

A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE WRITING STYLES OF SLAVE NARRATIVES

BY FREDERICK DOUGLASS AND HARRIET ANN JACOBS



Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree in English

at Srinakharinwirot University

October 2011

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This study aimed at studying the writing styles of Frederick Douglass in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* and Harriet Ann Jacobs in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*. Moreover, it compared the writing styles of Douglass to the writing styles of Jacobs. The concept of slave narratives and the theory of slave narratives were employed for the analysis.

The results of the study showed that Douglass and Jacobs followed the characteristics of slave narratives. That is, they used the first person in their narratives. They described the events of slave childhood, the brutality of slavery and the details of failed and successful attempts to escape. The study also found that although they both followed the characteristics of slave narratives, their writing styles were different. Douglass and Jacobs had their own unique techniques in their writings. Douglass showed the idea of manhood and hero in his own narrative and also focused on the struggle to achieve true manhood and freedom. On the other hand, Jacobs showed the idea of womanhood and was much more concerned with her family and people around her. In addition, Douglass's narrative was organized in chronological order and a linear narrative, but Jacobs's narrative was in a fragmentary and circular structure. Moreover, Douglass presented his public life while Jacobs tended to write about domesticity. It can be concluded that gender greatly affects their writing styles.

การศึกษาเปรียบเทียบลีลาการเขียนอัตชีวประวัติเรื่องทาสในงานเขียนของ  
Frederick Douglass และ Harriet Ann Jacobs



บทคัดย่อ  
ของ  
รัตนา กลิ่นจ้อย

เสนอต่อบัณฑิตวิทยาลัย มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษา  
ตามหลักสูตรศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ

ตุลาคม 2554

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ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ ดร. สุภาภรณ์ ยิ้มวิลัย

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาและเปรียบเทียบลีลาการเขียนอัตชีวประวัติเรื่องทาสของ Frederick Douglass ในเรื่อง *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* และ Harriet Ann Jacobs ในเรื่อง *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* ผู้วิจัยได้นำแนวคิดของการเขียนอัตชีวประวัติเรื่องทาส และทฤษฎีที่เกี่ยวกับการเขียนอัตชีวประวัติเรื่องทาสมาใช้ในการวิเคราะห์

ผลที่ได้จากการวิจัยแสดงให้เห็นว่า Douglass และ Jacobs เขียนประวัติเรื่องราวชีวิตของพวกเขาตามลักษณะเฉพาะของงานเขียนเรื่องทาส โดยใช้สรรพนามบุรุษที่หนึ่งในการเล่าเรื่อง มีการบรรยายถึงเหตุการณ์ในวัยเด็กของทาส ความรุนแรงของระบบทาส และรายละเอียดเหตุการณ์ของความพยายามในการหลบหนีซึ่งมีทั้งล้มเหลวและที่ประสบผลสำเร็จ นอกจากนี้ งานวิจัยพบว่างานเขียนของพวกเขามีลีลาที่แตกต่างกัน Douglass เสนอแนวคิดในเรื่องของคุณสมบัติของลักษณะความเป็นลูกผู้ชายและวีรบุรุษในงานเขียนเรื่องราวชีวิตของตัวเอง และยังมีมุ่งไปที่ประเด็นการต่อสู้เพื่อที่จะให้ได้มาซึ่งความเป็นลูกผู้ชายอย่างแท้จริงและอิสรภาพ ในทางตรงกันข้าม Jacobs เสนอแนวคิดของลักษณะความเป็นผู้หญิง และให้ความสำคัญกับเรื่องของครอบครัวและผู้คนที่อยู่รอบตัวเธอ นอกจากนี้ Douglass เล่าเรื่องตามลำดับเหตุการณ์และดำเนินเรื่องเป็นแบบเส้นตรง ส่วนงานเขียนของ Jacobs ไม่ได้เขียนตามลำดับเหตุการณ์ แต่นำเสนอชีวิตเรื่องราวภายในครอบครัว ซึ่งสรุปได้ว่าเพศมีผลต่อลีลาการเขียนของพวกเขาเป็นอย่างมาก

The Master's Project Advisor, Chair of English and Oral Defense Committee have approved this master's project A Comparative Study on the Writing Styles of Slave Narratives by Frederick Douglass and Harriet Ann Jacobs by "Rattana Klinjuy" as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in English of Srinakharinwirot University.

Master's Project Advisor

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The Master's Project has been approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in English of Srinakharinwirot University.

.....Dean of Faculty of Humanities

(Dr. Wanee Aujsatid)

October....., 2011

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Rattana Klinjuy

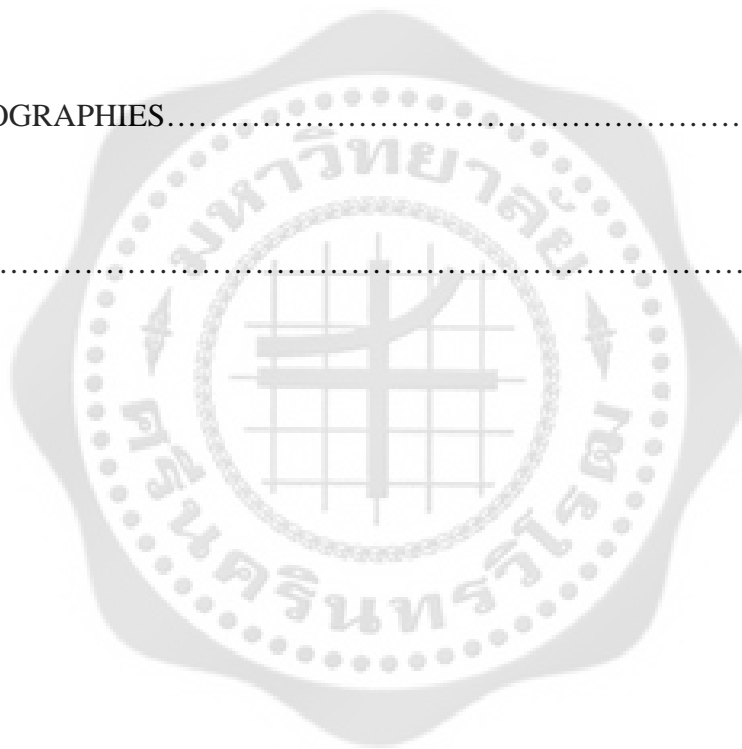


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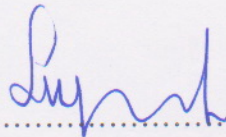
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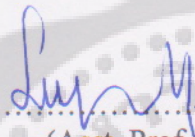
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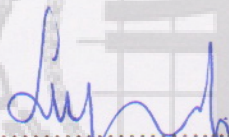
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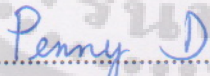


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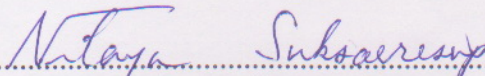
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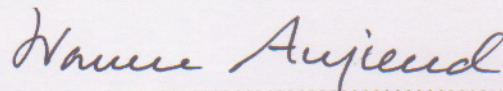


.....Committee  
(Asst. Prof. Penny Diskaparakai)



.....Committee  
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.....Dean of Faculty of Humanities

(Dr. Wanee Aujsatid)

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

Slave narrative is a type of autobiography that was most popular during the last half of nineteenth century before the Civil War in America. Slave narratives were written by escaped or freed slaves to tell their experiences of slavery, and most of them were assisted by abolitionists. Slave narratives first appeared in the United States around 1703, but most of them were published as a part of the abolitionist movement in America in the period between 1830 and 1860 until the end of the Civil War (Franklin 473). The main goals of slave narratives were to gain the sympathy of white readers as well as to support for the abolitionist movement. Slave narrative provided the readers with a view of slavery in the United States of America and allowed readers to explore some of the most compelling themes of the nineteenth century slavery, including labor, resistance and fight, family life, relations with masters, and religious belief (Fort 1).

Since the slave narratives were written by former slaves and they are the first hand experiences of slaves; therefore, several scholars are interested in the writing of slave narratives as a source for historical references. Therefore, slave narratives are one way to learn not only about black slave history but also more about American history. Narratives by slaves before the Civil War are essential to the study of American history and literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries during the time of the Atlantic slave trade. As historical sources, slave narratives recorded slaves' lives in the United States from firsthand experience of slaves. They revealed the struggle of black people, the reality of racism, and some histories of African American people, which were hidden to

the world. In the past, white people as the majority in society ignored and hid some historical incidents that they refused to record in the historical documents. White people viewed that black people as marginal groups in their society reflected on the oppression and suffering from being slaves. Thus, some incidents were too horrifying to be mentioned and recorded in historical documents, especially the issues of sexual oppression, segregation and other unethical and horrible incidents. Consequently, some factual details of the incidents were covered, ignored, and abandoned in the American history at that time. As a result, slave narratives document the history of blacks in America that had been ignored in the history books of white majority. Black slaves used narrative writings as a tool to reveal the reality of slave lives and to make a record for future generations and also to document their lives to be known and make contact with others. However, slave narrators could not straightforwardly tell their stories and record factual details into historical documents because they were at risks of being threatened by white supremacy. In addition, by the nineteenth century, it was generally illegal to teach a slave to read and write and black slaves had no chances to gain education. Slaves viewed that the acquisition of literacy was to revolt against their enslavement, and literacy became the first step in their quest for their freedom. Consequently, this form of literary works was applied as a tool to convey and contribute their traumatic experiences. Therefore, it can be said that slave narratives are valuable sources for readers to understand the experiences of slaves in the United States.

For this study, two slave narratives by two important writers who were former slaves and who wrote during the same time period were selected to study. They are Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* and Harriet Ann Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*.

Both authors presented the brutality of slavery, however, this study focused on their styles of writing.

Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* is a story of a black male slave. Frederick Douglass was a former slave who became one of the great American anti-slavery leaders of the 1800s. Douglass was a born-slave on a Maryland plantation. He was sent to Baltimore when he was eight years old. The mistress of the household began to teach him to read, but she stopped the lessons because she learned that teaching slaves to read was against the law. Douglass then realized that education was the way to gain freedom. Douglass became determined to learn to read and write afterwards. When he was 20 years old in 1838, he escaped to freedom in New York. A few years later, he went to work for the abolitionist movement. During this time, Douglass published his memoir, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* in 1845. After its publication, he traveled to England, Scotland, and Ireland where he continued speaking against slavery. He was also a strong supporter for women's rights. He is often described as the founder of the American civil rights movement. In 1847, Douglass began publishing his four-page weekly newspaper that he founded and edited, *the North Star*. *The North Star* allowed Douglass to report problems that blacks faced across the country. Douglass also wrote three autobiographical works throughout his life: the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845), *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), and the *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881, updated in 1892). His first memoir, the *Narrative of Frederick Douglass*, was quickly sold 5,000 copies, a large number for that time.

The *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* is well-known and gains a lot of reputation from its readers. For example, in

*Background to American Literature*, Surapeepan Chatraporn states that Frederick Douglass was the most famous black American anti-Slavery leader and orator of the era. Douglass gave numerous lectures for anti-slavery societies. He turned out to be a brilliant orator and his speeches and his writings were powerful in the abolitionist movement. In 1845, he published the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*, the best and most popular of many slave narratives. Douglass's narrative is vivid and highly literate, and it helps readers better understand slaves' suffering (330).

The second slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* is the story of a black female slave, Harriet A. Jacobs. She was born into slavery in North Carolina in 1813. She was a daughter of slave family. For the first six years of her life, Harriet did not know she was a slave. Upon her mistress's death, she was sent to serve a new white master. Throughout her teenage years, she had to deal with the sexual harassment from her master. Jacobs finally ran away from her master and hid for seven years in a small attic. She successfully escaped to New York by boat. Eventually, she achieved freedom and settled in New York. After her successful escape to the North, Jacobs began to write publicly about her experiences as a slave beginning with an article published in the *New York Tribune* in 1853. A female abolitionist, Amy Post, encouraged Jacobs to write her autobiography entitled *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* which revealed the personal experiences as a slave.

Like Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*, Jacobs' slave narrative gains a lot of attention. For example, in "Harriet Jacobs at Home in *Incident in the Life of a Slave Girl*," Anne Bradford Warner points out that Jacobs documents her story by specifying the southern and African home community in a way rarely presented in writing before the Civil War. Jacobs emphasizes

the inherent authority in the southern experience from being a southern woman rather than being a northern abolitionist. Jacobs addresses the northern reader's understanding of sexual abuses in slavery by giving details about sexual harassment and abuse she suffered as a female slave in Edenton, North Carolina before her eventual escape. At the same time, readers witness the deepening perversity and social decline that is characterized in the family of Flints. Jacobs focuses on the power and function of an African American family and community; in this community, readers find the values mirrored in many female writing of the period such as diligence, restraint, and piety. Jacobs's authority rests upon her being a southern slave and a woman (30-47). Meghan M. Manfra says in *Teacher's Guide to the Signet Classic Edition of Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* that Jacobs' narrative is also an excellent resource for teachers in both language arts and social studies classroom. Her text illustrates experiences of slaves living in the antebellum South. She uncovers the cruelty of the institution of slavery and the manner in which it disrupted both black and white lives. Jacobs also points to what female slaves frequently experienced in the hands of white masters. Her narrative can be used to teach students about the antebellum period, the experiences of slavery, and the struggles facing fugitive slaves in the North (3).

As illustrated above, these two slave narratives are very interesting, so the researcher proposed to study them. The aim of this study is to analyze the characteristics of slave narratives written by male and female authors. To do so, the researcher employed the concept of slave narratives, and the theory of slave narratives to be devices in the analysis.



## Purposes of the Study

The purposes of this study are:

1. To study the writing styles of Frederick Douglass in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*.
2. To study the writing styles of Harriet Ann Jacobs in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*.
3. To compare the writing styles of Frederick Douglass to the writing styles of Harriet Ann Jacobs

## Procedures

The procedures of this study consist of:

1. Related literature was studied.
  - 1.1 The concept of slave narratives and theory of slave narratives were investigated.
  - 1.2 The criticisms on *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* were studied.
  - 1.3 Related research was studied.
2. Two selected slave narratives were analyzed as following:
  - 2.1 The writing styles of the slave narrative written by Frederick Douglass
  - 2.2 The writing styles of the slave narrative written by Harriet Jacobs
3. Two selected slave narratives were compared and contrasted
4. Conclusion and discussion were drawn from the results of the study.

## **Significance of the Study**

This study will be beneficial in the following aspects:

1. It helps readers to understand the styles of writing in the slave narratives of Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*.
2. It helps readers to better understand and appreciate slave narratives.
3. It can be a guideline for further studies in related topics.

## **Definition of Term**

A slave narrative is a type of autobiographical genre. A slave narrative is the first-person narration and the first-hand experience of the author as a slave. Slave narrative recounts a personal experience of antebellum African American who escapes from being a slave. It is written to gain the sympathy of white readers and gain support for the abolitionist movement.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter discusses the related literature. It is divided into two parts: the concept of slave narratives and theory of slave narratives. Moreover, the related theories used as devices to analyze this research are discussed. Finally, the related researches are also collected in this section.

#### **The Concept of Slave Narratives**

In *Background to American Literature*, Surapeepan Chatraporn states that the slave narratives were the first black literary prose genre in the United States. They helped the blacks to establish an African-American identity in white America, and they have continued to exert an important influence on black fictional techniques and themes throughout the twentieth century. The search for identity, anger against discrimination, and a sense of living an invisible, hunted, underground life, as well as being unacknowledged by the white majority are themes that have recurred in the many works of such twentieth century black American authors (331).

In “The Slave Narratives: A Genre and Source,” David W. Blight states that the slave narratives are both an original genre of American literature and a source of historical information. Slave narratives are the first-person witnesses and first-hand experiences of slaves. American slaves wrote their personal stories because they were under pressure of white society and desired to demonstrate their own humanity among a society filled with racial prejudice. Moreover, American slaves also wrote about their personal experience to prove that they could be reliable narrators who told the truth of

their own experience. Also, they used the first pronoun “I” in order to declare their own literary, psychological and spiritual independence. The stories that slaves wrote are about how they escaped from enslavement and thus give readers outstanding events of history at that time. Therefore, slave narratives help readers access to the slaves’ daily lives, their psychological worlds, their treatment and experiences in the master and slave relationship, as well as their quest for freedom.

In “North American Slave Narratives: An Introduction to the Slave Narrative,” William L. Andrews states that the slave narratives are historical documents that describe the evolution of white supremacy in the south of the United States from the eighteenth century through early twentieth century. In slave narratives, many slave narrators reveal their struggles, sorrows, aspirations, and triumphs in their narrative writings. Slave narrators usually portrayed their struggles to survive in slavery and how they escaped from enslavement to seek freedom. Slave narratives are important to African American history and literature. They reveal to us the dialogue between whites and blacks at that time. Therefore, the narratives of former slaves are one of the few resources where readers can learn about first-hand experiences of slavery.

According to “African American Women Writers of Nineteenth Century,” Howard Dodson, the scholar, states that most of the black Americans in the United States were held in enslavement before the Civil War. The slaves had not been taught to read and write since it was generally illegal. White people enacted many laws restricting the teaching of reading and writing to black people because they feared that it would be dangerous if black people could read and write. Nevertheless, some black men and women in the nineteenth century tried to find ways to learn to read and write by themselves. Slaves viewed that the acquisition of literacy was a way to revolt against their enslavement, and literacy became the first step in their quest for freedom. During

the beginning of the nineteenth century, the controversy over slavery in the United States led to literary writings on slavery issues. They created several kinds of writing such as poetry, short stories, histories, narrative novels, and autobiographies concerning the slavery. However, a large number of their works were ignored because of white supremacy during this time.

In “Slave Narratives: Black Autobiography in Nineteenth-Century America,” Robert A. Gibson states that slave narratives were primarily written to document slavery and to support the abolitionist movement by providing their personal experiences of enslavement to the American public. Many abolitionists and anti-slavery supporters used slave narratives to reach the goal of freedom. Slave narratives generally were published by white editors or abolitionist friends of the narrators. Moreover, the narratives of black authors had to be endorsed by whites who could testify to their credibility in order to get their work published. However, the fact is that many fugitive and liberated slaves were educated enough to write their personal experiences as slaves and wrote practically all of the antebellum slave narratives without assistance from white abolitionist editors. Therefore, a lot of the narratives are real and reliable. Those former slaves told their stories to people throughout the North America and in Europe before publishing their stories into books, most of which are slave narratives published in the era of abolitionism.

### **The Theory of Slave Narratives**

In “An Introduction to the Slave Narrative,” William L. Andrew states that a slave narrative is a type of autobiographical narrative. A slave narrative is the first-person narration and the first-hand experience of the author as a slave. A slave narrative recounts a personal experience of an African American who escapes from slavery. It is written to

primarily document a slave's life and enlightens white readers about the realities of slavery. The slave narrator reveals his or her struggles, sorrows, aspirations, and triumphs in personal story-telling. Andrew explains that the slave narrator usually portrays slavery as a condition of extreme physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual deprivation. The narrator also often stresses faith and commitment to liberty and human dignity. Finally, the narrator undertakes an arduous quest for freedom. An important scene of slave narratives was the successful escape from enslavement to freedom in the North. Once the narrator attains freedom in the North he or she may rename himself or herself afterwards.

In "The Slave Narrative: Literary Movements," Donna Campbell explains that a slave narrative was the product of an author who was a black person in the South of the United States. The slave narrative recounted a personal experience of antebellum. This genre of writing emerged as an important source of information about plantation life because it was told by people who had a first hand experience of slavery. In addition, the slave narrative was written to reject the authority of their masters and was used as a historical document which described the chronicle of white supremacy in the South.

In "James Olney's 'I was born': Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature," Charles Twitchell Davis and Henry Louis Gates explain the characteristics of slave narratives that are seen in many narratives written by slaves. The key characteristics of slave narratives are as follows:

1. A first sentence begins with "I was born . . . ," then specifies a place but not a date of birth.
2. A sketchy account of parentage, often involving a white father is given.

3. Descriptions of a cruel master, mistress, or overseer, and details of first observed whipping and numerous subsequent whippings, with women very frequently the victims are projected.
4. An account of one extraordinarily strong, hardworking slave often “pure Africa” -- who, because there is no reason for it, refuses to be whipped, is included.
5. There is a record of barriers raised against slave literacy and the overwhelming difficulties encountered in learning to read and write.
6. There is a description of a "Christian" slaveholder (often of one such dying in terror) and the accompanying claim that "Christian" slaveholders are invariably worse than those professing no religion.
7. There is detailed information about the amounts and kinds of food and clothing given to slaves, the works and routines required of them, the pattern of a day, a week, a year.
8. Accounts of a slave auction, of families being separated and destroyed, of distraught mothers clinging to their children as they are torn from them, of slave coffles being driven south are reported.
9. Detailed incidents of patrols, failed attempt(s) to escape, pursued by men and dogs are told.
10. Details of successful attempt(s) and strategies to escape are illustrated sleeping during the day, travelling by night guided by the North Star, and reception in a free state by Quakers who offer a lavish breakfast and much genial conversation.

11. Strategies to be survival as a free man are informed, i.e., taking a new last name (frequently one suggested by a white abolitionist) to accord with new social identity as a free man, but retention of first name as a mark of continuity of individual identity.

12. Reflections on slavery are made (153).

Estelle C. Jelinek contrasts the autobiographical narratives of women and men on several points. She explains that men focus on their professional lives, while women emphasize personal and domestic details and describe connections to other people. At the level of life scripts, men aggrandize themselves in autobiographies that “idealize their lives or cast them into heroic molds to project their universal import.” Women, by contrast, seek to authenticate themselves in stories that reveal “a self-consciousness and a need to sift through their lives for explanation and understanding,” employing understatement to mask their feeling and play down public aspects of their lives. At the level of temporality, men shape the events of their lives into coherent wholes characterized by linearity, harmony, and orderliness. However, women characterize the lives of women and their texts disconnected, fragmentary pattern of diffusion, and diversity in discontinuous forms. Because of the multidimensionality of women’s roles seems to have established a pattern of diffusion and diversity when they write. Thus, women’s narratives are fragmentary, interrupted, and formless nature of their lives. (qtd. in Smith and Watson 9).

According to “Some Note of the Slave Narratives,” Greg Hampton shows the differences of slave narratives between men and women. These differences can reflect the belief of the roles of men and women in the past. For example, Hampton explains that the slave narrative for men is based on the American presumptions regarding the characteristics of manhood and hero that a man should accomplish by his use of force,



wits and his inherent courage. He must overcome the individuals as well as the institution of slavery in his narrative and the escape is often defined by danger, violence and the slave's physical strength and internal resolve. The struggle to preserve manhood is an essential factor to get freedom and the male narrative should have a moment of masculine power during his journey towards freedom.

For the female author, survival in the slave narrative falls along the Victorian conventions of motherhood. Righteousness, virtue, purity, domesticity, and attention to and protection of the family must be the qualities that are maintained during the various moments of the narrative. While the male slave's escape is often a lonely escape that makes him the fugitive hero on an idealized individual quest, the female slave escapes with family or not at all. Frequently, female narratives concern the freedom of her family.

In *Men and Masculinities*, Michael S. Kimmel and Amy Aronson state that all slave narratives are about horrors of slavery, the desire and justification for escape, and the dreams of new life and freedom. The narrator overcomes great hardships for freedom. Generally, slave narratives provide only sketchy details regarding the method of escape from slavery. Slave narratives repeatedly revealed that males and females desire the freedom to protect and support their families. Males want to support their families financially and to protect their wives and children from slavery. As property, unmarried and married female slaves are often forced to submit to their masters sexually. Therefore, female slaves desire freedom so that they could live up to the Victorian ideals of virginity until marriage and maintain monogamy within marriage. They desire to protect their children from being sold, and they wanted to raise their children to adulthood (741).

## Related Research on Slave Narratives

These are some studies on slave narratives. First, in “The Role of the Engaging Narrator in Four Nineteenth-Century American slave narratives,” Scott Thompson establishes the importance of society, political and racial oppression upon the autobiographical narratives of four prominent African-American writers: Frederick Douglass, William Well Brown, Harriet Wilson, and Harriet Jacobs. His study is outstanding in the discussion of slave narratives for its contention that each author employs the rhetorical device of the "engaging narrator" namely a narrative voice that intervenes in the text and addresses the reader or readers directly. This narrative voice is the mouthpiece of the author and allows the socially conscious autobiographical voice of the fugitive slave to speak plainly and simply about the horrors of slavery and the need to change the social reality of American society. Scott also reviews the historical, political and social realities of the mid-19th-century as portrayed in the narratives. It uses the theories of new historicism and the process of novelization to demonstrate that a revision of history from the perspective of slave narratives will lead to a clearer and more accurate understanding of American society under the influence of slavery.

Second, in “ House of Bondage, Loopholes of Retreat: Space and Place in Four African American Slave Narratives”, Morton Nanette June examines the relationship between space and the recognition of African American subjectivity in four African American slave narratives: Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (1845)* and *My Bondage and My Freedom (1855)*; Harriet Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861)*; and Elizabeth Keckley's *Behind the Scenes, or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House (1868)*. Morton indicates that socioeconomic relationship between slave owners and slaves produced slave space. The

area where slaves lived and worked, it was the evidence of the inferiority and non-subject status.

Third, in “Counter-Discourses on the Racialization of Theft and Ethics in Douglass’s *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845) and Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Lovalerie King investigates how African-American authors have responded to the way American legal and social practice contributed historically to the racialization of theft and unethical behavior, in general, and to the construction of the popular American image of the “thieving negro,” in particular. She considers how Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845) and Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) counteract the effects of other negative images, the stereotype of the black thief.

From the studies above, there are some studies on slave narratives. However, the study on the comparison of the writing styles of Frederick Douglass to Harriet Ann Jacobs has not found yet. Therefore, the researcher proposes to study the characteristics of slave narratives written by male and female authors.

## CHAPTER 3

### **AN ANALYSIS OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS'S *NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS, AN AMERICAN SLAVE, WRITTEN BY HIMSELF***

This chapter discusses the writing styles of Frederick Douglass. The researcher applies the concept of slave narratives and theory of slave narratives to analyze the slave narrative of Frederick Douglass.

*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* is a slave narrative. This book is told by Frederick Douglass who describes his painful life and difficulties during his life as a slave under his white master. In his book, Douglass acts as both the narrator and the protagonist. He portrays himself as a black slave who works as a servant for whites at Captain Anthony's house, his first master, on a plantation on the Eastern Shore of Maryland where he was born. He is later given to another white master, Mr. Huger Auld, who is Mr. Thomas Auld's brother in Baltimore. Throughout the story, he portrays his struggle to survive in the world of white supremacy in the United States and how he escapes from enslavement to seek freedom. Since this is Douglass's personal account, he has a first-hand experience of slavery, thus readers can truly know and deeply understand slaves' lives on a plantation from his point of view. In *The Slave Narratives: A Genre and Source*, David W. Blight states that slave narratives are the first-person accounts of slavery and first-hand experiences of slaves. First person account can give a firsthand knowledge of something seen, heard, or experienced in order to help the readers to experience the truth of what it is like to be a black slave. Thus, narratives from

a real slave's perspective can deepen readers' understanding and give readers insight to the inhumanity of slavery.

According to the theory of slave narratives in *The Slave Narrative: Literary Movements*, Donna Campbell points out that a slave narrative is written to be used as a historical document to reflect white supremacy in the South. Like Douglass's narrative, he narrates his first-hand experience as a black slave on plantations in Talbot country situated on the border of Miles River. The major products on plantation are tobacco, corn, and wheat. These plantations belong to Colonel Lloyd, a white rich man, who calls his large plantation "Great House Farm". Lloyd owns hundreds of slaves. Those slaves are overworked, and exhausted; they receive little food, few clothes, and have no beds. Those who break rules and even those who do not are beaten or whipped by the plantation overseers. In Douglass's narrative, Douglass portrays events that regularly occurred on plantations and also describes how slaves were treated by white people under slavery system. From Douglass's narrative, as well as others, it can be said that slave narratives are the important source of information about slavery on plantation.

In *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*, there are several key characteristics of slave narratives found in this writing. The slave narratives always expose physical and emotional abuses of slavery for example, scenes of whipping, sexual abuse, and starvation, especially of women or children. This kind of narrative always describes a quest for literacy, freedom and the loss of significant family members and the destruction of family ties. Douglass effectively provides readers with incidents of the true evils of slavery. He portrays the picture of slavery so vividly that readers can perceive and understand what he undergoes in his narrative.

The first characteristic of a slave narrative is the opening sentence which always begins the first sentence with "I was born" and then specifies a place but not a date of

birth". Similarly, in the first sentence of Douglass's narrative, he states, "I was born in Tuckahoe, near Hillsborough, and about twelve miles from Easton, in Talbot country, Maryland. I have no accurate knowledge of my age..."(16). Like many slave narratives, a black slave is unsure of his or her exact date of birth. Douglass is separated from his mother at a very early age. He hardly sees his mother during his childhood until his mother's death. Douglass only heard that his father is a white man called Captain Anthony, his master. However, he is unsure about this as he mentions, "The whisper that my master was my father, may or may not be true..." (3). We can see that when Douglass tells about his father and mother, he rarely knows about his parentage.

The second characteristic shown in Douglass's narrative is the description of cruel master, mistress, or overseer being violent towards slaves. Douglass details his first observed whipping and numerous subsequent whippings which is a key characteristic of slave narratives like the explanation of Davis and Gates. Readers can imagine vivid and horrible pictures of slavery. During his plantation life, when Douglass was young, he witnesses his master's cruelty in punishing his aunt. Douglass describes the horrible incident,

He used to tie up to a joist, and whip her naked back till she was literally covered with blood...The louder she screamed, the louder he whipped; and where the blood ran faster, there he whipped the longest. He would whip her to make her scream, and whip her to make her hush; and not until overcome by fatigue, would he cease to swing the blood-clotted cowskin. I remember the first time I ever witnessed this horrible exhibition (6).

From this incident, Douglass shows that whites who are the owners of the plantations, masters or overseers, feel that they are superior to black people, who are considered as plantation chattels. Therefore, whites treat them very brutally and inhumanly. The use of violence is to keep slaves powerless and degrade slaves as less than humans, and maintain their status as pieces of property. Douglass can portray the acts of violence

understandably to readers. In doing so, we can see that Douglass apparently follows traditional characteristics of slave narratives by describing master's cruelty in whipping slaves.

The account of difficulties is one of several characteristics that can be seen in Douglass's narrative. Douglass portrays the difficulties of black slaves throughout his narrative. The oppression and exploitation of white masters are unavoidable in a life under slavery. Slaveholders try to exploit their slaves as much as possible to gain economic benefits by forcing them to work on a plantation or in the household. To help readers imagine how slaves faced painful experiences and difficulties from enslavement, Douglass details information about the amounts and kinds of food and clothing given to slaves in his writing. This is clearly seen through Douglass's description when he wrote:

The men and women slaves received, as their monthly allowance of food, eight pounds of pork, or its equivalent in fish, and one bushel of corn meal. Their yearly clothing consisted of two coarse linen shirts, one pair of linen trousers, like the shirts, one jacket, one pair of trousers for winter, made of coarse Negro cloth, one pair of stockings, and one pair of shoes the whole of which could not have cost more than seven dollars... (10).

From the above description, readers can imagine how slaves are treated by their masters and they have to struggle to survive on a plantation under the control of white masters.

Through this description, readers can easily access the world of slaves and understand the difficulties slaves have to face.

In addition, the record of barriers against slave literacy is an outstanding key characteristic shown in Douglass's narrative. Douglass records his life after he arrives at Baltimore when he has an opportunity to learn to read and write. He is taught by Mrs. Auld, his mistress. However, Mr. Auld, her husband, forbids it. Mr. Auld talks with his wife about teaching reading and writing to a slave.

It was unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave to read. If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell and if you teach that nigger how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once unmanageable and of no value to his master (33).

In *African American Women Writer of Nineteenth Century*, Howard Dodson, a scholar, states that most of black people in the United States were held in enslavement. The slaves were not taught to read and write because it was generally illegal and unsafe to white people. If slaves had education they would likely run away and revolt against their masters. Consequently, white people enacted many laws restricting the education to black people. Like other black people in the United States, Douglass was a slave and he was not allowed to read and write as well. From the conversation between his master and his mistress regarding education for slaves, Douglass deeply perceives the evils of slavery and white supremacy to black people. Power and dominance could only be achieved if slaveholders kept their slaves uneducated. If slaves lived without knowledge, slaveholders could dominate them and control their slaves.

However, Douglass realizes that education is a pathway from enslavement to freedom. He realizes that knowledge is power. If he is educated, he can be free from enslavement. Therefore, he tries to find ways to learn reading and writing by himself in secret. Douglass finally declares his own humanity by describing his achievement of literacy, “They gave tongue to interesting thoughts of my own soul, which had frequently flashed through my mind” (39). “The more I read, the more I was led to abhor and detest my enslavers” (40). Douglass shows readers that his literacy liberated him to have physical and spiritual independence.

The accounts of slave auction and being separated from parents are shown in Douglass’s narrative too. In general slave narratives, narrators often describe the incident



of slave auction and portray how they are separated from their parents. In Douglass's narrative, he describes how he is separated from his mother at a young age. His mother dies when he is approximately seven years old. According to "How Slavery Affected African American Families," Heather A. Williams states that on large plantations or farms, it was common for children to come under the care of one enslaved woman who was designated to feed and watch over them during the day while their parents worked. Most enslaved children who reached the age of seven or eight were assigned tasks including housework, taking care of owner's young children, and eventually working in the tobacco, cotton, corn, or rice fields along with adults. In Douglass's narrative, he is the servant at Captain Anthony's house. After the death of Captain Anthony, Douglass is sent to Baltimore to live with Mr. Hugh Auld, who is the brother of Mr. Thomas Auld. Two years later, Douglass is taken back to serve Mr. Thomas Auld. However, Mr. Thomas Auld considers Douglass unmanageable, so he rents Douglass for one year to Edward Covey, a farm renter. Then, Douglass is rented to William Freeland for two years. Finally, Douglass is sent back to Baltimore to live with Mr. Hugh Auld to learn the trade of ship caulking. Apparently, we can see that Douglass, as the narrator, employs a typical characteristic of a slave narrative according to Gates and Davis by describing the frequent slave auctions through his narrative.

A detail of attempts to escape is another characteristic of slave narratives described in Douglass's narrative. In his narrative, the details of escape are divided into three phases. While Douglass is the servant at Mr. Freeland's house, he tells readers the outstanding part of his narrative when he decides to escape from his master.

In the first phase is his first attempt to escape. Douglass starts to plan his escape by beginning to secretly educate his fellow slaves in a Sabbath School at the homes of free blacks and also forms a plan of his escape with three fellow slaves. Upon the day of

escape on a Saturday morning, while Douglass and his fellows were going from the field to the house for breakfast as usual, they get into the house to look out at the lane gate and see four white men with two colored men coming to their lane gate. At this moment, Douglass and John, his fellow, are in the kitchen while Henry and other slaves are in the barn, and eventually all of them are found by Mr. Freeland because someone betrays and tells their plan to Freeland. Eventually, Douglass and his two fellow slaves, John and Henry, are taken to the jail.

The next phase is another attempt to escape. In this part, Douglass describes.

I stepped to the door, and inquired what they wanted. They at once seized me, and, without giving me any satisfaction, tied me--lashing my hands closely together. I insisted upon knowing what the matter was. They at length said, that they had learned I had been in a "scrape," and that I was to be examined before my master; and if their information proved false, I should not be hurt.....(89).

Douglass and other slaves try to escape from enslavement but they are eventually arrested by their white masters. However, two fellow slaves are taken out by Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Freeland leaves Douglass alone. After that, Douglass is taken out by his master, Captain Auld, and he is sent back to live with Mr. Hugh Auld in Baltimore again.

Until 1838, Douglass determines to plan an escape again. Gates and David explain that one characteristic of slave narratives is that slave narrators always give the details of a successful escape along with the strategies. Similarly, Douglass details his successful attempt and strategies. At first, Douglass plans to find his own work and pay his wage to Mr. Hugh Auld every week. Also, Mr. Hugh Auld sometimes gives him a small portion of the wages because he senses that it is unfair for Douglass, and he may also wants to remedy his guilt. During living with Mr. Hugh Auld, Douglass looks forward to having freedom. We can see that Douglass never gives up his goal to escape from slavery. Until one day in August, Douglass attends the meeting outside Baltimore, and he is unable to

give Mr. Hugh Auld his wages until the next day. Mr. Hugh Auld is very upset and revokes Douglass's privilege of hiring his own time because he fears that Douglass will soon attempt to escape. Then, Douglass decides to escape on the third of September. In doing so, Douglass decides to work diligently until that date, so Mr. Hugh Auld won't be suspicious. In this part of the narrative, Douglass details his escape strategies:

As the day upon which I would make a second attempt to secure my freedom. I now had three weeks during which to prepare for my journey. Early on Monday morning, before Master Hugh had time to make any engagement for me, I went out and got employment of Mr. Butler.... At the end of the week, I brought him between eight and nine dollars. He seemed very well pleased, and asked why I did not do the same the week before. He little knew what my plans were. My object in working steadily was to remove any suspicion he might entertain of my intent to run away; and I succeeded admirably.... The second week passed, and again I carried him my full wages; and so well pleased was he...(106).

In the above quotation, he just says that his escape is successful by reaching New York without any obstacles. He does not give details of the strategies because he does not want to give slaveholders any information that would help them prevent other slaves from escaping to the North as he describes, "How did I so, what means I adopted, what direction I travelled, and by what mode of conveyance, I must leave unexplained, for the reason before mentioned" (107).

The final interesting characteristic that can be seen in Douglass's narrative is taking a new last name which is frequently suggested by a white abolitionist to accord with a new social identity as a free man, but retention of first name as a mark of continuity of individual identity. Upon reaching New York, Douglass is anxious and is afraid of being arrested. He also finds himself in an unfamiliar city without friends, food, and money. Then, he meets a free black named David Ruggles who takes Douglass to a group of abolitionist. Mr. Ruggles also advises Douglass to go to Bedford to work as a caulker. When Douglass arrives in New Bedford, he is assisted from Mr. Nathan Johnson who

advises Douglass to change his name to protect him from being recaptured and punished. Douglass then eventually changes his surname to “Douglass.” In changing his name, Douglass still wants to use his first name as Frederick as a mark of continuity of his individual identity as he said, “ I gave Mr. Johnson the privilege of choosing me a name, but told him he must not take from me the name of Frederick. I must hold on to that, to preserve a sense of my identity....” (112). In this part, Douglass, therefore, changes his name to protect himself from being recaptured, but he retains his first name to preserve his individual identity.

From the above discussion, it is clearly shown that there are several keys of characteristics of slave narratives found in Douglass’s narrative. Douglass’s narrative contains descriptions of slave childhood, the brutality of slavery, the accounts of difficulties, the records of barrier against slave literacy, the slave auctions as well as successful attempts to escape. From this analysis, it can be said that Douglass outstandingly follows the key characteristics of slave narratives.

## CHAPTER 4

### **AN ANALYSIS OF HARRIET ANN JACOBS' *INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF A SLAVE GIRL, WRITTEN BY HERSELF***

This chapter discusses the writing styles of Harriet Ann Jacobs. The researcher also applies the concept of slave narratives and the theory of slave narratives to analyze the slave narrative of Harriet Ann Jacobs.

*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* written by Harriet Ann Jacobs is the most widely-read female slave narrative. This book is the first-hand experiences of enslavement and describes the horror of slavery, the sexual abuse, the mother bondage and the struggles during her life as the slave. In her narrative, Jacobs uses the pseudonym "Linda Brent" to narrate her first-person account. Jacobs or Linda Brent as the protagonist in the book is a daughter of a slave family. Linda does not know that she is a slave until she is six years old. When her mother dies, she is sent to live with her mother's mistress who treats her well and teaches her to read. After a few years, this mistress dies and then she is sent to live with Dr. Flint, her new white master. Dr. Flint is cruel and neglectful. Throughout her adolescence, she struggles against the sexual harassment from her white master; she, therefore, has an affair with Mr. Sand, her white neighbor, to avoid being raped by Mr. Flint. Then, Linda runs away from her white master and hides for seven years in a small attic. She plans to escape to the North but cannot abandon her family and her children. After seven years in the attic, Linda successfully escapes to New York by boat and eventually reunites with her children there.

According to the concept of slave narratives in “Slave Narratives: Black Autobiography in Nineteenth-century America,” Robert A. Gibson states that slave narratives in the nineteenth century were primarily written to document slavery and to support the abolitionist movement by providing their personal experiences of enslavement to the American public. Like Gibson’s idea, Jacobs writes her personal experiences of enslavement to be published. She states that her book may help to support the antislavery movement. In addition, Gibson states that many ex-slaves become abolitionist and anti-slavery supporters afterwards and their main purpose is to use slave narratives to reach the goal of freedom. Moreover, Gibson also states that slave narratives generally published by white editors or abolitionist friends of the narrators. In this regard, the narratives of black authors have to be endorsed by whites who could testify to their credibility in order to be published. Likewise, Jacobs worked with the abolitionist editor Lydia Maria Child in producing her work. Linda Maria Child, an abolitionist, testified to the accuracy of Jacobs’ book. Jacobs also becomes the antislavery activist, and she tells her story to people throughout the North and in Europe. Jacobs’ narrative helps to persuade northerners to join the cause against the immorality of the institution of slavery. Her story also reveals the double burden of slavery on women and the sexual harassment by their masters.

In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, there are several key characteristics of slave narratives found in this writing.

The first characteristic of a slave narrative is the opening sentence which always begins with “I was born” and then specifies a place but not a date of birth. Like many other slave narratives, Jacobs opens her narrative with statement, “I was born,” but this phrase is not followed by the date and place of her birth. In her writing, Jacobs does not specify even her birth place in the beginning of her narrative. She fails to mention her

place of birth but describes the accounts of her family members instead. Jacobs describes in details her family members like her father, her younger brother, her grandmother, and eventually her mother. According to “James Olney’s ‘I was born’: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature” by Charles Twitchell Davis and Henry Louis, slave writers always describe sketchy accounts of parentage, often involving a white father in the narrative. In her narrative, Jacobs describes her childhood and the happy family life with the details of her family members emphasizing family relationships. However, she does not clarify to readers if her father is white or black but just tells readers that her complexion of her parents is a light shade of brownish yellow and the person who has one white parent and one black parent is called mulatto. Jacobs tells readers about the account of her family members, and we can see that she emphasizes telling readers about her family more than herself.

The second characteristic found in Jacobs’ writing is the description of cruel master, mistress, or overseer, details of first observed whipping seen by the narrator as the witnesses in such incident. In the beginning of her narrative, Jacobs tells readers that she spends the first six years of her life unaware that she is a slave. Upon her mother’s death, when she is six years old, she is then forced to be enslaved. When she is nearly twelve years old, she becomes aware of her future as an enslaved woman and begins to experience the horror of slavery life as she portrays the characteristics of Mrs. Flint and Mr. Flint as she describes,

Mrs. Flint, like many southern women, was totally deficient in energy. She had not strength to superintend her household affairs; but her nerves were so strong, that she could sit in her easy chair and see a woman whipped, till the blood trickled from every stroke of the lash and Dr. Flint was an epicure. The cook never sent a dinner to his table without fear and trembling; for if there happened to be a dish not to his liking, he would either order her to be whipped, or compel her to eat every mouthful of it in his presence. The poor, hungry creature might not have objected to eating it; but she did object to having her master cram it down her throat till she choked. They had a pet dog that was a nuisance in the house

The cook was ordered to make some Indian mush for him. He refused to eat, and when his head was held over it, the froth flowed from his mouth into the basin. He died a few minutes after. When Dr. Flint came in, he said the mush had not been well cooked, and that was the reason the animal would not eat it. He sent for the cook, and compelled her to eat it. He thought that the woman's stomach was stronger than the dog's; but her sufferings afterwards proved that he was mistaken. This poor woman endured many cruelties from her master and mistress; sometimes she was locked up, away from her nursing baby, for a whole day and night (23).

From the above description, readers can imagine how slaves are treated by their mistress and master. Jacobs describes the cruel punishment of slave owners showing that slavery ruins the lives of slaves. Slave masters routinely brutalize black girls and women to be stripped, beaten, raped, and forced to work. In her narrative, Jacobs can portray the acts of violence understandably to readers. Readers can see into the mind and the private life of slaves and can reach the sense of what it means to be owned by another human being and what it means to be considered as a piece of property where owners can do any evil things to their slaves like pets. It is obvious that Jacobs follows this traditional characteristic of slave narratives by describing master's cruelty.

The account of difficulties is one of characteristics of a slave narrative that can be seen in Jacobs' narrative. Jacobs narrates the difficulties from enslavement.

..so far as work was concerned. I worked day and night, with wretchedness before me. When I lay down beside my child, I felt how much easier it would be to see her die than to see her master beat her about, as I daily saw him beat other little ones. The next day my new mistress began her housekeeping. I was not exactly appointed maid of all work; but I was to do whatever I was told. Monday evening came. It was always a busy time (142).

Moreover, Jacobs also describes the incident in the Slave's New Year's Day. She narrates that slaves are expected to go to their new masters on the second of January for working on plantation. On a farm, slaves must work until the corn and cotton are laid. A slave's master forces his slave to work hard on a plantation and slaves cannot refuse commands of their masters and mistresses. As Davis and Gates explain about the characteristics of



slave narratives, the slave author usually describes the account of an extraordinary and hardworking of slaves' lives. The below description can portray how slaves have to work hard in their daily lives and the outcome if slaves reject their master's command:

If a slave is unwilling to go with his new master, he is whipped, or locked up in jail, until he consents to go, and promises not to run away during the year. Should he chance to change his mind, thinking it justifiable to violate an extorted promise, woe unto him if he is caught! The whip is used till the blood flows at his feet; and his stiffened limbs are put in chains, to be dragged in the field for days and days! (25).

From the above description, readers can imagine what slaves encounter and how they are treated by their masters if they do not obey their master's command. Slaves are controlled both physically and mentally and definitely mistreated and abused by their masters and overseers. They were seen as property and had to obey every command of their masters. To help readers to imagine how slaves have to encounter painful experiences and difficulties from enslavement, Jacobs details information about the amounts and kinds of food and clothing given to slaves in her writing. It is clearly seen through Jacobs' description:

On that night the slaves received their weekly allowance of food. Three pound meat, a peck of corn, and perhaps a dozen herring were allowed to each man. Women received a pound and a half of meat, a peck of corn, and the same number of herring. Children over twelve years old had half the allowance of the women. The meat was cut and weighed by the foreman of the field hands, and piled on planks before the meat house....(142).

Giving the details of amounts and kinds of food, including the daily works given to slaves is another characteristic of slave narratives according to the explanation of Gate and David. Readers can easily imagine the world of slaves and better understand what Jacobs wants to portray her difficulties as a slave. Jacobs vividly describes incidents showing slaves were often mistreated and abused on a daily basis.

Another characteristic of slave narrative is the record of barriers against slave literacy. In her narrative, Jacobs describes about educational opportunity during her childhood as following;

As a child, I loved my mistress; and, looking back on the happy days I spent with her, I try to think with less bitterness of this act of injustice. While I was with her, she taught me to read and spell; and for this privilege, which so rarely falls to the lot of a slave, I bless her memory (16).

From the above description, Jacobs states that while she was with her grandmother's mistress, she has the opportunity to read and write. She also mentions that it is the privilege of her to read and spell because most of slaves rarely have chances to gain education. At this point, readers become aware that even though Jacobs can gain literacy while she is with her mistress; however, most slaves are rarely educated. In *African American Women Writer of Nineteenth Century*, Howard Dodson, a scholar, states that most of black Americans in the United States were held in enslavement. The slaves were not taught to read and write, since it was generally illegal and unsafe to white people. Jacobs' narrative emphasizes that how slaves have no chances to learn reading and writing in general. It is believed that if slaves have education they will run away and revolt against their masters. Consequently, white people enact many laws restricting education to black people.

The description of a Christian slaveholder is another characteristic of slave narratives shown in Jacobs' writing. Jacobs shows readers the topic of Christianity in regards to morality. In her narrative, she shows readers the hypocrisy of white slaveholders claiming to preach Christianity when she recalls:

My mistress had taught me the precepts of God's Word: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them." But I was her slave, and I suppose she did not recognize as her neighbor. I would give much to blot out from my memory that one great wrong. As a child, I loved my mistress; and, looking back on the happy days I spent with her, I try to think with less bitterness of this act of injustice (15-16).

From the above description, Jacob highlights the hypocrisy of whites and explains that slaveholders attempt to teach their black slaves to obey their master in the same way that they obey Christ. Slaveholders believed that slaves should accept their status as slaves and that they are inferior because it is the will of God. In this part, Jacobs makes readers to see the reality of slavery on religious matters and points out the immoral perversions used by slaveholders to justify the cruel and inhumane treatment of slaves to readers.

The account of slave auction including being separated from parents is another characteristic shown in Jacobs' narrative. In her narrative, readers can imagine slave auctions and how slaves are separated from family through her life. Masters often use female slaves for breeding, and children are taken from mothers and sold. Jacobs poignantly narrates this destruction of family through a New Year's Day auction of slaves as she describes;

One of these sale days, I saw a mother lead seven children to the auction- block. She knew that some of them would be taken from her; but they took all. The children were sold to a slave-trader, and their mother was bought by a man in her own town. Before night her children were all far away. ...I met that mother in the street, and her wild, haggard face lives to-day in my mind. She wrung her hands in anguish, and exclaimed, "Gone! All gone! Why don't God kill me?" I had no words wherewith to comfort her. Instances of this kind are of daily, yea, of hourly occurrence (26-27).

Jacobs gives precedence to her family. Readers can see that Jacobs records the story of her grandmother's family and her family. In her narrative, she says that her grandmother is separated from her children after the death of her master. According to the slave system, the master's properties were divided among his heirs. Jacobs describes the details of this fact as following;

My grandmother remained in her service as a slave; but her children were divided among her master's children. As she had five, Benjamin, the youngest one, was sold, in order that each heir might have an equal portion of dollars and cents. Though only ten years old, seven hundred and twenty dollars were paid for him. His sale was a terrible blow to my grandmother; but she was naturally hopeful,

and she went to work with renewed energy, trusting in time to be able to purchase some of her children (13).

Jacobs also mentions about the life of her older brother, William. She illustrates how he is sold to a slave trader and how he is treated like a piece of property.

The doctor went to the jail and told William he would take him back into his service if he would promise to behave himself; but he replied that he would rather be sold. "And you *shall* be sold, you ungrateful rascal!" exclaimed the doctor. In less than an hour the money was paid, the papers were signed, sealed, and delivered, and my brother and children were in the hands of the trader (161).

From this description, Jacobs shows readers how slavery degrades the humanity of slaves.

Slaves are seen as property not as humans. This shows the fact that most slaves are exploited and oppressed by their white masters. Obviously, we can see that Jacob employs a typical characteristic of slave narratives by describing the frequent slave auctions.

Details of failed and successful attempts as well as strategies to escape are told in Jacobs' narrative. In her narrative, she records that after her children are born, Dr. Flint offers Jacobs a cottage. Jacobs refuses his offer and is subsequently sent to the plantation of Dr. Flint's son. In order to save herself and her children from the degradations of slavery, she prepares a plan to escape. Jacobs hides in a small attic space in a cottage of her grandmother's house. There she stays almost seven years, tricking Dr. Flint into believing that she is living in the North. From her small space, Jacobs is able to watch her children grow up. In this part, we can see Jacobs' strategies for escape. This is because she is concerned about her children. Jacobs also tells readers that she hopes their father will purchase their children from Dr. Flint, and then set them free. Mr. Sands does purchase his children, but he does not free them as he promised.

Jacob successfully escapes to the North in 1842. There she makes several friends, including her new employers, Bruces. Her children eventually join her in the North for a

time, but she lives in the North without constant security because slave hunters still pursue her. Jacobs tries to hide from slave hunters for several years; however, Mr. Flint continues to search for her. After his death, his heirs still keep on searching for her. When Mr. Bruce's first wife dies, Jacobs' husband and her young daughter then visit England, and Jacobs works as the child's caretaker. Then, Jacobs returns to live in Boston for a couple of years and works with Mr. Bruce again in New York, who has remarried. Finally in 1852, Jacobs is purchased by Mr. Bruce's second wife who sets her free.

It is clearly seen that the key characteristics in slave narratives are found in the writing of Harriet Ann Jacobs. That is, Jacobs uses the first person point of view, and describes the cruel master and mistress. She narrates the difficulties of slavery and records the barriers against slave literacy. She also shows the subject of Christianity of white slaveholders and the frequent slave auctions. In addition, Jacobs details how she escapes from enslavement in her writing as well. From this analysis, it can be concluded that Jacobs follows the key characteristics of slave narratives.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This chapter concludes the writing styles of Frederick Douglass in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* and Harriet Ann Jacobs in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*. In addition, the writing styles of Douglass are compared to the writing styles of Jacobs. Finally, discussion and suggestions for further studies are given.

#### **Conclusion of the Writing Styles of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Ann Jacobs**

Both narratives follow the characteristics of slave narratives proposed by Charles Twitchell Davis and Henry Louis Gates. Douglass and Jacobs share many of the characteristics of slave narratives in their works.

Firstly, both Douglass and Jacobs demonstrate the first characteristic of slave narratives. That is, they begin the first sentence with “I was born.” David W. Blight states in *The Slave Narratives: A Genre and Source* that American slaves also write their personal experience to prove that they could be reliable narrators to tell the truth about their own experience. Douglass and Jacobs use the first pronoun “I” in order to show that their narratives are real.

Next, the second characteristic is also found in both narratives. That is, Douglass and Jacobs have to suffer from being separated from their mothers or their families. For Jacobs, this happened when she was six years old as she begins to realize her status as a slave. For Douglass, he is separated from his mother at a very early age. He hardly sees

his mother during his childhood before his mother's death. This clearly shows that both authors present similar experiences and convey similar messages to readers in their narratives.

Also, Douglass and Jacobs always reveal the difficulties of their lives as slaves. Each author gives descriptions of the inhumanity and cruelty of slavery. In their narratives, Douglass and Jacobs usually portray their struggles to survive in their daily lives as slaves. For example, they are both always uncertain about where and how they will get their next meal. Both detail the clear description of the difficulties of slaves' lives on a plantation under the control of white masters.

In addition, the record of barriers raised against literacy is shown in both narratives. The literacy scenes are illustrated in which the narrators explained how they are not allowed to read and write in the white society. Both Douglass and Jacobs record the difficulty they encounter in order to learn to read and write. Nevertheless, during their later childhood years, Douglass and Jacobs shared a common experience; that is, they have kind mistresses who teach them to read and write. Also, their narratives show that literacy eventually played a very important role in their decision to escape.

In both slave narratives, readers can see that Douglass and Jacobs frequently experience the accounts of slave auctions through their life. Douglass and Jacobs describe slave auctions and how they are separated from their parents when they are young and how they are frequently sold by their white masters.

Finally, details of failed and successful attempts and strategies to escape are told in the narratives of Douglass and Jacobs. They recount the personal experiences to survive in slavery and how they escape from enslavement to seek freedom. In "An Introduction to the Slave Narrative," William L. Andrew states that an important scene of slave narratives is the successful escape from enslavement to the North. Narrators then attain

freedom in the North and may rename themselves afterwards. Similarly, in Douglass's narrative, when he arrives in New Bedford, he is advised to change his name to protect himself from being recaptured and punished. Douglass then eventually changes his name to "Douglass." In changing his name, Douglass still wants to remain his first name as Frederick to maintain his individual identity. However, Jacobs does not change her name when she successfully escapes to the North.

### **Comparison of the Writing Styles of Frederick Douglass to those of Harriet Ann Jacobs**

In their narratives, although Douglass and Jacobs follow the characteristics of slave narratives, they have their ways to individualize their narratives and to tell their experiences in their own voices in their quest for identity and freedom.

In Douglass's narrative, he expresses the idea of manhood and presents that he is the hero of his own adventure. Douglass focuses on the struggle to achieve manhood and freedom in his narrative. He speaks of being intellectual and of his own inner struggle to achieve his manhood and freedom. Douglass then realizes that education can lead him to be a freeman. Through his journey towards freedom, he begins with education and continues struggling to control his own destiny. Douglass states that a slave who wishes to retrieve his manhood must brace up to take great risks, even to die. He believes that no male slaves can truly have his manhood and can be full human beings until they can choose the way how to live on their own. According to "Some Notes on the Slave Narratives," Greg Hampton states that a slave narrative for men is based on the American presumptions regarding the characteristics of manhood and heroism that a man should accomplish by his use of force, wits, and his courage. The struggle to preserve manhood



is an essential factor to get freedom and a male narrative always shows the moment of masculine power during his journey for being free. Likewise, in his narrative, Douglass creates himself as a true man who gains an identity and freedom when he successfully escapes from Baltimore to Massachusetts. Douglass focuses on his individual life becoming a fugitive hero, and his goal for writing is to end slavery and to be free.

On the other hand, Jacobs shows the idea of womanhood in which the woman should have virtue, purity, domesticity, and the convention of motherhood. Jacobs is much more concerned with her family and domesticity and tries to protect her family more than herself. Unlike Douglass's narrative, Jacobs shows the internal struggle of a wounded woman and her own inner struggle as a woman. In her narrative, Jacobs focuses more on the rights of women as well as a mother's desire to protect her family and to raise her children. This shows that her narrative clearly presents a feminist view of slavery. According to "Some Notes on the Slave Narratives," Hampton explains that female authors fall along the Victorian conventions of motherhood. Righteousness, virtue, purity, domesticity and, attention to and protection of the family must be the qualities that are maintained during the various moment of the narrative. While male slaves often escape alone and make them fugitive heroes, female slaves desire to escape along with their family or not at all. In this view, female narratives concern the freedom of their family more than male narratives. In the same way, Jacobs' narrative is more private, and her goal for writing is to draw an emotional connection with the white women of the North. In her narrative, Jacobs reveals evils of slavery, but she tends to focus on how women are oppressed at that time. She expresses the true feeling of a female slave and shows the suffering of women under slavery system.

Moreover, their way of telling stories are different. Douglass tells his story in chronological order of the events. Douglass portrays his experiences from the past to the

present characterized by a linear narrative. Douglass starts his own story in the past when he is young. He begins with his boyhood as a slave and then describes the sketchy account of parentage, the descriptions of his masters, mistresses or overseers, including their cruelty and violence respectively. Douglass continues detailing Colonel Lloyd's home plantation where he grows up and also portrays his painful life and other slaves' lives on a plantation under slavery system. He then tells readers his many experiences with different masters and overseers. Meanwhile, he always specifies his age while he tells each experience in his life. In the final chapter, Douglass portrays the part of his life when he succeeds in escaping from slavery. According to "Women, Autobiography: Essay in Criticism," Estelle C. Jelinek explains the difference of autobiography narratives written by women and men on several points. One difference is that men shape the events of their lives into coherent wholes characterized by linearity, harmony, and orderliness. From Douglass's narrative, we can see that Douglass relates each event in his life in chronological order. Douglass tells the story of his life, his birth, his days as a slave, and how he escaped slavery respectively. Readers can easily catch up what happens in his narrative and this makes his narrative cohesive and understandable and helps readers easily understand his writing.

On the other hand, in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, Jacobs writes in discontinuous form and fragmentary. This can be seen in the beginning chapters in her narrative. She introduces stories about members of her family and other people she met. For example, Jacobs starts telling the story of her life and describes her feeling when she was a child, but then in chapter three, "the New Year's Day," she changes to present and tells of painful experiences in the life of every slave in general and describes the laws against black slaves or the racism among white society. Through her narrative, we can find more chapters which Jacobs always describes the lives of other slaves, emphasizing

the personal and domestic details. Her narrative includes the lives of other people surrounding her. As a result, her narrative usually skips from one point to another point. While Jacobs is usually concerned with the personalities and actions of others through her narrative, Douglass focuses on his inner life and is more individualized than her. This shows that the pattern of Jacobs' narrative as the female writing is diffuse and diverse. This pattern is hardly found in male writings. Jelinek explains that men focus on their professional lives, while women emphasize personal and domestic details and describe connections to other people. Jelinek also explains that women's narratives are disconnected and fragmentary because the multidimensionality of women in socially conditioned roles seems to have established a pattern of diffusion and diversity when they write. This shows that women have various roles in her life such as the role of being workers, mothers, and wives. They have to support their family, raise their children and also work. Likewise, because of her various roles, Jacobs is always concerned with other people surrounding her and usually describes her many experiences related to those people and this causes multidimensionality and fragmentary in her narrative.

In conclusion, the results show that both narratives follow the traditional characteristics of slave narratives. Douglass and Jacobs both use the first person in their narratives. They also contain descriptions of slave childhood, the brutality of slavery, the oppression of slavery, the struggle for freedom as well as successful escape attempts of free slaves and other key characteristics of slave narratives as mentioned in the earlier chapters. However, the account of gender differentiates the writing styles between Douglass and Jacobs' narratives. Douglass's narrative is more public. Douglass tends to write about his professional life focusing on the struggle to achieve his manhood and freedom. He usually writes about the success, and his goal for writing which is to persuade people in the North to see the evil of slavery and to assist him in stopping the

institution of slavery. Jacobs has the same goal to gain as Douglass; that is to gain freedom and to abolish slavery, but she writes in a different way. Jacobs writes about domesticity, such as the stories of her family members, her relationship between her and her family including her master and mistress and other people surrounding her. She always describes social relations and problems she confronts in her daily life. It can be concluded that gender greatly affects as well as their writing styles.

## **Discussion**

The results of this study show that both Douglass and Jacobs follow characteristics of slave narratives. Moreover, their writings also reflect how men and women respond, speak, and act at that time. From the research study, readers can learn more about the gender differences between men and women in the past. In Douglass's narrative, he shows his personal experiences expressing his feelings and thoughts in masculine vision. He writes his narrative more public. Douglass tends to write his professional life focusing on the struggle to achieve his manhood and freedom. He usually writes about the success, and his goal for writing is to persuade people in the North to see the evil of slavery and to assist him to stop the institution of slavery. On the other hand, Jacobs has the same goal; that is to gain freedom and to abolish slavery, but she writes in different ways. Jacobs writes about the domesticity and the connection with other people surrounding her. She always describes about social relations and problems she encounters in her daily life focusing on the relationship with others.

According to the framework of Deborah Tannen, an American academic and a professor of linguistics, Tannen approaches the issue of gender differences by describing the perspectives that men and women reflect in their conversations. She explains that men and women talk differently in their linguistic behavior. Men often thought as dominant

speakers, while women are placed in a subordinate role during the conversation process. The important in this issue is the different communication patterns and emotional expression between genders. Women speak a language of connection and intimacy, while men always concern with status and independence.

Obviously, from this research study, readers can better understand the differences between men and women. Women often think in terms of closeness and support and struggle to preserve intimacy and connection. On the other hand, men are concerned with status and tend to focus more on independence. From the study, readers can understand not only about the writing styles of male and female through writings of Douglass and Jacobs, but also about the gender differences between male and female. From this study, readers can learn to understand in what ways men and women are different. Thus, men and women should learn to accept their differences and try to understand each other and adjust themselves to suit each circumstance.

### **Suggestions for Further Studies**

1. The writing styles between male and female slaves in contemporary global slave narratives such as the narratives written by Asian slaves should be studied.
2. Other theories should be applied to analyze slave narratives. For example, Thomas A. Parham's theory of racial identity development and Janet Helms's theory of white racial identity should be employed to analyze Douglass's consciousness in his own identity after learning literacy.
3. Other autobiographies should be studied about the styles of writing such as *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; or, the Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery* by William Craft which is the story of Ellen and William Craft, a young slave couple who made a daring escape to freedom.



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