

Frederick Douglass Essay; Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave: Written by Himself

One of the first things Frederick Douglass tells us about himself is that he doesn't know who his father was, that his mother died when he was very young and that he hardly recognized his biological siblings as relatives. In the pages he wrote, we find some attempt at replacing these foundational family relationships.

The first motherly figure that appears in the book is his aunt Hester that, however, will not have the chance to raise him as a mother would, since she herself is a slave and frequently whipped by master Captain Anthony.

A more influential woman in Douglass's life could be recognized in Hugh Auld's (Captain Anthony's son-in-law's brother) wife, Mrs. Sophia Auld. She is described by him as strangely kind and different from all the other white women he encountered in his life. She's said to be "in a good degree preserved from the blighting and dehumanizing effects of slavery." because she never owned slaves before. Frederick is strikingly amazed by her, and since he was less than 10 years old at the time, we can imagine how this woman might have fed his fantasy of having finally found a mother figure. Moreover, the most important fact is that she started teaching him the alphabet and to read small words. This has been a life changing event for Frederick that from that moment on will understand the importance of education in the process of emancipation for all the slaves.

A brother figure could be found in Colonel Loyd's grandson Daniel with whom Douglass spent time as a servant in hunting expeditions where they actually befriended as he witnesses in Ch. V "My connection with Master Daniel was of some advantage to me. He became quite attached to me, and was a sort of protector of me. He would not allow the older boys to impose upon me, and would divide his cakes with me."

As for the sister, he spent time with his real sister Eliza when he lived in Thomas Auld's in the 1830s. Nevertheless, Frederick does not say a lot about her or about their relationship, which was probably alienated by the work and by their condition of servitude.

The man who tried to give him some independence and hand out his knowledge could fit as a father figure: Hugh Auld. He indeed allows Frederick to seek work on his own after having taught him caulking at the shipyard. However, he was no better than other masters and Frederick eventually managed to escape to NYC.

It is there where he becomes acquainted with a free black, David Ruggles, who suggests him to go to Massachusetts in order to find a job as a caulker. He will also help him with the organization and the wedding ceremony of Frederick and Anna Murray, Douglass's future wife, a free black woman that helped him escape from slavery and supported him in his abolitionist cause throughout their life together.