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Frederick Douglass Essay

In *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave: Written by Himself*, Frederick Douglass confides in the reader that does not know who his father was (knowing only that he was white), and that he met his mother only a few times before her death (12). Consequently, it is apparent that Douglass tries to find people to compensate for his lack of family bonds. This essay explains the author's accounts of his family and explores any potential father, mother, brother, and sister figures which are present in the biography.

The absence of a family relationship made Douglass, at least subconsciously, wish for a family figure in his life. Before reaching a year of age, Douglass' mother is hired out to a farm about twelve miles from his home. She sometimes walks to his home at night (because she has to be on the field at dawn) but no more than five times before she dies (12). Additionally, while he is at his first master's plantation, he sometimes witnesses his aunt Hester being whipped (13). Apart from this, young Frederick lives far from his grandmother and he does not have a bond with his siblings because the only thing they share is a mother they hardly ever met (24). It is evident that Douglass was deprived of any emotional attachment to anyone, since the highlight of his family relationship was his mother putting him a handful of times to sleep.

Due to his desire for an emotional attachment, Douglass views his new mistress, who is kind to him, as a mother figure. Mrs. Auld has never had a slave and thus, she treats Frederick along with any other slaves she meets as human beings. Furthermore, she is disturbed when he

behaves servile to her. Mrs. Auld also teaches him to read, being forbidden from doing so by her husband later on – and Frederick, hearing the consequences of being able to read uttered by Mr. Auld, realizes he wishes to learn it (26). The author's relationship to Mrs. Auld is especially important because she was the first white person he might think of in regard to family ties, she was someone who did not treat him like a slave, and she commenced his education, even though she was prohibited from teaching him – and thus, she provided him with an escape from being a slave, albeit a mental one. Were it not for her, his life would never have steered in the direction it has.

The perception of Mrs. Auld being a mother figure to Frederick soon falls apart. He acknowledges the fact that slavery is as dangerous to her as it is to him – while at first, she is a kind-hearted woman, she quickly becomes a cruel mistress as a result of having slaves and flies into a rage when seeing Frederick with a newspaper (28). It is likely that Douglass understood this as punishment for being so close to her, or anyone else for that matter, and he realized that if he wants to get something done something, he has to find the means himself.

In conclusion, Frederick Douglass' life was so devoid of emotional attachment that he possibly felt close to people who were not cruel to him, potentially even perceiving them as family figures. However, he could not find a true family figure and ultimately had to rely only on himself to get through slavery.

Works Cited

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave: Written by Himself*. The Anti-Slavery Office, 1845.