

GENDER, SLAVERY, AND AMERICAN DREAM IN HARRIET JACOB'S AND FREDERICK DOUGLASS'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

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ABSTRACT

This research seeks to explore the accurate details of their fugitive slaves throughout their narratives, which emphasizing their sufferings under cruel masters and the strength they gained after they freed themselves. The autobiographies that will be utilized in the study include Frederick Douglass's "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: an American Slave" and Harriet Jacobs's "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl" were written by fugitive slaves of both genders. These two pieces reveal the differences in their experience and how their experiences, as a result of their respective genders, formulated their characters based on their innate gender traits. This paper will explore how the opposite genders were suffering and treated by their masters and mistresses. Even though Jacobs and Douglass obtained their freedom, their memories attached them to the past and formulated their personalities as well as their future

Keywords: Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Fugitive Slaves

1. Introduction

The literature of American slaves is becoming an important new genre because the fugitive slaves published well-documented autobiographies. Putting importance of slave narratives, Andrews' book *To Tell a Free Story* (1987) looked into stories as public autobiographies, while also examining and demanding liberty. Almost no book on American autobiography nowadays is published without a chapter on slave autobiographies. Slave narratives show that slaves suffered physically, emotionally, and spiritually under the slavery system. The fugitive slaves decided to make their own stories public. The testimonies of the fleeing slaves provide authentic accounts of their experiences, stressing their sufferings under harsh masters and the strength they gained after they were released. Frederick Douglass's "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: an American Slave" and Harriet Jacobs's "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl" were written by fugitive slaves of both genders. These two pieces reveal the differences in their experience and how their experiences, as a result of their respective genders, formulated their characters based on their innate gender traits.

2. Objective of Research

- Researching the cult of gender and slavery and its impact and correlation on American dream.
- Exploring the genre of gender and slavery and the most eloquent expression Harriet Jacob's and Frederick Douglass's Autobiographies.
- Comparing Douglass and Jacobs' narratives to highlight the wide variety of demands and conditions that slaves could face.

3. Methods

The researchers explored the research objectives through a descriptive method. To achieve the

best conclusion, exhaustive sources were analyzed and incorporated, including primary and secondary sources.

4. Discussions

Female Slaves and Male Slaves

Female slaves had more duties and roles than male slaves because women not only had to serve the household (Kumar, 2021b) they also had to raise children if they were allowed. Female slaves had less mobility than male slaves, and thus fewer opportunities to flee. Male slaves worked outdoors and sent and received letters for their masters. Literacy was beneficial to female narrators, but it only helped them gain a small amount of freedom (Sterling, 1984). The cult of domesticity enslaved the few female slave narrators in 19th century America (Welter, 1976; Kumar, 2020). Women who accompanied their male counterparts into the field were still required to complete their household chores while the men relaxed. Friendships were formed as a result of the women's collective effort. Laundry labor, for instance, allowed people to speak with one another and share their joys and sorrows. Slave women shared work skills and relied on one another for all aspects of their lives, including childbirth and childrearing. For healthcare, they relied on midwives and doctors, and for childcare, they relied on elderly slave women to feed and supervise their children while their mothers worked (Said, 2014). However, few researchers have conducted in-depth examinations of the role of gender disparities in these areas. They have, nevertheless, contributed to the broad influence of the “social organization of the relationship between sexes” (Scott, 1986). White (1985) details a number of ways in which slave women's lives differed from the lives of men during the period of slavery. White describes the connections that female slaves formed between themselves in her book. She highlights how, for example, being a woman placed additional demands on a slave's life while also facilitating the “cooperation and interdependence” that was necessary for a woman’s survival.

Throughout Harriet Ann Jacobs’s autobiography, Jacobs narrates many powerful anecdotes: “No pen can give adequate description of the all-pervading corruption produced by slavery” (Jacobs & Jacobs, 2009). “The literary and interpretative history of the Narrative has, with few exceptions, repeated with approval its salient assumptions and structural paradigms. This repetition has, in turn, created a potent and persistent critical language that positions and repositions Douglass on top, that puts him in a position of priority” (Qtd in Andrews, 1981). Douglass “charmed his audiences with his style” (Meyer, 1984). Despite the typical norms that mold all of the characters, including the protagonist's voice, into types in most slave tales, Douglass manages to stamp his individuality onto his Narrative (Foster, 1981). He believes that if he did not have anything that was written by a female slave, he would never know exactly how a female slave suffered. Harriet Ann Jacobs’s words in ‘Incident in the Life of a Slave Girl’ reflect how the female slaves were affected by slavery. For example, Jacobs did not know that she was a slave until her mother passed away. This shows the reader that her mother was very careful because she wanted her daughter to enjoy her childhood. Another example is her grandmother who would wake up at midnight to bake crackers even though she was tired. She would sell the baked crackers in order to earn enough money to purchase her children’s and grandchildren's freedom.

Reading both autobiographies shows that a female slave has less power over her situation than a male slave: “When they told me my new-babe was a girl, my heart was heavier than it had ever been before. Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women” (Jacobs &

Jacobs, 2009). Even in the way that Jacobs chose her words, she recognized her inferiority as a female slave. As a female slave, sexual abuse from a master was common. A female slave could not stop her master from raping her, as Jacobs mentioned in her story. Her audience experienced the same difficulties she did as a result of sharing her story with them. Dr. Flint began Harriet's lifetime of sexual assault when she was just 15 years old, and it continued until the end of her life. She started having sex with a well-known white lawyer called Samuel Tredwell because she was afraid Dr. Flint would keep abusing her. They later became parents to two kids together. She took this action because she was terrified of how Dr. Flint might act. Following that, Dr. Flint abducted Harriet and made her work long hours on a plantation that belonged to him. He also threatened to take her children away from their mother because, as the slave owner, her children were legally his. Separating children from mothers made it simpler to sell slaves to a rapist who valued the youngsters as extra property. Being the slave owner, he was legally the father of Harriet's children. Following is a remark from Harriet Jacobs that illustrates her bad relationship with Dr. Flint, her master:

When Dr. Flint learned that I was again to be a mother, he was exasperated beyond measure. He rushed from the house, and returned with a pair of shears. I had a fine head of hair; and he often railed about my pride of arranging it nicely. He cut every hair close to my head, storming and swearing all the time. I replied in some of his abuse, and he struck me. Some months before, he had pitched me down a flight of stairs in a fit of passion; and the injury I received was so serious that I was unable to turn myself in bed for many days. He then said, Linda, I swear by God I will never raise my hand against you again; but I knew that he would forget his promise (Jacobs & Jacobs, 2009).

Along with sexual abuse, female slaves were beaten. Masters and mistresses used beating to control their slaves. By examining, Jacobs' words, the reader see that the master and the mistress considered slaves just another piece of property. Jacobs was under Dr. Flint's constant supervision. The masters and mistresses brought the slaves to the level of animals: "There were horses and men, cattle and women, pigs and children, all holding the same rank in the scale of being, and were all subjected to the same narrow examination" (Douglass & Jacobs, 2000).

Douglass, in contrast to Jacobs, believed that in order to advance in society, he did not need to subjugate himself to others. While Jacobs believed that having an affair with a white guy would keep her children safe from their father, this was not the case: "Of a man who was not my master I could ask to have my children well supported...the wrong does not seem so great with an unmarried man, as with one who has a wife to be made unhappy" (Jacobs & Jacobs, 2009). Even though Jacobs obtained her freedom, her children reminded her of her days as a slave. She believed that if she had an affair with a white man her life would change, while Douglass did not have something reminded him of slavery like Jacob's.

Jacobs was descriptive in telling her story and appealed to the reader's emotions, whereas Douglass, as a male slave, was had more confident in telling his past because a man has masculine traits that slavery could not erase. However, slavery alone would not erase Jacobs's feminine traits or annihilate her self-respect. The repeated rape by her master coupled with slavery destroyed her self-respect and femininity. She did not have any confidence or pride in herself, and even though she obtained her freedom, she still felt the injury of slavery: "Death is better than slavery" (Jacobs & Jacobs, 2009).

In her autobiography, Harriet Jacobs supplied her readers with painful remembrances.

Douglass, in contrast to Jacobs, believed that in order to advance in society, he did not need to subjugate himself to others. While Jacobs believed that having an affair with a white guy would keep her children safe from their father, this was not the case:

I have tried for the last two years to conquer . . . [my stubborn pride] and I feel that God has helped me, or I never would consent to give my past to anyone, for I would not do it without giving the whole truth. If it could help save another from my fate, it would be selfish and unchristian in me to keep it back. (Elli, 1969; 262)

She succeeded in writing and publishing her own experience. Her experience had to be public because it addressed not only her own pain, but the pain of all female slaves, and this was why her friend, Amy, suggested she make her own pain public. Jacobs decided to write her story herself and spent years on the manuscript. After she finished, publishing her autobiography took several years, but it was finally published in England and in America. In a letter by Jacobs, she spells out what the lack of an endorsement from Willis or Stowe had cost her. When she did not hear from Nell and Child, she wrote to them, asking them to help her arrange the publication of her autobiography:

“Difficulties seemed to thicken, and I became discouraged.... My manuscript was read at Phillips and Sampson. They agreed to take it if I could get Mrs. Stowe or Mr. Willis to write a preface for it. The former I had the second clinch from, and the latter I would not ask, and before anything was done, this establishment failed. So I gave up the effort until this autumn [when] I sent it to Thayer and Eldridge of Boston. They were willing to publish it if I could obtain a preface from Mrs. Child....

I had never seen Mrs. Child. Past experience made me tremble at the thought of approaching another satellite of so great magnitude ... [but] through W.C. Nell's ready kindness, I met Mrs. Child at the anti-slavery office. Mrs. C. is like yourself, a whole-souled woman. We soon found the way to each other's hearts. I will send you some of her letters....” (Douglass & Jacobs, 2000).

Jacobs' autobiography took several years before it was public, unlike Douglass who was able to publish his own work easily. Female slaves' autobiographies revealed the hidden truth: masters raping their female slaves and even impregnating those women to the public. They were treated badly and suffered from physical and sexual abuses. For this reason, it took time to publish.

Conversely, Douglass did not face as many difficulties in publishing his own autobiography. He published his work several times. Douglass wrote his autobiography to make a contribution to history:

“I have written out my experience here, not in order to exhibit my wounds and bruises and to awaken and attract sympathy to myself personally, but as a part of the history of a profoundly interesting period in American life and progress. I have meant it to be a small individual contribution to the sum of knowledge of this special period, to be handed down to after-coming generations which may want to know what things were allowed and what prohibited--what moral, social, and political relations subsisted between the different varieties of the American people down to the last quarter of the nineteenth century and by what means they were modified and changed” (Douglass & Jacobs, 2000; 2054)

Douglass chose to record the black history of injustice and make it public in order to show his readers that when equality was absent and prejudice controlled the human conscience, what could happen. He did not write down this history to catch the attention of the public.

In addition to the difficulties in publication, Douglass and Jacobs introduced themselves differently. At the beginning of her autobiography Jacobs introduced herself as a slave rather than a female: “I was born a slave; but I never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away” (Jacobs & Jacobs, 2009; 2187). Her statement shows the reader that slavery controlled all aspects of her life. On the other hand, Douglass introduced himself as being part of the city where he was born: “I was born in Tuckahoe, near Hillsborough, and about twelve miles from Easton, in Talbot county, Maryland” (Douglass & Jacobs, 2000; 2045). In this statement, he introduces himself as a citizen rather than a slave. The introduction demonstrates how he felt like he belonged to the community because he could participate politically once he was free while Jacobs was still a second-class citizen because she was a woman even though she eventually obtained freedom.

Frederick Douglass was born into slavery, schooled himself, escaped arrest, and rose to become one of America's most important abolitionist leaders. Douglass' anti-slavery talks were well-informed and persuasive. He was invited to speak at an abolitionist meeting, and throughout his speech, the audience felt his desire for freedom. His narrative was his first autobiography. In this work, he reflects on his suffering and being looked down upon as a slave. When he obtained his freedom, he was so happy: “A new world had opened upon me. If life is more than breath, and the ‘quick round of blood,’ I lived more in one day than in a year of my slave life. It was a time of joyous excitement which words can but tamely describe” (Douglass & Jacobs, 2000; 2067).

Throughout Douglass’s narrative, he shows how he has poor knowledge about his simple rights, including his accurate age: “I have no accurate knowledge of my age, never having seen any authentic record containing it. By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs, and it is the wish of most masters within my knowledge to keep their slaves thus ignorant” (Douglass & Jacobs, 2000; 2045). Douglass showed his readers how much his rights as a human were ignored because he did not have any idea about his age.

A comparison of Douglass’ and Jacobs’ fugitive slave narratives demonstrates the full range of situations that slaves could experience. Some of the similarities in the two accounts are a result of the required formats that governed the publication of their narratives. As a female and male slave with different stories to tell, Jacobs and Douglass created truthful manuscripts of slave narratives. Jacobs stated, “Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own” (Jacobs & Jacobs, 2009; 2209). Jacobs made it clear that all female slaves, whether they were beaten or forced to work in the fields, went through terrible emotional pain, like being raped or losing their children. The loss of their children and the abuse of their sexuality were two of these emotional pains. She showed in her story how slave mothers felt when their children were taken away from them. For her, slavery's experiences were a difficult physical and mental punishment. Similarly to Jacobs, Douglass stated, “Never having enjoyed, to any considerable extent, her soothing presence, her tender and watchful care, I received the tidings of [my mother’s] death with much the same emotions I should have probably felt at the death of a stranger” (Douglass & Jacobs, 2000; 2047). Douglass concentrated on the internal workings of his family and the tragic death of his mother. The nineteenth-century audience put a high value on the concept of the family unit, just as we do now. In this quote, Douglass showed how the social injustice of the nineteenth century could be seen through the breakdown of a family

structure. This theme is repeated a couple of times: “There is no shadow of law to protect her from insult, from violence, or even from death” (Douglass & Jacobs, 2000; 2071).

The slave's texts themselves demonstrate the truth and accuracy of describing their lives. However, some American thinkers believe that autobiographies have limitations as a vehicle of truth (Kumar, 2021a). The Narrative of Frederick Douglass' Life, which is thought to be one of the best black American slave stories, focuses on the author's struggle to find his own identity (Ellis, 1969). In many contexts, Douglass's pointed out how slavery systems erases the slaves' rights and broke the family:

“My mother and I were separated when I was but an infant” (Douglass & Jacobs, 2000; 2045).

“I was seldom whipped by my old master, and suffered little from anything else than hunger and cold” (Douglass & Jacobs, 2000; 2046).

“Our food was coarse corn meal boiled. This was called mush. It was put into a large wooden trough, and set down upon the ground. The children were then called, like so many pigs, and like so many pigs they would come out and devour the mush” (Douglass & Jacobs, 2000; 2046).

In his appeal, Douglass expressed his suffering; the sale of children from parents was even more common, as he pointed out. They suffered from hunger, thirsty, and the climate changes. Family relationships and marriages between slaves were not recognised in the legal system of the United States. Anyone can purchase children from their brothers and sisters, parents from the children of their siblings, and spouses from their partners. In addition, Douglas chose to compare slave children to pigs because they are known to work in pairs and could also learn new behaviors. They were seated on the dirty floor, which might affect their skin and health as well.

In addition to the previously highlighted characteristics of the lives of slaves, Harriet Jacobs' owner disapproved of her relationship with the man she loved and would have kept her to himself if he had allowed her to marry him. Her life was filled with fear and pain. She was fifteen years younger than her master, Dr. Flint, and he considered her just as any other piece of his own property: “He told me I was his property: that I must be subject to his will in all things” (Jacobs & Jacobs, 2009; 2199). Jacobs understood her fate that she was more than upset with her white master.

5. Conclusion

One of the main things that prevented female slaves from accomplishing their goals and becoming independent was the lack of education they had. Slaves were not allowed to go to school, even though doing so would have given them better communication skills and a better grasp of social equality and their cultural history. In addition, education would have given slaves a deeper understanding of their own cultural heritage. Because of their individual histories, Jacobs and Douglass can relate to one another about their reading experiences. She received all of her formal education from Margaret Hornblow, who served as Harriet Jacobs' first mistress. To give Harriet a competitive edge over the other slaves on the estate, she taught her how to read, write, and sew. Hugh Auld's home was where Douglass spent nearly seven years of his life. Despite Mrs. Auld's scepticism and the fact that she is no longer his tutor, he is able to learn to read and write at this time. Douglass had some prior knowledge of the letters and was highly eager in learning to read. He offered the poorer lads in the community loaves of bread in return for teaching them to read. Although he was inclined to laud these young men in particular, Douglass

claimed he resisted because doing so might have put them in danger because it was against the law to instruct black people at the time. Douglass read the book *The Columbian Orator* when he was around twelve years old. A philosophical dialogue between a master and a slave was depicted in the novel. The debate provided inspiration for Douglass. The slave provided a refutation to each of the owner's justifications for slavery, which ultimately led to the owner deciding to liberate the slave. After reading this book, Douglass was better able to make the argument against slavery as a whole, but it also made him hate his masters even more.

Throughout their narratives Douglass and Jacobs used one of these analogies. For Jacobs, a female slave is like a cow while for Douglass a male slave is like a horse. They generalized this over the slaves even though this is not always the case. For Jacobs, when a female slave obtains her freedom, she will not be as confident in her self-worth as a freed male slave because she is still a slave to her bad memories like a cow caged in a corral. However, for Douglass, when a male slave obtains his freedom, he will be strong, but his memories of slavery will leave a big injury in his heart because by his nature like unbroken horse who will run away from his captors. Even though he has scars from the master who tried to break him, his heart is wild and free.

Without the writing of Harriet Jacobs, we would not have as clear a picture of slave women as we have today. Jacobs's account demonstrates how much worse it was to be a female slave than a male slave and just how powerless slaves were, especially female slaves. Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass show what it was like to be a slave. It was worse than being in prison. Being a slave meant they had no authority over themselves whatsoever. They were considered sub-human and were overworked more than the beasts of the burden. In addition, it is apparent that slaves are supposed to not show emotion, be content with their masters and being under his care. Jacobs was separated from her children and Douglass was torn away from his mother's warmth since he was a baby.

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