

The quest to freedom essay



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The quest for freedom came at a loss for most Black Slaves across the world. Most dreamt about it, others tried to go after it. Few truly obtained it. This causes me to think, what is freedom, and what does it mean truly to be free.

Webster Dictionary defines freedom as " Independence, Liberty, ease of movement, a right. " If we were to go by this somewhat simple definition, we could say Frederick Douglas and Mary Prince gained freedom. But, the path they both took to get it was far from being the same.

Their journeys to freedom posed many different complications, but the major difference in their experiences is because of gender.

Black women as a whole have had to deal with many different types of degrading sexist/sexual exploitations. Therefore, being a Black woman made Mary Prince's journey to freedom more challenging than Frederick Douglas'. When discussing slavery many seem to jump at the idea about how Black men were " administered". That they were forced into submission, stripped of their power, or their " manhood".

No one seems to talk about how Black women were forced into roles that put them, more so than not, into harm's way more frequently. " In a retrospective examination of the black female slave experience, sexism looms as large as racism as an oppressive force in the lives of black women.

" From birth, Mary Prince did not stand a chance. Not just because she was Black, but because she was Black and Female, subsequently, she never gained true freedom. While Mary Prince never comes out and says she was raped, she does talk about her master's repeated sexual abuse. He had an

ugly fashion of striping himself quite naked, and ordering me then to wash him in a tube of water.

This was worse to me than all the licks. The racial exploitation of Mary Prince as a domestic house slave was not as dehumanizing or degrading as the sexual exploitation she encountered. After dealing with a master who abused her both in a sexual manner, as well as beating her non-stop, Mary Prince found what she believed be her way out. “ God led me there.

The truth is, I did not wish to be any longer the slave of my Indecent master. She found her way to being in the service of Mr.. Wood, who would in turn be her final master. What Mary Prince did not know was that while she was a slave of the Wood family she would get small glimpses of hope for freedom.

The first glimpse is when she gets abused verbally by her mistress. In this situation, Mary Prince is sick with rheumatism and cannot perform her duties adequately enough to satisfy her mistress. She tells of her mistress following her and using “ ill language” towards her to point where Mary Prince has had enough. I bore in silence a great deal of ill words: at last my heart was quite full, and I told her she ought not use me so; – that when I was ill I might have lain and died for what she cared; and no one would then come near me to nurse me, because they were afraid of my mistress. ” Her mistress subsequently called her husband who instructed Mary Prince to take a note and go find another owner.

“ Not that he meant to sell me, but he did this to question why exactly was Mrs.. Wood so displeased with Mary Prince and why was her husband willing to act as if he so willing to get rid of her.

One can only speculate since Mary Prince does not speak of any sexual encounters between herself and her master.

When consulting Bell Hooks' book, *Anti Woman*, she suggests that " Most white woman regarded black women who were objects of their husbands' sexual assaults with hostility and rage. " When moving forward through Mary Prince's narrative we find again that she becomes ill and Mrs.. Wood is so dissatisfied with her work that she complains to her husband again. He in turn sent her away to find someone else to buy her.

This time, however, Mary Prince was prepared. " I went to Mr.. Brochure, showed him the note, and asked him to buy me for my own benefit; for I had saved about 100 dollars, and hoped with a little help, to purchase my freedom. " Again Mr.

. Woods takes back his note and in return takes back the idea of Mary Prince Ewing set free. Mary Prince goes on for years having these types of incidents with the Wood family. Eventually, on a trip to England with the Woods she is set free, but not without consequence. While in England Mr..

Wood gave Mary Prince an ultimatum, either she would stay and work as she was told, or she could leave and live freely in England. This is a problem for Mary Prince because by this time she has a husband back in the West Indies, and though she does decide to leave the Woods, she can never go back to the West Indies. The Freedom that she gains she does not allow her to roam the earth freely. If she were to go back to the West Indies, she would be taken back to the Wood family as their slave. Freedom to Mary Prince

simply Just meant that she would have the liberty to live her life how she saw fit.

She gave up everything for freedom in England, but she never gained true freedom outside of that.

Frederick Douglas' Journey to freedom had it's own ups and downs, though because of his gender he did not have to deal with the added pressures of sexual exploitation. As a child he lost his innocence when he saw his Aunt Hester beaten for inning of to be with another slave named Ned. " I was terrified and horror-stricken at the sight, that I hid myself in a closet, and dared not venture out till longer after the bloody transaction was over. I expected it would be my turn next. From this moment on Frederick Douglas is aware of the beatings that occur around him. At first he does not talk about himself being beaten regularly or even getting in trouble.

He seemed to have made good connections, especially with his first master. " I was seldom whipped by my master, and suffered little from any thing else than hunger ND cold. " , because of this relationship with his master he was afforded the opportunity to go to Baltimore and work for a family there. Going to Baltimore was the catalyst of him finding what he thinks is the key to freedom, education.

Very soon after he began living with Mr.

. And Mrs.. Laud, Mrs.. Laud began to teach him the alphabet.

Though, it was not this that made him value learning to read, or education as a whole for that matter. It was her husband's response ".. If you teach that

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Niger to (speaking of myself) how to read there will be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave.

” Frederick Douglas used this to drive his way to freedom. For Mr.. Douglas, having knowledge was power and power translated into being free, until something changed.

While throughout the narrative Douglas treats knowledge as the path to freedom, he himself presents his own transformation from slave to a free career as a slave.

It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived with me a sense of my own manhood. ” A few later he escapes from Baltimore to the North. Frederick Douglas explanation on how escaped elaborates on the idea of the reputation of slavery through enforced ignorance. Since education for Mr.

. Douglas is the key to freedom, slave owners keep Blacks enslaved by not educating them. Mr..

Douglas turns the tables by not revealing exactly how he escaped, or even how slaves escape in general.

Mr.. Douglas’ tone is very impassioned, as he suggests that he wishes the slaveholders to suffer in their ignorance, showing that lack of knowledge robs people of their ability to control. Mary Prince and Frederick Douglas both survived extraordinary things. They pushed the boundaries of what freedom is and how one should obtain it. Mary Prince had freedom dangled

in front of her by her masters as it she was a little baby, and they were playing a game.