Race, Identity and the Narrative of Self in the Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X

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ABSTRACT

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RACE, IDENTITY AND THE NARRATIVE OF SELF IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS, HARRIET JACOBS AND MALCOM X

Committee Chair: Timothy Askew, Ph.D.

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Prophet Muhammad stated, “A white has no superiority over black nor a black has any superiority over white except by piety and good action.” Because of the continual idea of race as a social construct, this study examines the memoirs of Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X, as it relates to the narrative of self and identity. They have written their personal autobiographies utilizing diction as a tool that develops their art of storytelling about their distinct life journeys. These protagonists utilize their autobiographical experiences to construct a generational transference of race and identity from when Douglass was born in 1818, to Jacob’s escape to freedom in 1838 to the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965.
Historically, the texts are written from where slavery was still an institution until it was abolished in 1865, proceeding through to the Civil Rights movement. Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X will experience racial trauma throughout their personal narratives that were life-altering events that severely influenced them as they matured from adolescence to adulthood. The writer has determined that, “Racial trauma can be characterized as being physically and or psychologically damaged because of one’s race or skin color that permanently has long lasting negative effects on an individual’s thoughts, behavior or emotions,” i.e., African American victims of police brutality are racially traumatized because they suffer with behavioral problems and stress, after their encounters.

This case study is based on the definition of race as a social construct for Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X’s narratives that learn to self-identify beyond the restrictions of racial discrimination which eventually manifests into white oppression in a world that does not readily embrace them. Their autobiographies provide self-reflection and a broad comprehension about how and why they were entrenched by race. Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X were stereotyped, socially segregated, and internalized awareness of despair because of their race.

Conclusions drawn from Frederick Douglass-Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: American Slave, Harriet Jacobs-Incidences of a Slave Girl, and Malcolm X’s-Autobiography of Malcolm X will exemplify the subject of African American narrators countering racism and maneuvering in society.
RACE, IDENTITY, AND THE NARRATIVE OF SELF IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES
OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS, HARRIET JACOBS AND MALCOLM X

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF HUMANITIES

BY
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This dissertation’s focus is the narrative of self, identity, and race in three specific African-American autobiographies. Narrators depict themselves as non-fictional characters dealing with these specific issues in their texts. Their narratives discuss how race, self and identity affect African American men and women in America. The quest of self and identity is assessed in the works of Frederick Douglass’ *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Harriet Jacob’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, and Malcolm X’s *Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Therefore, each narrator illustrates his or her realization of identity from slavery, beginning with Frederick Douglass to Harriet Jacobs to Malcolm X’s own revelations through the Civil Rights Movement. While there are countless African Americans writers that narrate their own journeys regarding race and identity, Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X are the most well-known and highly respected narrators who construct a composite of the African American experience. Additionally, they attempt to formulate their identities under the constraints of White society because they not readily accept nor embrace their existence. The contention of this examination is that race shapes the narrative of self and identity in the slave narratives of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and the autobiography of Malcolm X. Race shapes the self-identity of each narrator in the way society perceives and treats these African Americans based on their skin color.
Thus, each narrator exemplifies the suffering they endure in their texts whether it is discrimination, physical abuse or sexual assault since they are black and devalued by society. In a website article titled, "Race and Racism in Psychoanalytic Thought: The Ghosts in Our Nursery," by scholar and author Beverly J. Stoute, she introduces how racism began with our Founding Fathers:

Where should we begin this conversation about race and racism? A developmental perspective leads us to start even before conception. Do we start with the architects of democracy who wrote, ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights...’ while also creating the Three Fifths Compromise; namely that each African slave counted as 3/5 of a white man. As they wrote these words, these architects of our democracy owned slaves voted Africans subhuman, and built the foundation of our democracy on the countless millions of dead in the Middle Passage. Americans are acculturated, and bred in the notions of race, power and projection onto socially sanctioned ‘others.’(Ghost in Our Nursery)

Race is a social construct that informs each protagonist’s identity based on cultural, political and social mores. Furthermore, some white characters within the three texts view them as being others or less than. As previously determined by this writer, the term ‘racially traumatized’ is defined as the condition of a person who is psychologically
damaged because of one’s race or skin color that has long-lasting negative effects on an individual’s thoughts, behavior or emotions,’ i.e., African American victims of police brutality are racially traumatized because they suffer with behavioral problems, depression and anxiety after their encounters (Ref. List of Terms).

Specific to Frederick Douglass’ racial trauma, is the idea of being vulnerable whether it was physical, emotional or intellectual. Douglass experienced physical brutality, emotional, and verbal abuse which lead to his determination that vulnerability makes an individual weak. This concept led to the construction of his own masculinity. Therefore, Douglass knew that his freedom and becoming educated would minimize his vulnerability. Meanwhile, Jacobs’ racial trauma is evident in her text because she cannot bring herself to utilize the language to express the horrific sexual abuse she endured. Malcolm X’s racial trauma begins when he is Malcolm Little, in that he operates out of fear of being vulnerable. Malcolm X’s racial trauma evolves when he rationalizes that he will never be vulnerable again, based on his early experiences during adolescence. In addition, he begins to construct his idea of masculinity based on his racial trauma, just as Douglass does in his narrative. The idea is that Malcolm X is going to take (steal) from people before they could take from him. In his narrative, he overcomes his racial trauma by redefining his identity and comprehension of masculinity. From this point forward, the term will be understood as defined.

Douglass constructs a development of his narrative identity by dissecting his experiences as a product of slavery and eventually obtaining his freedom.
escapes to freedom, he creates a new identity as a free and educated man that allows agency. Similarly, Jacobs identifies her struggles as an enslaved woman and mother in her memoir. Her tales of sexual abuse and mistreatment are so horrific that she would not speak of them. These same testaments include accounts of their daily lives including punishments, loss, and the cruelty of plantation owners. There are accounts of both Douglass and Jacobs’ struggles to become literate, including the fact that when they become literate individuals, their educational accomplishments are correlated with their desire to be free from the evils of slavery. Once they become free, they transcend slavery and become staunch abolitionists. The utilization of diction in Douglass and Jacobs’ text further authenticates their racial trauma and transformation from being slaves to freethinking individuals who are no longer under the control of their enslavers.

In contrast to Douglass and Jacobs’ text, Malcolm X, the charismatic Black Nationalist, utilizes defiant rhetorical devices in his autobiography to articulate the ways in which race not only shapes his reality, but how his perception of his oppressors dominate his life. Unlike Douglass and Jacobs, where scholars question the validity of their narratives, Malcolm X’s memoir is credible because he and he alone dictates it to Alex Haley in several sessions, where he provides him with the details from his birth to his transformation, as a leader in the Nation of Islam. His credibility is solidified because Malcolm X would not tell his narrative to anyone but Alex Haley. Furthermore, he did not trust anyone else to dictate his autobiography and Haley was the first author to approach him about writing his story.
In addition, Malcolm X does not require white financial support nor did he seek white America’s validation for himself or his text, unlike Douglass and Jacobs, who were slaves and required white sponsorship to help them obtain their freedom and the publication of their works. Therefore, Malcolm X is free to express his views, did not fear being recaptured and sold back into slavery and does not have to use a pseudonym to hide his identity in his text.

Malcolm X’s narrative describes in detail how White people, beginning with his childhood in Lansing, Michigan, shape his racial views about the relationships between Black and Whites. More importantly, as his narrative develops, it shows his evolvement from a country boy from Lansing, Michigan, to a street hustler to the highly respected leader of the Nation of Islam. Malcolm X’s recounting of his life events further demonstrates his desire to be independent of White society. He knew as an adolescent that the African American race was perceived as being inferior and considered less than human.

Each narrator faces obstacles stemming from childhood that changed their perspective about existing in a culture that seemingly does accept their presence. Frederick Douglass, who was the product of an African American enslaved mother and a White father who owned him, chose to re-identify himself as being a free man who became auto-didactic, because it was illegal for slaves to have an education. After escaping to freedom and having limited opportunities, Douglass went on to become an outspoken abolitionist against the institution of slavery. Meanwhile, Jacobs, the only
woman protagonist amongst the three authors, gives insight about the mistreatment of African Americans from a female perspective. Jacobs both psychologically and physically survived in an attic for seven years. She had an innate need to remain close to her children until she could escape to freedom, which was her inspiration. She was so traumatized by what she experienced as a slave with Dr. Flint, she used a pseudonym to protect not only her identity, but also the individuals that guided her to freedom. In contrast, Malcolm X was so cognizant about his race at an early age that he acknowledges how it killed his father and ultimately destroyed his family. This set the foundation for him to unequivocally utilize diction to illustrate his own African American experience to America and in the Nation of Islam.

The concept of race, the narrative of self, and identity are explored through the autobiographies of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X. Therefore, these concepts are key to analyzing the African American autobiography. In addition, these narratives exemplify why language is essential in shaping race and identity. Without the text of Jacobs, Douglass and Malcolm X and diction, readers would not be able to experience and or witness their trauma as they reveal them in their autobiographies.

**Purpose and Research Design**

The purpose of this study is to show how three African-American narrators illustrate race to shape the narrative of self and identity in their personal memoirs. A personal narrative denotes a story from one’s own personal experiences or life that may include details, incidents, a sequence of events, or analysis. The individual may choose to
include or omit certain details to make their narrative either more dramatic or less entertaining. Anthony S. Parent, Jr. and Susan Brown Wallace, author(s) of “Childhood and Sexual Identity under Slavery” suggest that:

Although these memories may have been affected by the years after slavery, the experiences point to issues that concerned these individuals during childhood. Roy Shafer has written: Each account of the past is a reconstruction that is controlled by a narrative strategy. The narrative strategy dictates how one is to select, from a plenitude of possible details, those that may be reorganized into another narrative, which is both followable and expresses the desired point of view of the past. Accordingly, this reconstruction, like its narrative predecessor, is always subject to change. For whenever new explanatory aims are set and new questions raised, new slants on the past will be developed and new evidence concerning the events of the past will become available. Change of this sort typifies historical narratives of every kind. (366)

Additionally, the narrative form has been crucial to the identity of African Americans, because it is how we have maintained our history, culture, and birthright in America. Without these slave narratives, there would be no early records from the African American perspective. Slave narratives told from a European perspective would be extremely distorted from the reality of what happened to African-Americans as a whole.

From the Library of Congress Collection webpage, Born In Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writer’s Project, 1936 to 1938, it affirms:
History written from the bottom up—from the perspectives of the unlettered, the undistinguished, and the powerless—became increasingly fashionable. The Slave Narrative Collection has not only provided a wealth of previously unexploited data on the institution of slavery, but it has also responded to the interests of the proponents of the new social history for data that would reflect the perspectives of the voiceless masses who seldom left written evidence from which to write their history. (Born In Slavery)

Therefore, the relevance of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs’ slave narratives and Malcolm X’s memoirs and countless other narratives exist for maintaining African-Americans’ place in the fabric of this country and the retention of African culture. Moreover, these narratives are contributing to the study of African American biographies by illustrating how the slave narratives were a form of resistance to the enslavement that African Americans endured.

Although each resilient protagonist differs in age and gender, their experiences shape their identity through the narrative of self. Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Jacob’s and Malcolm X’s narratives all exemplify a desire to improve the overall African American condition in America. These narratives are impressive additions to the American literary canon because each narrator can achieve agency for the abolition of slavery and in the case of Malcolm X, equality for African Americans through their manuscripts.
Consequently, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Malcolm X’s narratives help shape identity and achieve a sense of agency in their lives. While African American authors are the central protagonists, individually he or she is as diverse as their personal memoirs. Still, their African American experiences are somewhat similar in that they all must deal with evident prejudice because of their race. Race shapes or informs their realities that are essential in shaping an individual’s identity.

Slavery is a significant factor which shaped both Douglass and Jacobs’s experiences. It was not officially abolished until the end of December in 1865. Frederick Douglass was born into slavery in 1818, but he did not escape until September 3, 1838, whereas Harriet Jacobs was born on February 11, 1813, and did obtain her freedom until 1842. *The National Archives.org* webpage confirms:

The abolishment of slavery occurred when passed by Congress on January 31, 1865 and ratified on December 6, 1865, the 13th amendment abolished slavery in the United States and provides that ‘neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.’ (National Archives)

Race is a significant part of both Douglass’ and Jacobs’s text because of their identities, which cause them turmoil in their lives as they attempt to psychologically survive in a country that only perceive them as slaves and the property of white plantation owners. Contributor Malik Simba from BlackPast.org webpage, *Remembered and Reclaimed*
defines the 3/5th clause as, “the three-fifths clause (Article 1, Section 2, of the U.S. Constitution of 1787) in fact declared that for purposes of representation in Congress, enslaved African Americans would be counted as three-fifths of the number of white inhabitants of that state.” (BlackPast.org)

Slavery is the historical context for both Jacobs and Douglass’s narratives. Slaves were valuable to their plantation owners because they were essential in maintaining the agricultural economy of the South. Millions of enslaved men, women and children worked on cotton, tobacco and sugar plantations that made many plantation owners quite wealthy. Accordingly, enslaved women produced children that made them more valuable than enslaved men, because these same children added to the plantation owner’s workforce. Author(s) Allen Weinstein, Frank Otto Gatell and Sara Sohn author(s) of “American Negro Slavery” contend, “Empirically speaking, Southern slavery was both an example of slavery in general and a form of servitude strictly limited to a single and supposedly inferior race. Two qualities about his laborers were bound to impress themselves upon the slaveholder’s consciousness—that they were slaves and that they were black” (50).

Slaves were not allowed by their plantation owners to know their birthdays, keep their original names, and were denied the ability to identify their parental heritage. Consequently, slave owners used these tactics to strip slaves of their identities. Author(s) Anthony S. Parent, Jr. and Susan Brown Wallace explain why this occurred:
Some of the manipulation involved repressing information. Children for the most part were not told their birthdays; even when the information was available they felt that their owners deliberately refused to tell them. The degrading practices included having children eat from troughs, as if they were animals. Slave-owners also controlled terms of endearment by not allowing children to define who their parents were or to use the same terms as whites used with their parents. A former slave on Dr. Gale's plantation remembered that in slavery the children could not call their father ‘papa’ because the whites said ‘papa’ but had to say ‘daddy’ and ‘mammy’; when freed they called their father ‘papa’ (p. 5). Historians and psychologists have applied a psychoanalytic theory to the history of slavery. (382)

Clearly, this shows how slaves were stripped of their birthright, traditions and parental heritage which further alienated them from having or establishing their own identity.

Malcolm X’s narrative is vastly different from Douglass and Jacobs’ for several reasons. For one, he was born on May 19, 1925, and slavery was legally abolished in 1865, which is approximately a sixty-year time period between the publication of the works of Douglass and Jacobs. As a young boy, he is cognizant of how his race impedes his family because of the murder of his father. Malcolm X’s early exposure to racism showed him why African Americans were diminished based on the color of their skin which left them at a disadvantage in comparison to White people. This reality impacted their entire community of color and exhibits how racism played a pervasive role in Malcolm X’s childhood.
His mother is institutionalized at a state hospital because of her mental breakdown. Most importantly, White people who were his foster parents or local townspeople regularly called Malcolm X a nigger, which further substantiates his identity and understanding of race as an adolescent. Nigger is a racial slur and derogatory term used for African Americans. By the time he dictates his life story to Alex Haley, which he turns into a manuscript for his autobiography, it is 1965 and Malcolm X has transformed from an illiterate street hustler, to an infamous leader in the Nation of Islam who is fearless, unapologetic and targeted by the FBI and the CIA.

Secondly, Malcolm X grew up when Jim Crow laws were being enforced, so he experienced the colored and white signs of segregation in public facilities and had to live by these harsh laws. These periods of enforced segregation and discrimination that take place during his life eventually evolve into the Civil Rights Movement where African Americans are fighting for equality and justice in America. Last, as a leader in the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X provided his vision for the empowerment of African Americans across the nation.

Race influences the construction of each author’s narrative of self shapes how they were developed and what they recounted for the world to see.

Kenneth J. Gergen and Mary G. Gergen from the Departments of Psychology from Swarthmore College and Pennsylvania State University in their article titled “Narrative and The Self as Relationship” emphasize:
We employ the term *self-narrative* (Gergen & Gergen, 1984) to refer to the individual’s account of the relationship among self-relevant events across time. In developing a self-narrative, the individual attempts to establish connections among life events (Cohler, 1979; Kohli, 1981). Rather than seeing one’s life as simply ‘one damned thing after another,’ the individual attempts to understand life events as systematically related. They are rendered intelligible by locating them in sequence or ‘unfolding process’ (deWaele & Harre, 1976). One’s present identity is thus not a mysterious and sudden event, but a sensible result of a life story. As Bettelheim (1976) has argued, such creations of narrative order may be essential in giving one’s life a sense of meaning and direction. (19)

Additionally, it stands to reason that each protagonist could have omitted some facts because they were too traumatized to relive them all over again, even if it was for the sake of telling their narratives. All three narrators are forced to deal with racism and its social limitations in their literary works. Respectively, Douglass, Jacobs, and Malcolm X were all cognizant of the White domination paradigm in America. Furthermore, each narrative will demonstrate how race and identity obstructed them from both physical and psychological perspectives because their first life experiences with racism were shaped before they ever reached adulthood.

This work will utilize the theories of Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan’s mirror image and Stephen Greenblatt’s New Historicism because these ideologies provide insight into Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X’s experiences with
racism. The interpretations of their personal experiences in the narratives are viewed from adolescence into adulthood and how they comprehend those experiences.

Psychoanalysis investigates the unconsciousness and conscious of an individual's mental processes. These mental processes can include but are not limited to repressed fears, repetitive occurrences and a person's development. This theory also includes conflict and human behavior that can be mainly determined by irrational forces that are deeply ingrained in the unconscious. *The American Psychoanalytic Association* webpage explains the purpose of psychoanalysis in an article titled *A Theory of Mind*: “Historical, political and economic explanations provide important insight into the irrationality of everyday life. However, psychoanalysis, offers another perspective. In addition to examining what lies beneath the surface of human behavior, psychoanalysis teaches us about the unconscious psychological forces within us outside of everyday awareness.” (Theory of Mind) Therefore, each author’s lives are affected by race. Each narrator experiences an assortment of traumatic incidents such as physical and sexual abuse, death, discrimination and overt racism.

Jacques Marie Emile Lacan was a French psychoanalyst and was known for reinterpreting Freud's theories about psychoanalysis. Lacan’s theories are methodically structured, and he is credited with the development of the mirror stage in the field of psychoanalysis. In Enoch Shane Smith’s work titled, “The Presence of Lacan’s Mirror Stage and Gaze in Robert Louis Stevenson’s Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and in Robuen Mamoulian’s 1931 Film,” he supports:
The mirror stage is a very early step in a child’s development of its own identity. According to Lacan, the stage begins when the child is six months old. Lacan writes, ‘It suffices to understand the mirror stage [...] as an identification [...] namely the transformation that place in the subject when he assumes [assume]an image’ (Ecrits, 76, italics Lacan’s) The stage starts when the human child first recognizes his own image in a mirror. At this point in the child’s life, it is helpless, relying on the caretaker for everything. The child also doesn’t have full control over its motor skills. While the child cannot always exercise control over its own body, it quickly realizes that by making motions it can, it can exercise a sort of control over the image in the mirror, which gives it great pleasure. (17)

His theories of psychoanalysis will identify the connection between the unconscious and the language each protagonist utilized to narrate their journeys throughout their memoirs. Lacan has been quoted as saying, "In other words, the man who is born into existence deals first with language; this is a given. He is even caught in it before his birth." (Cited in 1957 interview) Consequently, the link between language and the unconscious minds of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Malcolm X are evident based on the diction they use in their texts and what they have been exposed to as children and as they develop into adults.

As African Americans, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Malcolm X were all racially discriminated against this is evidenced by their recounting in their texts. Although their experiences were appalling and often painful at times, they put them into
words in their memoirs, using such terms as "cooning watermelon," "quadroon," "darkie" and “nigger,” which remained in their subconscious throughout their lives. Even though the prejudiced terminology changed or was diverse amongst the three authors’ texts, they still had a psychological influence and historical reference to their meanings and that negatively influenced them as individuals.

Frantz Fanon psychiatrist, revolutionary and author from the French colony of Martinique of the book titled, *Black Skin, White Mask* contends:

The African American man is unaware of it as long as he lives among his own people; but at the first white gaze, he feels the weight of his melanin. Then there is the unconscious. Since the racial drama is played out in the open, the African American man has no time to unconsciousnessize it. The African American man’s superiority or inferiority complex and his feeling of equality are conscious. He is constantly making them interact. He lives his drama. (129)

This theory from Fanon connects to psychoanalysis because it suggests how each narrator feels when they are gazed upon by Whites in society.

Sigmund Freud's theory of psychoanalysis is employed as the primary device in this work because it will show how they constructed the concept of race in their individual minds. Anthony S. Parent, Jr. and Susan Brown author(s) of “Childhood and Sexual Identity under Slavery” highlight, “Sigmund Freud and others believed that this development was influenced by sexual knowledge, thoughts, and conditioning. Freud was the first psychological theorist to focus on the developmental aspects of personality and
on the importance of childhood experiences in its form” (367). Freud’s theory explains how each narrator’s adult life was influenced by his or her childhood experiences. He used stories and literature to gain insight about what was occurring in an individual’s mind. Freud also utilizes Joseph Breur’s work in order to examine how one’s individual experience must be vocalized or verbalized in some form to move beyond it. Cathartic experiences allow individuals to express and confront their trauma. In addition, an individual’s memory or the ability to recall fills in the missing pieces of their experience so that they can fully verbalize their painful incidents.

Furthermore, psychoanalysis as a literary theory will explain how each protagonist is victimized by White oppression and how he or she is able to counter discrimination from a psychological perspective. Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs were slaves at one point in their narratives and, therefore, had no control over their own lives. However, it was not until both narrators were free, that they were able to counter discrimination by becoming abolitionists to make people understand the evils of slavery by releasing their own narratives. Frederick Douglass depicts slavery as, “If anyone wishes to be impressed with the soul-killing effects of slavery, let him go to Colonel Lloyd’s plantation, and, on allowance-day, place himself in the deep pine woods, and there let him, in silence analyze the sounds that shall pass through the chambers of his soul-and if he is not thus impressed it will only be because “there is no flesh in his obdurate heart” (30). Douglass goes on to further explain why slavery should be abolished as an institution and how he seeks to empower his brethren.
Although Malcolm X was not a slave on a plantation as the previous protagonists, he was still a victim of white oppression in Lansing, Michigan where several tragic incidents that shaped race in his narrative. The *Autobiography of Malcolm X* is one where the narrator is able to influence social and political change through; "his own life-story with the full collective history of his milieu and the laws of behavior controlling it gives his testimony its strength and large authority (183) and raises it above other well-wrought autobiographies, African American and white, of the period. Social and political change, as well as moral and religious conversion, are at the core of The Autobiography, which is at once akin to the Pauline epistles and to the model of the Political Testament articulated by historian Felix Gilbert,” according to Joe Weixlmann author of “African American Autobiography in the Twentieth Century: A Bibliographical Essay” (403).

Malcolm X comprehended that African Americans and White people were unequal under the law. African Americans were often persecuted and limited by society because of the color of their skin. One example of Malcolm X’s victimization would be the African American Legion who was a racist organization like the Ku Klux Klan that allegedly killed his father, Reverend Little. His father was known for spreading the teachings of Marcus A. Garvey who was the leader of the U.N.I.A or the Universal Negro Improvement Association throughout Lansing, Michigan as a freelance minister. Malcolm X says of his father:

My other two images of my father are both outside the home. One was his role as a Baptist preacher. He never pastored in any regular church of his own, he was
always a ‘visiting preacher. I remember especially his favorite sermon: ‘That little
African American train a is a-comin’…an’ you better get all your business right!’
I guess this also fit his association with the back-to-Africa movement with Marcus
Garvey’s ‘African American Train Homeward.’ (5)

Malcolm X perceived his father as a leader and one that empowered other Negroes to
take a stance against white oppression.

Then his family was forced into destitution because the white insurance company
refused to pay his mother, Louise because the insurance representatives believed that
Reverend Little committed suicide by laying on the tracks and letting the trolley car roll
over him. Following this incident, there were the white welfare caseworkers that ripped
his family apart which in turn destroyed his mother's fragile mind which further
victimized his stability as an adolescent. All these racially traumatizing incidents
affected Malcolm X so strongly that they eventually led him to become a Black
Nationalist who sought to empower African Americans by seeking to improve their
condition in America. This was his method of countering the racism that he faced as an
African American man during this time.

What these narrators encounter because of their race will explain the structure and
dynamics of their individual lives that facilitated the discrimination they experienced and
the hierarchies of inequality that they were subjected to despite their gender. In doing so,
each narrator will explain how he or she experienced racial hatred. As well as how he or
she perceived the world, in which they lived. Therefore, race is a determinant factor in
the construction of their narratives because its definition is exemplified in the utilization of his or her diction and how it influenced each protagonist as individuals.

New Historicism is employed in this study to comprehend Douglass, Jacob's and Malcolm X’s intellectual history through their narratives from their cultural contexts. Stephen Greenblatt, who is an American Shakespearean a John Cogan University Professor of the Humanities at Harvard University is credited with the development of the New Historicism theory. “As a founder of the ‘new historicism,’ Stephen Greenblatt has done more than establish a critical school; he has invented a habit of mind for literary criticism, which is indispensable to the temperament of our times, and crucial to the culture of the past,” states Homi K. Bhabha (205) from Harvard University. (Cited from stephengreenblatt.com webpage). Stephen Greenblatt establishes that literature is enlightened by its historical context. Furthermore, his New Historicism theory also suggests that all analysis of text is influenced by the period in which they were written and read. Jan R. Veenstra author of “The New Historicism of Stephen Greenblatt: On Poetics of Culture and the Interpretation of Shakespeare” argues:

Historical and literary texts may engage the whole of the sociohistorical context, but they will most certainly engage the most immediate element of this context: the self of the reader. In the introductory essay of a book called Learning to Curse. (23) in what might be called a confessio lectoris, or auditoris as the case may be. (24) Greenblatt states that narrativity is not so much tied up with the challenge it may pose to the hermeneutical enterprise as with the experience of
identity it enhances. Interpretation and self-fashioning are, of course, two aspects of the same process. Narratives and especially historical anecdotes are imbued with a disturbing and alienating otherness that defies abstraction and generalization and that refuses to be embedded in a larger structure or a totalizing history. At the same time, they are expressed by the authoritative voice of the narrator who in the act of telling is in quest of a solid foundation for the self, but who is also in constant peril of losing the object of his search. Greenblatt explains that story-telling is something obsessive and compulsive, an unquenchable urge in the human psyche. (182)

Therefore, the narratives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs are being analyzed from the historical context of slavery. Malcolm X's narrative will be interpreted within the context of the Civil Rights Movement beginning with his transformation from being a street hustler to an N.O.I. Muslim to him becoming a minister in the Nation of Islam. In addition, New Historicism also identifies how literary critics received their narratives and interpreted them based on their own principles, predispositions and environments.

This aforementioned theory will help to explicate how Frederick's Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself in 1845 developed by his time as a slave, before and after the Civil War with all its brutality and evil. In addition, Douglass discusses the relationships on the plantations between the masters and slaves who have no real sense of identity. However, despite all these unspeakable circumstances, Frederick Douglass went on to become an exceptional
orator, writer, newspaper owner, and abolitionist. As a slave from the time of his birth, until he escaped to freedom in 1838, most critics doubted that Frederick Douglass could have recounted his narrative with such elegant prose because his educational foundation was so restricted. Many African Americans and especially slaves had limited education, which was a factor that was evident in many slave narratives. However, in Douglass’s case not only was he self-taught, he was exposed to cultural diversity and educational opportunities that once he escaped slavery deeply influenced his personal narrative and future literary works. The Harvard University Press website makes this argument about Frederick Douglass’s narrative:

The title page of the Narrative carries the words, ‘Written By Himself.’ So, it was. ‘Mr. Douglass has very properly chosen to write his own Narrative,’ said Garrison in the Preface, ‘rather than to employ someone else.’ The Douglass volume is therefore unusual among slave autobiographies, most of which were ghostwritten by abolitionist hacks. The Narrative has a freshness and a forcefulness that come only when a document written in the first person has in fact been written by that person. Contributing to the literary effectiveness of the Narrative is its pathos. (Harvard University)

Douglass was adamant about telling his story in his own words. The reason why he was so adamant is because he recognized the connection between language and identity.

Often slave narratives that are labeled as being authentic have incorrect grammar are dependent on who is transcribing the story and whether the individual is a White or African American journalist. For example, if an African American journalist is
transcribing a slave narrative, he or she may transcribe it exactly the way it was dictated to them to maintain its authenticity whereas a White journalist may correct all the grammar in the narratives, which reflects his educational background and use of standardized English. Accordingly, an African American journalist may comprehend what is dictated and will transcribe it as such. These concepts must be acknowledged when one is considering the authenticity of a slave narrative because it will make a difference in how the story is depicted to critics. Still, Frederick Douglass’s use of the diction in describing his life as a slave and experiencing freedom afterward affects his initial narrative and other books he wrote that followed his life.

Since Harriet Jacobs was an enslaved woman, her narrative titled *Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl* depicts what it is like to experience slavery from a woman’s perspective. Unlike Douglass, Jacobs was a slave that was not separated from her family during her childhood as he was in his narrative. In fact, very early during her adolescence, her entire family remained together on one plantation, which made her quite fortunate. Furthermore, as an enslaved woman, Jacobs suffered in silence from sexual abuse from Dr. James Norcom a.k.a Dr. Flint in her text. Her narrative is distinct because she deals with womanhood and sexual oppression from an enslaved woman’s perspective.

Jacobs was characterized as being a beautiful mulatto woman with a crown of black curls that covered her head and that dressed well. She was intelligent and worked as
a seamstress. Lauren Berlant author of “The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Harriet Jacobs, Frances Harper, Anita Hill” explains:

Racial logic gave America a fantasy image of its own personal underclass, with European-style beauty in the slave population justifying by nature a specific kind of exploitation by whites, who could mask their corporeal domination of all slaves in fantasies of masculine sexual entrapment by the slave women’s availability and allure. For dark-skinned ‘black’ women this form of exploitation involved rape and forced reproduction. These conditions applied to mulatta women too, but the lightness of these women also provided for white men’s parodic and perverse fantasies of masking domination as love and conjugal decorum. Theatrically, they set up a parallel universe of sexual and racial domestic bliss and heterosexual entitlement: this involved dressing up the beautiful mulatta and play white-lady-of-the-house with her, building her a little house that parodied the big one, giving her the kinds of things that white married ladies received, only in this instance without the protection of law. Jacobs herself was constantly threatened with this fancy life, if only she would consent to it. (555)

Harriet Jacobs exposes her sexual abuse for the world to see because slave women were merely perceived as sexual objects for White plantation owners to do with as they pleased. Harriet Jacob’s narrative is developed from an African American woman feminist perspective where the paradigms of sexism and class oppression add layers to her as an African American and a woman that are inextricably connected in the work.
Dr. Jasmine K. Syedullah, a Black feminist political theorist of abolition and author of “Is This Freedom? A Political Theory of Harriet Jacob’s Loopholes of Emancipation”, asserts, “Harriet Jacobs is celebrated for authoring one of the most critically acclaimed and widely circulated American slave narratives. As the only of its kind to have been written by a fugitive woman and former slave girl, Jacob’s narrative offers an immeasurably valuable critique of the sexual politics of the peculiar institution (20).

All these ideals come to the forefront as her narrative unravels with her depictions of her life as an enslaved woman who desperately wants to escape to freedom and keep her family together. Moreover, Jacobs wanted White northern women to be aware of the cruelty they endured on plantations as enslaved women and to educate them as to why slavery should be abolished from a Christian perspective. Notwithstanding the fact that she also had an informal education like Frederick Douglass, she was able to recount her story with such intelligence and authenticity that most literary scholars firmly believe that she wrote the story herself. Albert H. Tricomi in his work “Dialect and Identity in Harriet Jacobs’s Autobiography and Other Slave Narratives” discusses her utilization of language in her narrative by declaring:

In the very first paragraph of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Jacobs as ‘Linda Brent,’ presents herself in terms of two signal features of family inheritance-intelligence and light skin color. Nonetheless, for Jacobs the decision about representing light-skinned people was not solely a literary choice; it touches her own identity. In her own life, Dr. ‘Flint’s’ (i.e., Dr. Norcom’s) sexual pursuit
may in part been incited by her light skin as well as her intellectual endowments. These literary and biographical considerations might easily be adduced to explain why Jacobs represents herself and her family of speakers of Standard English while other Negroes from Edenton speak African American dialect. But Jacob’s narrative method cannot be reduced to the formula-Jacobs and her light- skinned family member speak Standard English; Negroes speak dialect. Nor do her dialectal choices conform to the practices of white abolitionist, wherein dark skin color predicts a high degree of dialect and vice versa. (623-624)

With her use of dialect and standard English, Harriet Jacobs is able to extract sympathy from her readers as they learn about the hardships and sexual abuse that slave women endured on plantations across the South. It was her narrative that incorporated sickening imagery that diminished the romanticized narrative versions of slavery where slave women were happy being objectified and utilized as concubines.

Malcolm X’s autobiography is different from Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass’s memoirs because of the period which was from 1925 to 1965. His autobiography also demonstrates the progression of the Black biography from slavery to the contemporary period in African American literature. Malcolm X then participates in the Civil Rights Movement through the Nation of Islam towards the latter end of the 1960s. He grew up in Lansing, Michigan where there was a clear segregation of African Americans and Whites, from educational facilities to where they were allowed to worship within city limits. After leaving Lansing, Michigan, he moves in with his sister Ella in
Boston, Massachusetts, where the same discriminatory regulations existed because she lived on the Negro side of the city. Even how African American people were called Negroes during Malcolm X’s life in comparison to Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass’s time periods are different because they were called “colored,” “mulattoes” and or slaves.”

Conversely, Malcolm X was an African American boy and therefore he still experienced racial trauma early in his childhood because of his father’s beliefs in the Marcus Garvey movement and the way it affected his entire family. During Malcolm X’s adolescence, Marcus Garvey was the leader of the U.N.I.A. or Universal Negro Improvement Association. Reverend Little, Malcolm X’s father firmly believed in Garvey’s movement and that African Americans would fare better if they went back to Africa and controlled their own economy. Marcus Garvey believed that African Americans needed to have their own country where they would be in control of their government and where they could be free to do as they wished and not be dominated by Whites. As a child, Malcolm X often traveled with his father to the U.N.I.A meetings and listened intently. These meetings are where he learned about the Pan-African movement for himself. Chapter two titled Nightmare Malcolm X offered his memory of Marcus Garvey:

I remembered seeing the big, shiny photographs of Marcus Garvey that passed from hand to hand. My father had a big envelope of them that he always took to these meetings. The pictures showed what seemed to me millions of Negroes
thronged in a parade behind Garvey riding in a fine car, a big African American man dressed in a dazzling uniform with a gold braid on it, and he was wearing a thrilling hat with plumes. I remember hearing that he had African American followers not only in the United States but all around the world, and I remember how the meetings always closed with my father saying, several times, and the people chanting after him, ‘Up, you mighty race, you can accomplish what you will!’ (7)

Pan-Africanism existed and began to manifest well before Malcolm X’s time because it originated sometime in the 1780s with the development of African American churches across the country and African American people desiring their own religious institutions. When African American people attended white churches, they were made to sit in the balconies during service and when they transitioned from this life to the next, they were not allowed to be buried in the church cemetery next to White parishioners. Both of which are examples of racial segregation that existed not just in religious institutions but in society as a whole that African American people were no longer willing to tolerate.

Scholar Minkah Makalani of the Pan-Africanism Rutgers University Africana Age webpage expounds:

Pan-Africanism represents the complexities of African American political and intellectual though over two hundred years. What constitutes Pan-Africanism, what one might include in a Pan-African movement often changes according to whether the focus is on politics, ideology, organization or culture Pan-Africanism
actually reflects a range of political views. At a basic level, it is a belief that
African peoples, both on the African continent and in the Diaspora, share not
merely a common history, but a common destiny. (Pan-Africanism)

These aforementioned meetings and Malcolm X’s father’s freelance ministry were his
first introduction to Black Nationalism. After Malcolm X was born in Omaha, Nebraska
in 1925, his family relocated to Lansing, Michigan from Milwaukee, Wisconsin because
Reverend Little needed to escape the Black Legion because they often threatened to kill
him and his family for the rhetoric he was spreading. “Soon, nearly everywhere my father
went, African American Legionnaires were reviling him as an ‘uppity nigger’ for wanting
to own a store, for living outside the Lansing Negro district, for spreading unrest and
dissension among the ‘good niggers,’ according to Malcolm X (3).

In addition, the Black Legion is described as being similar to the Ku Klux Klan
with the only difference being that they wore black robes instead of white. Even when the
family relocated to Lansing, Michigan, they could not escape the Black Legion and their
fatal threats. The Black Legion burned down the family home in 1929 and by 1931,
Reverend Little had been murdered. Both incidents were described as being accidents by
the local law enforcement in Lansing, Michigan but Malcolm X and his family were
certain that the Black Legion were responsible for the mutual tragedies. Furthermore, no
one was ever held accountable for his father’s tragic demise when Malcolm X was a boy
and or later when he transformed into a Black Nationalist.
After his father’s murder, his family suffered discrimination and extreme indifference from the White people in Lansing, Michigan, from prospective employers not giving his mother, Louise, work because of her husband to the welfare workers removing the children from the home, which caused her to have a mental breakdown. All of which was because of the White people that were in authoritative positions in Lansing, Michigan, whether they were police officers, foster parents or judges who were ultimately responsible for the demise of Malcolm X’s family. These life-changing or traumatizing experiences never left Malcolm X’s psyche as he matured into a young man, even when he left Michigan and moved to Boston with his oldest sister, Ella. As the narrator, Malcolm X has each chapter in his autobiography titled with profound labels that describe his life during its most tumultuous periods such as “Nightmare,” “Mascot,” “Hustler,” and ‘Homeboy.” These descriptive labels signal what is occurring in Malcolm X’s life at the time, his comprehension of identity and how he is evolving from one stage of development to another in his autobiography.

As critics have reviewed his autobiography over the years, they have given it high praise for its significance, brutal honesty and having an illustrious purpose in the African American literary canon. Fifty-three years after his assassination, universities and colleges alike, have made his autobiography as a part of the required reading for English Literature classes because it is so iconic in its revelations and authenticity. His autobiography is very popular and especially in the curriculums at historically African American institutions because African American students are establishing a sense of identity while connecting to the overall African American experience.
Moreover, after his assassination on February 21, 1965, when his autobiography was first being introduced to mainstream America, some publishing houses called the N.O.I. leader a violent demagogue who wanted racial insurrections to occur across the country ‘by any means necessary’ to directly quote Malcolm X. They also vehemently declared that his speeches were full of hatred for the Blue-eyed devil or White people, so they ultimately refused to publish the fallen leader’s work. In contrast to Malcolm X’s narrating own his life story, Alex Haley who co-wrote the work and his epilogue revealed the many facets of the N.O.I. leader that the world did not know. For example, people did not know Malcolm X enjoyed lindy hopping, his passion for improving the condition of Negroes or that he thought the room where the interview was conducted was under surveillance by the FBI. Since he had so many encounters with law enforcement and several attempts on his life, Malcolm X was suspicious of everyone including Alex Haley. Author and co-writer, Alex Haley portrays their first encounter:

After this first encounter, I realized that there were two Malcolm X’s-the private and public person. His public performances on television and at meeting halls produced an almost terrifying effect. His implacable marshaling of facts and his logic had something of a new dialectic, diabolic in its force. He frightened white television audiences, demolished his Negro opponents, but elicited a remarkable response from Negro audiences. (xii)

Nonetheless, Haley’s epilogue also captures his unfortunate assassination that shocked the world and people mourned for a leader who knew as a young man that he would die
by violent means. Peniel E. Joseph, a Professor of History at Tufts University who wrote an article for the Chronicle of Higher Education webpage, titled *Rescuing Malcolm X From His Calculated Myths* maintains this stance about Malcolm X’s autobiography, “It remains a classic memoir of the once wayward youth's transformation from juvenile delinquent and criminal into the Nation of Islam's fiery national spokesman and, following a messy divorce from the group that would ultimately lead to his death, a radical human-rights advocate and Pan-Africanist who candidly admitted that some of his past views had been politically shortsighted, even reckless.” (Peniel Joseph) However, Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn author of the book titled *Race Experts: How Racial Etiquette, Sensitivity Training, and New Age Therapy Hijacked the Civil Rights Revolution* contends, “Like Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice*, The Autobiography of Malcolm X, and Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time*, African American Rage was unrestrained in its condemnation of racism and unstinting in its articulation of the necessity of ending its effects” (78).

**Chapter Organization**

The dissertation is organized in six chapters. The first chapter introduces the female and male narrators in the memoirs of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Malcolm X. This chapter is introducing how each author utilizes diction to describe their experiences with race, how it shapes the narrative form and identity, as they develop them in their works. Race as a social construct is presenting a theoretical and critical perspective that is framing this work. This chapter provides research that supports how race is applicable to each one of the text as the narrators develop from adolescents into
adults from 1818 to 1965. The most notable difference in one of the narrators is that one of them is a woman named Harriet Jacobs and thus her perspective is somewhat diverse in relating her experiences in her narrative because of her gender. Directly correlated to her gender is the physical abuse and sexual oppression that she suffers under the control of Dr. Flint. Frederick Douglass and Malcolm X are men and do not suffer from sexual abuse which is a profound difference in their texts.

Chapter two will provide a literature review from a thematic approach of Sigmund Freud’s Psychoanalysis, Lacan’s theory of the mirror image is applied to the idea of identity and New Historicism criticism as they apply to the texts. The chapter begins with the social construct of race and then it transitions to show how psychoanalysis is applicable to the non-fictional protagonists’ lives that further inspired their narratives. The Journal Psyche webpage explains who Sigmund Freud was in the Psychology field, “Sigmund Freud is considered to be the father of psychiatry. Among his many accomplishments is, arguably, the most far-reaching personality schema in psychology: the Freudian theory of personality. It has been the focus of many additions, modifications, and various interpretations given to its core points.” Within the same context, he is credited with the discovery of psychoanalysis. Therefore, the literary theory of psychoanalysis is examining how race affects each narrator from a psychological perspective with consideration towards their life experiences and how they are dealing with those incidences in their narratives. Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis further explains how a range of events in each of the protagonist’s lives as adolescents later influences them as they matured into adults.
Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X as protagonists experience some form of racial trauma that developed their personalities before they reached maturity. An illustration of this psychoanalytic theory emerges in Malcolm X’s narrative when the White welfare workers came into his home and removed him and his siblings and put them into foster care. The welfare workers felt justified in separating the family because Louise could no longer properly care for them after the death of her husband. This tragic episode could have caused him to have separation anxiety or abandonment issues. This episode is a traumatic experience from his past that was hidden in his consciousness. Thus, this hidden memory from his past may have prompted him to resist any help from Whites who worked in social services when he is an adult. Malcolm X perceives them as a force that not only destroyed his family but also left him abandoned at the same time.

Lacan’s theory of the mirror image is characterized as how an individual is perceived when gazed upon by someone else. An individual may look in the mirror and the reflection may show a charismatic and diplomatic leader. However, when another person stares upon that same reflection, he or she does not see that same individual. Taken from the Lacan: The Mirror Stage Hawaii.edu website:

The idea of the ‘mirror stage’ is an important early component in Lacan’s critical reinterpretation of the work of Freud. Drawing on work in physiology and animal psychology, Lacan proposes that human infants pass through a stage in which an external image of the body (reflected in a mirror or represented to the infant
through the mother or primary caregiver) produces a psychic response that gives rise to the mental representation of an ‘I’. The infant identifies with the image, which serves as a gestalt of the infant's emerging perceptions of selfhood, but because the image of a unified body does not correspond with the underdeveloped infant's physical vulnerability and weakness, this image is established as an Ideal-I toward which the subject will perpetually strive throughout his or her life.

(Lacan: Mirror Stage)

Then the mirror separates a baby from themselves or us as adults from ourselves. Lacan theorized, “In order to recognize myself, I have to be separate from myself. Thus, identity as a notion I consider appears” (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Jacques Lacan 1901—1981).

New Historicism is the final theoretical framework that allows each narrator to place emphasis on the historical context of his or her work. For Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, their historical context will include slavery, abolition and the Civil War since they both lived through those periods. In contrast to Douglass’s text, Malcolm X’s narrative is using the historical context of the U.N.I.A, Marcus Garvey and the Civil Rights Movement. As a result, all three texts are products of specific periods. They offer or reflect the values of society during slavery that is one of the darkest periods in history to the Civil Right movement where African Americans demanded equality and justice in all aspects of life from public housing to education. As a theory being utilized for this work, it dissect Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X’s memoirs and
examines how they are reflective of the historical and sociocultural context. Furthermore, each narrator’s literary work comments and relates to their contextual framework with an emphasis on race, the use of language and identity.

Chapter three presents a short summary of Frederick Douglass’s life and then discusses his text entitled the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. Chapter four presents a short summary of Harriet Jacob’s life and discuss her text, *Incidents of A Slave Girl*. Chapter five presents a short summary of Malcolm X’s life and then discuss his autobiography, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Each of the protagonist’s autobiographies are examined to draw parallels between their personal narratives and how the critics received their work.

Chapter six connects the concept of race to the personal narratives of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Malcolm X using the theoretical framework and historical context in which the stories were developed. Each of the protagonists’ biographies are examined to draw parallels between their personal narratives and how the critics received their work. All of the narrators have patterns of utilizing the art of the narrative to not only tell their stories but also exemplify the African American experience in America from 1818-1965.

**Historical Background**

New Historicism establishes the political, social and cultural context for a literary text. Therefore, the peculiar institution otherwise known as slavery provides the cultural, social and political framework for Frederick Douglass and Harriet Ann Jacobs’s
narratives. Assistant Professor Avidit Acharya of Stanford University and Assistant Professors Matthew Blackwell and Maya Sen of Harvard University who co-wrote the article titled, “The Political Legacy of American Slavery” reassert, “For the first 250 years of American history, white landowners, predominantly from the South, enslaved millions of individuals of African descent. This peculiar institution, otherwise known as slavery, defined the social, economic, and political landscape of the American South throughout this period. Slavery was so crucial to the South that one Georgia newspaper editor wrote, ‘Negro slavery is the South, and the South is Negro slavery’ (cited in Faust 1988, 60). Europeans justified enslaving Africans because they felt the need to civilize the brutish savages, while establishing roles of supremacy for the colonizers who would become future plantation owners. Taken from “Who Read the Slave Narratives?” by Charles H. Nichols, John Spencer Bassett declares that the ‘African slaves were close to savagery,’ and that, although the overseers knew little of culture, they knew enough to teach the benighted African American people:

It was the force of slavery that taught him [the Negro] to labor with some degree of regularity, it was the authority of the master that him to improve his ideas of morality, it was the superior authority of the white race that induced him to change fetishism for a rude and simple kind of Christianity. In many ways slavery instilled in him the fundamentals of civilization… Slavery was a hard school but in it Africans learned some good lessons. (158)
This is how Europeans perceived Africans when they gazed upon them in Lacanian mirror because did not understand them but saw it as their opportunity to civilize and Christianize Africans for their own purposes.

Slavery was a harsh institution that did not equally consider Africans as humans. Thus, White plantation owners motivated by their greed and proclivity to control them utilized those aforementioned factors to dominate them. Dr. Brian Melton, on the Texas Christian University’s website, reviewed renowned historian’s John Blassingame’s book titled, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* established:

Blassingame begins, logically, with a look into the slave trade in Africa and the Middle Passage. He emphasizes the shock with which most slaves greeted their capture, especially when embarking on the long, terrifying trip to the Americas. Treated like cargo and often unable to communicate even with each other, they were allowed exercise and food. When they arrived in the English colonies, they were completely isolated form their home, culture, their master, and often each other due to language difficulties. (Melton)

To such a degree, American slavery or the peculiar institution is the western version of the holocaust for African-Americans. As a historical scholar, Blassingame and his research confirm what occurred to many slaves during the journey and in effect, the mental traumatization they suffered after being captured by the Europeans. Christina Snyder, author of “The Long History of American Slavery” further supports this historical research when she maintained:
The peculiar institution used to be quarantined in American history. Safely confined in time and space, slavery was formerly a tragic story of southern exceptionalism, one that did not threaten a master narrative focused on freedom. Recently, however, scholars have upset that narrative by tracing the deep roots and continental reach of bondage. Slaves worked on Mississippi cotton plantations, Ivy League campuses, in Detroit trading posts, Texas missions, urban factories, Massachusetts kitchens, California brothels, and at the governor's mansion in Santa Fe. (23)

Forcibly kidnapped and transported to North America, Africans and those people who lived in the Caribbean islands were forced to work on American tobacco, cotton and sugar plantations across the country by white enslavers. Seth J. Schwartz et. al from the University of Miami, and author of “Methods and Racial Identity” indicates:

Ethnic and racial groups are collective entities that confer specific identities on their members while at the same time permitting their members to identify with the group to varying extents (Ashmore et al., 2004). An individual is simultaneously a unique person and a member of any number of social groups (Brewer, 2003). Groups have collective histories that influence what it means to identify with the group. For example, the collective history of African Americans involves slavery, indentured servitude, and formal and informal discrimination and oppression. (63)
While they were being transported from Africa to America, many Africans willingly jumped in the ocean and were devoured by sharks before they could make it to the states because it is alleged that they instinctively knew what awaited them on the other side. Millions of Africans perished during the journey known as the Middle Passage because of the violent and horrific conditions and were thrown overboard by the enslavers. American Historian, John Hope Franklin in his book titled, *From Slavery to Freedom, A History of Negro Americans* details the conditions of the slave ships by declaring, “The filth and stench caused by close quarters and illness brought on more illness and the mortality rate was increased accordingly. Perhaps not more than half the slaves shipped from Africa ever became effective workers in the New World. Many of those that had not died of disease or committed suicide by jumping overboard were permanently disabled by the ravages of some dread disease or by maiming which often resulted in the struggle against the chains” (58).

However, for those Africans that jumped to their deaths, they preferred to die in the ocean rather to live their lives in bondage because they knew their fate at the hands of the white enslaver was unpredictable and they no longer controlled what happened to them. Scholar Marika Sherwood of the Institute of Historical Research.com School of Advanced Study London and author of “Britain, Slavery and The Trade in Enslaved Africans” explains why Europeans chose Africans to enslave over other races of people:

Why were Europeans enslaving Africans? Because they needed laborers to work for them in this world new to Europe – the Americas. In the process of conquest,
they had annihilated many of the native peoples; those who survived the Europeans’ guns and diseases not unnaturally refused to work in the mines taken over by their conquerors, or on the plantations they created. The Europeans tried two solutions: export prisoners, and export men who indentured themselves to pay off debts. But both groups either succumbed to diseases new to them, or ran away to freedom. So, another solution was sought. Africans did not have guns either, so why not enslave and transport them? Europeans could not send armies to conquer Africans or to kidnap them. They had to make their purchases from the local kings and chiefs. The traders found all conceivable means to foster warfare, as Africans were usually only willing to sell prisoners-of-war. The enticement of European goods – especially guns and ammunition – also eventually resulted in kidnapping gangs raiding neighboring peoples. (Sherwood)

Historically, Africans were also captured and sold by their own people in exchange for ammunition, in addition to being kidnapped by white enslavers. After arriving in America, Africans were forced to work for the white plantation owners, which validates Sherwood’s explanation about why slavery created a prosperous economy in America. Over 20 million Africans were kidnapped and brought to America to work against their will. They had to endure whatever cruelties the White plantation owners subjected them to once they arrived in this country and were placed on auction blocks.

In contrast, John Hope Franklin, African American historian and author of From Slavery to Freedom a History of Negro Americans proclaims, “It cannot be denied,
however, that the total number of Africans removed from their native land ran far into the millions. When one considers the great numbers that must have been killed while resisting capture, the additional numbers that died during the middle passage, and the millions that were successfully brought to the Americas the aggregate approaches staggering proportions. These figures, five, ten, or fifteen million, are themselves a testimonial to the fabulous profits that must have been realized in such a sordid business, to the ruthlessness with the traders prosecuted it, and to the tremendous demands being made by New World settlers for labors” (59). Slavery, therefore was an economic phenomena and those in power maintained their wealth and status because of it. As human commodities in the American economy, federal legislation protected the plantation owner’s rights to them which only increased their market value. Moreover, Dr. Jenny Bourne of Carleton College, University of Chicago in Economics and author of “Slavery in the United States,” clarifies:

Central to the success of slavery are political and legal institutions that validate the ownership of other persons. A Kentucky court acknowledged the dual character of slaves in Turner v. Johnson (1838): ‘[S]laves are property and must, under our present institutions, be treated as such. But they are human beings, with like passions, sympathies, and affections with ourselves.’ To construct slave law, lawmakers borrowed from laws concerning personal property and animals, as well as from rules regarding servants, employees, and free persons.’ (4)
As a result, these federal regulations not only supported the Southern way of life but ensured its economic success as well. Jonathan A. Bush author of *Free to Enslave: The Foundations of Colonial American Slave Law* adds to the establishment of laws or rules for slaves when he endorsed:

Most important was that normative thinking about slavery occurred outside of legal forms. In addition to law, colonial Southerners found social legitimation in other normative systems such as honor and religion, which supported slavery. The master-slave relationship, which implied the complete removal of the slave from the public sphere, was particularly open to elaboration outside of formal law. And the developing political culture of plantation slavery, emphasizing values of personal autonomy and paternalism, made it likely that slave-owners would use law as but one means of implementing their mastery. (426)

Slavery was a legal and justifiable institution because it provided a robust economy for tobacco, cotton, rice and other agricultural products off the backs of enslaved African men, women and children across plantations across the South and the North. Juan E. Perea author of “The African American /White Binary Paradigm of Race: The Normal Science of American Radical Thought” and the California Law Review avows, “There can be no question, I think, that slavery and the mistreatment of African Americans in the United States were crucial building blocks of American society. The constitutional, statutory and judicial attempts to create more equality for African Americans, imperfect as these all have been, correspond to the history of mistreatment of African Americans”
(166). Slaves were considered to be property without legal voice or right. Paul Finkleman, author of “Slavery in the United States Persons or Property?” of Duke University Law School explains, “They are no free agents, have no personal liberty, no faculty of acquiring property, but on the contrary are themselves property, and like other property entirely at the will of the Master” (118). While slavery sustained a culture of wealth for white plantation owners, it also provided the political and social regime that controlled its direction, in connection to the racial hierarchies in the U.S. Eric Foner, Professor of History at Columbia University who participated in *Africans in America* documentary on the PBS.org webpage maintains, “Slavery was an immense political power in the country, as well as an economic power.” The South was a major influence on the federal government for almost until the 19th century. (Foner)

Legally, plantation owners and the federal law prohibited slaves from marrying without permission, holding public office or drinking liquor. They could not leave their plantation without the master’s permission, pass notes and could be punished at the plantation owner’s whim all of which established and regulated the plantation owner relationship between the plantation owner and slave. White plantation owners and those that held political office had the advantage over slaves because they implemented the state and federal laws that established patterns of inequality that have lasted well over 400 years since the inception of the peculiar institution.

In addition, most of the public opinion and or fear about slavery stressed the importance of preventing slaves from reading and or writing because if they became
educated, it was feasible that they would revolt against their white enslavers and kill them all. Thus, by maintaining the veil of ignorance over slaves, it upheld the wealth of white plantation owners, made them docile and developed a flourishing economy. In the review of John W. Blassingame’s *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* by Dr. Brian Melton on the *Texas Christian University* website, “Assumptions based on the hypothesis that African Americans were either deviant or childlike supported the reigning ideology of the period and justified white ‘guardianship’ of slaves. In reality, the assumed ‘dependency’ of African Americans, which helped justify and underpin southern economic imperatives, resulted from a mass of cultural misinterpretations by whites.” (Melton)

For the same reason, since slaves were from Africa and lived in tribes, they comprehended and utilized the value of family and depended on one another for support and survival. This led to cooperation amongst themselves and the development of their own communities on the plantations. In these communities, they would share food, birth children and worshipped together. They also tended to their fellow slaves when they were sick and abused by their captors. African people are communal by nature and it was how they formulated their reaction to the physical and mental trauma of being enslaved by their plantation owners. This was the result of slaves being subjected to brutal beatings, inhumane executions, rape and extreme whippings. Additionally, slaves sought each out each other for solace because local law enforcement during this period did not protect slaves on the plantations because they were merely property in the eyes of the law. Even
though slaves were prohibited from learning to read and write by law, they fulfilled this need by communicating through narratives and or songs.

These equivalent songs, prayers and stories are illustrated as the oral tradition in the literary canon. These forms of the oral tradition are a formidable facet of African American culture today. The stories and songs that slaves told and were passed down to future generations allowed them to maintain a cultural connection to their African roots, despite being enslaved in America. In addition, the oral tradition for slaves also provided them with a coping mechanism to deal with the cruelties and inhumanity of being enslaved that they could vocalize to others within their communities when they could tell no one else. Milton Polsky author of, “The American Slave Narrative: Dramatic Resource Material for the Classroom” underscores:

Most of the characters in the narratives are wise in the ways of nature of everyday survival. For the most part, the slave’s education was in the learning of day-to-day living, observing people and working out strategies for survival and resistance. However, as also revealed in the narratives, slaves hungered for knowledge and sense of self. Despite great risks of severe penalty of learning to read was punishable by death in many states) James Roberts, Jaime Parker, Frederick Douglass, Austin Steward, and others, managed to beg, borrow, or steal spellers and other reading materials. (172-173)
Accordingly, some former slaves took those same experiences and developed them into narratives, sermons, newspapers and poetry that provided the foundational literature for abolitionist to utilize as material against the peculiar institution.

However, the most popular form of anti-slavery literature was the slave narrative, especially from ex-fugitive and newspaper owner Frederick Douglass. His personal account and others such as Olaudah Equiano gave White northerners and staunch abolitionists an accurate portrayal of slavery that could not be denied while at the same time decimating the idyllic portrait that the antebellum South wanted everyone to believe about them. Winifred Morgan author of “Gender-Related Difference in the Slave Narratives of Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass” substantiates the appeal of slave:

> In the narratives, fugitives and ex-slaves appealed to the humanity they shared with their readers. Slave narratives show that slaves suffered physically, emotionally and spiritually under slavery; that slaves yearned for freedom and resisted slavery in every possible way; that slavery was a pernicious system ultimately destroying masters as well as slaves; that the narrators were telling the truth about their own experiences; and that each narrator was a ‘reliable transcriber of the experience and character of African American folk.’ (74)

In addition to showing how these themes recur in the slave narratives, those written during the 18th century depicted topics from previous texts before the Civil War where the genre began to shift beyond portraying physical enslavement to focus and challenge the probity of slavery as an institution.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW: THEORETICAL PERSEPECTIVE OF RACE, PSYCHOANALYSIS, IDENTITY AND NEW HISTORICISM

Race is a social construct that classifies for various ethnic groups based on skin color. For African Americans, race is and has always been a determinant factor in American social hierarchy: “…race ‘explains’ historical phenomena; specifically, that it explains why people of African descent have been set apart for treatment different from that afforded to others” (100), proclaims Barbara Jeanne Fields, author of the article “Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America.” Peter Wade from the University of Manchester, UK further affirms in his article titled “Human Nature and Race: An Anthropological Perspective:” “Races are social constructions. A ‘race’ is not definable in biological terms; it is a product of social processes” (157). In this way, race in the narratives of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Malcolm X are an integral part of the social forces that shape identity and the experiences of each protagonist.

Floya Anthias, author of “Race and Class Revisited-Conceptualizing Race and Racism,” declares:

Race has no analytical validity in its own right but is a social construction with its own representational, organizational and experimental forms linking it ontologically to the wider category of ethnos which provides its analytical axis.

Race denotes a particular way in which communal or collective differences
come to be constructed and comprehended. Its placement within the
category of ethnos that is nation and ethnicity is not in terms of cultures of
difference but in terms of specific positing of boundaries. (22)

Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X are all rejected by society because of
their race, and the racism is exemplified in the racist epithets, incidents and brutal
oppression that as Negroes they endure in their narratives. Robert M. Young, author of
“Psychoanalysis and Racism: A Loud Silence” from Psychoanalysis-and-therapy.com
contests:

Race is not a disease to be identified, diagnosed and treated. Rather, it is a
mediation of an amalgam of economic, ethnic, class and nationalist forces which
engender (1) splitting off taboo or feared aspects of the self; (2) projection of
them onto the Other who (3) usually reprojects a version of them which is often
amplified; (4) scapegoating and stereotyping a particular social group. (2)

Therefore, race is influential in developing the identities of Douglass, Jacobs, and
Malcolm X as they convey their experiences in their narratives. As a consequence, using
contemporary terminology, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Malcolm X are
members of the minority group classified as Negroes, i.e., or African Americans.

Accordingly, since Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Malcolm X are a part of the
African American race they share certain characteristics. According to author Dr. Joseph
F. Healy who is Professor Emeritus of Sociology at Christopher Newport University in
Virginia in his book *Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Class: The Sociology of Group Conflict
and Change* sustains that a minority group has several characteristics: “1). The members
of the group experience a pattern of disadvantage or inequality 2). The members of the group share a visible trait or characteristic that differentiates them from other groups. 3). The minority group is a self-conscious social unit” (8). These characteristics are similar to the characteristics found in the social construct of race. Healy’s argument is essential and can be maintained for Douglass, Jacobs, and Malcolm X. Beginning with Healy’s first and second points, he confirms that each narrator “experienced patterns of disadvantages or inequality” based on their race (8). Douglass and Jacobs are similarly disadvantaged because not only are they African American but also enslaved. Malcolm X also experienced patterns of inequality or disadvantage as well because he was also a Negro.

Secondly, their visible trait that each narrator possesses is the color of their skin which cannot be overlooked or dismissed. Their White oppressors viewed them as inferior because of their skin color. Therefore, the narrators’ visible trait is an element that they cannot overcome as individuals nor diminish in the presence of others. Douglass, Jacobs, and Malcolm X are considered mulattoes. Seth J. Schwartz, Tiffany Yip and Deborah Rivas-Drake, Moin Syed, Georgia P. Knight and Richard M. Lee authors of “Methodological Issues in Ethnic and Racial Identity Research With Ethnic Minority Populations: Theoretical Precision, Measurement Issues and Research Designs” contend:

Ethnic and racial identity also are both claimed by individuals with different heritages, tones, family socialization experiences, and so on-suggesting a large degree of heterogeneity in the specific meaning of ethnic and racial groups.
Ethnicity and race may be highly salient to some individuals but less salient to others. (Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004, 59).

Moreover, Healy’s third point about minority groups being a “self-conscious social unit” (8) also applies to race because Douglass, Jacobs, and Malcolm X had to adjust their behaviors and physical mannerisms in the presence of White people to in order to survive, and maintain safety for themselves and their families. Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Malcolm X are all conscious of their race.

Ultimately, race impacts an individual’s life and in this case the lives of Douglass, Jacobs, and Malcolm X. Their physical differences and especially their skin color are the catalyst for the discrimination and abuse they suffer at the hands White society.

Matthew Clair of Harvard University and Jeffrey S. Denis from McMaster University argue in “Sociology of Racism:”

Racism cannot be defined without first defining race. Among social scientists, ‘race’ is generally understood as a social construct. Although biologically meaningless when applied to humans-physical differences such as skin color have no natural association with group differences in ability or behavior-race nevertheless has tremendous significance in structuring social reality. Indeed, historical variation in the definition and use of the term provides a case in point. The term race was first used to describe peoples and societies in the way we now understand ethnicity or national identity. (857)
These social forces and influences are implemented in each work from historical and institutional perspectives as the protagonists describe their encounters in society as they mature from adolescents into adults. Taken from *Race and Ethnicity* edited by Alma M Garcia and Richard Garcia, Dr. Cornel West expounds on the subject of race in his book titled *Race Matters*, “How we set up the terms for discussing racial issues shapes our perception and response to those issues. As long as African American people are viewed as ‘them,’ the burden falls on African Americans to do all the “cultural” and ‘moral’ work necessary for healthy race relations” (77).

Similarly, for Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, race is a critical element in their narratives. When Negroes were brought to the United States from Africa, they were forced to work on tobacco, rice, sugar and cotton plantations, while breeding children and suffering inhumane cruelties. Donald C. Jones author of “A Comment on Politicizing the Personal: Frederick Douglass, Richard Wright and Thoughts on the Limits of Critical Literacy” underscores, “Over one hundred years ago, W.E.B Dubois declared, “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line,” and at the start of the twenty-first century his declaration unfortunately is still an accurate characterization of race relations in the United States” (401). Therefore, slavery cannot be overlooked when dissecting the text of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs. Its historic nature shapes morality, the psyche, and the experiences of enslaved Africans and Europeans as well. Matthew Clair and Jeffrey S. Dennis affirm:
Bundled up with eighteenth-century classifications of various racial groups were assertions of moral, intellectual, spiritual, and other forms of superiority, which were used to justify the domination of Europeans over radicalized others. In the North American context, racist ideology served as justification for land appropriation and colonial violence toward indigenous peoples as well as the enslavement of Africans starting in the sixteenth century. (858)

This is to say if they were not African-American regarding their ethnicity, then they would have been free just as their European counterparts.

Nonetheless, since they were African Americans and consequently slaves, they were subjected to systematic discrimination, inequality, and exploitation. These enslavers, in most cases, also fathered many of the biracial children on the plantations across the country. Race is even more of a complex issue for Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs because they had White fathers who were their masters and African American enslaved mothers. In his narrative, Frederick Douglass describes his father as, “The opinion was ... whispered that my master was my father; but of the correctness of this opinion, I know nothing.... My mother and I were separated when I was but an infant.... It [was] common custom, in the part of Maryland from which I ran away, to part children from their mothers at a very early age. ... I do not recollect ever seeing my mother by the light of day. ... She would lie down with me, and get me to sleep, but long before I waked she was gon” (10).
Historical scholars have also noted that Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacob’s mothers were both mulatto women. As a result, both he and Jacobs are characterized as being Negro mulattos in their narratives. Etymonline.com defines the term mulatto, “1590s, "offspring of a European and a African American African," from Spanish or Portuguese mulato "of mixed breed," literally ‘young mule,’ from mulo "mule," from Latin mulus (fem. mula) ‘mule’ (see mule(n.1)); possibly in reference to hybrid origin of mules (compare Greek hemi-onos ‘a mule,’ literally "a half-ass;" as an adjective, (‘one of mixed race’). As an adjective from the 1670s. Fem. mulatta is attested from 1620s; mulattress from 1805. American culture, even in its most rigidly segregated precincts, is patently and irrevocably composite.” (Albert Murray, "The Omni-Americans: African American Experience & American Culture")

To further add to this concept of explaining the term mulatto during slavery, Leah Donnella of National Public Radio who wrote “All Mixed Up: What Do We Call People of Multiple Backgrounds?” affirms,

In 1850, things got a little more explicit. The U.S. Census Bureau rolled out two new racial categories: ‘B’ for African American and ‘M’ for mulatto, a term for someone with one African American and one White parent that became sort of a catch-all for anyone perceived as racially ambiguous, including many Native Americans. As for White folks, they didn't have to answer the race question at all; they were considered the default. (68)
Even though Frederick Douglass was a mulatto or of mixed race, it did not afford him any special privileges such as obtaining an education nor lessen his traumatic experience as an African American man during that period in history. Frederick Douglass was forced to live and work as any other slave on the Maryland plantation while he plotted his escape to freedom. Scholar, Robert Booker of the *Mulatto Diaries for Frederick Douglass* webpage insists this is how the term, ‘mulatto’ applies to the eminent abolitionist:

> It was Feb. 25, 1895, and they had come to say farewell to Frederick Douglass, who had been born into slavery and died six days earlier. Two days before the memorial, The Knoxville Tribune had its say about Douglass and wondered if he was a true Negro: ‘If we consider Douglass as a Negro, he was the brightest of his race in America. But he was not a Negro in the full sense of the term.’ Although born a slave, his father was a white man and his mother was a mulatto. Born a bastard and a slave, he rose to distinction and influences, and there were those among a class of white people who delighted to honor him. (89)

From the time, he entered Mrs. Auld’s home as a house slave to when she attempted to show him some compassion to when he and Covey the overseer had a physical altercation, Frederick Douglass’s race was not just an ideological concept because it influenced him physically and psychologically. Associate Professor of English, University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez Gregory Stephens who wrote the *Afterword* in Douglass’s narrative titled “*To Write My Own Pass*”; *Douglass’ Post Narrative*
“Trajectory” contends, “Douglass understood that racialism, ‘the insidious confusion of race with culture haunts society,’ in the words of Ralph Ellison, was the root cause of racism, and is a problem perpetuated by people of all colors. Douglass called racialism ‘diseased imagination.’ It could not be cured, it could be contained by presenting a more attractive alternative” (136). Race influenced the way he viewed the world and the recounting of his life until he passed away at the age of eighty fighting for the equality for all Negroes.

Just as Frederick Douglass was a mulatto, so was Harriet Jacobs and her race and gender profoundly influenced her perception of slavery and her life experiences that she recounted in her narrative. Harriet Jacobs presents this perspective of her parentage: “My master was, to my knowledge, the father of eleven slaves. But did the mothers dare to tell who was the father of their children? Did the other slaves dare to allude to it, except in whispers among themselves? No, indeed! They knew too well the terrible consequences” (55). She goes on to further state, “Southern women often marry a man knowing that he is the father of many little slaves. They do not trouble themselves about it. They regard such children as property, as marketable as the pigs on the plantation; and it is seldom that they do not make them aware of this by passing them into the slave-trader's hands as soon as possible, and thus getting them out of their sight” (168).

Hence, Harriet Jacobs comprehends that not only her race, but her gender makes her and other slave women powerless victims against their white plantation owners. Plantation owners impregnated helpless slave women either by raping or coercing them with false promises of freedom. Then once a child was born from this forbidden union, he
or she was either sold to a neighboring plantation or was left to be raised by the enslaved mother whose father owns them both. Iman Cooper, author of “Commodification of the African American Body, Sexual Objectification, and Social Hierarchies during Slavery” emphasizes the status of enslaved women:

The different standards of conduct that women were held to, in comparison to men allow for the intervention of the possibility of solidarity between the disciplined bodies of the African American slaves and the white women to become a bit clearer. Gender served as the point of similarity between these two groups, as it disciplined women’s bodies as subjects to their male counterparts. While white women were in an undeniable superior position to that of African American slaves, their bodies and behavior were still disciplined within the regulations of both white society and the male desire for female inferiority. (23)

Mistresses or plantation wives were also powerless because they were not socially mobile or respected as their husbands. While they may have had control over slaves and especially enslaved women, their sexuality was restricted during that period as well.

Although these forbidden relationships between slave women and masters were frowned upon by society and the majority of white mistresses, they still occurred until slavery ended. Some plantation owners even attempted to keep their affairs with enslaved women discreet in order to keep their wives happy, so they did not have to incur their wrath. Additionally, those particular plantation owners also maintained some form discretion because they did not want to receive backlash from society or be ostracized because of their covert affairs. While on the other hand there were many plantation
owners who were unconcerned about receiving backlash or being ostracized from society. For example, plantation owner and former U.S. President Thomas Jefferson was unapologetic and open about his affair with Sally Hemings who was recognized as the half-sister of his wife, Martha Wayles Jefferson. Jefferson was unconcerned about how antebellum society perceived about him having Sally Hemings as his mistress. Taken from the *Thomas Jefferson Foundation Monticello Organization* website:

In September 1802, political journalist James T. Callender, a disaffected former ally of Jefferson, wrote in a Richmond newspaper that Jefferson had for many years ‘kept, as his concubine, one of his own slaves.’ Her name is Sally, Callender continued, adding that Jefferson had ‘several children’ by her. Although there had been rumors of a sexual relationship between Jefferson and an enslaved woman before 1802, Callender's article spread the story widely. It was taken up by Jefferson's Federalist opponents and was published in many newspapers during the remainder of Jefferson's presidency. Jefferson's policy was to offer no public response to personal attacks, and he apparently made no explicit public or private comment on this question (although a private letter of 1805 has been interpreted by some individuals as a denial of the story). Sally Hemings left no known accounts. (Thomas Jefferson)

Afterward, when mulatto children are born from the forbidden union, they became visible reminders to the wife of her husband’s infidelity. In turn, the plantation owner would either put the mulatto children to work on the plantation with plans to eventually free them or his wife would urge her husband to put them on the auction block to be sold into
slavery, so that she did not have to be reminded of the bastards that her husband and slave mistress created.

Even though White women were respected in society during slavery and were inferior in social status to White men, their significance in society was still greater than that of an African American enslaved woman. White women were characterized as pure and thus they had to be sustained for all points of saintliness and discipline against African American women. Enslaved women were objectified, and their bodies were sexually exploited and abused by their White plantation owners. Scholar Iman Cooper challenges:

Female virtue and docility went hand in hand. It is also important to note here that, in contrast to the African American woman, white women’s value is determined relative to religion, not by the market. In other words, white women’s character was established on the basis of integral, moral grounds; while African American women’s integrity was proven through the external, economic forces of the market that had no room for ethics. Thus, identities are always relative to someone else. (28)

Furthermore, a White woman or mistress’s purity was sustained by the degradation of the enslaved Black woman who for all purposes was characterized as impure. Thus, the Black woman’s impurity and body were segways for plantation owners to abuse and denigrate without any repercussion or consequences. Harriet Jacobs is emphasizing the relationship between the exploitation of the enslaved woman’s body and the sexual abuse
they suffered from the plantation owners. In her 1861 narrative, *Incidents of a Slave Girl*, Jacobs recounts her life as an enslaved Black woman who is also the protagonist.

Likewise, Harriet Jacobs was born a slave but was unaware of her status because she had a sheltered life until she turned six when her parents died. Afterward, she was sold and her very first mistress made sure she was aware that she was indeed a slave. However, this same mistress gave her an informal education where she was provided with the basic fundamentals of reading and writing. As a result, Harriet received an informal education that she utilized when she wrote her narrative. It is not until some years later, as she matures into a young woman that the sexual abuse began to take place between she and Dr. Flint. Iman Cooper highlights Harriet Jacobs discussing her sexual abuse:

It wasn’t until she was sold to the Norcom family that her troubles initiated, where-the war of my life had begun; and though… powerless, I resolved never to be conquered. It was this fierce determination that later allowed Jacobs to escape the persistent advances of her owner. Jacobs’s master, Dr. Norcom, was attracted to her when she was still a young age and began making advances toward her on a regular basis. She recounts: But I now entered on my fifteenth year--a sad epoch in the life of a slave girl. My master began to whisper foul words in my ear. Young as I was, I could not remain ignorant of their import. I tried to treat them with indifference or contempt. He was a crafty man and resorted to many means to accomplish his purposes. He peopled my young mind with unclean images,
such as only a vile monster could think of. I turned from him with disgust and hatred. But he was my master. I was compelled to live under the same roof with him. —My soul revolted against the mean tyranny. But where could I turn for protection? (34)

Jacob’s race and gender not only shaped her identity but how she was perceived as an African American woman. She was a helpless victim against Dr. Flint’s and any other white man’s domination. Harriet Jacob could not readily escape his persistent advances and there was no one that would come to her rescue. As a result, she and all other enslaved women during slavery were not only inferior because of their race in society but for their gender as well.

Although he was not a slave like the previous narrator, Malcolm X’s race still impeded his growth as a young African American man. His race, like Douglass and Jacobs, was determined by the color of his skin. His first experience in understanding how race worked was in his immediate family because it is own skin color that is most noticeable to his parents because of the way he treated him in comparison to his other siblings. Malcolm X’s mother Louise was so light complexioned in skin tone that she could have passed for being a White woman. Malcolm X describes his mother in chapter one titled “Nightmare:”

Louise Little, my mother, who was born in Grenada, in the British West Indies, looked like a white woman. Her father was white. She had straight African American hair, and her accent did not sound like a Negro’s. Of this white father
of hers, I know nothing except her shame about it. It was, of course because of him that I got my reddish-brown mariny color of skin, and my hair of the same color. I was the lightest child in my family. Out in the world later on, in Boston and New York, I was among the millions of Negroes who were insane enough to feel that it was some type of status symbol to be light complexioned—that one was actually fortunate to be born thus. But, still, later I learned to hate every drop of that white rapist’s blood in me. (2-3)

Malcolm X’s reddish skin color determined how he saw himself at an early age and how his parents treated him based on their own knowledge of what it meant to be light and dark complexioned in society at that time. Therefore, his issue with race and comprehension of it has some of its origins from his own parents’ upbringings, psychological and physical conditions. It was often theorized as Malcolm X espoused in this narrative, that lighter-complexionioned African Americans were more acceptable in society because they were almost near white in skin color and features when compared to their darker complexioned counterparts.

What is more, White society did not seem to be cognizant of the fact that lighter complexioned African Americans were a result of four hundred years of rape and sexual oppression of enslaved African American women from plantation owners. Additionally, during slavery, plantation owners would keep lighter-complexionioned Negroes in the house to work while darker-complexionioned Negroes were sent to the fields to work. This
separation of Blacks created even more contention amongst slaves because of the obvious favor that was shown toward lighter-complexioned slaves from the plantation owner.

In contrast, some African Americans automatically preferred being light complexioned no matter how they evolved because in their minds they were more acceptable to White society. African Americans that were darker in complexion were often ridiculed for their physical features and were deemed as being dangerous and or lazy by society. Hence, examining this incident from a psychoanalytic perspective, when Malcolm X was a youth it can be perceived that he was developing a superiority complex based on the color of his skin and not his status as an African American man at the time. Moreover, his parents further cultivated his belief that his skin color was superior and yet problematic at the same time because his father seemed to favor him over his siblings whereas his mother despised his coloring and wanted to negate it as much as possible. Malcolm X asserts how he recognized the difference in the way his parents treated him as a child:

Nearly all my whippings came from my mother. I’ve thought a lot about why. I actually believe that as anti-white as my father was, he was subconsciously so afflicted with the white man’s brainwashing of Negroes that he inclined to favor the light ones, and I was his lightest child. Most Negro parents in those days would almost instinctively treat any lighter children better than they did darker ones. It came directly from the tradition that the ‘mulatto’ because he was visibly nearer to white, was therefore ‘better.’ Thinking about it now, I feel definitely that
just as my father favored me for being lighter than any other children, my mother
gave me more hell for the same reason. She was very light herself, but she
favored the ones who were darker. I remember that she would tell me to get out of
the house and ‘Let the sun shine on you so you can get some color.’ She went out
of her way never to let me become afflicted with a sense of color superiority. I am
sure that she treated me this way partly of how she became light herself. (4-8)

Nonetheless, the true color of Malcolm X’s skin, which was African American in society,
determined where he and his family lived, socialized and obtained work. Their skin color
even determined where they could even worship as a family. Even though Malcolm X
may have considered himself as favored in his mind because he was light complexioned,
society did not offer him nor his family any privileges or constitutional rights because of
it. In fact, they suffered more racial trauma, if not more, from White people as many
other African Americans in Lansing, Michigan, did simply based on the color of their
skin. He, nor Douglass or Jacobs could never change the color of their skin or be
completely accepted by White society. Malcolm X had to endure whatever society
subjected him to as he attempted to maneuver through life as an African American man.

Throughout his autobiography, Malcolm X deals with race relations from
adolescence to adulthood. His experiences and issues with race relations begin with his
family having to move several times across the country by the time he is four years old
because his father Reverend Little insisted on spreading the teachings from Marcus
Garvey and how African Americans should be economically free. Malcolm X was
cognizant about White oppression and how it affected African Americans all over the world. He witnessed oppression firsthand with the murder of his father and the psychological destruction of his mother. He and his family were oppressed for no other reason than being African American in America. Paulo Freire in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, chapter one, on the webpage explains the justification of oppression from the colonizers that Malcolm X and his family experienced:

> But while both humanization and dehumanization are real alternatives, only the first is the people's vocation. This vocation is constantly negated, yet it is affirmed by that very negation. It is thwarted by injustice, exploitation, oppression, and the violence of the oppressors; it is affirmed by the yearning of the oppressed for freedom and justice, and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity. Dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human. (Freire)

It was because of the aforementioned racial incidents in Malcolm X’s life during his adolescence that he was cognizant of the white oppression that African Americans were subjected to every day and why he comprehended that as a race of oppressed people that they must be liberated from the White paradigm. Since he was a young boy at this time, he was fearful about not conforming to the ideals established by White society because he knew it could mean that any non-conformist would be dealt with in an extreme and or violent manner. In addition, he had already witnessed the tragic demise of his own father
for not conforming to be a good nigger in Lansing, Michigan. A good nigger is defined as a Negro who did not cause trouble nor stir up others in town. However, as Malcolm X matures into an adulthood, he begins to break away from those white conformist ideologies and will later attempt to liberate himself and African Americans as a race of people.

Afterwards when Malcolm X finally converts into a Black nationalist, he believes that the only way that African Americans will make progress is to stop denying their racial identity and not to integrate with White society. He believed that African Americans remaining separated from Whites would produce better educational opportunities, more Black businesses and an economy that would not be controlled by White people’s discrimination. He proclaimed it one of his speeches in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, “And the only way the African American people caught up in this society can be saved is not to integrate into this corrupt society, but to separate from it, to a land of our own, where we can reform ourselves, lift up our moral standards and try to be godly” (348).

From his perspective, Negroes could remain pure and preserve their race without any white interference. He also strongly contended that any form of integration was not going to solve the race relations problem in America. Malcolm X supported separation over integration between African American and White people in America because he felt that Western society as whole was immoral and corrupt. Therefore, Negro people as a race should no longer be subjected to its influence or power in their lives and thus create
their own world without fear or White domination. It is also important to note in this study, that initially Malcolm X’s speeches were filled with racist ideology but once he disconnected from the Nation of Islam, he gained a better comprehension of race relations and was able to effectively communicate how the Negro should proceed in America. “As he hammered and chiseled away toward a singular identity, he immersed himself in a public role and in a cause which, over time, could be described as anti-racist, anti-imperialist, and certainly pan-humanist (advocating human rights). Although once labeled as mascot, hustler, and controversialist, Malcolm X became primarily a teacher whose speeches and life commitment imported much force because of their, “substantive fullness, their penetration and honesty, as well as their closeness to reality,” wrote Robert Scheer, editor of Eldridge Cleaver’s Post-Prison Writings and Speeches (38).

Psychoanalysis as Literary Criticism

The psychoanalytic theory, most associated with the research of Sigmund Freud, is extremely useful in examining the narratives of Douglass, Jacobs, and Malcolm X. Sigmund Freud was an Austrian neurologist who is often credited as the “father of psychiatry” and known for his work with the human personality. According to the Journal Psyche Organization webpage, they describe the human personality as, “Human Personality: The adult personality emerges as a composite of early childhood experiences, based on how these experiences are consciously and unconsciously processed within human developmental stages, and how these experiences shape the personality. Not every person completes the necessary tasks of every developmental
stage. When they don’t, the results can be a mental condition requiring psychoanalysis to achieve proper functioning.” (Journal Psyche) As a psychiatrist, Freud staunchly believed that events during our adolescence and/or childhood critically influence our adult lives and thus determine our personalities. Thus, race shapes individual’s identities for the three narrators because they are unable to vocalize their trauma and connect their experiences in an ordered structure. They relive their traumatic experiences as they convey them in their text. Dr. Michael Delahoyde of Washington State University and author of *Psychoanalysis Criticism* of wsu.edu explains:

> Psychoanalytic criticism adopts the methods of ‘reading’ employed by Freud and later theorists to interpret texts. It argues that literary texts, like dreams, express the secret unconscious desires and anxieties of the author, that a literary work is a manifestation of the author's own neuroses. One may psychoanalyze a particular character within a literary work, but it is usually assumed that all such characters are projections of the author's psyche. (Delahoyde)

Freud’s theory allows the explication of the narratives of Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X while providing an introspective key and a method of decoding the impact of race in their individual experiences. Further, psychoanalytic criticism for the purpose of this examination is depicting Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X’s unresolved emotions, sexual conflicts, fixations, family life and childhood trauma which is evident in their behavior patterns throughout the texts.
Psychoanalysis as Literature

Accordingly, psychoanalysis is the literary theory that is identifying how Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Malcolm X’s identities were shaped early in their childhoods as they began to deal with race. This was the onset of the racial trauma that they would experience for the rest of their lives and is evident in the diction they are utilizing to convey them in their texts. Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis is distinguishing how each protagonist dealt with pain, racial trauma, loss, sexual abuse and happiness. In Henning Lauvanger’s “Analyzing Authorization in the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass,” he states, “In the 19th century, as autobiographical theorists started investigating the influence of these cultural changes, certain analytical theories came about which proved to be useful when analyzing autobiographies. Since an autobiography is a representation of the self, psychoanalysis proved to be effective. The theories of Sigmund Freud, especially his theories on the unconscious and his analytical methods used in psychoanalysis were useful when investigating self-reflection in autobiographies,” (Smith & Watson, 193-235) (13).

The theory is illuminating those individuals that who influenced Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X and how they developed into adults. Dr. Delahoyde further expounds on his theory of psychoanalytic criticism, “One interesting facet of this approach is that it validates the importance of literature, as it built on a literary key for decoding.” From a psychoanalytical perspective, all of the narrator’s thoughts, instincts and memories are recognized in their narratives because they all reside in the unconscious of Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X.
Race is establishing the foundation in each of the text as the narrators attempt to move beyond it in society. Author(s) Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith who wrote “Reading-Autobiography-A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives” ascertain:

In the 19th century, as autobiographical theorists started investigating the influence of these cultural changes, certain analytical theories came about which proved to be useful when analyzing autobiographies. Since an autobiography is a representation of the self, psychoanalysis proved to be effective. The theories of Sigmund Freud, especially his theories on the ‘unconscious’ and his analytical methods used in psychoanalysis were useful when investigating self-reflection in autobiographies. Other theories that proved useful were the works of Jacques Lacan, whom revised the work of Freud and challenged the notion of an autonomous self. The autobiographer was to be an autonomous and enlightened other. One focused on theological patterns of development, and self-understanding through reflection on the past representative status of the narrator. Scholars also started investigating the role of the silenced, repressed and ignored. This would include the colonized and people of the working class. Narratives by women were also rarely examined. (193-235)

However, some scholars would argue that Freud’s psychoanalytic theory cannot be utilized to dissect race, especially that of African Americans. “At the Thresholds of the Human: Race, Psychoanalysis, and the Replication of Imperial Memory,” author Brian Carr puts Freud’s psychoanalysis theory on race in plain words, “As Freud's gesture
betrays, psychoanalysis is concerned with the ‘shaping of human life,’ not with the
colonial projects by which bodies are systematically dehumanized.” (124) Carr espouses
that Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis is not applicable to race and especially African
Americans because he dehumanizes anyone who is considered to be a ‘un-subject.’ An
un-subject or colonial project as Carr phrased them would be those that have been
colonized by Europeans, which are more specifically, African Americans. African
Americans were a colonial project renamed slaves that were dehumanized by Europeans
for four hundred years. To further sustain this argument about colonial projects and or
unsubjects, Celia Brickman who authored “Race in Psychoanalysis: Aboriginal
Populations in the Mind” adds to Carr’s argument about how African Americans were the
un-subject, “In fin-de-siècle Vienna, the language of racial inferiority was used not only
for dark-skinned peoples in such places as Africa, the Americas, or Australia, but also for
Jews, who were variously described as ‘Oriental,’ ‘primitive,’ ‘barbarian,’ and ‘white
Negroes;’ Jews and Africans were characterized as "equivalent dangers to the 'white'
races’ (56-68).

Dr. Michael Eric Dyson in his book titled The Black Presidency: Barack Obama
and the Politics of Race in America argues against race being established on the color of
one’s skin color when he lays emphasis on:

What is not true about race is the alleged biological input that separates one group
from another; what is true about race is that culture and identity are invented in
space, and build, or erode, over time. What is not true about race is that
intelligence of members of a group is innate and tied exclusively to a group’s
genetic structure; what is true about race is the different qualities in a group are
born when opportunity marries environment (65).

Based on the aforementioned characterization it is obvious how Europe and America
applied the prejudiced labels of being dangerous and primitive to African Americans as a
race of people. To make it clear, in the field of psychoanalysis it would stand to reason
that Freud would base his beliefs about African Americans, from the theory of evolution
developed by Charles Darwin. Peter Wade who wrote “Human Nature and Race”
provides these details about race and slavery, “Although the notion of race predated the
transatlantic slave trade, this trade and the associated institutions of slavery in the
Americans and the Caribbean helped consolidate the idea. But the idea of race was not
tied only to slavery. In fact, when slavery began to be dismantled, the notion of race
became even more powerful, helping to justify the oppression of non-white people by
European colonial powers all over the Americas, in Africa, Asia and Australia” (161).

There is a correlation between race and social inequality that continues to incite why
human being view each other as being different.

Consequently, Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X as African Americans were not
allowed to express their feelings about race and discrimination because they are non-
white people and it was theorized that they did not have the intellectual capacity to do so.
“Race was undoubtedly invented to control groups and to justify other’s stake in their
intellectual and moral inferiority,” claims Dr. Michael Eric Dyson (65). An example of
this occurs in Chapter two, titled “Mascot” in Malcolm X’s autobiography when he is enrolled at Mason Junior High school. Malcolm X was expelled from his former school because he put a tack in his teacher’s chair. While waiting to go to reform school, he is adopted by a white couple named the Swerlins who run a detention home.

They keep him at the detention home and enroll him at Mason High School where he is the only African American student who is polite and respectable.

To this end, these character traits and the color of his skin turned him into the school mascot and made him somewhat popular. His teachers, the Swerlins and fellow students considered him as him as a pet rather than respecting him as a human being. Malcolm X became a token pet at Mason High school but psychologically he thought he was being accepted by his white peers. Not only do his white peers not accept him as a person, they do not consider his feelings when they utilize the word nigger in his presence. The townspeople, his white peers at school nor the Swerlins realize that they are being prejudiced against Malcolm X in the way that they treat and speak to him. Malcolm X recalls in chapter two, titled “Mascot” of his autobiography:

They all liked my attitude, and it was out of their liking for me that I soon became accepted by them. They would talk about anything and everything with me standing right there hearing them, the same way people would talk freely in front of a pet canary. They would even talk about me, or about ‘niggers,’ as though I wasn’t there, as if I wouldn’t understand what that word meant. A hundred times a day, they used the word ‘nigger.’ I suppose that in their own minds, they meant
no harm; in fact, they probably meant well. What I am trying to say is that it just never dawned upon them that I could understand, that I wasn’t a pet but a human being. They didn’t give me credit for having the same sensitivity, intellect and understanding that they would have been ready and willing to recognize in a white boy in my position. (27-28)

Malcolm X’s race was acknowledged as an anomaly at the Swerlins and Mason Highschool but not as a member of the human race. He psychologically internalized how the word nigger made him feel as a youth and how it transformed him when he became a mature adult. Thus, it is the narrator’s skin color, not their character that establishes the oppressive conditions they endure and the restrictions that society maintained against them. As a result, each narrator exhibits feelings of isolation and alienation from a psychoanalytic perspective and their white oppressors, just as Malcolm X did in highschool, that are exemplified in their texts. “Oppressors can only exist as oppressors in the presence of their opposite, the oppressed. The two groups stand in an inherently contradictory relationship, irrespective of how either group perceive themselves,” according to Peter Roberts who authored “Knowledge, Dialogue, and Humanization: The Moral Philosophy of Paulo Freire” (98). Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X are all conscious of their audiences and/or readers and therefore develop their narratives around the social conditions and the politics of race.

During slavery, African Americans were subjected to physical and psychological trauma in the form of abuse while being socially alienated at the same time. Racial
Trauma and social alienation are not limited to slavery because it continues to happen today to African Americans in the forms of unjustified police brutality, prejudice and the lack of economic opportunities. Their African Americanness just like the protagonists in their memoirs caused a certain growth of hatred from other races, especially the White oppressors that would rather persecute and alienate them rather than accept them. Rogers M. Rogers Smith who authored, “The Puzzling Place of Race in American Political Science” uses Ralph Ellison to emphasize the aforementioned point by affirming, “Ralph Ellison’s notion of the ‘invisible man,’ meaning, as did Ellison, that the dominant society sees African Americans through the lenses of stereotypes, rather than as actual people with values, aspirations, intelligence, and other attributes that the dominant society sees in itself” (41).

When Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X recounted disturbing incidents in their memoirs, the diction they utilized acted as a form of catharsis where they could experience an emotional release by writing about their encounters as African Americans. They could then dissect and illuminate the racial trauma that they suffered in their own lives. The Literary Devices webpage defines the term as, “A catharsis is an emotional discharge through which one can achieve a state of moral or spiritual renewal or achieve a state of liberation from anxiety and stress. Catharsis is Greek word that means “cleansing.”

As a consequence, their texts serve as a mechanism for them to “cleanse” themselves from all of their previous fears, recall their memories and for people to
participate in their racial trauma as slaves and an African American man during the Civil Rights period. Their texts provide a means for the audience to vicariously experience their lives through their words. From a psychoanalysis outlook, the narratives help the protagonists to recall some of their most painful memories hidden in their unconscious that began shaping them as children. Norman R. Yetman, author of “The Background of the Slave Narrative Collection” clarifies the purpose of the slave narrative:

The avowed intention of the publication of the ante bellum narrative was to challenge the roseate portrait of slavery painted by its apologists. The proslavery justification of the ‘peculiar institution’ alleged that it was a benevolent system and that the position of the slave was more secure than that of the northern wage earner. The slave, according to George Fitzhugh, one of the most vigorous of the proslavery propagandists, ‘was happy as a human can be.’ But the stereotype of the ‘contented slave’ was contradicted by the many fugitive slaves who sought refuge from bondage in the North and in Canada. Their often-sensational revelations of the realities of slave life provided a persuasive challenge to southern justifications of slavery. During the ante-bellum period several thousand autobiographical and biographical accounts of slave experiences, generally promoted and distributed by abolitionist propagandists, were published. While it is difficult to weigh precisely the influence on the antislavery crusade exerted by these tracts, the conclusion that they proved effective counter-propaganda to that disseminated by the proponents of slavery is inescapable. The typical ante-bellum narrative had served as an expose of the horrors of the slavery. (536)
Slave narratives as collective works or individual essays were a point of view taken from African Americans that had survived slavery and all the racial trauma it encompassed. This assessment of their utilization of diction is not only true for Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs’ memoirs who survived slavery but for Malcolm X’s narrative as he discussed race relations as a N.O.I. minister and Black Nationalist. The discourses about race and racial trauma in this country have been historically depicted with debates about African American’s status as well as the interpretability of their biological difference, especially when compared to other ethnicities and their experiences with racism.

All three narrators suffered exclusion and patterns of social injustice, which was permissible in society because of their ethnicity. In the public domain, during slavery and up until the Civil Rights Movement the federal government and politicians did not avoid race but encouraged the maintenance of the status quo and discrimination against African Americans. This idea was also true regarding the catalyst for the Civil War because the South did not want to free the slaves only because they were going to lose their free labor force which meant a decline in wealth and a devastated economy. The status quo of maintaining slavery and being able to control African Americans as a race of people was a popular sentiment at the time. Stephen Maizlish, Associate Professor of History at the University of Texas at Arlington who wrote, “A Strife of Tongues: The Compromise of 1850 and Ideological of the American Civil War” observed, “Slavery was central to the debate because it was central to southern society. Southerners did not hesitate to proclaim that slavery, as well as white supremacy formed the basis of their world and their worldview, while northerners responded with their own focus on the institution and on
African American-white relations. No discussion of midcentury American ideological divisions can be complete without a comprehensive understanding of the role that slavery and race played in them” (134).

Therefore, the race question or discussion may have been modified during the narrators’ distinct time periods in their narratives, but it never disappeared. The issue of race continues to be a historical, institutional and individual problem that current scholars are attempting to dismantle in the 21st century as the narrators examined in their text. “Races are social constructions. A race is not definable in biological terms; it is a product of social processes,” states Peter Wade (157). The concepts about race, with particular emphasis on African Americans are aligned with discrimination and social inequality, even today. For example, an enslaved woman such as Harriet Jacobs was discriminated against because she was African American and a woman. She had no political rights and her voice was never meant to be heard because her race determined her status and visibility according to her plantation owners.

On the other hand, had Harriet Jacobs been fundamentally white or of pure European ancestry, her racial trauma would have either been non-existent or minimal. When Douglass, Jacob’s and Malcolm X’s traumatic incidents are revealed in their narratives they are repeatedly marginalized by some White critics because of the way they envision race and continue to perpetuate the presence of tacit assumptions. Further, Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs were liabilities to their plantation owners because they were exposing the truth about slavery and its severe conditions in their narratives.
that called for racial redemption and political changes in America. Considering the magnitude of discrimination and prejudice in this country against African Americans, Freud’s attempts to minimize the narrator’s racial trauma by using a rational argument of portraying African Americans as being savages at the time was extremely naïve but accepted by White society. Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X were intolerant of the status quo for race relations during their lives and therefore they could not stand by and do nothing while their fellowmen suffered from grave injustice, prejudice and inequality. The language that they utilized provides evidence that they cognizant of the white gaze that was always upon them which influences the way their conveyed their text. Since they had each endured extreme physical and psychological trauma, they did not want their fellowmen to suffer the same fate. As a result, each narrator suffered from mass-hatred and malice because of the color of their skin.

“Psychoanalysis and the Negro Problem” by author Charles I. Glicksberg argues that it is not the color of the protagonists’ skin that makes victims of society but the overall white oppression that they endure:

But the Negroes, exposed as they are to discriminatory intimidations from which the whites are exempt, do respond in a way that is different from the reactions of the whites. In short, it is not their racial character that makes them different. The unique configuration of the human personality is determined in the main by environmental influences. Because he lives in America, the Negro closely resembles the whites in his behavior, but the necessity that pushes him behind the confining walls of caste and prevents him from voicing his protest, this heavy
burden of oppression, seriously warps his personality. Thus, the white man's culture, with its specific framework of discriminatory practices, serves to define the marked deviations in the Negro's personality. The psychoanalytic study of the Negro personality in American culture reveals what one would expect to find. The Negro suffers from multiple and cumulative frustrations, conflicts between aggression and appeasement, revolt and conformity. The walls of caste that hem him in, the unvoiced but ever-present threat of oppression, the numerous restrictions of opportunity he must face because of his color, his obsession with degrees of lightness of complexion within his own segregated community, all this reinforces his sense of unworthiness, if not downright guilt. Others struggle along as best they can, lonely, embittered, alienated, filled with vain dreams of revenge against their white oppressors or of glory which will redeem them in the eyes of the world. The pressures brought to bear upon the Negro, the effect these have on his personality growth, are not to be interpreted in terms of cultural origin. The Negro was compelled to adapt himself to the dominant mode of the American cultural scene. (45-46)

Critics usually dismiss personal narratives by African American authors because they focus on their flaws and or the stereotypes rather than the heavy burden of white oppression that they are conveying in their texts. Consequently, it is from the Freudian psychoanalysis as a literay theory, that Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X utilize their narratives to express and interpret their own racial trauma and transcend the limits of their race to deal with the issues of slavery, discrimination and sexual oppression. For
that reason, psychoanalysis as a tool provides each narrator with a method to break down the barriers of their individual experiences with the matter of race.

The utilization of psychoanalysis as a lens to examine each text further proves that Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X’s works not only incited racial protests about slavery, discrimination and unequal rights but as African Americans that they were all racially conscious. Since each narrator is racially conscious, their narratives can be perceived as their weapons to advocate for the rights of African Americans. Most certainly, Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs would have been physically abused or murdered had they spoken about the injustices of slavery when they were slaves and for spreading the nonsensical ideas of freedom to other African Americans. Likewise, scholars have often theorized that it was indeed Malcolm X’s outspoken vehement speeches and aggressive tones about race relations that caused his sudden death.

Race as a theme is for comprehending the psyches of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X as their narratives unravel from slavery to the Civil Rights period. Psychoanalysis as a theory presents the potential to uncover and explicate how race plays a vital role in the social inequality and racial trauma they expressed in their narratives. It structures each of the narrator’s lives and is a valid part of their own self-identity. Frantz Fanon emphasizes, “At certain moments the African American man is locked in his body. And yet, for being who has acquired the consciousness of self and body, who has achieved the dialectic of subject and object, the body is no longer a cause of the structure of consciousness; it has become an object of consciousness” (200).
That is, while other facets of the narrator’s lives may have been more pertinent, their race is the one factor that was constantly visible that made their lives even more problematic. It is because of racism and the racist individuals within the narrator’s texts that did not accept them because of the difference in skin color. Hence, for Douglas, Jacobs and Malcolm X, they had to learn how to respond or maneuver through the racist situations that they encountered in their lives in order to survive. For example, in some instances, for Douglas, Jacobs and Malcolm X they had to either avoid or maneuver through racial situations to maintain their own safety or perhaps even save their own lives.

To illustrate this point, in Chapter two entitled “Mascot,” Malcolm X as a youth wanted to box like his brother Philbert Little because he was a natural boxer in his own words. Malcolm X was very tall, 128 pounds and thin for a boy who was thirteen but was determined to get in the ring to fight in order to prove his worth. He was classified as a bantamweight and was matched with a White boy named Bill Peterson who was an amateur. His entire family and including the rest of the town came to his first amateur bout because they had already seen Philbert box before and he was pretty good, so the assumption was that Malcolm X was too, since they were from the same family. This first fight between the two boys would prove not to be the case. In his text, Malcolm X presents this version of the fight:

I walked down the aisle between the people thronging the rows of seats, and climbed in the ring. Bill Peterson and I were introduced, and then the referee
called us together and mumbled all of that stuff about fighting fair and breaking clean. Then the bell rang, and we came out of our corners. I knew I was scared, but I didn't know, as Bill Peterson told me later on, that he was scared of me, too. He was so scared I was going to hurt him that he knocked me down fifty times if he did once. He did such a job on my reputation in the Negro neighborhood that I practically went into hiding. A Negro just can't be whipped by somebody white and return with his head up to the neighborhood, especially in those days, when sports and, to a lesser extent show business, were the only fields open to Negroes, and when the ring was the only place a Negro could whip a white man and not be lynched. When I did show my face again, the Negroes I knew rode me so badly I knew I had to do something. But the worst of my humiliations was my younger brother Reginald's attitude: he simply never mentioned the fight. It was the way he looked at me -- and avoided looking at me. (24-25)

From this aforementioned example, Malcolm X instinctively knew in his subconscious that his race determined how and where he could defeat Bill and where he could not because he articulates those elements when he recounts his boxing story. If Malcolm X had fought Bill on a street-corner, whether he won the fight or not, there was a possibility that he could have lost his life, or his entire family could have suffered because he was Negro and Bill was white. Eventually there is a rematch between Malcolm X and Bill in Alma, Michigan and Malcolm X loss yet again but not in the presence of his own community. The only difference in the second bout was that there were no witnesses and it was a very short fight. Suitably, in each narrative there is a discernable relationship
between each narrator’s subconscious and their social world or reality. This is evident within Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X’s subconscious and as African Americans because they comprehended that certain behaviors were not acceptable because of their race. Therefore, they had to internalize oppressive norms in order to survive in society.

Alex Haley shows how Malcolm X espoused this notion during their first encounter when he wrote, “During this first encounter Malcolm X also sought to enlighten me about Negro mentality. He repeatedly cautioned me to be aware of Negro affirmations of good will toward the white man. He said that the Negro had been trained to dissemble and conceal his real thoughts, as a matter of survival.” (xi). Haley expands further, “The art of deception practiced by the Negro was based on a thorough understanding of the white man’s mores, he said; at the same time, the Negro has remained a closed book to the white man, who has never displayed any interest in understanding the Negro” (xi). Psychologically, Malcolm X and all African Americans at that time were cognizant about the behaviors that were deemed acceptable by white society and what it meant for their overall existence.

Nonetheless, some theorists will often assert that even though no one is born a racist, over time and with societal influences, individuals will express racist opinions and transmit racist thoughts and attitudes. As a result, the White people that were racist toward Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X were in fact given permission by society to legitimatize their inequalities while benefitting from their oppression. The White
pressors in the three texts believe that they deserve those benefits and did not care about the racial trauma that they subjected Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X to as human beings. White oppressors inflict racial trauma upon the narrators in the form of authority figures such as plantation owners, mistresses or social workers in their texts.

Yet, those same racist thoughts and attitudes are evident in their texts with examples of the abusive language, the denial of political/constitutional rights, prejudice, extreme violence and sexual oppression. Frederick Douglass explicates how the African American suffers in his Fourth of July speech entitled, “The Meaning of the Fourth of July for the Negro.” Douglass gave this speech in Rochester, New York on July 5, 1852. With meticulous language and determination, Frederick Douglass provides a comprehensive account of race and having been a former slave when he proclaimed:

What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer; a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are, to Him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is
not a nation on the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the
people of the United States, at this very hour. (Douglass)

From this specific aforementioned portion of the speech, it can be extracted that
Frederick Douglass is declaring that America is hypocritical because it is celebrating the
freedom of the county while still maintaining the status quo of slavery and enjoying the
profits from the free labor of African Americans both atrocities of which are occurring
because they are African American and slaves. It is an explicit contradiction because they
are celebrating their freedom as a country but do not see the rationale of freeing human
beings, i.e., enslaved Negroes from bondage. He calls America fraudulent because
African Americans are suffering a grave injustice and psychologically traumatized
because their race denotes social and structural constraints from White society. Taken
from Seabrook and Wyatt-Nichol’s “The Ugly Side of America: Institutional Oppression
and Race,” author Rome Dennis who reviewed “Black Demons: The Media’s Depiction
of the African American Male Criminal Stereotypes” maintains, “…….it is important to
point out the precept of inferiority is unique to the American slavery experience.
Moreover, this experience of African Americans is unique in African Americans
ascription to inferior status in that no other ethnic minority group entered the country as
slaves and just as important, no other group was victimized across centuries the way
African Americans have been victimized” (19) (28). As a former slave, when he
examined the country’s celebration, he realized that there was no humanity or mercy for
African Americans which speaks to multiple tacit assumptions as to how they were
regarded as a race of people. Thus, based on Frederick Douglass’s earlier experiences as
boy and ex-slave, they both shaped how he characterized plantation owners and America’s perception of African Americans.

Each narrator all had different experiences with race that were dependent on their geographical and social location. J. Kovel, author of “White Racism: A Psychohistory” explains racism concerning geographical locations when he declares, “Dominative racism is the direct oppressive relationship of the southern American states. Aversive racism is the exclusion and cold shuddering of African Americans in the northern states” (3). Further, Douglass and Jacobs’s social location were a part of the working class or slaves so their experiences with race were vastly different from that of Malcolm X. However, Malcolm X was still a part of the working-class years after slavery just as his parents were before him. Even though Malcolm X’s mother was an educated woman from Grenada, she was only able to work as a domestic in the U.S. to financially provide for her own children. Since Malcolm X’s father was a minister who was also a follower of Marcus Garvey, it further decreased his social location in Lansing, Michigan.

It is also common that race is perceived in a different way in various geographical locations, more specifically for this study which are in the South and the North. In the South, Douglass and Jacob’s experienced racial trauma that included emotional abuse, whippings lynching, starvation, and the castration of African American males and destruction of entire families. Southern African Americans were often ridiculed, intimidated and met with physical aggression if they attempted to stop any forms of harassment from White plantation owners. These dreadful motifs are detailed examples
of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs experiences with race in the South until the Civil War was fought and slavery was abolished. Renita Seabrook and Wyatt Nichol author(s) “The Ugly Side of America: Institutional Oppression and Race” established:

The work of social psychologists in this century strongly suggests that conditions in the post-war South were ripe for the emergence of heightened racial hostility on the part of whites…Freud argued that sanctioned hostility towards a clearly identified minority or ‘outsider’ group can contribute significantly to social cohesion among a majority, especially under conditions of social stress. In 1958, Gordon Allport, while not sharing Freud’s emphasis on universal, instinctual aggressiveness, also argued that aggression and hatred towards a scapegoat group can be a need-satisfying mechanism under conditions of unmanageable frustration. (Pressman 1998, 4) (25)

In this instance, Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X were all scapegoats in their text to White oppressive societies. Each protagonist could be falsely accused of various crimes and since they were the “outsiders” by societal standards, they had no mechanism to defend themselves from racial trauma or prejudice which in turn caused them more psychological stress as individuals. Derek Hook, author of “Fanon and the Psychoanalysis of Racism” sustains:

Racism, very importantly, is also a set of separations that come to be implemented at higher levels-those of culture, morality, psychology—and it is this ability of racism to motivate difference (and superiority/inferiority) at a variety of different
levels which makes it so durable, so resistant to change. So, if a racist explanation of difference fails at the body—that is, in terms of concrete physical or material ‘defects’ it can be pitched again at the level of psychology, or of culture, at levels which are less tangible and hence harder to disprove. The point here is simply that racism as a system of values uses both racism of the body and racism of the mind, ‘racisms’ of physical and moral qualities each to motivate and justify the other. (128)

Additionally, from a psychoanalytic perspective, this also explains the narrators’ fears and distrust of White people, even towards those who showed them any kindness or generosity throughout their lives.

Since White people had either mistreated, physically and or psychologically abused Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X as children it made it hard for them to trust any acts of generosity that they may have bestowed upon them as adults. To illustrate this point, Frederick Douglass is sent away as a young boy to live with the Aulds after being sold from Colonel Lloyd’s plantation. Upon arrival, he is astonished at Mrs. Sophia Auld’s kindness and treatment towards him. Frederick gives this impression of Mrs. Auld in Chapter VI:

She was by trade a weaver; and by constant application to her business, she had been preserved from the blighting and dehumanizing effects of slavery. I was utterly astonished at her goodness. I scarcely knew how to behave towards her. She was entirely unlike no other white woman I had seen. I could not approach
her as I was accustomed to approach other white ladies. My instruction was all out of place. The crouching servility, usually so acceptable a quality in a slave, did not answer when manifested toward her. (47-48)

Initially, Douglass’s interaction with Mrs. Auld gave him a different perspective of White people than what he was used when he lived on Colonel Lloyd’s plantation. This is because he had experienced his own racial trauma as a young boy with the overseers and masters that were sadistic to him, his family and the other slaves on Colonel Lloyd’s plantation. Frederick Douglass’s recalling of the Auld scenario perhaps caused more confusion for him in his psyche because he would not have known if she was being genuine, since his interactions with white plantation owners up until that point had been so appalling. Shortly after this scenario occurs, Frederick soon realizes that Mrs. Auld’s personality is just like all the other White people he has known his entire life because she begins to mistreat him and stops teaching him how to read.

Moreover, this realization is evident when Douglass remarked, “That cheerful eye, under the influence of slavery, soon became red with rage, that voice made all of sweet accord, changed to one of that harsh and horrid discord; and that angelic face gave place to that of a demon” (47-48). Mary E. Williams, author of Issues in Racism explains African American behavior in the presence of their White oppressors when she avows, “Many minorities maintain that they realize that every adverse encounter with whites is not due to racism. But people of color can expend a lot of emotional energy trying to interpret white’s negative comments and actions. Because they do not want to jump to
easy conclusions, they may find themselves ambivalent and suspicious in interactions with whites” (32). Additionally, Mary E. Williams states, “equally burdensome is the anger that people of color may feel when whites deny that minorities are encountering racial discrimination” (33).

Whereas Malcolm X as a young boy experiences the death of his father and the ultimate dismantling of his entire family because of the color of his skin in the northern part of the country. Segregation and racial prejudice were obvious without ever having to be verbalized to Malcolm X when he was young boy. He and his family understood how their race defined them because it established the way they were treated and where they lived in Lansing, Michigan. For example, Malcolm X presents a vivid picture of the living conditions of Negroes when he expresses, “As in East Lansing, no Negroes were allowed on the streets there after dark—hence the daytime meeting. In point of fact, in those days lots of Michigan towns were like that. Every town had a few “home” Negroes who lived there” (7). He too, along with his family experienced physical threats, intimidation and denial of social services. “Whites have long comprised the majority of those who control U.S. politics and culture. Because of their social status, whites as a group have the power to assert racial prejudice and deny minorities opportunities to succeed in society. This situation has created, in author David Wellman’s words, “a system of advantage based on race,” insists Mary E. Williams (7). Thus, all of these incidents prove to Malcolm X later on in life that the mistreatment of African Americans in society was designated by their skin color. Negroes were negated, undermined and undervalued human beings.
By the same token, Malcolm X’s father as an African American man and matriarch could not even defend his family against the Black Legion or the harassment they were subjected to as they tried to maintain a life in Lansing, Michigan. Therefore, it is evident why Malcolm X’s feelings manifested into immediate hatred and distrust of White people that were in authoritative positions in his life stemming from when he was young boy until he became an adult. Malcolm X talks about his feelings about White people after the death of his father:

I was growing up fast, physically more so than mentally. As I began to be recognized more around town, I started to become aware of the peculiar attitude of white people toward me. I sensed it had to do with my father. It was an adult version of what several white children had said at school, in hints or sometimes in the open, which really expressed what their parents had said—that the African American Legion or the Klan had killed my father, and the insurance company had pulled a fast one in refusing to pay my mother the policy money. (15)

While the conditions of African Americans had somewhat improved from slavery by the time Malcolm X was born, Jim Crow laws were implemented, and the Ku Klux Klan was running rampant in many parts of the country during his life and law enforcement did nothing to stop them. All three narrators realized early on in life that being African American could destroy their families, psychologically oppress them and or ultimately cause their death. African Americans were not empowered members of society but its victims without voices or political rights. In *Issues in Racism* by Mary E. Williams,
Beverly Daniel Tatum, author of “Why Are All the African American Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations about Race,” she acknowledges, “racism….is not only a personal ideology based on racial prejudices, but a system involving cultural messages and institutional policies and practices…In the context of the United States, this system clearly operates to the advantage of whites and to the disadvantage of people of color” (13). Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X experienced many instances of racial prejudice in their lives. Their frequent individual encounters with racial discrimination based on the color their skin made it difficult for Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X to believe that there would ever be equality and justice for them or any African American in America.

Accordingly, their repetitive experiences with racism also made them cynical and distrustful of White society as a whole. Definitely, anguish about the concept of race in Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X’s texts in comparison to today has led to some form of progress. However, that same progress can become stagnant when White society is unable or is in constant denial about how race is an integral part of the African American experience just as it was in their narratives. In order to oppose the ideals of race and racism, there must be a cooperative effort on both parts of African Americans and White people, just as Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X emphasized about correcting the injustices and inequalities that originated in slavery. Therefore, it befits the literary scholars and critics to survey as to why Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X had such a profound comprehension of race and how it affected them psychologically with regards to discrimination and prejudice. Stephen Frosh, author of “Psychoanalysis,
Colonialism, Racism” and professor of Psychology claims, ‘The positioning of
psychoanalysis has frequently aligned itself with conformist and even ‘repressive’
tendencies that reproduce colonial at time racist tropes, often in the manner of
psychological individualism, but sometime in an explicitly political manner.’ (Jacoby,
1983; Frosh, 1999) (3)

**Lacan’s Mirror Image and Identity**

Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X initially did not have self-
awareness or identities in their narratives. In addition, since all three narrators were
Negroes they were subjected to the societal restrictions that were placed upon them.
Subsequently as long as their White oppressors kept them in ignorance they could not
become empowered or embrace their identities. Consequently, their lack of self-identity
in the White paradigm of their text provided a means for society to exercise their control
over them as Negroes. By maintaining the status quo of ignorance for the narrators, their
White oppressors ensured that their identities or ‘knowledge of self’ were minimized in
the social hierarchy. Hence, Lacan’s theory of the mirror phase is integral in how each
narrator perceived their own identities and or knowledge of self when they looked in the
mirror. Edith Kurzweil in her text titled, “Jacques Lacan: French Freud” explains the
psychoanalyst’s mirror theory:

What is this mirror stage? To what extent does it ‘improve’ on Freud? Basically,
Lacan finds that a child’s first and usually jubilant reaction to its own reflection in
a mirror, which is said to happen between six and eighteen months, is of
fundamental importance. He says it reveals a libidinal dynamism potentially present in Freud's studies on narcissism, and in the Ichspaltung of the imago. This moment, alleges Lacan, is the child's initial awareness of itself as a biological organism, as an entity bound up with the human species, and as ‘a threshold of what it would become,’ at a time before it can verbalize or make sense of this experience. Because this stage, in its simplest terms, is part of the psychoanalytic problem of identification, Lacan locates the individual's anticipation of the self in this moment, and invests it with all the complex emotions and intellections that go into one's future relations between the Innenwelt (Inner world) and the Umwelt (environment). (425)

Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X were perhaps unaware of their identities when they first looked into the mirror as adolescents however it did not take long for their family members and their surrounding communities to ensure that they recognized themselves as African Americans in their reflections. As they matured into adults, they begin to comprehend what it meant to be an African American slave in the South or an African American boy in growing up in 1930’s America. Even though their self-identities were established over time, they each had to deal with their own coherent realities of discrimination, prejudice and alienation from their White oppressors. “As humans, we have the capacity to reflect on the very process of knowing itself, on (our) consciousness and its relationship with the world. We can not only know, but know that we know (Davis, 1980, 58-5). For Freire, the essence of human consciousness is intentionality toward the world. Humans can "stand back" from the immediate reality of
their material existence and reflect upon it,” taken from Peter Roberts’s work titled “Knowledge, Dialogue, and Humanization: The Moral Philosophy of Paulo Freire” (102). Once this realization was revealed and accepted by Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X, it impacted their future psychological development as adults, however, whenever their White oppressors gaze upon them in the psychological mirror, no matter the environment or geographical location, they viewed them as un-subjects or being less than others in society.

In contrast, some theorists contend that Lacan’s mirror image theory has limitations to his psychoanalytic study as well as benefits. Professor Stephen Frosh of Psychology from Birbeck College and author of “Psychoanalysis, Colonialism and Racism” discloses, "The culturally undifferentiated Lacanian mirror phase attributes alienation to the adoption of the visual image as the ‘truth’ of the subject, and sees all subjects as similarly constructed by this process. The Lacanian subject looks in the mirror and sees its image reflected back to it, and then appropriates the image as the source of comfort and a way of making meaning out of what was a previously fragmented experience. In doing so, the subject adopts as ‘real’ the image given back to it from the mirror; for Lacan, this description of how the ego functions to cover up the Real (3). He further affirms:

According to ‘Frantz Fanon,’ who offers a racialized version of Lacan’s theory when applied to Negroes, more specifically for Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X, because they are subjected to the racist gaze of the White
people in their narratives, they see themselves in a white mirror which further removes the possibility of their self-assertion and mastery which only creates further fragmentation of their identities. As ‘Negro subjects’ and or narrators they are objects in their texts and do not ‘appropriate the fantasy of integrated subjectivity.’ (3)

However, R. Khanna author of “Dark Continents; Psychoanalysis and Colonialism” contends that, “What has happened is that the African American subject has been fixed by an external gaze-the ‘mirror-as-camera.’ The psychoanalytic ambiguities of the mirror stage are, in a sense, then the flip side of the colonial machinery that renders the colonized subject split only when refracting a certain form of light” (187).

Ergo, all three narrators are alienated in a world that they did not create, and they are perceived as being inferior who makes them dependent on White society to make sense of their lives and existence. For example, when Frederick Douglass as a slave was gazed upon by his white enslaver in the mirror, his reaction was one of disdain and or fear. Perhaps his enslaver did not even comprehend his existence when he gazed upon him. Even though this may have been true in his enslaver’s mind, he immediately recognized that Douglass was inferior to him and had to be controlled by his whip.

The rationale is that “African American body and psyche when undermined by their White oppressors or society when gazed upon in the mirror by them return to a fragmented state that needs to be controlled,” according to Fanon (Oliver, 2004, 21). The mirror theory for White people in the narratives of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs
and Malcolm X provides them with a sense of assurance and power which maintains the “undermining and control of the Negro psyche.” Frantz Fanon details this phenomenon, “When one has grasped the mechanism described by Lacan, one can have no further doubt that the real other for the white man is and will continue to be the African American man. And conversely. Only for the white man the Other is perceived on the level of the body image, absolutely as the not-self-that is, the unidentifiable, the unassimilable” (161).

The relationship of self-identity to race in each of the narratives turns out to be very complicated because of the legacy of slavery and colonialism. As a result, “Lacan’s mirror exhibits how White society can physically and psychologically oppress African American people with a type of gaze that would annihilate any opponent. In addition, it also exposes how White society’s gaze in the narratives of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X are conflicted by both ‘hate, destruction, desire and envy’ all of which reflect the differences of how they are perceived as Negro people” (161). Therefore, Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X as African Americans and their race can never be dissected from their self-identities.

Within their texts, these narrators attempted to classify themselves but were defined by White society’s standards who would not allow them to construct their own identities. For example, when the plantation owners told Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs that they were mulatto slaves, they accepted that label until they could become
enlightened because they had no prior knowledge outside of where they lived. Kimberly Drake’s author of “Rewriting the American Self: Douglass and Jacobs” asserts:

Hortense Spillers, who describes slavery as “one of the richest displays of the psychoanalytic dimensions of culture before the science of European psychoanalysis takes hold (Spillers, 77). Spiller explains the way slavery disrupts the slave’s ability to develop his/her identity in the fashion described by Lacan: ‘under the pressure of patronymic, patrifocal, patrilineal and patriarchal order, the slave child’s ‘human and familial status’ is disfigured. The very concept of family relations, considered to be ‘universal’ in its application, loses meaning since it can be invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by the property relations (Spillers, 74) Whether or not one considers the classic psychoanalytic model to be a universal truth or, as Margaret Homans suggests, a culturally specific construct, the ‘psycholinguistic retelling of a myth to which our culture has long subscribed,’ one must agree that slaves were forced to accept Western models for male and female identity as ‘normal’ even if they were prevented from conforming to those norms. (93) (Homans 5-7)

Douglass and Jacobs did not have access to the same political or governmental power structures as their owners. Moreover, as an enslaved woman, Harriet Jacobs legally and virtually could not refuse consent which further restricted her knowledge of self. Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs looked into Lacan’s mirror and only saw
themselves as being property of their white plantation owners who gave them their names and had no legal rights as declared by the governmental authorities.

The plantation owners also controlled Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs’ families and could ensure whether they lived on died by mere suggestion. While Malcolm X in contrast, in his narrative, attempted to relax his hair in order to erase its Negroid characteristics in order to identify and assimilate into White society. His self-identity as a young man was correlated to having straight red hair like his white counterparts because when he looked in the mirror, he did not like his country coarse African hair and his obvious Negro features.

Likewise, each narrator was defined by their race as Negroes without any consideration for their evolvement as humans and or individuality. When white domination and Lacan’s mirror image theory are applied to the texts of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X, it is evident that they attempted to modify their self-identities as adults by becoming free, educated and or empowered from the knowledge that not only liberated them as individuals but as African Americans as well. Douglass and Jacobs’ attempts and eventual re-identification from African American slaves to abolitionist earned them respect and the acknowledgement from society with their published narratives. Malcolm X’s re-identification from a street hustler to a minister in the Nation of Islam gave voice to Black oppression that earned him notoriety as one of the most radicalized leaders during the Civil Rights movement.
Consequently, when White society gazed upon Douglas and Jacobs as abolitionists, they saw an African American man and woman championing for the freedom of all slaves that revealed all the evils of slavery in their narratives who wanted to abolish it as an institution. The same implication is applicable to Malcolm X and his text because he went from a street hustler to a N.O.I. minister who re-identified as a Black Nationalist, that when White society gazed upon him in Lacan’s mirror saw a vehement and violent leader that was willing to liberate and separate Blacks from the White race.

**New Historicism**

Neema Parvini author of *New Historicism* of oxfordbibliographies.com defines it as:

New historicism has been a hugely influential approach to literature, especially in studies of William Shakespeare’s works and literature of the Early Modern period. It began in earnest in 1980 and quickly supplanted New Criticism as the new orthodoxy in early modern studies. At its core, new historicism insists—contra formalism—that literature must be understood in its historical context. As a formal criticism, ‘it views literary texts as cultural products that are rooted in their time and place, not works of individual genius that transcend them.’ (Parvini)

Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs as narrators are products of slavery whereas Malcolm X is a product before and during the Civil Rights movement. It can also be argued that the literary genius of each narrators was necessary because had they not
shared their memoirs when they did, the literary canon would not have authentic African American experiences from slavery up to the Civil Right movement.

Slavery is comprehended as being a tumultuous period in U.S. history. As narrators during slavery, Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs paint accurate portraits of this peculiar period and all the atrocities it encompassed. Stephan Palmie author of the article “Slavery, Historicism and the Poverty of Memorialization” in his book titled Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates in chapter twenty-four emphasizes:

The danger here seems to lie not just in trivializing, by qualification the incommensurability of the sheer frequency of New World slavery and ignoring the cultural and ideological centrality of the regime of systematic dehumanization in the formation of Western modernity itself. Nor is it merely that slavery’s lasting impact on post-emancipation schemes of racially iniquitous nation building might be written off ‘through terminal’ compensatory structures of privileges and inequality. Rather, and as in debate about apologies for slavery, a major part of what is at issue, is the nature of the collective subjective involved in making or accepting amends for the historical wrong of slavery. (368-369)

Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs attempt to persuade America how to correct the wrongs of slavery by emphasizing the discrimination and the mistreatment of African Americans in their narratives, but it remained in effect until Civil War officially ended in 1865.
From slavery until 2018, the structures of White privilege and inequality remain in effect today. Raphael Cassimere, Jr. who reviewed, “Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies: A Comparison of St. Domingue and Cuba by Gwendolyn Midlo Hall; The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South by John W. Blassingame calls attention to:

John Blassingame's *Slave Community* is a sociocultural study of slave life in the antebellum United States. Remarkably, Blassingame makes the enslaved come alive. It differs from both the two major or traditional perspectives of viewing slavery: The apologists, led by such contemporaries as Fitzhugh and professional historians such as U. B. Phillips, and the moralists such as Olmstead, Frederick Douglass, Kenneth Stampp, and others. While certainly affirming the moral approach in looking at slavery, Blassingame presents a fully humanistic account by probing African American culture and society as perceived by the slaves themselves. With numerous slave narratives, he is able to re store the moral perspective sometimes over looked by those cynics who have been skeptical of the objectivity of ‘crusading abolitionists.’ (257-258)

Robert L. Douglass, author of “Myth or Truth: A White and Black View of Slavery” offers his view of slavery when he points out some of the similar points stressed by Blassingame:

Slave inferiority was necessary in order to promote White superiority, but opposite conditions were at work also. Slave narratives speak of poor Whites as
‘trash’ whom slaves held as ‘laughing stock.’ Slaves of small farmers often found their masters to be as ignorant of learning and writing as themselves. Slaves often secretly elevated their own self-worth while diminishing the significance of the master. Learning to read secretly or providing extra food for their families were small deeds the worth of which was exaggerated to increase the slave's self-image. Being outside the constant surveillance of the master or the overseer, slaves were often supportive of each other. (357)

Blassingame is considered as the eminent African American historian and therefore his perspective about slavery and the narratives that come from that period in history, configure a collective characterization of slaves and a need for their reality to be conveyed in the most authentic form. The concern for slave narratives as they relate to slavery is that they appear authentic and not mythical or romanticized in any way. If the narratives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs had been romanticized, they would have been detrimental to enslaved African Americans because the abolitionist would have not comprehended the need for the peculiar institution to end. Douglass and Jacobs’ narratives offered the world and their fellow African Americans bravery, inspiration and the celebration of freedom as ex-fugitive slaves. Sandra Hinson, Richard Healey and Nathaniel Wiesenbergs author(s) of the Grassroots Policy Project for the National People’s Action website workbook entitled, Race, Power and Policy: Dismantling Structural Racism challenge:
Race is deeply embedded in our society, and at the same time social understandings and the implications of race changes over time, precisely because race in our society is a social construct that serves political ends. Racial differentiation has been created, and is constantly being re-created, to serve a social and or economic purpose. It is maintained through social, legal and political controls (from slavery to Jim Crow laws to ghettoization to uses of ‘law and order’ and the criminal justice system, restrictive immigration policies, etc.) It is reinforced by belief systems, such as the notion of white superiority, and/or associating ‘American’ with whiteness, and asserting U.S. dominance over the Western Hemisphere. The effects of racialization accumulate over time. Some of the effects are altered, at times sharply, as in the case of the passage of the civil rights legislation, but they are not erased, even with the election of the first Black President. (35)

Racial concepts in America may fluctuate but the reaction to racism and the acceptance of African Americans as a people continues to be a topic of debate.

Whereas Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs’ narratives were conveyed during slavery, Malcolm X’s historical context is fifty-three years after the Civil War, before the Civil Rights Movement and afterwards. Slavery was officially abolished in 1865 and Malcolm X was born in 1925. This means that his paternal grandparents who were from Georgia, dealt with the backlash of Reconstruction which happened right after the Civil War. “All over the South, however, there emerged a body of laws generally regarded as
the Black Codes which covered every aspect of the life of a slave. There were variations
from state to state, but the general point of view was the same in most of such legislation.
The point of view was that slaves were not persons but property; and laws should protect
the ownership of such property should protect the whites against any dangers that likely
to arise from the presence of large numbers of Negroes, and should maintain a position of
due subordination on the part of the slaves in order that the optimum of discipline and
work could be achieved,” according to American Historian and African American
scholar, John Hope Franklin (188).
As a result, Malcolm X, his parents and siblings had to adhere to the regulations that were
established for Negroes. These new regulations were known as Jim Crow laws. These
were discriminatory regulations were not always apparent in society and Blacks
understood the rules that were not. The Constitutional Rights Foundation organization
webpage explains what Jim Crow meant for African Americans:

Jim Crow was a derisive slang term for a black man. It came to mean any
state law passed in the South that established different rules for blacks and
whites. Jim Crow laws were based on the theory of white supremacy and
were a reaction to Reconstruction in the depression-racked 1890’s, racism
appealed to whites who feared losing their jobs to blacks. Politicians
abused blacks to win votes of poor white ‘crackers.’ Newspapers fed the
bias of white readers by playing us (sometimes even making up) black
crimes. Though seemingly rigid and complete, Jim Crow did not account
for all the discrimination Blacks suffered. Unwritten rules barred Blacks
from white jobs in New York and kept them out of white stores in Los Angeles. Humiliation was about the best treatment Blacks who broke such rules could hope for. Groups like the Ku Klux Klan which revived in 1915, used venom and violence to keep Blacks ‘in their place.’

(Constitutional Rights Foundation)

Furthermore, these new rules of discrimination towards African Americans would eventually establish the framework for the Civil Right movement to take place. The Reconstruction Era: 1865 – 1877 taken from Howard University.edu explains, “Cruel and severe black code laws were adopted by southern states after the Civil War to control or reimpose the old social structure. Southern legislatures passed laws that restricted the civil rights of the emancipated former slaves. Mississippi was the first state to institute laws that abolished the full civil rights of African-Americans. ‘An Act to Confer Civil Rights on Freedmen, and for Other Purposes,’ a very misleading title, was passed in 1865.’ These Black codes became the norm as other states began to implement “their own versions and forced Negroes to adhere to them.” (Reconstruction Era)

Historians suggested that codes were restrictive and similar to slavery because Negroes were forced to serve long sentences in prison for various offenses and a state in turn would receive free labor for construction of highways and entire towns. Paul Butler author of “One Hundred Years of Race and Crime” states, “During the Jim Crow era, blacks were discriminated against, disenfranchised, excluded from juries, prevented from bringing legal challenges and denied other civil, political, and legal rights” (1048).
Malcolm X was an adolescent when these Black codes were enforced in Lansing, Michigan but he was cognizant of the rules because as African Americans, he and his family suffered from its discriminatory practices. An example of Jim Crow laws being enforced occurs in his narrative when Malcolm X’s family was restricted about where they could live and where they were allowed to go in town. In most cities and or towns whether they were in the northern or the southern parts of the country, Black people had to live either in the African American section of town or develop an area outside of city limits that White people deemed acceptable. A current example would be the town of Blacksville in Henry, Georgia where all African Americans had to live sometime during the Jim Crow era because they were not allowed with Whites who resided in McDonough, GA. The presence of racial discrimination throughout American society was, to use the words of Samuel Johnson, a fact “too evident for detection and too gross for aggravation,” according to Kenneth J. Arrow a Joan Kenney Professor of Economics Emeritus Stanford and author of “What Has Economics to Say about Racial Discrimination?” (92)

Not only were these African American codes discriminatory towards African Americans, it was very rare that law enforcement would protect them from organizations like the Ku Klux Klan or the Black Legion when they committed a crime against them. All of which, lends to the historical context of his narrative from Malcolm X’s childhood until he goes to prison. The incidents that occur as he is maturing into a young man formulate his understanding of how Blacks are perceived and discriminated against in society. This is why as a Black Nationalist; Malcolm X sought to change the condition of
African Americans because he could not accept the discrimination and discord that they were subjected to by White society. Furthermore, from a historical perspective it also shows that many African Americans across the country had to adhere to the same restrictions that Jim Crow laws dictated across the South. Jim Crow laws did not differentiate for Blacks in terms of skin complexion and or socio-economic status because they were all black under the law.

Furthermore, the reasons and conditions that initiated slavery, the Civil War, Jim Crow laws and the Civil Rights Movement demonstrates racism in America while dispelling myths or romanticized versions of historical facts. Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X’s narratives are permeated with justifications and merit for the lives they experienced, and they counter the negative stereotypes of slaves and Black Nationalists. The historical truths of slavery and racial discrimination were catalysts for a change in the American landscape for African Americans.

The plantation owners and White society wanted African Americans to remain in servitude that originated from slavery. This specific issue can be correlated to the condition of Douglass and Jacobs as the property of White plantation owners. Even though Malcolm X was not a slave or born into slavery, his status in society as an African American boy during the Jim Crow era was established around these discriminatory laws as he developed into a young man that faced racism and prejudice based on the color of his skin. Since all the narrators are African American, their recalling of different events in history show the restrictive and cruel nature of White society that despite their humanitarian ideals were never applied to them. The term *Negro* from the Merriam
Webster Dictionary webpage is defined as, “A race of humankind native to Africa and classified according to physical features (such as dark pigmentation or dark skin). In recent years, however, many people have come to consider the word hurtful, and you may offend someone by using it.” Thus, for the purposes of this study, the term will be used in characterizing the narrators. This is also reflective of the diverse periods that appear in their texts.

Using the theories of psychoanalysis and New Historicism Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X deal with the social construct of race and identity through diverse periods and geographic locations. Further, utilizing the Narrative of Self as a literary technique in each of the text, the narrators reveal innate details about themselves and as Negroes in America. Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis and Lacan’s mirror image theory provides an insight on how Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Malcolm X all experienced traumatizing incidents as adolescents that remained with them in their subconscious as adults. These same experiences shaped the way they saw the world and how they perceived themselves as African Americans. New Historicism as a literary theory provides agency for each text in regards to Douglass and Jacobs being slaves and Malcolm X growing up during Jim Crow era.

**The Narrative Form**

When people read Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X’s narratives, they provide contextual detail and specific characteristics about them that gave their audiences the opportunity to get to know them as individual people and not just African Americans. As a literary device, narratives serve as an instrument for people to communicate their life
experiences and or knowledge to each other. In addition, this phenomenon of sharing life experiences occurs within every culture in the world. Harnet E. Manelis Klein, author of the “Narrative” from Suny Stony Brook explains the narrative form:

The key term narrative has appeared in analyses of myths, legends, life histories, controversial analyses, as an exemplar of discourse, as a pragmatic entity, and as a tool of political rhetoric. For anthropologist and linguistic anthropologist in particular, narrative often meant a form of oral literature, but its contemporary use has included a written form, divulged by speakers, who provide tokens of their culture through speech and interpreters of those tokens. In its most basic usage, narrative can create or elicited. The type of narrative is defined by the roles of the narrators and the listeners. Narratives can be personal; Narratives can be autobiographical. Narratives depend on an audience, and for an appropriate response, require a variety of techniques that at times indicate implicit or explicit evidence of the narrator’s preconceptions and aims. Themes for narratives are culturally determined. (167)

Hence, narratives are a traditionally consistent method to comprehend and discover life experiences. A narrative can elicit emotions, provide answers and or questions and illuminate the social context of events. Additionally, narratives also illustrate transitional points in an individual’s life. These transitional points for Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X in their narratives include but are not limited to times of crisis, escape to freedom, intimidation, discrimination, murder, separation,
family changes, absence of family, rape, sexual abuse and transforming from a street hustler to a Black Nationalist. Samantha Vice, author of “Literature and the Narrative Self” confirms:

In order to understand the distinct credentials of the narrative view, we must first understand the concept of narrative. The view not only has it that we find, or seek, meaning and coherence in our experience of self and world, but that this meaning and coherence is narrative in structure. Essential to the concept of a narrative is that it shows connections between its constitutive elements and traces continuities and changes through time. This is presumably, what differentiates a narrative proper from historical records like annals or chronicles, which list events without noting their larger significance or connections and from more experimental fictional forms that lack coherence or closure. (95)

Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X all utilized the narrative to frame their lives as Black men and women from slavery up to the Civil Rights Movement. There are constitutive elements and changes through time in each of the texts that provide a geographical, social and political context for each text. In essence, their texts are historical records because their audiences are able to experience slavery, the Reconstruction Era, Jim Crow and the Civil Rights Movements from Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X recalling of events in their autobiographies.

As narrators, they are all conveying these historical events as they occurred in their lives. Thus, each event shows a historical progression of Negroes beginning with
slavery until the latter 1960’s. “Narrative Freedom,” written by Robert Zussman suggests, “Race may be a particularly inescapable aspect of identity in the contemporary United States, but other aspects of personal histories and identities, individual and collective, are also difficult to escape. Yet, self-invention is also possible, in small ways and large, in formal autobiographies and in everyday accounts, and, not least, in the ways we lead our lives” (808).

Therefore, readers witnessed firsthand disruptive and unexpected life changes in the narrators’ lives, whether they were social or behavioral. For example, Malcolm X’s behavior began to change drastically once his mother became a widow after the death of his father. He began acting out in school by stealing and getting into trouble because of the murder of his father and city officials refusing to solve it. From this analysis, the reader can perceive how his behavior goes from being a scholar in school to a delinquent almost over-night. This transfer of knowledge from the narrators’ texts provides a foundation as to how authors, more specifically Black authors convey their African American experiences in America.

Moreover, as narrators, their narratives are culturally sensitive with contextualized knowledge that questions both the liberator dynamisms and racial oppression that are integral components of African American life. Robert Zussman calls this aforementioned notion narrative freedom and he further contends:

By narrative freedom I mean simply the ability to tell stories about ourselves in the ways we want, not simply to muster particular facts and events but to draw
meanings and morals about our own lives. In evoking narrative freedom, I do not mean to include the ability to tell (or get away with) explicit and self-conscious lies: although lying certainly happens and raises interesting issues of its own, I have in mind here more the processes of selection and connection, the acts of imaginative construction that are basic to narrative. This selectivity is what makes narrative meaningful, what makes it something more than a mere list of events, what gives narrative an inherently moral quality that is independent and apart from any concerns about objectivity. (Polkinghorne, 1988; White) (808)

For Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, it was crucial for them to narrate their stories about slavery because they wanted to express themselves without any intrusion or outside influence because of what they revealed about their experiences exposed a shameful and gruesome peculiar institution that lasted for 400 years in America. Literature and or narratives that explore the themes of race, self-identity and cultural racism raise questions about the need for diversity in the western literary cannon.

For that reason, Frederick Douglass’s narrative and speeches won over audiences over to the abolitionist cause and gave rise the slave narrative as a genre. “In his first narrative, he combined and equated the achievement of selfhood, manhood, freedom and voice. The resulting lead character of his autobiography is a boy, and then a young man, who is robbed of family and community and who gains an identity not only through escape from Baltimore to Massachusetts but through his ability to create himself through telling his story,” insists Lucinda MacKethan, Distinguished Professor of English Emerita
at North Carolina State University and author of “Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs: American Slave Narrators” (3).

On the contrary, Frederick Douglass was unlike many former slaves that were illiterate and had to articulate their stories to White editors who could then modify them in order to appeal to White America and plantation owners. Arthur P. Davis’ who reviewed “Frederick Douglass and Benjamin Quarles ed. Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass and American Slave, Written by Himself” contends:

Dr. Quarles is quoted as stating, ‘First of all, the work was written by Douglass himself (many of the slave narratives were ‘ghosted), and, therefore, has the kind of immediacy which only firsthand narration can possess; its highly readable work; it has a series of ‘sharply etched portraits; it contains deeply moving descriptions of slave life; it argues strongly against the institution of slavery but always with restraint and decorum; and above all else, it has creditability-‘the book is soundly buttressed with specific data on persons and places, not a single one of them fictitious.’ (270)

As a result, if a White editor recounted an illiterate slave’s narrative then they could depict slavery as a favorable institution that should not be abolished. Whereas if a former slave could tell their own narrative without any unnecessary embellishments or modifications, they could then contradict the plantation owners’ depiction of events and auspicious declarations concerning slavery.
It is also critical to note that according to Henning Lauvanger author of “Analyzing Authorization in the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave” upholds, “The book was one of the first slave narratives penned by the former slave himself. Before slave narratives were related through someone else. By the time of his publication, editors from the abolitionist movement had learned to produce captivating narratives” (22-23). White editors became very ingenious when it came to publishing and sanctioning slave narratives. When they controlled the slave narratives, they would decide what to delete and what remained in the text. In this manner, they could determine what was acceptable and then spread them to larger audiences. Lauvanger further explains, Following the success of other famous autobiographies editors saw it as necessary to emulate the success of such great life narratives; therefore, the role of the editor was less visible in the later slave narratives (1840) and onwards, rather than before when the stories were often related through them” (22-23). The end result was that as a race of people, African Americans exhibited the mastery of the language and the intelligence to compose their own historical accounts of slavery without the influence of White America, despite how white plantation owners and or editors characterized them or wanted to be portrayed in their narratives.

Along these lines, the recounting of events and themes in these slave narratives included but were not limited to families being separated, survival, escape, sexual abuse, heroism, inspiration and the extreme conditions under which slaves lived. As a genre, slave narratives drew audiences in and captivated them with characters such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs which caused audiences with sympathize with the former
fugitive slaves. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. director of the W.E.B. Dubois Institute for African and African American Research and distinguished Alphonse Fletcher University Professor at Harvard University wrote in the introduction of *The Classic Slave Narratives* regarding Frederick Douglass:

The most famous of them all is Frederick Douglass’s 1845 *Narrative*. Classic and elegant in its simplicity and gripping readability, Douglass’s compelling lucidity belies his narrative’s literary complexity, a complexity that masks or disguises itself precisely because Douglass was a master rhetorician, expert in both spoken and written English. Douglass tells such a good tale that his text opens itself to all classes of readers, from those who love a good adventure story to those who wish to have rendered for them in startling detail the facts of human bondage—what it meant to discover that one was a slave and what one proceeded to do about it, while someone was doing all manner of horrendous things to keep that slave from imagining himself or herself otherwise. Douglass’s rhetorical power convinces us that he is ‘the African American slave’ that he embodies the structures and thoughts and feelings of all African American slaves, that he is the resplendent, articulate part that stands for the whole, for the collective slave community. Douglass’s narrative demonstrates not only how the deprivations of the hallmarks of identity can affect a slave but also how the slave owner’s world negates and perverts its own values. Douglass’s language is made to signify the presence and absence of some quality—in this case, humanity itself. Douglass uses this device to
explicate the slave understanding of himself and his relation to the world. (xvii-xviii)

Frederick Douglass’s narrative contradicted the favored structure of slavery where slaves were content with their lives but instead who were emotionally and physically traumatized by their masters. He spoke about the cruelties that he and his family members suffered on the plantations, the need to abolish slavery and his quest for an education.

More significantly, his narrative was conveyed in a strategic and political manner to White America and especially northerners so that they could comprehend and accept it without being offended by his depiction. This design of his narrative was purposeful by Douglass because he knew that he if he was too abrasive and true-to-life with his literary work then not only would his White audience not respond to his abolitionist rationale they would not be persuaded to abolish slavery either. James Matlack author of “The Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass” supports this idea by underscoring:

However resentful of white paternalism, Douglass remained acutely aware of his audience for whom he was writing. The form and style of the Narrative were carefully tailored to persuade and above all, not to offend white readership. Only the white majority had the numbers and power to make a difference on the issues of slavery. Douglass therefore had to avoid affronts to the values and prejudices of pious white Northerners. The most conspicuous aspect of form in the Narrative designed to allay hostile reaction is the “frame” within which the autobiographical
account is placed, a frame provided by two letters of introduction and Douglass’s own Appendix. (18)

In addition, Henning Lauvanger from the Artic University of Norway adds support to the aforementioned notion by accentuating:

Douglass was heavily involved in the antislavery abolitionist movement. This meant that he was probably very aware of the political context of his narrative. Moreover, as it was released with the help of well renowned abolitionists like Wendell Phillips and William Lloyd Garrison there was intention behind the publication that Douglass’s narrative would fuel the antislavery debates. We have also established that many Northerners were skeptical towards ending slavery and even though many supported its abolition, they still saw Afro-Americans as inferior to White Americans. Douglass, then had all the reasons to prove his opponents wrong by releasing his narrative at that particular time in history. (20)

Consequently, the political movement that utilized the state and federal laws when Frederick was a slave influenced his narrative because they were implemented to control the slaves and or the free Negroes population across the country.

Historically, political movements and ideologies in narratives or autobiographies that involve physical or mental trauma can advocate for human rights but may also be a warning to future generations not to make the same mistakes and provide a means for people to comprehend the social and cultural context in which people lived and or survived. By developing his narrative, Frederick Douglass was able to campaign for the
human rights of slaves while providing the discourse about the institution of slavery. Further he explained why it caused such suffering to humankind. It was his activism that led him to become an orator, owner of his own newspaper, author and political leader.

Jessica Wahma author of “Illusions and Disillusionment: Santayana/Narrative, and Self Narrative” explains the purpose of the narrative as:

The ability and even the need to engage in storytelling has long been recognized as an important factor in human life; it can both unite members of a group under a cohesive narrative and provide individuals with a unique sense of identity as they define their particular place within a social schema. Narrative, then, can be seen to play a sort of adaptive role: the stories we tell ourselves about whom we are and where we fit in help us to navigate through a wildly complex social scene and to retain our sense of personal distinction within that public sphere. Furthermore, reflection on these narratives can aid us in self-knowledge, in charting a course toward a more mature account of ourselves both as individuals and as members of a species functioning within the greater workings of nature. (164)

If this true, then Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X’s narratives presented their personal experiences and revealed intimate details about themselves, which included their ideas, character, hopes and fears in such a way that White Americans could absorb and comprehend their individual struggles. Moreover, their narratives provided them with a mechanism to construct, interpret and visibly project racially constituted images of themselves in face to face interaction with the world. There
is a relationship between the “narrative and self-such that narrative can be said to be play a privileged role in the process of self-construction.” To further add to this explanation, Robert Zussman author of “Narrative Freedom” argues that there two types of narratives when he sustains:

One dimension, then, in distinguishing narratives is the authority of the audience for that narrative. In some cases, the audience (a police officer, a priest, a physician) is able to direct the narrative. These are narratives generated from the top down. In other cases, there may be an audience, actual or imagined, but one without authority over form or content. These are narratives generated from the bottom up. But there is also a second dimension to narratives. Narratives, particularly narratives of the self, may be distinguished by intention and consequence. Some narratives are meant to be restorative and integrative: They are meant to restore society as it has been or, at least, as some group believes it should have been, by integrating or reintegrating a transgressor or stray. This is very much the case for confessions, again both criminal and religious, generated from above, but it is also the case at reunions, generated from below. By contrast, other narratives are meant not to restore but to transform the individuals who tell them and often, by implication, society as well. This is again the case among the kind of autobiographies created within identity movements, generated from below, typically meant self-consciously to transform the meaning or evaluation of an identity; But something similar is also the case in many therapeutic moments, generated by an authority, but with the intention not of restoring the storyteller to
some previous state so much as transforming him or her into something or someone new. A second dimension of narratives, then, is whether they are restorative or transformative. (811-812)

Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs’ memoirs were meant to restore society by expressing the need to abolish slavery and obtain equal rights for African Americans as they transformed into abolitionists. Whereas Malcolm X’s memoir was about his individual transformation into an African American nationalist who wanted African Americans restored to their natural state by separating from White society.

Miller, Potts, Fung, Hoogstra and Mintz, author(s) of “Narrative Practices and the Social Construction of Self in Childhood” contend, “Once of the narrative-self affinity is a shared temporal dimension; both the experiences of self and the events in a narrative are organized with respect to time (Ricoeur 1984). The narrative form is thus especially well-suited to representing that basic psychological dimension of the self that Hallowell called self-continuity. Hallowell used this term to refer to an individual’s capacity to relate temporally distinct experiences through personal memories within an organized structure, a process that is a functional requirement for the experience of self-awareness (292).

Throughout the narrators’ texts, they relate through stories through historical periods of enslavement, freedom, the Civil War, Reconstruction and the Civil Rights movement that add to the context of their individual narratives. These periods in their texts are key to each of their narratives as a means of self-identification and their
multicultural interaction in America. Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm
X’s texts also expose the historically oppressive systems of racism, prejudice and
discrimination in their narratives as they seek to comprehend why African Americans are
targeted by White America. Although these concepts in their narratives are of a sensitive
nature, it is why they provoked reactions from their audiences while helping to construct
their own self-identities and their limitations as revealed in the texts.

Hence, these narrators provide honest revelations about their identities from
adolescent to adulthood that are controversial and challenging by utilizing language that
accurately conceptualizes their experiences as Negroes. As a result, Douglass, Jacobs and
Malcolm X’s narratives gave them a means of expression and the ability to comprehend
who they were as individuals. E.V. Wolfenstein, author of “Race, Racism and Racial
Liberation” observed:

Stating the point more generally, we may say the Negro identity (like any other
externally imposed and therefore stereotypically limited identity) is a character-
form of group emotion, determined through the mediation of identification with
the oppressor, conscience and consciousness are both whitened out, and African
Americanness becomes firmly attached to unacceptable, predominantly
aggressive, infantile emotional impulses. African American people and white
people alike come to have a character-structure in which the I, including the moral
I, is white, and the It is African American. Within this relationship, African
American people can think of themselves as fully human only by denying their
true racial identity, while white people secure their humanity only at the price of African American dehumanization. (145)

African Americans attempt to maneuver through a racist society within a social hierarchy that continually dehumanizes them based on the color of their skin and not their character.
CHAPTER III
FREDERICK DOUGLASS

His Narrative

Frederick Douglass is quoted as stating, “Without a struggle, there can be no progress. Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe.” When Douglass began to narrate his memoirs, he wanted the country to hear his story from bondage to freedom in his own words, not from a ghostwriter or white editor who could misconstrue and embellish his personal memoir. The reason for this is if white editor controlled what was written about him, then they could develop the narrative while omitting the harsh realities that he endured as a slave.

Thence, as an ex-slave, he was no longer dominated by the plantation owner’s whip nor his words. Lucinda Mackethan, Distinguished Professor of English Emerita at North Carolina State University and author of “Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs American Slave Narrators” discusses the importance of ex-fugitive slave narrating their memoirs when she illuminates, “White abolitionist urged slave writers to follow well-defined conventions and formulas to produce what they saw as one of the most potent propaganda weapons in their arsenal. They also insisted on authenticating endorsements
of the slave’s narratives through prefaces and introductions. Yet for the writer’s themselves, the opportunity to tell their stories constituted something more personal; a means to write an identity within a country that legally denied their right to exist as human beings” (7). As narrators, they utilized methods to “individualize their narratives to speak in their own voices in a quest for selfhood that had to be balanced against the aims and values of their audiences.” Scholar Robert Zussman further asserts:

The effort at self-invention is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the long tradition of African-American autobiographical writing. This is a literature that most often both claims African Americanness and attempts to transform its meaning. This effort is present in Frederick Douglass's (1999) *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and Harriet Jacobs's (1973) *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, in James Baldwin's (1955) *Notes of a Native Son*, in the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1964), in Maya Angelou's (1970) *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, and, more recently, in Barack Obama's (1995) *Dreams from My Father*. In each of these autobiographies, the narrative is an expression of self-invention, a matter of the author putting in words the process of his or her own self-discoveries. However, each is also itself an act of self-invention. The writing does not simply reflect a self but creates one, does not simply report an identity but claims one, does not simply claim an identity but transforms that identity. (809)

Cited in the introduction of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass; An American Slave*, “Wendell Phillips, writing to Douglass ‘in added encouragement’ about
his memoirs said in a letter printed as a preface to the *Narrative*, “You remember the old fable of ‘The Man and the Lion,’ where the lion complained that he should not be so misrepresented ‘when the lions wrote history’? I am so glad the time has come when the lions write history.” (ix) As the “lion” and the narrator, Frederick Douglass sought to have a deliberate engagement about slavery with the White American audience in his text and the speeches he gave all over the country. There may be contemplations about the origins of American slavery and the freedom that eluded African Americans who were in bondage, but Frederick Douglass as a narrator discusses their racial oppression and connects it to the public sphere of the ante-bellum south. “All in all, if there hadn’t been slave narrative writers, especially Frederick Douglass the conscience of the American nation wouldn’t have been awakened in order to put an end to slavery,” proclaims Dr. Natasha Kampark, author of “Frederick Douglass-Criticism of Slavery in Narrative of Frederick Douglass an American Slave” (2).

In addition, author James Matlack, author “The Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass,” discusses how Douglass’ white sponsor wanted him to craft his work for White America as a narrator when he reveals:

Douglass’s white sponsors did not want him to analyze present conditions or try shape future actions. They were to be the interpreters and prophets-in short, the leaders-and he was the showcase specimen of a fugitive slave. In penning his *Narrative*, Douglass broke this cycle. He jettisoned the obsessive preoccupation with his past life and freed himself for more ambitious work. This was symbolic
gesture of near-defiance an assertion of independence from a certain kind of psychological and role-playing bondage perpetuated by those whites who were most insistently proclaiming the freedom of Negro Americans. It was also a mark of Douglass’s self-strong assurance. (17)

To illustrate this point, Harry S. Stout who wrote “Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War” quotes Frederick Douglass by providing his thoughts about the “possible” results of the Civil War, “The law and the sword cannot abolish the malignant slaveholding sentiment which has kept the slave system alive in this country during two centuries. Pride of race, prejudice against color, will raise their hateful clamor for oppression of the Negro as heretofore. The slave having ceased to be the abject slave of a single master, his enemies will endeavor to make him the slave of society at large” (187). Stout further expounds, “To Douglass, the confusion between slavery and race was fatal, although even he could not guess how enduring the effects of that confusion would be” (43).

Frederick’s life as a slave was unpredictable because of the social, political and cultural conditions that existed during slavery. Conversely as an ex-fugitive and narrator, he wanted to raise awareness about the atrocities of slavery in his narrative so that White America could have a dialogue as to why it should be abolished as a societal institution. Even among the abolitionists there were strong racial prejudices. Douglass said in the mid-1850s: “Opposing slavery and hating its victims has come to be a very common form of abolitionism. The crucial role of African Americans in the anti-slavery struggle was
generally acknowledged but it was narrowly defined. African Americans were to tell of their first-hand experience in bondage and, by the very act of successful platform presentation, refute the charge that Negroes suffered inherent mental disabilities,” stresses James Matlack, author of “The Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass” (16). Furthermore, once Frederick was liberated, he was no longer under the control of the whip and the words of the white enslavers.

Historically, cultural racism continues to be a social contemporary problem that originated with slavery. In his text, Frederick Douglass is a slave, then an ex-fugitive who eventually becomes a Black author whose story becomes a part of the American literary cannon. Frederick’s self-development from a slave through some life fluctuating events to an abolitionist speaker create his identity in his narrative. Therefore, his racial identity as an African American man and ex-fugitive impels the way he tells his narrative. Senior Lecturer, Didik Murwantono, at the College of Languages at UNISSULA and author of “Psychanalytic Literary Criticism of American Romanticism Literature As Reflected In Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass,” proclaims, “Instead of telling his life in a set of events, Frederick Douglass wrote in a form of an autobiography in which he could put forward his feelings-regret, fear, sadness, hope, love and despair personally. It shows how instead of sinking him to a weak and helpless condition, Douglass’s feelings make him strong and firm to determine his path to gain freedom” (136).
Accordingly, from Douglass’ text, scholars are able to expose the social and cultural conditions of slavery while assessing the language he utilized to comprehend Douglass as a character in his own narrative. Samantha Vice, author of “Literature and the Narrative Self” proclaims:

Similarly, to a currently popular view, selfhood or identity is constituted by the narratives that we tell about ourselves. More precisely, we are characters-usually the protagonists-of the stories we tell or could tell about ourselves. Experience, in other words, is essentially narrative in form. (93)

Ergo, selfhood and the art of the narrative are collaborative efforts that provide a lens for our experiences to be intimately shared with others and the world.

In the beginning of the narrative, Frederick Douglass discusses his parents and the fact that he does not know when he was born when he stated:

I was born in Tuckahoe, near Hillsborough and about twelve miles from Easton, in Talbot County. I have not accurate knowledge of my age, never having seen any authentic record containing it. By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their ages as horses know theirs and it is the wish of most masters within my knowledge to keep slaves ignorant. The white children tell their ages. I could not tell why I ought to be deprived of the same privilege. My mother was named Harriet Bailey. She was the daughter of Isaac and Betsey Bailey. My mother was of a darker complexion than either my grandmother or grandfather. My father was
a white man. He admitted to be such by all I ever heard speak of my parentage

(Chapter one- Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave)

Thereupon, his initial realization from this passage is that he is subservient to the plantation owners and the slave-owning society in which he lives. Lisa Yun Lee author of “The Politics of Language in Frederick Douglass’s Narrative of the Life of an American Slave” emphasizes:

Gates points out those negative statements reveal Douglass’s extreme lack and deprivation of knowledge (Gates 90). These negative statements are followed by statements about Douglass absent slave mother and unknown white father. He emphasizes his ignorance about them: ‘I know nothing; the means of knowing are withheld from me’ (21-22). Douglass thus reveals the gaps in knowledge that contribute to his marginality. He is a mulatto slave who furthermore doesn’t even know his own origin. Society recognizes him as neither man nor animal. Moreover, Douglass is denied a means of expression, of language by which he could become his own man. The young Douglass is in effect a decentered subject as he is dehumanized prevented from establishing self. (54-55)

Frederick attempts to identify himself outside of the confines of his master and society because he comprehends why they wanted to keep slaves ignorant. This first example of eradicating his identity and that of other African Americans on plantations is the fact that he did not know when he was born. Author James Matlack contends, “He began, however, with nothing. Most autobiographies open with a birth date and a description of
the author’s parentage. Douglass can supply neither” (21). Douglass makes the
comparison that even “horses knew their birthday” but not slaves. Dr. Natasa Kampark
further suggests “He had no special day to celebrate his individuality-because slaves had
no individuality, they did not exist as human beings at all” (4). Thus, the construction of
his identity and race are crucial to his development as slave and eventually a free man of
color.

Still, the brutality and horrors of slavery were constant assaults on the physical
and psychological wellbeing of slaves. Their masters, enslavers or white people were
always subjecting slaves to physical and psychological trauma in general, especially in
the antebellum South. Therefore, these acts of violence, intimidation or physical abuse
motivated Frederick Douglass as an ex-fugitive to re-identify himself where he was no
longer deconstructed and dehumanized by his enslavers. Douglass’s narrative rebuilds his
identity starting from being an illegitimate child by providing him with a voice as a
former victim of slavery. Once Douglass was able tour America as an ex-fugitive, he
verbalized the struggles and fears of those slaves that were still living on the plantation
across the country. Lucinda MacKethan, Distinguished Professor of English Emerita at
North Carolina State University and author of “Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs
American Slave Narrators” confirms:

Douglass’s 1845 narrative grew out of the story of enslavement that he honed as a
speaker for the Massachusetts Antislavery Society. ‘Discovered’ and hired to
lecture on the abolitionist circuit by William Lloyd Garrison in 1841, three years
after he had made escape from Baltimore, Douglass developed rhetorical devices common to sermons and orations and carried these over to his narrative which abounds with examples of repetition, antithesis, and other classical persuasive strategies. Douglass also reflected the Emerson idealism so prominent in the 1840s, as he cast himself in the role of the struggling hero asserting his individual moral principles in order to bring conscience to bear against the nation’s greatest evil. In addition, his story could be read as a classic male ‘initiation myth,’ a tale which traced a youth’s growth from innocence to experience and from boyhood into successful manhood; for Douglass, the testing and journey motifs of this genre were revised to highlight the slave’s will to transform himself from human chattel into a free American citizen. (2)

Douglass’s narrative demonstrates how he utilized his race and re-identified himself not only as not a man but an ex-fugitive who politically and methodically constructed it to appeal to America and white northern abolitionists.

Moreover, Douglass’s absence of parentage or familial connection further deconstructed his identity because he was still considered to be property even if he was the son of the plantation owner. Unfortunately, his mother died when he was seven. James Matlack reaffirms, “Douglass’ father was white, but he never knew which among the slavers it might be. Progeny of the oppressors lacking any roots or identity, how could young Douglass know or say who he was? His very name was given to him by a white master. Nor should one underestimate the power of slavery to dehumanize its subjects”
Douglass validates his lack of identity by confessing, “I have found that, to make a contended slave, it is necessary to make a thoughtless one. It is necessary to darken his moral and mental vision, and, as far as possible, to annihilate the power of reason…. He must be made to feel that slavery is right; and he can be brought to that only when he ceases to be a man” (133). Frederick therefore was forced to forge a “his own character and sense of himself out of nothingness” (21).

More importantly, this practice was very common for white plantation owners to impregnate their slave women by creating more slaves to sell or work on their plantations. Then either the slave woman and the illegitimate children or just the children were put on the auction block or put on the plantation to work in the fields. When Frederick Douglass’s mother Harriet suddenly dies and he is not allowed to attend her funeral, he realizes that she never revealed who his father was to him in the little amount of time they had together. “Called thus suddenly away she left me without the slightest intimation of who my father was. The whisper that my master was my father, may or may not be true; and, true or false, it is of but little consequence to my purpose whilst the fact remains, in all its glaring odiousness, that slaveholders have ordained, and by law established that the children of slave women in all cases follow the condition of their mothers; and this is done too obviously to administer to their own lusts, and make a gratification of their wicked desires profitable as well as pleasurable; for by this cunning arrangement, the slaveholder, in cases not a few, sustains to his slaves the double relation of master and father,” writes Douglass. (21) Michael Hardin, author of “Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man: Invisibility, Race, and Homoeroticism from Frederick Douglass to E.
Lynn Harris” upheld, "Clearly the South was the area before the end of slavery where miscegenation was most common, but since the product of that act would be considered property, there was not the economic incentive for slave owners to discourage such practices. However, once slavery is ended, and African Americans are given (some) standing under the law, the incentive to reproduce "whiteness" becomes all the more important socially as well as politically” (98). Since his mother was a slave on the plantation and Frederick Douglass was their child, his father was the enslaver and master of them both. He recalls how he infrequently saw her in the narrative, so they never had the opportunity to establish a true mother/son connection. Frederick Douglass describes the relationship with his mother in Chapter one:

My mother and I were separated when I was but an infant-before I knew her as my mother. It is a common custom, in the part of Maryland from which I ran away, to part children from their mothers at a very early age. Frequently before the child reaches its twelfth month, its mother is taken from it and hired out on some farm a considerable distance off, and the child is placed under the care of an old woman too old for field labor. For what this separation is done, I do not know, unless it be to hinder development of the child’s affection toward its mother, and to blunt and destroy the natural affection of the mother for the child. This is the inevitable result. (20)

Dr. Natasa Kampmark explains behind the separation of slave children from their mothers when she adds support:
We should understand that, because the slaveholders removed children from their parents it was because they wanted to destabilize families and make the parents (the slaves) more focused on their work. Also, children slaves were sold at slave markets. As Douglass writes, ‘it was common custom.’ Slavery prevented the both the child and the mother to make a natural bond, which is one of the basic bonds in the world. The only time Douglass had the chance to see his mother was at Colonel Lloyd’s plantation, and what is worse, these visits were few in number brief in duration and mostly made at night. (3)

When we read Douglass’s confession we can visualize how he was impressed and astonished with the troubles his mother had to go through and obstacles just to see him.

Frederick Douglass was further psychologically traumatized as an adolescent because he was separated from his mother as an infant. Cited from author and former slave Charles Ball book titled, *Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball, a African American Man, Who Lived Forty Years in Maryland, South Carolina and Georgia, as a Slave, Under Various Masters, and Was One Year in The Navy With Commodore Barney, During the Late War, Containing an Account of the Manners and Treatment of the Slaves, With Observations Upon the State of Morals Amongst the Cotton Planters, and the Perils and Sufferings of a Fugitive Slave, Who Twice Escaped from the Cotton Country*

http://docsouth.unc.edu/ballslavery/menu.html and Desiree Bell, author of *Childhood in Slavery*, upholds:
The environment where a slave spent his or her infancy through childhood set the foundation of the slave child's life. Slave children were often forced to move when they were sold to different masters. Many slave children were taken from their families as early as three years old. Some stayed with their families as old as seven and some lucky slave children were never removed from their family. In most situations, slave children were sold several times throughout their childhood. Some, if given the opportunity, were later able to return to their original plantations but it was seldom possible.

Frederick Douglass was denied the affection between a mother and child, which further reduced his identity of self.

A child who does not have a familial connection, cannot articulate nor his explain existence in the world. Dr. Peter Ernest Haiman, author of *Effects of Separation on Young Children: Implications For Family Court Decision Making* cites on his website how a child cannot be impacted when separated from their primary caregiver from a psychological perspective, “Thus, from an emotional standpoint, the most essential task of the first three years of life is the creation of a secure attachment between the infant and its primary caregiver, who is usually the mother. This bond is built through the consistent interplay of a highly complex and sophisticated, but purely emotional, communication taking place between the primary caregiver and the child. Studies have demonstrated that the manifestations of right brain growth and development that occur within the first two to three years can last a lifetime” (Schore, 2002). Children who grow up feeling secure in
their primary relationship will undergo normal emotional development. They will be equipped to handle constructively most traumas that may occur, either during childhood or later in life. According to neuropsychologist Allan Schore, “security of the attachment bond is the primary defense against trauma-induced psychopathology.”

Dr. Haima further expounds, “children that are subjected to disruptive separation from their mothers or primary caregivers at an early age lack a secure foundation, which causes them have less impulse control, overreact to stimuli cannot handle stress and are less likely to tolerate frustration,” than those children who experience a stable childhood. When Frederick experienced the loss of his mother, “feelings of loss and fear” overwhelmed him and therefore he intrinsically developed a need for self-expression. He was frustrated with the loss of his family and or the physical and social conditions of slaves. Dr. Haima believes, “The child can feel forcibly silenced as a result. The child feels a powerful need to say something, but at the same time feels this need must be forcibly repressed.”

In view of the fact that Frederick was a child slave and an African American, the absence of his parents made him an orphan as an infant that further contributed to his devaluation as a person and mandatory silence. This is why he conveys his loss of a family connection at the very beginning of his narrative even though Douglass has a grandmother with whom he stays with occasionally. However, once his mother dies, an aunt, two sisters, one brother and some cousins are present, but his strongest familial connection was with his mother, Harriet. “My mother was dead; my grandmother lived
far off, so that I seldom saw her. I had two sisters and one brother, that lived in the same house with me; but the early separation of us from our mother had well-nigh blotted the fact of our relationship from our memories,” writes Douglass (44).

Under these circumstances and as a young child, the beginning of Douglass’s narrative clearly describes the White supremacist gaze upon him that physically oppressed his presence and psychologically controlled his existence because of his race. Additionally, it exhibits that slave children were subjected to the physical and emotional trauma of slavery just as the adults were because of the political and social mores at the times, which stayed with them as they matured into adults, as in the case of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs. Derek Hook in his article titled, “Fanon and the Psychoanalysis of Racism” affirms:

If we are looking for the cause of neurotic disturbances, says Freud (and hence, a means to cure them), one must always look to the childhood history of the individual. The symptoms of neurosis are always linked to a kind of physical trauma, which lends them their individual character. More than this, we are not always looking for a single event, for the cause of the symptom most often arises out of ‘multiple traumas, frequently analogous and repeated’ (Freud, cited in Fanon, 1986, 44) Such traumas are expelled from the conscious mind as means of saving the neurotic from great suffering. Hence, the neurosis of the African American man or woman need not then have stemmed from actual experiences (the witnessing of the lynching of one’s father is the example Fanon gives (1986),
but rather from fantasized experiences or, more to the point from indirect or cultural forms of oppression or trauma. Then again, one might argue it would seem that real examples of traumatic racist violence or abuse would seem quite commonplace in the colonial environment. (118)

Having already established his adolescent existence and lack of identity early in the narrative, as Frederick grows into a boy on Colonel Lloyd’s plantation he begins to experience some life altering and traumatizing events that will develop him into a future abolitionist.

The first of these traumatizing incidents is where he witnessed the merciless whipping of his Aunt Hester. The overseer at Colonel Lloyd’s plantation was Mr. Plummer which Frederick described as being, “a miserable drunkard, a profane swearer and savage monster. He always went armed with a cow skin and a heavy cudgel. I have known him to cut and slash the women’s heads so horribly, that even master would be enraged at his cruelty, and would threaten to whip him if he did not mind himself” (22). The life altering event that traumatized Douglass was him witnessing Mr. Plummer brutalizing his Aunt Hester with his whip. Frederick Douglass recalls:

I remember the first time I ever witnessed this horrible exhibition. I was quite a child, but I well remember it. It was first of a long series of outrages, of which I was doomed to be a witness and a participant. It struck me with awful force. It was the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which I
was about to pass. It was a most terrible spectacle. I wish I could commit to paper the feelings with which I beheld it. (23)

Aunt Hester disappeared off the plantation one night when Colonel Lloyd desired her presence. Additionally, she had been forewarned on numerous occasions by Colonel Lloyd not to be caught in the presence of Ned Roberts. Ned had an interest in Hester and Colonel Lloyd was not pleased about the possibility of them marrying. Douglass recalls Hester was of “noble form, and of graceful proportions, having very few equals, and fewer superiors, in personal appearance, among colored women of our neighborhood” (23). When Aunt Hester is discovered, she is in the presence in Ned and is found guilty of disobeying Colonel Lloyd’s order, it is ordered that she is to be whipped for committing this offense at the hands of Mr. Plummer. Frederick Douglass depicts the brutal scene as:

Before he commenced to whipping Aunt Hester, he took her into the kitchen, and stripped her from neck to waist, leaving her neck, shoulders and back, entirely naked. He then told her cross her hands, calling her at the same time a d------d b-- -----h. After crossing her hands, he tied them with a strong rope, and led her to a stool under a large hook in the joist, put in for the purpose. He made her get upon the stool, and tied her hands to the hook. Her arms were stretched up at their full length, so that she stood upon the ends of her toes. He then said to her, “Now, you d-------d b-----h, I’ll learn you how to disobey my orders!” and after rolling up his sleeves, he commenced to lay on the heavy cow-skin, and soon the warm, red
blood (amid heart-rendering shrieks from her, and horrid oaths from him) came dripping to the floor. (24)

When the “bloody transaction” was over, Douglass expected that he would be next in line for a whipping while hiding in a closet. Lisa Yun Lee, author of “The Politics of Language in Frederick Douglass’s Narrative of the Life of an American Slave” acknowledges:

Rhetorically, Douglass narrates as a voiceless observer. In the first half of the book, he never depicts himself as physically or verbally impacting upon situations nor does he even show himself imagining to do so. He suffers in silence and conveys to the reader what he has seen. This rhetorical strategy of voyeur is even more apt given the historical laws which forced slaves to witness daily crimes against themselves and others, yet prevented slaves from filing suit or testifying in court (40). Again, and again, Douglass reenacts the scene of powerless watcher as he is forced to watch others torture Aunt Hester (26), young and old Barney (34), Demby (40) and so on. (52)

Until that point in the narrative, he had never witnessed a whipping because he had lived with his grandmother on the outskirts of the plantation. This only the first of the bloody transactions that Douglass witnesses because his wife’s cousin was murdered who was between “fifteen and sixteen years of age” by her mistress. His cousin was murdered because she fell asleep watching Mrs. Hick’s baby and the baby cried endlessly through the night. Mrs. Hicks “seized an oak stick of wood by the fireplace, and with it broke the
girl’s nose and breastbone, and thus ended her life” (41). According to Douglass, Mrs.
Hicks was never prosecuted for the crime although a “warrant was issued for her arrest”
(41).

Importantly, there is an element of scapegoating at here in the victims of
punishment and aggression in such narratives are typically not, in view of the full
historical reality, really deserving of the violence meted out on them. This is a
mechanism that Fanon makes use of in his analysis of racism also, and he is fully
aware of the bizarre (if unconscious) logic that is at work here: a hating of one’s
victims proportionate to the guilt one feels for the injustices and violence one has
subjected them to! This, then, is one psychoanalytic interpretation of racism;
racial hatred arises from the need to deal with feelings of guilt that have emerged
from acts of violence, injustice or oppression that one has perpetuated on a
particular racial grouping, declares Derek Hook. (120)

After these dreadful events occur, Frederick Douglass is sent to the Auld plantation to
work in Baltimore, Maryland. He recalls, “I was probably between seven and eight years
old when I left Colonel Lloyd’s plantation. I left with joy. I shall never forget the ecstasy
with which I received the intelligence that my old master Anthony had determined to let
me to go Baltimore, to live with Mr. Hugh Auld, brother to my old master’s son-in-law”
(43). Douglass further elaborates regarding this journey, “I look upon my departure from
Colonel Lloyd’s plantation as one of the most interesting events of my life. It is possible,
and even quite probable, that but for the mere circumstance of being removed from that
plantation to Baltimore, I should have to-day, instead of being here seated by own table,
in the enjoyment and happiness of home, writing this Narrative, been confined in the
galling chains of slavery” (46).

Douglass believed that God showed him favor and interceded on his behalf in
order for him to gain his freedom by leaving Colonel Lloyd’s plantation. This is a
secondary example of a life fluctuating event for Douglass because it is where he will be
introduced to education for the first time as a young slave in the Auld home. In turn, this
specific incident of him learning how to read and illustrating it in his narrative is just one
of the many attempts by Douglass to negate any disputes that enslavers and White
America had against slavery. From this perspective, Douglass has utilized himself as a
politician and his arguments against slavery in his story serve as the arena for the
apparent political cause to abolish it as an institution.

When he first meets Mrs. Auld, she appears kind and warm-hearted to Douglass
who is not used to slave-owners showing any compassion towards him. Moreover, she
proceeds to teach Frederick the alphabet because she is unaware of the strict codes about
educating slaves and she has never owned a slave before him. He recollects his first
informal education session when he endorses:

Very soon after I went to live with Mr. and Mrs. Auld, she very kindly
commenced to teach me the A, B, C. After I had learned this, she assisted me in
learning to spell words of three or four letters. Just at this point of my progress,
Mr. Auld found out what was going on, and at once forbade Mrs. Auld to instruct
me further, telling her, among other things that it was unlawful, as well as unsafe,
to teach a slave to read. To use his own words, further, he said, ‘If you give a
nigger an inch, he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his
master-to do as he is told. Learning will spoil the best nigger in the world.’ Now,
‘he said, ‘if you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would
be no keeping him.’ (48)

As previously mentioned, he learned the alphabet from Sophia Auld, but she ceased to do
so when her husband caught her in the act of teaching him how to read. African-
American historian and author, John Hope Franklin in his work titled, From Slavery to
Freedom emphasizes, “The case of Frederick Douglass having been taught by his
mistress is perhaps the best -known instance of an owner teaching a slave,” (202).
Henning Lauvanger author of “Analyzing Authorization in the Narrative Life of
Frederick Douglass, An American Slave,” corroborates this event:

With this statement, Hugh Auld elaborates on common conceptions regarding
slaves and slaveholding prevalent in the South during the 19th century. He justifies
the fact that Mrs. Auld could not teach Douglass how to read, because this could
potentially “harm” the poor slave boy, and in the end make him unhappy. For
Douglass however, this event came as a blessing. He now realizes how the white
man’s power is used to enslave the African American man. Douglass states, ‘This
was a special revelation, explaining dark and mysterious things, with which my
youthful understanding had struggled but struggled in vain.’ (28-29)
Douglass had an epiphany about several ideas while living in Baltimore. First, he realized that becoming educated would physically and psychologically free from his enslavers. Frederick Douglass was prevented from becoming educated, but he soon realized that with an education came knowledge and freedom. His desire to obtain knowledge only made him more determined to physically escape slavery by obtaining an education. Knowledge was power, and his white enslavers maintained it both socially and politically.

Secondly, in his text he also refers to the rural countryside from where he came from versus the city of Baltimore where he is sent to live where slaves were vastly different. This is because slaves that lived in rural areas or the countryside were observed closely because enslavers feared they would run away. Whereas slaves and or freedmen who lived in northern cities such as Philadelphia, Boston and or Baltimore were given limited mobility, exchanged intellectual ideals and experienced some social freedoms that slaves that lived in rural areas could not. Despite being a slave, the city of Baltimore gave Frederick a plausible opportunity to be physically be free in the future, while he was being enlightened about the world. As long as Douglass stayed in the North, he was physically closer to freedom than he ever was living down South or in rural areas of the country. Cited in Winifred Morgan’s article titled, “Gender Related Difference in the Slave Narratives of Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass,” Dr. Eric Sunquist, American scholar of literature and author of “Frederick Douglass: Literacy and Paternalism” discloses:
Both the contents and the serial development of his autobiographical writings make evident the subversive lesson young Frederick first learned in reading the alphabet—that literacy is power. The Narrative demonstrates in 1845 how someone has gained control of his life by gaining control over the means of communication (79) (109). He says, ‘From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom’ (28).

“The quest for literacy is a class trait in slave narratives. In a sense, he embodies what is being denied to slaves, and with his intent to learn how to read and write he disproves every argument the white hegemony has against it,” writes Lauvanger (29).

As a companion to the aforementioned research, author Winifred Morgan espouses on the theme of literacy in slave narratives when she validates:

For example, critics have almost invariably cited the hunger for literacy as one of the most prominent themes found in slave narratives; scholars repeat as a truism that the narratives stress the importance of learning to read and write. In their introduction to The Slave’s Narrative, for example, Charles Davis and Dr. Henry Louis Gates Jr. base their explanation for several common strategies encountered in the narratives on a preoccupation with literacy presumably found in all slave narratives. Gates and Davis generalize that in their concern about writing, narrators depict vivid scenes describing their learning to read and write, underscore the dominant culture’s strictures against African-American literacy, and intertwine an ‘ironic apologia’ for their literary limitations with denunciations
of the system that has refused the slave ‘development of his capacities’ emphasis added. (75)

Furthermore, Winifred cites scholar and author Lucinda MacKethan to further substantiate her point, “From Fugitive” where she discusses the correlation where Douglass “utilizes strategies to validate his role as a “fugitive American slave narrator…seeking in a written document to prove that” he has successfully appropriated through language the free territory he claims. MacKethan notes the close connection as well for Douglass between the acquisition of literacy and personal autonomy” (57).

Even though Mrs. Auld ceased teaching him how to read, Frederick Douglass discovered another avenue to learn on his own. To this end, Douglass declares:

The plan which I adopted, and the one by which I was most successful, was that of making friends of all the little white boys whom I met in the street. As many of these as I could, I converted into teachers. I used also to carry bread with me, enough of which was always in the house, and to which I was always welcome; for I was much better off in this regard than many of the poor white children in our neighborhood. This bread I used to bestow upon the hungry little urchins, who in return would give me that more valuable bread of knowledge. (53)

As a result, while Douglass continues to struggle to obtain his physical freedom, he has begun to liberate his mind in order to remove himself from under the psychological veil of ignorance and racism that the enslavers have placed upon him and that he endures as a Black man. Derek Hook asserts, “One account of racism, then, is that it involves an
attempt to externalize, to ‘project out’ those qualities of one’s self that one finds reprehensible, ‘to ascribe [their] origins to someone else’ (Fanon, 1986, 190). One thus avoids having to confront certain qualities of the self. It is in this way that ‘African American man stands for the bad side of character’ (189) What we are able to perceive in white racism, then, is ‘an expression of the bad instincts, of the darkness inherent in every ego, of the uncivilized savage, the Negro who slumbers in every white man” (125). James Matlack, author of The Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass adds, “Douglass’ Narrative tells such a story in an unusually profound and literal way. The central movement of the book is a process of liberation. There are two essential components in this process-literacy, to gain awareness of his self-hood; and resistance, to assert his manhood. Paradoxically, Douglass had to liberate himself psychologically before he could attempt to become free” (21).

At the same time, the language serves as a vital mechanism for Douglass quest for freedom. “In all slave narratives, the fugitive or former slaves relate their trials as slaves, their flight to freedom, and finally, their dedication to helping others flee slavery. As in other slave narratives, Douglass’s Narrative makes this pattern explicit; but in addition, Douglass further organizes his narrative around the theme of increasing control over his life as a path toward personal independence. Perhaps the paramount virtue in his Narrative is the individual’s courage, and the crucial weapon-in a struggle where armed conflict would be suicidal-is the word,” claims Winifred Morgan (77). It is evident in Frederick’s narrative that his enslavers and white male politicians control ex-slaves and
those that still resided on the plantations, which continued to maintain the existing cultural and social views of African American inferiority.

As a young boy on Colonel’s Lloyd’s plantation to his arrival to the Auld’s home in Baltimore, Maryland, Frederick Douglass comprehends that as long as he is a slave and Negro, that the dominant culture does not want him to develop a person or as a man. It is also important to note that Frederick Douglass is living in Baltimore, Maryland, when he learns the word “abolition” and he connects its definition to the conditions of the Negro race with regards to the term “anti-slavery.” Charles H. Nichols who wrote “Who Read the Slave Narratives?” declares, “Furthermore, the idea of the Negro’s biological inferiority, the notion of his separateness from American culture took a firmer grip on the minds of people all over the land. For with abolition of slavery, those elements of the population who had propagated genuinely equalitarian doctrines were silent” (157).

To this end, Douglass is determined to learn and become educated despite the obstacles that he had to face as a slave. “His autodidactic education could no longer be stopped, and Douglass has narrated the fact that he learned a great deal from studying the Bible and the primers of white boys in the streets of Baltimore. And in 1830, at the mere age of twelve, he put his meager savings to good use and brought himself a used copy of the Columbian Orator (1797), a popular collection of speeches and moralistic instruction,” confirms Wolfgang Mieder author of the article titled, “Do Unto Others as You Would Have Them Do Unto You” Frederick Douglass’s Proverbial Struggle for Civil Rights” (123). The *Columbian Orator* which explains the relationship between
slave and master from a philosophical perspective. “Every opportunity I got, I used to read this book. I found in it a dialogue between a master and his slave. In this dialogue, the whole argument in behalf of slavery was brought forward by the master, all of which was disposed by the slave,” writes Douglass (53).

The master in the book establishes an argument for the justification while the slave refutes all of his points, which ultimately convinces the master free him. In addition, the book presents the speech in favor of the emancipation of the Irish Catholics. In the same book, I met with one of Sheridan’s mighty speeches on and in behalf of Catholic emancipation. The moral which I gained from the dialogue was he power of truth over the conscience of even a slaveholder. What I got from Sheridan was a bold denunciation of slavery and powerful vindication of human rights, asserts Frederick Douglass. (54)

After reading this text, Douglass becomes severely depressed because he realizes slavery with its extreme racism and inhumane practices towards slaves, presents no hope of him ever achieving freedom. In this way, from his new-found ability to read, he finally comprehends why the enslavers wanted Blacks to remain uneducated and he begins to loathe them even more. Frederick Douglass states, “The more I read, the more I was led to abhor and detest my enslavers. I could regard them in no other light that of successful robbers, who had left their homes, and gone to Africa and stolen us from our homes, and in a strange land reduced us to slavery” (54).
Frederick Douglass “painstakingly” learns to write during this time because when the Aulds leave him alone in the home, he copies down what he sees in books. Justine Phipps of Trine University and author of “The Battle of the Sexes: How Gender Influenced the Experience of Slavery,” brings forth:

His desire for education was very clear, and he even uses this to his advantage in the writing style of his autobiography. He tells his story as if it were a gathering of knowledge along the journey to freedom. Additionally, he consistently uses the Bible and political documents to develop and shape his intellectual views. He recognizes the importance of intelligence and that is represented through validating thoughts and ideas with sources. As Douglass continued to gain an education, he developed into the person who he desired to be; a valuable and influential member of society. (1)

James Matlack adds, “The struggle for literacy, for command over the power of words, was the first stage of his escape from oppression. Without the power of language and the self-affirmation which it opened to him, Douglass might not have been able to survive and to sustain his will to escape” (22).

After the encounter with Mrs. Auld, he works for the family for seven years however when he is about eleven years old, he is sent back to his previous plantation because his former master Captain Anthony has passed away. Douglass dreads returning to his former plantation because he has become intellectually enlightened and he knows prefers Baltimore over the country. Since he was Captain’s Anthony’s property, he and
the other slaves were to be divided amongst his children, Mrs. Lucretia Auld and Andrew Anthony. The slaves and livestock had to be appraised according to their value and Douglass illuminates how humiliating the process is by illustrating:

We were all ranked together at the valuation. Men and women, old and young married and single, were ranked with horses, sheep and swine. There were horses and men, cattle and women, pigs and children all holding the same rank in the scale of being, and were all subjected to the same narrow examination. At this moment, I saw more clearly than ever the brutalizing effects of slavery upon both the slave and slaveholder. (59)

Likewise, Frederick Douglass had severe anxiety in comparison to his fellow slaves about the possibility of being sold or kept on the plantation because he had been “kindly treated,” rarely whipped and had seen a world that his fellow slaves knew nothing about. Mr. Andrews, the new owner was known as, “a most -a common drunkard, who had, by his reckless mismanagement and profligate dissipations, already wasted a large portion of his father’s property” (59). Frederick Douglass had also witnessed Mr. Andrews brutalize his brother with the heel of his boot, “stamped upon his head till the blood gushed from his nose and ears-was well calculated to make me anxious as to my fate” (60). Again, Providence intervenes and Douglass is given back to Mrs. Lucretia Auld in Baltimore but while there, Lucretia and Mr. Andrews both die. This creates panic in Frederick because neither Lucretia nor Mr. Andrews free any of the slaves and their fate is left in the hands of strangers.
Accordingly, two years after the death of Lucretia, her husband Thomas Auld takes on a new bride named Rowena Hamilton. There is some sort of “falling out” between the brothers, that is not explained but Douglass declares, “However, a “misunderstanding took place between himself and Master Hugh; and as a means of punishing me, he took me from him to live with himself at St. Michael’s. Douglass’s life is again controlled by the enslavers because even though he wishes to remain in Baltimore, he can advocate for himself to do so. “Master Thomas had said he would never let me return again. The barrier between himself and his brother he considered impassable,” writes Douglass (63).

Remarkably, it is on his journey from Baltimore going back to the Eastern shore of Maryland that he begins to formulate a plan of escape by observing the ship’s path to Philadelphia, when he recalls:

I paid particular attention to the direction which the steamboats took to go to Philadelphia. I found, instead of going down, on reaching North Point they went up the bay, in a north-easterly direction. I deemed this knowledge of the uttermost importance. My determination to run away was again revived. I resolved to wait only so long as the offering of a favorable opportunity. (63)

Consequently, Frederick Douglass begins his life at Thomas Auld’s plantation in March of 1832 and it is the turning point in the narrative when no longer identifies as a slave but a Negro man. He points out, “I have said Master Thomas was a mean man. He so, Not to give a slave enough to eat, is regarded as the most aggravated development of
meanness even among slaveholders” (64). Douglass works in the kitchen with his Aunt Priscilla and his sister Eliza. They were forced to steal and beg for food from sympathetic neighbors because what Thomas provided was, “a bushel of corn-meal per week, and very little else, either in the shape of meat or vegetables. It was not enough for us to subsist on,” according to Douglass. (65) He also describes Master Auld as being, “He had been a poor man, master only at Bay craft. He came into possession of all his slaves by marriage; and of all men, adopted slaveholders are the worst” (65). By August of 1832, Thomas Auld experiences a religious awakening when he attends a Methodist camp meeting but instead of it making him more compassionate he becomes even more merciless to the slaves on his plantation. Therefore, Douglass has clearly defined his new life at this plantation, the inhumane treatment of the slaves and the character of Mr. Thomas Auld.

It is because of Douglass’s exposure to city of Baltimore and obtaining an informal education, he is no longer “fit” to work on the plantation. He says, “My master and myself had quite a number of differences. He found me unsuitable to his purpose. My city life, he said, had had a very pernicious effect upon me” (68). An example of his unacceptable behavior was when he would let the horses run away on purpose to Auld’s father-in-law’s farm so that he could secure something to eat. At this point in the narrative, Frederick Douglass had only lived with Thomas Auld for nine months, but he could no longer tolerate his insubordination and lack of discipline, so he resolved to send to Edward Covey for a year who was known for breaking slaves. Initially, Douglass describes Covey as “professor of religion-a pious soul and a member and a class-leader in
the Methodist church” (69). In exchange for “breaking negro slaves,” Covey received free labor for a year. In addition, Douglass was aware of how evil Covey could be, but he rationalized that the promise of good meals would be better than being on Auld’s plantation.

His first encounter with Covey and his whip occurs when Douglass is put in the fields to work and guide a team of unrestrained oxen. The oxen almost kill him and “crush the gate post.” Despite his explanation to Covey about the unbroken oxen, he insists that he has be whipped for this offense. In his text, Douglass maintains:

He then went to a large-gum tree, and with his axe cut three large switches, and, after trimming them up neatly with his pocketknife, he ordered me to take off my clothes. I made him no answer, but stood with my clothes on. He repeated the order. I still made no answer, nor did I move to strip myself. Upon this he rushed at me with the fierceness of a tiger, tore off my clothes, and lashed me till he had worn out his switches, cutting me so savagely as to leave the marks visible for a long time. (71)

It is the first of many unjustifiable whippings that Douglass receives at the hands of Covey. Cover whips Douglass almost weekly for his alleged awkwardness.

What’s more, Covey is characterized as a snake in the narrative because he would sneak upon slaves that were resting in the cornfield to frighten them. “When we were at work in the cornfield, he would sometimes crawl on his hands and knees to avoid detection, and all at once he would rise nearly in our midst, and scream out, “Ha, ha!
Come, come! Dash on, dash on!” This being his mode of attack, it was never safe to stop a single minute. His comings and goings like a thief in the night, recants Douglass (72). He also worked the slaves without mercy, no matter the weather conditions or hours. They seldom have time to have a meal. Even his religious zeal is fraudulent because of his cruelty towards the slaves and the fact that he owns one slave named Caroline whose sole purpose is for breeding. Covey hires a married man to sleep with her and will able to own more slaves as she produces them for his plantation.

Therefore, Douglass’s characterization of Covey and several incidents on the plantation establish the backdrop for their future altercation. His time at Covey’s plantation for the first six months is the worse in his life as a slave. Frederick Douglass is constantly punished, abused, exhausted and overworked. He contemplates death and perhaps even murdering Covey to escape his miserable condition. It is here that he observes the “beautiful vessels” sailing down the Chesapeake Bay who are free while he remains enslaved. “The sight of these always affected me powerfully. My thoughts would compel utterance; and there, with no audience but the Almighty, I would pour out my soul’s complaint in my rude way, with an apostrophe to the moving multitude of ship: -,” writes Douglass (75). He wants God to save him but he also accepts the reality that he must escape to freedom in order to save his life.

In the beginning of the narrative, Douglass recalls his “dehumanization” from man into a slave but in the tumultuous episode with Covey, he was converted from a slave back into a man. At this juncture, the identity of Douglass has been established and
it is one last life-changing event that makes him into a man. It is August of 1833 and it is
an extremely hot day and Douglass has suffered from heat exhaustion and collapses.
Covey is angered by what he perceives to be Douglass’s laziness which instead is actual
fatigue and hits him with a wooden plank across the head. “Making a large wound, and
the blood ran freely; and with this again he told me to get up,” writes Douglass (77).
Covey continues to abuse him by continuously kicking him. Douglass who is in shock
and pain walks back to the Auld plantation to tell Thomas Auld about Covey’s abuse and
how he wanted to get a new home. Auld Thomas’s ridiculed Douglass’s request. He said,
“He knew Mr. Covey, that he was a good man, and that he could not think of taking me
from him; that, should he do so he would lose a whole year’s wages; that I belonged to
Mr. Covey for one year, and that I must go back to him, come what might; and that I
must not trouble him with any more stories, or that he would himself get a hold of me,”
recants Douglass (79). When Frederick Douglass returns to Covey’s the next morning, he
chases him with a whip. Desperate, Douglass hides in the cornfields to escape Covey’s
whip. Covey searches for Douglass but he cannot find him so he gives up. Douglass
eventually finds safety in the woods and meets up with slave from nearby plantation
named Sandy Jenkins.

After explaining the abuse that he has endured from Covey, Sandy gives Douglass
a magical root and claims it will keep the vile master from beating him. Douglass is very
skeptical and affirms, “I at first rejected the idea, that the simple carrying of a root in my
pocket would have any such effect as he had said, and was not disposed to take it; but
Sandy impressed the necessity with much earnestness telling me it could do no harm,
if it did no good. To please him, I at length took the root and according to his direction carried it upon my right side,” (80). Alicia Simmons from the University of Pennsylvania and author of “The Power of Hoodoo: African Relic Symbolism in Amistad and The Narrative of Frederick Douglass an American Slave” insists, “Frederick Douglass received the empowered item after running away from his master. Because slaveholders did not tolerate disobedience, Douglass expected to be whipped upon returning to the plantation. Jenkins saw within the runaway slave a need for strength, and therefore supplied a folk remedy” (42).

When Douglass goes back on Sunday morning to Covey, he is kind to him and thus he believes that the magical root has worked in his favor. However, on Monday morning, the cruel Covey has returned and when he finds him in the stable he attempts to tie up his legs. Douglass fights Covey back with all his strength. “Mr. Covey seemed to think he had me, and could do what he pleased; but at this moment—from whence came the spirit I don’t know—I resolved to fight; and suiting my action to the resolution, I seized Covey by the throat; and as I did so I rose” (81). Covey is so frightened by Douglass grabbing him around the throat that he calls another slave named Hugh to help tie him down. However, when Hugh arrives he can do nothing after Frederick kicks him so hard in the ribs that he hastily retreats. When that fails, Covey calls for Bill, another slave to assist him with Douglass but he told him, his master hired him out to work not to help whip another slave. Douglass tells Covey that he will no longer be treated as “brute animal.”
Moreover, Covey and Douglass continue to fight for two long hours but it is he who draws blood from his overseer. James Matlack contends, “Though a slave could expect severe punishment for violence against his master, Douglass fought Covey to a draw. Despite being mauled, Covey claimed victory and took no reprisal. He had to protect his reputation as a tough overseer of fractious African Americans. As indicated by the imagery of ascendency and renewal which surrounds the fight, it was moment of deliverance for Douglass” (22). Douglass evokes that memory when he reminisces, “This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning-point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. I had now resolved that, however long I might remain a slave in form, the day had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact” (82). Covey never laid a finger on Douglass again after this altercation and neither did any other white man as he remained a slave for the next four years of his life. Winifred Morgan, author of “Gender-Related Differences in the Slave Narratives of Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass” sustains:

Despite the ‘generic conventions’ that mold into types all the characters and even the protagonist’s voice in most slave narratives. Douglass does, in fact manage to stamp his individuality onto his Narrative. In this, his Narrative, Douglass presents himself as someone who has learned to read and write almost solely by his own efforts, who fought with Covey, the slave breaker, for his human dignity, and who finally seized his own freedom, all pretty much on his own. Douglass presents himself as someone who in order to break free from slavery, found sources of strength within himself rather than from his community. Yet at the
same time, he puts himself forward as someone whom other slaves, freedmen and fugitives can emulate. Thus he also becomes an Emersonian ‘representative’ man, an exemplar. (80)

Matlack continues this line of thought by espousing, “Through resistance, the assertion of an internalized liberation, Douglass ended the psychological power of slavery over his life. Thereafter it was only a matter of time and opportunity until he would strike for true freedom,” (22). He needed to put his insights into words so that he could understand them. Telling one’s own story is “a particularly human way of organizing and coming to understand one’s experiences,” states Winifred Morgan (80). From a literary perspective during this historical period and this episode in Frederick’s narrative, white men were viewed as being independent, powerful and rational human beings that managed to establish their own destinies and wealth with perseverance and bravery.

Thus, Frederick Douglass attempts to display these character traits about himself as he narrates his story and the life-changing event with Covey. It is then Douglass’s description of the physical altercation with Covey where he takes the opportunity to restore his manhood which is one of the many character traits that slavery stole from him. Aza Nedhari’s in her “In Search of Manhood: the African American Man’s Struggle for Identity and Power” endorses:

Within the cultural framework of America, the systemic structure is characterized by White male patriarchy that allows for African American males to have the ability to negotiate the way in which they have been socialized and
institutionalized to think, act, and behave because they are men. However, the reality of race and the lack of diversity in the purest sense, impedes upon this effort and cripples the African American male’s ability to truly transition into manhood. He is left to constantly struggle and fight for an identity, for power, for respect, and for understanding of who he is versus what he is projected as: a nigger. The ‘nigger’ does not exist in a cultural vacuum, but is rather an “expressive of the cultural crossing, mixing, and engagement of African American male culture with the values, attitudes and concerns of the ‘white majority.’” (hooks, 1994) (1)

In this way, Frederick Douglass attempted to create a popular and heroic African American male character who’s every word and movement in the text could be justified by him as the author. Justine Phipps of Trine University affirms:

Frederick Douglass provides a clear example of the male slave’s desire for manliness. White men were viewed as independent and powerful-traits which, under slavery, African American men could not have, yet still desired. Slaves could do nothing to protect themselves against the overseers or masters and could be punished under any circumstances. This creates a sense of defenseless which especially bothered most slave men during this time. Manliness is a desired characteristic of a male and it is something which men contribute to their identity. When Douglass fought for and regained his manliness, he essentially regained his personal value and importance as a person. (2)
In addition, White authors did not want ex-slaves depicted as men but as former savages who are saved and Christianized by their enslavers.

In contrast, Douglass in his narrative is able to restore his reality of manhood, while leading the antislavery crusade as an ex-fugitive. Winifred Morgan expounds on this contrast:

Despite the ‘generic conventions’ that mold into types all the characters and even the protagonist’s voice in most slave narratives Douglass does, in fact manage to stamp his individuality onto his *Narrative*. In this *Narrative*, Douglass presents himself as someone who has learned how to read and write almost solely by his own efforts, who fought with Covey, the slave-breaker, for his human dignity, and who finally seized his own freedom, all pretty much on his own. Douglass actually sets up two contrasting frames: he presents himself as someone who is ‘one of a kind’ and at the same time representative.’ Douglass presents himself as someone in order to break free from slavery, found sources of strength within himself rather than from his community. Yet at the same time, he puts himself forward as someone whom other slaves, freedmen and fugitives can emulate. Thus, he also becomes an Emersonian ‘representative’ man, an exemplar. (79-80)

By 1838, Frederick Douglass finally escapes to freedom but refuses to elaborate exactly how he achieved this feat. Patrick E. Horn, author of *Summary of Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave Written by Himself* from the University of North Carolina webpage, explains, “He does not provide the full details of his escape in
his 1845 *Narrative*, for he fears that this information will prove useful to his owners seeking to thwart or recapture future runaways. Douglass believed that his silence would assist other slaves that were contemplating escaping to freedom by not revealing how and who helped him along the way.”(Horn) Lisa Yun Lee, adds further support by attesting, “This pronounced silence announces its presence. Through silence about his escape, Douglass asserts control over the text. He places himself in the empowered role of protector by withholding information. He is an African American who is now protector of the white abolitionist and African American slaves” (57).

Conversely, in his autobiography Douglass does reveal that he is able to plan his escape when Hugh Auld allows him to work for wages at a Baltimore shipyard. Upon reaching the North, Douglass describes his sensations as “a moment of the highest excitement I have ever experienced. I felt like one who had escaped a den of hungry lions (107) (2). James Matlack, author of “The Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass” advocates:

The *Narrative* leaves the actual break from bondage a cryptic and mysterious transit from Baltimore to New York in 1838. There were powerful reasons for not being more explicit about his means of escape. Douglass did not want to compromise those who had helped him, nor prevent other fugitive slaves from following the same route. He criticized successful escapees for boasting of their runaway techniques, thereby reducing the chances of later fugitives. (23)
Yet, by 1873, Frederick finally revealed his heroic escape by “riding North on the railroad leaving Baltimore posing as a sailor with “free papers” borrowed from a seaman that resembled him” (23).

Once he arrived in New Bedford, Massachusetts with his new-found freedom, he changed his name from Frederick Bailey to Douglass, one of the most important and last steps in reclaiming his identity. Bailey was the name that his mother had given him at birth, so he kept it but dispensed his two middle names of Augustus and Washington. Mrs. Johnson, one of the people who assisted him in his transformation from ex-fugitive to freedman had been reading a book titled, Lady of the Lake and suggested at once, “that my name be Douglass,” (Chapter 11). From that point forward, Frederick had established his identity as a free Black man and is empowered as an individual with his utilization of diction. This name would maintain his safety and disguise his former status as the ex-fugitive known as Frederick Bailey.

Shortly, afterwards, he marries his first wife Anna Murray, a free Black domestic servant who initially encouraged him to escape. He takes on several odd jobs as a caulker and outfitter for whaling ships. Anna is quite frugal and that is what saves them as couple while they suffer the hardships of being ex-slaves.

The Harvard University Press website in their article titled, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, Revisited puts forth:

In August 1841, while attending an abolitionist meeting at Nantucket, he was prevailed upon to talk about his recollections of slavery. His sentences were
halting but he spoke with feeling, whereupon the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society lost no time in engaging him as a full-time lecturer. For the following four years the young ex-slave was one of the prize speakers of the Society, often traveling the reform circuit in company with high priests of New England abolitionism, William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips.

Likewise, the publication of the *Narrative* helped to support and spread his message of anti-slavery to the nation. In fact, his recalling of his life was so eloquent in form, that some people could not accept that he had indeed ever been a slave. Frederick Douglass went to the British Isles to further promote his message of abolition. Douglass participated in the Underground Railroad in addition to his speaking and writing engagements. Frederick Douglass was great orator, author of the *Narrative* and with his increasing recognition as an abolitionist, there was a concern that he could be recaptured so he was advised to travel to Britain to elude his former enslavers. He remained in Britain for twenty months until he could return home where his English anti-slavery friends had raised enough money to secure his freedom from the Aulds which in turn further validated his narrative as an ex-slave.

Thus, by the end of the book, Douglass’s position has changed from remarkably, from speechless slave to teacher, speaker and leader. Douglass narrates as teacher to the reader, to his fellow slaves, and moreover to whites in the end. The African American slave as dehumanized object is denied admission to the normative language and is denied the right to form his own. Thus, Douglass acts out his
situation as nonspeaking non-participatory person. He is spoken for. Rather than doing the speaking himself. Douglass’s identity and power are not defined and differentiated until he gains language. He then emerges from signified to signifier, form used to user, from mute to speaker, affirms Lisa Yun Lee. (57)

Author Ronald Sundstrom of the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Frederick Douglass webpage emphasizes, “Douglass’s life, from slavery to statesman, his writing and speeches, and his national and international work have inspired many lines of discussion in debate within the fields of American and African American history, political science and theory, sociology, and in philosophy. His legacy is claimed, despite his links to ideas of cultural and racial assimilations, by African American Nationalist as well as by African American liberals and African American conservatives” (3). “The book was written, as Douglass states in the closing sentence, in the hope that it would do something toward hastening the glad day of deliverance to the millions of my brethren in bonds,” according to the Harvard University Press (6).

This chapter discussed Frederick Douglass’s text. Slavery served as the historical, political and social background for Frederick’s text. In this way, the theoretical perspective of New Historicism was utilized for explaining slavery for its cultural relevance and its 400-year historical period. Lacan’s mirror image theory and Freud’s psychoanalysis provides an introspective perspective into the mind of Frederick Douglass as a slave child who is illegitimate and orphan as he develops into an adult that eventually escapes to freedom.
CHAPTER IV

HARRIET JACOBS

There is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you that which he gains by kindness and attachment.
—Harriet Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl

Once Harriet Jacobs becomes six years of, her entire life drastically changes because it is the first time that she recognizes that she is a slave. Kimberly Drake, author of “Rewriting the American Self: Race, Gender, and Identity in the Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs” upholds:

At age six, her enslaver becomes her ‘mother;’ at age twelve, when her mistress dies, Jacobs’s grandmother takes over the maternal role. Jacobs revises Chodorow’s description of the mother-daughter dyad by providing herself with not one but three mothers, subtly reinforcing the hardships of slavery, which took her mother’s life. Jacob’s maternal ‘shelter,’ formed in response to the loss of her real mother, proves to be unstable. Jacobs undercuts her seemingly celebratory portrayal of the motherly slave mistress (who taught Jacobs to read, preparing her to enter patriarchal society and thereby subverting both gender and racial roles) when she reveals that this ‘mother’ didn’t provide her ‘child’ with the
ultimate act of protection which in this case, is the freedom to remain with her family but instead bequeathed her to a relative. (101)

Drake provides a psychological perspective of Jacob’s text by further emphasizing, “Though some revisionist of Freud and Lacan believe that prolonging the dyadic state with the mother can damage the daughter’s ego boundaries, Jacob’s bonds to her mother’s would have been far healthier for her ego than the “paternal” intervention turns out to be. The “father (the master) overrides Jacob’s previous “idyllic” relations to her mother(s), and reveals her subordination to him within the patriarchal order. This is the typical process for white women, but under slavery, women’s subordination is taken to its most perverse extreme” (101).

Her Gender

Harriet Jacobs maneuvered through her life as an enslaved Black woman and mother. These factors greatly impact the way her narrative is structured and what she reveals to the Christian white Northern women about being chattel. Dionne Blassingame, author of “The Trauma of Chattel Slavery: A Womanist Perspective Women on Georgia in Early American Times” asserts, “Harriet Jacob’s Incidents, published in 1861, describes the enslaved black female condition within the United States of America prior to the initial draft of the Emancipation Proclamation on 22 September 1862. Regarding Harriet Jacob’s narrative, the community in which she published her narrative questioned her character as a writer and a woman. Interestingly, Harriet Beecher Stowe, an
abolitionist and author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, desired to narrate Jacobs’s story in her book; however, Jacobs decided to write her own book” (5).

As an African American woman, Jacobs was systematically disregarded by the plantation owning society in which she existed and men. Laurie Kaiser, author of “The African American Madonna: Notions of True Womanhood from Jacobs to Hurston” sustains:

The early novels of African American women illustrate the situation of double jeopardy for African American females. Not only are African American females marginalized by race but also by gender. Jacobs and Harper wrote during the Victorian era, a period obsessed with morality. The period spawned a code of ethics for women, ‘the cult of womanhood.’ The ‘true woman,’ according to prevailing notions of the period, was a paragon of virtue, a Madonna, as it were: pious, pure, submissive, domestic. Of course, this view of the ideal woman, promoted by whites, did not extend to white women, who were too often seen as temptresses with insatiable sexual appetites. (98)

Since enslaved women were objectified by society they were relegated as rewards for white men and their thoughts and or desires were never taken into consideration.

Jacobs’ early life was greatly influenced by her grandmother who fought to maintain the stability of her family and who provided her with a structure for family values. “She differs from Douglass because she acts in a selfless manner; rather than focusing on the freedom of herself alone, she desires to have her entire family with her.
Sarah Wood, author of “Exorcizing the Past: The Slave Narrative as Historical Fantasy” suggests, “While Jacobs's narrative belongs to the general tradition of slave narratives it is, as Hazel Carby notes, 'assertively gender-specific and resonated against the dominant forms of the male slave narrative' (1987: 60-61). The shift in focus to issues that directly concern and influence the lives of female slaves is a characteristic of Jacobs's text, but so is her emphasis on the centrality and importance of community in the lives of both male and female slaves. This dual strategy implicitly inserts the slave woman as part of an integral to the survival of the whole of the slave community, and answers back the figure of the isolated adventurer that Washington identifies as emblematic of slave narratives written by black men” (84). Her passion is perfectly expressed when she says: “I knew the doom that awaited my fair baby in slavery, and I determined to save her from it, or perish in the attempt,” according to Justine Phillips (4). Harriet Jacobs exemplifies these same values. As Jacobs develops into a young woman she replicates the values of her grandmother by ensuring the safety and well-being of her family and children. She is consistently attempting to maintain her family unit because she does not want them sold into slavery but ultimately live together in freedom. Jacobs is motivated to stay alive in the lonely garret for the sake of her family and children, therefore those relationships were of importance to her and influenced her quest for freedom. Winifred Morgan further champions:

Relationships also play a central role in women’s novels of the period. According to Beth Maclay Doriani, Jacobs and her contemporary, novelist Harriet Wilson, both reshaped the slave narrative as it had been written by men in order to show
‘the world of the African American woman-as a person inextricably bound up with others yet responsible for own survival, emotionally, economically, and politically’ (emphasis added) (207). While male fugitives stressed their individuality, their ability to stand alone and assume male responsibility for themselves, women fugitives generally saw themselves as part of their communities. So women like Jacobs and Wilson, according to Doriani, stress connections among members of their communities rather than their isolation. Female narrators envision themselves as striving with and for others. They do not think of themselves or other fugitives as alone. (64)

As Jacobs’ narrative develops from her childhood, to the sexual abuse and eventual escape to freedom it will include historical discernment and her life as a slave. John Blassingame contends, “Until the twentieth century, the reception of Incidents attested to the continuing difficulty of Jacobs, or any African American woman writer, gaining an audience. She was faced with the ‘double negative’ of being a member of the African American race and a member of the female gender” (6).

Gender is also apparent in the manner in which Jacobs tells her narrative because she is a woman and she reveals her awareness that all slave girls and eventually her own daughter one day will face sexual violence at the hands of a slave-master. Sarah Way Sherman, author of “Moral Experience in Harriet Jacob’s Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl” endorses this aforementioned notion by elaborating:
Slavery was acted out on male bodies but also within female ones. As ‘brood’ mare or concubine, wet nurse or mammy, part of a slave woman’s work was reproduction. Slavery’s threat was therefore even more intimate and brutal. If slavery denied the female slaves selfhood, it tempted her master to monstrous selfishness, unfettered by recognition of common humanity. (170)

Slave women dealt with violence whether it was physical, psychological or sexual and were thus rendered powerless against their plantation owners. While there is no question that slave women were brutally beaten, lynched or even drowned, the relentless sexual abuse they endured psychologically traumatized them even further as they were being held captive by their white plantation owners. Dionne Blassingame stresses the point:

Slavery was not a uniform experience for enslaved men and enslaved women. In *Ar’n’t I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, Deborah Gray White asserts ‘the images of African American women that grew out of the slavery era reflect that African American males and females did not experience slavery the same way’ (40). Slavery was gendered down and not a shared or homogenous event in history. Men were rarely sodomized by their owners, whereas women were routinely raped and impregnated. The slave culture encouraged such behavior, and it was profitable to the slave owners for female slaves to procreate. (18)

Moreover, plantation owners considered slave women as property because they had no ownership over their own bodies.
Plantation owners would also begin to molest or sexually abuse slave girls when they reached the age of puberty. Therefore, the denial of slave girls’ femininity began in adolescence and the culture’s interpretation of womanhood maintained it. Gloria T. Randle, Assistant Professor of African American Literature at Michigan State University and author of “Between the Rock and the Hard Place: Mediating Spaces in Harriet Jacob’s ‘Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,’” lays emphasis on:

Because moral values are so severely perverted by slavery, “the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others” (386). ‘O, ye happy women, exclaims Brent, ‘whose purity has been sheltered from childhood, who have been free to choose the objects of your affection, whose homes are protected by law, do not judge the poor desolate slave girl too severely! I wanted to keep myself pure’ (384). The picture of security that surrounds white women—which Brent underlines with descriptors such as sheltered, ‘protected,’ and ‘purity’-mocks the tyranny that young slave women face, and illuminates the perversity of a system that provides only one type of education for young slave girls. (4)

The inclusion of the sexual exploitation of slave women, which Harriet Jacobs implements in her narrative, is a key element because it exposes how African American women were powerless in attempting to defend themselves against their slave masters nor were they able to fulfill the moral codes established by ante-bellum white society. A woman in antebellum society, especially if she were white was supposed to possess the qualities of purity, piety and submissiveness. However, these character traits were never
not applicable to African American slave women even if they were educated and free. Bulent C. Tantritanir, author of “The Way to Freedom in Harriet Ann Jacobs Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl” encourages:

In spite of her embarrassment, Jacobs insisted on telling her story honestly and completely, and determined to make white Americans aware of the sexual victimization that slave women commonly faced, and to dramatize the fact that they often had no choice but to surrender their virtue. Sherman states that, ‘Slavery is terrible for men,’ Harriet Jacobs wrote in 1861, ‘but it is far more terrible for women. Citing this passage from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Jean Fagan Yellin argues that Jacob’s book was the first book to address the sexual exploitation of women. (Shermen, 1990: 167) (164)

Hence, it is her work according to Tantritanir that “presented sexual history in slavery while constructing a woman centered narrative that emphasized family relationships, incorporated forms of the domestic novel and reshaped the genre to encompass the female experience” (164).

Before Jacobs’s text was received by the literary world, the slave narrative as a genre had been dominated by male authors and the most notable one was by Frederick’s Douglass. As a male narrator, Frederick Douglass was born a slave and was characterized as fearless ex-slave in his pursuit of freedom despite any obstacles he may have faced throughout his journey. Jasmine K. Syedullah, author of “Is This Freedom? A Political Theory of Harriet Jacob’s Loopholes of Emancipation” maintains:
In counter distinction to narratives that realizes the heroism of men, Jacob’s narrative speaks for those, ‘millions of women at the South, still in bondage,’ and in doing so announces for all who listen the powerlessness of Black men to redress the states of injury women bore as a badge of bondage. The tenants of moral piety, conventional piety, conventional acts of heroic determination and redemption were no contest for the pervasive dispossessions of sexual autonomy slavery sanctioned. Without naming dispossessions of black masculinity as acts of sexual violence that targeted men per se, Jacob’s narrative makes clear the connections between sexual violence and political disenfranchisement that rendered black communities with little claim to author their own standards of moral authority and social responsibility. (102)

Douglass had no family connections and his desire to become educated made his narrative even more appealing to his readers. Whereas Harriet Jacobs did not know that she was a slave until she was six years old. She was taught to read by her own mistress and was sexually abused until she could escape Dr. Flint. Justine Phipps explains the difference between the male and female slave experience:

When Douglass fought for and regained his manliness, he essentially regained his personal value and importance as a person. Women were also viewed as valuable sources of labor but they were also viewed as sexual objects available at the slaveholder’s pleasure. Having women as property merely encouraged the slaveholders to discredit the delicate nature of a woman and take advantage of
them in whichever way they please. The slave women were expected to completely cast aside their own feelings and values to perform all manual labor of a man, the housework of a woman, and the pleasure of a mistress. (2-3)

These aforementioned expectations were required and often demanded of Harriet Jacobs and most of the slave women on the plantation. In addition, if a slave woman sought to marry another slave on the same plantation her request was often declined because slave masters did not believe in the sanctity of marriage for slaves nor did they wish to relinquish control over their Black mistresses. While both text address why slavery should be abolished, it is the difference in gender that makes Jacob’s readers aware of the demeaning conditions of slave women. Cited in “The Way to Freedom in Harriet Ann Jacob’s Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl” by Bulent C. Tanritanir, he endorses:

Jacobs wants the novel to receive the attention of Northern people. Jacobs believed that a moving representation of her afflictions and her grandmother’s dedication to her children would encourage Northern women to ‘feel right’ and to take their duty to heart’ (Mills, 1992: 255) (164). ‘One of the most important differences then between Jacobs and Douglass is gender. Gender directly shapes Jacobs’s experienced both as slave and free woman; moreover, gender shapes the conventions available for her interpretation of these experiences. The exemplary rise of a self-made woman was not a common literary plot,’ confirms Sarah Way Sherman (1990), author of “Moral Experiences in Harriet Jacob’s Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.” (168)
Jacobs’ as an enslaved woman and narrator represents many of the traumatic experiences that Black women endured during slavery.

**Her Narrative**

“Jacob’s narrative should be considered foundational to the development of African American women’s letters, as it is among the earliest full length texts authored by an African American woman utilizing autobiographical writing to creatively construct themselves as subjects in the presence and aftermath of slavery. Furthermore, Jacob’s astute observations of her positionality as woman, mother, and fugitive property in relationship with slavery offer such deep insight into the gendered and sexualized aspects of enslavement that Katherine McKittrick and Saidiya Hartman argue Jacob’s work is foundational to African American feminist theory,” cited in Caitlin O’Neil’s work titled, “The Shape of Mystery: The Visionary Resonance of Harriet Jacob’s Incidents in the Life of Slave Girl” (1).

Harriet Jacobs’ life begins in North Carolina in the early 19th century, and she is not cognizant that she was even a slave until the age of six after the death of her parents. Her life was idyllic in comparison to Douglass because she grew up in a nuclear family and everyone lived together in one household. Jacobs recalls, “Such were the unusually fortunate circumstances of my early childhood. When I was six years old, my mother died; and then for the first time, I learned, by the talk around me, that I was a slave” (14). The Horniblow family owned her and her mother but it was Mistress Margaret Horniblow that taught Harriet to read and write. However, it is after this idyllic period
that Jacobs’ life begins to take on a tumultuous and dreadful turn. “Beginning in colonial
times and continuing to the end of the Civil War, hundreds and possibly thousands of
biographies and autobiographies of slaves and former slaves appeared in print; some of
them are brief, others are long. In this respect, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* is a
distinguished study which represents the life of slaves in a very detailed approach.

*Incidents in The Life of A Slave Girl* deals with the tortuous treatment of slave women
and men, the sexual exploitation of slave women and it also points to the punishments
that slaves had to endure,” according to Bulent C. Tanritani and Frantz Yildiz author(s) of
“The Way to Freedom in Harriet Ann Jacob’s *Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl*”
(161).

Like Frederick Douglass’s text where he staunchly fights against slavery and
Harriet does the same, the contrast is where she exposes the sexual perverseness of slave
master’s aggression toward their defenseless enslaved women. William L. Andrews, a
Joyce and Elizabeth Hall Professor of American Literature at the University of Kansas
and author of “The Novelization of Voice in Early African American Narrative” believes:

When African American narrators undertook a similar transition from factual to
fictional accounts of slavery in the mid-nineteenth century, their writing
responded to another kind of instability between the categories of fact and fiction
in American narratives of the era. This instability was based on the refusal of
many Americans to accept as fact a narrative whose description of slavery’s
enormity left nothing to the imagination. Harriet Jacobs spoke for many ex-slave
narrators when she stated from the outset of *Incidents* ‘Reader be assured this narrative is no fiction. I am aware that some of my adventures may seem incredible; but they are nevertheless, strictly true. I have not exaggerated the wrongs inflicted by Slavery; on the contrary, my descriptions fall far short of the facts.’ (25)

Her account of her life as a slave and the forced sexual relationships that occur on plantations in regard to enslaved women were not only true but so disturbing that her recounting of events cannot be denied. Harriet Jacobs utilizes the pseudonym “Linda Brent” so that she can protect her loved ones and those individuals that helped her escape to freedom. She recounts her life as slave by utilizing diction to depict vivid pictures about the traumatizing incidents that happen to her for her readers that cannot be transcribed into words. Although the incidents that occurred in slave narratives were real, historical scholars have contended that they were merely watered down in order to appeal to white America and abolitionists. Sarah Way Sherman, author of “Moral Experience in Harriet Jacob’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*” challenges:

While Linda’s awareness of slavery begins at six, with her mother’s death, her moral education begins at twelve, with the death of her mistress, ‘almost a mother to her.’ She is not freed as she has to expect but is ‘bequeathed’ to her mistress’s little niece, Emily Flint. This shock destroys whatever illusions Linda might have had about her actual condition. The story now takes on some qualities of a conventional seduction novel, a sentimental story of innocence pursued. Linda is
not physically coerced, but she is, from puberty onward, relentlessly harassed by Flint, her master until Emily’s majority. (170)

Therefore, Jacob’s text can be characterized as a “sexual slave narrative” because as she recounts her life, Dr. Flint sexually harasses her repeatedly and some incidents that happen to her are too traumatic for her to even reveal in the story. Jean Fagan Yellin who is a Distinguished Professor Emerita of English at Pace University and African American historian has been quoted as stating, “Jacob’s book is the only slave narrative that focuses specifically on the sexual vulnerability of slave girls and women” (Texts, 263). In addition, it is bond with her family and those relationships with the ones she loves that contribute to her knowledge of self and nourish her within the community despite the hardships of slavery and sexual abuse.

Moreover, in “The Trials of Girlhood” chapter, Harriet Jacobs discusses her sexual vulnerability and abuse from Dr. Flint. By this time, Jacob has become a young woman between the ages of fourteen and or fifteen and is living with Dr. Flint who is keenly aware of her blossoming beauty and intelligence. Bulent C. Tanritanir emphasizes, “The age of fifteen is the time when the sorrow of a slave girl starts to increase. The slaves at this age are mature enough to be abused sexually by their masters. Barbeito stated that, Harriet Jacobs ground breaking slave narrative, which was enlisted in the abolitionist effort, focuses on the sexual exploitation of women during slavery and directly associates the woman slave’s struggle for freedom with the freedom to control her own sexual activity (Barbeito, 1998: 365) (162).
Along those same lines, Jacqueline Marie Smith, author of “Women’s Narratives of Confinement: Domestic Chores as Threads of Resistance and Healing” contends, “Images of women fall into five categories, all reinforced by the controlling theme of family dislocation: (1) victims and virgins, (2) victors and vanquishers, (3) mothers, daughters and sisters, (4) traumatized women and (5) transculturated women” (39). Thus in Brent’s narrative, she is first a daughter, virgin, then victim who becomes a mother and is ultimately a victor by end of her text because she is able to secure her freedom.

In her narrative, Harriet Jacobs is described as a mulatto girl who is educated and has the proper grooming of a being a southern lady in antebellum society. Jacobs depicts her first encounter with Dr. Flint as such:

But now I entered my fifteenth year—a sad epoch in the life of a slave girl, my master began to whisper foul words in my ear. Young as I was I could not remain ignorant of their import. The master’s age, my extreme youth, and the fear that his conduct would be reported to my grandmother, made him bear this treatment for many months. He was a crafty man, and resorted to many means to accomplish his purposes. He peopled my mind with unclean images, such as only a vile monster could think of. (44)

Dr. Flint made his sexual intentions obvious towards Jacobs and he wanted to her concede them at his will. Assistant Professor Gloria T. Randle of African American Literature points out:
Flint’s predatory nature reflects an unbridled lust for mastery that advances through aggression and sadism. Dr. Flint’s ‘restless, craving, vicious nature roved about day and night seeking whom to devour’ (352). Brent’s characterization of Flint as a roving cannibal and herself as his intended victim holds chilling psychological implications: The perverse nature of his appetites is apparently attached to an infantile orality, based on upon destructive impulses projected outward and bound up in the satisfaction of his own passions (Freud, Outline 336). Brent’s fear that Flint will ‘eat her alive’ clearly represents ‘sexual anxiety.’

Furthermore, his efforts included trying to engage Jacobs in conversation, writing her letters and outright demanding that since he owned Jacobs by law that she would be ultimately compelled to submit to his advances. In Iman Cooper’s “Commodification of the African American Body, Sexual Objection and Social Hierarchies during Slavery,” she accentuates, “Jacobs recounts how “he told me I was made for his use, made to obey his command in everything; that I was nothing but a slave, whose will must and should surrender to his,” further demonstrating how the African American body was expected to be subject to the white patriarchy” (37). More importantly, Jacobs held her grandmother in high regard and since Dr. Flint was aware of this fact, he also used it to his advantage to pressure her even more in attempt to get her to sleep with him.

He tells Jacobs that he will kill her grandmother she if does not remain silent about his sexual advances towards her, which only frightens her more. Even though Dr.
Flint could do with Jacobs as he saw fit because she was his chattel, he wanted his affairs to remain discreet and hidden from the society’s judgment. However, it also meant that he was acutely aware of the heinous acts he is committing towards Jacobs. Although he valued his status in antebellum society, it did not outweigh his selfish and evil desires to have her.

Jacobs’ attempts to maintain her chastity in the midst of Dr. Flint’s sexual advances and the values that her grandmother has instilled in her however they place her between the poles of morality in her narrative. This ongoing dilemma is occurring because this nefarious predicament is confusing to her. She is ambivalent because she been taught to obey her master by her grandmother and not to lose her virginity for no other reason than marriage. Jacobs is desperate because she wants to uphold the teachings of her grandmother and not submit to Dr. Flint’s sexual advances. She instinctively knows that Dr. Flint’s sexual conquest of her body will destroy her chastity and she will never recover from it.

Still, it is not only the sexual advances of Dr. Flint that Jacobs is avoiding, but also his sons and overseer who begin to bribe her with gifts in order for her to relinquish her chastity to them. When bribery does not work, she is subjected to psychological intimidation and physical trauma of being starved or whipped to death. Historically, these were just some of strategies that were utilized to break slaves mentally and physically so that they would stop being resistant and comply with their master’s wishes. She begins to feel as though defiance is unpromising because her grandmother who is not
psychologically nor tangibly equipped can protect her from the men’s advances on the plantation, especially that of Dr. Flint nor was the law going to protect her as an enslaved slave woman. In fact, even if she married another slave, the slave owner still controlled both of their lives. In addition to this, she was subjected to Mrs. Flint’s menacing jealousy when she sought her protection. Mrs. Flint hated her because she knew her husband relentlessly pursued Jacobs with reckless abandon.

Thus, slavery as a historical backdrop for her narrative destroyed her value as a person and more importantly as a Negro woman. Harriet Jacobs was raised to be a respectable lady event though she was a slave which further established her entrapment by Dr. Flint and others in society. Jacqueline Marie Smith gives emphasis to:

The early genres of Early American captivity narrative and the American slave narrative exhibit distinct characteristics based on the narrator’s relationship to their captors and the cultural forces that shape their memoirs. Both genres examine women in captivity, but they also examine the male captivity experience, which is notably different in many ways; thus, neither genre accurately encapsulates the experience of female entrapment. Also, these genres also only focus on involuntary captivity (at least initially), when in fact some female narratives explore the complex experience of psychological and physical entrapment women sometimes recount being wives and mothers, as well as being subjects in a patriarchal society in which their efforts are ignored, suppressed or punished. (4)
Jacobs provides insight to the concept of the female narrative from an enslaved woman’s point of view. She is subjected to psychological and physical abuse as any other slave but her torture is of a sexual nature that many enslaved women endured but were never able to vocalize as she does in her narrative. Sonia Sedano Vivanco, author of “Literary Influences on Harriet Jacob’s Incidents in the Life of Slave Girl” advocates, “Jacob introduces her loss of virtue in the context of her struggle to escape from Mr. Flint’s sexual harassment. According to Manuela Llorente, she is an innocent woman since she did not want that relationship and cannot therefore be accused of experiencing illicit desires. Jacobs proves that it was slavery itself that is responsible for the loss of innocence. She was forced to lose her virginity in order to survive in a society where slavery was legal” (3).

To illustrate this point more, Iman Cooper underscores, “There was also the social assumption that African American bodies were exotic and rugged, and this fetishization of the African body might be seen as another reason why relationships of these type occurred. African American women were seen as sexually promiscuous and lustful; thus, cases of sexual violence were often viewed as being the fault of the African American woman. These cultural assumptions were successful in indirectly reinforcing the notion of het pure white woman, set against the vileness of the African American one” (40).

As a reaction to Dr. Flint’s constant pursuit, Jacobs begins to act in ways that are unbecoming of the woman that her grandmother raised her to be. Harriet Jacobs
ultimately decides to take control over her life and body by taking a consensual lover. In this way, she is also claiming an identity for herself by not letting Dr. Flint or others define her womanhood nor her body. Kimberly Drake (1997) submits:

When she learns that Flint is finalizing plans to force her into, Jacobs makes a ‘plunge into the abyss’ and stakes a claim for her body. She renews contact with Mr. Sawyer, a young white slaveholding neighbor and begins a sexual liaison with him with ultimately results in two children. Refusing to become Flint’s sexual property, she takes control of her body in order to give herself a degree of freedom and security; she resists the will of the ‘father’ and chooses her own mate. Yet Jacobs cannot explicitly interpret her actions as revolutionary freeing, because she knows too well the interpretation of her actions according to the cult of true womanhood. Mixed in with these exhortations, however, are assertions of the ‘deliberate calculation’ of her actions and the unfairness of white readers judging slave women by their own moral standards. (Incidents 53-54) (104)

In this manner, Jacobs hopes that Flint will lose interest in her and the status of her identity will shift from “sexual object” to “sacred mother.” She had no romantic interest in Sawyer who was a family friend but whom was merely a means to stop Dr. Flint’s unwanted sexual advances. Iman Cooper contends,

In this minor assertion of sexual choice, Jacobs found some sense of agency, even though the cost was despising herself and a loss of self-respect. This poor excuse for a ‘choice’ highlights the limited amount of
options available to African American women during this period. This is in regard to having agency to define how they wanted to live their life, including sexual partners. The lack or inability to control the most intimate part of their being, physically and psychologically crippled them as women even further because it impacted the way a slave woman perceived herself and how she was viewed by others. (36)

Furthermore, Dr. Flint did not want illegitimate children or evidence of his sexual conquest of his concubines on his plantation and was known to send them away once they became pregnant. Jacobs risked having consensual relationship with Samuel Sawyer who was white lawyer and family friend because she had no other option to stop Flint’s advances. Harriet Jacobs loathed Dr. Flint so immensely that she willingly gave up her virginity to man whom she assumed could secure her freedom.

She hopes that her maternity, despite its illegitimacy will provide an appeal to the mothers of the North and enable her to form a bond with them. As a young slave woman, Jacobs is not allowed bodily integrity (‘virtue’), a key aspect of society’s moral codes for women, and thus has difficulty in achieving the feelings of self-worth experienced by ‘true women.’ But in motherhood, Jacobs finds a “vehicle for the retrieval of lost self-respect” which ultimately fuels her determination to escape. writes Drake. (Braxton, 33) (105)
She moves to her grandmother’s house to give birth to her first child but Dr. Flint continues to harass her there. When she continues to reject him at her grandmother’s home, he sends her away to his son’s plantation to work.

Jacobs feels morally guilty throughout the rest of the narrative because she became pregnant by a man that she was not married to and therefore is disappointed in herself. When she became pregnant by Sawyer, it went against all the moral values that her grandmother had instilled in her but Dr. Flint’s sexual harassment and physical abuse were violating her as a woman. “Jacobs deals with the double-jeopardy theme. Brent loses her chastity while trying to maintain her dignity-by taking a white lover instead of succumbing to her master’s persistent sexual advances. She defends her actions by saying, ‘It seems less degrading to give one’s self than to submit to compulsion,’ indicates” Laurie Kaiser (55) (99). A woman was to remain pure and virtuous until marriage during this era because those qualities made them more desirable to men. But even when Jacobs finds an African American carpenter who happens to be a free man of color who loves and wants to marry her, Dr. Flint forbids it. Jasmine K. Syedull affirms:

Linda’s loss of her love-dream in the form of a future free from both the uncertainty of fugitivity and the threat of sexual domination at the hand of her master in her relationship to the free black man whom she loved, is reanimated when presented with an imminent threat to the livelihood of her children. What begins as a critique of the prohibition of enslaved women’s right to sexual autonomy becomes a social analysis of the domestic order of slavery and the
dispossession of enslaved people’s right to love. With the exception of her
longing for union with the man her master threatened to kill, Linda’s expression
of love is all directed toward members of her family. (100)

Psychologically, Jacobs’ mind and the values she held dear to her heart as a woman were
deeply influenced by the institution of slavery. What’s more, Jacobs is aware of how she
is perceived by Dr. Flint and how the antebellum community stereotypes enslaved
Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl” by Bulent C. Tanritanir and Firat Yildiz, Jacobs
states, “Still, in looking back, calmly on the events of my life, I feel that a slave woman
ought not be judged by the same standard as others (Jacobs, 1973: 56) Then she
continues, ‘For years, my master had done his utmost to pollute my mind with foul
images and to destroy the pure principles inculcated by my grandmother, and the good
mistress of childhood. The influences of slavery had had the same effects on me that had
on young girls’ (Jacobs, 1973, 54) (162).

After this incident Jacobs is made aware that her two children, a daughter and son
by Sawyer would soon be arriving on the plantation where she is working. It is then that
she begins to plan to escape because she does not want her children to grow up as slaves
After she runs away from the plantation, she stays with friends, first then on to her
grandmother’s house, “in a storeroom where she hid in a small garret” (163). She lives
there in the crawlspace for the next seven years of her life, with no room to exercise or
barely breathe. Her skin is pale from the lack of vitamins and she drastically loses weight
in the crawlspace that has no windows or heat. This prisoner experience is both psychologically and physically traumatizing to Jacobs as she endures her unbearable living condition so that her children may be free. Georgia Kreiger, author of “Playing Dead: Harriet Jacob’s Survival Strategy in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl” claims:

Brent’s self-incarceration in the garret is construed as a self-sacrifice offered in payment for her own and her children’s redemption. As such, the ordeal renders her a re-made woman worthy of acceptance by a white abolitionist sisterhood and equally important, an ideal mother and savior to her son and daughter. Jacobs’s rendering of Brent’s seven years in hiding serves to affirm the values and standards of her readers, but it also adapts their ideologies to her own defense. (607-608)

While Caitlin O’ Neil advocates in her article titled, “The Shape of Mystery: The Visionary Resonance of Harriet Jacobs’s Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl:”

By way of the garret, Jacobs becomes both mother and monster. Although the changes to Jacob’s body are profound, a reading of her as monster is not meant to assert an ableist discourse. Truly, Jacobs is most monstrous for her cunning approaches to enslavement and her often devious and defiant performances of African American womanhood even when presented within the discursive framework of respectability politics in the Victorian era. The transformation of Jacob’s consciousness in the garret can be read- alongside the physical transformation of her body-as linked to her (self-generative) powers. (61).
Jacob has crafted an existence out of the garret then rationalizes that she must sacrifice herself in order to save her family and children. Her behavior and state of mind are deliberate because she does mind how she suffers as long as her family unit can be maintained. Besides “Futural skepticism occurs when Jacobs attempts to escape to the North but winds up being confined to the garret in her grandmother’s house; indeed, this “loophole of retreat,” as Jacob calls it, is one of a series of enclosed spaces that literally and figuratively represent her conditions of enslavement,” suggests Nick Bromell, author of “This, and Much More, I Thought Of Political Thought without a Future in Incidents in the Life of Slave Girl” (13).

While Jacobs suffers in the crawlspace, Sawyer is working to secure the freedom of her children. It is during these scenes in the narrative that she able to catch glimpses of her children. Jacobs asserts, “I heard the voices of my children. I could watch the children, and when they were near enough, I could hear talk (438-39) Season after season, year after year, I peeped at my children’s faces, and heard their sweet voices, with a heart of yearning all the while to say, “Your mother is here” (467). She is unable to properly mother her children because is an escaped fugitive living in a crawlspace and still a child herself. Harriet does not have a “dependable maternal presence, moral guidance nor a construction of sound racial identity” that she can share with her own children (Cited in Stephanie Li’s “Motherhood as Resistance in Harriet Jacobs’s Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl” (14-21). Thus, all of these images and incidences evoked sympathy from her white Northern Christian readers who could then attempt to comprehend her story as an enslaved woman. Author Winifred Morgan suggests:
Jacob’s relationship with her northern, white, middle class women readers, her primary audience, is perhaps best thought of as analogous to her relationships with the white women in her narrative. Both were problematic. She found some of these women trustworthy, some untrustworthy but few capable of genuine empathy. Her relationship with the northern reading audience lacked the trust and support she enjoyed from friends and relatives. To communicate with this audience, she used her ability to write her own story; to do that used a mode a variation of the domestic novel, suited to their expectations appealing to their sympathies. Her reliance on narrative strategies usually encountered in sentimental domestic fiction certainly shows that she assumed that this audience would have difficulty accepting much less understanding her experience. (87-88)

Based on her status and gender in White society, Jacobs use of sentimental fiction exhibits that she did not think her audience would be able to receive nor fathom her experiences as an enslaved woman.

Additionally, it becomes evident as time passes that her own children have learned to function without their mother. Michelle Burnham, author of “Loopholes of Resistance: Harriet Jacobs’ Slave Narrative and the Critique of Agency in Foucault” proposes:

The absence of freedom, the physical hardships, the separation from children and family, and the secrecy that all mark the slave’s condition are repeated and exacerbated by Jacob’s confinement ‘in her dungeon,’ Yet that repetition is one
with a signal difference, a difference that is concealed within the enormity of hyperbole, for ‘alone in my cell….no one but God s could see me (133). Not only is Jacobs free from Flint’s gaze, but she appropriated the power of surveillance for herself, since through her ‘peeping-hole’ she is able ‘to watch the passers-by,’ including Dr. Flint, who without being seen, and to ‘hear many conversations not intended to meet my ears’ (117). Jacobs becomes an eyewitness to slavery, a position of spectatorial objectivity which William L. Andrews has argued is usually filled by the abolitionist editors of slave narratives, while the ex-slave authors more commonly serve as the subjective and participatory ‘I-witnesses’ to their own experience. (58)

When her grandmother with a “loving deceit” finally comes to rescue from her self-inflicted hiding spot, she is overjoyed. Harriet writes, “The hibernation is over. I must shake off the old skin and come up for breath. …In going underground, I whipped it all except the mind, the mind (580). Similarly, it is time for Brent to emerge. She too, has “whipped it all except the mind.” But the psychological forces that have kept her immobile have yet to be reconciled. Brent’s shame, fears, and sense of loss must be confronted even after she leaves her secure hiding place,” cited in Assistant Professor of African American Literature Glenda T. Randle’s “Between the Rock and the Hard Place: mediating spaces in Harriet Jacob’s Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl” (8). Harriet then makes her escape to the North by boat despite her grandmother’s anxiety with her children’s and brother’s freedom secure, she becomes employed with the Bruce family. Assistant Professor Gloria T. Randle further insists:
Jean Fagan Yellin describes Brent’s story as once the plea of an erring American female, the heroic valiant African American slave mother, and a woman’s vindication of her life (‘Texts’ 263) Brent’s life is circumscribed by an unconscionable social system, but in spite of this she never truly succumbs to the imperatives and consequences of her enslavement. Instead, she conjures up avenues of impossibility time and again. Without a mother, she locates maternal figures; forced to relinquish her chastity, she reconstructs her virtue on her own terms; torn between heaven and hell on multiple levels she secures a place in purgatory for seven years. Most importantly, with such narrow mediating spaces available and so little room to maneuver, she refuses to compromise with regard to her children’s freedom. (9)

In addition, her narrative does not end with the typical marriage as it would for most female narrators during that era but instead with her escape to freedom and journey as an abolitionist against slavery. Harriet Jacobs A.K A. Linda Brent’s Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl was examined with consideration to not only her race but also her identity as a woman in the text. She expresses the horrors of being a slave woman, mother and daughter who endures the physical/psychological abuse and sexual harassment from Dr. Flint. Additionally, uniquely narrated she is a female narrator whose memoir did not end in marriage but in the attainment of her freedom for herself and family.
CHAPTER V

MALCOLM X

Nobody can give you freedom. Nobody can give you equality or justice or anything. If you’re a man, you take it…

—Malcolm X

His Childhood

Malcolm X experienced the appalling effects of segregation and other forms of racial discrimination as a young boy, which remained in his conscious until his death. He was the most outspoken and brazen leader for the Nation of Islam until he disconnected with the organization on March 8, 1964. Born into a tumultuous environment as Malcolm X Little on May 19, 1925, in Omaha, Nebraska, he was one of seven children of Louise and Reverend Earl Little, who was a Baptist minister. Malcolm X’s early life was ingrained with racism, intimidation, harassment and even murder because when he was a child, Reverend Little was a U.N. I.A member and spread the teachings of Marcus Garvey wherever they lived. Unlike Jacobs and Douglass, Malcolm X had come from a two-parent home with siblings where he was loved until it was disrupted by the death of his father.

Nonetheless, the family stability he knew as child soon disappeared because his mother was later institutionalized in a state hospital after the murder of her husband since she could no longer physically or perceptually care for her seven children. It is from these
experiences, as an adolescent that Malcolm X’s comprehension of African American empowerment and Black Nationalism began to develop. Therefore, he implemented these same experiences into his quintessential narrative about being a young African American man in America from the 1940’s to the 1960’s trying to establish his own identity despite the racial impediments that surrounded him. Author Bashir M. El-Beshti of “The Semiotics of Salvation: Malcolm X and the Autobiographical Self” in the Journal of Negro History insists:

The double focus of The Autobiography, the split personality of the subject, and hence the gap between what the mature Malcolm X writes (or tells Haley) and what the young character says, gradually narrows down. As the historical moment catches up to the act of composition, as the narrative records more fully the growth of Malcolm X’s character, we see a fusion of speaking voice and the life that is being recounted. There is no real distinction between what is uttered in recollection and what is uttered on the page. Malcolm X emerges from Mecca as a fully integrated human being: ‘In my thirty-nine years on this earth, the Holy City of Mecca had been the first time I had ever stood before the Creator of All and felt like a complete human being’ (365). In this sense, the progress of the autobiographical narrative-a continuum stretching from the historical moment up to the time of composition-becomes a progress to-wards a new identity. It is here that the autobiographical form intersects with the Bildungsroman; both give an account of the growth into maturity of an individual and hold out the possibility of education and of learning a new way. (360)
Moreover, one of Malcolm X’s key influences was the teachings from his father who was a member of the U.N.I. A. Movement lead by Marcus Garvey. The U.N.I.A or the Universal Negro Improvement Association was a Black Nationalist movement that promoted the political and economic independence for Negroes. Dr. David Van Leeuwen, author of *Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* and from the *National Humanities Center* webpage asserts:

Garvey’s brand of African American Nationalism had three components—unity, pride in the African cultural heritage, and complete autonomy. Garvey believed people of African descent could establish a great independent nation in their ancient homeland of Africa. He took the self-help message of Washington and adapted it to the situation he saw in America, taking a somewhat individualistic, integrationist philosophy and turning into a more corporate, politically minded nation-building message. Much of what he said concerning racial pride and the potential for great racial success in later figures such as Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael.

Thus, Malcolm X was a product of his environment because he absorbed all the teachings from his father about Black Nationalism and the overt racism that he experienced as a child remained in his psyche his entire life. Black Nationalism remained a major influence on him from childhood and is theorized that Garvey’s influential rhetoric is reason that Malcolm X was considered as a radical leader until his death in 1964. When these teachings were combined with the psychological trauma that Malcolm X experienced, it produced a narrative that can be characterized as a coming of age memoir.
that employs resistant and iconoclastic diction. In addition, Malcolm X’s autobiography is a work of non-fiction because he uses demonstrative diction to describe the people, places and events that are all authentic to convey his narrative.

As well, his narrative is characterized as being defiant in comparison to Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacob’s narrative for several reasons, one of which was that he was not born a slave as they were so he did not have to escape to freedom to write his narrative. This also meant that he did not have to be concerned about what he conveyed in his text for fear of rejection from the publishers or White sponsors. Nor did Malcolm X have to white-wash or sugarcoat his diction that so White America would not be offended with his text. The second reason that his utilization of diction in his narrative is vastly different from that of Douglass and Jacobs is that his identity was freer because he did not seek acceptance or validation from White America.

Malcolm X was unconcerned with White America’s opinion regarding his rhetoric on racism. He was concerned about the conditions African Americans and the necessity for segregation because he was a nonconformist. Thus, the purpose of Malcolm X’s autobiography was to recount his life and psychological experiences with racism not to have White America validate his existence or identity. Todd Steven Burroughs, author of the article titled, “50 Years Later, the Autobiography of Malcolm X is Still a Must Read,” claims, “Fifty years later, a central controversy would surround this book in black intellectual circles. In Haley’s epilogue was an edict from Malcolm: ‘Another letter was
dictated, this one an agreement between him [Haley] and me: ‘Nothing can be in this book’s manuscript that I didn’t say, and nothing can be left out that I want in it” (3).

Malcolm X is unapologetic for his emotionally charged diction because of his stance for the empowerment African Americans as a race of people. Then as a narrator, Malcolm X utilizes diction in such a way that it interposes the development of the individuals, circumstances and concepts in his narrative. Manning Marble, author of Rediscovering Malcolm X’s Life upholds, “Malcolm X was the African American Power generation’s greatest prophet, who spoke the uncomfortable truths that no one else had the courage or integrity to broach. Especially young African American males, he personified everything for us everything we wanted to become: the embodiment of African American masculinist authority and power, uncompromising bravery in the face of racial oppression, the ebony standard for what the African-American liberation movement should be about” (21).

The Autobiography of Malcolm X has many moments of racial turmoil and mental anguish that Malcolm endures from childhood to adulthood. In addition, his name changes describe phases of life and tumultuous psychological periods as he attempts to establish his own identity as a Black man in White America. When his autobiography begins, he is Malcolm Little, “his father’s seventh child” (2). After the untimely death of his father, he matures into a young man who begins to participate in crime and becomes a juvenile delinquent. His entire family begins to fall apart after Reverend Little’s death
and his mother’s mental demise. Malcolm recalls his mother’s condition with extreme sensitivity:

When she began to sit around and walk around talking to herself—almost as though she was unaware that we were there—it became increasingly terrifying. The state people saw her weakening. That was when they began the definite steps to take me away from home. As my mother talked to herself more and more, she gradually became less responsive to us. And less responsible. (19)

Malcolm X then moves in with two foster families over the next several months which are the Gohannases and the Swerlins. In the chapter called “Nightmare” Malcolm X characterizes his mother as, “Remained in the same hospital at Kalamazoo for about twenty-six years. Later, when I was still growing up in Michigan, I would go visit her every so often. Nothing that I can imagine could have moved me so deeply as seeing her pitiful state,” according to Malcolm X (21). Malcolm X takes the dismantling of his family very hard while white social workers take control of his family. Their presence and authority are a serious threat to him as a boy and as a member of the Little family. Malcolm X vehemently states, “We were state children,” court wards; he had the full say-so over us. A white man in charge of a black man’s children! Nothing but legal modern slavery—however kindly intentioned” (21). He further states, “Despite the artificially created separation and distance between us, we still remained very close in our feelings towards each other” (23).
It is after this traumatizing incident that he moves in with the Swerlins, his last foster family. However, there is a racial incident that occurs at school concerning his educational future that prompts him to move to Boston and stay with his sister Ella that was his “father’s grown daughter from his first marriage” (34). This incident occurs in chapter two titled, “Mascot” where he is attending school and progressing academically with good grades and conduct. Mr. Ostrowski was Malcolm X’s white English teacher and advisor. He asks Malcolm what he wants to be when he grows up. Malcolm X responds, “The truth is, I hadn’t. I never figured out why I told him, “Well, yes sir, I’ve been thinking I’d like to be a lawyer” (38). Mr. Ostrowski is shocked when he hears Malcolm X’s response and says to him, “Don’t misunderstand me, now. We all like you, you know that. But you’ve got to be realistic about being a nigger. A lawyer—that’s no realistic goal for a nigger. You need to think about something you can be” (38). Although it was not Malcolm X’s first experience with being called a “nigger,” it was when he began to change inside. Malcolm X declares:

I drew away from White people. It became a physical strain to simply to sit in Mr. Ostrowski’s class. Where “nigger” had slipped off my back before, wherever I heard it now, I stopped and looked at whoever said it. And they looked surprised that I did. Nobody including the teachers, could decide what had come over me. I knew I was being discussed. (38-39)

Malcolm X could not verbalize why at this particular point in his adolescence why the word “nigger” did not roll off his back anymore but his personality drastically changed.
Malcolm X then espouses relief in leaving for Boston after the incident at school when he says, “All praise is due to Allah that I went to Boston when I did. If I hadn’t, I’d probably still be a brainwashed black Christian” (40). Robert Young, author of “Psychoanalysis and Racism: A Loud Silence” suggests:

What is black and banished cannot be seen. The long term consequence of this was, according to Fanon, that in Europe, that is to say, in every civilized country, the Negro is the symbol of sin. Whatever is forbidden and horrifying in human nature gets designated as black and projected onto a man whose dark skin and oppressed past fit him to receive the symbols. Once again, Wolfstein points out that relationship remains dialectal. It grips the oppressor and the oppressed. In his excellent biography of Malcolm X (the best book on racism I have ever read), Wolfstein spells out the relationship as follows: ‘Stating the point more generally, we may say the Negro identity (like any other externally imposed and therefore stereotypically limited identity) is a character-form of group-emotion, determined through the mediation of identification with the oppressor. Conscience and consciousness are both whitened out, and blackness becomes firmly attached to the unacceptable, predominantly aggressive, infantile emotional impulses. Black people and white people alike come to have a character structure in which the I, including the moral I, is white and the It is black. Within this relationship, black people can think of themselves as fully human only by denying their true racial identity, while white people secure their humanity only at the price of black dehumanization. (6)
Once Malcolm’s X behavior and personality change after that traumatizing incident, he goes from being a promising scholar to a street hustler after arriving in Boston, Massachusetts. This psychological change occurs because Malcolm X is identifying as the “It” which is the label that White people in Lansing, Michigan that controlled and destroyed his life gave him. In addition, he was an African American child that was berated for wanting to become a successful attorney but Mr. Ostrowski’s comment alienated him further by berating his career goals and academic potential. “Signaling the demise of his aspirations to belong to white society, this comment forces Malcolm to confront his dehumanization and to reckon with his social invisibility in a provincial white environment,” claims John Henry, author of “The Public, Spiritual, and Humanistic Odyssey of Malcolm X: A Critical Bibliographical Debate” (79). This aforementioned incident also proved to Malcolm X how White people perceived African Americans as being incompetent and may have been the catalyst as to why he later censured integration as a Black Nationalist and member of the Nation of Islam.

When Malcolm X moves to Boston, he is in awe when he sees African American people dressed in fancy clothes and using language that he never heard before back in Lansing, Michigan. In his third chapter, entitled “Homeboy,” he affirms:

I spent the first month in town with my mouth hanging open. The sharp-dressed young ‘cats’ who hung on the corners and in the poolrooms, bars and restaurants, and who obviously didn’t work anywhere, completely entranced me. I couldn’t get over marveling at how their hair was straight and shiny like men’s hair; Ella
told me this was called a ‘conk.’ And these children threw around swear words I’d never heard before, even and, slang expressions that were just as new to me, such as ‘stud’ and ‘cat’ and ‘chick’ and ‘cool’ and ‘hip. (45)

The slang or vernacular that Malcolm X recalls in this section of the narrative evokes the historical time period of the 1920’s to the 1960’s. However, it is Malcolm X’s mentioning of the conk hairstyle that helps to validate the lifestyles and people in his life at this time as being authentic. The conk was the male version of a perm today except there was a difference in the way it was developed for Black men’s hair. The hairstyle was very popular when Malcolm arrived in Boston and his original conk was made out of lye, eggs and potato skins. The conk would straighten out an African American man’s kinky hair and make it like straight like a White man’s hair. In spite of this, an African American man’s newly conked hair had to be maintained with a Dorag and reapplication of the lye when new hair grew out. This concoction was known to leave an individual with chemical burns in their scalp or cause the hair to fall out just as it will today if left on a woman’s head too long. Malcolm X describes his first conk as, “I gritted my teeth and tried to pull the sides of the kitchen table together. The comb felt as if it was raking my skin off. I couldn’t stand it any longer; I bolted to the washbasin” (56).

After the pain he endures, he is proud that his hair lays like a white man’s and it the African American kinkiness is obsolete. Malcolm X continued to conk his hair many times after that despite the pain it caused him. In contrast, it was when he is recounting this section of his life to Alex Haley when he realizes, “This was my first big step toward
self-degradation; when I endured all that pain, literally burning my flesh to have it look like a white man’s hair. I had joined the multitude of Negro men and women in America who are brainwashed into believing that black people are ‘inferior’-and white people ‘superior’-that they will even violate and mutilate their God-created bodies to try and look ‘pretty by white standards’ (56-57). Alex Gillespie author of “Autobiography and Identity: Malcolm X author and hero,” suggests:

Arguably, conking, although it ‘relaxes hair,’ is a distinctive Black, not White tradition. Was Detroit Red attempting to imitate White people, or was he being socialized into a hybrid, but nonetheless distinctively Black, culture? While answering the question may be difficult, it is noteworthy that Malcolm X does not the let the question arise. Or rather, such questioning does not suit the narrative template. The narrative template needs Malcolm X’s ‘self-degradation’ in order to make more shining his subsequent salvation. (4)

Additionally, it is during this time that Malcolm X quickly learns the ways of the streets and peddles dope, becomes a bootlegger and involved in other illegal activities. Malcolm X becomes exactly what White society expects of him as an African American man which was a dope dealing thief. Malcolm X asserts in his “Hustler” chapter, “Now sometimes, I smoked opium with some white friends, actors who lived downtown. And I smoked more reefers than ever before. I didn’t smoke the usual wooden match-sized sticks of marijuana. I was so far gone by now that I smoked it almost by the ounce” (126). Likewise, he makes no excuses for his behavior or life of crime and is determined
to reveal the truth about his life and identity that is dominated by the White American paradigm.

Transformation from Little To “X”

From the chapters titled “Homeboy” to “Hustler,” to “Trapped” to “Caught” then finally to “Saved” Malcolm Little evolves from a dope fiend robber into a Black Muslim known as Malcolm X. Manning Marble calls attention to, “Malcom then relocated east to Roxbury and Harlem. He then became an urban outlaw, the notorious Detroit Red, a pimp, hustler, and burglar and drug dealer. Pinched by police, Detroit Red was sentenced to ten year’s hard labor in prison, where he then joined the Black Muslims. Once released, given the new name Malcolm X, he rapidly built the Black Muslims from an inconsequential sect to over one hundred thousand strong” (21). Scholar John Henry and author of “The Public, Spiritual, and Humanistic Odyssey of Malcolm X: A Critical Bibliographical Debate” adds:

His physical imprisonment is the literal equivalent of his spiritual imprisonment; and …his state of psychical imprisonment becomes symbolic of the bars that Black American faces all his life as a second-class citizen. Thus, the seemingly uninhibited and extemporaneous style of Roxbury and Harlem which intrigued and seduced Malcolm, does not lead to the reconstruction of truly liberating attitudes and human relations; on the contrary it spawns new forms of enslavement—he finds a life of crime and eventual self-imprisonment. (81)
Malcolm writes about his arrest in Chapter five entitled “Caught” for attempting to get a watch he had left in a jewelry shop for repairs and the cops going back to his home address and finding his apartment filled with stolen items. “The cops found the apartment loaded with evidence—fur coats, some jewelry, other small stuff, plus tools of the trade. A jimmy, a lock pick, glass cutters, screwdrivers, pencil beam flashlights, false keys…and my small arsenal of guns,” writes Malcolm (152).

While Malcolm X is incarcerated for burglary, he is able to introspectively examine all the occurrences of his life and reflect on who he is as an individual. It is the first time in his life, where he is not and cannot attempt to be anyone other than who he actually is in life. This fact is also recognizable because he does not give those chapters in his book a name like “Hustler” but rather “Satan” and “Saved.” The fact that he utilizes these specific terms for this period of incarceration in his life, establish that he was still at point of self-discovery. This self-discovery by Malcolm X is on the final page in the chapter entitled “Caught” where it reads:

But people are always speculating—why am I as I am? To understand that of any person, his whole life, from birth, must be reviewed. All of our experiences fuse into our personality. Everything that ever happened to us is an ingredient. But I am spending many hours because the full story is the best way that I know I have it seen, and understood, that I had sunk to the very bottom of the American white man’s society when-soon now, in prison—I found Allah and the religion of Islam and it completely transformed my life. (153)
Malcolm X’s transformation in prison allows him to mature as a man and further his education about the world and the Islamic religion. John Henry emphasizes Malcolm X’s psychological transformation in prison when he avows:

This act of reflection and clarification leads to the peeling off of a false layer of the self, as in Anais Nin’s *Diary I*, and therefore leads to the achievement of spiritual rejuvenation. Erik Erikson has referred to such crises as potential personality shapers. Malcolm not only pressed in the direction of intellectual self-hood, he also embraced the Nation of Islam (Black Muslims), the only religion actually generated by economic and racial conditions in America. As Malcolm said, ‘I don’t think anybody ever got more out of going to prison than I did.’

Seeing the world differently altered how he saw himself. (81)

After he was released from prison, Malcolm’s brother Reginald assisted him in shedding his Christian slave name which was Little so that he could adopt “X” as his new last name. The “X” was a representation of Malcolm’s original unidentified African name. As Malcolm X’s popularity increased, the X became tantamount with those who supported and identified the Black Muslim movement. Additionally, author Alex Gillespie upholds this version of Malcolm’s transformation:

The salvation comes when Malcolm X is in prison. After conceding to an urge to get down upon his knees and pray, Malcolm X is rewarded with a ‘vision’ of Master W.D. Fard, the Messiah’ and founder of the Nation of Islam (285). The narrative genre at this point is that of a spiritual conversion: Malcolm X is ‘saved’
(263) Malcolm X writes: I remember how, sometime later, reading the Bible in the Norfolk Prison Colony library, I came upon, then I read, over and over, how Paul on the road to Damascus, upon hearing the voice of Christ, was so smitten that he was knocked off his horse, in a daze. I do not know, and I did not then, liken myself to Paul. But I do understand his experience. (*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 257) (5)

Thus, after experiencing periods of extreme racial indifference as an adolescent and eventually leading a life of crime as Malcolm Little, aka “Detroit Red,” Malcolm takes control of his life and rei-identifies as Malcolm X. It is at this juncture that Malcolm X is no longer concerned with White society gazing upon him in Lacan’s mirror nor is he seeking their validation because now he acts and communicates according to the will of Allah. Despite still being subject to racism, Malcolm X’s life has purpose at this point. Moreover, while incarcerated, the anti-white rhetoric that he will eventually deliver in his famous speeches was established on the belief from the Nation of Islam that the white man was the devil. John Henry provides the rationalization for the “White man” rhetoric being the devil when he argues:

Judging Black Americans to be intellectually, spiritually, and culturally dead, the Nation of Islam held that they were victims who had lost their humanity. Thus, central to the Nation’s metaphysic was the Yacub myth of black genetic superiority. The myth held that a black scientist embittered with Allah, created a devil in the form of a white person, who in turn polluted the world with deceit,
cruelty and tyranny. By nature, the devil has always sought the total destruction of Black people. Therefore, through the Nation of Islam the Yacub myth served to awaken and protect black people against the devil’s lies, deceits, hypocrisy, and its process of scientific brainwashing. Once the Black man was enlightened, this knowledge presumably compelled him to separate from society’s evil source. (82)

Malcolm’s readily acceptance of White people being white devils stemmed from his interaction with them as an adolescent because they destroyed his family. First, the Black Legion murdered father which was a white organization, which caused the psychological dismantling of his mother who eventually lost custody of her children to white social workers which separated his entire family. Then he stayed with white foster families who treated him as if he were the family pet while using racial epithets in his presence. These aforementioned incidents were racially motivated and traumatized him as child and remained with him as an adult. Ergo, as a Black Muslim who was a Nation of Islam minister sought to empower the Black race by espousing how the white devil had destroyed and would continue to terminate any economic prosperity and opportunities of equality that they would create on their own. He believed at this time separation was the way for Black people to be productive without the interference of White people.

When Malcolm left prison in 1952, he was transformed from a street hustler to Black Muslim in the Nation of Islam and a Black nationalist. It was the Honorable Elijah Muhammad who serves as his mentor because he saved him while he was incarcerated from a life of crime and drug addiction. Moreover, Malcolm X is also credited with
having increased N.O.I. membership from 400 to 4,000 by 1960. With his identity solidified as a Black Muslim, he embarks on speaking engagements about African Americans being cognizant of their self-worth and the racial issues that were not acceptable in mainstream. David R. Novak, author of “Engaging Parrhesia in a Democracy Malcolm X as a Truth-teller,” sustains:

The writings of Foucault offer a useful lens through which to analyze the project of Malcolm X. Parrhesia, which means “free speech,” is engaged by a parrhesiastes, or ‘one who speaks truth’ (Foucault, 2001, 11) Foucault characterized parrhesia as ‘a verbal activity in which the speaker expresses his personal relationship to the truth, and risks his life because he recognizes truth telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself’) (19).

Understanding Malcolm X’s rhetorical relationship to parrhesia can help inform our knowledge of the underutilized rhetorical tool. Although some critics fail to appreciate the entirety of his career and sometimes misunderstand the rhetoric of Malcolm X, he remains an influential voice in the quest for racial equality. (26)

Likewise, as he matures into a Black Muslim, he makes the name change from Malcolm Little to Malcolm X at the Detroit Temple. Malcolm X says, “My application had, of course been made and during this time I received from Chicago my “X.” The Muslim’s X symbolized the true African family name that he could never know. For me, my “X” replaced the white slave master name of “Little” which some blue-eyed devil named Little had imposed upon my paternal forebears” (203).
This is the second transition that will occur with his identity in the narrative and it is very significant because it exhibits his conversion into a Black Muslim and his disconnection from historical stripping of his name. C. Kendrick of “On the Autobiography of Malcolm X” maintains, “Change was another feature of the complex personality. From changing his religion and/or philosophical outlook to the changing of his name-Malcolm Little to Malcolm X to El Shabazz. In the latter we are led to think of the inevitable changes often seen in the search for identity” (45).

Malcolm X lives with and works directly under Elijah Muhammad as his disciple in 1953 after moving to Chicago, IL. He is appreciative of the opportunity and deeply respects Elijah Muhammad. He is also very eager to spread the liberating teachings of the Nation of Islam. Once Muhammad feels he is ready, Muhammad gives Malcolm X permission to work with Brother Lloyd X in Boston. It is from that juncture, that he uses sophisticated rhetorical techniques that persuade his audiences to comprehend the historical atrocities of the past to correlate to the racial injustices of the 1950s to the 1960’s. “Thus through Muslim rhetoric, shaped by eloquence and personal magnetism, Malcolm helped to redefine reality,” according to John Henry (86). In support of previous statement, Malcolm X vehemently remarks:

The call me the angriest Negro in America. I wouldn’t deny that charge. They called me ‘a teacher, a fomenter of violence.’ I would say pointblank that is a lie. I am not for wanton violence, I’m for justice. I feel that if white people are attacked by Negroes-if the forces of law proved unable, or inadequate, or reluctant
to protect those whites from those Negroes—then those white people should protect
and defend themselves from those Negroes, using arms if necessary. And I feel
when the law fails to protect Negroes from whites’ attack, then those Negroes
should use arms, if necessary, to defend themselves (Cited in John Henry’s “The
Public, Spiritual, and Humanistic Odyssey of Malcolm X: A Critical Biography.”
(86)

He wanted his audiences to comprehend why they should not be complacent but outraged
about the current state of African Americans in America. David R. Novak proclaims, “He
struggled to reveal alternate ‘truths’ about African Americans in the 1950s and 1960s. He
argued that African Americans should be politically involved rather than isolated,
economically viable and self-sustaining rather than burdensome, and that they were
institutionally oppressed by white power structures and not a race of people incapable of
taking care of themselves” (27).

Moreover, in this role, Malcolm X becomes Assistant Minister and second to
Elijah Muhammad and establishes a new Temple in Harlem in 1954 which becomes very
instrumental in developing the Nation of Islam into a mass world organization. From
1954 to 1956, as Assistant Minister, Malcolm X was establishing new Temples across the
nation and bringing in new Muslims to join the Nation of Islam. The memberships of
Black Muslims increased not just with impoverished African Americans but the middle-
class ones as well. Taken from the Sixties Project, author Horace Coleman in his article
titled, “Perspectives on Malcolm X” asserts, “Although we have been given these gifts
before, Malcolm’s street theology clearly spoke to the black masses. He reached those of us not of the mythical middle class. His words shook the souls of the middle class and professional civil rights groups” (2).

Temple Seven was so appreciative of his membership efforts that they bought Malcolm X a car. Malcolm X was so committed to his faith that there were times that he did not sleep or eat. John Henry advocates, “Malcolm believed and advocated that Islam was the one religion which would abolish the race problem from society” (84). Malcolm X writes, “The Western world’s most learned diplomats have failed to solve this grave race problem. Her learned legal experts have failed. Her civil leaders have failed. Her fraternal leaders have failed” (Cited in John Henry’s “The Public, Spiritual, and Humanistic Odyssey of Malcolm X: A Critical Bibliographical Debate”) (84).

While Malcolm X was spreading his faith and attempting to empower Blacks, he did not recognize the importance of anything else, especially marriage. Initially, he did not want to be physically or emotionally tied down to a woman and after his own mother’s emotional breakdown. One can theorize that it also affected the way he perceived women which made him very distrustful of them. Stemming from his tumultuous childhood, one could also perceive that Malcolm X internally blamed his mother, Louise and her psychological demise for the dismantling of his family after his father’s death. Thus, Malcolm X is providing the readers with the implication that he may have believed that women are feeble or were weak in nature and cannot physically or mentally maintain their stability without presence of a man. Still, when he meets Sister
Betty in 1956 who was a nursing student at Temple 7, he reconsiders his feelings about women because she is leaving Temple 7 where she teaches hygiene classes.

Accordingly, he tells Elijah Muhammad about Sister Betty and after meeting her, he gives Malcolm X his blessing for marriage.

To this end, Malcolm X describes his proposal and marriage to Sister Betty in practical and non-enthusiastic tones because it is more out religious responsibility rather than out of romantic love. In chapter thirteen, entitled “Minister” Malcolm X, he writes, “We got the necessary blood test, then the license. Where the certificate said “Religion,” I wrote “Muslim.” Then we went to the Justice of the Peace” (235).

Nina Bosnicova, author of “Malcolm X and the Fair Sex: Representation of Women in Malcolm X’S Autobiography,” expresses:

If one accepts Patricia Collins Eve-Madonna dichotomy as a way of understanding of Malcolm X’s perception and representation of women, then Betty stands, more often than not, on the Madonna side of the dichotomy. She fulfills the Madonna definition by being one of those ‘archetypal’ wives and mothers who sacrifice everything for their husbands and children” (Collins 1992: 76) Although Malcolm X gives due respect to Betty’s understanding, tolerance and support, he refuses to depict her life in his story as a full human being. (81)

Just as Douglass and Jacobs experienced less than ideal relationships as slaves, Malcolm’s description of marriage is somewhat similar because there is no real emotion
behind his description and due to his religious convictions, he chose to remain silent about an intimacy or loving moments they shared in his text.

Malcolm X remains in the N.O.I. until the later 60s continuing to spread his faith across the country. In 1963, he gave a speech at the University of Berkeley called “Racial Separation” where he speaks about why integration will not work for African Americans when he stresses:

We must have a permanent solution. A temporary solution won’t do. Tokenism will no longer suffice. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad has the only permanent solution. Twenty-million ex-slaves must be permanently separated from our former slave master and placed on some land that we can call our own. Then we can create our own jobs. Control our own economy. Solve our own problems instead of waiting on American white man to solve our problems for us. (Cited from The Black Past Remembered and Reclaimed. Blackpast.org/1963-malcolm-x-racial-seperation)

He formed the Organization of Afro-American Unity in the following year which was 1964 and the Muslim Mosque but due to the lack of membership and financial resources these organizations never fully developed. In addition, later in that same year, several incidents also occurred that made him change his stance about Elijah Muhammad and the faith he so feverishly believed in as an N.O.I. minister. In 1964, journalist Barry Sheppard interviewed Malcolm X during this time and he champions:
A powerful speaker and thinker, Malcolm was a great success as proselytizer for the Nation of Islam, which began to attract significant support in the late 1950’s and the early 1960’s as nationalist sentiments spread among Blacks in the wake of an increased pace of civil rights activity throughout the country. As the Black struggle burgeoned in the early 1960’s, in the North as well as the segregated South, Malcolm X began to press the Nation of Islam to become more deeply involved in the struggle. His conflict with the leadership deepened when he discovered that the moral percepts of the Nation of Islam (which had helped reshape his life and which included opposition to drugs, alcohol and violence and sexual abuse against Black women) were not being adhered to by Elijah Muhammad. Malcolm X was suspended from the Nation of Islam at the end of 1963. In early 1964, he broke from the organization. (1)

From that same 1964 interview with Barry Sheppard, when asked about the split, Malcolm X explains it by recalling:

The split came about primarily because they put me out, and they put me out because of my uncompromising approach to problems I thought should be solved and the movement could solve. I felt the movement was dragging its feet in many areas. It didn’t involve itself in the civil or civic or political struggles our people were confronted by. All it did was stress the importance of moral reformation—don’t drink, don’t smoke, don’t permit fornication and adultery. When I found
that the hierarchy itself wasn’t practicing what it preached, it was clear that this part of the program was bankrupt. (2) (Cited on the http://links.org.au/node/46)

Malcolm X was disillusioned because of the hierarchy in the Nation of Islam, more specifically with the Honorable Elijah Muhammad who was a hypocrite because of his sexual relationships with his secretaries which produced children outside of his marriage. Furthermore, because the Honorable Elijah Muhammad filled the void in Malcolm X’s life after the death of his father, he was even more distraught when he realized that his mentor envied rather than support him.

**El-Hajj Malik Shabazz**

After his spilt from the N.O.I. Malcolm X makes his pilgrimage or “haji” to Mecca and goes into metamorphosis yet again, where he becomes aware of the fact that Islam embraces people of all colors and accepts everyone, not like he had been taught in the N.O.I. This pilgrimage correlates to the stripping of Malcolm X’s position of ministry and Black empowerment cause because he is ostracized and banished from the Nation of Islam. Mentally, he was in anguish because this was the organization that he believed in and thought would improve the social and political condition of African Americans. However, his identity and belief system will change and be renewed once again based on his new found enlightenment about Islam. Malcolm X then transforms into El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz and begins a new journey of faith. John Henry explains Malcolm X’s transformation during his pilgrimage when he avows:
However, this breakdown was very brief, as his pilgrimage to Mecca culminates not only his new identity represented by ‘X’ but also the adoption of a new name symbolizing a broadened perspective of brotherhood—El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. John Henrik Clark has claimed that after Malcolm’s trip to Mecca had a revolutionary impact upon his thinking. After his return to America, he no longer arbitrarily opposed black-white brotherhood or repudiated efforts with progressive whites. The mental freedom and new political understanding no longer allowed him to make sweeping indictments against all white people, as he realized that some whites were truly sincere and genuinely capable of being brotherly toward a Black man. (89)

Upon returning from his pilgrimage, Malcolm has a renewed faith in Islam and is now tolerant of his white brothers and sisters. Alex Gillespie examines Malcolm X’s pilgrimage when he professes:

He authors himself as experiencing genuine brotherhood in Mecca: he gives up the idea that White people are the devil incarnate and states that there can be brotherhood between Whites and Blacks. He reports: ‘My pilgrimage broadened my scope. It blessed me with a new insight’ (478). That insight is most clearly expressed in his public letter from Mecca: You may be shocked by these words coming from me. But on this pilgrimage, what I have seen, and experienced, has forced me to rearrange much of my thought-patterns previously held […] Each hour here in the Holy Land enables me to have greater spiritual insights into what
is happening in America between black and white. (A.M., 455) Again we can see Malcolm X using a narrative template of conversion in the form of a pilgrimage. The ‘pilgrimage’ he writes, brought ‘spiritual insights.’ Pilgrimage, as a narrative trope, is a socially accepted mode of personal transformation. (6)

Ergo, Malcolm X in Chapter eighteen titled “El-Hajj Malik-Shabazz” Malcolm X acknowledges, “It was in the Holy World that my attitude was changed, by what I experienced there, and by what I witnessed there, in terms of brotherhood—not just brotherhood toward me, but brotherhood between all men, of all nationalities and complexions, who were there” (369).

Malcolm X dedicated personal time into his narrative while being cognizant that his death was imminent because of the many threats he had received upon his life. He was also frustrated and there was criticism about his inactivity since his return from Mecca. C. Kendrick wrote about Malcolm X’s imminent death when he sustained, “We suggest that as a child Malcolm dealt with this threat of death by a psychological surrender to the inevitable, as it were. Malcolm, it seems, reacted to the threat as though it had occurred already, ‘it was destined to be so,’ and is so doing could reduce his anxiety. In his mind, the event had taken place, he had gone through it already. It was going to happen anyway and he was helpless to do anything about it as had been the case when he was a child” (49). In the chapter titled “1965,” Malcolm X claims:

I am only facing the facts that when I know that any moment of any day, or any night, could bring me death. This is particularly true since the last trip I have
made abroad. I have seen nature of things that are happening, and I have heard things from sources which are reliable. To speculate about dying doesn’t disturb me it as it might some people. I never felt that I would live to become an old man. Even before I was a Muslim—when I was a hustler in the ghetto jungle, and then a criminal in prison, it always stayed on my mind that I would die a violent death. In fact, it runs in my family. My father and most his brothers died-by violence—my father because of what he believed in. (385-386)

Moreover, Malcolm X hopes that readers and America will view his autobiography as a testimony as an individual that once hated the white man and characterized as him as the devil but then changed his views to become tolerant of him after becoming enlightened about Islam. Malcolm X recognizes, “I have given to this book so much of whatever time I have because I feel, and I hope, that if I honestly and fully tell my life’s account, read objectively it might prove to be a testimony of some value” (386).

However, he does not regret his stance on racial equality or the endearment he has for his race. In hindsight, he wishes he could have received a formal education, so that he could have served his fellow African Americans as a lawyer or congressman. He works with author and journalist Alex Haley in a series of interviews to dictate his story from 1963 to February 21, 1965 to when he assassinated in New York City at the Audubon Ballroom. Aza Nedhari illustrates the events that occur when Malcolm X is assassinated:

In 1965, Congress would pass the Voting Rights Act, overturning the institution of the ‘black codes.’ However, this same year, El Hajj Malik Shabazz (Malcolm
X), was assassinated. Shabazz as many other Black men, was an outspoken activists and advocate against racism (white supremacy). What Black men began to realize as the Civil Rights era ended and the Black Power movement took up the torch, was freedom only existed on paper, but the cultural reality of America told a different story. (2)

Alex Haley continues in the Epilogue, “Malcolm X was put on a stretcher and an unidentified photographer got a macabre picture of him with his mouth open and his teeth bared, as men rushed him up to the hospital clinic emergency entrance” (444). Haley further illuminates, “Between then and an hour before midnight, two thousand people, including scores of whites, had filed past the open coffin in which the body lay dressed in a dark business suit, a white shirt and dark tie, with a small, oblong brass plate above it inscribed, “El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz-May 19, 1925-Feb. 21, 1965” (450).

After his death, his audience is cognizant that Malcolm Little, Malcolm X and El-Hajj Malik Shabazz are the composite of his former self because with each transition, there is a connection of experiences and diction that serve a purpose for each he becomes in his life. To illustrate this transition, he goes from the street hustler that uses the words “cat,” “reefer” and “Daddy-O” to an auto-didactic in prison where he expanded his limited education and vocabulary which leads him to the Nation of Islam. This is where Malcolm X becomes a sophisticated rhetorical orator that mesmerized his audiences with unyielding connation and notable diction. Najee E Muhammad, author of “The Transformational Leadership of Malcolm X,” clarifies, “All of his life series of
transformations, as individuals navigate and negotiate themselves to higher levels of consciousness. Malcolm X’s life was no different as he transitioned from Malcolm Little, to Detroit Red, to Malcolm X, to El Hajj Malik Shabazz” (2).

In the final analysis of Malcolm X’s autobiography, John Henry exemplifies:

Black identity served to move blacks beyond the image of themselves, just as Malcolm journeyed from his social period of nigger to his spiritual summit of El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, reflective of both an individual and a universal humanity. It should be underscored that although Malcolm extended his geographical horizons and divested himself of racial chauvinism, he maintained individual, racial, and cultural integrity. ‘….no religion will ever make me forget the condition of the people in this country…I want to make that point clear.’

Furthermore, G. Thomas Courser, believed that the most profound transformation was underway; that in his last years he was simply absorbed in the process of becoming (89).

Facing this crisis in his life, Malcolm stated, “I’m man enough to tell you that I can’t put my finger on exactly what my philosophy is now, but I’m flexible” (91). Malcolm X knew that he was not going to live long and but had come to the realization that he was not his former self and would accept whatever Allah bestowed upon him. Thomas Doherty author of “Malcolm X: In Print,” on Screen, espouses:

Whatever the outcome of scholarly debates over authorship and historical assaults on the integrity of the narrator, it seems unlikely to detract from its popularity of
the tale. No wonder: The Autobiography of Malcolm X tells a traditional American story with direct links to at least three venerable literary genres. Like Benjamin Franklin, Malcolm X is, in John Cawelti’s phrase, an apostle of the self-made man. Like Frederick Douglass, Malcolm journeys from slavery to freedom in a kind of twentieth century slave narrative. Like Puritan fathers from Jonathan Edwards to Tom Dooley, he experiences a Damascus-like moment of conversion, and dedicates himself to missionary work among the infidels. Linking all three tropes is the theme of literacy, an almost religious reverence for the redemptive power of the printed word as the path to salvation and self-transformation. (31)

“One book, about a Black man, written by a Black man. Forty-five editions around the world. In a half-century, never out of print. Ever,” writes Todd Steven Burroughs from the Root webpage. In closing, Dr. Cornell West in his article written for the SmithsonianMag.com webpage titled, Why Malcolm X Still Speaks Truth to Power enthusiastically espouses:

Malcolm X is the great example of parrhesia in the black prophetic tradition. The term goes back to line 24A of Plato’s Apology, where Socrates says, the cause of my unpopularity was my parrhesia, my fearless speech, my frank speech, my plain speech, my unintimidated speech. The hip hop generation talks about ‘keeping it real.’ Malcolm was as real as it gets. James Brown talked about ‘make it funky.’ Malcolm was always, ‘Bring in the funk, bring in the truth, bring in the reality.’ (2)
Ossie Davis, the great civil rights activist and actor, is quoted as saying in his speech about Malcolm X at his funeral, “Malcolm was our manhood, our living Black manhood. This was his measure. This was his meaning to his people. In honoring him we honor what is best in ourselves.”

The *Autobiography of Malcolm X* was examined for its narrative form and the racial trauma Malcolm X suffered as an adolescent growing up in the Midwest. The incidents deeply impacted his psyche which remain with him until his untimely death. *Malcolm X* transforms his identity from a street hustler, to a minister in the Nation of Islam who gave aggressive speeches about the white devil to *El Hajj Malik Shabazz* who after traveling to Mecca who finally experiences the true meaning of Islamic brotherhood. His text is different from Douglass and Jacobs in that he does not seek validation from White America for his defiant diction nor does he want it. He unapologetically writes his narrative for himself and in it reveals his development as a young man where he struggles with racism, drugs and criminal activity. Then when Malcolm X is incarcerated and conforms to the will of Allah, he joins the Nation of Islam under the guidance of Elijah Muhammad. As a Black Nationalist, Malcolm X wanted African Americans to be self-sustaining while becoming free of the economic and political oppression that America had placed upon them as a race of people.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the narratives of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and Malcolm X were derived from their individual experiences with race and the identity of self in America. Cited in Juan Perea’s “The Black/White Binary Paradigm of Race: The Normal Science of American Radical Thought” Dr. Cornell West affirms, “To engage in a serious discussion of race in America, we must not begin with the problems of black people but with the flaws of American society-flaws rooted in historic inequalities and long-standing cultural stereotypes. How we set up the terms for discussing racial issues shapes our perception and response to these issues. As long as Black people are viewed as a ‘them,’ the burden falls on blacks to do all the ‘cultural’ and ‘moral’ work necessary for healthy race relations” (1227).

Therefore, in the recounting of their memoirs, each narrator provides readers with first-hand accounts of their racial trauma experiences that agitated the conscious of White society and America. Beginning with the slave narratives of Douglass and Jacobs who were both fugitives but differed in gender, their enemies and causes were the same which were to escape from bondage and abolish the peculiar institution known as slavery. To illustrate this aforementioned point, the slave narrative as a genre served in the
development of the abolitionist movement, the anti-slavery crusade while at the same
provided historical accounts of slavery from those who lived through that period in
Material for the Classroom” argues, “The genre offers a unique perspective on American
slavery as told from the vantage point of the victim” (167).

Additionally, the Autobiography of Malcolm X was not just a coming of age tale
but one that utilized resistant language that challenged White America’s views of
African Americans. It is also acknowledged that his autobiography is one of the most
well-known literary works in the African American literary canon but it was rejected for
inclusion in the Western literary cannon because white society characterized Malcolm X
as a violent demagogue that was spreading repulsive rhetoric that was deemed
intolerable. Stephen Tuck, University Lecturer in American History at Oxford University
and author of, “We Ain’t What We Ought to Be: The Black Freedom Struggle From
Emancipation to Obama” underscores, “His autobiography-published soon after his
death-would become required reading for would-be Black revolutionaries during the later
1960s” (314) Alex Gillespie author of “Autobiography and Identity: Malcolm X as author
and hero” further highlights:

In the case of Malcolm X, Alex Haley and the actual imagined audience. Within
interaction people are held to account, and especially in the act of self-narration,
one justifies past, present and future action. In the Autobiography we encounter,
in a very real sense, Malcolm X telling us his story-telling us who he is, what he has done, and what he feels he must do. In telling this story, he orients to us, and in orienting to us, he must try to reflect upon himself from our point of view (18).

This conclusion is based on their first-hand personal accounts, biographical information and interpretation of the primary texts. Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X as authors examine the nature of themselves and how their narratives are constitutive to their progressive conversions.

**Implications of Study**

Although the autobiographies of Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X are included in the African American literary canon, they present a fresh perspective of the narrative. Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X consciously decided to share their individual realities with society that further substantiate the debates about race and the identity of self for Blacks in America. Consider, for instance, the impact of people reading these specific texts and how the narrative themes correlate to such issues as police brutality, racial trauma, inferiority and gender discrimination. Authors Seabrook and Wyatt-Nichol affirm, “It is important to point out that the precept of inferiority is unique to the American slavery experience. Moreover, this experience of African Americans is unique in African American ascription to inferior status in that no other ethnic minority group entered the country as slaves and just as important, no other group was victimized across centuries the way African Americans have been victimized” (28). The liberatory power
of Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X’s narratives derive from their visible critiques of racism and their appeal to deconstruct White America’s idea of African Americans and their position in society. Further, their individual experiences correspond to the figurative language that is utilized throughout their narratives which further enhances the value and credibility of the works.

Moreover, each narrator’s text exemplifies the Black experience from an atypical perspective. For example, Harriet Jacobs describes her life as an enslaved woman, daughter and mother. To further substantiate this claim, Jacqueline Marie Smith affirms, “Jean Fagan Yellin examines Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents*, taking note of the qualities that make Jacobs’ narrative unique from other slave narratives. Yellin approaches the narrative from a feminist perspective, focusing on Jacob’s unusual first-person account, recounted by her autobiographical narrator Linda Brent, that simultaneously describe the discrete perils of slavery to women and addresses Jacobs’ professed female white audience. Yellin contends that Jacobs’ narrative “is at once the plea of an erring American female, the heroic recital of a valiant black slave mother, and a woman’s vindication of her life.” (263)

She serves not only as a female protagonist but an African American woman who defines herself and determines that her life will not end in marriage but in freedom for herself and children. Harriet Jacobs is heroic woman and as a narrator exemplifies this idea because she is willing to sacrifice her life for the betterment of her children despite
the dehumanizing conditions she is subjected to from Dr. Flint. Therefore, her narrative sustains the existence of African American women as narrators and how she conveys the images of women, self and the surrounding communities. These ideals in literature can be researched from the perspectives of Black feminism, autobiography, Black motherhood and Black women’s power.

More briefly, the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* and the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* both exemplify the Black male experience from the perspective of slavery for Douglass and Jim Crow to the Civil Rights Movement for Malcolm X. Douglass’s text is known as the one the most famous slave narratives to be published in the U.S. Douglass’s narrative details his experiences as a slave, the absence of parental heritage and his quest to physically liberate himself from slavery and psychologically through education. Charles H. Nichols author of “Who Read the Slave Narratives?” asserts, “This fugitive slave literature is destined to be a powerful lever. We have the most profound conviction of its potency. Argument provokes argument, reason is met by sophistry, but narratives of slaves go right to the heart of men” (153). Douglass’s *Narrative* is also relevant for its influence on abolitionist propaganda and the anti-slavery crusade that he vehemently supported throughout his national tours and other writings. Douglass is characterized as the heroic fugitive that despite his dehumanizing and awe-inspiring circumstances rose to become a statesman, orator and staunch abolitionist.
Whereas, Malcolm’s narrative with its resistant and unapologetic rhetoric speaks to how White domination occupies the mind and spirit of African Americans. Malcolm X developed a revolutionary realm of self-revelation in his narrative that White America was unprepared for but one that African Americans desperately needed. Thus, Malcolm X constructs a new account of being black in America that significantly contrasts the works of Douglass and Jacobs. His first-hand account is a reformed vision of what African Americans should be absent Jim Crow but instead infused with the principles of Black Nationalism and empowerment. Dr. Cornell West in his article titled, *Why Malcolm X Still Speaks Truth to Power* for the *Smithsonian Museum* webpage of the National History insists:

Malcolm X was music in motion. He was jazz in motion, and, of course, jazz is improvisation, swing and the blues. Malcom had all three of those things. He could be lyrical and funny and in the next moment, he’d shift and be serious and push you against the wall. The way he spoke had a swing to it, had a rhythm to it. It was call and response with the audience that you get with jazz musicians. And he was the blues.

Blues is associated with catastrophe. From the very beginning, from slavery to Jim Crow, that sense of catastrophe, of urgency, of needing to get it out, to cry out, somehow allowed that fire inside of his bones to be pressed with power and with vision. He never lost that. (1)
Areas Recommended for Further Studies

This aforementioned research will provide insight to comprehend the ongoing problems with race and the White paradigm in America.

Summary

Chapter six, this conclusive chapter summarized the text of Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X with regards to their dialogue and diction that was utilized in their narratives about race and self and identity. The historical backdrops for their narratives included but were not limited to slavery, the abolishment of slavery, the Civil War, Jim Crow to the Civil Rights movement which all impeded race relations in America. Ergo, these historical facts made it possible to comprehend how each narrator psychologically developed from childhood into adulthood and how these specific events impacted their subconscious. However, despite the racial obstacles Douglass, Jacobs and Malcolm X endured, they were still able to transcend their inferior status and elevate to becoming some of the most influential African Americans in history. Their narratives were evolutionary and interconnected the whole of the Black experience.


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