

# Fredrick douglass dbq

Business



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While slaves show some agency with religion, how hard they worked, expressing themselves, and trying to get an education, the overwhelming oppression made it negligible. The different ways each slave was treated and different rights slaves were granted was only given if one rebelled against what they were told or “suppose” to do.

The slaveholders would never give them the option of having a say in what they were suppose to do for the day, so the choice of agency was made by the slaves who wanted more for themselves then being taken advantage of. Slaves showed agency with religion because they had their own “black church” after the required “white service”. Sarah Fitzpatrick, a house-slave in Alabama, was able to show how the different services were in different times of the day and how it differed depending on the color of your skin. “So white fo’ks have deir service in de mornin’ an’ “niggers” have deirs in de evenin’.” She went on to talk about how they could do what they wanted in their own service and didn’t have the white folks around to judge them or “put them in their place”. Although their own services shows they have agency with their religion, it also shows they don’t.

In “white ceremony” in which they were required to attend, they were taught that their master knew best and that they should listen to what they have to say, cause it’s always correct. “White preacher he preach to de white fo’ks an’ when he git thu’ wid dem he preach some to de niggers, tell em to mind deir master an’ b’have deyself an’ dey’ll go to hebben when dey die. There were two completely different messages being taught through out the day. They were forced to listen to a service that made them foolishly believe that “slavery is the answer God chose for the black people”. Then

they were able to have a lesson where their own opinions could be expressed, but only away from authority. In the narrative of Frederick Douglass, Douglass talks about the requirement of religion and the connection of cruelty from the use of religion between the slaveholders and their beliefs.

The most undesirable slaveholder to have was the most religious and spiritual. “ There was not a man in the whole county, with whom the slaves who had the getting their own home would not prefer to live, rather than with this Rev. Mr. Hopkins. And yet there was not a man any where round, who made higher professions of religion.

“(Page 88) How religion was portrayed as a bad thing for a master to have unmistakably can be misread in the whole bases of religion in the time of Fredrick Douglas. When now a days, a religious man would be portrayed as a respectable and “ holy” man. But in the end each slaveholder uses the religion to control each slave instead of try to educate him with the teachings. In which they indicate the importance of obeying their master. Slaves showed agency with how hard they worked because they were able to limit the amount of effort they put into each job they were assigned and how much time it took.

In Fredrick Douglass, Douglass decided to rebel against his master’s commands but he was punished for it. “ He ordered me to take off my clothes. I made him no answer, but stood with my clothes on. He repeated his order. I still made him no answer, nor did I move to strip myself. Upon this he rushed at me with the fierceness of a tiger, tore off my clothes, and

lashed me till he had worn out his switches, cutting me so savagely as to leave the marks visible for a long time.

“(Page 71) Douglass had the ability to not listen to his master, but in the end he ended up getting punished. This gave fear to him and other slaves so that they wouldn’t even consider rebelling or denying a command. Showing oppression to the fact he was unable to make his own choice on what he wanted to do. Another way slaves showed some agency is how they expressed themselves by creating songs and dances that they kept a secret from slaveholders. The “ Lynchburg Negro Dance” painting shows that the slaves were able to dance and have a good time together without the dictation of their masters telling them what to do. This painting also shows how they had oppression, because they still had to keep the dance a secret away from their slaveholders.

Regardless if they were able to do it with out getting caught, they had no freedom to do it in the first place. Another way the slaves expressed themselves was through the song “ The Ship of Zion” and in Fredrick Douglass when the slaves would sing sad songs happily to each other, or happy songs in a sad tone. “ The Ship of Zion” shows the hope some of the slaves contained and how they saw ships as a symbol of freedom. The songs that the slaves sang in Fredrick Douglass talked about the cruel life they lived and also their hope to escape. “ I am going away to the Great House Farm! O, yea! O, yea! O!” (Page 29) The reason the songs also show oppression is how they had to sing them in such a way that the slaveholders would not be able to interpret what they were saying. It was a secret way of

communicating, hence, they were not granted the right to communicate with each other, other than behind their masters' backs or in code.

Another way Fredrick Douglass was able to have some agency was by his determination to get an education. Douglass was able to set goals for himself through out his slave life to learn to read and write. " I lived in Master Hugh's family about seven years. During this time I succeeded in learning to read and write."(Page 51) He could be taught how to read from his mistress in the house but in the mists of learning how to write, his master ordered her not to continue the lessons. " A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master.

Learning will spoil the best nigger in the world. Now if you teach that nigger how to read, there will be no keeping him."(Page 48) This shows the view they had of slaves and how he tried to cut off the education that Douglass was working so hard to receive. Although he was able to successfully learn how to read and write, he had to do complete the learning through stealing and trickery of little white children who took their learning for granted. " In learning to read, I owe almost as much to the bitter opposition of my master, as to the kindly aid of my mistress.

I acknowledge the benefit of both."(Page 49) By this Douglass is saying he needed the push of refusal from his master to be able to complete his education with a new determination. Another part in Fredrick Douglass that shows some agency is when Douglass and a friend were confronted and tied up. Douglass' friend, Henry, refused to be tied and did not let them take him away. "" I won't" said Henry, in a firm tone, indicating his readiness to meet

the consequences of his refusal” (Page 96). Just there it explains that he is going to be punished for not listening to the commands given to him.

Just like all the others, this example of agency even though he was showing resistance at first, the overwhelming oppression that came after made the choices hardly an effort to begin with. In the end of the novel Fredrick Douglass, after Douglass is a free man he is still struggling with the same fear that he had when he was a slave. “ I was afraid to speak to any one for fear of speaking to the wrong one, and thereby falling into the hands of money-loving kidnappers, whose business it was to lie in wait forest lie in wait for their pray.”(Page 113) He was the pray to them, in his mind, he was just going to be controlled again even if he was now a free man, there was no escape. Even after he was free he still felt alone.

“ I felt like one who had escaped a den of hungry lions. This state of mind however, very soon subsided; and I was again seized with a feeling of great insecurity and loneliness.”(Page 112) This shows how even if he has agency over his own life, he is forever dwelling on the scar of slavery. That oppression will never leave his mind, and at this point he is unable to look past the past and move on to the greater future. Other than the feeling of alone, slavery left a feeling of untrustworthiness. “ I saw in every white man an enemy, and in almost every colored man cause for distrust.

“(Page 113) Douglass wasn’t able to adapt to being his own master as quickly as he wanted to. Slavery left him thinking he was unable to have friends to trust because they were just going to be taken away, or betray him. Along with every white man he saw they reminded him of the

unfairness and oppression he had to go through in order to stay alive. By this, one can tell the freedom that slaves can receive after hard work and rebellion is not always as easy to adapt to as they once expected. This is because they are left with this uncertainty that makes them analyze every aspect of their new life. There are many ways one can argue that there was agency with slaves and that they could make choices for themselves, but in no way do the slaves have any freedom given to them by the slaveholder's choice.

The only way to receive any agency as a slave was to rebel against what you were told to do or do what you wanted without your master finding out. Slaves lived in oppression, not having choices and not being able to express themselves openly without having their lives in danger. Slavery did not leave any slave in a good mental place afterwards; they were left with the oppression and fear that they experienced during slavery. That is why regardless of how much freedom they found they were unable to obtain such agency without disregarding what they were told and needed to have an overwhelming determination to accomplish their goal.