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THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO

الجامعة الأمريكية بالقاهرة

The American University in Cairo (AUC)

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**The Impact of Slavery and Colonialism on the Black Consciousness:**

*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, The Confessions of Nat Turner, and Incidents in  
the Life of a Slave Girl*

Thesis submitted to

The Department of English and Comparative Literature

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts

Mariam M. Badawi

SID: 900112880

Under the supervision of Professor Steven Salaita

May 2023

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my family who have supported me throughout my education.

Thank you for helping me see this adventure through to the end.

## **Acknowledgments**

I am deeply indebted to Professor Steven Salaita, Chair of Committee, for his tremendous support, endless patience, and invaluable feedback throughout this year. I would also like to express my deepest appreciation for Professors Ghazoul and Abdel Nasser who provided me with their time, support, and expertise to improve my thesis.

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## Abstract

According to the German author, essayist, and empirical psychologist Karl Philipp Moritz, to be able to analyze someone psychologically, we have to be able to analyze ourselves as one would know oneself better than one would know anyone else. Therefore, he proposed the study of autobiographies to be able to delve into a writer's "innermost soul" through their knowledge of themselves (qtd. in Schlumbohm 32). Moreover, "the psychological effect that the ideology of white supremacy and European imperialism, in the form of slavery and colonialism, has had on Africa and her people has never been fully addressed and understood" (Nobles 233). Slave narratives provide insights into the slaves' consciousness and the impact slavery has left on such consciousness as well as the rippling effect it has left in its wake on the slaves' descendants. Thus, to be able to better understand the impact on the Black race in general, for the slaves and their descendants, *the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1831), and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) have been chosen for my thesis to analyze, focusing on slaves' characters as well as the impact slavery and colonialism have left on their minds and consciousness. Beforehand, we need to define the term "consciousness," as it is not limited to the dictionary definition of a person's awareness. Rather it encompasses how the person places themselves in the world, views their rank among other citizens of the world, and perceives and builds their understanding of the world. The constructs they build in turn impact and/or shape the person's relationships, interactions, sense of entitlement and rights, as well as self-esteem and self-worth. The oppression that silenced the slaves during those times helped them find an outlet for their voice through writing narratives. Therefore, the aforementioned narratives will serve as material for analysis of the impact of slavery from the perspective of African Americans to counter the impact that white supremacy and oppression have left on the perspectives of other writings or historical documents.

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## Introduction

Professor and autobiographer James Olney defines autobiographies as narratives or recollections written by the author in the present, from the author's present perspective, looking back at the past. Olney explains that an autobiography or a narrative, written in hindsight, does not focus on an unbiased, neutral perspective of the author's life, rather it focuses on certain events that have led to the current state of being. Olney refrains from discussing fictional autobiographies or false memories; he only focuses on the significant weight the memory allocates to certain events that are essential in explaining who the author is at the present, or how the author came to be or reach the present state: "Memory creates the significance of events in discovering the pattern into which those events fall. And such a pattern, in the kind of autobiography where memory rules, will be a teleological one bringing us, in and through narration, and as it were by an inevitable process, to the end of all past moments which is the present" (47). According to Paul John Eakin, writing autobiographies can be considered "an identity practice" as it helps forms the identity of the autobiographer (22). Thus, reconstructing or retelling certain significant events in an autobiography helps the reader understand the autobiographer and their identity. Thus, perusing the author's autobiography assists in examining the author's identity.

Lynn A. Casmier-Paz explains the importance of studying fugitive slave narratives published between 1760 and 1865 in examining and revising the historical knowledge about slavery and the slave community through scrutinizing "the past sufferings, escape, and freedom of .. former slave[s]" (215). According to Casmier-Paz, "historians have found that fugitive slave narratives are essential for understanding slave experience" (215). Multitudes of research have doubted the authenticity of those narratives on accounts of bias on the autobiographer's part, on the fact that some of the slave narratives were not in fact written by the narrators, and for the discrepancy between the slave's and the narrator's names. However,

scholarship of slave narratives has proven the significance of those narratives in understanding the consciousness, or the psyche, of the slaves. As mentioned before, memory has an active and decisive role in filtering what to be included in --or excluded from-- an autobiography, or a narrative. However, even if the author or narrator chooses to selectively include certain recollections or events in the narrative, it would still prove to be true, as the narrator's consciousness is what is represented in those life writings, rather than a factual, detailed account of someone's biography. The consciousness, in other words, is an agglomeration of spiritual, psychological, emotional, discursive, and political factors that, taken together, comprise the character presented in the autobiography. Thus, life writing in this case can still serve the purpose of understanding the narrator's psyche, in the sense of that narrator's textual existence. Olney claims that the scholars' interest in studying autobiographies stems from a "fascination with the self and its profound, its endless mystery" (qtd. in Eakin et al 466).

In her book *Mental Slavery: Psychoanalytic Studies of Caribbean People*, Barbara Fletchman Smith argues that slavery has influenced African descendants, the way they interact with Europeans, and the way they regard themselves today (21). Slavery has left racism in its wake, making a person feel alienated from society, degraded to a second-level citizen, persecuted, oppressed, and inferior to other people. Slavery's aftermath oppresses a group of people who belong to an ethnicity that does not hold the economic and political power in the world and which was also wronged by the world in a past era. Hence, we must review slave narratives to be able to study the slaves' consciousness and examine the impact slavery has left on the Black race in general, and to what extent. Saidiya Hartman, a leading thinker in African American studies, posits that autobiographical works are not merely personal stories, rather they are "really about trying to look at the historical and social process and one's formation as a window onto social and historical processes, as an example



of them” (qtd. in Sharpe 8). According to Christina Sharpe, another scholar of Black studies, slavery is not a singular event that has taken place in a particular spatial and temporal point in history, rather it is what she calls “a singularity” that has altered and shaped the world and its impact can still be witnessed till today (qtd. in Ewara 100). The trauma slavery caused the slaves between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries is not just a personal trauma, rather it has traumatized an entire race. In other words, personal trauma is caused by a deeply distressing or disturbing event that affects the person in question and may end by resolving the issue or by the person’s demise. However, in the case of slavery, the traumatic event is a prolonged one that impacted an entire race for centuries in a way that caused major alterations to the race’s identity in the eyes of the world and of themselves. Since the trauma has touched the entire race, it became generic to include later generations who have not experienced the trauma firsthand but are still suffering the consequences of the said trauma. In her article “Family Pictures: Maus, Mourning, and Post-Memory,” Marianne Hirsch argues that the descendants of historical trauma survivors are collectively implicated by the event through what she calls “post-memory” (8). Hirsch explains that post-memory is similar to a memory in its “deep personal connection” (8) to the individuals, or the descendants, yet it is different in that it is shaped by history, even if there is a “generational distance” (8) from the historical event. The descendants’ lives are shaped and “dominated by memories of what preceded [their] birth” (8). Slave descendants are dominated by their sense of entrapment and inferiority. Their post-memories drive their struggles against the racist structure they have been generationally entrapped in. Sharpe supports Hirsch’s theory highlighting the fact that the entire Black race still suffer from the aftermath of slavery, including herself: “The precarities of the afterlives of slavery [...] the precarities of the ongoing disaster of the ruptures of chattel slavery. They texture my reading practices, my ways of being in and of the world, my relations with and to others” (Sharpe 5). She quotes Hartman to illuminate on

some of the said precarities: “skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment” (qtd. in Sharpe 5). In her book, *In the Wake, on Blackness and Being*, Sharpe uses personal examples from her life and her family’s lives to explain how in the wake of slavery, Black people still suffer racism and are positioned in a world that calls for — and supports— antiblackness to this day. She explains how Black people are not free – and will never be free – so long as the Black race is perceived and treated as an inferior race as a result of slavery and how it has shaped the perspective of the world. Sharpe provides an example of her cousin, Robert, who had suffered from Schizophrenia but was known and accepted in his neighborhood. Robert was a victim of police brutality, but when Robert’s death was reported in the news, the papers failed to mention that “Robert’s neighbors knew him and were not afraid of him; they were concerned for him and they wanted help [the police] calming his agitation. What the paper did not say is that the police shot Robert, who was unarmed, or armed with a starter pistol—a toy gun—point blank eleven times, or nineteen times, in the back” (7).

### **Construction of Racism**

According to Rhett S. Jones, modern scholarship has agreed that race is a social construction with no biological evidence, meaning that there is no one gene or cluster of genes that is common among people of, what we consider, different races (479). The notion of race did not exist before the nineteenth century when people started assigning negative characteristics to entire groups to enforce their inferiority. For capitalism to be adopted by the United States, people had to use cheap and forced labor, which led them to resort to slavery. Slavery may not have been established by rich American people, but they have contributed to enslaving millions of people over the centuries. Racism was highlighted during that period when distinctions were made among people using terms such as “white” and “slave.” These distinctions came with privileges and benefits to the rich, slave-owning capitalists while they

harmed and labeled an entire race because they were poor and enslaved. Cognitive Dissonance is a term that describes a discord that occurs in one's mind when one behaves in a way that contradicts one's values or beliefs. Owning another human being and degrading them to the level of property or cattle may have caused this dissonance. To avoid or diminish this dissonance, one must convince oneself that they did not oppose their beliefs; therefore, one would need to convince themselves that the "slave" is not human, maybe belongs to a lesser species, or even deserves to be enslaved to rid their minds of this dissonance.

According to Winthrop Jordan, author of "White Over Black," people belonging to different races, specifically what we now call "whites" and "Blacks," had active participating roles in building race (qtd. in Jones 479). Sometimes even "Blacks" are blamed for participating in the construction of race: "Racism is defined as the beliefs, practices, or structural systems – such as education – that function to oppress racial groups. It is socially produced and endemic in societies, operating ideologically to contribute to the social and material or economic stratification of certain groups" (Mills et al 314). Studies have proven that there is no inherent biological difference among the different nations or ethnic groups (Jones 479); therefore, race must be a matter of perception imposed by events and conflicts that occurred in recent history. According to Robert Miles, race is a matter of "material, political, and cultural realities" rather than a biological one (Ashe et al 2010).

In "Psyche and Society in the Slave Construction of Race," Rhett S. Jones posits that there are three distinct theories as to how the construction of race came to exist. The first theory claims that American settlers established the idea of race to satiate their self-interest: "Slaveholders and their supporters created race as part of a deliberate plan to prevent poor whites, native peoples, and blacks from joining together against them" (480). Jones' second theory claims that slaveholders created racism accidentally while "developing working communities" (480). The theory also emphasizes that the foundation for establishing racism

dates back to the “long-standing English ideas about, and fears of, blackness. Black was evil, ugly, and bad, while white was beneficent, beautiful, and good. These ideas about color [...] were deeply rooted in English culture so that it was easy for the colonists to adopt racism when confronted with Africans and with the manifest reality that enslaving Africans was in their economic interest” (480). The third theory posits that psychological forces were at play in the construction of racism, relating to “a deep white disgust with black’s dark color” (480). Jones explains that regardless of how race was constructed and how discrimination against the Black race came to exist, “it was clear that the newly created United States was going to be a racist nation, with Blacks relegated to an eternal subordinate position to whites on the grounds that they were a biologically inferior people” (480), thus the natives started adopting the whites’ ideals regarding Africans to avoid being classified as inferior as them.

According to Barbara Fields and Karen Fields, scholars of American studies, “Race as a coherent ideology did not spring into being simultaneously with slavery, but took even more time than slavery did to become systematic” (118). They explain that the inferiority of race stems from that racial oppression. Africans and African descendants might be perceived as inferior to white people due to the religious, social, and physical differences they have, as well as the fact that they were placed in a society where they lacked citizenship and rights which others claimed naturally (118). This historical placement or displacement of the “other” in American society is what created the racial ideology that Black people are inferior to white people.

Going back to his claim that Black people had a role in constructing race as well, Jones explains that because of the whites’ treatment and enslavement of Black people, “slaves had embraced race, viewed themselves as Black, and aggressively used their Blackness as a vantage point from which to attack racism and slavery” (480). According to Jones, many theorists have claimed that Black people have adapted and adopted race by

creating a sense of Blackness different from the one whites/slaveholders have imposed on them: “The cruel realities of slavery forced the slaves if they were to psychologically survive, to consciously work out ways of making themselves into a new people” (481). In that way, therefore, they adopted the notion of race to be able to fight against racism and slavery. Even though the two races have different definitions of race, they both agreed on the centrality of race; hence they both contributed to the construction of race.

### **The Black Consciousness**

Frantz Fanon (1925–1961) was a psychiatrist, philosopher, revolutionary, and author, born in Martinique under French colonial rule. Fanon is one of the most prominent and influential writers “in Black Atlantic theory in an age of anti-colonial liberation struggle” (Drabinski 1). He was perhaps the preeminent thinker of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on the issue of decolonization and the psychopathology of colonization. His works have inspired anti-colonial liberation movements for more than four decades. At first, his writings and works were concerned with slavery and the problem of blackness; however, after he moved to Algeria for a psychiatry position at a hospital there in 1953 and participated in the Algerian revolutionary struggle, he shifted his theories and writings to encompass colonization as well.

Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* is influenced by Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1946) which theorizes that the “Jew” was created by the anti-Semites, meaning that racism against the Jews is what created the concept of a Jew. Fanon’s book is also “reacting against Octave Mannoni’s thesis that the colonial subject develops an inevitable psychological dependence on the colonizer” (Littlewood 187). The objective of writing the book was to examine the psychodynamic effects of colonialism and slavery on the characters and actions of Black people by examining “clinical case histories, memoirs and novels, government documents and psychoanalytical theories” (Littlewood 187). According to Daniel Goodey, who reviewed Isaac Julien’s film adaptation of *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin*,

*White Masks*, Fanon wrote his book as he became aware of the prejudice against him as a result of his skin color, and consequently, “his sense of self was shattered” (94) because of how people viewed him. Moreover, he explains that the book is not as much about racism as it is about “the Black individual who has grown up with a white image (mask) built up around the self—and the shattering of that image” (94).

The issue of racism and the Black/non-Black relation is examined by a theory called Afro-pessimism. Frank Wilderson III, an American writer, scholar, and activist, supports the argument that defining slavery forced labor is limiting because this confines slavery to the experiences of slaves whereas slavery has affected the Black people’s being, not just their experiences. In the collective anthology titled “Afro-pessimism, An Introduction,” the compilers explain that “the slave experiences their ‘slaveness’ ontologically, as being for the captor, not as an oppressed subject, who experiences exploitation and alienation, but as an object of accumulation and fungibility” (Wilderson et al 8). In his article, “Blacks and the Master/Slave Relation,” Wilderson defines slavery as a social death which is further scrutinized in three constituent points: “One is gratuitous violence” which means that the slave’s body is susceptible to the violence imposed on it by others with or without any transgression on the slave’s part. Even if the slave does not experience violence, the vulnerability that the slave experiences, and is allowed by law, causes this social death. The second point is that “the slave is natively alienated” meaning that they are intentionally alienated from their families and birth ties, and their familial structures are “broken apart” on purpose. The fact that the world can do this to slaves and Black people goes back to the first point which is the vulnerability of the slaves to everyone else. The third point is the “general dishonor,” meaning that the world has created an association between the Black race and dishonor leading to every Black person being considered dishonorable for their being not for their actions: “you’re dishonored prior to your performance of dishonored actions” (18).

Those three points constitute the social death that the Black race suffered from during slavery and still suffers from today. A modern example of social death would be the police violence that Americans of African descent experience, including killing or persecuting African Americans: “A Black person on the street today faces open vulnerability to violence just as the slave did on the plantation” (Wilderson et al 9). The aforementioned example supports Afro-pessimists’ claim that “Blackness and slaveness cannot be dis-imbricated” (Wilderson 20).

Fanon’s rejection of the notion of race as an inherent biological constituent for discrimination is clear in his introductory chapter which states that “the man who adores the Negro is as ‘sick’ as the man who abominates him. Conversely, the black man who wants to turn his race white is as miserable as he who preaches hatred for the whites” (11). The racism which had been constructed as explained previously has led to certain standing facts that Fanon acknowledges even if he does not believe in their validity: “There is a fact: white men consider themselves superior to black men. There is another fact: Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect” (12). Fanon concludes that there is only one destiny for the Black man, and “it is white” (12). Supporting these facts are Mannoni’s arguments that Africans suffer from a “dependency complex,” or Caliban complex, which is deeply rooted in their collective consciousness, and which entices the “‘noncivilized,’ that is, the African man” to satisfy his/her natural inferiority complex by the need for colonial domination as he/she is “totally unfit for a pattern of life absent of complete subjugation” (qtd. in Nobles 235). Mannoni explains in *Prospero and Caliban* that the African seeks to “rectify the situation by establishing a dependence relationship” on the colonizer which is similar to that of a child to its parents (61). Fanon responds by explaining that Mannoni’s claim to the existence of an inferiority complex stems from the difference in the economic statuses of Africa and Europe. This

difference causes the internalization of that sense of inferiority, or what Fanon calls the “epidermalization of this inferiority” (13), which is the process in which people of color relativize themselves to the white norm. According to Mannoni, the colonizer suffers from a feeling of dissatisfaction, or what Mannoni calls an “inferiority complex,” or Prospero complex, which he explains as the need to dominate others to assert superiority over them “to compensate for feeling inferior” (61), a theory that Fanon supports. Mannoni claims that “the ‘inferiority complex’ engenders high development of personality and culture and fosters dominance and the ‘need to rule’” (qtd. in Nobles 235), while the dependency complex staggers development and fosters dependence on the colonizer. The aforementioned inferiority complex leads the colonizer to overcompensate by colonizing and enslaving the African (Fanon 84). Their point of departure is where Mannoni argues that the inferiority and dependency complexes have always existed prior to colonization, whereas Fanon claims that “it is the racist who creates his inferior” (93), which means that the sense of inferiority experienced by the colonized as well as the sense of superiority experienced by the colonizer are consequences of colonization. Fanon’s argument about racism supports Sartre’s: “The Jew is one whom other men consider a Jew: that is the simple truth from which we must start . . . It is the anti-Semite who makes the Jew” (qtd. in Fanon 93).

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, a German philosopher, supports Sartre’s argument as well. Hegel argues that a person becomes conscious of him/herself through the recognition of others (qtd. in Nobles, 234). Hegel also explains that “the frustration of one’s desire to be recognized is the source of human struggle and conflict [... therefore,] that the one whose ‘humanity’ is recognized but who does not recognize the ‘humanity’ of the other becomes the master while the one who recognizes the ‘humanity’ of the other while their own ‘humanity’ is not recognized becomes the slave” (Nobles 234). Similarly, Jacques Lacan theorizes that development occurs in the form of stages that are spatial in which the subject continues to



play them out; once the subject enters into the symbolic order or the Imaginary stages, it will always be in them. The subject will always be suspended in the language and the image. The first stage is “the Real” stage which means that one is now a subject and will always be. Agency and control are already lost since the self is ex-centric to itself: the real is outside the subjectivity, symbolization, and the image. The subject is subjected to and is controlled by structure, language, symbolic order, culture, and ritual. According to Lacan, the Real is experienced at the infant phase where the subject is “governed by pleasure” (54). Even after the subject enters the Symbolic Order, there will always be a part of the subject that is left “a prisoner in the toils of the pleasure principle” (Lacan 55). The next stage is “the Imaginary,” which starts once an infant is exposed to a mirror and develops an image for himself/herself (Armstrong, 64). At this point, the subject is developing its “self-consciousness,” but it has not yet encountered other consciousnesses, which means that the image the subject sees/creates for itself is not tainted by external factors as it is not yet positioned within any structures. However, it is an image of the subject, not the subject; therefore, a misrecognition occurs, or what Lacan calls “méconnaissance” (74). The third stage is the “Symbolic” stage in which the subject enters the symbolic order, and there it is subjected to the entire structure of language and culture, or what Lacan refers to as “the gaze [...] that surprises me” (84), meaning that the subject now exists in relation to other subjects. Hegel supports the same argument by describing the subject as the first self-consciousness who thinks about himself as a master of himself and master of the world, and then when the subject encounters another self-consciousness, the aggressivity transpires (Armstrong, 66). When the subject then enters the symbolic order, it causes the imaginary to shatter and forces the subject to assimilate to the symbolic order, or structures of the language and culture. The subject is aware that the symbolic order pre-exists it, which means that the only way the subject can exist is through language, the symbolic order, and this ex-centricity of the “self” indicates that a subject can

only exist by losing its “self.” Since the subject has no control over its “self” and must abide by the structures of the symbolic order, African American subjects find themselves trapped in a structure where they are placed as inferior and live their entire lives trying to break out of the structure. Since the language structure already includes signifiers such as “race, Black, inferior, slave, . . . etc,” it traps the African American identity in such structure. If a Black subject never encounters the white consciousness and its declarations about the Black subject, then the Black subject would just be a subject and never has to live its entire life proving that it is indeed a subject that should not be judged and placed in the world based on an unfair and degrading structure. In America, in particular, the question of the identity of the African American still prevails. Free Black people used to refer to themselves as “African” up until the 1830s when white supremacists argued that they should be repatriated back to Africa since both subjects identified the Black subject as African. The words “colored” and “negro” replaced “African” to cut any affiliations with Africa to be able to identify better with the American identity, which was still an issue as well because America never fully recognized the citizenship of Black people (Ogbar 4). To this day, even after the term “African American” has become the dominant term used to describe an American with African roots, African Americans still do not receive the same treatment or recognition other Americans receive. The term itself poses an issue as the adjective “African” implies that there is a want in the recognition of their Americanness; they are not Americans, rather they belong to a certain type or subcategory of Americans.

The lack of recognition the slaves faced in the United States amassed the Black population into one nation, which is how Black Nationalism started. It is a movement which “can be viewed as the reaction of formerly disparate groups of African descent to a sense of mutual oppression and humiliation” (Bush 36). Since the expression of African culture was prohibited in the slave states, the traditions of the enslaved population were destroyed which

led to a common identity that could be recognized as “the root of nationalist consciousness” (Bush 36). On the other hand, many white people, following the abolition of slavery, fought to maintain the same racial disparities Black people suffered from during slavery by preserving privileges for white people only: “these practices led to the restriction of Black people from certain desirable jobs, neighborhoods, social activities, and so forth” (Bush 37). To conclude, if a Black person feels a sense of inferiority subsequent of racism, it is usually a result of being rejected by a civilization or a culture to which they have tried to assimilate and conform (Fanon 93). The consequence of this issue of racism creates “a massive psycho-existential complex” which Fanon hoped to address and extinguish (14).

Fanon concludes that colonialism and slavery affect the Black race in a way that instills an inferiority complex in the unconscious resulting in a risk of disintegration of the colonized/Black’s psychic structure. Black people are sometimes unconsciously consumed by the desire to be white, not because they believe that they are the superior race, but rather because they live “in a society that makes [their] inferiority complex possible, in a society that derives its stability from the perpetuation of this complex, in a society that proclaims the superiority of one race; to the identical degree to which that society creates difficulties for [them], [they] will find [themselves] thrust into a neurotic situation” (Fanon 100). The society imposes this dilemma on the Blacks: “turn white or disappear” (100). Even when people try to treat Black people fairly or nicely, Fanon claims that it is done in spite of the fact that they are Black: “When people like me, they tell me it is in spite of my color. When they dislike me, they point out that it is not because of my color. Either way, I am locked into the infernal circle” (116).

Fanon explains that those feelings and experiences are shared among the Black race and uses Carl Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious to try and understand how the Black psyche has been altered (144-145). Jung’s theory refers to the idea that a segment of

the deepest unconscious mind is genetically inherited and is not shaped by personal experience, which is largely true, and indicative of the racism issue examined in this thesis. However, what has been inherently stored in the collective unconscious must be triggered by a Black person's interaction with the outside world for it to work. In other words, given Fanon's and Sartre's theories, a Black person would not know that they are "Black," or would not understand what it means to be Black until they interact with the outside world, the white world, to be able to fathom the notions of race, racism, and what it means to be Black in a white world. Thus, Africans only realized their "Blackness" after the West started invading/colonizing African countries and imposing its ideas, religion, and superiority on them. Had the West not interacted with African people, the conception of racism, and the inception of the notion of the inferiority of the Black race, would not have affected African people.

In addition to Fanon's analysis of the Black consciousness, Nobles similarly attempts to explain how slavery came to impact an entire race. Nobles explains that "the complexity of psychological damage for African people can best be captured in the notion of derailment" (236). He explains how the Africans do not even realize how derailed they have been because "African life and experience continues." This derailment was a consequence of the million souls lost to the slave trade and was "experienced at the personal level as psychic terror and physical torture" (236)

Human beings were chained together and then piled on top of each other, as cargo [...] A vicious cycle of disease ensued as African people huddled together crying, screaming, vomiting, and defecating uncontrollably. Along this human chain of misery, where some were dead and some alive, the wafting of rotting bodies added to the stench. There was no escape from disease. Life on the plantation simply continued the terror and torture. One can only imagine the state of mental health for those trapped in this living nightmare. Panic, anxiety, and hysteria must have prevailed. Pure rage alternated with a deep collective depression manifesting in mutinies, on-board rebellions, and constant and continuous slave revolts. At the collective or corporate level, Africa's human capital of intellect, insight, and

imagination was depleted and/or derailed at the very moment in history when humanity was moving into a new age (236-237).

In addition to the transatlantic slave trade, the dissection and colonization of Africa by Western nations have resulted in hindering Africa's progression with regard to the rest of the world. If the West – who colonized Africa, depleted its resources, kidnapped and sold its people, and mistreated them – believes that Africans are inferior to other humans when it comes to intellect, wealth, etc..., it is only because the West caused this developmental gap, as the Africans were fighting the colonizers rather than developing and progressing, which led to the purported inferiority of Africa. Hence, the colonization and enslavement of Africa and its people have perpetually affected the Black race and its collective consciousness.

### *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

Frederick Douglass (1818-1895), a leader in the abolitionist movement, was born into slavery. He did not know his mother, and his father was believed to have been his white master. It was through reading that Douglass's ideological opposition to slavery began to take shape. Douglass tried to escape from slavery twice before he finally succeeded. Following the publication of his first autobiography *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* in 1845, Douglass traveled overseas to evade recapture ("Frederick Douglass Biography" 1). He remained in Ireland and Britain for two years, speaking to large crowds on the evils of slavery. In 1847, the famed writer and orator returned to the United States as a free man. By the time of the Civil War (1861-1865), Douglass was one of the most famous Black men in the country. He used his status to influence the role of African Americans in the war and their status in the country. In 1863, Douglass conferred with President Abraham Lincoln regarding the treatment of Black soldiers, and later with President Andrew Johnson on the subject of Black suffrage. Douglass became the first African American to be nominated for vice president of the United States. Douglass died on February 20, 1895, of a massive heart attack or stroke ("Frederick Douglass" 1).

In *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Douglass recounts the horrors and brutalities he faced as a slave in Maryland. He explains how slavery had taken its toll on him, enslaving not only his body but his mind as well. Thus he decided to educate himself as a first step in his escape plan. Douglass first learned to read and write with the help of his mistress, Sophia Auld, until she was prohibited by her husband to continue, but Douglass was aware of the importance of literacy as a key to his freedom, so he sought education elsewhere. He started trading food secretly with young schoolboys to continue his education. As evident in many slave narratives, slaves were prohibited from reading and writing, yet those who were educated often were the ones who managed to take action against slavery in

one way or another. However, literacy is not simply limited to reading and writing, it also allows the slaves to understand the world and censure their enslavers and the system that placed them in enslavement. Literacy challenges the structures as well by placing the literate slave in the category of human beings rather than chattel or property. According to Martha J. Cutter, literacy is what helped slaves break the structure that placed them in the category of property and moved them to the category of humans: “To write is to move from object to subject; as Houston Baker puts it, the slave narrator had ‘to seize the word. His being had to erupt from nothingness. Only by grasping the word could he engage in the speech acts that would ultimately define his selfhood’” (Cutter 210). Douglass understood how language was used through law and religion to justify slavery. Therefore, he understood the importance of literacy in challenging and transforming the language as a key tool to breaking the structure and abolishing slavery. Therefore, according to Cutter, slaves needed to become critically literate: “it is crucial that slave narrators not only become literate, but critically literate; it is crucial that they read the word and the world, and that they come to see that language can be used either to transform, or to serve, the dominant social order” (211). Mr. Auld, Douglass’s master, was aware of the power of literacy and advocated that slaves should not be educated for that reason. Douglass overheard him talking to his wife Mrs. Auld about ending Douglass’s education claiming that “a nigger should know nothing but to obey his master—to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world. [...] It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master. As to himself, it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy” (Douglass 29). Little did Mr. Auld know that those same reasons are what would help Douglass realize the essentiality of literacy and understand that keeping slaves illiterate is a strategy to keep them enslaved. Mr. Auld’s words did prove to be true later on when Douglass read *The Columbian Orator*, a philosophical dialogue between a

master and slave outlining the entire case of slavery, detailing the justifications of slavery by white people and refutations to those points by the slave character in the book. Douglass was indeed “discontented and unhappy” (29) as he understood the injustice of his position but had no way to escape it yet. He also hated his masters for enslaving him, which indeed did turn Douglass into an unmanageable slave.

Douglass's despair led him to suffer through a harrowing experience while escaping as a result of his pact with himself to either attain freedom or die. As he mastered the skills of oration and writing, Douglass became an eloquent spokesperson for the civil rights of African Americans and a devoted abolitionist. Throughout the book, Douglass experiences a few epiphanies. The first epiphany was realizing what slavery is, and that he was a slave. As a child, he was not aware of the fact that he was a slave, as he had not experienced or witnessed what freedom is like or suffer from physical torture. However, as a child, Douglass witnessed the suffering his family members experienced in slavery. For instance, he recounts what happened to his aunt who was abused, which facilitated the construction of the concept of slavery in Douglass's mind and instilled the idea that he, like his family, is mere property to be bought, sold, owned, and manipulated by other human beings, and that he had no say in, or control over, his own life. Another epiphany Douglass experienced was when he realized the power of education; he understood that slavery only existed because slaves are ignorant. Douglass realized that if slaves could be educated, their minds would be free and so would their bodies. Reading and knowledge help one understand one's rights and be able to understand where one stands in the world. However, if one is illiterate and only has access to what a person of authority and power tells one, then everything they can know and believe is whatever the person declares. For example, reading the Bible would have helped slaves learn that Christianity, the slaveowners' religion, condemns slavery and promotes equality among all humans. Moreover, they would have understood how religion was used and manipulated



to promote the slaveowners' ideas and beliefs, justify slavery, and maintain control over slaves. If they had had access to any book about human rights, laws, etc, they would have understood how slavery defies the natural order of the world and violates basic human rights. Had slaves been allowed to write, they would have reached out sooner to the world, to anyone, to present their argument and convince the world to stand up against this atrocity. However, slaveowners were very intent on keeping their slaves illiterate, so that they are cut off from the world. They cannot know what the slaveowners do not want them to know, and they cannot say what the slaveowners do not want them to say. Keeping slaves illiterate takes away their voices and enslaves their minds. Douglass was aware of this which is why he was keen on educating himself to be able to free his mind as a pathway to freeing his body as well.

At one point in his life, Douglass was humiliated and tortured to the extent that his state of mind was reduced to an animal's, and he was desperate and helpless to fight for his freedom. Douglass was rented to someone named Mr. Covey, who had no slaves of his own. Covey was known for his skill to break slaves. Douglass suffered miserably under Covey: "Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit" (55). Nevertheless, he managed to bounce back from this state of mind into one where he saw himself for who he truly is, a human being with a free will, a free mind, and eventually one with a free body, as well, who would rather die than give up his rights as a human being. Therefore, when Covey charged at Douglass, for the last time, trying to beat and tie him, Douglass stood up for him by grabbing his throat to prevent him from whipping him, explaining that "he had used [him] like a brute for six months, and that [he] was determined to be used so no longer" (62). Covey called on a few other slaves to help him, but one of them was put down by Douglass, and the other refused to help Covey. Covey and Douglass fought for a long time, but Covey learned from that incident that he would not be able to

break Douglass; therefore, he never touched him again after that incident. Even though Douglass was not a violent man, he had to resort to violence, not only to put an end to the physical abuse he was susceptible to all the time for being a slave, but also to regain back his humanity, precisely the sort of phenomenon Fanon would describe nearly a century later. Throughout the book until this incident, Douglass had relayed the process of his degradation and dehumanization into a slave, and now he had taken an action to transform back into a man; “You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man” (57). The first step Douglass had taken on his journey to reclaim his humanity was standing up for Covey. He explains that “this battle with Mr. Covey was the turning-point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again with a determination to be free. The gratification afforded by the triumph was a full compensation for whatever else might follow, even death itself” (63).

Eventually, Douglass managed to escape slavery and gain his freedom; however, he realized that he would never be fully and truly free as long as slavery existed. Thus, he dedicated his life to the abolition of slavery altogether. Speaking and writing to a mostly white audience, Douglass was not only determined to highlight and explain the impact of slavery on the slaves and the Black race; he was also determined to illustrate how slavery corrupts everyone, including the white race as well. For instance, Douglass explains how his mistress, Mrs. Auld, was a kindhearted and benevolent person who had never owned slaves in her life before Douglass. He says that she was “preserved from the blighting and dehumanizing effects of slavery” (28). However, she soon changed and became as harsh and inhumane as the other slaveowners, when she became consumed with power. Being in a superior position to other humans while retaining complete control over them – their bodies, mind, actions, and freedom – can corrupt a person. Mrs. Auld became a cruel person after

becoming a part of the slavery institution: “The fatal poison of irresponsible power was already in her hands, and soon commenced its infernal work. That cheerful eye, under the influence of slavery, soon became red with rage; that voice, made all of sweet accord, changed to one of harsh and horrid discord; and that angelic face gave place to that of a demon” (28). Using Douglass's *Narrative* in this study, I will attempt to highlight the negative impact slavery has on the state of mind of the slaves and the freed slaves to exemplify how slavery did not only affect those who were enslaved but also continues to affect all Black people.

Some critics have tried to invalidate the authenticity of slave narratives as autobiographies for various reasons even though, as Sekora puts it, “Slave narratives remain the most important and most neglected body of early American writing” (482). One of the reasons critics have tried to de-authenticate slave narratives is the fact that the memory is selective of the events and incidents reproduced in the narrative, to which Eakin responds by explaining how autobiographies *should* be subjective as they propose to express the autobiographer’s identity as they perceive it (22), as well as certain events and incidents that the autobiographer would like to shed light on through writing the autobiography. Another reason is that many of the slave narratives either use pseudonyms or are not written by the slaves whose lives are narrated. According to Casmier-Paz, “slave narratives [...] repeatedly refuse the contractual obligation [which occurs between the reader and the writer and implies that the name on the text's cover is also the name behind the ‘I’ of the autobiographical narrative]. The name on the cover may not be the same as the ‘author’s,’ or even the text's protagonist” (216). An example would be Harriet Jacob’s autobiographical *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*; “although supposedly written by the ‘slave girl/ herself,’ the protagonist about whom the “incidents” are related is named ‘Linda Brent’ (Casmier-Paz 219). Historians and literary critics who have tried to discredit slave narratives

as authentic accounts or true autobiographies have not taken into consideration the fact that slaves had no other outlet to express their miseries and adversities. Furthermore, they have not taken into consideration how slaves had little to no education resulting in their resorting to third parties and other writers, to write their accounts for them. Additionally, they have not taken into consideration the hardships slaves faced in trying to publish the said accounts. Some slaves were persecuted for telling supposed lies about their owners, while others would not be allowed to publish at all. For fear of persecution or retaliation, some slaves had to change their names, publish under pseudonyms, and even change or retract the names of all the people mentioned in their narratives. Regardless of whether the accounts were written or narrated, they stand true as testimonies of how slaves suffered. The debate or controversy about whether autobiographies should be considered a literary genre or a historical document still stands since slave narratives are narrated or written in a personal and intimate tone, documenting the slaves' personal experiences, thoughts, and emotions. However, they are the only historical accounts we have of what occurred during that period from the perspectives of the slaves. Frederick Douglass's *Narrative*, however, defies the aforementioned trend. It stands as one of the few slave narratives that cannot be de-authenticated. Casmier-Paz explains that Douglass's *Narrative* was "prefaced with a letter written by abolitionist Wendell Phillips, which testifies to the narrative's credibility and the author's truthful character" (220) as well as another authenticating preface by Garrison (Blumenthal 178). Furthermore, given Douglass's education and eloquence, it is believable that he had narrated and written his slave narrative without relying on someone else's help.

In *Narrative*, it is evident that the language used was paradoxically a sign of his freedom as well as his enslavement. The ironic fact that he could only impart his experiences as an ex-slave by using the language of his masters speaks to his enslavement within the white man's language and only having the ability to call for freedom through the

slaveowner's tongue: "although Douglass fashions his autobiography in a language that is carefully and skillfully crafted, this language is generally not typical of the slaves the text represents. [...] Douglass appears to write in a style which is typical not of a Black slave but of a white slaveowner" (Burns 83). For one, he was confined to using the language the white population uses, and he skillfully used and manipulated the language as a well-educated person at a time when education was only reserved for the white population and prohibited for the slaves/Black population. Douglass also discovered that he had to confine himself within "a literary box." The slave narrative that was supposed to be a means to freedom turned out to be a representation of the confinement he faces using the white man's language (Burns 83) as well as a limitation to Douglass's freedom regarding the definition and expression of his sense of identity and selfhood (Burns 84). Since the intended audience for his *Narrative* was Black people and white people alike, Douglass was forced to use a language that the white audience uses to deliver his message and use his *Narrative* to further propel the abolition journey he started. His *Narrative* was targeted at Black slaves to encourage them to understand their rights, where they should stand in the world, and gain their rights and freedom. Yet, it was a cry for help for the white audience to understand the inhumanity of slavery, how it has destroyed generations of people, how it is on the verge of destroying an entire race, and how it is unnatural and brutal and therefore needs to be abolished. Douglass's position as mediator between slaves and the white reading audience rests on his doubleness of self. He must be both the demeaned self who experienced slavery and the liberated, the educated self who can interpret the institution of slavery. This doubleness or fracturing of self can lead to a fractured identity and consciousness, or it can lead to a heightened sense of purpose since Douglass stands to be a product of the inhumanity of slavery as well as a representation of the freedom, or hope, that other slaves can realize. His position, as one of the few slaves who are educated and can write, carries the

responsibility of conveying the impact of slavery on both white and Black people to try to abolish slavery.

Some of the incidents that have left an imprint on Douglass's mind include one of his first interactions as a child with other white children. He explains how white children knew their ages, but he was not even allowed to ask his own. A right as basic as one's age had been stripped away from him early in his childhood, forcing him to learn how white children had access to basic human rights, whereas he, because of his skin color, did not (7). Early in his childhood, when he was too young to work in the field, he still was not spared from suffering. He explains that he suffered inhumane conditions, even as a child: "I was kept almost naked—no shoes, no stockings, no jacket, no trousers, nothing on but a coarse tow linen shirt, reaching only to my knees. I had no bed. I must have perished with cold, but that, the coldest nights, I used to steal a bag which was used for carrying corn to the mill. I would crawl into this bag, and there sleep on the cold, damp, clay floor, with my head in and my feet out. My feet have so cracked with the frost, that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes" (71-72).

Given the simple fact that white was believed to have been superior to Black, it would have made sense that a mixed-race person should suffer less than a Black person or have more rights as a result of having a white parent. However, Douglass, as a mixed-race slave, explains that this was not the case, rather he believes that as a mixed-race slave, he stands to suffer the wrath of his mistress in addition to the accustomed sufferings the slaves are susceptible to. Given the fact that most, if not all, mixed-race children are a product of a Black female slave and a white male slaveowner, the law states that the children should follow their mother's status, meaning that a child born to a slave mother is a slave, regardless of their skin color or race. The white slaveowners' wives would not be thrilled having around

a constant reminder of their husbands' infidelity; hence they would take it out on the children, treating them worse than they would any other slave (8).

Douglass recounts the psychological violence of slaveholding as well as the physical one. He explains how slavery dehumanizes men mentally as well as physically. As evidence, he explains the damaging effects of the slaveowners' inconsistency of punishment. He explains how masters often whip slaves when the slaves least deserve it, but neglect to whip them when they make mistakes, which proves that the whipping, and the torture in general, is a sign of exerting power over the helpless rather than "justified" by the slaves' actions. This point also further supports the "social death" theory proposed by Afro-pessimism in that the slaves' bodies do not belong to them as long they are vulnerable and susceptible to any violence by the slaveowners. Therefore, to survive, slaves must learn to become paranoid and must endure the feeling that they will be punished at any moment regardless of their actions (25). George P. Rawick, an American historian, comments on the slave-master relationship, explaining that "whipping was not only a method of punishment. It was a conscious device to impress upon the slaves that they were slaves" (qtd. in Brewton 707).

### *The Confessions of Nat Turner*

Nat Turner (1800-1831) was the leader of a violent rebellion in Southampton, Virginia, in 1831. He was an enslaved person who became a preacher and made history as the leader of one of the bloodiest enslaved revolts in America (History.com Editors). On August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1831, Turner and his supporters began a revolt against white owners. They started by killing Turner's owners, the Travis family, and went from there killing everyone to procure arms until they can escape. Turner took a solar eclipse as a signal that the time to rise had come. He recruited several other enslaved people to join him in his cause. Turner's supporters had reached around forty or fifty slaves. They were able to secure arms and horses from those they killed. Most sources say that about fifty-five white men, women, and children died during the rebellion. Turner was eventually captured two weeks after he left his hiding place where he had stayed for six weeks ("Nat Turner Biography" 1). He was represented by Thomas R. Gray, the lawyer who wrote down his confession. Turner pled not guilty during his trial, believing that his rebellion was a task assigned to him by God.

In *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, Gray recounts the confessions of Turner, as narrated by Turner in prison while awaiting his death after the failure of the rebellion. Turner's account, though narrated rather than written, still stands as a slave narrative as this is the only account we can examine to understand Turner's motives and experiences. The fact that it was documented by a white attorney could imply that the account might not be completely accurate. Gray explains in the book that the account is authentic, and he only adds his ideas and comments in the forms of questions asked to Turner or notes/comments written in parentheses. For example, while Turner was narrating the events of the insurrection, Gray notes that "they immediately rushed to the spot and arrived just in time to arrest the progress of these **barbarous villains**, and save the lives of their friends and **fellow citizens**" (qtd. in Turner 16); the diction used in the previous quote (boldfaced and underlined) highlights



Gray's perspective of the insurrection, Turner, and the other slaves. Nonetheless, for this study, it will be included in the examination of the experiences of the slaves.

Turner was a slave and a preacher who managed to plan and execute an effective, yet aggressive, insurrection along with four other slaves, who then managed to engage more people in the rebellion that resulted in the death of around sixty white people: men, women, and children. Turner's initial plan was to kill his master and steal firearms, and then, with the help of the other slaves, kill every single white person they would cross paths with until they escaped to freedom. As he described it, "until we had armed and equipped ourselves, and gathered sufficient force, neither age nor sex was to be spared" (12), which speaks to how desperate the slaves were to gain their freedom. They entered the first house secretly, rationalizing that it would be better not to attract attention until they are ready, killing the entire family in its sleep. Turner mentioned that "it was observed that [he] must spill the first blood" (12), probably because he was the leader, and he had to represent relentlessness in his pursuit of freedom to encourage the others to follow suit. However, Turner could not kill the master, and Will, one of Turner's men, had to take over the task. After they killed the entire family and moved on, they realized there was an infant at that house, and two of Turner's men, Henry and Will, went back to kill it. When they would stop to evaluate their plan and decide on how to proceed, it was evident that Turner was the one in charge; he gave the orders to the other men, "carrying them through the maneuvers [he] was master of" (13). Will did most of the killing; however, other people joined in as well. At some point, Turner calls Will "the executioner" (13) which implies that Will did most of the killing. Turner, on the other hand, was supposed to kill two people, but in both situations, he failed to accomplish the target. On one occasion though, he managed to kill someone, Miss Margaret, by repeated blows on her head. It would seem that the sword he was carrying with him during the insurrection, which was discovered on him when he was captured, was dull and ineffective.

After the insurrection failed due to the discovery of the group by a group of white men who tracked the blood stains left by the insurgents, Turner managed to hide for six weeks and run for two more weeks before getting arrested, while everyone else who was caught was killed, and their heads were placed on signposts in public places to terrify the Black population and thereby diminish the threat of a renewed attack. The public was "curious" to understand Turner's motives behind the insurrection as if everything that happened to slaves is not enough motive; therefore, Gray was tasked with documenting Turner's confessions.

As opposed to Douglass's *Narrative*, Turner's *Confessions* was not written by him, but by a white lawyer, Gray, who was believed to have influenced the outcome of the autobiography. Turner believed that he was acting per God's will. He believed that he was executing a divine will by the rebellion. However, in *Confessions*, it is evident that two distinct voices impact the narrative of the autobiography. In "This Unparalleled and Inhuman Massacre: The Gothic, the Sacred, and the Meaning of Nat Turner," Stephen Howard Browne distinguishes between the two voices presented in the text: "as represented in the voice of Nat Turner, violence is construed as the fated consequence of divine will; as represented in the voice of Thomas Gray, it was to be taken as the result of individual will corrupted by circumstance and accident" (310).

In *Confessions*, Turner recounts what led him to finally decide to proceed with the rebellion. He starts his confession with "You have asked me to give a history of the motives which induced me to undertake the late insurrection, as you call it—To do so I must go back to the days of my infancy, and even before I was born" (7). In the very first page of Turner's account, it is evident that slavery goes beyond the experiences of one single slave; it is an institution into which slaves are born, live, and possibly die as a result. The slavery institution proclaims what will happen to a person before they are even born. It strips the person from the right to choose what happens in their lives. It condemns a person to a life of tragedy and

suffering for no fault of their own other than the fact that they were born in an unjust world where power is skewed toward another nation, or race, that deems itself more superior. It gives itself rights that it does not own and abuses the fact that it is more powerful than other nations to exercise control and oppression over them. Turner's mind probably refused his position in such a world; he refused to accept that this is his fate/his life. Therefore, he believed he had a greater role in this world than just living and accepting his situation. He believed he was tasked by God to uprising against slaveowners and fight for his freedom. He believed that he was intended for some greater purpose and that he was a prophet sent by God to help other slaves. He probably suffered from delusions ever since he was a child, which could be traced back to the fact that Turner was born a slave, and probably his mind could not handle such a traumatizing situation, thus he escaped through his delusions. Turner's *Confessions* can be used as an example of how traumatizing slavery can be on someone's mind via exhibiting Turner's coping mechanism with slavery as an example. He relates that “the Lord had shewn [him] things that had happened before [his] birth” (7), and he carried this belief with him throughout his life, probably as a way to comfort himself with the fact that God had not forsaken him and is with him throughout his life to support him until he gains his freedom. Another analysis of this part would be that Gray intentionally portrays Turner as a religious fanatic or extremist with psychological issues - represented by Turner's saying that after he attempted to escape once, he went back to his master because he saw the “Spirit,” and it commanded him to go back as he had lost his way by seeking earthly pleasures, signifying his earthly freedom, “the spirit spoke to me, saying, “Seek ye the kingdom of Heaven and all things shall be added unto you.” *Question*—what do you mean by the Spirit. *Ans.* The Spirit that spoke to the prophets in former days” (9) – who led the insurrection as a result of the aforementioned issues rather than as a result of slavery and his sufferings as a slave. Another analysis of Turner's motivation would be his resistance to the

structure he was exposed to and trapped in as a slave, and he had to resort to violence, as Douglass did, to assert his humanness and break out of the enslaved, chattel-like, life he had.

Nevertheless, similar to Douglass, Turner believed in the importance of education. However, he did not decisively seek it as an adult, rather he was just aware that at a young age, he could read well. Turner then used this opportunity to further enhance his knowledge and literacy by reading any book he could get his eyes on (8). Regardless of the approach and the opportunities, Turner and Douglass were both adamant about educating themselves as they were aware that education, banned to slaves, could be their ticket to freedom.

Turner's *Confessions* aims to explain the incidents and circumstances that led him to undertake such a violent action against the whites with no regard to age or gender: "Sir, You have asked me to give a history of the motives which induced me to undertake the late insurrection, as you call it" (7). Turner believed himself to be a prophet or claims that people believed him to be a prophet since a young age, as a consequence of his ability to recount incidents which happened before he was even born. This incident first occurred when he was around three or four years old and managed to shape part of his belief system and identity as someone who has a connection to the divine. Whether it be accurate or not, Turner believing it to be true would unconsciously attribute most of his actions to the will of God. It could be that he felt inferior to the other people surrounding him, thus his divine association would compensate for his feelings of inferiority. On the other hand, stripping away his power and rights to the extent that he had no control over his own life or destiny might have instilled that belief in his psyche, and thus would need to attribute his thoughts and actions to an external being or entity.

According to Gray's account, Turner's ultimate motive was the vision he saw of two armies, white and black spirits, battling while "the sun was darkened" (9) which he later interpreted to be a solar eclipse and which he took to be a sign to initiate the insurrection, as

well as the voice he heard saying “Such is your luck, such you are called to see, and let it come rough or smooth, you must surely bare it” (10). His vision was further supported by the series of miracles he witnessed: the blood he saw on the corn, hieroglyphics depicting figures in blood battling, and figures resembling the fight from his vision on tree leaves. He had a conviction that Judgement Day was happening soon. The series of miracles, along with Turner’s conviction of the impending Judgement Day, could act, in Turner’s mind, as a coping mechanism where he set for himself a light at the end of the tunnel of slavery to be able to feel that it could come to an end at some point. His mind’s resort to Judgment Day implies that Turner could not see a conceivable way out of slavery except through the end of the world.

Turner’s account of his master and his family is rather confusing. He claims that his master, Joseph Travis, the one he started working for at the beginning of 1830, and the one he was working for at the time of the insurrection, was very kind. He explains that he “had no cause to complain of his treatment to [him]” (12). Yet, when he and his accomplices were planning the insurrection, they had vowed not to stop or spare anyone until they have gathered all their supplies and needs to escape. Turner, in a pragmatic tone, recounts how they had killed Travis and his entire family, save for an infant that was forgotten at the time, but “Henry and Will returned and killed it” (13). The insurgents then moved to another person’s house, where they used a ruse to get him out of the house and kill him. Then they moved to another’s house and killed a woman in her sleep, as they did with Travis’s family. The methods with which they killed Travis’s family and the others are all portrayed as ruthless while the people who were murdered are portrayed as defenseless –sleeping people, an infant, and a deceived man. Another interesting point is the diction used when describing the murder of Mr. Richard Whitehead, a white person living in the area, “we called him over into the lane, and Will, the executioner, was near at hand, with his fatal axe, to send him to an

untimely grave” (13). The language used when describing the murder of Mrs. Newsome is brutal: “I struck her several blows over the head, but not being able to kill her, as the sword was dull” (13). The lack of remorse, along with Turner’s firm conviction that he was acting based on the “Spirit’s instructions,” or “God’s will” could further support the theory that Turner could have been suffering from delusions, probably undiagnosed schizophrenia, that had prompted him to act in that way. On the other hand, if Gray had somehow altered the narrative, he could have been trying to portray Turner as a heartless, remorseless killer who did not even spare an innocent, harmless infant. However, the visions Turner relates in his account support the former theory.

Turner then proceeded to narrate the path of the insurgents, describing who was murdered in an impassive tone, as interpolated through Gray, along with a description of the increasing number of insurgents. The tone itself – along with the way he detailed the murders – speaks to a point previously discussed regarding the social death of a slave. Taking on someone’s life is a major action that is not easily decided upon with a lot of consequences to consider, ranging from legal consequences to religious consequences to psychological consequences. Even if Turner had psychological problems that facilitated his making such a decision of taking people’s lives, the other insurgents may not have suffered from the same problems. However, their actions with all the details of the cold-blooded killing that took place during the insurgence, highlight a few points. Firstly, this is a group of desperate people who have nothing to lose and hopefully their freedom to gain if they proceed with their plan, as they see no other way out of their current situation as slaves. Secondly, they are considered socially dead meaning that they are already condemned as brutal, violent, dishonorable people, so they might as well live up to society’s expectations if it will get them where they need to be since they were condemned and labeled as such before doing anything wrong. Moreover, they have suffered an insurmountable amount of violence and degradation by a

certain group, so inflicting harm on people who belong to the same group may seem justifiable in their perspective since it was the same group that created a division in the society and put Black people on the other side of the line, and so it was the same group that needed to be murdered to be free and to “gratify [their] thirst for blood” (16). Finally, these people were alienated from their families and friends, and censured by the law, to be alone in the world with no one to rely on or to help, which was successful. However, since they could not rely on anyone, or any law, to protect them, they had to resort to taking matters into their own hands. Violence is never justified, nor is murder, but the insurrection itself, regardless of the form it has taken, could only be viewed as a reaction to slavery and how it had impacted the slaves. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that during Turner’s narration of the events, there was no mention of the Spirit, or God, or any verses from the Bible. Even though Turner explains at the beginning of his account that he is a religious person, he had failed to consider the religious consequences of murdering people, including children. A fact that speaks to his level of desperation. Other possibilities include that he truly believed he was doing the right thing since he was tasked by God, or he was too focused on the end that he could not think rationally about the means. A few decades later, John Brown, another deeply religious figure, would make a similar calculation. Both Turner and Brown are perceived as freedom fighters as well as religious fanatics (T. Smith 60). John Brown was an American abolitionist who believed he was an instrument of God to take down slavery. He was believed to have incited a slave rebellion in 1859. Brown was motivated by religion since he believed that Christianity endorsed freedom and equality. He believed that he had to resort to violence to end slavery since decades of nonviolent efforts had failed. Turner had the same belief since he saw no other way out of slavery.

Turner pronounces that he had lost hope in life after having been betrayed by two of his men. As a slave, he had no one; he was separated from his family and had no friends. He

had explained early in the book that he was not close to other slaves because he wanted to focus on his relationship with God and the signs sent to him by the Spirit. While planning for the insurrection, he managed for the first time to make friends since they had a common goal, but getting betrayed by people he trusted and relied on, for the first time in his life, to help him reach his freedom and end his agony as a slave, had been a terrible blow to Turner to the extent that he failed to be hopeful or anticipate a positive outcome to his situation, either as a fugitive or as a slave.



### *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs (1813-1897) chronicles the hardships and suffering she faced as a female slave, under the pseudonym Linda Brent. Jacobs was subjected to abuses, threats, and other horrors by her master who threatened to sell her children if she didn't submit to his sexual advances. She recounts the terror she lived in while trying to escape slavery several times. She even had to hide from her master in a garret attached to her grandmother's house for seven years, which was so small that she could not even stand in it. Slave narratives were written mostly by male slaves; therefore, Jacobs wanted to explain the distinctive and additional brutalities that were inflicted on enslaved women. Jacob's *Incidents* aims to highlight how women, white and Black, were at the mercy of the patriarchal system, with no control over their destinies, which positions white women as victims and as accomplices as well since they allow white men to get away with their actions and injustices toward Black women. Jacobs aims to help other enslaved women view themselves as human beings, rather than property, to be able to defy the system and elude the hardships they encounter in slavery. She also highlights how the system seizes the Black population's right to freedom by instilling fear of the consequences of escaping in enslaved people. They instill fear through lying about the free states and the state of free people there, deliberately keeping slaves in ignorance about the North, and instilling the idea that they are better off where they are because they would not be able to survive on their own. On the other hand, the system limits the free Black population's rights by forcing them to carry certificates to prove they are free or else they would get kidnapped and sold, prohibiting them from voting or holding public offices, banning them from testifying against White people, forbidding them from carrying or owning weapons, restricting their use of public transportation and facilities, and threatening them with enslavement if they cannot pay taxes or pay back debts. All of the aforementioned details can help establish the state of mind of

enslaved men and women at the time and of the free Black population as well to be able to verify the impact slavery has on the Black race.

Slaves were not allowed to be educated, nor even to read and write; however, Jacobs managed to learn how to read and write because her mistress until the age of twelve was kind enough to allow her to learn how to read and write even if she was not properly educated. Jacobs explains in the preface that she was “altogether incompetent to such an undertaking” meaning writing her own story even though she can read and write, and according to her, she had “improved [her] mind somewhat since [she moved to the North]” (2). This declaration by Jacobs can prove how slaves were driven to feel insecure and inferior about their minds since society has imposed this idea on them to the extent that it got rooted in their minds that they are intellectually inferior. Jacobs deemed herself unfit for such an “undertaking” (2) because she believed that her mind was not bright enough or shrewd enough to write her personal history.

Jacob’s book is targeting “women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions of women at the South, still in bondage, suffering what [she] suffered, and most of them far worse”(2) to raise awareness as to how slavery in reality is and how “deep, and dark, and foul is that pit of abominations” (3) which can only be understood if one were to examine a slave’s experiences. Lydia Maria Child, an American abolitionist and women’s rights activist, who edited *Incidents*, wrote in the introduction that her objective in publishing *Incidents* is for free women in the North to start questioning slavery, and for men to stop pursuing fugitives and let them be. Overall, the book was written to help people understand the sufferings of slaves which was not publicly announced even though people might have been aware of them, but the details along with the narration of the emotions and thoughts as well might have helped people fathom the impact slavery had on enslaved people.

Jacobs starts her narration by explaining that she was born a slave even though she only realized her situation at the age of six: "I was so fondly shielded that I never dreamed I was a piece of merchandise, trusted to them for safe keeping, and liable to be demanded of them at any moment" (8). Jacobs describes how slaveholders take advantage of slaves in a way that conflicts with the natural order of things. For example, her father, a very skillful carpenter, was only *allowed* to work in his profession on the condition that he paid his mistress two hundred dollars a year and supports himself. As a slave, he had no right to privileges and prospects allowed to other people, but given this "opportunity," he was forced to pay his mistress a large amount every year for just being able to work. Similarly, her grandmother was allowed to sell her crackers, which she baked on her own time after all her slave work was done, on the condition that she provided for and clothed herself and her children. The grandmother's mistress even took her earnings, an amount of 300 dollars, as a loan to buy a "silver candelabra" (13), promising to pay them back even though "no promise or writing given to a slave is legally binding; for, according to Southern laws, a slave, being property, can hold no property. When my grandmother lent her hard earnings to her mistress, she trusted solely to her honor. The honor of a slaveholder to a slave!" (9). When the mistress died, her son-in-law, Dr. Flint, was appointed executor, and he refused to pay Jacobs's grandmother, claiming that "the estate was insolvent, and the law prohibited payment" (13). Another advantage that was taken of a slave mentioned in Jacobs's first chapter was the fact that her mother was weaned at the age of three months for her grandmother's nursing to be sufficient enough for her mistress's daughter. Jacobs's mother was not the only infant that had to suffer getting weaned early under slavery. Slave mothers in the South were exploited under slavery in a way that cannot be evaluated or quantified by historians. White women would abuse the fact that slave women have given birth around the same time they had and are lactating; they would then have the luxury to decide whether they would rather breastfeed

their own children or delegate that task to the slave women (West et al 37). Breastfeeding is one of the worst ways of exploiting slave mothers for many reasons. First, breastfeeding is an emotional process for mothers because it is very taxing physically and emotionally on the mother, but mothers still choose to do it because they understand that their infants need it, so they willingly sacrifice their own comfort for their children. Second, breastfeeding creates a strong bond between the mother and her child as the skin-to-skin touch while breastfeeding makes the child feel safe and close to the mother, while the mother strengthens her connection to the child. Third, breastfeeding is a natural process where the breast milk is produced with the sufficient nutrients the child needs, for the amount of time the child needs it, and the production is stopped automatically when the child does not need it anymore. There are indeed ways to increase or decrease the milk supply based on the mother's consumption of certain products that enhance the lactation process and the signals sent to the mother's brain based on the child's consumption of the milk; however, if all external factors are disregarded, the supply is just enough for the child's needs. When the slave mother is forced to breastfeed a white woman's child, she is deprived of enhancing her connection with the child - a connection which the white slaveowners deemed it proper to reserve the right to sever at any moment through many ways - the slave infant is deprived of the milk supply produced specifically for it and the safe feeling that comes with the process of nursing at the mother's breast. The decision taken to force a slave to wean her infant to breastfeed another's child has many psychological and physical implications on the slave mother and the slave infant, but the slaveowners would not consider such implications since the slave mother for them is merely a tool at their disposal, and they have the right to use this tool however they see fit.

Jacobs describes her mother as "a slave merely in name, but in nature was noble and womanly" (10). The diction Jacobs uses with the conjunction "but" implies that slave women

were not perceived as noble or womanly; rather, it requires contrast to explain that even though she was a slave, she could still be noble and womanly as other free women are. After the death of her mother and her mistress, Jacobs would be endowed to a relative of her mistress. Even though Jacobs truly believed that her mistress loved her and hoped that she would set her free upon her death, Jacobs knew that this was too hopeful for someone who is born to be property. She writes that her childhood was a happy one, and that it was “too happy to last” as she knows that the “blight [...] too surely waits on every human being born to be a chattel” (10). Jacobs considers it ironic that her mistress had taught her the following verses “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (11) and “Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even unto them” (11), but she does not follow them herself when dealing with slaves. Jacobs resolved to think that it could probably be because her mistress did not view her as a “neighbor” (11), which implies that the mistress may not just fail to regard Jacobs as her neighbor, but she may as well not even perceive her as a human being; for Mrs. Flint, Jacobs is merely property which the verse does not apply to. Regardless of how kind her mistress was to her, she still perceived her as property rather than as a human being who deserves to live a life where she can make decisions for herself or even have a say in her life. Therefore, it was crucial for Jacobs that her mother was noble and womanly even though she was a slave or a piece of merchandise. As Jacobs explains “these God-breathing machines are no more, in the sight of their masters than the cotton they plant, or the horses they tend” (11). The aforementioned belief about slaves is what prompted Dr. Flint to disregard his mother-in-law’s will regarding setting Jacob’s grandmother free and decided to sell her and make a profit off of her instead. The same belief is what prompted people to label the auction in which slaves are traded “public sale of negroes, horses, &c.” (13). Adding the word “negroes” to the list of items to be displayed implies that all the items in the list have the same weight, meaning that the slaves are items to be sold just like horses are. This is very

degrading and dehumanizing to the human beings who stand on display waiting for someone else to decide on what will happen to them in the next phase of their lives, while another person makes a profit off of their misery. The slaves are left with utter want of agency or autonomy over their own lives or bodies.

When Jacobs's father passed away, she was not allowed to go to his house the morning after because she had tasks to do. For her owners, the task of collecting flowers and decorating the house for a party was way more important and urgent than allowing a young girl to go see her father's body and properly mourn him: "What cared my owners for that? He was merely a piece of property" (12). Moreover, her father was not a much-admired person as people criticized his beliefs and parenting methods; Jacobs says that "they thought he had spoiled his children, by teaching them to feel that they were human beings. This was blasphemous doctrine for a slave to teach; presumptuous in him, and dangerous to the masters" (12). It is interesting to note the language and tone used by the slaves when describing their situation. For example, in the former quote, Jacobs uses a sarcastic tone to highlight how, according to the slaveowners, they are not human beings and do not have the right to act or think so. According to the law, slaves are considered property with no autonomy over their own bodies, no autonomy in decision-making when it comes to matters in their lives such as marriage and work, no right to hold property, and no laws to protect them from the brutality of the white slaveowners. Slaves are considered objects rather than subjects; a concept which sunk deep within the minds of the slaveowners to the extent that they failed to show them mercy or compassion. Slaves constantly lived in vulnerability to be controlled and tortured by their owners, or even sometimes by other white people who were not their masters. This lack of compassion or empathy led the slaveowners to treat the slaves more harshly since they are objects, merely props in the white people's movies, and do not

require compassion, which has in turn led to more incivility and injustice on the slaveowners' part.

Later in the same chapter, Jacobs tries to comfort her brother by giving him hope that they could buy their freedom, a strategy that William, her brother, does not approve of. Even though the phrase "buy our freedom" is prominently used in many slave narratives, whether the slaves actually managed to do it or not, it is interesting to note how diction is used in the previous phrase. The very fact that a person needs to pay money to be able to enjoy their basic right to freedom goes against the natural order. If a person is incarcerated, they might need to pay bail or a fine to gain their freedom which is understandable given that the incarcerated person had wronged society or an individual in some way; however, a slave is usually born incarcerated in slavery without having done anything wrong to justify the incarceration or to justify taking their money or earnings to allow them out of the system.

Language poses a threat to slaves in general and Jacobs in specific as she is abused by language but must resort to language to reach her liberation. In the Preface, Jacobs explains that she would rather not have written her account, "it would have been more pleasant to me to have been silent about my history" (2). She also mentioned how she had "improved her mind" (2), yet she still feels inadequate in her use of language to be able to communicate her own story, which could contribute to the readers' understanding of how slavery and the language of the slaveowners have impacted her in a way that made her feel insecure because she is still using their language, the "language which denies her subjectivity" (Cutter 209). Her owner, Dr. Flint, uses language to abuse Jacobs and coerce her into giving in to his sexual desires with "stinging, scorching words; words that scathed ear and brain like fire" (Jacobs 18). Other examples of how language was used to abuse Jacobs include: "he **told** me that I was made for his use, made to obey his commands in *every* thing; that I was nothing but a slave, whose will must and should surrender to his" (18); "he **told** me that I was his

property; that I must be subject to his will in all things” (26). The boldfaced words in the previous quotations highlight how deep of an impact Dr. Flint’s “words” left on Jacobs. Dr. Flint also used language to threaten her to sell her children if she would not submit to his advances. The former examples, among many others in *Incidents*, highlight how Jacobs is forced to be a part of a language that denies her rights: to be and act as a human being, to be protected by law and customs, to marry whomever she chooses, and to be in charge of her body and not be physically or sexually abused or vulnerable to anyone. The language that abuses her and forms “a large part of her oppression” (Cutter 209) is the language that she must use to express her agonies and struggles. To achieve her purpose of raising awareness about the torments slave women faced in their lives, Jacobs is confined to using the language of the slaveowners. According to Martha J. Cutter, a professor of American Studies, Jacobs had achieved “critical literacy,”(209) which is a skill that goes beyond simple literacy, being able to read and write. Instead, she attained a skill that allowed her to be able to reappropriate the language of the slaveowners to her advantage. Jacobs understood how the language “functioned to keep slaves disempowered, imprisoned in a culture of silence,” and she managed to “transform the structure of oppression,” “challenge these signifying practices” (Cutter 210), and find her voice. A voice with which she could express herself and her ideas through manipulating the language of the oppressor. One strategy used by Jacobs to exercise control over her text and language is leaving gaps in her story to demonstrate how the language of the oppressor is in itself inadequate and deficient. She claims that “no pen can give an adequate description of the all-pervading corruption produced by slavery” (45). This authorial strategy represents Jacobs’s transcending the language structure rather than conforming to it.

Jacobs had a relationship with a free man of the Black race which was condemned by the Flints for various reasons. First, Dr. Flint would relinquish complete control over Jacobs,



“body and soul” (35), if she is married; therefore, he refused her request to marry and told her that she could instead marry one of his slaves. The suggestion he proposed would allow him to own the entire family, husband and wife; thus, he would still have complete control over Jacobs and coerce her to submit to his advances, without much trouble from the husband. Second, Mrs. Flint deemed it unfit for one of her slaves to get married, have children of her own, and take care of them – “the children of that nigger” (Jacobs 34) – along with Mrs. Flint’s children. Third, like many other slaveowners, the Flints believe that “slaves had no right to any family ties of their own; that they were created merely to wait upon the family of the mistress” (34). A belief that contributed to the social death of the slaves by cutting their ties from their families, selling members of the same family to different owners in different parts of the country, disregarding important family affairs and obligations such as funerals as was mentioned previously, and obtaining the right to deny the slaves their right to marriage or creating any new family ties. Fourth, Dr. Flint’s suggestion for Jacobs to marry one of his slaves implies that he does not believe that a woman, especially a slave woman, has the right to fall in love or choose her own husband.

To maintain the institution of slavery, slaveowners practiced some strategies to exercise control over the enslaved people. Some of these are violence, manipulation of the law, isolation of individual slaves, and maintaining the illiteracy of slaves. One specific strategy that has proven very effective is fear. When the insurrection of Turner took place, Jacobs was still owned by the Flints and suffered the aftermath of the mentioned insurrection. She reports that the terror increased in all the southern states; brutes were sent to terrorize slaves of even considering escaping or rebelling. They even manufactured evidence to further terrorize and torture slaves: “in some cases the searchers scattered powder and shot among their clothes, and sent other parties to find them, and bring them forward as proof that they were plotting insurrection. Every where men, women, and children were whipped till the

blood stood in puddles at their feet. [...] No two people that had the slightest tings of color in their faces dared to be seen talking together” (Jacobs 56). Not only did slaveowners force the slaves to fear them, but they also made them fear the unknown. When a free person living in a normal situation likes or dislikes what is known, they may have the risk-taking skills to try the unknown. However, for slaves, it was different; the known was completely miserable, yet the unknown was represented as even more miserable or dangerous; thus, many slaves resolved to remain in their current situations, rather than take the risk and face the unknown. In *Incidents*, Jacobs explains that slaveowners lie to their slaves about the North and the state of the free slaves there. Jacobs mentioned an example of a fugitive slave that she knew who was seen in the North by one of the slaveowners who claimed that she was in a desolate state, dying of starvation, and begging to go back to her “kind” master. Such stories were relayed by slaveowners to scare the slaves so that they would remain where they are rather than take the risk of escaping. Another strategy is the manipulation of the law, where White Americans rewrite laws in a language that segregates white and Black people. White people are the only ones considered “citizens” of the country and have their constitutional rights, whereas free Black people are restricted by law to exercise their citizenship rights, and of course, the slaves have no right as, by law, they are considered property rather than human beings. For example, Jacobs mentions the Fugitive Slave Law which forces Northerners to return any fugitive slaves to their owners in the South. Another law states that since a slave is property, they cannot hold property; therefore, a slave is not allowed to own anything. Furthermore, since the slave is considered property, no documents or written contracts are legally binding. Adding to that, since the slave is property, the owner has the right to do whatever they want with the slave; “there is no shadow of law to protect her from insult, from violence, or even from death” (Jacobs 26).

Illiteracy, as a tool, has limited the slaves from reading the newspapers to understand what is happening in the world to limit their view and understanding of the world, and it has put many doubts and insecurities in the slaves to the extent that their lack of awareness and understanding of the world led many of them to believe that they are better off where they are rather than help pursue their freedom to be “useful men, and enable them to protect their wives and children” (Jacobs 39). Jacobs also mentioned that had slaves been literate they would have understood “their own capabilities, and exert[ed] themselves to become men and women” (39) rather than remain in the condition of being merely property.

Jacobs questions the integrity and religiousness of the slaveowners and their supporters by claiming that God had not created them to be slaves as the slaveowners preach. She questions: “what libel upon the heavenly Father, who ‘made of one blood all nations of men!’” (Jacobs 40). She also questions the idea of race by claiming that one cannot measure how much African blood or Anglo-Saxon blood slaves have. It is evident in the chapter titled “The Church and Slavery” that slaveowners manipulate religion to enforce their ideas and beliefs as if they are from God, which is another strategy used to oppress slaves by claiming that God wants them to be where they are, in an enslaved situation, and is asking them to accept and embrace their enslavement. In one of the sermons reproduced in this chapter, the preacher explains that the slave must obey their earthly master in all things whether the master can see them or not because “if you disobey your earthly master, you offend your heavenly Master” (60). The reverend goes on to detail examples of minor offenses by slaves such as stealing food to highlight how such offenses are sins and are punishable by God. Some slaves resort to stealing food, for example, as a result of the starvation they feel when their owners do not give them enough food for the day. Some even go to the extent of punishing slaves by prohibiting them to eat for an act they deem punishable. For example, Mrs. Flint would “spit in all the kettles and pans that had been used for cooking [...] to

prevent the cook and her children from eking out their meagre fare with the remains of the gravy and other scrapings” (Jacobs 14) if the dinner was not served on time. She would even do that on Sundays after she had come back from church. Jacobs argues that Mrs. Flint is similar to other “white-faced, black-hearted” (61) people who go to church, preach for the slaves’ obedience, and torture them outside the church ought to behave in a Christian manner and treat the slaves as fellow human beings. The same Bible that asks the slaves to “renounce the devil and all his works” (Jacobs 65) – including stealing and escaping from their earthly masters – asks the slaveowners to do the same – including showing humility and kind treatment toward the slaves. The Bible that they pick and choose verses from to suit their interests is the same Bible that states that “all men are brethren” and no man has the right to treat another human being in that way.

## Conclusion

As evident in all three narratives, slaves who were born into slavery were not fully aware of their condition until they passed childhood when they started interacting with the outside world. This supports Fanon's and Sartre's theories regarding the Black consciousness in that the Black subject does not realize its Blackness until it interacts with a white subject that denies it its subjectivity. Douglass realized what slavery was after he witnessed the incident with his aunt, Aunt Hester; however, before that, he did not understand what slavery was or what it entailed. Similarly, Jacobs only realized she was a slave at the age of six. After the children were taken from their homes or their mothers and put to work, they begin to understand that they are slaves and that they were born slaves. This transition corresponds to Lacan's developmental stage where the subject enters the symbolic order. Turner, for example, was aware that the symbolic order, the structure within which he was trapped and turned into an object rather than a subject, preceded him and his birth. Turner explains in the opening statement of *Confessions* that to understand what led him to rebel against his owner, he "must go back to the days of [his] infancy, even before [he] was born" (7). All three slaves were aware of their place in the symbolic order, and they all decided to utilize and transform the tools used to confine and enslave them to disturb the structure and gain their freedom; hence, they decided to use literacy to manipulate the white language and use it for their own purposes. For example, Douglass and Jacobs left gaps intentionally in their narratives to highlight the inadequacy of oppressor's language as a way to dismantle the structure.

All three narratives highlight how religion was another tool that was used to confine slaves. Many examples were mentioned in the studied narratives regarding religious and pious slaveowners who frequent the church but are also very brutal in their treatment of the slaves. Examples of this hypocrisy would be Mrs. Flint spitting in the pans to prohibit the cook and her children from eating the scrapes, Dr. Flint and Mr. Auld becoming more violent

and brutal after joining the Episcopal church (Jacobs 64) and a Methodist camp (Douglass 47) respectively, and the sermons delivered to slaves using verses from the Bible manipulated to suit the slaveowner's interests. Examples of the verses that were mentioned in the narratives include "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ," (qtd. in Jacobs 59), and "For he who knoweth his Master's will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes, and thus have I chastened you," (qtd. in Turner 10), whereas verses such as "And masters, do the same for your slaves. Give up your use of threats, because you know that He who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with Him" (Ephesians 6:9) were neglected to mention altogether. Douglass and Jacobs were aware of the discrepancy between the Christianity the slaveowners practiced in the South and the Christianity that called for equality, mercy, and compassion. Douglass mentioned in the Appendix to *Narrative* "between the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference—so wide, that to receive the one as good, pure, and holy, is of necessity to reject the other as bad, corrupt, and wicked. [...] I therefore hate the corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land" (101). Jacobs mentions a similar conviction in *Incidents*, "There is a great difference between Christianity and religion at the south" (64).

Social death is a concept proposed by Afro-pessimism and proclaims that slaves were socially dead and by association Black people still suffer from social death to this day. Social death could be observed in the studied narratives through incidents and experiences of the narrators as well as other incidents witnessed or relayed by them. In Douglass's *Narrative*, Douglass's body was constantly vulnerable to beatings and physical torture. Douglass was even rented to Mr. Covey whose sole job was to physically torture slaves until they are broken, then they are returned tamed to their masters. As a child, Douglass witnessed his aunt

being physically tortured by her master: “Before he commenced whipping Aunt Hester, he took her into the kitchen, and stripped her from neck to waist, leaving her neck, shoulders, and back, entirely naked [...] he commenced to lay on the heavy cowskin, and soon the warm, red blood (amid heart- rending shrieks from her, and horrid oaths from him) came dripping to the floor” (6). Jacobs relates similar experiences when she was exposed to sexual advances from her master who proclaimed that Jacobs, including her body, belonged to him to do as he pleased with her. Furthermore, Douglass was separated from his mother as an infant and did not know his father’s identity who was supposed to be a white man, probably the mother’s master, and he was later separated from his entire family and other filial connections when he was sent to a new master at the age of seven. Similarly, Jacobs was separated from her children to protect them from her master, and she was separated from other family members as well for different reasons all related to the institution of slavery. Likewise, Turner was separated from his family as well once he was old enough to work. The aforementioned examples correspond to the second constituent of the social death experienced by slavery which is to separate and isolate slaves from all connections they have especially familial connections. It was common for slaveowners to separate mothers from their children to place the mother as a nurse for another white infant, for the mother to resume her duties after childbirth, or for the child to be sent somewhere to commence its duties as a slave. Douglass argues at the beginning of *Narrative* that the reason could be “to hinder the development of the child’s affection toward its mother, and to blunt and destroy the natural affection of the mother for the child. This is the inevitable result” (2). Another plausible reason could be to isolate the slave from any connections that could provide them with support, strength, or aid. The seclusion and solitude a slave experiences as a result further heightens the slave’s vulnerability in the world.

Through the examination of slave narratives, we can see the present perspective of the narrators/writers, as Olney mentioned while trying to form their identities through the writing process, as Eakin explained. The sufferings relayed by the slaves in their narratives help the readers form an understanding of the slaves' world and community. Nevertheless, we can also see how the slaves used their "Blackness" to criticize racism, a theory that was proposed by Jones. The slaves used the fact that they were slaves to explain their struggles as a way to criticize and abolish slavery. Additionally, the inferiority and dependency complexes proposed by Mannoni are evident in the examination of the narratives as well. The readers can see how the white people, along with institutions of authority such as the government and the church, exercise power over the Africans through the manipulation of laws and religion. Whereas the dependency complex can be traced in the slaves' oppression, their fear of the masters, and their fear of freedom as well. Examining the identities of the narrators throughout this study has provided us with an understanding of the slaves' "self-consciousness," an understanding of its formation as a result of the lack of recognition of the slaves' humanity, and understanding of the impact all of which had left on the Blacks' consciousness in the wake of slavery.

Through the examination of slavery along with its impact on slaves and the entire Black race by association, it is evident that the dehumanization and oppression of slaves have affected the entire Black race in slavery's wake, stamping the Black race as a more inferior race and categorizing it as a second-degree citizen of the world. The experiences related by the slaves in their narratives are considered evidence of the perplexing and disturbing ways in which the Black race has been degraded and humiliated for no fault of their own save for belonging to a nation that is not as economically or politically superior or powerful as other nations.



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