

# Compare contrast douglass and jacobs essay sample

Literature



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## **Compare/Contrast Douglass and Jacobs Essay Sample**

The experiences, memories and treatment in any situation are viewed upon differently between a man and a woman. Obvious in the case of slavery, the two sexes were treated differently and so therefore their recollections of such events were-different. In the following short essay, we look closely at the perspective of the female slave, Harriet Jacobs in “ Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl”, and respectfully compared to that of a man slave, Frederick Douglass in “ The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass”. Although both experienced their freedoms despite facing great adversity, being a slave woman offers a different perspective of a woman’s account of her disadvantages.

One way that Harriet Jacobs perceived slavery differently than Frederick Douglass is that as a child, she never even realized she was a slave. This could be a disadvantage because it could become a safety issue if she does not realize her “ place” among the races as well as when she reaches an age of being able to labor and be sold; it would have a profound effect on her when she could have been more prepared. Within the first page of her autobiography, Jacobs states “ I was born a slave; but I never knew it...” (281). She then goes on to state in a different line that “...I was so fondly shielded that I never dreamed I was a piece of merchandise...” (281). Jacobs’s father was head workman. He had the liberty to manage his own affairs and work at his trade.

She lived in what she describes as a “ comfortable home” and had relationships with her family members such as her brother, grandmother,

mother and uncle. Frederick Douglass on the other hand, had already realized slavery was amidst him in his childhood. In the first paragraph of Chapter 1, Douglass states “ A want of information concerning my own was a source of unhappiness to me even during childhood” (395). He took a very direct look at slavery whereas Jacobs was not even aware. We can see this when he does not understand and goes onto state why he “ ought to be deprived of the same privilege” (Douglass 395). In Chapter 1 of “ Narrative of The Life of Frederick Douglass”, he states “ I have no accurate knowledge of my age...” (395).

Another way that Jacobs perceives slavery differently than Douglass is that she does not yearn for or look into the future for freedom as comfort for most of her life, as did Douglass. Instead, she looks for comfort of family. This could be a disadvantage because maybe she would have been able to escape with her children at a younger age so that she and her children could experience more years as a free people and she could have found comfort at times that her family was not able to be there for her. As Jacobs states in Chapter 2, paragraph 5, “...and strengthened by her love, I returned to my Masters” (284). Here, Jacobs is referencing her grandmother. Later, in Chapter 5, Jacobs states “ I longed for someone to confide in. I would have given the world to have laid my head on my grandmother’s faithful bosom, and told her all my troubles” (288). Where Harriet looks to comfort in times of trouble, Douglass looks to the idea of freedom.

Family was not an option for him. Douglass states In Chapter 5, paragraph 4 “ I shall never forget the ecstasy with which I received the intelligence that

my old Master had determined to let me go to Baltimore..." (407). Douglass is so excited to go to Baltimore because he has heard good things about Baltimore from his cousin Tom. He hopes of future happiness, learns of the possibility of wearing trousers, and hears of the city slaves being kept clean. This is perhaps his first experience towards freedom, and in Chapter 5, paragraph 11, Douglass states " Going to live at Baltimore laid the foundation, and opened the gateway, to all my subsequent prosperity" (408). In moments of desperation, Douglass relents to thoughts of suicide. The thought of freedom in the future however, saves him. As described in Chapter 7, paragraph 7, " I often found myself regretting my own existence, and wishing myself dead; and but the hope of being free, I have no doubt but that I should have killed myself..." (Douglass 413).

A third way that Jacobs perceives slavery differently than Douglass is her reason for obtaining freedom and the method by which she found it. Jacobs decides to obtain her freedom so that she could protect her children from the horrible conditions that she herself has experienced and so that they may be free. She decides to do this by running away (so her Master thought) and hiding in a 9x7 garret at the top of her grandmothers shed. She stayed inside that garret for 7 years so that she could keep watch over her children as best as she could and so that she could wait for the opportune time to escape to the north. The disadvantage of Harriet Jacobs method by which she obtained her and her children's freedom is that she lost any little freedoms she did have in order to receive full freedom. She lost a relationship with her children for seven years; she lost sunlight and fresh air, and many other things. Another disadvantage was that she had to endure

physical and emotional hardships. Jacobs stated in Chapter 21, paragraph 1 “ This continued darkness was oppressive.

It seemed horrible to sit or lie in a cramped position day after day, without one gleam of light” (298). Douglass took a different route and perspective to freedom. He was so intrigued with intelligence and education, that intelligence and education was his route to freedom, so that he could become intelligent and educated. With these tools, he would then educate others on the sufferings and wrong doings of the slaves in the South. In Chapter 6, paragraph 3, Douglass states “...I set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read” (410). As a man, he strongly looked at slavery and at freedom right in the eyes. In Chapter 10, paragraph 9, Douglass states “ You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man” (424). In this quote he is explaining how he defended and stood up for himself against his Master.

This action changed the way by which his Master dealt with him in the future. He did not wait 7 long years hiding out as a frightened slave, hiding and being quiet. As a matter of fact, at the age of twelve, Douglass states in his autobiography “...and the thought of being a slave for life began to bear heavily upon my heart” (412). It took Douglass approximately 8 months of planning before attempting and succeeding in obtaining his freedom. In Chapter 11, paragraph 5, Douglass states “ But I remained firm, and, according to my resolution, on the third day of September, 1838, I left my chains, and succeeded in reaching New York without the slightest

interruption of any kind” (443). Most of his life, Douglass prepared for freedom. Through many ways, he educated himself so that he could use his knowledge to become free.

Even though Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass both gained their freedoms despite facing great adversity, different as their adversities may have been, one thing they both had in common was that they were persistent and shared the same dream. The dream that they both shared was freedom for themselves and for their future. As a little girl, Jacobs never even realized that she was a slave. She lived in a comfortable home and had the pleasure of living with and maintaining relationships with most of her family members, therefore, she need not look to the future for freedom. She already felt that she was as free as she needed to be. As a teenager, she realized that she was nothing more than a piece of merchandise to her Master and by the age of twenty, had two children.

Jacobs’s concern as a female slave was to provide and protect her children. This was her primary source of persistence and motivation and ultimately led her and her children to freedom. As a man, Douglass’s take on slavery and how he gained his freedom was almost opposite of that of a females. As a child, Douglass had already come to realize that he was owned property. He did not know his mother or father, nor did he know how old he was. He did not have a comfortable home or clothes to wear. Where Harriet Jacobs looks to comfort in times of turmoil, Douglass looks to the prospect of freedom in his future. This outlook saved his life in the darkest of his days. He believed his route to freedom was through education. Douglass insisted on becoming

educated, and through his persistence to learn throughout most of his life, he obtained his freedom.

#### Works Cited

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