

Lucie Kudláčková

Jeffrey Alan Vanderziel, B.A.

AJL17051 African American History and Culture

30 April 2021

Search for Relationships in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

In the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Frederick Douglass acquaints the readers with his early life under the bondage of slavery, his escape, and the beginning of a new life as a free man. As he was taken away from his mother as just a little child and did not know who his father was, he was deprived of creating a bond with his immediate family and was forced to live his early life on his own. One of the significant aspects of Douglass's recounting is, therefore, his search for close relationships.

Douglass talks very little about his relationships with women, even with his wife, Anna, and most of the mentions of women in the narration are descriptions of slaveholders' wives. Yet, two women stand out among others. The first one is Douglass's grandmother Betsey Bailey. Although Douglass mentions it only as minor information, it is known that after the separation from his mother, he spent some years with his grandmother, who “had the responsibility of raising young enslaved children” (Trent). Douglass reveals his affection towards her in his lamentation over her cruel fate (Douglass 32-34). Because Douglass was a little child when he came to Betsey Bailey, she probably served as a substitute for a mother in these early years of his life, even though Douglass himself does not give any evidence of her conduct. However, his strong condemnation of her late masters' conduct clearly shows his great care and devotion for his grandmother.

The second significant woman figure is Sophia Auld, Douglass's new mistress after his arrival to Baltimore. Douglass himself describes her as “a woman of the kindest heart and finest feelings” with a face “made of heavenly smiles” (Douglass 26). She also introduced letters to

Douglass and thus opened for him a possibility of a better life. Although Auld's behavior changed under the influence of her husband, Douglass later recalled her kindness after being beaten by the ship-carpenters (Douglass 55). Douglass remembers “mother's tenderness” of Mrs. Auld's care and even states that her affectionate and kind behavior “was almost compensation for his suffering” (Douglass 55). These words show that Douglass cherished the kindness and care she displayed upon his arrival and that she possibly served as a mother figure to him.

Speaking about men who would potentially replace the missing father, Douglass mentions Sandy Jenkins. Sandy Jenkins was a slave who helped Douglass after the flight from Mr. Covey and whom Douglass calls his “old adviser” (Douglass 43). Jenkins' superstition about the power of root made Douglass survive his return to Mr. Covey and eventually ended the whipping for him whatsoever. Douglass and Jenkins stayed in touch even after this event as they were both hired by Mr. Freelender (Douglass 47). And because Douglass recollects frequent talks with Jenkins, it can be assumed that they keep the close acquaintance and that Jenkins remained an important person in Douglass's life.

Two other men played a significant role in Douglass' life with their fatherly conduct, even though Douglass probably did not spend enough time with them to build a profound relationship. The first one is Mr. David Ruggles, who helped Douglass after his escape and who was present at Douglass's wedding with Anna Murray (Douglass 61). The second one is Mr. Nathan Johnson, who provided help, accommodation, and money for Douglass and his wife after their arrival to New Bedford (Douglass 62). From the symbolic point of view, Mr. Johnson also did something that customarily belongs to parents – he gave Douglass his new name.

However, it seems that Douglass developed the strongest relationships with those sharing his wretched lot of slavery. “I never loved any or confided in any people more than my fellowslaves” (Douglass 48), states Douglass, and his warm words display a strong emotional

bond. When Douglass talks about his Sabbath school, he expresses such deep affection and pride that do not appear anywhere in the *Narrative*. The happiness found in engagement in teaching other slaves, the determination to include his friends in the first attempt to escape as well as deep sorrow for leaving his friends at the time of his final escape indicate how much had Douglass's enslaved friends meant for him. And how these “friends that [Douglass] loved almost as [he] did [his] life” (Douglass 59) probably became as brothers and sisters to Douglass and enable him to experience a bond of a true family.

Search for a family relationship does accompany Frederick Douglass throughout his life in slavery. In his *Narrative*, he introduces to the reader several people whose kindness and guidance potentially made them mother and father figures for Douglass, as well as fellow slaves who probably became his new brothers and sisters. In this sense, Douglass's attempt to find a new family seems successful. However, in order to obtain freedom, he had to leave the strongest bonds behind, and at the end of the novel, he finds himself without family again. Yet this time, he is not alone. With the support of his neighbors and with his wife Anne by his side, he can build the family of his own and carry the legacy of his enslaved brothers and sisters in his abolitionist efforts.

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