

Response to harriet jacobs and frederick douglass readings assignment

[History](#)



Critical Response on Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass Both Douglass and Jacobs were inspirational icons for the African-Americans in American history. Their contributions to the abolition of slavery and liberalism of the African-American race in the U. S. are very notable and important too; not only for honor but also important to American literature. They both lived during the period of the Antebellum (1820 - 1865) when the abolition of slave trade was a big issue in the country. At this time, most writers were writing on the subject of slavery.

The works of Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* respectively, were narratives of their lives giving details of their experiences as slaves. Their narratives point out their intentions, thoughts, actions and feelings during this time. They give critical accounts of the kinds of conditions in which they lived as slaves. Harriet Jacobs was a slave girl who lost her mother at a very early age. Since then she lived in her master's house until adulthood.

Her reactions to her own experiences as a slave girl (in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*) show her hatred for slavery and her immense dislike for people that involved themselves in this malpractice. Jacobs saw slavery as dehumanizing. In the seventh chapter of her narrative, *The Lover*, Jacobs expresses her hatred for her slave master who deprived her of her right to love and be loved as a human. From this chapter we see that slave owners were wicked people who took advantage of the weakness of the black race and treated them as lower class creatures that did not deserve any good treatment from the whites.

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Besides ill treatment, slaves could not be sure of their “tomorrow,” as they could be bought up at any time from one slave owner to the other. This continuous movement from one owner to the other shows that slaves could not be sure of their happiness and in the case of Jacobs and “The lover,” she was threatened by her master that she’d be separated from the one she claims to love. There was no much liberty given to slaves at this time as feelings of love were not allowed to mature in the hearts of slaves. The continuous change of masters/mistresses built in the slaves mixed emotions towards their owners and masters.

Freedom, what every (at least most if not all) slave looked forward to was pushed farther away from them. Hence every slave’s attempt to escape from slavery would always have a tragic end. Jacobs’ perception of freedom was different from what other slaves saw as freedom. The common practice was to work hard and buy your freedom from your master but because she was enlightened, she did not accept that as a good way to gain freedom. From my own point of view, Jacobs did not just want to gain her freedom for just her sake but she tried to abolish some of the practices that misinterpret man’s status.

Jacobs’ love for humanity was what she was fighting for. No wonder she had mixed feelings of happiness and unhappiness when her freedom was bought, happiness in the sense that she was free at last but she was unhappy because at the end, she was still treated as a property and not as a human, as it ought to be. Jacobs’ main inspiration for such actions she took might have come from the fact that she did not want her children to continue living

as slaves, and for this I think she fought so hard. Harriet Jacob's narrative is both inspiring and exemplary to other slaves in existence and yet unborn.

This story shows the meanness of whites on the colored race. Also she shows her struggle, persistence and refusal to give up. This, I see is aimed at telling other people to fight hard for their rights as humans and also to enlighten them so that the issue of slavery would be eradicated completely. This narrative I'm sure inspired a lot of other writers to write and educate people on the subject of slavery. Also inspirational is the story of Frederick Douglass, originally born Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey, a slave.

Frederick disliked the culture of slavery. Like in the account of Jacobs, Frederick was separated from his mother at a very early age and never knew his father. His narrative paints different clear pictures of ill-treatment and the descriptions of his experiences were well detailed to assure credibility and discount of fiction but pure reality and truth. In it he does not write for the mere purpose of convincing the reader but he writes to tell the truth about everything that had happened to him from childhood all the way to adulthood.

In his narrative, Frederick mentions the continuous change of masters and overseers, again another similarity to that of Harriet Jacobs. The tone with which he gives this account was not one coming from a person speaking with love but hatred for the other party. He shows how much he disliked the idea of enslavement and the effects slavery had on every person. Frederick himself experienced some moments of mixed feelings towards his enslavers but the unpleasant always outweighed the pleasant.

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Furthermore, like Jacobs Douglass' education did not come easy and unchallenged. He used different ways to get educated like " mingling with the white boys" and was so interested in getting educated because his masters were always against him having any form of education with the fear that someday, he'll get out of control and unmanageable. He further narrates events that aided him being a man growing through a life of slavery. One very notable similarity between him and Jacobs is their persistence and refusal to give up on their quest for freedom.

Also another example that should be taken from Douglass is that even after getting caught trying to escape and jailed afterward, he went forward to device another plan in order to gain his freedom which he finally got. Douglass' freedom I would say is a reward for determination and refusal to give up. He fought hard to make sure his people were not looked down on but rather seen as important in the society. He showed his love for his people in his narrative by not giving full details of his escape so as not to jeopardize another person's plan.

In conclusion, as afore mentioned, these narratives are inspirational pieces which are of no doubt of the highest credibility and authenticity. They were meant to have some specific functions in the society; as to influence, motivate and inspire people. Indeed these narratives are good pieces of literature. These writers both existed during the same era and a time when the abolishment of slavery was a well discussed topic in the country. Their pieces were meant to be examples of good literature and also to influence

people to fight against slavery and work towards achieving freedom for the colored race.