

Harriet jacobs



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Harriet Jacobs For many, the 19th century United States meant slavery and abuse, and Harriet Jacobs was no different. Jacobs was born to slave parents, which meant that she inherited their social status. The early life of Jacobs was not easy; her mother died when she was just 6 years old and she was forced into the care of her mother's mistress (Margaret Hornblow). However, when Jacobs reached the age of 8, Hornblow also died, and the ownership of Harriet as a slave was transferred to a girl of just 5 years old (the niece of Hornblow). Because a 5 year old girl could not legally be in possession of a slave, the Jacob was automatically placed in the care of the father of this child, Dr. Norcom. Dr. Norcom (given the pseudonym Dr. Flint in her Jacobs' novel) would play an influential role in the life of Jacobs, sexually abusing her for most of her early life as a slave girl and threatening her should she refuse him. All of these factors led to Harriet Jacobs leading a difficult early life, which she recorded in her memoir *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Life for Harriet Jacobs as a slave girl in the south was not easy. Although her parents were considered to be relatively high status for slaves, her mother's early death meant that she was alone and under the full control of slave masters for the entirety of her early life. Dr. Norcom (Flint) began to sexually harass Jacobs just a few years after she was entrusted to his care. Jacobs was still very young at this point, and this sexual harassment would be one of the major influences on her life and her later writing. Cleverly, Harriet consented to the sexual advances of another white man (Mr. Sands), which she thought would prevent Dr. Flint from sexually harassing her. Although Jacobs has said that she did not love this man and did not find it to be a Christian relationship, it was still preferably to being abused at the hands of Flint. Dr. Flint did not, however, end up selling her to her new lover (as Jacobs had

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intended), instead sending her to work as a field hand. Jacobs would have two children from this consensual relationship. However, as she was still bound by the laws of slavery, her two children were considered slaves also and were in the care of Dr. Flint. Fearing that her children would suffer as she had, she hatched a desperate plan that involved hiding in the attic of her grandmother and trusting Mr. Sands to buy her children. Eventually, she is reunited with her daughter in New York, although Jacobs is still a slave at the close of the novel. Dr. Flint was very influential in the life of Harriet Jacobs. Sexually abusing a girl so young of a social standing where it would be impossible to refuse had a massive effect on Jacobs, who is considered one of the first feminist writers. Jacobs found the whole thing disgusting and tried to appeal to the morals of white Christian women in the writing of this book. The wife of Dr. Flint was also very influential in Jacob's life and writing; Jacobs felt that she should have stopped the abuse. Their daughter, Emily Flint, becomes the automatic owner of Jacob's upon Dr. Flint's death, and due to the developments from the civil war, Jacobs' expects that Emily would free her. The death of Harriet Jacob's mother would also play an influential role; her death (and the death of her mistress 2 years later) was the event that led to her being in the care of Dr. Flint. As a slave, it is interesting that Jacobs' found the time and was allowed to write such a memoir. It was at first difficult to publish, but eventually it became periodically published in sections, although the sexual abuse was omitted to protect the audience. After this book was published, the Civil War began and Jacobs became active in the female anti-slavery world. The new versions of the books were popular with abolitionists, although these still did not have true accounts of the sexual abuse. As an activist and writer, life was still not easy for Harriet

Jacobs, although she became associated with hospitals and schools and became dedicated to ensuring that these provided the same services to black and white alike.