

Michal Kudláč

Jeffrey Alan Vanderziel

AJL17051

19 March 2021

Family Values

The fact that slavery in one of the biggest highlights in the development of The United States of America is saddening. Millions of poor souls ignored and considered inferior, stripped of possessions, dignity, freedom or even the mere ability to be able to recognize one's own identity. Through the peril that was enslavement, Frederick Douglass travels across multiple estates, understanding the dynamic of its inhabitants. The loss of his parents and having no real friends leaves him alone and in search for an acquaintance that sees him as equal. To attain this friendly and soothing acquaintance is what drives the narrative, a drive described in the following essay.

The very first hint of a figure to look up to is shown already on the first plantation. While Douglass does describe false praise with which slaves caress their master, the way he also depicts his relationship with Master Daniel Loyd is far friendlier than one might imagine. A tad too young to then suppress truth or to have anything negative to say about his master in the first place, Douglass seems to reminisce of Loyd in a positive light, almost as somebody who he needed in order to survive the insufficient amounts of food and cold nights.

The ridiculous conditions Douglass lives in on the plantation, regardless of how helpful Master Daniel seems, are changed dramatically upon his departure to Baltimore. The excitement from merely seeing the town is quickly swapped for even greater joy; Mrs. Auld. Having lost his mother at such a young age, barely ever forgetting himself in the simple but most joyous moments a child should have with their parent, Douglass experiences a moment of respite, a majestic sight of unexpected proportions: "A woman of the kindest heart and

finest feelings...Her face was made of heavenly smiles, and her voice of tranquil music." (p. 26) The well-known signs of disgust are nowhere to be found with Mrs. Auld, she even begins to teach Douglass to read. It is only when Mr. Auld enforces halt to any further teaching of their newcomer that the illusion begins to shatter. The herd mentality of slavery turns the angelic creature into an ever-observing beholder, and yet another chance to be loved or wanted is denied in the process.

Deprived of his previous city-like nourishment, the black-skinned protagonist finds himself on the estate of Mr. Covey. Only upon being sent to collect previously chopped up wood does Douglass encounter Sandy Jenkins. Sandy is proclaimed "an old adviser," having spoken of carrying a root in his right pocket, an element that helped him go unwhipped his whole life. Douglass does utilize the advice with great hesitation, but soon comes to realize its power. The root is in no way magical or force of divine intervention, but rather a symbol given to him by his newly found friend Sandy Jenkins, a symbol of resistance and control over one's destiny.

Mr. Covey is soon replaced with Mr. Freeland. It is on this man's grounds that Frederick Douglass finally comes close to what family represents. He spreads all he knows from his previous studies, his fellow slaves as eager to learn as Douglass is to teach. The sense of comradeship and friendship is something none of them ever felt and it, perhaps inevitably, leads to an attempted escape, one that fails and leaves the brotherhood separated, never to be reunited again.

Following this unfortunate incident, against all odds, He finds himself in Baltimore once more. Being beaten in a shipyard he worked at, he is happy to have some form of reconciliation with the Auld family as they are outraged by the deed. Yet, the steady income Douglass later acquires still goes to his master and the now more abundant leisure time makes him think of liberty and the possibility to have what he never quite had; a family.

The ultimate goal the enslaved man has sought after does come true. Sure, the initial alienating feeling upon finding himself in New York is menacing, but with help from David Ruggles, who is celebrated most glamorously in the text, the vision of freedom and family is now a reality. Yet, having lived through many years of slavery and seeing all the fanatical overseers hide their crimes under the guise of the church, the protagonist ponders on the hypocrisy of Christianity in America, how the theft of religion is as great as the theft of free life, and how he was denied the greatest Father of all; God.

Many do not realize just how important it is to have somebody by their side, somebody to lean on when things go wrong. They live in the illusion that the perfect setting they find themselves in can never change. While the biography contains dreadful depictions of 19th century America, it is the lack of familiarity and the pain it causes that Douglass pays closer attention to, simultaneously warning future generations from ever repeating the inhumane mistake of depriving one of freedom and loved ones ever again.

Works Cited

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave*. The Antislavery Literature Project, 2005. *African American History and Culture* <https://elf.phil.muni.cz/20-21/mod/resource/view.php?id=10773>