

# Narrative of the life of frederick douglass, an american slave

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Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave & Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. By Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs (Introduction by Kwame Anthony Appiah). (The Modern Library: New York. c. 2004. 434 pp. \$6. 95). Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglas, an American Slave is a firsthand account of the struggle of Fredrick Douglas who was born into slavery. The book hits on several main points of slavery from the brutal beatings that were inflicted upon slaves to the hypocrisy of Christian slave owners who used religious teachings as a justification for the treatment of their slaves.

Douglas immediately immerses the reader in the atrocities of being a slave. The feel is very "matter of fact" but leaves the reader feeling compelled to be irate. Douglas is almost able to actually bring the reader into the life of a slave. The imagery that is used is so vivid that you can actually see the book play out in your mind. The ascription of meaning to the slave songs that Douglas heard in the pine woods is eye opening and the quote "The mere reoccurrence to those songs, even now, afflicts me; And while I am writing these lines, an expression of feeling has already found its way down my cheek.

To those songs I trace my first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery (pg 28) ". The power of that quote alone is enough to open the heart and mind to the pain of the African American slave. The scope of this narrative is across the life of Fredrick Douglas, from his childhood as a slave to his role as an speaker on behalf of abolition in which he drew the courage to speak out even in front of his white

counterparts. The purpose of the narrative is to inform the reader of the circumstances that the slaves had to deal with on a day to day basis and also as a public argument against slavery.

I feel that the book is an exceptional piece of literature that by all standards envelops the reader into the world of a slave in the 1800s. The literature not only examines the life of Frederick Douglass but the ideas of the time in which he lived. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave & Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. By Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs (Introduction by Kwame Anthony Appiah). (The Modern Library: New York. c. 2004. 434 pp. \$6. 95). *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs is exactly as the title says, an account of incidents that "Linda Brent" had went through in her life.

It is important to note that "Linda Brent" is used as a pseudonym for Jacobs. Brent did not fully understand that she was a slave until around age six when her mother dies and she is now. One thing that I liked about this narrative was the emphasis on family. In "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave" family is not examined as much, due to the treatment of the slaves by their masters, their family lineage is mostly a secret. Jacob's goes into detail about the bond between her and her mother as well as her grandmother.

The purpose of this book is to indulge the reader into several incidents that made Harriet Jacobs who she was. The motif of broken family cohesion is ever existing in the book as it is shown that black women are, most of the

time, not allowed to raise their children, marriage is not allowed between slaves and if it is they do not live with one another, and mulatto children are sold and the white fathers feel no obligation to their children. The major conflict in the text between the need for freedom and the need to protect her children brings a very realness to the narrative.

I do feel that Jacobs wants the reader to believe that all of the accounts or incidents in the book are in fact nonfiction, as stated, " Reader, be assured this narrative is no fiction. I am aware that some of my adventures may seem incredible; but they are, nevertheless, strictly true. I have not exaggerated the wrongs inflicted by Slavery; on the contrary, my descriptions fall far short of the facts (pg 1)" The horrific events that happened in the narrative are hard to understand or believe, that is why Jacobs inserts the previous adage.

The juxtaposition I have chosen for the two slave narratives is family. In " narrative of the life of Frederick Douglas, an American Slave" family is not a prevalent theme. In fact the lack of family would be a more accurate depiction. Yet in " Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl" family is one of the most important things to " Brent", aside from freedom, and the argument could be made that family came before freedom. As a child family was very important to Brent and as a mother it remained just as strongly to her.