

Incidents in the life of
a slave girl by harriet
jacobs: the real
slaves' life an...



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The book *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs is an important piece of writing that sheds light on what life as a slave was really like. The book goes into detail about the terrible things that happened to one slave named Linda. This book also gives examples of how the many slave owners that claimed to be Christian disobeyed so many of the rules, but most commonly the 10 Commandments. Many slave owners would use religion as a way to make sure that they had a clean reputation and as a cover if any rumors about them started to spread. This book also shows how slavery didn't just have negative effects on slaves, but on slave holder's wives and families.

One of the main historical events that happened during the book was Nat Turner's rebellion. This was the first and only effective slave revolt that happened in the south. This rebellion resulted in the murder of 51 white people and scared other white settlers in the south. The Fugitive Slave Acts were another important historical event that happened during the writing of the book. These laws stated that any runaway slaves that escaped to the north could be captured and returned to their masters in the south.

When Linda was born a slave but, " never knew it" because Linda's family lived in a comfortable home and weren't treated how slaves typically were at the time. Linda faced a hard time, when at the age of six Linda's mother passed leaving only her brother William, her father, and grandmother. The mistress that owned Linda's mother takes responsibility for Linda, the mistress doesn't makes Linda work hard but, the mistress does teach Linda how to read the bible. It was very rare for masters to want their slaves to be educated so Linda learning how to read was something that rarely happened

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for slaves. When Linda is 12 the mistress dies and in the will Linda and William are given to the mistress' niece, 5 year-old Emily Flint. All that Linda and William have known so far are kind masters, when the siblings arrive at the Flint house hold it is completely different from how Linda and William have been treated their whole lives.

A year after being at the Flint household Linda and William received the news that their father has passed away. Linda's grandmother tries to comfort Linda by saying that God has saved Linda's parents from "evil days to come." Instead of letting Linda see the body before the burial Mrs. Flint forces Linda to get flowers ready for a party. Mrs. Flint was horrible to the slaves in many other ways for example, instead of letting the slaves in the family's leftover food Mrs. Flint would spit in it so the slaves could not eat it. This would not have been as bad if Mrs. Flint would have provided the slaves with enough food to keep themselves healthy, because of this Linda and William had to turn to their grandmother for food and clothing. Dr. Flint was not any better Linda claims to see Flint tie up and whip one of the slaves because the slave claimed that Dr. Flint was the father of the slave wife's baby. The Flints went to church every Sunday but their actions would not show it. The family is a great example of how ironic the actions of slave owners that claim to be Christian can be.

Linda and William's grandmother was bought by a kind lady and was set free and gave God all of the glory for being able to survive slavery and tells the siblings to "pray for contentment" but Linda cannot use religion as a reason to endure slavery, instead Linda uses religion as a reason to try and escape

slavery because Linda believed that it could not have been “ the will of God” for William and herself to live in slavery.

When Linda begins to go through puberty Dr. Flint begins to make advances and whispers inappropriate things to Linda in an effort to make Linda submit to Flint, but the “ pure principles” that Linda has been taught give Linda the strength to stand up against Flint. Mrs. Flint is aware of Dr. Flint's actions towards the slaves but instead of being angry towards Dr. Flint, Mrs. Flint blames the slaves for her husband's actions and tries to keep a watchful eye on her spouse. Dr. Flint was so determined to get with Linda that Flint begins to write Linda letters with the same foul language that has been whispered to Linda in the past. In an effort to get closer to Linda, Dr. Flint moves their youngest daughter's crib into a room close to the couples and forces Linda to sleep in the room as well. When Mrs. Flint discovers this, she is furious and requires that Linda swore on a bible to tell the truth about all of the wrongs that Dr. Flint has committed towards the slaves and Mrs. Flint, such as Mr. Flint having 11 illegitimate children with slaves. Linda tells the truth and can tell that Mrs. Flint is angry and frustrated because of this Mrs. Flint forces the sleeping arrangements to be switched so that Linda sleeps in the same room as Mrs. Flint. All of this shows how slavery can cause distrust between husband and wife and how slavery wasn't beneficial for southern home life. This is also another example of the irony of Christianity in a slave owner's home “ Thou shalt not commit adultery.”

Throughout the whole book one of the main points that Linda conveys is that slaves have the same wants and desires as whites although they are not allowed to have them. An example of this is when Linda falls in love with a <https://assignbuster.com/incidents-in-the-life-of-a-slave-girl-by-harriet-jacobs-the-real-slaves-life-and-religion/>

free-born carpenter who feels the same way towards Linda. Dr. Flint will not sell her and Mrs. Flint does not care if Linda is sold or not, but believes that slaves do not have the same right to happiness as free people do. Linda talks to a friend of her grandmothers to convince Dr. Flint to sell Linda to the carpenter but Dr. Flint refuses. Because of this the only secure relationship in Linda's life is the one with William, but even then there is always the fear that one of the siblings will be sold and they will never get to see each other again. Every person deserves to have one solid relationship where there is no worry about one of the people leaving, but slaves had no guarantee at a relationship like that because their family could be sold off in the blink of an eye.

Southern slave-holders would oftentimes use manipulation to keep slaves from running away. Slave owners would tell stories about runaway slaves in the north being starved to death and wanting to return to slavery because the conditions for slaves were so bad. Because slaves are uneducated and are not allowed to have their own thoughts, it is very easy for masters to trick their slaves into not wanting to run away. Southerners talk bad about Northerners in order to keep slaves from running away which demonstrates another way that southerners were not following Christian values such as "thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."

Dr. Flint still has not given up on getting Linda to submit herself to all of his desires. In order to avoid a scandal Dr. Flint informs Linda that there will be a cabin built outside of town where Linda will reside. When Linda sees the cabin actually being built, Linda starts talking to a single white man named

Mr. Sands. Linda hopes that if things start to become physical with Mr. Sands
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it will anger Dr. Flint to the point of giving Linda up. Linda knows that if all of this works out the way it was planned, Linda's grandmother will be disappointed because Linda did not save herself for marriage. Linda also knows that this might be the one chance to get away from Dr. Flint for good. When Flint informs Linda that the cabin is done there is also some shocking news waiting for Dr. Flint, Linda informs the doctor that Mr. Sands is the father of their unborn child. Linda then goes to grandmother's house to share the news, but Mrs. Flint bursts in and starts screaming at Linda and claims that Linda is pregnant with Mr. Flint's child. Linda's grandmother, so full of anger and disappointment, throws Linda out of the house. Linda walks for a few miles to a family friend's house before grandmother comes to retrieve Linda. When this happens, Linda tells of all the abuse that has been endured that led to the decisions that were made. Because of this grandmother forgives Linda and is understanding of the situation. Many slaves had to give up their religious and moral beliefs in order to please their masters, and to survive.

Soon after this Nat Turner's rebellion occurs, this is a very monumental step in the direction of ending slavery and scaring slave owners because this was the very first slave rebellion and southerners did not want something like this happening again. After the rebellion masters want their slaves to attend church services "to keep them from murdering their masters." All of the services are led by white men that will tell slaves to obey their masters and teach that slavery is the will of God. Linda begins to realize that many southerners use religion as a way to have a good reputation, but are not truly Christian and only want slaves to go to church services if what is being taught benefits the masters.

After Linda gives birth to Benjamin, Mr. Sands son, shortly after Linda falls pregnant with Sands again. This time Linda is expecting a girl who Linda ends up naming Ellen. Linda knows that when the children become older Mr. Flint will treat Linda's children the same way that Linda was treated. The only solution is Linda, Benjamin, and Ellen fleeing to the North. Linda knows that this will be a tough task that will require a lot of planning. Linda knows that it will be impossible to flee to the North with two kids in tow, so Linda decides that the best plan is to hide in the crawlspace of grandmother's house. Because of this Mr. Flint believes that Linda has escaped to the North and decides to sell Benjamin, Ellen, and William to a slave trader who works for Mr. Sands. Linda is overjoyed because Ellen and Benjamin will finally be free, Mr. Sands agrees to send Ellen to a relative that lives in New York. William escaped from Mr. Sands and went up North. Linda manages to get to New York where Ellen lives and stays with the Bruce family. This family is very kind to Linda and treat her with respect. After Mrs. Bruce dies Linda receives a letter from Emily Flint (now Mrs. Dodge) stating that if Linda returns to the south it will be a comfortable home where Linda might be able to eventually purchase freedom, Linda doesn't reply. William decides to take Benjamin to work in California and Ellen is doing outstanding at school. Linda goes back to work for Mr. Bruce and take care of the new baby with Bruce's new wife, who love and care for Linda. Around this time the Fugitive Slave Acts are passed and Mr. Flint knows where Linda is. Because of the Bruce's adoration for Linda, Mr. Bruce sends Linda to hide in the countryside for a month before returning to New York.

Linda soon receives the news that Mr. Flint has died, but Mrs. Flint wants Mrs. Dodge to retrieve her slave. Mrs. Bruce and Ellen both encourage Linda to leave the city when the Bruces arrive. Once Ellen and Linda leave Mrs. Bruce negotiates with Mr. Dodge about selling Linda and taking away the claims on Linda's children. When Linda's freedom is bought Mrs. Bruce excitedly tells Linda right away to return home. Linda is welcomed with tears of joy, and finally, a free woman.

This book addresses the issue of the very little rights of women in the south, and the horrible things that slaves had to go through every day. Women knew that their husbands were unfaithful with the slaves on the plantations, but divorce was not an option and was a very taboo subject at the time. Southern white women just had to turn the other way and pretend to be oblivious to their husband's actions. As for slave women their masters would abuse and rape them, and many times this caused the women to fall pregnant. Often times masters would have children with multiple slave women and everyone would know about what was happening because that was the only way to keep the masters wife, the slave women, and the illegitimate children safe.

The reason that Dr. Hancock chose this book is that it goes deeper into the topic of slavery which is something that was discussed in class. The book was also written when events such as Nat Turner's Rebellion and the Fugitive Slave Acts occur, these were both topics that were discussed in class. This book shows what was going on in people's lives during the time of these events and allows the students to learn more about these events.

The book *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* gives a first person point of view as to what slavery was really like. This book gives light to the sexual and physical abuse inflicted on slaves daily by masters that claimed to be Christian. Harriet Jacobs does not spare any details, although some of the topics were taboo at the time, the book was beautifully and should be read by everyone to realize just how much the world and society has improved since then.

Harriet Jacobs' main reason for writing this book was to shed light on the terrible things happening to her personally and to fellow slaves. The book also showed the irony of Christians in the south, if these people claimed to be Christian then how could white people believe that owning slaves and treating them as if they weren't human was ok?