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AJ17051 African American History and Culture

29 April 2021

Family Relationships of Frederick Douglass in *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*

The story of Frederick Douglas is not just a story of escape from slavery but also a narrative about the loss of connections with beloved people and native places. In fact, having lost his family at an early age, Frederick was forced to seek alternative relationships that could replace his mother and father, as well as brothers and sisters. In this essay, I would like to discuss who may appear as potential parents and siblings in this story, how early childhood loss affected his relationships with other people and the decision to run away.

First of all, I would like to cover the early childhood of Frederick to understand the origins of his quest for a family and close emotional tie. At the very beginning of his story, Frederick compares slaves to horses because they also do not know when they were born. Moreover, he notes that he never met a slave who knew his birthday (12). Frederick's mother died when he was very young, leaving no information about his biological father. Most people identify themselves with their roots and families, but, in fact, Douglas was deprived of

this opportunity as well as such common knowledge as his birthday. His tragical fate led to the fact that he had to look for a new family in his life's journey.

Regarding his affection for the mother, Frederick saw her only three or four times and apparently this had inevitable result for their closeness (12). As a consequence, Frederick had to find a replacement in the woman who was surprisingly kind to him - Mrs. Auld. After their first meeting, he states: "It was a new and strange sight to me, brightening up my pathway with the light of happiness" (25). In Auld's house, he postpones thoughts about escape indicating that probably he may have found some kind of home there. Later in the narrative he admits that she has "a mother's tenderness" – and this indicates his thoughts about her as a mother (55). Frederick Douglass reconsiders the decision about escape only when he is forced to leave her house.

As concerns possible brothers and sisters, there can be singled out two types of characters who may act as potential siblings of Douglass. The first group are white boys from the street who, in fact, helped Frederick learn to write and read. He finds them at an early age and their relationship resembles that one of younger brothers who enjoy playing, mocking each other and competing. For example, Douglass told the boys on the street that he could write better than them, and they, trying to beat him, became Douglas's teachers. As a result, when Douglass had to leave Baltimore, he says that "it was to those little Baltimore boys that I felt the strongest attachment" (34). They were another loss that

Douglass faced. The second type of brothers is his fellow slaves, with whom he eventually decides on an escape plan. Frederick gets acquainted with them at a more conscious age, when everyone needs the support and guidance of his brothers and sisters. Frederick Douglass believes that they would have died for each other admitting that he “never loved any or confided in any people more than the fellow slaves” (49). They play a key role in formation of his final decision and simplify the process of running away. However, it turns out that they are forced to leave one another and lead to another loss in Douglas's life.

Douglass had to leave his friends and close people so often that it influenced his determination to run away. Reflecting on why many slaves stay and do not flee, Douglass notes that the reason is that they are not ready to leave their family and friends. He expresses his opinion that “thousands would escape from slavery, who now remain, but for the strong cords of affection that bind them to their friends” (56). Douglass often lost touch with his beloved ones. Having such a hardening, it was much easier for him to leave the habitable places and decide to escape.

In conclusion, Douglass lost his family very early and tried to replace it with attachments to other people along the way. New losses on the path of life temper Frederick and allow him to decide on an escape, which is much more difficult for the majority because of test family ties. However, he finally ended up to feel like home at Mr. Johnson's - the one who ultimately gave Frederick his name which is quite a paternal thing to do.

Works cited

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of The Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*. Independently published, 2020.