

Jana Vernerová

Jeffrey Alan Vanderziel, B.A.

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Frederick Douglass's Relationships

Throughout the narrative, Frederick Douglass did not spend a lot of time in one place during his childhood, so it made it more difficult for him to form deep relationships. The slavery did not allow him to have relationships with his immediate family, however, the people that he met partly substituted these relationships.

Since Douglass was very early in his life separated from her mother at first by distance and then by death, he did not have the chance to form a mother-son relationship with her. He was raised by his grandmother, who replaced the mother figure in his early life. Another person that subsidizes Douglass's mother is Sophia Auld. When he arrives in Baltimore to live with them, he describes as "a woman of the kindest heart and finest feelings." (Douglass 26) Mrs. Auld is learning Douglass to read before she is forbidden by her husband. This started Douglass's active determination to find freedom. Hugh Auld unknowingly inspired Douglass how to pursuit freedom. In a way, this may be looked upon as a fatherly lesson, even though they did not have any kind of a good relationship with each other. "

The kindest master of his was Mr. Freeland. Douglass describes his treatment towards him as "heavenly". When he is beaten by the fellow apprentices and returns to Mr. and Mrs. Hugh, Mrs. Hugh treats his wounds "with a mother's tenderness" (Douglass 55) and Mr. Hugh takes him to Esquire Watson to try to obtain justice for Douglass.

When Douglass and his wife reach New Bedford, they meet Mr. and Mrs. Johnson. This married couple may be potentially considered to be Douglass's parents because they

helped him to start a new life in New Bedford and Mr. Johnson chose the name “Douglass” for him. They also provided them with food and shelter.

Douglass had siblings by blood; however, he was separated from them as he was with his mother very early in his life. The first brother-like behaviour that appears in the Narrative is by Colonel Lloyd’s son Daniel. Daniel Lloyd protects young Douglass from the older boys and takes him on his hunt for birds. He then became friends with some poor white boys in Baltimore, he exchanged bread for some lessons from them. He talked about slavery with them, and they expressed sympathy for his state of being a slave for life. When he was leaving Baltimore, he felt sad that he must leave them. He wrote: “It was to those little Baltimore boys that I felt the strongest attachment. I had received many good lessons from them and was still receiving them, and the thought of leaving them was painful indeed.” (Douglass 34). Before he reaches his freedom, he faces a decision, whether to leave his friends in Baltimore again or whether to remain in slavery without being separated from them.

When he was working at Mr. Freeland’s farm, he met other slaves and he began to teach them to read. There is a whole paragraph where he talks about his relationship with them:

“ For the ease with which I passed the year, I was, however, somewhat indebted to the society of my fellow-slaves. They were noble souls; they not only possessed loving hearts, but brave ones. We were linked and interlinked with each other. I loved them with a love stronger than any thing I have experienced since. It is sometimes said that we slaves do not love and confide in each other. In answer to this assertion, I can say, I never loved any or confided in any people more than my fellowslaves, and especially those with whom I lived at Mr. Freeland’s. I believe we would have died for each other. We never undertook to do any thing, of any importance, without a mutual

consultation. We never moved separately. We were one; and as much so by our tempers and dispositions, as by the mutual hardships to which we were necessarily subjected by our condition as slaves.”

This suggests that they were the closest people that he had on his journey towards freedom. These may be qualified as his brothers and sisters. He built a whole community there with whom he shared the hardships of slavery. The closest confidants with whom he planned to escape were Sandy Jenkins, Henry Harris, John Harris, Henry Bailey, and Charles Roberts.

It can be said that there were people whom he could consider to be his family, however, he was parted from them by slavery. Every time, he created a relationship with somebody, he was moved somewhere else never seeing them again. Or he was facing a decision between his friends and his freedom. The experience of slavery taught him to trust nobody. When he arrived in New York, the loneliness crept upon him. There was this fear in him that if he confided in any white man, that person might be somebody who would put him back into slavery, which isolated him. However, when he reached New Bedford, he discovered that the people live very differently there and are much kinder. It is possible to say that he finally found his place there and started his family with the help of his new friends there.

Works cited

Douglass, Frederick (1818-1891). 1845/54. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*