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Fredrick Douglass and his relationships

In this essay the focus is on Fredrick Douglass and his relationships over the years. How he tried to replace the traditional family relationships with other people whom he was not related to. The goal is to find out if he had some father or mother figures or even people who he could have considered to be his brothers and sisters.

Fredrick knew of his real mother but unfortunately for him she was a slave to another master than him and visited him “[not] more than four or five times in [his] life” (Douglass 10). He also knew that “[his] father was a white man” (10) which was presumed to be his first master Captain Anthony. Throughout his childhood he never had any sort of a father or mother figure while he lived in Maryland. When his old master died, he was inherited by Capt. Anthony’s daughter Lucretia Auld. She sent him to Baltimore to work for Hugh Auld and his wife. Mrs. Sophia Auld became his first and only parent figure. In the beginning, she was “a woman of the kindest heart and finest feelings” (26) which is very mother-like behavior, especially coming from a slaver. She even “very kindly commenced to teach [Frederick] the A, B, C” (26) and “assisted [him] in learning to spell words of three or four letters” (26) which was unlawful and unsafe by slave-owners. When Hugh Auld found out about her teaching Frederick how to read, he accidentally gave Frederick instructions to become a free man.

After Mrs. Auld was forbidden to teach Frederick, he still found a way how to learn to read and write. Since he came to Baltimore, he became friendly with the white boys in

the neighborhood. Frederick “converted [many of these boys] into teachers” (28). This type of trickery seemed very brother-like, however, Frederick most likely did not think of them in that way. He found people who he would consider to be his brothers and sisters much later when he was sent to Mr. William Freeland. Frederick met with Henry and John Harris, two slaves that Freeland owned, and Handy Caldwell with Sandy Jenkins whom Frederick met before and helped him to stand up against the cruel Mr. Covey. Frederick “devoted [his] Sundays to teaching these [his] loved fellow-slaves how to read” (48) and “It was necessary to keep [their] religious masters ... [because] instead of spending the Sabbath in wrestling, boxing, and drinking whisky, [they] were trying to learn how to read” (48). Frederick also slowly started to encourage other slaves to escape their masters. This trust that Frederick and other slaves built between each other, is the reason why he saw them as a family. Unfortunately for them, their escape plan was thwarted, and they were sent to jail. Frederick stayed in jail longer than others because he was “at the head of the whole affair” (51). Frederick returned to the Auld family in Baltimore and later escaped to New York. There he met his wife, Anna. This was his first long lasting relationship which did not end in some sort of a betrayal.

Frederick had found some temporary family-like relationships over his years as a slave. First it was a mother figure in Sophia Auld who was the first slave-owner that acted like a decent human being towards him and other slaves. She also taught him how to read which gave him hope to become a free man later. His other temporary relationship was between his fellow slaves while he was staying with Freeland. He taught them how to read and write. As their bond grew, they planned to escape together but in the end someone betrayed them and that led to Frederick’s distrust towards everybody. However, in New

York he got help from David Ruggles and Frederick also met his wife Anna with whom he had his first long-term relationship.

Works cited

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