

Frederick douglass: struggles of the american slaves



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Frederick Douglass: Struggles of the American Slaves Frederick Douglass, who was born into slavery around 1818, will forever remain one of the most important figures in America's struggle for civil rights and racial equality.

As an ex-slave, his inspiration grew beyond his borders to reach the whole world. Without any formal education, Douglass escaped slavery and became a respected American diplomat, a counselor to four presidents, a highly regarded speaker, and an influential writer. By common consent Douglass's Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave (1845) is recognized as the best among the many slave narratives that appeared before the Civil War. He amazed people when he spoke bravely in his Fourth of July speech.

He spoke out against oppression throughout America and abroad, and his struggle for freedom, self-discovery, and identity stands as a testament for all time, for all people. Although some people accused him of lying, exaggerating, and using his narrative and his well-known Fourth of July speech as part of an abolitionist plot, Douglass was able to clearly demonstrate his talents, sensitivity, and intellectual capacity by revealing the truth about the lives, culture, and psychological struggles of American slaves. To be able to use Douglass's Narrative as well as his Fourth of July speech as historical sources, one must distinguish between facts and opinions. Facts within both sources can be considered as historical base because they were written by someone who lived, experienced, and suffered in the same time and place of the events. People can learn and understand history from historians and autobiographers like Douglass. His opinions share the same importance but must be looked at differently.

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These opinions are his interpretations and thoughts about that period of time, however we may agree or disagree with them as well as have our own ideas and thoughts about them. From the opening sentences of the narrative, Douglass defines the context by imposing the question of what it means to be human. Douglass reveals the fact that slave owners typically thought of slaves as animals. Douglass does not know how old he is, and he quickly declares that this is not unusual, since most slaves “ know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs.

” It is instructive that this initial comparison of slaves to animals does not serve to express something about the minds of the slave owners; instead, it expresses something about the minds of the slaves that is the consequence of being born into an environment constructed and carefully maintained by their owners. In an environment that does not permit the idea that slaves are human, the only perspective available to them is that of their owners. Their own perspective therefore becomes an additional barrier to thinking of themselves as human. Douglass reveals more about the psychological struggles that slaves go through when he describes the pain of separation and death of his mother. He was separated from his mother when he was an infant. He never enjoyed his mother’s watchful care.

Slaveholder’s don’t want slaves to be attached to their mothers or establish love bonds between them. They also “ destroy the natural affection of the mother for the child. ” He received the news about his mother’s death and felt “ with much the same emotions I [he] should have probably felt at the death of a stranger. ” In addition, slaves witness the harsh treatment and whipping of slaveholders at a younger age. Slave children were scared all the

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time and don't know when their turn will be to be whipped or beaten for reasons they may not necessarily know about.

Douglass witnessed the horrible exhibition of whipping his Aunt Hester and described it to be “ blood-stained gate” and this was his “ entrance to the hell of slavery. Slaves cannot stop thinking about their conditions and the fact that they will be slaves for the rest of their lives. This was an enormous physiological struggle for them. Knowing that they will never be free and happy made there life meaningless and without dreams. They can never be creative and must only do what they are told. Douglass expresses his condition by saying, “ I have often wished myself a beast ... It was this everlasting thinking of my condition that tormented me.

There was no getting rid of it. It was pressed upon me by every object within sight or hearing, animate or inanimate. ” Because of the terrible conditions that slaves live with, they sometimes regret their own existence. Slaves lived through very terrible conditions where slaveholders articulated every possible way to dehumanize slaves.

Slaveholders have dishonestly established as law the designation of the children of slave women to follow the condition of their mothers so as to legally protect themselves from becoming their fathers. This law gave them free reign to act upon their lusts. Slave women were helpless victims of their white master's lusts. The other victims were the mulatto children who are severely mistreated, especially by their white mistresses because they represent their husband's infidelity. Mulatto children were most often sold off

by their own fathers. In addition, killing a slave was often not considered a criminal offense.

Slaveholders have little regard for their slaves' lives. Douglass recounts several murders where the perpetrator receives little or no punishment. There are many murders that go unpunished. Douglass recalls that there was a common saying among the white little boys that, " it is worth a half-cent to kill a " nigger," and a half-cent to bury one. " Slaves not only suffer from frequent beatings and whipping, they also suffer from cold and hunger.

On the Great House Farm, young Douglass has to steal a corn bag so that he can keep warm sleeping on the cold, damp floors. Slave children go half-naked all year long and are fed food in a trough like pigs. Douglass went deep inside slave's culture to tell us much about what they do and don't do. Slaves were so desperate in their lives that they used to sing not expressing their joy like everyone, but to reveal more about their sadness.

They would sing anything that comes to their minds just to release their pain. Douglass states that, " very tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains. " Slaves were forced to say only good things about their masters and never mention bad things. Douglass tells the story of a slave seeing his master in a roadway without knowing him as his master. When the master asked the slave about his living condition and weather his master takes care of him, the slave replied negatively. The master sold the slave and separated him from his family and friends.

Slaves were forced to think this way about their masters until they can't distinguish between good and bad master. The most important element that <https://assignbuster.com/frederick-douglass-struggles-of-the-american-slaves/>

destroyed slave's self-identity was that " They seemed to think that the greatness of their masters was transferable to themselves. " They saw themselves to be better if owned by a rich slaveholder instead of moving toward their freedom. Learning to read and write is essential to see the world correctly and Douglass understood that early in his life.

As he describes it, the achievement of these abilities is inseparable from the dawning of self-consciousness. Reading gives Douglass access to a new world that opens before him, but the strongest effect of his literacy is the light it casts on the world he already knows. His suffering is so great that he " would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. " It allows him to see his " wretched condition, without the remedy. Douglass represents the extent of slavery's ability to dehumanize through his insights into the mentality of slave owners. Douglass suggests that if slaves are made rather than born, the same is sometimes true of slave owners.

The mistress who began teaching him to read and write " at first lacked the depravity indispensable to shutting [him] up in mental darkness. " Under the influence of her husband and, more generally, the institution of slavery, " the tender heart became stone, and the lamblike disposition gave way to one of tiger-like fierceness. The mistress not only stops teaching Douglass to read and write, but she is even more alert than her husband in preventing him from learning. The transformation of his mistress raises the question of how much of the behavior of slave owners toward their slaves was learned and how much was internally motivated. Douglass argues that both slave-owners and slaves are victims of slavery.

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In his speech, What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July delivered in New York 1852, Douglass uses his reason and argument by challenging America, which had become a leading slave-nation and demanded the abolition of slavery. He asked the American people to rethink about the Declaration of Independence with all the great principles of political freedom in it and to apply it to slaves. Douglass reveals that this glorious anniversary would only increase the distance between the American people themselves. The way white people are treating slaves is not the way the Declaration of Independence saw the nation to be. He saw the nation divided and dehumanized by forgetting slavery conditions and never solving slave's problems. Douglass was firm when he did not argue the wrongfulness of slavery because he did not see any counter argument to it.

He saw slavery to be anti-humanity, anti-religion, anti moral, anti-liberty, and anti-reason. Ironically, the American people had already declared most of these when they signed the Declaration of Independence. While some people saw Douglass's Narrative as full of lies and they even went further to suggest that it is part of an abolitionist plot, the level of details he supported his work with and the use of reason tells us the opposite of that. In his narrative, Douglass was able to remember in details many house names, streets, places, people's names, parts of speeches, and stories. He was also very articulate and objective when talking about slaveholders. He reveals both the good and bad qualities of slaveholders and don't discard any favor he gets from any person even slaveholders.

Douglass's wrote history from the perspective of those who previously had no voices and can say nothing about themselves. In addition, in his Fourth of <https://assignbuster.com/frederick-douglass-struggles-of-the-american-slaves/>

July speech as well as his Narrative, Douglass used sound argument and rationalization to communicate with his listeners and readers. All his arguments were supported side by side by facts from his life and the life many slaves. The very existence of the narrative makes it a testament to its author's humanity and, therefore, a document of revisionist history. Through his intellectual and lateral ability, Douglass was able to prove to his critics that all the information imbedded in his work is, in deed, true and ought to be classified under historical sources.