transcend odds. *The Narrative* is a compelling document that shows Douglass' ability to transform himself from an illiterate, oppressed slave to an educated, liberated free man not only literally, by escaping slavery, but also figuratively, in language.

At the time that Douglass wrote his *Narrative*, most African Americans, especially in the South, had few opportunities to learn to read and write. Further, they also had little legal representation or standing that could protect them from physical harm or provide them access to legal action. Yet as a slave, Douglass manages both to teach himself to learn and to protect himself from harm, as in his showdown with Mr. Covey. The fight that erupts between Douglass and Covey is the turning point of the *Narrative*. It shows that Douglass' fight to gain freedom is also a fight to gain a selfhood, to be a man. His famous line, ' 'You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man," counters the prevailing argument of the day that slaves were not humans. He illustrates in this line that slaves were perceived as non-humans because they were not treated or represented as such, not because they were biologically inferior, as many claimed. Throughout the *Narrative*, Douglass reveals how slaves were denied basic concepts that would provide them with the means of constructing legitimate identities. For example, Douglass mentions at the beginning of the *Narrative* that slaves rarely knew when they were born, as "it is the wish of most masters ... to keep their slaves thus ignorant." To know one's birth date, in a sense, provided one with

a particularly human identity, a location in time and history. Slaveholders denied even this basic knowledge to keep slaves psychologically on the same level as animals. Throughout the narrative, Douglass brings to light a number of ways in which slaveholders withheld information from slaves in order to keep them from having a basic understanding of themselves as human beings. Such insights lend credibility and powerto his narrative at the same time that they reveal his own coming into being as a person. As American Studies professor Albert E. Stone claims, in ' 'Identity and Art in Frederick Douglass' *Narrative*," ' 'For the more clearly and fully we see the man *and* the writer... the more we acknowledge the force of his argument for an end to slavery's denial of individuality and creativity."

One of the difficulties in getting mid-nineteenth-century readers to believe that Douglass had written the *Narrative* was the pervasive stereotype that African Americans were incapable of learning. That a slave could write was unheard of, because it is through writing that one's identity is tangibly seen and affirmed; writing is a mark of one's capacity to think. In the introduction to *I Was Born a Slave: An Anthology of Classic Slave Narratives, Volume One, 1772-1849*, Yuval Taylor comments that slave narratives functioned to counter racist stereotypes perpetrated in popular culture, and for fugitive slaves such as Douglass, ' 'the mere act of writing was the ultimate act of self-affirmation, the ultimate denial of enslavement."

It is through the acquisition of reading and writing that Douglass not only fashions a sense of self but becomes conscious of his own oppression. Douglass' writing creates an undeniably African-American literary figure, one who has lived through a traumatic past and testifies to his experience through writing about it. As scholar Annette Niemtzow argues, in ' 'The Problematic of Self in Autobiography," "slave narratives had a deep social mission which would insure that the future would not repeat the past, and that was to establish the identity of each slave as slave no longer, but sentient, intelligent being."

Thus, Douglass' *Narrative* has a twofold action: it acts as a form of protest literature against slavery, yet at the same time it shows and persuades the reader that Douglass has been transformed and is no longer a slave. One way Douglass establishes this transformation is by creating a complex narrative structure with two narrating "I's" within the text. The first' T' narrator is Douglass as a slave, as found in the secondary title, *An American Slave*; the other ' T' is Douglass as a free man and writer, as found in the last bit of the title, *Written by Himself*. It is the tension between these two narrators that gives the work its complexity by illustrating the change Douglass has undergone. For example, he describes his experiences of slavery in the past while interpreting that experience from his position as a free man.

One of the best examples of how these two narrators engage with each other is when Douglass combines them in a single sentence. For example, when describing the cold he felt as a child, Douglass claims that' 'My feet have been so cracked with the frost, that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes." Thus, readers engage with both the experience of Douglass as a slave and the narrator who interprets those experiences. In this way, Douglass challenges the notion of African Americans as being

incapable of acts of self-representation by writing his "educated" self into the narrative as proof.

Throughout the narrative, Douglass provides a number of striking examples of the ways he manages to acquire literacy skills, despite attempts by southern whites to deny him access. One of the most illuminating examples is when Douglass' mistress, Sophia Auld, is caught teaching Douglass the alphabet by her husband, Hugh. In witnessing Hugh's anger, Douglass understands that it is through illiteracy that white southerners maintain their power over African Americans: "From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom. It was just what I wanted, and I got it at a time when I least expected it." What Douglass realizes that day is that literacy is equated with not only individual consciousness but also freedom. From that day, Douglass makes it his goal to learn as much as he can, eventually learning how to write, a skill that would provide him with his passport to freedom.

Yet, despite its high literary acclaim as an exemplary autobiography similar to those writtenby Benjamin Franklin, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau in its ability to fashion a truly American self-made identity, some critics have noted its limitations. For example, in ' 'In the First Place: Making Frederick Douglass and the Afro-American Tradition," Deborah McDowell rereads Douglass' narrative in terms of its representations of African-American women and finds that they leave much to be desired. Many of the women in the *Narrative* are depicted as sexual victims of white men's pleasure and have little ability to transcend their circumstances as Douglass does. In fact, McDowell argues, Douglass' slave narrator witnesses the brutal whippings of African-American women so many times that it makes him ' 'enter into a symbolic complicity with the sexual crimes he witnesses." In other words, by observing the constant repetition of these violent acts in the narrative, Douglass participates in the act of looking at women as objects.

Other critics, such as Wilson Moses, note that within the constraints of the slave narrative genre, Douglass had to write his narrative in a way that made it socially acceptable to white liberals by reproducing the myth of the successful individual. His rags-to-riches story "symbolized the myth of American individualism, but it also symbolized the ideals of American communalism, altruism, and self-sacrifice." Yet despite some limitations, the overall power of the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* even one hundred and fifty years after it was written cannot be denied. It has become one of the most important early African-American literary texts, one whose depiction of slavery cannot easily be forgotten. Yet at the same time the *Narrative* provides hope in the form of the courageous, self-made figure of Frederick Douglass.

Source: Doreen Piano, Critical Essay on *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself, in Nonfiction Classics for Students*, The Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Rothenberg asserts that Douglass' Narrative ' 'contains an unwritten text of folklore... which adds greatly to the strength of the narrative."

Much has been written on Frederick Douglass and his triumphant escape from slavery. His prose work, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* is considered to be a masterpiece of personal autobiography and documentation of the' 'peculiar institution" known as American slavery. Almost every article written about Douglass deals with the *written* text as Douglass presents it, either in terms of historical accuracy or as some form of reflection upon the events leading up to the Civil War. What does not get discussed is Douglass' *unwritten* text, the one that he does not consciously write but which is there nonetheless. Frederick Douglass' *Narrative* contains an unwritten text of folklore that the reader, and probably Douglass himself, may not be conscious of but which adds greatly to the strength of the narrative. The way to point out this unwritten text is to provide a background of the missing folk elements in his work (and the lessons they teach), and to show how Douglass incorporates them. In doing so, it can also be seen how Douglass rejects his own folk group in favor of the dominant White folk group. Henry Louis Gates says that the *Narrative* ' 'become[s] the complex mediator between the world as the master would have it and the world as the slave knows it really is." In the case of a folklore study, this is taken a step further to show how Douglass creates a work that fluidly blends both the Black and the White folk groups and how Douglass himself becomes a bridge between both groups.

Frederick Douglass was an Afro-American, born into slavery but descended from an African folk culture. Whether he tries to suppress this heritage or not, it is inevitable that some of it will reveal itself in his writing. The important distinction between folklore and Douglass' *Narrative* is that the work□and subsequently Douglass himself□breaks from what Negro folklore traditionally teaches. Often folklore contains disguised messages intended to educate or warn the listener. When Little Red Riding Hood is warned not to stray from the path to grandma's house, and then does so, she is eaten by the wolf. She did something she was not supposed to do, and she was punished for it; a grim lesson, indeed. Douglass defies these lessons of not' 'straying from the path" and charts his own path to freedom and self-realization.

To understand Douglass, his folklore and how he deviates from it, some basic background is necessary. Much of this Douglass himself alludes to in his *Narrative*, though he does not elaborate on it. For a full understanding of this folklore background, it is important to go all the way back to Africa, since that is where the roots of Afro-American folklore lie. Unlike European folklore, whichcame amalgamated to America, Afro-American folklore has retained much of its characteristics. As Richard Dorson notes, "Only the Negro, as a distinct element of the English-speaking population, maintained a full-blown storytelling tradition" descended from its African roots. In Africa, the role of the storyteller was often held by the griot, whose main job was that of tribal historian. As with so much of early history and literature worldwide, African history was passed down orally. Because of the griot's vast knowledge, he or she was often called

upon to be the advisor to the king and educator to the people. In short, the griot maintained the cultural and tribal identity. Folktales of this nature are hard to come by, but they probably resemble much of the animal folklore that has already been collected in America. The story's closeness to that of an African folktale is especially likely considering many of the tales were told by first or second-generation slaves not far removed from their African heritage.

When the Africans were brought to America as slaves, they brought their oral traditions with them. The storytelling grew to reflect their new situation, and both it and their music became a subtle form of protest. Douglass mentions the singing of the slaves early in his text, but admits that he did not understand their meanings at the time. "I was myself within the circle; so that I neither saw nor heard as those without might see and hear." The truth of the matter may be that Douglass does indeed understand the messages he hears in slave songs, but he chooses to ignore them. Slave singing, which would later evolve into blues music, teaches endurance of life as it is, with no real hope for change. David Evans says that blues singers ' 'are content to describe the dimensions of their subject, taking the situation as giving and not likely to be altered significantly in the long run." In short, "No real solutions to major problems are proposed in the blues."

Gospel music is very similar to blues music in this respect. It sends a message of overcoming hardship that the blues lacks, but the overcoming does not occur in this life but the next one, Heaven. Douglass makes no references to gospel singing in his text, but this religious ideology is one that Douglass must have been aware of. Douglas often comments on the ironic teachings of the church, especially when it concerns his master Captain Auld. ' 'Prior to his conversion, he relied upon his own depravity to shield and sustain him in his savage barbarity; but after his conversion, he found religious sanction and support for his slaveholding cruelty." Douglass later says that "I can see no reason, but the most deceitful one, for calling the religion of this land Christianity. I look upon it as the climax of all misnomers, the boldest of all frauds, and the grossest of all libels." The idea had to occur to him that if God existed, and God was a just and loving God as the Bible said, then he would not ever have been a slave; but since he was a slave, God must not exist, which makes the entire institution of religion a fallacy. If there were a God, then he would "'save me,' 'deliver me,' 'let me be free'", which are all the same things spirituals speak of.' 'God, deliver me! Let me be free! Is there any God? Why am I a slave?" he asks a Being he is not even sure exists. Douglass eventually realizes that he must save himself, and rejects the notion of help from a divine outside source. His help and strength must come from within himself first, and he refuses to accept the idea that he must wait until the afterlife for his suffering to end. In a very humanistic way of thinking, Douglass realizes that he should not have to suffer in *this* life.In the science of folklore, religion is classified as a type of folklore in itself. It is usually under the heading of mythology, but the principle idea that folklore advocates is still the same□it is a way of binding people together with oral tradition. Note that Douglass rejects this folkloristic tradition, as well.

While all of this may seem like a lengthy background summary, already it can be seen how Douglass ties in with the folk group that slavery produced. The best known part of that group, however, are the folk tales. The ones of particular interest are the tales

collectively known as John tales. The lore cycle involves the Negro slave John in various adventures with and against his owner, Ole Massa. These are the types of stories the slaves would have told to pass the time, and even though Douglass was raised around white people from the age of eight and older, it's certain that he would have heard these or other folk tales at some point. ' 'On any given evening slaves might transcend their temporal situation by singing their sacred songs of hope, attempting to control it by putting into practice one or more of their varied store of folk beliefs, and understand it and its immediate imperative by reciting some of their tales. All three were essential parts of the slaves' life."

Like the blues song and folk seculars, the Negro folktale is often a disguised form of protest. It also shares the characteristic of not advocating any action against Ole Massa and the slavery system; again, more lessons in endurance, not rebellion. John, the trickster figure, often plagues Massa to end with his mischief, but in the end it's all a moot point. Rarely, if ever, do the folktales ever advocate escape or show John successfully fleeing his oppressor. There are scenes of flight from Ole Massa, to be certain, but whether John successfully escapes or not is never told. Even though that ending is not provided, it's probably safe to assume that John does not escape, and if he does it is still in such a fantastical way that it can only be looked on as imaginative amusement and not serious advice on how to escape. It should be remembered that folk tales are often thought to work in the subconscious, sometimes spring to mind much later as a form of advice that may not have been apparent when the story was first heard. As Douglass himself remarked, he did not understand the meanings behind the slave's singing until much later. Consider the implied message they are giving: there is no escape; don't even bother to try, Ole Massa will get you and kill you. Assuming Douglass would have figured out the messages in the songs and tales at an older period of his life, there is no message of hope for him to take inspiration from. Instead, it's one of acquiescence and tolerance. Even though the songs and folktales are a form of protest, they still offer no advice on what can be done to change the situation (or that anything *can* be done), and any inspiration and determination that Douglass finds must come from within himself.For example, consider the ' 'Philly-Me-York" folktale, possibly one of the most popular John tales ever collected. Massa goes away to the city, colloquially called "Philly-Me- York," and leaves John in charge of everything. John, in Massa's absence, throws a party for himself and the rest of the slaves, going so far as to dress in Massa's fine clothes and kill some of his hogs to eat. Ole Massa disguises himself, sneaks back and discovers just what John has done. The common ending is for the tale to end with John's discovery by Ole Massa.

To someone who is literal-minded, there should be an obvious question that comes to mind: why doesn' t John escape? Instead of fleeing to the woods and at least *trying* to escape, he throws a party. Even in the version where he almost gets hanged, it ends like every other John tale with John remaining on the plantation and no sense that John will ever be free. For the slave telling these stories, that was the way life really was; there was little, if any, hope for freedom. This is perhaps a more telling portrait of Douglass' historical background than people realize. It's one thing to discuss the physical horrors of slavery, but it's quite another to consider its psychological horrors. If a collective body of people, all enslaved, is telling stories that offer no hope for escape

at all, that must mean the collective will of the people is crushed so badly that they cannot even bring themselves to *imagine* escape in their stories. If Ole Massa is stupid enough to leave his plantation unattended, why wouldn't his slaves attempt to flee? But even in fantasy this is not portrayed as happening. The story, then, becomes a psychological symbol of the ultimate despair.

Douglass makes no mention of the "Philly-Me-York' ' story at all in his *Narrative*, perhaps for the very reason that he does not allow himself to ultimately give in to despair. However, this tale is representative of the types of tales he would have heard as a child on the Lloyd plantation or elsewhere. Like all the others, there is no sense of hope or escape. If this is the collective body of folklore that the slaves are teaching themselves, then it is obvious that in order to escape one has to first break away from this folk group and the lore it is teaching.

This breaking away is inevitable, if not with Douglas then with somebody else. One interesting note about the lore cycle classification is that as the cycle progresses, the lore begins to lose its effect for the folk group. If, at the height of its cycle, theNegro folklore is advocating non-resistance and endurance, then a 180 degree turnabout from this would be to become active and resist. This is the area of the lore cycle, that Douglass fits into. Douglass makes a conscious decision to escape, and another conscious decision on how to escape. Whether he is making a conscious decision to break from his heritage is debatable, but it is evident that he is making a conscious decision to embrace the White culture by becoming one of them□educated and free. His narrative is directed at a white, educated audience. In order to appeal to this audience, it would have been necessary to suppress his background and appear as educated, or more so, than his audience. His language is very carefully chosen and literary sounding. This is not the text of an illiterate Negro slave, and that is a very conscious and careful decision on Douglass' part. He wants to be a part of the White folk group. Until he can fit in to that White culture, he is out-of-sorts. Being an escaped slave, he no longer quite fits in with the plantation slave, and not being white he cannot easily amalgamate himself into that culture either. He is the man in the middle, and no matter how hard he tries, some of his folk background still slips through the *Narrative*.

Ironically, even though Douglass is rebelling against the "no-hope" idea taught in Negro folklore, he embraces the aspect of tales used as warnings to others. Many of the stories Douglass relates are simply examples of how the life of a slave is, but they also serve as a warning of the consequences of going against the slavery system. One interesting example straight out of primitive folklore is Douglass' experience with the root Sandy gives him. The root is supposed to protect Douglass from further beatings at the hands of a white man, which Sandy swears is true. ' 'He said he had carried it for years; and since he had done so, he had never received a blow, and never expected to while he carried it." In a few sentences Douglass uses to describe Sandy, he paints a picture of what might be called a superstitious primitive. Sandy relies on superstition to protect himself, and for him it works. Douglass tries it and it fails. The folktale Richard Dorson collects, "The Mojo," ends in a similar way: the slave John is given the root and told that it will protect him from Ole Massa by allowing him to change into three different animals in order to escape. The first time John is chased by Massa, he changes into a

hare. Massa changes into a greyhound. John changes again, this time into a quail. Massa changes into a chickenhawk. Finally, John changes into a snake. Massa says, ' 'I'll turn into a stick and I'll beat your ass." That is where the tale ends.

Where the tale ends is important. The reader, or listener, is never told if John escapes or not, but the implied threat, as well as the pattern established by the other John tales, says he does not. Douglass, when relying on the root, faces the same fate as John when his master comes to beat him. However, where John flees, Douglass stands his ground and faces Mr. Covey in the scene that shows "how a slave was made a man." Douglass obviously does not do this as a stand against his folk heritage; he's fighting for his life and his self-worth. His actions, though, are an act of defiance against this tradition. He uses the very same tool that is being used against him□violence□to remake himself, and in doing so he adopts the methods of the White folk group. There are no explicit lessons in any folk group on how to act or what to do in order to be a part of it, but considering the black folk group as a non-volatile, passive group and the White folk group as dominant, educated, aggressive and□most importantly□ free, then Douglass clearly leaves the Black folk group for the White one.

In *My Bondage and My Freedom* there is even a larger gap between the Black and White folk groups that Douglass is bridging. This is especially evident in his rewrite of the scene with Sandy and the root, where Douglass states point blank that he sees the root as " 'absurd and ridiculous, if not positively sinful,"' and admits his own distancing from his heritage by saying Sandy " 'professed to believe in a system for which I have no name."' By the time Douglass is writing *My Bondage and My Freedom*, he has come too far away from his folk culture to truly understand it anymore.

There are many other instances of folklore in Douglass' *Narrative*. The problem in pointing them out is that there is still a lot of Afro-American folklore that has not been collected yet, so proving examples from the work as folklore is not a concrete possibility. The validation for proving them folklore falls to the fact that in every story Douglass narrates there is some sort of implicit warning or lesson to be learned, which fits in with traditional folklore. There is also the fact that many of the stories Douglass relates he does not witness, but events he heard about. This oral factor is a key tip-off to something being a folktale. The fact that it is Douglass relating these events to us makes them more believable, since we believe Douglass' *Narrative*. In other words, Douglass' voice carries weight with the reader. This is another key point in folklore, especially folklore concurrent with the time period it is being told: no matter how ludicrous, it carries the weight of plausibility. When the reader knows that everything else in the *Narrative* is true, it is natural to assume that these folktales should be taken as truth, as well. Donald Gibson says that even ' 'when it is not clear whether he [Douglass] actually witnessed an event or heard it told ... it is fairly obvious that he perceives it as actual, and hence it carries the weight of fact." This is compounded when it is realized that nearly everything in the *Narrative* is related to the readers as if it were directly experienced by Douglass.

So, is Douglass participating in his own folklore and, if so, why? Everyone participates in their own folklore without realizing it. If they realized it, it would not be folklore. It's like

the children's game of telephone. One person starts a message at one end of the room, and by the time it gets to the other end of the room, it's completely different. The changes that take place in the message are not intentional; they just happen. This is what happens to Douglass when he relates these events. He may not have been there, but just as they sound truthful to Douglass' audience, they must have sounded truthful to him, as well. Therefore, when he relates them back they become more personalized and believable.

Even though Douglass may inadvertently be changing his own narrative in a folkloristic way, it still follows the patterns already established. Every story, whether true or not, is both educational in way slaves were treated, and also served as a warning to Douglass when he heard them. Consider the story about the slave and Colonel Lloyd. When Lloyd asks the slave, who does not recognize him, how his master treats him the slave replies truthfully. " 'Well, does the colonel treat you well?' 'No, sir.''" For the slave's honesty he was sold to a Georgia trader and separated from his family, probably forever. The lesson from this: lie because your life depends on it. Douglass says this is why a slave never speaks badly about his master, and why people get the impression that all the slaves are happy to be working the plantations in the hot, Southern sun.

Consider the lesson of the freed Black who threatened to report a runaway slave to his master.The blacks of New Bedford organized a meeting and immediately decided to kill the betrayer. The lesson from this: never betray one of your own. There are also little things in the text, such as the folk saying "it was worth a half-cent to kill a 'nigger,' and a half-cent to bury one." All of these things portray in a coded way both the environment Douglass came from and what he had to rebel against to obtain his freedom. Even though these folktales have probably not been recorded anywhere, a further argument for their legitimacy as folklore can be made by using the Stith Thompson Motif index that is the standard for folklore classification. Even though these were designed with European folklore in mind, they can serve as a working classification, especially considering the idea of polygenesis in folklore. For example, the Colonel Lloyd tale could theoretically be classified into Motifs HO-H199 (Identity tests: recognition), H1550-1569 (Tests of character) and S400-499 (Cruel persecutions). Of course this is only conjecture, but it helps to show how these tales have elements in common with other folktales. But again, no matter how they are classified, the point is that Douglass refuses to follow what they dictate. If taken as a lump sum, Douglass' folklore heritage says that one should endure slavery because there is nothing that can be done about it; that lying is the only way to stay alive, and that one person cannot deliver himself from slavery, but that it must come from an outside Divine source. Douglass refuses to accept all of this. His Narrative is not only a social protest against the system of slavery, but it is also a protest against the folk tradition that taught him that these things were to be tolerated. Douglass does not believe that a man should have to lie in order to stay alive; that's why he writes his *Narrative* as brutally honest as he does. He refuses to just endure his situation, and instead sets out to better himself (an idea from the White folk group□the self-made man pulling himself up by his own bootstraps). Part of Douglass' success in seeing his situation for what it was, and managing to escape, is due to the fact that he began living in a white household at the age of eight, but the rest of it is due to his sheer determination. Instead of sticking to his folk group, he begins adopting a new one, the

White folk group. By learning how to read and adopting some of their tactics (such as fighting back and standing up for himself, instead of being passive), he manages to use their own weapons against them. Through education□primarily a White luxury□he learnsenough to help him escape, and then turn around and receive support from the same race of people that had enslaved him in the first place.

None of this rebellion from his folk group is conscious on Douglass' part. The literal text as Douglass wrote it is probably closest to his immediate feelings, but the change Douglass must undergo in order to obtain his freedom involves an unconscious change in folk groups, as well as physical change of situation. It has to. Had Douglass remained with his folk group he may never have seen any hope past the boundaries their folktales imposed. Symbolically, he must become the taboo breaker, the one who dares to go against what the folklore says and break the barriers down. If John is the trickster figure of the slave folktales, then Douglass becomes symbolic of the type of tricker that appears in Native American folklore, the trickster who is the most powerful member of the tribe and who dares to transgress the taboo barriers. Douglass is a barrier-breaker: he renounces the folklore of his people, dares to do what is unspeakable in that folklore□break free, and adopts the custom of another folk group altogether. His *Narrative* finally becomes his own folk warning, not one caked in folklore imagery but one that comes right out and says what it means: be passive and be conquered.

Source: Kelly Rothenberg, "Frederick Douglass' *Narrative* and the Subtext of Folklore," in *The Griot*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Spring 1995, pp. 48-53.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Sekora examines the history of the slave narrative and Douglass' efforts to transcend its trappings.

In the struggles of Frederick Douglass lies the intellectual history of nineteenth-century America. Douglass directly influenced much of that history and touched virtually every issue of consequence in black-white relations. Once he mounted an anti-slavery platform in the summer of 1841, neither abolition nor Afro-American writing were ever the same again. He was so prescient, his successes so many, the strength of his writing and speaking so great, we are inclined to pass quickly over many of his conflicts, confident that history has upheld the positions he took. In the best-known example of the pre-war period, later historians have indeed credited him with exposing the intellectual compromises and sheer blindness of the Garrisonian wing of the abolition movement. Yet not all features of even that quarrel have been explored, and on one aspect it is *literary* historians who must speak.

In the first of his life stories, the monumental *Narrative* of 1845, Douglass leads up to his rise to prominence in abolition circles, his association with Garrison and other leaders, and his stunning successes as lecturer and writer in the anti-slavery cause. His second narrative, *My Bondage and My Freedom* of 1855, appears well after the break with Garrison and the advent of his own, independent literary career. In a passage of arresting compression, he notes a personal dilemma□and thereby the constraint felt by a generation of slave lecturers and narrators.

"Let us have the facts," said the people. So also said Friend George Foster, who always wished to pin me down to my simple narratives. "Give us the facts," said Collins, "we will take care of the philosophy." ... "Tell your story, Frederick," would whisper my then revered friend, William Lloyd Garrison.... I could not always obey, for I was now reading and thinking. New views of the subject were presented to my mind. It did not entirely satisfy me to *narrate* wrongs; I felt like *denouncing* them. I could not always curb my moral indignation ... long enough for a circumstantial statement of the facts which I felt almost everybody must know. Besides, I was growing and needed room.

The distant occasion of this recollection is Douglass's experience as anti-slavery agent and lecturer. Blended with this is the later, more immediate memory of his trials as author and international representative of American anti-slavery societies. They are two sides of one coin. The literary history of the antebellum slave narrative is also put at issue in this passage. For we now know that other writers, before Douglass and during his lifetime, were equally distressed by the form they had unwittingly inherited. But it is he who poses the major questions□questions that American literary history has not yet addressed. What are the "facts" the people crave? Who are the "people" who crave them? Who are the "we" Collins refers to, and what is the ' 'philosophy" ' 'we" will take care of? Why are "the facts" equivalent to Douglass's whole "story"? Why is that story pinned down to narratives that are merely "simple"? Why does he choose the word "obey" to describe his relations with fellow abolitionists? Why is he asked to limit himself

to narrating the wrongs of slavery? Was henot already denouncing them, exercising his moral indignation? why did he feel constrained to "a circumstantial statement of the facts" ? Why did he feel "almost everybody must know" those facts already? Why did not the form of the slave narrative provide him with room to grow and flourish?

Although the questions Douglass raises are intertwined, they cannot be answered fully in an essay. Why for instance does he challenge the form of the slave narrative in a slave narrative? So each question subdivides itself interminably. Yet tentative answers are possible if one permits a summary convergence. All of his misgivings imply that the narrative as a form has an existence prior to and beyond the narrator's control or possession. Is that implication valid? If so, *who owns the slave narrative?*

The question itself has along history, extending to the very beginnings of the genre in the eighteenth century. As the earliest slave narrative in America, some historians cite the ten-page transcript of a trial held in Boston 3 August to 2 November 1703. *Adam Negro's Try all* is in text and celebrity the quarrel between two very prominent men, Samuel Sewelland John Saffin, who battle one another in court over the terms of Adam's bondage. Adam is called upon to recount a small portion of his life in response to interrogation, but he is merely the proximate cause in a dispute between white figures. *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprizing Deliverance of Briton Hammon, A Negro Man*, published in 1760, is an actual personal narrative and is told in the first person. Its title page joins it to earlier and highly popular stories of Indian captivity. It also indicates the heavy burden of "facts" the slave narrative will carry. For in fourteen pages we will be given a circumstantial statement of how in negligence Hammon fled from his owner, suffered daily hardships thereafter, went to sea and was captured, then tortured by Florida Indians, endured nearly five years of captivity, and by divine providence was reunited with his owner and returned to Boston. Although Hammon's life has been filled with wonders, his preface explains why the narrative will be limited to a circumstantial rehearsal of bare facts:

As my Capacities and Conditions of Life are very low, it cannot be expected that I should make those Remarks on the Sufferings I have met with, or the kind Providence of a good GOD for my Preservation, as one in a higher Station; but shall leave that to the Reader as he goes along, and so I shall only relate Matters of Fact as they occur to my Mind.

In this carefully wrought sentence we have the earliest instance of the distinction noted by Douglass between "facts" and "philosophy." The decisive error of Hammon's early life was his claim to too much freedom. Having endured uncommon sufferings as a result, he has learned better. He willdisciple himself severely in the narrative, leaving all philosophy, all acts of interpretation to his betters. As William L. Andrews has observed, this is the first example of a black subject relinquishing all claim to the significance of his life. Because of his "very low" capacity, Hammon will be limited to mechanical recollection of' 'Matters of Fact," leaving the moral and literary meaning of his life to be determined by others□of *higher station*.

Even without questioning how much of Hammon's narrative is edited or dictated, the intellectual hierarchy and division of labor is sufficiently clear. A white editor has determined that the bare incidents of an exciting Indian captivity will engage a white audience, who would not (needless to say) be concerned with Anglo-American captivity. Hammon's recollection of relevant facts will be given a proper context and a proper meaning by his audience. Hammon does seem to be left with a residue of freedom: to select from his memory the facts that are relevant and to order them as he wishes. But even that small exercise of selfhood is illusory.

Also published in Boston early in 1760 and in its third printing when Hammon's was printed was the captivity narrative of a young white man, Thomas Brown. The full title page of *A Plain Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Remarkable Deliverance of Thomas Brown*, names and dates aside, is virtually identical to Hammon's. So too is the narrative; its preface emphasizes age rather than status

As I am but a Youth, I shall not make those Remarks on the Difficulties I have met with, or the kind Appearances of a good GOD for my Preservation, as one of riper Years might do; but shall leave that to the Reader as he goes long, and shall only beg his Prayers, that Mercies and Afflictions may be sanctified to me, and relate Matters of Fact as they occur to my Mind.

Brown's narrative was in all likelihood the immediate model for Hammon. If so, then the last vestige of Hammon's autonomy is exercised, for the facts of his story and their ordering are called up, not from the voluntary activity of his will, but from the involuntary pre-existence of a white model. The facts are the whole of his story. Neither Hammon nor Brown, it is true, is permitted to possess his own life story. One is disqualified by lowly status, the other by youth. Perhaps both are disqualified for reasons of class and education. Whatever the case, the conditions Douglass describes in 1855 are present a century earlier. And the slave narrative is borninto a world of literary confinement: of simplicity, facticity, and submission to authority.

While we cannot know with conviction the overarching shape of Briton Hammon's historical life, we can doubt that it would easily fit the mold of a prodigal white apprentice. The black subject is held, as if in court, as witness to his own existence; what is to be made of that existence is left to a negotiation between sponsors and readers, who together determine the shape of the life story, its emphases and principles of ordering, and its language of expression. On the language of the narratives, the practice of interrogation, dictation, and revision became the norm for the remainder of the century and well into the next. Another captivity narrative, that of John Marrant in 1785, is "Taken down from His Own Relation, Arranged, Corrected, and Published By the Rev. Mr. Aldridge." Marrant's life story is already announced to be a collective enterprise, before Aldridge reveals more in his preface: "I have always preserved Mr. Marrant's ideas, tho' I could not his language...." Moreover, the collective pattern present in such captivity tales is extended by the end of the century to all other forms of slave narrative, including those of religious conversion, criminal confession, and ministerial labor.

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Whether one begins with *Adam Negro's Try all, the Narrative* of Hammon, or a later narrative, the distinction persists between the "facts" provided by the nominal subject and the "philosophy" "we" as editors/sponsors/readers will supply. Precisely why this is true is not clear. Evangelical Protestantism was determined to record and inscribe the triumphal American errand into the wilderness. Fully to do so might require inclusion of at least a few examples drawn from the lowliest of the low. Perhaps the slave was for white sponsors necessarily Other. Perhaps the local treatment of (say) Hammon was later generalized into the treatment of all slave narratives. Whatever the motive, its consequence was to distance the narrative and its subject, to envelope both in the workings of institutional power. What is constant, moreover, is the institutional imperative. Here is Alridge's preface to the *Narrative* of Marrant:

The following Narrative is as plain and artless as it is surprising and extraordinary. Plausible reasonings may amuse and delight, but facts, and facts like these, strike, are felt, and go home to the heart. Were the power, grace and providence of God ever more eminently displayed, than in the conversion, success, and deliverance of John Marrant?

Alridge tells readers what not to expect□art, style, logic, amusement□as well as what they may look forward to□facts, extraordinary facts. He assures readers they will not be affronted by the life story of a former slave; rather they will be moved by a story of God's providential dealings. Besides constructing the ' 'philosophy" for the narrative, he has turned Marrant inside out□from the subject of the narrative to the object. Thus while becoming the object of God's favor and the beneficence of religious institutions, the slave narrator is simultaneously the object of the sponsor and reader's condescension.

Although Foster, Collins, Garrison, and the other abolitionists of Douglass's circle did not invent the conditions of Douglass's dilemma, they did aggravate them. When he enlisted in the anti-slavery movement in 1841, five constitutive principles were already in place. First, for Garrison, Tappan, Weld and other white leaders, the goal of the crusade was action on the part of white northerners; white abolitionists would somehow compel the white majority to rise up and expunge slavery from the land. Whether of slave or freeman, black expectations were taken for granted and hence irrelevant. Second, former slaves were essential in one role□ as witnesses, body witnesses to the horrors of bondage. Less articulate fugitives would, when identified, be interrogated, their stories transcribed and then verified and published. For articulate fugitives, the role was greater; like Douglass they would be encouraged to serve as full-time anti-slavery agents and lecturers. Speaking about their lives under slavery was their primary duty; writing was secondary, valuable insofar as it reached areas that lecturers could not and brought in funds otherwise untapped. By the late 1830s some eighty anti-slavery societies had been formed across the Northeast into the Mid-West. More than half were formed by white groups, and of these nearly thirty took part in the printing of slave narratives.

Third, the abolitionist design for lectures and narratives alike was a collective one: to describe slavery to an ignorant northern audience, not to describe an individual life. Reviews and announcements routinely stated that "former slaves have a simple, moving story to tell," using the singular noun to suggest a collective account transcending

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personal variations. Titles, prefaces, introductory letters would be used to the same purpose. Fourth, all this emphasis upon facticity and collectivity converged in the demand for authenticity. Because white abolitionists sought to convert the ignorantand the indifferent, they scrutinized and investigated slave accounts with all the references available to them. Facts were useful□and verifiable. Personality and opinion□these were indispensable. Not literary authority but historical veracity was the quality demanded in a narrative

Finally, black expression was expected to be collective in yet another sense. Each slave lecturer or narrator was normally preceded and followed by several white figures who supplied introductions, testimonials, affidavits, support, approval. When a narrative was published by an anti-slavery society, it must carry the *nihil obstat* as well as the *imprimatur* of the movement. In time white sponsors came to view their editing and introducing as causal to the narratives. In one sense they were entirely correct. For the language of the narratives□their social attitudes and philosophical presuppositions□had been formed in the 1820s and early 1830s, before blacks had been enlisted in the cause. Among other things this meant that moral indignation against the South was one thing, but against the North it was something else. Likewise the call for abolition was mandatory, the call for racial equality forbidden. Samuel May, Jr., said that William Wells Brown had no life apart from the movement and that he should be grateful for the reason for being that it gave him. Garrison of course was much more bitter toward Douglas.

Douglass came eventually to distrust all of these constraints upon black expression. Slavery is incidental to the narrative of Briton Hammon, but it is essential to the narrative of Frederick Douglass. Why cannot he and other authors be entrusted to provide the moral context for their own life stories? The short answer, Douglass came to believe, was that many of the white abolitionists he knew well did not understand blacks or black demands at all. These men and women regarded black life as little more than *what was done to blacks;* present and former slaves were basically passive victims. This false philosophy became the language of abolition, justifying a kind of cultural hegemony, and on so many issues of great moment to blacks anti-slavery societies could not reason without reasoning falsely. It is clear that the limitations of the abolitionists are inscribed upon the form of the slave narrative. It is equally true that much of the interest of the narrative derives from an author's attempts to evade or subvert white literary impositions.

After his break with Garrison, Douglass's black colleagues applauded anew stage in his struggle forblack civil rights. James McCune Smith wrote of his decision to found his own newspaper: ' 'Only since his Editorial career has [Douglass] seen to become a colored man! I have read his paper very carefully and find phase after phase develop itself as in one newly born among us." A final small portion of his dilemma can be sketched by noting a private side of Garrison certain to rankle. In his correspondence with white friends, Garrison's terms of praise for a white author are "magnificent," "powerful" and the like. When he is describing the work of a black author, however, his recognition is limited to ' 'useful," "agreeable," or "making a very favorable impression." His abiding question is, how will a white audience respond?

For more than thirty arduous years Garrison worked at close hand with dozens of fugitives and freemen. Yet his voluminous correspondence is as silent in personal understanding of his black associates as it is effusive about his white. In his dealings with Douglass and Wells Brown, he required black leaders to be strong enough to control their followers, yet sufficiently weak not to challenge him. In his correspondence he treats black writers as though they exist in some distinct, segregated limbo, hardly in touch with the white world. On 30 July 1868 he writes to Tilton concerning a petition proposed by Horace Greeley:

Mr. Greeley suggests getting the names of "at least fifty leading, life-long Abolitionists" to the desired document. In the present divided state of feeling, I doubt whether half that number could be obtained of those who are well known to the country. Neither Phillips, nor Pillsbury, nor Foster, nor Whipple, nor any who affiliate with them, would join in any such movement. Probably Gerrit Smith, Samuel J. May, Samuel May, Jr., Samuel E. Sewall, and Edmund Quincy would sign the paper. Some colored names ought to be added□such as Douglass, Garnet, Nell, Wells, Brown, Langston, &c, &c. Perhaps these had better send an appeal of their own. Of course, Purvis and Remond would have nothing to do with the matter.

Structurally similar to several earlier ones, this letter separates his anti-slavery colleagues into white and black sentences, with the black names appended ("colored names ought to be added") as an afterthought. While most white figures are identified by full names, even initials, the blacks are referred to as examples ("such as") by last names only, followed by a sign that Garrison will not try to be exhaustive ("etc., etc.").

By way of explanation, he continues: ' 'There are so few of the freedmen who, in the nature of things, can know anything of the Abolitionists, thatI am not quite sure it would amount to much if any number of names were appended to the paper proposed." This is one of the most startling sentences, public or private, Garrison ever penned. The specific nature of Greeley' s petition is unknown; Garrison's editors guess it concerned amnesty or suffrage. In any case, Garrison is referring to black leaders who have known him for more than a generation, who were anti-slavery authors, lecturers, and international representatives. They include men who have been speaking and writing at length over many years about white abolitionists and the cause; Douglass alone delivered an estimated 1,000 lectures, Brown 2,000. They too called themselves Abolitionists, though now he would withhold the title. What is the mysterious ' 'nature of things" that allows knowledge to flow but one way, to whites but not to blacks? His lament may be that the influence of freedmen, even of the stature of Douglass, would not amount to much. Yet the ignorance he finds may be his own. His final words on the subject reflect a familiar gambit□using the threat of southern retaliation to suppress black voices: ' 'Moreover, might not such names exasperate the rebel enemies of the freedmen, and stimulate them to the infliction of fresh outrages? It is worth considering whether a calm and simple statement *per se*, as to what is the political duty of the freedmen in the coming struggle, will not be sufficient." Like Agassiz, Garrison seems preoccupied with the potential for "our detriment." In earlier campaigns black voices were considered an essential chorus; now they are not. (Calm and simple statements *per se*, it should be remembered, are the *raison d'être* of the slave narrators.) What

Garrison prefers is an unequivocal announcement of white hegemony: a statement drafted by men like himself to direct freedmen to their political duty. Blacks are not needed to frame the language of such a statement, merely to fulfill it. The dilemma faced by Douglass and other slave narrators is clearer. Garrison would have important decisions made by white people talking to white people.

When he set off on his own course, several of his former sponsors charged that Douglass had betrayed the cause, some said he secretly opposed emancipation, and one said he was no longer mentally fit. On 5 June 1958 Clennon King, a black professor at Alcorn A and M, attempted to register for doctoral courses at the then-all-white University of Mississippi. From the registration line, King was taken into custody by the Mississippi highway patrol and committed to a state mental hospital.Patrolmen explained to reporters: "A nigger *has* to be crazy to try to get into Ole Miss." Douglass would have understood King's predicament. Sometimes it is as hard to break out of a white institution as to break in.

Source: John Sekora,' 'The Dilemma of Frederick Douglass: The Slave Narrative as Literary Institution," in *Essays in Literature*, Vol. 10, No. 2, Fall 1983, pp. 219-25.

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay, Zeitz explores how Douglass uses religious language and biblical allusion in his Narrative.

Frederick Douglass' *Narrative*, first published in 1845, has been described by a recent commentator as ' 'a consciously literary work, and one of the first order." While I suspect that few readers would challenge this view, surprisingly few have sung the work's praises in the annals of literary criticism. Although pioneering discussions of Douglass' use of agrarian and animal imagery, nautical metaphors, ironic humour, and techniques which create verisimilitude have established a firm base upon which further studies may be built, there is one area of investigation in which the groundwork has yet to be laid. This is the whole subject of the role of religious language and Biblical allusion in the *Narrative*.

The use of Biblical references and imagery would not have seemed peculiarly "literary" or learned to men of Douglass' time. Knowledge of the Scriptures was ' 'general," and an author's allusions to Christian concepts would have bolstered his readers' understanding, not interfered with it. The white abolitionist audience for whom Douglass wrote the *Narrative* would certainly have responded to a language of religious reference, but Douglass was probably not consciously catering to their tastes. Jeanette Robinson Murphy, one of the first commentators on black spirituals, has pointed out that the slaves themselves recognized a parallel between their situation and that of the Israelites: ' 'One of the most persistent fancies that the old slaves cherished was that they were the oppressed Israelites ... and that Canaan was freedom... In many of their songs they appropriate Bible prophecies and ideas to themselves." One of the most familiar patterns in sermons delivered by black ministers was that of the linear Christian view of history: the sermon ' 'began with the Creation, went on to the fall of man, rambled through the trials and tribulations of the Hebrew children, came down to the redemption byChrist, and ended with the Judgment Day and a warning and an exhortation to sinners." The prophecy of a coming Judgment Day figures prominently in the *Narrative's* allusions, as I shall demonstrate; it seems likely that Douglass was inspired, at least in part, by the black homiletic tradition.

Douglass uses Biblical phrasing primarily to refute the claim that Christianity sanctions slavery. He makes this strategy clear when he explains that "of all slaveholders ... religious slaveholders are the worst." The case of Captain Auld is the most telling: he "experiences religion," and becomes a "much worse man after his conversion than before", having found "religious sanction and support for his slaveholding cruelty." In fact, the religious sanction is founded on a misreading of Scripture, as Douglass' example of such a passage shows. His master quotes the following as justification for beating a slave: '"He that knoweth his master's will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes"". The verse quoted appears in Luke xii, a chapter which focuses on the responsibilities of a Christian disciple. The "Master", Christ, exhorts his followers to seek the kingdom of heaven and to live in a state of constant readiness for that day when they will be judged, for they are ' 'like unto men that wait for their lord." In the

parable which follows, Christ develops this figure of man as servant; all who "wait for their lord" must be prepared to meet him at any time, ' 'for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not." The servants of God may not postpone their preparations:

But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens ... [t]he Lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.

It is clear from an examination of the Scriptural context that the slaveholder's Biblical "justification' ' for beating a slave is founded on a misreading of the Gospel. The slaveholder is exposed: he is the faithless servant who beats ' 'menservants and maidens," and who, in turn, will be "beaten with many stripes" for failing to follow the commandments of the Lord of all. The words of the slaveholder have been turned back upon his own head, and he need fear both the Day of Judgment which is the end of time, and the Day of Judgment which will herald the death of the institution of slavery.

In the appendix to the *Narrative,* Douglass quotes extensively from Matthew xxiii, identifying Christianity in America with the worst excesses of the "ancient scribes and Pharisees." These quotations serve as excellent illustrations of the technique that identifies Biblical patterns operative in secular history. The passages selected emphasize the price to be paid by the oppressors: "'They bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers . . . But woe unto you ... ye shall receive the greater damnation.'" The threatening voice of the prophet of social revolution is unmistakable.

The cursing of Ham, which some slaveholders insisted was proof of the justness of American slavery, is alluded to in the first chapter of the narrative. Douglass thus begins his account with a reference to that section of the Book of Genesis which was held by the enslavers to mark the beginning of black history. As Douglass proceeds to demonstrate, however, this ' 'justification" of slavery is no longer "scriptural," for there are many slaves "who, like myself, owe their existence to white fathers, and those fathers most frequently their own masters." "If the lineal descendants of Ham are alone to be scripturally enslaved," Douglass argues, ' 'it is certain that slavery at the south must soon become unscriptural." The very existence of slaves with white fathers ' 'will do away the force of the argument, that God cursed Ham, and therefore American slavery is right." Douglass rejects the division of the human race into the enslaved (the descendants of Ham) and the enslavers, and advances, instead, the traditional Christian division of the race of man into the children of God and the children of the devil. In the lengthy quotation from Matthew xxiii in the appendix, that basic division appears in the explicit description of the Pharisees (whom Douglass has just identified with the "votaries" of "the Christianity of America") as "the child[ren] of hell." Douglass' citing of the term, "child of hell," is especially helpful in placing his prevalent use of such adjectives as ' 'fiendish" and "infernal" within a Biblical context.

BOOKRAGS

From the start Douglass associates the slaveholders with the forces of evil through his choice of traditional Christian terms for the demonic: the deeds of the slaveholders are "most infernal"; slavery itself is of an "infernal character"; "infernal purpose", "infernal work", and "infernal grasp" all refer to the actions of the oppressors. "Fiendish" is another prevalent adjective, and, in what is perhaps the clearest illustration of Douglass' purpose in employing these traditional Christian terms for evil, the slave traders are described as "fiends from perdition" who "never looked more like their father, the devil." ' 'None of them is lost," said Christ, "but the son of perdition." "He that commiteth sin is of the devil . . . Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin ... In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil." Mr. Plummer, Mr. Severe, and a "swarm of slave traders" are described as profane swearers; their blasphemy is further evidence of their sinfulness. Like their association with things "infernal" and "fiendish," the slaveowners' "bitter curses and horrid oaths" mark them as "children of the devil." It is these human demons who have brought about "the hottest hell of unending slavery."

Throughout the *Narrative* Douglass refers to his own brethren as ' 'souls"; an explicit contrast is thus made between the genealogy of the slaveholders and that of the slaves, "children of a common Father." The scholars at Douglass' Sabbath school, for example, are "precious souls ... shut up in the prisonhouse of slavery; their songs are the ' 'prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish." The word "souls" emphasizes the slaves' humanity, their possession of that spark of divinity which animates an immortal being. The repetition of the term also draws attention to ' 'the soul-killing effects of slavery." In contrast with the "souls" of the slaves are the "hardened hearts" of the enslavers. If any man needs to be convinced of the spirit-destroying effects of slavery, he has only to listen to the songs of Colonel Lloyd's prisoners and ' 'analyze the sounds that shall pass through the chambers of his soul,□and if he is not thus impressed, it will only be because 'there is no flesh in his obdurate heart.'" The Biblical passage alluded to here is from the Book of Ezekiel; the destruction of the wicked and God's offer of a new spirit tothose who will abide by His laws are prophesied: ' 'I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh." As for those whose hearts remain obdurate, "I will recompense their way upon their own heads, saith the Lord GOD." Douglass is connecting his voice with the voices of the Old Testament prophets when he promises the coming destruction of the wicked. This strategy is used frequently in the Narrative.

Another instance of it is found in Douglass' description of his friend Nathan Johnson,' 'of whom I can say with a grateful heart, 'I was hungry, and he gave me meat; I was thirsty, and he gave me drink; I was a stranger and he took me in.'" The passage quoted is Matthew xxv, 35, and once more the allusion invokes the Second Coming. Christ welcomes those who cared for their fellow men, though strangers, for they will inherit His kingdom: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Those who did not take in the needy stranger are cursed and sent into the ' 'everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." As the gospel account alluded to makes clear, to reject the appeals of suffering humanity is to reject Christ Himself and, thus, Salvation. The passage provides further evidence of Douglass' use of Biblical allusion to strengthen his argument against the religious "sanctions" of slavery.

The association of suffering humanity with Christ is used most effectively in the description of Douglass' fight with Mr. Covey, though this is not the only place where such a parallel is drawn. In chapter eight, for example, Douglass describes his fellow-slaves as ' 'men and women of sorrow, and acquainted with grief'; in Isaiah the Lord is ' 'a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." The slaves and their Lord are explicitly connected with each other. The same may be said of the description of the fight with Covey; Douglass is associated with Christ and Covey with Satan. The struggle thus stands representative of the perpetual battle between the children of God and the devil. Covey is called ' 'the snake" by the slaves, and his defining characteristic is "his power to deceive", exactly that ability which is always associated with Satan. Douglass remarks ironically, ' 'He seemed to think himself equal to deceiving the Almighty." Covey succeeds in "breaking" Douglass, but only for a short time. Before describing the battle that he calls "the turning-point" however, Douglass presents his famous account of the sailing ships on the Chesapeake Bay.

This account might aptly be seen as a kind of emblem for the overall movement of the *Narrative*. Framed between the description of Covey and the actual fight, and placed in the centre of the central episode, its position indicates its importance. Initially, "freedom's swift-winged angels" evoke utter despair and the anguished cry, "Is there any God? Why am I a slave?". But as Douglass thinks about the ' 'protecting wing" of the sails, he vows that he will escape and that he will do so by water. We know from his later autobiographies that it was in the clothing of a sailor that he was delivered from bondage; his prophetic resolutions led him to freedom. The movement toward hope in the ship episode is emblematic of the movement of Douglass' life as it reaches its turning point: ' 'There is a better day coming."

The struggle with Covey begins when Douglass loses consciousness in the fields. The overseer refuses to believe that he is unable to rise and strikes him on the head, leaving a large wound. Douglass runs, pushing through bogs and briers,

barefooted and bareheaded, tearing my feet sometimes at nearly every step ... From the crown of my head to my feet, I was covered with blood... My legs and feet were torn in sundry places with briers and thorns, and were also covered with blood.

Douglass' resemblance to the crucified Christ is unmistakable. When he finally confronts Covey again, he resolves to fight: ' 'I seized Covey hard by the throat; and as I did so, I rose." His triumph is ' 'a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom." In 1841 Theodore Parker suggested that Christ must be seen as the ' 'paragon of humanity": ' 'There was never an age," he said, ' 'when men did not crucify the Son of God afresh." Parker's remarks are especially illuminating when brought to bear on the parallel crucifixions and resurrections of the *Narrative;* so, too, are the words of St. Paul in the second epistle to the Corinthians: ' 'As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ." "As ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation."

For Douglass, consolation rests in the day of the destruction of slavery. Of Mr. Covey, the man who embodies the infernal, he says, ' 'His comings were like a thief in the

night." Once more, language turns back upon its surface meaning: In Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians we find, ' 'The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night", and in the Second Epistle General of Peter, ' 'The day of the Lord willcome as a thief in the night." The day of the Lord is the Day of Judgment.

The voice that speaks to us through this fabric of Biblical allusion is a prophetic voice. After each of three narrow escapes Douglass alludes to the famous Old Testament prophet Daniel, who was protected by the God he served: ' 'I had escaped a worse than lion's jaws"; "I suppose I looked like a man who had escaped a den of wild beasts, and barely escaped them"; "I said I felt like one who escaped a den of hungry lions." In the Biblical account not only is Daniel saved, but those who had condemned him are cast into the pit where "the lions had mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces." Again the promise of the punishment of the wicked is alluded to.

Douglass aligns himself with one more prophet: Jeremiah. In the only true ' 'vision" of the *Narrative*, he imagines the condition of his aged grandmother. She lives in utter loneliness, having been turned out to die; the children, ' 'who once sang and danced in her presence, are gone", and she suffers in "the darkness of age." The vision concludes with the question, ' 'Will not a righteous God visit for these things?". In the appendix to the *Narrative*, Douglass quotes the scriptural reference: "'Shall I not visit for these things? saith the Lord. Shall not my soul be averaged on such a nation as this?"".

The voice of the *Narrative* is that of the prophets of all ages. The apocalypse heralded is a fire of the soul, a spiritual liberation and resurrection which will lead to the day of actual physical freedom from slavery's chains. Douglass' work is a plea for action, a challenge to his readers to take up "the sacred cause" that is truly sanctioned by Scripture, and hasten "the glad day of deliverance." The prophet has spoken, and who are we to doubt that "this good spirit was from God"?

Source: Lisa Margaret Zeitz, "Biblical Allusion and Imagery in Frederick Douglass' *Narrative*," in *CLA Journal*, Vol. XXV, No. 1, September 1981, pp. 56-64.

Adaptations

Frederick Douglass, part of Biography Series, available from A & E Television Network, is a fifty-minute video exploring the life of Douglass, with critical comments from biographers, historians, and African-American scholars.

Frederick Douglass: 1818-1895: Abolitionist Editor, part of *The Black Americans of Achievement Video Collection* (1992), is a concise, comprehensive portrait of Douglass' major life accomplishments as a writer, editor, and abolitionist activist. Directed by Rhonda Fabian and Jerry Baber, the piece runs thirty minutes and is available from Schlessinger Video Productions.

Frederick Douglass: When the Lion Wrote History, a PBS video production, provides an extensive historical and cultural background to Douglass' life from his life as a slave to his lifelong project to provide equal rights and protection to African Americans. It is directed by Orlando Bagwell, 1994.

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass is an audiotape published by Recorded Books. Charles Turner reads the entire narrative, with a running time of four hours and thirty-one minutes.

Topics for Further Study

In the 1840s, when Douglass wrote his antislavery narrative, the abolitionist movement was gaining momentum in both the United States and Great Britain. However, unlike today, communication methods were limited. Research the abolitionist movement of this time and discuss the communication methods that abolitionists used to spread the antislavery message.

At the same time that abolitionists were calling for the end of slavery, women in the United States were beginning to organize around equal rights. This First Wave of feminism was closely linked to the abolitionist movement. Research the relationship that the abolitionist movement had with First Wave feminism. How were their goals similar? Where did they part? How was Douglass involved in the First Wave feminist movement?

Since Douglass wrote his *Narrative*, many other African Americans have written autobiographies that use their own experiences to critique American society's marginalization of them. What other groups in the United States have used the genre of autobiography in this manner? When were these books written and what was their mission?

Published in the 1960s, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* had the same crossover appeal that Douglass' *Narrative* did in terms of attracting both African-American and white audiences. Read excerpts from the book and draw comparisons between the two books. For example, what themes do the two books address? How do they differ? How are they the same?

Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, published in 1861, is the mostly highly acclaimed slave narrative written by a woman. Read it, and then compare and contrast it with the *Narrative*. In particular, analyze how gender accounts for specific experiences undergone as a slave. Then discuss differences in narrative structure, themes, and literary devices in the texts.

Explore more thoroughly the differences that Douglass brings to light between being a plantation slave and a city slave by researching historical documents and books that describe what life was like in these two different environments.

Compare and Contrast

1840s: Douglass and other abolitionists campaign around the country to abolish slavery, speaking of its horrors and promoting the rights of African Americans to be granted legal and political representation.

Today: African Americans and other minority populations have legal protection and equal opportunities in all aspects of life, even though racial discrimination continues to occur.

1840s: Douglass is one of the first African-American public intellectuals to bring issues of race and inequality to the forefront of political life in the United States and works closely with presidents to achieve equal rights for African Americans.

Today: African Americans are represented in high political offices by newly elected Secretary of State Colin Powell and National Security Advisor Condoleeza Rice as well as in academiclife by intellectuals such as Cornel West, Patricia Williams, and Henry Louis Gates.

1840s: A growing and increasingly literate American population devours popular literature such as slave narratives, adventure novels, and captive narratives.

Today: Popular literature continues to be read in the form of suspense, mystery, romance, and horror novels.

1840s: Douglass travels from state to state protesting the evils of slavery and continues to speak for African-American rights until he dies. Many of his speeches are recorded and distributed in newspapers.

Today: Hip hop artists such as Ice T and Lauren Hill expose the continuing injustices of racial discrimination in their songwriting. They send their message via live performance and recordings.

What Do I Read Next?

The Autobiography of Malcolm X, by Malcolm X as told to Alex Haley (1964), is a stunning record of one man's ability to educate himself and fight for the rights of African Americans. It continues the tradition of African-American autobiography and the relationship of African-American protest literature to literacy issues.

The Oxford Frederick Douglass Reader, edited by William Andrews and published in 1996, provides a wide variety of later writings by Douglass that include impassioned speeches, excerpts from his later autobiographies, letters, and his novella *The Lessons of the Hour*.

Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, published in 1987 and winner of the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for fiction, depicts the horrors of slavery and its traumatic aftermath even for those who think they have escaped its dehumanizing effects.

In her book *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, published in 1992, African-American scholar and writer Bell Hooks looks at how African Americans are represented in contemporary media and popular culture.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's popular antislavery novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, first published in 1862, provides an interesting counterpoint to Douglass' *Narrative*. Written by a white abolitionist, the book became an instant success, selling over three hundred thousand copies during its first year. It details the injustices of slavery in the South, mostly via the character named Tom.

/ Was Born a Slave: An Anthology of Classic Slave Narratives, edited by Yuval Taylor and published in 1999, is a two-volume anthology of slave narratives that reveal a broad range of slave experiences from the seventeenth to mid-nineteenth centuries.

The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature (1996), edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Nellie McKay, is a comprehensive collection of the African-American literary canon, including poetry, fiction, drama, and autobiography, as well as vernacular forms such as spirituals and blues songs.

Further Study

Blassingame, John W., *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, Oxford University Press, 1979.

This historical and cultural study focuses particularly on the lives of plantation slaves in the South, detailing their daily lives and the constraints, impositions, and harsh realities they had to overcome in order to create a community.

Davis, Charles T., and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Slave's Narrative*, Oxford University Press, 1985.

This selection of essays, responses, and critical reviews analyzes and discusses the genre of slave narratives.

Foster, Frances Smith, *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Ante-Bellum Slave Narratives*, 2d ed., University of Wisconsin Press, 1994.

This classic study of slave narratives analyzes the social, political, and literary aspects of this particularly African-American genre.

Genovese, Eugene D., *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made,* Vintage Books, 1976.

This thorough account of the institution of slavery in the United States covers economics, psychology, politics, sociology, and geography.

McFeeley, William, *Frederick Douglass*, Norton, 1991.

This comprehensive and highly respected biography details the many aspects of Douglass' life.

Miller, Douglas T., *Frederick Douglass and the Fight for Freedom*, Facts on File Publications, 1988.

Miller provides a generalized biographical account of Douglass' rich and varied life.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Nonfiction Classics for Students (NCfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NCfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on

□classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NCfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NCfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NCfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NCfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an at-a-glance comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NCfS includes The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature, a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Nonfiction Classics for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Nonfiction Classics for Students

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