

The narrative of the life of frederick douglass assignment

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The True Story of Slavery The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass is a riveting story that shows how cruel and dehumanizing slavery truly is.

Slavery was an issue for nearly all of the 70 years it plagued America. In this narrative Douglass brings to light the sickening experience that slavery is for slaves themselves. Douglass is able to communicate how terrible the institution of slavery is because of the physical abuse many masters forced the slaves to endure, the necessities that were not provided to them, and their treatment as something like cattle.

Douglass learned very early that brutal physical abuse was synonymous with everyday plantation life. For nearly any reason, a supervisor or overseer could beat or whip a slave. Most of the times slaves were abused, it was done publically in order to set a precedent for punishment of other slaves. The theory was that when other slaves see their possible punishment, that they would behave themselves. Douglass recalls a gruesome scene from his early days on the plantation that perfectly illustrates the cruelty of the overseers. He recalls his first overseer, Mr.

Plumber, beating his Aunt Hestor: “ He used to tie [her] up to a joist, and whip upon her naked back until she was literally covered in blood. No words, no tears, no prayers, from his gory victim, seemed to move his iron heart from its bloody purpose. The louder she screamed, the harder he whipped; and where the blood ran fastest, there he whipped longest. He would whip her to make her scream, and whip her to make her hush” (Douglass 5) This beating shows the pain that overseers go out of the way to create incredibly painful and uncomfortable situations that their slaves must go through.

Unfortunately, this example was commonplace, and done even for the smallest wrongdoings. This caused spectators to think they could do nothing to avoid being beaten because someday they will mess up and be forced to endure the pain of the cow skin. Essentially, these vicious beatings became an inevitability of slave life. Although plagued everyday with physical beating, the life of a slave does not get any easier as they return home. If slaves were lucky, they were treated almost equal to cattle, but most of the time given even less food and other necessities.

Slaves were required to work insanely long hours in the field, while coming home to a shack without any of the necessities of life. They were not provided with proper food, housing or clothing. Douglass recounts the minimal amount of food he received each month: " Eight pounds of pork, or its equivalent in fish, and one bushel of corn meal" (Douglass 9). This amount of food is not even enough to feed a sedentary person, let alone someone who has been toiling from sunrise to sunset in the fields. The food the slaves were given essentially had no nutritional value. Their yearly clothing consisted of two coarse linen shirts, one pair of linen trousers, like the shirts, one jacket, one pair of trousers for winter, made of coarse negro cloth, one pair of stockings, and one pair of shoes" (Douglass 9). The clothing that the slaves were provided with was not anywhere near adequate to keep them warm during the winter, or to provide protection against the elements in any way. As horrible as it was, the deprivation of clothing and food from slaves was only just the beginning. Worst of all was the mental pressures put upon the slaves, this pressure grew to be extremely tormenting for almost all slaves.

Their treatment as nothing more than property, easily replicable and of no value made slaves depressed, and feel hopeless. The slaves were in constant mental turmoil, trying to deject the thoughts constantly implanted into their minds by their masters. Overseers took pride in making sure slaves were aware of their inferiority to white men. Douglass recalls how the slaves were grouped with animals: “ We were all ranked together at the valuation. Men and women, old and young, married and single, were ranked with horses, sheep, and swine.

There were horses and men, cattle and women, pigs and children, all holding the same rank in the scale of being” (Douglass 46). This grouping essentially denies their right to be human and to feel any self worth. Slaves are left with a lack of confidence and eternal self-pity. Through Douglass’ narrative he is able to communicate the true ills of slavery. Not many subjects can still send a chill down reader’s spines over 100 years later. Douglass is able to accurately portray how the Physical and Mental strains of slavery can affect the willpower of the slaves.