

# Harriet jacobs work by lydia maria child

Literature



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## Harriet Jacob's Work by Lydia Maria Child

Harriet Jacobs was a slave girl, who put down the trials and tribulations of her life in her memoir entitled "Incidents in the life of a slave girl, written by herself." The book is a heart wrenching narrative of the life of Jacobs, marked by exploitation, especially sexual, at the hands of her master. Jacobs was the first writer to expose this unsavory aspect of a young girl slave, who was an easy prey for her male masters. These incidents were written under the pen name of Linda Brent, and upto the 20th century, it was generally accepted that the book had been authored by Lydia Maria Child. Child was a white abolitionist editor who was recruited to edit this book. The book gained critical acclaim when Jean Fagan Yellin, through painstaking research of the correspondence between Jacobs and Child, and Jacobs and Amy Post, another abolitionist sympathizer, credited the book to Jacobs.

The book is a mix of the genres of domestic literature and the slave narrative, while at the same time being an autobiography. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has labeled this book as a work of sentimental domestic fiction, but the other concerns of the book, like violation of womanhood, search for self and identity make it more than just a domestic novel. Jacobs traces her life as the daughter of slave parents, who upon the death of her mother went to live with her mother's owner, Margaret Horniblow. Her new mistress taught her reading, writing and sewing, but her death, when Jacobs was eleven years old, altered her life irrevocably. Mrs. Horniblow willed Harriet to her three year old niece, Mary Norcom whose father sexually harassed the little girl. In order to stall his advances, Jacobs became pregnant with the child of a white slave-holding neighbor, having two children from him. When <https://assignbuster.com/harriet-jacobs-work-by-lydia-maria-child/>

she was 21, she ran away from the Norcom household and spent seven years hidden in her grandmother's attic space, who was an emancipated slave. Jacobs fled North in 1842 and was reunited with her children but the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, forced her into hiding once again. Throughout her life she was relentlessly pursued by Dr. Norcom, who refused to recognize her freedom and even offered huge sums of money to anyone who could inform him of her whereabouts. Her new employer Mrs. Willis finally purchased her in 1852, and prodded her into putting her life's story on paper. During and after the Civil War, Jacobs and her daughter fought for the rights of the African Americans. Although the book is an autobiographical account, Jacobs has changed the names of all the characters, including her own.

Harriet Jacobs' autobiography was different from that of other slave writers because of the depiction of sexual abuse of female slaves at the hands of their owners. Throughout the days of slavery, this horrific aspect was kept under wraps, but Child published this material, saying "I willingly take the responsibility of presenting them with the veil withdrawn." Jacobs never uses explicit language to describe her distress, but her plight as the oppressed lonely girl is vividly sketched. Harriet Jacobs also highlighted the role of the Church in keeping slavery alive by holding special services for the slaves where they were indoctrinated to be subservient to their masters and serve them in the same way they would serve God. They were even told that their minds were full of "all manner of evil". Jacobs' work may have been derided as sentimental fiction, but her staunch support for liberation, especially of her own gender redeems the book as a sappy slave narrative. Jacobs' passion for freedom can be gauged by the fact that upon hearing the <https://assignbuster.com/harriet-jacobs-work-by-lydia-maria-child/>

Emancipation Proclamation, she felt that all the brutalities to which she had been subjected to had been amply repaid. Until her death in 1897, Jacob's worked ceaselessly for the rights of newly freed slaves and helped to set up the National Association of Colored Women.

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