

Veronika Zejdová

Jeffrey Alan Vanderziel, B.A.

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Family Relationships Shaping Douglass's Personality

Family relationships and upbringing form strongly the personality of people. For slaves in the United States who were often purposely separated from their families and not allowed to grow dependent on them was this an important aspect of their personality. For they would give up on the idea of parental love completely or in other cases search for parental bonds in many other places and people, wherever they could. In the case of Frederick Douglass, who missed completely on this sort of relationship with both of his parents, it shaped his personality into a more independent and strong individual who valued people of virtue.

One of the first things Frederick Douglass mentions in *The Narrative of the Life* is the fact he barely knew his parents and did not have a close bond with his siblings, which resulted in him not being as dependent on other people later on in his life. Not letting members of a family form strong and loving relationships with one another and “keeping the slave thus ignorant” was a common tactic among slaveholders (Douglass 12). For this reason, it was generally easier to sell slaves and separate families. For Douglass, this meant he was many times looking forward to moving to a different owner and not as hurt for leaving people behind. This lack of dependency on others made it possible for him to run away in the end and overcome obstacles in the form of emotional bonds that would discourage many others from doing so.

Despite being less used to form strong attachments, Frederick nevertheless sought parental relationships in his masters and mistresses. Just like most slaves, he naturally hoped for kind masters and would appreciate and be thankful for them, just like in the case of Sophia Auld, “a woman of the kindest heart and finest feelings”, who taught him to read (26). Slaves hoped for a relationship that would include their protection from the master. From their position, there was a high chance of them being protected not as a child that was loved, but as a property, that was to be valued. On the other hand, brotherly love was formed more easily especially with other slaves with whom Douglass shared

his struggles and hardships as well as with young white boys who taught him to read and to whom he is very thankful (29).

As a result of not having strong family bonds since birth and seeking them in other people, it can be observed that Douglass appreciates people for their personalities and their behavior. In the words of Martin Luther King Jr., Douglass was judging people by the content of their character rather than by the color of their skin. Being friends with white boys and learning from them, not once expressing any hatred towards the white race itself. The relationship he formed with other slaves was almost on a family level, being greatly sorry for leaving them behind on his way to pursue his freedom. To all these people who helped him or were good friends to him without any sort of official, blood-line attachment, he expresses in his narrative many thanks.

To conclude, the intentions of slaveholders to prevent creating strong family bonds were in the case of Frederick Douglass successful and led to his ability to move from one owner to another alone without much grief and sadness and in the end resulted in such independence that enabled him to run away and live as a freeman. He was able to form very close relationships with his friends but these relationships were not as strong as they would be in the case of a family bond since birth. Frederick's personality was greatly influenced by the fact of not knowing his mother and not knowing who his father was, but without this, his life would not be the same.

Works Cited

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Anti-Slavery Office, 1845.