

Magdaléna Demelová

Jeffrey Alan Vanderziel, B.A.

AJL 17051 African American History and Culture

30th April 2021

Frederick Douglass' Family Discovery

At the beginning of *The Narrative*, Frederick Douglass described his biological parents, and he revealed that he felt little to no emotional connection to them. He did not know who his father was, and he was separated from his mother as an infant and met her only on few occasions. During his life, he encountered people whom he perceived as relatives or family members. It seems that he had never found a full substitution for the parental figures, but he managed to replace the relatives missing from his life.

The most significant mother figure in *The Narrative* is Douglass' maternal grandmother. She raised many children and grandchildren on Captain Anthony's land, one of them being Frederick Douglass. When her new master considered her useless and sent her to the hut in the woods to live there for the rest of her life, Douglass was disgusted by the way she was being treated and he spoke of her fondly. He referred to her as his "poor old grandmother" and he reflected on the loneliness she felt after being disconnected from all her children and grandchildren. His affection towards his grandmother was expressed when he said: "Will not a righteous God visit for these things?" (Douglass 34). He considered his master's behavior towards the woman who raised him as unjust, therefore he questioned his religion and wished for better treatment of his grandmother.

Douglass briefly mentioned his biological siblings, but he revealed that he did not feel connected to them as to his relatives. He considered the fellow slaves he encountered during his stays at different masters' lands to be his brothers and sisters. The fellowship and unity of

slaves are described as something of great importance in *The Narrative*. While living with Mr. Freeman, Douglass created a connection with his fellow slaves by teaching them how to read. He described the love he felt for his fellow slaves as love stronger than anything he has experienced. It is said that Douglass never loved any people more than the slaves he met at Mr. Freeland's. To emphasize the strong connection slaves share, Douglass says that they would even die for each other (Douglass 49). The deep feelings slaves feel for each other could be also seen in the way Douglass felt for them when he decided to run away and become a free man. The thought of being separated from his friends caused him more distress than being separated from his biological family, which shows how important the friendship with other slaves was for him.

In summary, Douglass was able to substitute the traditional biological family slavery prevented him from having. He attributed the role of a mother he did not know well to his maternal grandmother and he grieved the way she was treated. The most important relationships for him were the ones he had with the fellow slaves he met during his life. Although he was successful in finding a new family among his friends whom he admired and loved deeply, he was forced to leave them behind in order to become a free man and pursue his liberty.