

Latisha this world and
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conditions?

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Latisha Jones Mrs. Karen Gainey Eng 311 Studies of African American Literature January 21, 2018 Harriet Jacobs, *A Mother's Instinct to Protect* A mother's love for her children none would say is unconditional until death. Motherhood is a given sixth sense to most women, in other words a mother would do anything in her power to nurture and protect her child. During slavery, a woman was powerless to protect and keep her children from harm. Most mothers had to experience the pain of seeing their children beaten or sold, furthermore if they were girls the mothers lived with the knowledge that they would experience the same sexual abuse. Harriet Jacobs was the first woman to author a slave narrative in the United States about sexual abuse among slave women.

Born in 1863 as a slave, Harriet Jacobs was unaware she was a slave until she was six years of age. Harriet states " They lived together in a comfortable home; and though we were all slaves, I was so fondly shielded that I never dreamed I was a piece of merchandise, trusted to them for safe keeping, and liable to be demanded of them at any moment" (225). Her father was a carpenter who supported himself and managed his own affairs. A slave herself, her mother was favored by her owner, but as Jacobs wrote " we all know that the memory of a faithful slave does not avail much to save her children from the auction block" (226). In her narrative, " Incident in the Life of a Slave Girl", Jacobs exhibits herself as a black slave woman whose indomitable spirit as a mother helps her to fight to prepare, and protect her children during slavery.

Being prepared for slavery is an impossibility, how can you prepare anyone, especially your child, to come into this world and endure such terrifying conditions? In Harriet Jacobs' narrative she was not prepared by her parents about slavery and the life she would come to know once she was of age. Motherhood and womanhood was stripped away from women slaves, so there was not any way of giving their daughters the foundation necessary to prepare for becoming a mother or woman. Harriet's quest in preparing her children seemed to be different from her mother's. Upon finding out she was having a girl, Harriet's "heart was heavier than it had been before. Slavery is terrible for men: but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own" (Jacobs 240). Harriet's preparation was that she would fight and be determined that her children would not be subjected to slavery. Protecting your children is another's instinctive inclination.

Harriet Jacob's courageous acts in protecting her children and herself from the awful acts and punishment of slavery is something I, as mother, would have done for my children. Additionally, for her to have lived in a small shed under her grandmother's house with no light nor fresh air for several years was the sacrifice that almost any mother would make to protect her children. Even within the animal kingdom, we can see how mothers protect their young from all levels of danger.

This instinct is a common bond within beasts and humans. A situation occurred where I had to protect my youngest son from an abuser, I can readily identify with all her protective feelings as a mother. In conclusion, I

can relate to Harriet Jacob's sacrifices and decisions she made to protect her children.

Another goes above and beyond to try to prepare and protect their children for what they may face in life. Although, I am a free woman and never had to fear having my children being stripped away from me, if put in Harriet's position I would have done the same thing. I can't imagine not being able to have any say in raising my children. I truly admire Harriet Jacob's strength and endurance during slavery.

She is an example for all women, of how a mother's love is unconditional. After reading about the life of Harriet Jacobs, her choices are congruent with the choices I would make as a mother... I could personally identify with her.

Works Cited Jacobs, Harriet A. Incidents in the life of a slave girl: written by herself. Publisher not identified, 1860.