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Parental Figures and Family in the Narrative of Frederick Douglass

F. Douglass, even though separated from his mother when he was still an infant (which was a common practice among slaves imposed by their masters), was fortunate to find a potential parental figures and people that became close to him on the level that he refers to them as brothers. Frederick Douglass was a former slave. He had several masters throughout his life before he became a free man, and in his book *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* he reminisces about his past life as a slave and how the people have been treating him, starting the narrative from his childhood all the way to how he became a free man and eventually married.

There are more possibilities for mother figures in his life. His own mother died when he was young, and because of their separation they did not share many moments together. The main motherly figure for Douglass was then the woman which he calls grandmother. This grandmother received him as a child when he has been taken from his mother to another plantation, where they lived together. These old women that were taking care of the little children were usually of old age and unfit for hard labour in the fields anymore, so they were helping with bringing up the young ones. Douglass talks very fondly of this woman and towards the end of his narrative he recalls her and thinks about her, especially as he thinks about her possible lonely death and feels sorry for her. These black women were a big part and contribution to the white men's property, as they were giving birth to children who then also worked for them, but in return were treated poorly, as every other slave. Douglass has been assigned to one of such women, and he remembers her several times throughout his

narrative. A possible candidate for another mother figures could be some wives of the masters whom Douglass has served, but that affection and care never lasted. When they realized their power over him their treatment of Douglass changed, or it was because of their husbands, who did not wish them to have any affective feelings towards Douglass.

Master Daniel Lloyd could be considered a father figure to young Frederick, because Lloyd grew fond of him. He was in his service and had to obey, however, the master grew fond of him and became in a way attached to him, which was to Frederick's advantage. Master Lloyd sometimes shared his food with him and his company and affection that was known to others scared possible bullies away, so Lloyd also offered protection for Douglass in this way.

Another relationship that Douglass had that may be considered on the same level as family can be the other slaves. Throughout the narrative, Douglass refers to them as "my brethren in bonds" (Chapter 2) and brothers. He also writes that he and the other slaves he befriended were not afraid of being sold as much as they were dreading their separation and the possibility of never seeing each other again. For him, the other slaves were kindred spirits, and he shared a close relationship of trust with them and was thinking of them as his own brothers. He also writes about the "little Baltimore boys that [he] felt the strongest attachment to" (Chapter 8) when he was leaving the city. However, the most significant relationship for Douglass here were the other slaves – his brothers.

Towards the end of his narrative, he writes about getting married and the idea of building a new life only for himself and his wife. Douglass seems genuinely happy about this turn of events for him, so in the end he found his happiness in his life after all. This happiness did not stem only from his marriage, but it was a part of it. Relationship is important and necessary part of human lives and depriving them of this elemental and essential need of living in a community that is friendly and provides a safe ground for them to live in is

inhumane and cruel. The slaves were thought about as animals, who do not have those needs and can be treated in an extremely harsh ways by their masters, who went unpunished for their mistreatments of black people.

Works cited

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. The Antislavery Literature Project, 2005.