

"uncle tom's cabin"  
and "narrative of the  
life of frederick  
douglass" essay  
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## **“ Uncle Tom’s Cabin” and “ Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass” Essay Sample**

It was once written by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence, We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. These words are very simplistic and nonspecific, which is a reason why they are interpreted differently by various people. The part of this document that I wish to focus on for this paper is equality. Many have disagreed over the message being sent. For example, who is included in the phrase, all men are created equal? What does this equality entail?

Are both genders meant to be treated equally? There are so many ideas that we can introduce on this subject. After reading the works by Stowe and Douglass, I had a much better understanding to what equality meant to some people during the 1800s. Slaves wanted an equality where they would be viewed the same as any other person, regardless of color. They wanted the right to vote, participate in government, live life freely without being under a Masters eye, basic principles that white men called their inalienable rights.

Harriet Beecher Stowe presented her views through the story Uncle Toms Cabin. A tale that begins among the relatively happy lives of Kentucky slaves and finishes in the midst of death and freedom, Stowe vividly gives explanations of the thoughts and actions of various personalities in the 1800s. We heard stories from those who did not believe African Americans

deserved the same rights as what white people received. We also heard counterpoints from those who believed blacks did deserve equality. There was much discussion as to the naturally inferior qualities that supposedly represented the black race. In 1854, George Fitzhugh wrote that the African race was inferior to the white race. If they were given their freedom and equality it would bring about the extermination of their race because they would not be able to compete against whites. Africans were not given equal treatment because they were simply looked at as the lesser race.

They were thought of as not being on the same level as their white masters, and were treated as such. In a conversation with Augustine St Clair, we hear Alfred talk about how all men are not born free, nor equal. This type of mind set is a reason why African Americans were not given rights in the 1800s and were held as slaves to those who were thought of as the naturally superior race. Stowe shows this situation again when she speaks of slaves having no acknowledged rights or position. They are observed by law as not being worthy of any equality. This is a heart wrenching fate for slaves.

Because they are not seen as equals, they have no say as to what happens in their lives, they are looked at as being lower than human. Because of this, they do not even receive the opportunity to really demonstrate their worth and equality. Stowe showed the pain slaves felt when family members were sold and families torn apart; when they were not even treated as people, but rather as the private property of an owner.

By showing such scenes, Stowe proved that slaves were like any other human being, and just like their white counterparts, slaves were capable of experiencing strong emotional reactions. This was a counter to the view of <https://assignbuster.com/uncle-toms-cabin-and-narrative-of-the-life-of-frederick-douglass-essay-sample/>

natural inferiority. Stowe's argument raised the question that regardless of any physical attribute, how can a person be seen as inferior if they are capable of the same thoughts and feelings as the next person? Frederick Douglass showed his views on equality through the writing of his narrative. Like Stowe, Douglass presented similar arguments. He tells the story of a slave who remarked to a passerby, that he was not treated well by his master. Because of this he was chained and taken away from his family, all for giving his opinion and telling the truth. In this time, slaves could not even speak their mind without fear of some sort of reprimand. African Americans were thought of as being so inferior that they were treated like common livestock. Douglass recalled being fed in troughs on the ground without any utensils.

Meals consisted of boiled corn meal, referred to as mush, in which slaves fought one another in order to get enough food. In other instances, slaves were lumped together, inspected, and valued as property along with farm animals, such as cattle and swine. Slaves were intentionally held back. White slave owners did not want to see their slaves acting as intellectual, moral, and accountable beings. Douglass told of the struggles he had to overcome in order to educate himself. It was up to the Masters individually, if they wanted to educate their slaves or not. Just to learn a common practice such as reading and writing, Douglass had to trick young white children into teaching him and practice on already used copy sheets. For some, it may not seem worth all the effort that Douglass gave to learn such a simple task. But in his search for freedom and equality, he realized that education was not just for becoming an intellect, but rather a key to open the door of

opportunity. Education and the ability to learn new skills gave the tools needed to advance in life and come closer to achieving freedom and equality.

We have seen thus far that race played a factor on who was treated equally, but what about gender? In Uncle Toms Cabin, Mr. Shelby tells his wife that she could never understand business for the fact that she is a woman. It was not a woman's job to be in the business and economical affairs of the family. A woman was to stand behind her man and support him and his decisions. Like African Americans, women did not have the equality that they deserved. They were denied basic rights that were bestowed to white men, and forced to stand in the background. Neither author put forth an argument for gender as strongly as they did for race, but Stowe nevertheless presents most of the female characters in her book to be intelligent, moral, and strong individuals, more than capable of being held on the same level as their male counterparts. I believe she showed this best in Mrs. Shelby and Eva.

Eva, even in her youth, was very influential not only with the slaves, but also with her father and Aunt. Her soft angelic nature touched the lives of the people she associated with. When no one else could get through to Topsy, Eva succeeded. Mrs. Shelby was also deeply cared for by the families slaves. Though she was the mistress of the house, she was not above working in order to obtain the funds to retrieve Tom, even against her husbands wishes. I think this really shows the strength and character demonstrated by women. Another way Stowe shows this is in Aunt Chloe. She brings up to Mrs. Shelby the prospect of being hired out to work for the money to buy her husband back. She was willing to leave her children behind in order to raise that

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money all on her own. This demonstrates the abilities of a strong woman, capable enough to take care of her family.

Frederick Douglass did not make much mention to gender in his narrative. I believe a reason for this was because he believed that all people were equal and deserved to be treated the same. Douglass made no distinctions between race and gender while dealing with the issues of equality because he did not see anything that made it to where they should be treated differently. Slaves were both men and women, and nothing made it to where the women were any less deserving than the men of their rights. In 1848, he was one of the only men to attend the first Womens Rights Convention, showing his support for gender equality. Douglass worked endlessly to see that all people regardless of race, class, or gender, could be treated as equals.

When reflecting on the issues surrounding equality in the 1800s, one can see that Jefferson's famous phrase that all men are created equal, did not actually apply to everyone. It protected the rights of white men and white men only, completely disregarding others on the basis of their race and sex. Both Stowe and Douglass showed through their writings that they thought it should rightfully include all people, regardless of race or gender. They wanted everyone to receive the same opportunity, the same rights, and for all people to be treated fairly and justly.

Stowe wrapped these beliefs up well at the end of Uncle Toms Cabin, with some words from George Harris. He stated We ought to be free to meet and mingle, - to rise by our individual worth, without any consideration of caste

or color. Oppressed groups, such as African Americans and women, wanted people to see that there were no biologically superior groups of people, who were born better than the rest. They were just as capable as anyone else, but lacked the opportunity to fully develop their own sense of skills, intellect, and self worth. They wanted the right to be free, to be treated as one in the same, to receive the same opportunities as the next person, to voice their opinion and live life in full equality.

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