

**FROM A SLAVE TO A MAN: A CRITICAL
STUDY OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS AND
HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHIES**

ABSTRACT



Amanda Khyriem

**Department of English
North-Eastern Hill University
Shillong**

2010

English

USHU LIBRARY
Acc. No. 104077
Acc. # ~~_____~~
Date 15/7/2011
Class by _____
Sub - Heading by _____
Enter by _____

DS
813.3
DOU/KHY

FROM A SLAVE TO A MAN: A CRITICAL STUDY OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS AND HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Slave narratives compose one of the most influential and extensive traditions in African American literature and culture. A sub genre of the African American autobiography, the slave narrative has proven to be one of the most effective weapons against American slavery. In fact, in antebellum America, the fugitive slave narrative was the most popular genre of the period with some seventy or so narratives published from 1760 to the end of the Civil War in 1865.

The three decades between 1830 to 1860 saw the slave narrative evolving into a militant literature as it unravels the moral and social corruption of America and it is no coincidence that the American abolitionist movement was also at the height of its popularity during this period. Many writers in the nineteenth century like William Wells Brown, Harriet Jacobs, Frederick Douglass and others started their literary careers with autobiographical narratives of their lives.

The chapterisation of the thesis will be as follows:

- Chapter I: Introduction
- Chapter II: Educating the Self
- Chapter III: Articulating the New Self
- Chapter IV: Authenticating the Self
- Chapter V: Conclusion

Chapter-I: Introduction

Born on a farm in Tuckahoe of a slave mother, Harriet Bailey and an unknown white man, Frederick Douglass is given the name Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey by his mother, a name which evokes the commanding examples of European, Classical and American national patriarchs¹ and also a name which gives him a sense of identity and self worth. Growing up, Douglass ultimately claims February 14, 1817 as his birth date on the ground that once he heard his mother called him her 'Valentine'. His search for his father however proves futile because the harsh slaveholding laws of the time forbid slave mothers from revealing the names of the white men who father their mulatto² children. When rumours started floating that his master is also his father, it is assumed that Captain Aaron Anthony must have fathered him. McFeely on the other hand offers an enticing alternative in his biography on Frederick Douglass when he points out that when Douglass speaks of his master, he is usually referring to Thomas Auld, who owned him at the time of his escape to the North.³ This explanation would explain Auld's complex relationship with Douglass.

Frederick Douglass has always tried to portray himself as a man of heroic proportions and he is driven to better himself by any means possible. His sense of abandonment by the people closest to him, namely

his mother and grandmother, awaken in him a desire to prove his worth to the world but it also makes him wary of forming close relationships. This adds to his aura of a distant heroic figure. Even his death is fitting of the aura that he has created for himself, "...he began to mimic one of the day's grandiloquent speakers, rising from his chair and then sinking to his knees in a heroic gesture."⁴

Before we can discuss Slave Narratives mention must be first made of the Atlantic Slave Trade. Slavery already existed in Africa long before the arrival of the first Europeans but it had none of the horrors of American and European slavery. In Africa slaves were generally well treated by their masters because most were either debtors, members of other tribes or erring members of their own tribe but of course slave treatment can also differ from place to place and master to master.⁵

The Portuguese were the first to export slaves out of Africa in the mid-fifteenth century and the Americans started sending their slave ships to Africa by 1636.⁶ The iterativeness of the trade is reflected in the 11, 698,000 or so Africans exported to the New World⁷ during the Transatlantic Slave Trade which lasted from 1518 to 1870 despite the abolition of the international slave trade in 1807.⁸ The slave trade in Africa corrupted Africans to such an extent that even familial ties could not provide a shield against being sold away to slave traders. For those

captives the shock and fear of capture was compounded by the horror of the Middle Passage⁹ in the notorious slave ships. Dorothy and Carl J. Schneider intriguingly ascribe the sadism and cruelty of the sailors to the fact that most of them were forced or tricked into working on a slave ship.

The first Africans who set foot in North America in 1619 were some twenty Blacks who were brought ashore near Jamestown, Virginia after they were seized from a captured Spanish slave ship. It is significant that the early arrivals were hired as indentured servants¹⁰ but by 1660 Blacks were forced into chattel slavery as seen from surviving Virginia county court records from 1652, "...sold to John Pott 'one negro girle named Jowan; aged about ten years and with her issue and produce during her (or either of them) for their Life tyme. And their successors forever'." ¹¹

The banning of the International Slave Trade in 1807 led to the rise of the domestic slave trade in America which in turn led to the slave becoming almost like a cash crop. The Oxford English dictionary before the sixteenth century described the colour black as "Deeply stained with dirt; soiled, dirty, foul....Foul iniquitous, atrocious, horrible, wicked..." ¹² It is no surprise then that blackness for the white man came

to be associated with everything sub-human thereby making it easier for him to debase, humiliate and enslave a race of people.

Slave narratives which are the autobiographical narratives of former slaves first made their appearance in the United States in the early Eighteenth century. These writings are the most extensive and influential traditions in African-American literature and culture. Slave narratives are divided into three categories – Narratives which have been ghostwritten by whites, those which have been dictated by illiterate slaves to white editors and those authored by the slaves themselves.¹³

Many slave narrators like Olaudah Equiano, Elizabeth Keckly, William Wells Brown, Harriet Jacobs, Henry Box Brown and Frederick Douglass have all exposed the inhumanity of American slavery through their writings. The women's experience differs greatly from that of the men because they were also victims of sexual exploitation at the hands of their masters and overseers. Their writings are also revelations of their inherent intelligence and aptitude when they are able to fashion their own flight from slavery.

With the publication of Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*, in 1845 the Slave Narrative reached its pinnacle. What makes the *Narrative* unique is Douglass's style of self-presentation. In all his three

autobiographies, *Narrative* (1845), *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass His early Life as a Slave, His Escape from Bondage, and His Complete History to the Present Time* (1881), Douglass has written about slavery and exposed the truth about the Northern States concerning their deep rooted racism and dislike of slaves.

When the African slave first arrived in America he was divested of his culture and reduced to a condition termed 'social death'.¹⁴ It is increasingly seen in Nineteenth century America however that it is the American born slave who is better able to cope with slavery because they have a wider support system and are more knowledgeable about European ways.

Slaves below the Mason-Dixon line¹⁵ were denigrated to an unimaginable extent. Symbols of civilization like education and politics were closed to slaves and even Christianity which they were allowed to embrace was subverted to the conventions of slavery. This was possible because white people believed that Blacks are inferior intellectually, morally and spiritually.

Above the Mason-Dixon line things were no better because resentment against Black people was escalating due to the ever increasing numbers of fugitive slaves who were ready to work at any job for lesser

wages. This conflict between the two races has endured because this relationship is symbiotic - a fact which many whites refuse to believe.

As a child Frederick Douglass is protected from the inhumanity of slavery by his grandmother but as he grows older the realization of his status as a slave comes to him in degrees. With this understanding comes the awareness that his mother is a shadowy figure in his life because slaveholding laws in Maryland hold that slave children must be separated from their mothers after completing a year of their life. As an adult Douglass realizes that this practice breaks all bonds between a mother and her child as he himself admits "I cannot say that I was very attached to my mother".¹⁶ Of his father, "I knew nothing"¹⁷ Douglass writes abruptly since slave laws have effectively reduced the father to a non entity since children follow the mother's condition and in the case of white fathers, "Father he might be, and not husband, and could sell his own child without incurring reproach. if in its veins coursed one drop of African blood."¹⁸

Most Americans have seen Blacks usually portrayed as stock figures such as the character of 'Sambo'¹⁹ but fugitive slaves like Sojourner Truth and Douglass are determined to reveal the truth about slavery, from the slave songs which are commonly believed to reflect the slave's contentment and happiness when in fact the opposite is true, to the

fall out of such repressive laws as the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793,²⁰ the gag rule of 1836²¹ and the Dred Scott decision of 1857.²² James M. Whitfield's poem *America* (1853) a bitter parody of the patriotic hymn *America the Beautiful* encapsulates not only the horrific plight of Black slaves but also the apathy of the United States government:

America it is to thee,
Thou boasted land of liberty,
It is to thee I raise my song,
Thou land of blood, and crime and wrong.²³

(line 1-4)

Chapter-II: Educating the Self

Black slaves who decide to break away from the shackles of slavery take various and multiple routes to freedom. Though some buy their freedom from their masters through hard labour, some gain their freedom through acts of courage and daring. For Frederick Douglass, his road to freedom lay through education and his awareness of this fact becomes the driving force, pushing him to find ways and means to better himself intellectually.

Douglass's childhood friendship with Daniel Lloyd, Col Lloyd's youngest son, gives him the opportunity to see life on the other side of the fence. Douglass deliberately sets out to learn the language of his masters because it is a mode of liberation as well as a form of power.²⁴ Through this contact, Douglass's eyes opened to the disparity that exists between

White masters and their Black slaves and the desire to overcome his disadvantages is born. He, therefore, makes a conscious effort to drop the slave dialect and appropriate the formal English language spoken by the Llyods and their friends realizing even at this young age that how speaks will open or close doors for him in the future.

Frederick Douglass's stay with Hugh and Sophia Auld²⁵ in Baltimore opens a Pandora's Box for him when he is introduced to the English alphabet by his mistress. Sophia's act of reading the Bible and then teaching Douglass his letters stands as a conundrum especially when we consider the Draconian laws that were passed, prohibiting the mastery of letters by Blacks after the Stono Rebellion of 1739. The mystery behind Sophia's action lies in her roots since she comes from a Northern working class background with no knowledge about the workings of slavery as practiced in the South. Perhaps Sophia wanted to see how far this intelligent slave boy can progress if given the right tools. It is Hugh Auld who unwittingly creates a craving for education in Douglass when he puts a stop to the lessons on the ground that education will do Douglass no good, but a great deal of harm.²⁶

An interesting aspect of slavery in the United States is that since for most slaves their situation is the only condition they know, this state of living becomes tolerable to them. Of course this is not a generalization

of the whole community because America's slave history is dotted with numerous slave rebellions. Interestingly, Douglass never takes part in a slave revolt though John Brown, the abolitionist invited him to join the raid in Harper's Ferry in 1859. A reason is because Douglass realizes that the plan is doomed to failure. Later in life Douglass condones violence as a means of achieving freedom because in the middle of the Civil War he confesses that "from the first, I, for one, saw in this war the end of slavery". At the same time too he believes that education is the road to freedom because it is the slave's ignorance and illiteracy which keeps him in fetters.

In a direct subversion of the White man's law, Douglass seizes an education through trickery and bribes using the streets of Baltimore as a school room. He surreptitiously adds to his growing store of knowledge by challenging the little white boys to a game of who knows the most words. Oddly enough Douglass attributes his love for learning to his sable, unprotected and uncultivated mother and not to his unknown Anglo-Saxon father.²⁷

James McCune Smith, a Black physician and abolitionist labels Douglass a "Representative American Man" because he reveals a tenacity and intellectual courage that is unique. A self-made man, Douglass is able to overcome all obstacles in his quest for education. During his stay with

Covey the slave breaker, Douglass is made to drink the bitterest dregs of slavery and during this period his literary pursuits are all but forgotten. It is only when he is sent to live with Mr. Freeland at the end of the year that Douglass feels alive once again and his slumbering passion for reading and education is reawakened. Within a short time Douglass is running a discreet Sabbath school for his fellow slaves who want to break free from the darkness they have been forced to occupy.

What separates Douglass's three autobiographies from the other slave narratives is that his books are not just narratives of his experiences but they are also critiques of the institution of slavery. Douglass bitterly critiques the Christmas holiday week where slaves are encouraged to entertain their masters through athletic feats and drink themselves into a stupor so that during this idle period thoughts of rebellion and running away will be furthest from their mind.

A book which greatly influenced Frederick Douglass was "The Columbian Orator"²⁸ since this book gave speech to Douglass's innermost thoughts. The book marked a turning point in Douglass's life because it was able to mould and shape the impressionable young slave to the man he finally becomes. It is this kind of education which provides Douglass with the necessary confidence and presence of mind to make

his escape to the North where he is able to make a new life for himself, a life of dignity and self-respect, where for the first time he is his own man.

Chapter-III: Authenticating the New Self

Frederick Douglass sets foot in New York on September 4th 1838, a free man and filled with an ecstasy indescribable. The euphoria however doesn't last long because after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1793, New York became one of the most dangerous cities in the 'free' North for fugitive slaves. Arrival in the free states of the North did not signal the end of all the Black man's problems because he is threatened by something more insidious and potentially more dangerous psychologically. In the *Souls of Black Folk* W. E. B. Du Bois writes about how the negro is confronted by his 'twoness' – an American and a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two warring ideals in one body. Douglass is made to forget his twoness when he first joined the Garrisonians since he is a novelty as a fugitive slave lecturer. He is however brought face to face with his twoness when he is advised by Collins, a fellow Garrisonian, to have, "a little of the plantation manner of speech...."²⁹ To Douglass's commendation he refuses saying that he must speak, "just the word that seemed to me the word to be spoken by me".³⁰

All that the American Negro desired is to be both Black and American but this is something that white America is not ready to accept.

Since it will not allow him to merge his double self, America finds it easier to relocate him to a place far away because it believes in the adage, “out of sight, out of mind”. Under the relocation programme of the American Colonisation Society freed Blacks were sent to Liberia in Africa and some went to Haiti, but the failure of these programmes suggests the degree to which these Blacks were American in their identity and cultural expectations.³¹ This inability to adjust to a new life is an indication of how much of America the Black man has imbibed within himself and it stands as a testament to Douglass’s proclamation, “Individuals immigrate – nations never”.³² In support of his belief in integration, Douglass fights for integration in public schools because for him Black separatism is not the answer to the problem of colour.

In his journey to freedom and manhood, Douglass attributes his fight with Covey as the beginning of the creation of a new self. In the beginning Douglass submits to Covey’s brutality until his spirit is broken but a day came when enough is enough and he fights back. He declares that this battle with Covey is the turning point in his career as a slave because it revives in him the expiring embers of freedom and it gives him a sense of his manhood.

When a man is pushed to the edge of the cliff, sometimes his leap of death ends in a rebirth for him. This is what happens to Douglass

because after the fight with Covey he announces, "I was nothing before; I WAS A MAN NOW".³³ With the Garrisonians, Douglass is able to metamorphose from a voiceless slave to an orator and influenced by John Brown he begins to think that slavery can only be destroyed through bloodshed.

As he progresses Douglass reveals a remarkable level of maturity since he refuses to divulge his route of escape so that others may follow him. He also refuses to name the white boys who contributed to his education in Baltimore in case white society ostracizes them. When a people are able to criticize itself it reveals its maturity as a society. It is significant that Douglass exposes the faults and weaknesses of the slaves themselves when he points out that slaves not only boast about being born in the United States but they also quarrel among themselves and boast about the relative goodness of their respective masters. What is even worse is that they are also capable of ill-treating and starving their own just as Douglass suffered at the hands of Aunt Katy when a child in Aaron Anthony's house. In the North some free Blacks work in tandem with slave catchers to kidnap their own and send them back to their masters for a reward.

Colour prejudice among the sable population is a problem and the issue is considered as a bit of dirty laundry. Douglass's second marriage

to a red-headed woman in 1884 leads to accusations that he is ashamed of his own race. To his children, his marriage is not only like a formal repudiation of them but it is also like a confirmation of their sense that they being darker than he were of less value.

Racial attitudes in the North were extraordinarily complex. Though most whites do not accept the idea of Black equality and social segregation was common, yet whole towns would pour out into the streets in protest if a fugitive slave was seized. This attitude also explains the Garrisonian's behaviour to Douglass, especially when they counsel him to give only the facts and to leave the philosophy to them. White America carries a preconceived notion that Blacks are incapable of any constructive thought or action and they doubted Douglass's authenticity as a slave since they are confronted by someone who is literate and a master of oratory. The *Narrative* is written as an answer to all the doubting Thomases. Throughout his life, Douglass is always brought face to face with racism but each time he is always able to transcend it. We witness racism at its worst when Douglass is appointed Marshall of the District of Columbia but without the honour of presenting guests to the President of the United States during formal receptions. A reason is because it is unthinkable that a former slave will perform such an honour.



In his speech entitled "*What is to the Slave the Fourth of July*", Douglass celebrates the principles of the founding fathers but at the same time he goes on to contrast the immeasurable distance between the conditions of Whites and Blacks in the United States. But he asserts that, "progress is yet possible",³⁴ which implies that there are still miles to go towards achieving a black heroic identity. Douglass does emerge as the most visible, persuasive and influential African American of the nineteenth century," a life, ironically, that could have happened only in America."³⁵

Chapter-IV: Authenticating the Self

All art involves self-projection to a certain extent and in the novel or the drama, the writer projects his own personality into the character that he creates. As a result, self-projection is inevitable in literature and in almost every age autobiographical writing is evident. The diary, journal, memoir and letters all fall under autobiographical writing but each is different from the other.

A diary is a faithful and minute recording of a person's daily life, but unlike the journal which usually has a specific object, the diary is sometimes not very coherent. Though the memoir and the autobiography are closely related to one another yet the memoirist concentrates more on

recording public events rather than the 'self' whereas the autobiographer illumines the author's inner self.

The term autobiography was coined in 1809 when Robert Southey commented on the life of Portuguese painter Francisco Veirira.³⁶ The word autobiography can be described in terms of three constituent elements – autos (self), bios (life), and graphe (writing).³⁷ In America it is only in recent years that the autobiography has received scholarly attention since before it was derided as an inferior kind of literature.

Black American literary tradition with its roots in Africa began with the oral tradition and these stories about the experience of capture and enslavement were passed on from mouth to mouth. Black American autobiography is a continuation of this creative literary tradition and this genre not only fulfills their need for a rhetorical mode to do battle against racism but it is also capable of having a mass impact on the conscience of ante-bellum America.

Black autobiography actually has its roots in the Slave Narrative because the convention of such writing is to focus more on the escape from bondage to freedom. Experienced abolitionists recognize that autobiography or first person narrative is the most effective tool in their fight against slavery in the South because they offer an in-depth and intimate look into a world which before stood as an enigma.

A charge often leveled against slave narratives is that they often degenerate into propagandistic material for the abolitionists with their excessive scenes of whipping, beatings, deprivation and sexual violence against women. Early historians have believed that this genre is weak in factual substance, yet John W. Blassingame asserts that these accounts not only have a ring of truth but they can also be verified by independent sources.³⁸ In autobiography the nature of truth is very complex because the autobiographer presents the truth of life as seen from inside. It is because of this that slave narratives have been accepted with great skepticism and resistance especially since this genre is an arm of abolitionist propaganda. Frederick Douglass's determination that his story must be believed as the truth makes him reveal his master's identity and the place of his birth. Though he knows that it is reckless to reveal such details, yet his conviction that the *Narrative* will be worthless without such revelations pushes him on to a full disclosure of all his particulars.

In White autobiography, truth is viewed very differently. White autobiographers do not have to prove the authenticity of their writings since their sincerity is assumed. Thoreau declares at the beginning of his experience at Walden Pond, "I, on my side, require of every writer, first or last, a simple and sincere account of his own life".³⁹ This statement exposes the bias of white readers because Douglass on the other hand

goes to great lengths to establish the authenticity of his story. In White autobiography, literary egoism may be praised as self-reliance but in Black autobiography the same is termed as impudence

It is interesting to see that though Douglass conforms to the traditions of the slave narrative in his first autobiography by having Garrison and Wendell Phillips, two white abolitionists, write the preface, yet in his two later books he has Black men to do the honours. James McCune Smith, a Black physician and abolitionist and George L. Ruffin, the first Black American to graduate from Harvard Law School in 1869 and the first to serve on the Massachusetts State legislature.

An interesting aspect of Douglass's three autobiographies is that he often makes no mention about certain people and incidents in his life. His childhood friendship with Daniel Lloyd, Col Lloyd's youngest son, is only given a brief mention and he makes no mention at all of his courtship of Anna Murray in Baltimore, before announcing their marriage in New York a few days after his escape. Douglass deliberately plays down his association with Daniel Lloyd because within its boundaries he was the lowly, ignorant slave boy, an impression which does not sit well with the image that he now wants to show the world. His wife Anna, an illiterate, dark-complexioned and coarse woman did not fit into Douglass's world filled with outspoken and militant personalities. By

keeping silent about them Douglass tries to uphold only his heroic qualities.

The continuation of slavery and human bondage has given rise to various forms of protest and Black autobiography is one of them. Black protest started on the slave ships with the slave rebellions and it matured into the act of seizing an education in the face of white opposition. Other forms of protest range from a deliberate work slowdown to oratory and religion, when Black slaves inscribe Christianity with certain African forms of worship such as the calling out which is very popular in Black churches.⁴⁰ A recurring theme in most Black autobiography is the Black man's protest against the cruelty and injustice imposed on him by white America, a theme which is relevant even in twentieth century America. This is indicative of the collective failure of the American nation in providing basic civil and human rights to a race of people whose forefathers were forcibly brought across the ocean against their will.

For Douglass a potent weapon against the debilitating effects of slavery is a deliberate misreading of what the slave holder stands for. As Douglass puts it, "What he most dreaded, that I most desired. What he most loved, that I most hated".⁴¹ Douglass has always done the opposite of what others want him to do but for him: the act of misreading is not an act of social commentary or moral criticism, it is an act of self-creation.

It is only through autobiography that Douglass feels he can authenticate his own self because this is the only genre which can provide him with the platform to reveal to the world the man that he is, a hero.

Chapter-V: Conclusion

Though the sheer force of his character, Douglass is able to emerge as a spokesman for his people and during the American Civil War, he is able to successfully lobby President Abraham Lincoln on two fronts – to abolish slavery and to let Blacks fight in the war as soldiers. However during his long career as a voice for his people Douglass has had to face a number of hurdles but each time he always emerges unscathed. His tenure as President of the Freedmen's Savings and Trust Company in 1874 ended with the closure of this bank⁴² but many people understood that it was humanly impossible for Douglass to turn around the fortunes of this irresponsibly managed bank overnight.

White western philosophers like Hegel, Kant and Hume have dismissed the sable race as inferior to the white race in intelligence, morality and spirituality but this comes as no surprise because white men have always wondered whether the African is a species of man or not. In their writings, slave narrators have been able to prove that they are more than a mere species of man, through their writings they have shown that they are not so obtuse as to be unconscious of the wrongs committed

against them. Frederick Douglass's autobiographies stand as proof to these statements. Douglass makes no claim to literary greatness in spite of the high critical acclaim that his books have generated. One of the reasons why his writings were so popular is because they struck a chord with the mood of the age, an age characterized by reformist movements – women's rights, peace, public school education and others.

A discussion of Frederick Douglass will not be complete without mentioning his speeches. His brilliant command and use of language, his intellectual brilliance quickly made him one of the more popular speakers in antislavery meetings. Some of his more popular speeches are, *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July*, *Self-Made Men*, *Lessons of the Hour* and others. Many times Douglass was able to control an unruly crowd through the sheer magnetism of his voice, "Full, rich and deep came the sonorous tones, compelling attention, drowning out the catcalls as an organ would a penny whistle."⁴³

Frederick Douglass's disposition is that he never makes the mistake of considering his education as completed. This fascination with education will remain with him throughout his life. His intellectual superiority is even more amazing when we consider that he has never had a day's formal schooling. To Douglass, education is a continuous process and not to be limited within the four walls of a classroom.

James McCune Smith has correctly said that Douglass is more than an American hero. He is a Black American hero as well as the Father of the Civil Rights Movement in America. Douglass has been able to provide a Black perspective through his writings because his thoughts have come from within him and they are embellished in his own words. Douglass presents his life as a symbol of Black success but he is not without his critics who have accused him of having been co-opted by affluence, self-interest, political debts and undue regard for white acceptance. However it cannot be denied that Douglass has an appeal that is not limited to his own race or to Americans alone. He has the ability to touch the conscience of mankind as a whole.

In his writings, Douglass has projected himself not only as a leader of his people but also as a kind of Moses. Because he is truly a hero, a man who upholds his principles no matter what, later Blacks from Booker T. Washington to W. E. B. Du Bois have all sought “to appropriate into their own autobiographical self-portraits the African American culture hero first created and projected by Frederick Douglass”.⁴⁴

End Notes

- ¹ William L. Andrews, *The Oxford Frederick Douglass Reader*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.6.
- ² Originally from Spanish 'mulato' meaning hybrid. The first-generation offspring of a black and a white person.
- ³ William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass*, (New York: Norton, 1991), p. 13.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 381.
- ⁵ Dorothy and Carl J. Schneider, *Slavery in America: From Colonial Times to the Civil War*, (New York: Facts on File, 2000), p.2.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- ⁷ Signifies the western hemisphere: the hemisphere that includes North America and South America.
- ⁸ Colin A. Palmer, *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History; The Black Experience in the Americas*, (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), p. 2062.
- ⁹ The Atlantic crossing between Africa and the Americas where countless enslaved Africans died en route.
- ¹⁰ A labourer under contract by an employer usually works for 3-7 years, very like a slave, except it's for a specified amount of time.
- ¹¹ Winthrop Jordan, "White Over Black," *America's Black Past*, ed. Eric Foner, (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 67-68.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 57.
- ¹³ Harish Chander, "Frederick Douglass (1818-1895)", *African American autobiographers: A Sourcebook*, ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson, (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002), p.101.
- ¹⁴ William L. Andrews and Frances Smith Foster, "Introduction", *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, (New York: Norton, 2004), p. 155.
- ¹⁵ The boundary between Maryland and Pennsylvania, a symbolic dividing line between the North and the South before the American Civil War.
- ¹⁶ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, (New York: Miller, Orton and Mulligan, 1855), p. 52.
- ¹⁷ Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass His Early Life as a Slave, His Escape from Bondage, and His Complete History to the Present Time*, (Hartford: Park Publishing Co, 1891), p. 15.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- ¹⁹ The typical plantation slave, docile but irresponsible, loyal but lazy, humble but a liar and a thief.
- ²⁰ The law guarantees the right of a slaveholder to recover an escaped slave.

- ²¹ The U.S House of Representatives passes the Gag rule which prevents any antislavery petition or bill from being introduced, read or discussed.
- ²² A ruling by the U.S Supreme Court that people of African descent can never be US citizens.
- ²³ James M. Whitfield, "America", *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, eds. Gates and McKay, (New York: Norton, 2004), p. 484.
- ²⁴ Emory Elliot, gen.ed. *Columbia Literary History of the United States*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p.359.
- ²⁵ Hugh Auld is Thomas Auld's brother.
- ²⁶ Frederick Douglass, "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself", *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. Gates and McKay, (New York: Norton, 2004), p. 409.
- ²⁷ ---. "Life and Times of Frederick Douglass His Early Life as a Slave, His Escape from Bondage, and His Complete History to The Present Time", (Hartford: Park Publishing Co, 1881), p. 24.
- ²⁸ A popular collection of classic poems, dialogues, plays and speeches that Douglass uses as a model for his own speeches.
- ²⁹ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, (New York: Miller, Orton and Mulligan, 1855), p.362.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.362.
- ³¹ James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Hard Road to Freedom: The Story of African America*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001), p.132.
- ³² Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass His Early Life as a Slave, His Escape From Bondage, and His Complete History to The Present Time*, (Hartford: Park Publishing Co, 1881), p.293.
- ³³ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, (New York: Miller, Orton and Mulligan, 1855), p.246.
- ³⁴ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, (New York: Miller, Orton and Mulligan, 1855), p.405.
- ³⁵ Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Alan Steinberg, *Black Profiles in courage: A Legacy of African American Achievement*, (New York: William Morrow and Co, 1996), p.73.
- ³⁶ Sarojini, "Autobiography: A Literary Genre", *Women's Writing*, ed. Jasbir Jain, (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2004), p. 202.
- ³⁷ Andrews and Foster, "Introduction", *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. Gates and McKay, (New York: Norton, 2004), p.2.
- ³⁸ William L. Andrews, "The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, Theory and Explication", *African American Literary Criticism, 1773 to 2000*, ed. Hazel Arnett Ervin, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999), p. 232.
- ³⁹ Quoted in William L. Andrews, "The First Century of Afro American Autobiography, Theory and Explication", *African American Literary Criticism, 1773 to 2000*, ed. Hazel Arnett Ervin, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999), p.224.

- ⁴⁰ Aldon Morris, "Centuries of Black Protest: It's Significance for America and the World", *Race in America. The Struggle for Equality*, ed. Hill and Jones, (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), p. 26.
- ⁴¹ Frederick Douglass, "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself", *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. Gates and McKay, (New York: Norton, 2004), p. 410.
- ⁴² After discovering that the institution is insolvent, Douglass tries to reorganize it with the help of John Sherman, chairman of the Senate Finances Committee, but in June the trustees vote to close the bank. The bank's failure causes thousands of freed people to lose their savings.
- ⁴³ William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass*, (New York: Norton, 1991), p. 371.
- ⁴⁴ Andrews and Foster, "Frederick Douglass 1818-1895", *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. Gates and McKay, (New York: Norton, 2004), 387.

MEMU LIBRARY

Acc. No. 104077,

Acc. in. R/Nor/Sia

Date. 15/7/2011

Class by. _____

Sub - Heading by. _____

Enter by. _____

**FROM A SLAVE TO A MAN: A CRITICAL
STUDY OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS AND
HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHIES**

Amanda Khyriem



**Submitted in fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Master of Philosophy**

**Department of English
North-Eastern Hill University
Shillong**

2010

Handwritten mark

NYU LIBRARY
Acc. No. 104077
Acc. No. ~~PNOLC~~
Date 15/7/2011
Class by ~~AM~~
Sub - heading by ~~22/9/11~~
Entw by _____

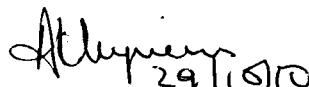
**Department of English
North-Eastern Hill University
Shillong**

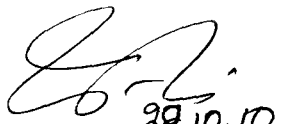
October 2010

DECLARATION


I, *Amanda Khyriem*, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, and that the contents of this thesis did not form the basis for the award of any previous degree to me or, to the best of my knowledge, to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other university/institute.

This is being submitted to the North-Eastern Hill University for the degree of Master of Philosophy in English.


29.10.10
(Amanda Khyriem)
Candidate


29.10.10
(Prof. Tamsula Ao)
Supervisor

**Professor in English
North Eastern Hill University
Shillong - 793022**


(Dr. Meon Moon Mazumdar)
Head



Acknowledgements

My gratefulness is to God for His blessings and for giving me the strength when I needed it.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Prof. Temsula Ao for guiding me and for having faith in me when I did not have any.

I would like to thank the Head of the Department, Dr. M.M. Mazumdar for her words of support. My sincerest thanks to Prof. Esther Syiem for all her help and support in everything. I would also like to thank Mrs. Nola Syiem and Dr. K.S. Nongkynrih for their invaluable help; Dr. U. Sewa, Dr. S. Bhattacharjee and Dr. M. Ranganathan for their help and encouragement. A big thank you to the office staff, Kong Riti, Felis, Mercia and Kong S. Dkhar.

This thesis is dedicated to my mother and my two children, the wind beneath my wings and the lights of my life.

Last, but not the least, I would like to thank all my friends for sharing their thoughts and ideas with me.

Amanda Khyriem

CONTENTS

Chapter-I:	Introduction	1-26
Chapter-II:	Educating the Self	27-40
Chapter-III:	Articulating the New Self	41-63
Chapter-IV:	Authenticating the Self	64-76
Chapter-V:	Conclusion	77-89
	Bibliography	90-94

CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

Born on a farm in Tuckahoe, in the back country of Maryland's Eastern Shore of a slave mother, Harriet Bailey, and an unknown white man, Frederick Douglass is given the name Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey by his mother, a name which evokes the commanding examples of European, Classical and American national patriarchs.¹ By giving her son an illustrious name, Harriet Bailey tries to bestow on him a sense of destiny and a sense of self-worth which will belie the unpleasant reality of his status in the slave hierarchy as a fatherless slave. Growing up, two things rankled Douglass. One is his ignorance of the year of his birth and the other and the most important is his ignorance of his father's identity. For most of his life, Douglass tries to fill up these blank spaces surrounding his birth and in 1835 he overheard his master say that he was about seventeen years of age.² When a child, Douglass remembers his mother referring to him once as "her Valentine" and this resulted in Frederick Douglass claiming February 14, 1817 as the date of his birth. Recently, historian Dickson Preston discovered the property book of Douglass's first master, Aaron Anthony, where Douglass's birth date is recorded as February, 1818.³

The blank space concerning the date of his birth thus filled up, Douglass then becomes obsessed with the identity of his father. His search proves futile because of the harsh slaveholding laws which forbids slave women from revealing the names of the white men who father their mulatto⁴ children. As a child Douglass must have felt the difference between himself and his siblings, a “yellow” boy with a complexion several shades lighter than that of his sable brothers and sisters. This glaring difference between him and his closest relatives must have added to his determination to discover his father’s identity and claim a name to fill up the remaining empty space. When rumours started floating that Douglass’s master is also his father, it is immediately assumed that Captain Aaron Anthony must have been the man who fathered him. In his biography *Frederick Douglass*, William S. McFeely however writes about the possibility of Thomas Auld having fathered Douglass. According to him, Auld may have been attracted to Harriet Bailey at about the same time when he started thinking of courting Lucretia Anthony. McFeely clinches his argument by declaring that in the *Narrative*, when Douglass speaks about his master, he is usually referring to Thomas Auld⁵ who owned him at the time of his escape to the North. This explanation to McFeely would explain Auld’s complex relationship with Frederick Douglas.⁶

Starting with his illustrious original name, Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey, Douglass seems destined for greatness. A number of factors contribute to create a man of heroic proportions. His sense of abandonment by the people he loves the most, namely his mother and grandmother, makes him wary of forming close personal relationships and this adds to his aura of a distant heroic figure. Perhaps his belief that the people closest to him have betrayed him awakened in him a desire to prove to the world that he is a worthy son. The conviction that he has to prove his worth not only to the world but more so to himself drives him to better himself by any means possible. The awareness of a lack in his being, which is a result of his ignorance of his father's identity, makes him strive for greatness and it is appropriate that his death on February 20, 1895 came a few hours after he had attended a women's rights rally. McFeely describes Douglass's last moments in his biography "...he began to mimic one of the day's grandiloquent speakers, rising from his chair and then sinking to his knees in a heroic gesture."⁷ Before an analysis of the genre of Slave Narratives can be undertaken, it is imperative that mention must be made about the Atlantic Slave Trade and the history of slavery in North America. In Africa slavery existed long before the advent of the Europeans. According to Dorothy and Carl J. Schneider, debtors, members of other tribes as well as erring members of

their own tribe were enslaved by Africans.⁸ However, slavery in Africa had none of the horrors of American and European slavery. Olaudah Equiano informs us in his *Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*:

With us they do no more work than other members of the community....Some of these slaves have even slaves under them as their own property, and for their own use.⁹

This statement however cannot be taken as demonstrative of all African slavery because slave treatment varies from place to place and from master to master.

Long accustomed to foreign invasions for slaves, it came as nothing new to Africans when the Portuguese started exporting slaves out of Africa in the mid fifteenth century.¹⁰ Americans started sending their slave ships to Africa by 1636. Their modus operandi was they would sail from Rhode Island for example, with a cargo of rum to trade for African slaves, then during the Middle Passage¹¹ the slaves will be transported to the Carribbean islands and South America and finally the slavers will return home with molasses to make more rum to trade for African slaves.¹² With the opening up of the New World in the Americas, the demand for African slaves also increased which in turn led to raids by Europeans on unarmed family groups or undefended villages. When the Europeans realized that it was easier to depend on local Africans for the supply of slaves, slave holdings defended by forts started dotting the West African Coast and thus started the slave-hunting expeditions deep

into the African interior which resulted in the exportation of some 11,698,000 people to the New World in America during the Transatlantic Slave Trade which lasted from 1518 to 1870 despite the abolition of the international slave trade in 1807.¹³ Dorothy and Carl J. Schneider estimate that about “7 percent of these came to what is now the United States”.¹⁴

These numbers indicate the lucrativeness of the trade, so much so that nations competed for it. The major players, the Portuguese, Dutch and the English, tried to monopolise the trade. For Africa, the slave trade not only commercialized the economy, thereby changing the everyday life of Africans but most importantly it corrupted them to the extent that even familial ties did not provide a shield against being sold away to slave traders. After having endured the shock and fear of capture, worse lay in store for these captives during the Middle Passage in the notorious slave ships. Dorothy and Carl J. Schneider believe that the reason why sailors in the Middle Passage were so brutish was that most of them were either forced or tricked into working on a slave ship. Service on the slave ships had a bad reputation among sailors and in the course of the journey their brutishness hardened into sadism and cruelty.¹⁵

The first Africans who set foot in North America in 1619 were some twenty blacks who were brought ashore near Jamestown, Virginia

after they were seized from a captured Spanish slave ship. This group and later arrivals were probably hired as indentured servants¹⁶ who were usually set free after serving their white masters for a stipulated time. In indentured servitude it is usually the worker's labour which is owned and not his person. By 1660 however, Blacks in Virginia were forced into bondage for life which ultimately turned into chattel slavery as seen from surviving Virginia county court records from 1652, "...sold to John Pott 'one Negro girle named Jowan; aged about ten years and with her Issue and produce during her (or either of them) for their Life tyme. And their Successors forever.'"¹⁷

When the International Slave Trade was banned in 1807 by the major European powers and the United States Congress it led to the birth of the domestic slave trade in North America which in the words of Dorothy and Carl J. Schneider led to "insecurity about the future, little permanence, and all too often separation from family and friends".¹⁸ In the Southern states slaves were regarded as more valuable than the land, they became almost like a cash crop. Slave ownership meant not only wealth, but also more importantly it led to prestige and status and this in turn led to the myth of the superiority of the White Man. The Oxford English dictionary before the Sixteenth century described the colour black as " Deeply stained with dirt; soiled, dirty, foul...Foul, iniquitous,

atrocious, horrible, wicked....”¹⁹ It is no surprise then that blackness for the white man came to be associated with everything sub-human thereby making it easier for him to debase, humiliate and enslave a race of people.

In North America a reason, why slavery flourished in the Southern States is that the heat, the swamps and the low wages did not attract white labourers. As a large workforce is needed to clear, drain and cultivate the fertile land, planters turned to slavery to supply the workers. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that by 1830 the North had only 3,568 slaves whereas the South had 2,005,457.²⁰

The Slave Narrative first made its appearance in the United States in the early Eighteenth century. However the genre flourished and reached the height of its popularity between 1831 to the end of the Civil War in 1865.²¹ Slave Narratives are the autobiographical narratives of former slaves about their life under slavery and they serve as the most extensive and influential traditions in African-American literature and culture. As Theodore Parker, a noted transcendentalist clergyman declares that Slave Narratives qualify as America’s only indigenous literary form because “all the original romance of Americans is in them, not in the white man’s novel”.²² Harish Chander has divided Slave Narratives into three categories – Narratives which have been ghost

written by whites, those which have been dictated by illiterate slaves to white editors and those which have been written by the slaves themselves. Narratives authored by the slave themselves have greater authenticity because their story is told in their own words without any editorial interference.²³ This is also the reason why Douglass included the lines “Written by Himself” in the title of his *Narrative* so that there will be no confusion as to the identity of the author.

The early Slave Narratives bear close resemblance to popular white American accounts of Indian captivity.²⁴ The antislavery movement of the early Nineteenth century however brings in a new dimension to Slave Narratives. By the late 1830's and early 1840's a new brand of Slave Narratives with a strong antislavery message started making its way to the reading public. These personal stories become weapons for white abolitionists in their fight against slavery, but all too often, some of these stories degenerate into mere propagandistic material for the abolitionist cause. To arouse horror and sympathy in the reading public, scenes of whippings, beatings, deprivation and in the case of women, sexual violence, are dwelled upon in great detail and sometimes we get the feeling, especially with Narratives written by a white person for the illiterate Black, that these scenes have been exaggerated to a certain extent. However, what makes these stories believable to the public at the

time is the note of introduction and authentication written by a white person of repute appended at the beginning of every Slave Narrative. Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* has an introduction by two well-known abolitionist leaders, William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips. Interestingly his second book *My Bondage and My Freedom* carries an introduction by a black physician and abolitionist James McCune Smith thus breaking away from the earlier tradition.

Since Slave Narratives are a potent weapon against the institution of slavery, it is only natural that they will follow a particular pattern. According to Colin A. Palmer these stories centre on a slave's rite of passage from slavery in the South to freedom in the North. Slavery is usually portrayed as a hell on earth where slaves are forced to go through extreme physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual deprivation. What precipitates the narrator's decision to escape is usually personal crisis such as the sale of a loved one, the inability to live one second more under the lash of slavery or the intermittent need to discover one's own true self and the abilities one is capable of.²⁵ For Douglass his inability to continue living under the shadow of slavery coupled with his belief that he had a right to his own being, led to his escape to the North. The slave's attainment of freedom does not end simply with his arrival in the North,

the circle is completed with the slave renaming himself and dedicating himself to abolitionist activism.

A thread, which binds all these Narratives together, is the slave's determination to set himself free no matter what hardships he has to endure to achieve it. Prominent slave narrators like Olaudah Equiano, Elizabeth Keckly, William Wells Brown, Harriet Jacobs, Henry Box Brown and Frederick Douglass all have their own unique way of achieving freedom. Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (1789) is popularly regarded as the prototype of the Slave Narrative. Though he is not the first African-born former slave to write about his experiences under slavery, yet he is the first to write his own story himself without any help from white editors. Tracing his life in Africa – his kidnapping by two men and a woman, his years as a slave sold from one master to another and finally his determination to buy his own freedom and launch his own business, is testimony to Equiano's grit and determination in extracting a life for himself. Though his dream of returning back to his native Africa never happens, yet Equiano is able to make a future for himself in England with his English wife, Susanna Cullen.

The Narratives of former slaves William Wells Brown and Henry Box Brown are also remarkable in their own way because despite the common belief that slaves are not capable of thought, ingenuity and originality, yet these two have proven all detractors wrong. William Wells Brown not only reveals a determination to escape slavery by not giving up at the first failure, he also reveals a firm resolve to attack slavery through all means possible to him by authoring the first novel in African- American literature, *Clotel; or The President's Daughter* (1853). Henry Box Brown's narrative is notable because of his ingenuity in fashioning his escape from the South. Sealing himself in a wooden box, he had himself mailed by his friends to waiting abolitionists in the North.

The narratives of Elizabeth Keckly and Harriet Jacobs however differ greatly from those of the men. Female slaves not only had to endure hard labour in the fields and whippings like the men but they were also victims of sexual exploitation at the hands of their masters and overseers. Harriet Jacobs, the first woman to write a slave narrative in the United States had to enter into a secret liaison with a white man, from whom she bore two children, as a way of protecting herself from the unwanted sexual advances of her owner. Elizabeth Keckly's story is extraordinary because in spite of all the hardships she had had to face, beginning with her separation from her parents at an early age, beaten,

raped and violated, she is able to carve out a successful career as a modiste, catering to the political crowd in Washington and finally establishing herself as Mary Todd Lincoln's friend and confidante.

The Slave Narrative reached the height of its popularity in 1845 with the publication of Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*. Apart from becoming an international bestseller, the book's popularity surpassed even classic white autobiographies such as Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854).²⁶ Though Frederick Douglass follows the conventions of earlier Slave Narratives, yet what makes his *Narrative* unique is his style of self-representation, because for him freedom from slavery does not only mean physical freedom. For Douglass freedom implies both physical and mental freedom because it is only when the body and mind are free that a human being, even a slave, can aspire to become a complete being. In all his three books, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845); *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass His Early Life as a Slave, His Escape from Bondage, and His Complete History to The Present Time* (1881), Douglass has addressed not only the issues of slavery but he has also exposed the truth about the Northern States, their deep rooted racism and dislike of Blacks.

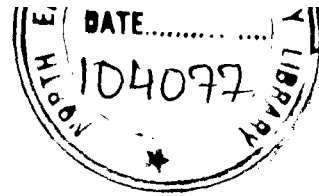
Slavery has been described as “the unconditional servitude of one individual to another”²⁷ and as “the most absolute and involuntary form of human servitude”.²⁸ In *David Walker’s Appeal in Four Articles; Together with a preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (1829), Walker points out to the existence of slavery among the Egyptians, Spartans and the Romans but their kind of slavery is “no more than a cipher – or, in other words those heathen nations of antiquity, had but little more among them than the name and form of slavery”.²⁹ A reason for this maybe because most of these slaves were either soldiers or citizens of a nation captured during a war and forced into slavery as a way to subjugate them. American slavery however enslaves a race of people because of the labour they provide. When slavery becomes an instrument for a nation to attain material prosperity, a human being becomes in the words of slave trader, Theodore Canot, “... the most valuable article on earth”.³⁰

By the Nineteenth century, the number of slaves in North America had grown to about a million,³¹ and an increasing number of them were American born. American born slaves, with their knowledge of European ways, an understanding of the slave system and a wider support system are better equipped to cope with slavery. The African born slave, newly arrived in the New World, is divested of his culture and reduced to a

condition termed “social death” by the historian Orlando Patterson. As a consequence, chattel slavery led to the emergence of what Patterson calls “a social non person, a being that by legal definition could have no family, no personal honour, no community, no past and no future”.³²

In *Black Legacy: America's Hidden Heritage*, William D. Pierson asks a question which probably enslaved Africans and generations of their progeny must have asked in their bitterest hours of despair: “Why? Why me? What have I done to deserve this?”³³

Slaves below the Mason – Dixon line³⁴ are brutalized and denigrated to an unimaginable extent. All institutions deemed as symbols of civilization, like education and politics, are closed to slaves but they are allowed to embrace Christianity into their lives. This is done by the slaveholders who subvert the teachings of Christianity to justify their roles as holders and traders of human flesh. “The planters encouraged the acceptance of a religion emphasizing obedience, sin and gentleness....Many relatively benevolent planters saw religion as a vehicle for reinforcing their power, arguing that God commanded slaves to obey their masters and to be loyal, leaving any relief from bondage for the next life”.³⁵ Of course slaves view Christianity from an entirely different angle, giving prominence to the Old Testament, especially Exodus with its stories of escape from bondage and freedom from



oppression. Spirituals like *Oh Mary, Go Down Moses*, indicate that slaves identify themselves with those Biblical heroes who challenged slavery in ancient times.³⁶ As Frederick Douglass writes of his master, Thomas Auld in his *Narrative* :

If it had any effect on his character, it made him more cruel and hateful in all his ways: for I believe him to have been a much worse man after his conversion than before. Prior to his conversion, he relied upon his own depravity to shield and sustain him in his savage barbarity but after his conversion, he found religious sanction and support for his slaveholding cruelty.³⁷

Instead of encouraging faith and piety among the slaves, slaveholders very often persecute true believers, denying them opportunities to worship and pray and even punishing those who try to live Christian lives.

White philosophers like Friedrich Hegel, Immanuel Kant and David Hume believe that “differences in externals – complexion , hair and other physical features – between blacks and whites meant also a difference in character – intelligence , morality and spirituality – of the two groups”.³⁸ Though blatantly racist, this opinion is upheld by most white people of the time, which allow the slaveholders and their overseers to treat their slaves as non-humans, to whip, starve and even murder them without any compunction.

Under the Declaration of Independence, all people are created equal and given inalienable Rights of Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of

Happiness by their Creator. Some nationalists have raised an uncomfortable question that if this is really true, then how can Americans own slaves? Thomas Jefferson, one of the drafters of the Declaration of Independence and a slaveholder himself argue that American slaves can never achieve any distinction because of their blackness. He asserts that he has never met a black who “had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration, never seen an elementary trait of painting and sculpture...no poetry...in imagination they are dull, tasteless and anomalous...inferior to the whites in the endowments of body and mind”.³⁹ This belief allows Jefferson and countless other Americans to practice a slavery which is based on race while at the same time exhorting the egalitarian ideas of the Declaration of Independence.

When Alexis de Tocqueville visited the United States in the 1830’s he observed, “race prejudice seems stronger in those states that have abolished slavery than in those where it still exists, and nowhere is it more intolerant than in those states where slavery was never known”.⁴⁰ This impression is representative of the attitudes prevalent during the Nineteenth century. Above the Mason – Dixon line, free Blacks do not get opportunities that will enable them to rise economically, on the other hand they are relegated to performing the most menial and unskilled jobs. When Frederick Douglass arrives in New Bedford he is prevented

from practicing his trade as a ship's calker by white workers who refuse to work with him. He is reduced to performing unskilled manual labour like shoveling coal, sweeping chimneys or rolling oil casks, all, which he did for three years. Throughout the North, Black men had to work as labourers, mariners, servants, waiters, barbers, coachmen, bootblacks, porters and women as washerwomen, dressmakers, seamstresses and cooks. Only a handful of Blacks managed to enter business or the professions.⁴¹

The attitude of the white citizens in the North towards free Blacks has always been hostile. Now the anger of the white working class is escalating due to the ever-increasing numbers of Blacks who arrive in the North as fugitive slaves, who they fear will take away their jobs. Racial stereotyping allows whites a psychological consciousness of superiority. Writing against the proposed colonization of Blacks, a New England journal warns, "white men must hew our wood, draw our water, and perform our menial offices. They [Negro] supply the place of so many whites, who may be spared for higher purposes."⁴² Conflicting views concerning the Black presence in the North persisted and a probable reason why this conflict has endured is because the relationship that exists between the two races is symbiotic, a fact which many whites refuse to believe.

As a child, Frederick Douglass knew nothing of being the property of another person. Growing up in his Grandmother's cabin by the side of the Tuckahoe creek, Douglass was protected from the inhumanity of slavery. However, as he grew older, the realization of his status as a slave comes to him by degrees amid whispers of the feared name "Old Master". With this realization also comes his awareness of his mother's absence from his life. McFeely writes that Douglass "had no recollection of seeing her during his years in Betsy's cabin, even though she appears to have been nearby, working in Aaron Anthony's fields or hired out to work on a neighbouring farm".⁴³ Years later Douglass perhaps realized the reason for his mother's absence from his life. Seeing him, a helpless infant, would have been unbearable for Harriet Bailey since slaveholding laws in Maryland held that slave children must be separated from their mothers before completing a year of their life.

The only time Harriet visits her son is when he is living at Col. Llyod's plantation. These visits are few in number, brief and mostly made in the night. Waking up in the mornings, Douglass always finds himself alone. Douglass comes face to face with his mother's love for him when she discovers that Aunt Katy has deliberately starved him. Douglass finds himself "in the protecting arms of a mother; a mother who was...more than a match for all his enemies". He writes jubilantly, "that night I

learned the fact, that I was not only a child, but somebody's child", ⁴⁴ this jubilation is, however, short-lived because in the morning he finds his mother gone and this time never to return.

In his writings and speeches, Douglass has condemned this forced separation between a mother and her child in the most bitter of words. In his experience, this bestial practice leads to the breaking of all ties that binds a mother to her child. As he writes chillingly in, "I cannot say that I was very attached to my mother".⁴⁵ What is even more disturbing is his reaction to the news of her death, "I received the tidings of her death with no strong emotions of sorrow for her, and with very little regret for myself on account of her loss".⁴⁶ It is no wonder then that years later after seeing the devotion of mothers to their children, Douglass realizes what slavery has snatched away from him, a child's right to his mother.

Of his father, "I know nothing", Douglass writes abruptly in *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*.⁴⁷ Since slavery does not recognize fathers and does not uphold the sanctity of a family, hence a slave child must follow the condition of his mother. With an icy cynicism, Douglass writes in "The father might be a white man, glorying in the purity of his Anglo-Saxon blood, and his child ranked with the blackest slave. Father he might be, and not a husband, and could sell his own child without incurring reproach, if in its veins coursed one drop of African blood".⁴⁸

“Genealogical trees do not flourish among slaves”, Douglass pronounces bitterly in *My Bondage and My Freedom*.⁴⁹

An event which makes a lasting impression on Douglass and which will forever define slavery for him occurs when he was less than seven years of age. Though the incident might seem trivial yet in its culmination, the cruel and callous face of slavery is exposed. As is the custom, at six years Frederick is taken from his grandmother’s cabin to live in his master’s house. Kept in ignorance about the future awaiting him, on arrival he is sent outside to play with his brother Perry and sisters Eliza and Sarah who were already living in Capt. Anthony’s house. Informed by a cousin, “Fed, Fed, grandmamma gone”, Douglass rushes into the kitchen to find his beloved grandmother gone forever from his life. He will never trust another human being again. “I wish to give a faithful history of my experience in slavery, I cannot withhold a circumstance which at the time affected me so deeply, and which I still remember so vividly. Besides this was my first introduction to the realities of the slave system”, Douglass writes somberly about this event.⁵⁰

A study of Frederick Douglass’s life reveals that as a boy with a heightened sensitivity, every injustice meted out to him and his fellow slaves grated harshly against his beliefs. The injustice of slavery prompts

him to finally make his escape to the North where he will make the Abolitionist cause his platform for exposing all the evils and vileness of American slavery.

African-American slave history earlier depended only on traditional historical evidence gleaned from speeches, newspaper articles and letters. Early historians depended on plantation journals, reports by traders and census returns when gathering information about slavery in America. An interesting feature about these reports is the fact that they represented slavery from the master's viewpoint and not the slaves'.⁵¹ This naturally leads to stereotypical portrayal of Blacks particularly through the character of 'Sambo', the typical plantation slave, docile but irresponsible, loyal but lazy, humble but a liar and a thief.⁵² This picture of Sambo is however contradicted by the fugitive slaves who escape to the North. Frederick Douglass writes about how masters and overseers force their slaves to sing while working because a silent slave is not liked. These mournful songs, full of meaning to the slaves were sung to make the slaves themselves happy. He writes desolately:

I did not, when a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude, and apparently incoherent songs.... They told a tale which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension; they were tones, loud, long and deep.... The hearing of those wild notes always depressed my spirits and filled my heart with ineffable sadness.... These songs still follow me...⁵³

Upon reaching the North, Douglass is stupefied to hear people speak of these songs as evidence of the slave's contentment and happiness.

Sojourner Truth's speeches and the most notable one, *Ar'n't I a Woman* (1851), are proofs that the slave is a person with an active and independent mind and if given the chance can more than match white people in intelligence and originality.

The genre of Slave Narratives exposes the horror of slavery with unprecedented candour. Though white Southern society may pretend ignorance of the true conditions of slavery yet the permanent disfigurement caused by the overseer's or the slave driver's whip on the slave's back stands as a testimony to the harshness of the system. In the *Narrative* Douglass tells of two slaves Henrietta and Mary who were so badly beaten by their mistress, Mrs. Hamilton, that Mary's head, neck and shoulders were literally cut to pieces. Slave Narratives also expose the injustice and cruelty of the American government towards a race of people who were brought to foreign shores against their will and are then ravaged and exploited and reduced to a beast-like state. Though states like Pennsylvania and Vermont did try to give justice to this oppressed race by abolishing slavery within their territories, yet these attempts were checked by repressive laws passed by the United States Supreme Court, Congress and the House of Representatives, like the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793,⁵⁴ the "gag rule" of 1835⁵⁵ and the Dred Scott decision of 1857.⁵⁶ In the *Narrative* Douglass writes about his first few days in New York

after his escape from the South and especially about his fear of slave catchers sanctioned by the Fugitive Slave Law, “Let him be a fugitive in a strange land – a land given up to be the hunting-ground for slaveholders – whose inhabitants are legalized kidnappers”.⁵⁷ James M. Whitfield’s poem *America* (1853) a bitter parody of the patriotic hymn *America the Beautiful* encapsulates not only the horrific plight of Black slaves but also the apathy of the United States government:

America it is to thee,
 Thou boasted land of liberty,
 It is to thee I raise my song,
 Thou land of blood, and crime and wrong.⁵⁸
 (line 1- 4)

End Notes

- ¹ William L. Andrews, *The Oxford Douglass Reader*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 6.
- ² Frederick Douglass, "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself". *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, eds. Gates and McKay, (New York: Norton, 2004), p. 395.
- ³ William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass*, (New York: Norton, 1991), p. 8.
- ⁴ Originally from Spanish 'mulato' meaning hybrid. The first generation offspring of a black and a white person.
- ⁵ Capt. Aaron Anthony's son-in-law.
- ⁶ McFeely, *Frederick Douglass*, p. 13.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 381.
- ⁸ Dorothy and Carl J. Schneider, *Slavery in America: From Colonial Times to the Civil War*, (New York: Facts on File, 2000), p. 1.
- ⁹ Olaudah Equiano, "The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself", *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, eds. Gates and McKay, (New York: Norton, 2004), p.196.
- ¹⁰ Schneider and Schneider, *Slavery in America*, p. 3.
- ¹¹ The Atlantic crossing between Africa and the Americas where countless enslaved Africans died en route.
- ¹² Schneider and Schneider, *Slavery in America*, p. 3.
- ¹³ Colin A. Palmer, ed. *Encyclopedia of African -American Culture and History; The Black Experience in the Americas*. 2nd ed, (Detroit: macmillan Reference USA, 2005), p.2062.
- ¹⁴ Schneider and Schneider, *Slavery in America*, p. 13.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- ¹⁶ A labourer under contract by an employer usually works for 3-7 years. very like a slave, except it's for a specified amount of time.
- ¹⁷ Winthrop Jordan, "White Over Black", *America's Black Past*, ed. Eric Foner, (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 67-68.
- ¹⁸ Schneider and Schneider, *Slavery in America*, p. 54.
- ¹⁹ Jordan, "White Over Black", p. 57..
- ²⁰ Schneider and Schneider, *Slavery in America*, p. 52.
- ²¹ Roger M. Valade III, ed. *The Schomburg Centre: Guide to Black Literature, From the Eighteen Century to the Present* (New York: Gale Research Inc, 1996), p.418.
- ²² Quoted in Palmer, *Encyclopedia of African -American Culture and History*, p.2051.

- ²³ Harish Chander, "Frederick Douglass (1818-1895)", *African American Autobiographers: A Sourcebook*, ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson, (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002), p. 101.
- ²⁴ Palmer. *Encyclopedia of African American Culture and History*, p. 2050.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2052.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2051.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2060.
- ²⁸ Valade III, ed. *The Schumberg Centre*, p. 419.
- ²⁹ David Walker, "David Walker's Appeal in Four Articles; Toether with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World"; *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, eds. Gates and McKay, (New York: Norton, 2004), p. 228.
- ³⁰ Quoted in Schneider and Schneider, *Slavery in America*, p. 1.
- ³¹ James and Lois E. Horton, *Hard Road to Freedom: The Story of African America*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001), p. 105.
- ³² William L. Andrews and Frances Smith Foster, "Introduction", *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, eds. Gates and McKay, (New York: Norton, 2004), p. 155.
- ³³ William D. Pierson, *Black Legacy: America's Hidden Heritage*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), p. 3.
- ³⁴ The boundary between Maryland and Pennsylvania, a symbolic dividing line between the North and the South before the American Civil War.
- ³⁵ Horton and Horton, *Hard Road to Freedom*, p. 114.
- ³⁶ Eric Foner, ed. *America's Black Past*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 79.
- ³⁷ Douglass, "Narrative", p. 419.
- ³⁸ Andrews and Foster, "Introduction", p. 155.
- ³⁹ Paul Finkleman, "Slavery and Race", *Encyclopedia of American Cultural and Intellectual History*, eds. Mary Kupiec Cayton and Peter W. Williams, (New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 2001), p. 313.
- ⁴⁰ Quoted in Foner, ed. *America's*, p. 143.
- ⁴¹ Leon F. Litvack, "North of Africa", *America's Black Past*, ed. Eric Foner, (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 146.
- ⁴² Quoted in Litvack, "North", p. 148.
- ⁴³ McFeely, *Frederick Douglass*, p. 6.
- ⁴⁴ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, (New York: Miller, Orion and Mulligan, 1855), p. 56.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

- ⁴⁷ Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass His Early Life as a Slave, His Escape from Bondage, and His Complete History to The Present Time*, (Hartford: Park Publishing Co, 1881), p. 15.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- ⁴⁹ Douglass, *My Bondage*, p. 45.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- ⁵¹ Foner, ed. *America's*, p. 78.
- ⁵² Stanley Elkins, "Slavery and Personality", *America's Black Past*, ed. Eric Foner, (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 81.
- ⁵³ Douglass, *My Bondage*, p. 99.
- ⁵⁴ The law guarantees the right of a slave holder to recover an escaped slave.
- ⁵⁵ The US House of Representatives passes the gag rule which prevents any antislavery petition or bill from being introduced, read or discussed.
- ⁵⁶ A ruling by the US Supreme Court that people of African descent can never be US citizens.
- ⁵⁷ Douglass, "Narrative", p. 443.
- ⁵⁸ James M. Whitfield, "America", *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, eds. Gates and McKay, (New York: Norton, 2004), p. 484.

Chapter-II

EDUCATING THE SELF

Black slaves who decide to break away from the shackles of slavery take various and multiple routes to freedom. Some like Elizabeth Keckley, and Venture Smith buy their own freedom from their respective masters through hard toil and labour while others like William Wells Brown and Harriet Jacobs gain their freedom through acts of courage and daring. From childhood, Frederick Douglass is aware that his personal road to freedom lay through education. In this aspect Douglass is unique because driven by this belief, throughout his life he is constantly in search of ways and means to better himself intellectually. Douglass “was determined to bear witness to the self-awareness, intellectual independence and literary authority of the slave .¹

This attribute in Douglass can be traced back to his childhood spent on Col. Llyod’s plantation. His friendship with Daniel Llyod, Col. Llyod’s youngest son, sanctions his entrance to the hallowed rooms of the Big House, not through the back door surreptitiously, but through the front door. A highly observant child, Douglass duly notices the behaviour of the Llyod family and their upper class white friends and most importantly, Douglass takes special note of their upper class speech. An excellent mimic, Douglass is able to appropriate the formal English

language spoken by the Llyods and their friends in no time at all and the desire to overcome his disadvantages is born. To Douglass language is a mode of liberation and also a form of power.² His ability to speak in the language of his masters gives him a sense of self-worth which is severely lacking in his psyche considering the fact that he is a mulatto with an unknown father. From an early age, Douglass makes a conscious effort to drop the slave dialect of the plantation realizing that how he speaks will open or close doors for him in the future. An examination of his life reveals that Douglass is able to gain admittance into some of the most prominent white societies of the country, something which is quite unheard of at the time.

In all his three autobiographies, Frederick Douglass did not write in great detail about his childhood friendship with Daniel Lloyd who though only a few years older than him yet became his protector and benefactor. A curious practice common in the slaveholding South is to allow slave children and their little white masters and mistresses to play together. For Douglass this contact opens his eyes to the disparity in the quality of life between the Whites and their Black slaves. A desire is born in him to better himself, to aspire to great heights and to finally become Daniel Lloyd's equal. In his third autobiography *Life and Times*, Douglass writes about his triumphant return to Col. Lloyd's plantation, the place when as

a young slave boy on his way to his new home in Baltimore, he had hoped never to lay eyes on again. Now returning as a celebrated author, speaker and as a Marshall of the United States, Douglass is ceremoniously received by the two young Llyod grandsons into the Big House where he is entertained as a respected guest.³

Douglass's thirst for education is such that he is willing to risk all for it. His introduction to the English alphabet by his white mistress Sophia Auld opens a veritable Pandora's Box for him. In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass writes about how Sophia's reading of the Bible awakens in him a curiosity about the mystery of reading.⁴ Sophia's action of reading and then teaching Douglass the alphabet stands out as a conundrum considering the draconian laws that were passed, prohibiting the mastery of letters by Blacks after the Stono Rebellion of 1739.⁵ The mystery behind Sophia's blatant disregard of the rules perhaps can be traced back to her roots. Coming from a Northern working class background Sophia is ignorant about the workings of slavery as practiced in the South. Frederick Douglass's obvious intelligence perhaps awakens in her a desire to see how far the little black boy can progress intellectually if the door to learning is unbolted. This deed of Sophia's is comparable to John Wheatley's act of educating his own slave Phyllis Wheatley, the first African American to publish a book of poems and the

first to achieve an international reputation as a writer. Unwittingly, Sophia Auld sets in motion the end of slavery for Douglass. As McFeely writes:

...she was a dangerous subversive. She undercut the fundamental psychological discipline of slavery, and thereby raised the expectations of a slave to a point beyond which bondage was not endurable. In the most comforting of ways she destroyed the slave boy's comfort.⁶

Hugh Auld, her husband, however realizes immediately the dangers of educating a slave and prohibits her from continuing the lessons. He tells his wife,

If you give a nigger an inch he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master. Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world...if you teach that nigger how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave...it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy.⁷

Hugh Auld adds further, "If you learn him how to read, he'll want to know how to write; and this accomplished, he'll be running away with himself."⁸ These words by Hugh Auld prove to be prophetic because the more Douglass progresses intellectually the more discontented he becomes with his situation as a slave. His agony is such that he starts envying his fellow slaves their stupidity and many times he wishes for his own death because the freedom that he craves for seems to be beyond his reach.

An interesting aspect of slavery in the United States is that since for most slaves their situation is the only condition they know, this state of living becomes tolerable to them. Of course this is not a generalization

of the whole community because America's slave history is dotted with numerous slave rebellions. Some of the notable slave rebellions are the Stono Rebellion of 1739 in South Carolina where 30 whites were killed, the Nat Turner Rebellion⁹ of 1831 where 57 whites were killed and a few others.¹⁰ It is interesting to note that Douglass never takes part in a slave rebellion though the opportunity presented itself when John Brown, the abolitionist,¹¹ invited him to join the raid in Harper's Ferry in 1859. A reason is because Douglass realizes the plan is doomed to fail and when Brown refuses to listen, Douglass leaves him. Ever since Hugh Auld's outburst against his reading, Douglass comes to firmly believe that education is the only path which will lead all slaves to freedom. Moreover Douglass also believes that the reason why white men are able to keep black slaves under subordination is because of their ignorance and their illiteracy. The draconian laws passed by South Carolina in the aftermath of the Stono Rebellion, outlawing education for Blacks is an affirmation of the White man's belief that if Blacks are kept in complete ignorance and extreme poverty, he will have the power to enslave the sable population. Because of this understanding Douglass decides to seize an education for himself since it will be his ticket to freedom.

In a direct subversion of the White man's law Douglass proceeds to teach himself how to read and write through trickery and bribes when

Sophia Auld brings his lessons with her to a halt. With the streets of Baltimore for a schoolroom Douglass sometimes challenges the poor white neighbourhood boys to a game of who knows the most words and thereby is able to surreptitiously add to his growing vocabulary. Other times he will openly bribe them with bread, of which there is always plenty at home, if they will teach him whatever they have learned in the schoolroom. It is remarkable that a boy of not more than 12 years will have such a mature understanding about the value of education and be willing to take such risks such risks to claim it. In his three autobiographies, Douglass attributes his love for learning not to his unknown Anglo-Saxon father who comes from a race known for its inventions and discoveries, but to “the native genius of my sable, unprotected and uncultivated mother – a woman who belonged to a race whose mental endowments are still disparaged and despised”.¹² This is an act of affirmation on Douglass’s part to show that he comes from a race of people who are not so obtuse as they are thought to be.

Frederick Douglass’s literacy is of course not unique because early slave writers and poets like Phyllis Wheatley and Olaudah Equiano were educated by their white masters who wanted to see for themselves if the sable race, when given the same opportunities as their white masters and mistresses, can attain the same kind of intellectual achievement. Both

Wheatley and Equiano have proved beyond a doubt that when the sable race is given the same opportunities and tools as the white race, nothing can withhold their progress and the blossoming of their various talents. However, not to take away any of the accomplishments achieved by them, note must be taken that Frederick Douglass's achievements deserve all the acknowledgements bestowed upon them because he is the self-made man, the man who is able to wrest an education for himself in spite of tremendous odds working against him.

Labelled a "Representative American Man" by James McCune Smith in the preface to the second autobiography Douglass reveals a tenacity and intellectual courage that is unique. When he is sent back to St. Michael's to live with his master Thomas Auld in March 1832, his life undergoes a major change. Thomas Auld is a complete stranger to the young slave though he is his master. Douglass writes, "I was ignorant of his temper and disposition; he was equally so of mine. A very short time however brought us into full acquaintance with each other".¹³ Vastly different from his brother Hugh Auld, Thomas proves to be a mean master, never giving his slaves enough to eat and finally Douglass and the other slaves are reduced to begging and stealing and as Douglass himself writes, "...whichever came handy in the time of need, the one being considered as legitimate as the other".¹⁴ All this when food in plenty is

lying rotting in the safe and smoke-house. Weighed down by this change in his circumstances, Douglass makes no mention of his literary pursuits during this period and when nine months later he is let out to Mr. Covey, a notorious slave-breaker, Douglass's only consolation is the knowledge that Covey gives his slaves enough to eat. The year Douglass spends with Covey is the harshest period of his life. Physically, mentally and intellectually beaten down by the back breaking and mind numbing work, Douglass is forced to drink the bitterest dregs of slavery. He writes:

We were worked in all weathers. It was never too hot or too cold; it could never rain, blow, hail or snow, too hard for us to work in the field. Work, work, work, was scarcely more the order of the day than of the night. The longest days were too short for him and the shortest nights too long for him.¹⁵

The resultant effect of this lifestyle on Douglass is that his literary pursuits are relegated to the back-burner and he falls into a beastlike stupor. It is only when at the end of the year he is sent to live with Mr. Freeland that Douglass is able to shed his stupor and he begins to feel alive and be a human being once again. It is during his stay with Mr. Freeland that Douglass's slumbering passion for reading and education is reawakened and within a short time every Sunday is devoted to teaching his fellow slaves how to read in a discreetly run Sabbath school. The first test to Douglass's commitment comes in the form of Messrs. Wright Fairbanks and Garrison West, class leaders in church, who break up this dedicated little Sabbath school with sticks and stones. For a man who is

committed to sharing his knowledge with his more uninformed brethren , this action of the two white men of God simply spurs him on his mission to free his fellow black slaves from the darkness they have been forced to occupy. It is a testimony of Frederick Douglass's grit that he is able to continue his Sabbath classes secretly for a year in the house of a sympathetic free black.

A study of Douglass's life is a revelation of his stupendous determination to succeed no matter what the odds. The very fact that this slave boy is able to play such a major role in influencing America's black history as an adult is remarkable and it encapsulates a journey of heroic proportions from which Douglass emerges as a "Representative American Man", symbolic of the spirit of America, the land of heroism and adventure.

A comparison of Douglass's three autobiographies with that of the other Slave Narratives reveals that Frederick Douglass's books provide a black perspective not seen in most works written by his contemporaries. His autobiographies are not simply narratives of his experiences, they are also critiques of the institution of slavery. One of the most evocative passages in the *Narrative* is when the sight of a fleet of Chesapeake Bay ships moving out to the open sea on a Sunday morning provokes in Douglass a bitter apostrophe:

You are loosed from your moorings, and are free; I am fast in my chains, and am a slave....You are freedom's swift-winged angels, that fly around the world; I am confined in bands of iron! The glad ship is gone; she hides in the dim distance. I am left in the hottest hell of unending slavery. O God, save me! God, deliver me! Let me be free! Is there any God? Why am I a slave?¹⁶

In his essay called *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Benjamin Quarles writes, "The *Narrative* is without humour or light touches. Its tone is steadily condemnatory, all roads converging to this end."¹⁷ Certain practices deemed as entertainment and therefore harmless by Whites are exposed for what they really are by Douglass. The holiday week from Christmas to the New Year is a sore point with Douglass. During the entire week slaves are made to indulge in sports and merrymaking which to Douglass is a huge fraud because slaves are encouraged to drink themselves into a stupor so that thoughts of rebellion and escape remain buried under an alcoholic cloud during the holiday week. Douglass realizes that this week is crucial to the whites because harvesting is over and the icy ground is still too hard to till, so with no field work to occupy their waking hours slaves may be tempted to rebel and run away from their cruel masters during this idle period. Douglass is forced to take part in this whole exercise orchestrated by the whites for their own advantage and entertainment but he sees the truth behind such shenanigans. After the slaves have drowned all their sorrows in drink and let out all their anger and frustrations in athletic feats, they are ready to face another year of whippings, starvation, abuse and back breaking labour with the

likelihood of their being sold away from their families hanging like a sword of Damocles over their heads. These insights are what makes Douglass's three autobiographies distinctive and as he writes in his second autobiography *My Bondage and My Freedom*, "It did not entirely satisfy me to narrate wrongs; I felt like denouncing them".¹⁸

One of the most powerful scenes in the *Narrative* is when Frederick Douglass comes to understand how the White man is able to enslave the Blacks. Hugh Auld's tirade to his wife Sophia about the dangers of educating a black slave boy convinces Douglass that the Black man's lack of education is what facilitates the chains of slavery to be bound around him. But once education is imparted to him his mind will be set free and the road from slavery to freedom will be clear. Therefore Douglass can say about Hugh Auld in the *Narrative* "What he most dreaded, that I most desired. What he most loved, that I most hated. That which to him was a great evil, to be carefully shunned, was to me a great good, to be delightedly sought; and the argument which he so warmly urged, against my learning to read, only served to inspire me with a desire and determination to learn".¹⁹

When African slaves first arrived in America, zealous missionaries and sympathetic supporters taught them how to read so that they can learn the principles of the Christian religion and convert to Christianity. Early

black education however met with great difficulties with laws passed against it, though many slaves were able to become mechanics, clerks and overseers. Mulattoes especially were in a position to help their fellow Blacks learn how to read and write because the colour of their skin guaranteed them labour inside the home of their masters as house servants where they pick up smatterings of knowledge. However the slave insurrection led by Nat Turner in Virginia in 1831 led to “Black Codes” being enacted in several states to keep the slave in his place by refusing him access to educational facilities of all kinds.²⁰ Therefore with formal education out of his reach, Douglass sets about to educating himself through the means available to him. But education does not simply mean to gather knowledge for Frederick Douglass. Of course the White boys who he befriended in the streets of Baltimore have contributed immensely to his store of knowledge, but for Frederick simply the ability to read and write is not the be all and end all. At 12 years of age, he is able to get hold of *The Columbian Orator*, a popular collection of classic poems, dialogues, plays and speeches. This book gave speech to Douglass’s innermost thoughts and beliefs. He writes in the *Narrative*:

What I got from Sheridan was a bold denunciation of slavery, and a powerful vindication of human rights. The reading of these documents enabled me to utter my thoughts, and to meet the arguments brought forward to sustain slavery....²¹

Once Douglass's mind is free from all the shackles which bind it, education for him becomes an awareness of one's surroundings, the ability to come out from the beast-like stupor induced by slavery's brutality. It also becomes the ability to sensitise oneself and one's fellow sufferers to the oppression and exploitation perpetrated by a dominant race. The acquisition of *The Columbian Orator* marks a turning point in Douglass's life because the book is able to mould and shape the impressionable young slave to the man that he finally becomes. The book arouses feelings of discontentment in Douglass and till his escape to the North, these feelings continue to smother him and at great risk to himself he makes it his duty to teach and sensitise his fellow slaves about a life free from the shackles of slavery.

It is this education which provides Frederick Douglass with the necessary confidence and presence of mind to make his escape to the North disguised as a sailor travelling on a train to New York. Once in the North, in the sea-side town of New Bedford, he is able to make a new life for himself, a life of dignity and self-respect, where for the first time in his life he is his own man.

End Notes

- ¹ William L. Andrews and Frances Smith Foster, "Introduction", *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, eds. Gates and McKay, (New York: Norton. 2004), p.159.
- ² Emory Elliot, gen. ed. *Columbia Literary History of the United States*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 359.
- ³ Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times*, (Hartford: Park Publishing Co, 1881), p. 452.
- ⁴ ---, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, (New York: Miller, Orton and Mulligan, 1855), p.113.
- ⁵ Gates and McKay, gen eds. "Introduction", *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, (New York: Norton, 2004), p. xxxix.
- ⁶ William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass*, (New York: Norton, 1991), p. 29.
- ⁷ Frederick Douglass, "Narrative", *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, eds. Gates and McKay, (New York: Norton. 2004), p. 409.
- ⁸ Douglass, *My Bondage*, p. 146.
- ⁹ Nat Turner, a slave led a slave uprising in Southampton County, Virginia where three thousand soldiers and Virginia militiamen reacted by killing Blacks indiscriminately. Turner was captured and hanged.
- ¹⁰ Gates and McKay, *Norton Anthology*, p. 2695-2697.
- ¹¹ Brown tried to seize federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry< Virginia and arm slaves in the surrounding area. He was captured and hanged in Virginia.
- ¹² Douglass, *Life and Times*, p. 24.
- ¹³ ---. *Narrative*, p. 418.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 418.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 423.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 424.
- ¹⁷ Benjamin Quarles, "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass", *Landmarks in American Writing*, ed. Henning Cohen, (N.p. : United States Information Service, 1970), p. 106.
- ¹⁸ Douglass, *My Bondage*, p. 362.
- ¹⁹ ---. *Narrative*, p. 410.
- ²⁰ Harry A. Ploski and James Williams, eds. *The Negro Almanac: A Reference Work on the African American*, 5th ed, (Detroit: Gale Research Inc, 1989), p. 734.
- ²¹ Douglass, *Narrative*, p. 412.

Chapter-III

ARTICULATING THE NEW SELF

I was broken in body, soul and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute!¹

From a brutish existence, Frederick Douglass is able to recreate a new self, a self which did not come easily or cheaply. He pays a high price for this cherished freedom since he has to leave his bosom friends behind in Baltimore. He writes:

I had the painful sensation of being about to separate from a circle of honest and warm hearted friends in Baltimore. The thought of such a separation, where the hope of ever meeting again is excluded, and where there can be no correspondence, is very painful. In my opinion, that thousands would escape from slavery who now remain there, but for the strong cords of affection that bind them to their families, relatives and friends I had no sisters and brothers; but the thought of leaving my friends, was among the strongest obstacles to my running away.²

Yet showing a resoluteness and strength of mind, Douglass is able to break the chains of friendship that bind him to the slaveholding South and make his way to the free North. He sets foot in New York on September 4, 1838, a free man and filled with an ecstasy indescribable. When asked later about his emotions and feelings at finding himself in a free state, Douglass admits to never giving a satisfactory answer to his questioners. In the *Narrative* all that he will admit to is "I suppose I felt as one may imagine the unarmed mariner to feel when he is rescued by a friendly man-of-war from the pursuit of a pirate".³ This euphoria however does

not last long because once reality sets in, the truth of the matter is that New York is one of the most dangerous cities in the “free” North for fugitive slaves.

The passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1793 by the U.S Congress authorizing the return of fugitive slaves to their masters led to a lot of tension between North and South politicians.⁴ Though some Northern states passed “personal liberty” laws to undermine federal law, yet the ground reality remained that the North cannot offer a safe haven to fugitive slaves. Though free from the shackles of slavery, Douglass cannot yet free himself from the fear of slave catchers who prowl around the streets of New York keeping a vulture’s eye for fugitive slaves to kidnap and return to their southern masters for a sum of money. In 1850, a most shameful occurrence in the history of America takes place when the Clay Compromise is accepted to strengthen the 1793 Fugitive Slave Act. Harriet Jacobs writes in her narrative:

It was the beginning of a reign of terror to the coloured population.... But while fashionables were listening to the thrilling voice of Jenny Lind in Metropolitan Hall, the thrilling voices of poor coloured people went up, in an agony of supplication, to the Lord, from Zion’s church. Many families who had lived in the city for twenty years, fled from it now.⁵

In a bid to escape the kidnappers a common practice among fugitive slaves is to assume a new name. Through the Slave Narratives we see that many narrators themselves take on new names when they escape slavery. William Wells Brown’s story is very interesting because he is born of a

slave woman known only as Elizabeth. During his flight to freedom, he becomes friendly with a Quaker couple Mr. and Mrs. Wells Brown whose name he later adopts as a gesture of his gratefulness.⁶ Sojourner Truth's story is an inspiration to all, through the centuries. Born Isabella, she claims the name Sojourner Truth after seizing her freedom, to signify the new person that she has become in the spirit, a traveler who is dedicated to speaking the truth as God reveals it.⁷ For Frederick Douglass, changing his name is a matter of survival. When he first arrives in New York, he changes his name from Frederick Bailey to Frederick Johnson for fear that he will be kidnapped back to the south. When he moves further up north to New Bedford he drops the name Johnson because it is too common among Black families there and Douglass's own benefactor Nathan is also called Johnson. The name Douglass is selected by Nathan after James Douglas, from Sir Walter Scott's *Lady of the Lake*. The choice of the name Douglass is not only appropriate but also prophetic of the man that Frederick will become one day, a fearless leader who will toil tirelessly for his oppressed people's freedom.

For Douglass, claiming a new name for himself has various connotations. Apart from being a matter of survival, it is also a way for him to create a new self, a new identity, which is far removed from his earlier existence, an existence where his body, soul and spirit lies

broken.⁸ He writes, "I have often found myself regretting my own existence, and wishing myself dead; and but for the hope of being free, I have no doubt but that I should have killed myself..."⁹ But with a new name, 'Douglass', which carries with it connotations of strength and power, Frederick is able to fashion a new future where everything is possible, where he is his own master and where he is able to emerge as a leader of his people.

However, arrival in the free states in the North did not signal the end of all the Black man's problems. Of course, physically he is free from his abusive and exploitative southern masters but in the north, he is threatened by something more insidious and potentially more dangerous psychologically. W. E. B. DuBois writes about how the negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil and gifted with second sight, born into a world which only lets him see himself through the eyes of others, born into a world where his soul is measured by a tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.¹⁰ He writes further, "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness....One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder".¹¹ Immediately on joining the ranks of the Garrisonians as a speaker, Frederick Douglass is made to forget his

twoness. He writes, “For a time I was made to forget that my skin was dark and my hair crisped.”¹² Douglass is aware that he is a novelty among the Garrisonians because, “Fugitive slaves, at that time, were not so plentiful as now; and as a fugitive slave lecturer, I had the advantage of being a ‘brand new fact’-the first one out”.¹³ However, he is brutally brought face to face with his twoness when he is advised by Collins, a fellow Garrisonian to “have a little of the plantation manner of speech...’tis not best that you seemed too learned”.¹⁴ For a man who since childhood has deliberately set out to improve himself mentally and verbally, these words must have come as a bolt of thunder, especially since they have been uttered by a fellow Garrisonian. Douglass’s decision that, “I must speak just the word that seemed to *me* the word to be spoken by *me*” speaks a great deal about the kind of man that he is.¹⁵

W. E. B. DuBois writes:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife; to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American.¹⁶

This is a problem which the American Negro has to face because white America will not allow him to merge his double self. It is easier for white America to relocate the Black man to a place far away from it because it believes in the adage “out of sight, out of mind”. Therefore,

when the American Colonization Society started their African settlement program in 1816, free blacks in the South were forced to go to a site on the western coast of Africa which later came to be known first as Monrovia, after President James Monroe and later as Liberia in 1838.¹⁷ Thousands of Black Americans also went to Haiti from 1824 encouraged by Jonathan Granville, a Haitian official, but this venture did not prove to be very successful. An uncomfortable urban co-existence is created by this immigration, between the Catholic French-speaking Haitians and the Protestant English-speaking African Americans.¹⁸ As a result, many African Americans returned to America within a few years. James and Lois Horton conclude in that “the reaction of the thousands of migrants who returned to the United States, however, for whom the French culture seemed too foreign, suggests the degree to which these blacks were American in their identity and cultural expectations.”¹⁹

This inability to adjust to a new life is an indication of how much of America the Black man has imbibed within himself. However, to White America it is unthinkable to be both Black and American. Douglass is a firm advocate of the integration of the Black man into the fabric of American society.²⁰ In a letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Douglass proclaims:

The truth is, dear madam, we are here, and here we are likely to remain. Individuals immigrate – nations never. We have grown up with this republic,

and I see nothing in her character, or even in the character of the American people, as yet which compels the belief that we must leave the United States.²¹

As a demonstration of his belief in integration, Douglass deliberately gets his daughter admitted into a white school, Tracy Seminary, near his residence in Rochester. Several days later his daughter, Rosetta, is sent back home because a parent, Mr. Horatio G. Warner, a democrat editor, objected to the presence of a black child in his daughter's school.²² To a man who believes that education leads to freedom, this incident did not put a stop to his efforts to bring about integration in schools and finally after repeated efforts with voice and pen, coloured children are permitted to attend public schools with the others.²³ A reason why Douglass is not willing to accept the diktat of the school authorities is because of his belief that physical separation from the White man will not benefit the Black man in any way. Black separatism is not the answer to the problem of colour and Douglass's life stands as a testament to this belief.

You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a Man.²⁴

In his journey to freedom and manhood, Douglass attributes his fight with Covey as the beginning of the creation of a new self. Slaves are trained to supplicate themselves before their white masters and not to react to the whippings and abuse that is heaped on them. Passivity is the hallmark of most slaves. Frederick Douglass stands out as unique because he always

strives to take the road less travelled. His yearlong stay with Mr. Covey is marked by deep despondency in the beginning and by a sense of defiance in the end. In the beginning, Douglass subjects himself to the brutality of Covey until his spirit is broken. He writes, "Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul and spirit".²⁵ However, a day arrives when Douglass has had enough and the man in him resolves to fight his oppressor:

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.²⁶

For Douglass, this fight with Covey is not only a physical resistance, it is a fight for his human dignity, a fight to reclaim his manhood. Douglass's action of fighting back rejuvenates his broken spirit and he feels his power coursing down his veins. Never again will Covey touch him and never again will Douglass passively allow himself to be beaten without putting up a fight. When a man is pushed to the edge of the cliff, sometimes his leap of death ends in a rebirth for him. This is what happens to Frederick Douglass for he admits, "I had reached the point, at which I was not afraid to die. This spirit made me a freeman in fact, while I remained a slave in form".²⁷ Therefore he proclaims, "I was nothing before; I WAS A MAN NOW".²⁸

In seizing his own freedom, Douglass is also able to forge a new identity for himself. From a voiceless slave he becomes an orator and the

wind beneath the wings of freedom. His meeting with William Lloyd Garrison, the abolitionist, in 1841 paves the way for Douglass to join the ranks of the Garrisonians as a speaker. For the next fourteen years Douglass preaches moral suasion in keeping with the Garrisonian belief that slavery is a moral issue. Gradually however, Douglass realizes that a peaceful abolition of slavery is impossible with the American nation not really serious about solving this problem. After meeting John Brown, the man who will lead the abolitionist raid in Harper's Ferry, in Springfield, Mass, in 1847, Douglass becomes convinced that slavery can only be destroyed by bloodshed. When expressing his apprehension in an anti-slavery convention in Salem, Ohio, Sojourner Truth interrupts him with the question, "Frederick, is God dead?" Douglass replies, "No, because God is not dead slavery can only end in blood".²⁹

In his progress towards a new beginning, Douglass reveals a remarkable level of maturity. He also reveals an integrity which is admirable. In his first two autobiographies, *Narrative* and *Life and Times*, he refuses to divulge his route of escape for fear that others behind him will not be able to take the same escape route. He also refuses to divulge the names of the little white boys in Baltimore who helped him with reading and writing, for fear that they will be ostracized by white society. Unlike Harriet Beecher Stowe who is inclined to idealize the slave,

especially the character of Uncle Tom in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Frederick Douglass is under no illusions at all about the sable race and he portrays the truth no matter how unpleasant it is. In *An Eyewitness History, Slavery in America*, Dorothy and Carl Schneider write about how Blacks boast of having been born in North America and brag about the status of their owners. Douglass does not idealize the slave because he is just a human being with all his faults and weaknesses. In the *Narrative*, he writes bitterly about how the Lloyd slaves living in the out-farms compete with one another to be honoured with the privilege of going to the Great House on errands:

The competitors for this office sought as diligently to please their overseers, as the office seekers in the political parties seek to please and deceive the people. The same traits of character may be seen in Col. Lloyd's slaves, as are seen in the slaves of the political parties.³⁰

Douglass also admits that slaves can be as prejudiced as their masters, they think their own better than that of others. Douglass writes, "It is not uncommon for slaves to fall out and quarrel among themselves about the relative goodness of their masters, each contending for the superior goodness of his own over that of the others. At the same time, they mutually execrate their masters when viewed separately".³¹ Douglass admits candidly that slaves are also capable, just like their masters and mistresses, of starving and ill-treating their own just as he himself suffered at the hands of Aunt Katy in Aaron Anthony's house when he

was a little boy. In his autobiographies, Douglass admits resorting to stealing when he and his fellow slaves were deliberately starved by their master, Thomas Auld. When a people is able to critique itself it reveals its maturity as a society. In a demonstration of his growing maturity, Douglass openly admits that it is Sandy, a fellow slave, who betrays him and his friends to Mr. Freeland's father-in-law about their plan to run away.

A more damaging charge that Douglass levels against the sable population is that in the North some of them work in tandem with the slave catchers to kidnap their own, so they can be returned back to their masters in the South for a reward. Upon his arrival in New York after escaping the South, Douglass writes:

I was afraid of speaking to anyone for fear of speaking to the wrong one, and thereby falling into the hands of money-loving kidnappers.... I saw in every white man an enemy, and in almost every coloured man cause for distrust.³²

This is in direct contrast to the relationship shared by the Black community in the South. Dorothy and Carl Schneider write about how, "slaves cared for each other, covered for each other and supported each other in times of trouble. A runaway hiding in nearby woods could count on his friends for food from their own meager rations".³³ In his novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain also writes about how Jim, the runaway slave is fed and looked after by the Grangerford slaves when he becomes separated from Huck.³⁴

Colour prejudice is like a disease among the sable population. Mulattoes on account of their fairer skin and Caucasian features were always accorded a higher rank in the slave hierarchy. Most of them were put to work in the master's house because of their light skin, where they served as house-servants. Their work was physically easier than the backbreaking work of the field slaves who worked from dawn to dusk come rain or shine. As a result, house slaves more often than not had an air of superiority about them because they were more privileged.

Colour prejudice among African American persists till today. Though the issue is considered as a bit of dirty laundry, yet many African Americans are less reluctant to discuss it publicly today.³⁵ The most famous example is the late Michael Jackson, an African American superstar in the entertainment world. Jackson altered his skin colour and facial features to look more Caucasian, giving rise to allegations that he is trying to get away from his race. Another example is Vanessa Williams, a fair-complexioned, green-eyed African American who was chosen Miss America in 1983. Some Blacks complained that she was "half white" and not "in essence black".³⁶ In his essay Litwack writes:

Although whites understandably associated a lighter skin with a superior type of Negro surprising fact is that so many Negroes consciously or unconsciously accepted this colour valuation.... the strong tendency among Negroes, particularly those in the upper and middle classes, envy a light complexion, accept white standards of beauty, and do everything possible to alter their own appearances accordingly.³⁷

Douglass's second marriage to a red-headed white woman in January, 1884 leads to accusations that he is ashamed of his own race. To his children his second marriage is like a formal repudiation of them, their mother and their mother's people who were all black. "Marrying a white woman seemed a public confirmation of his children's heretofore private grievance, their sense that they being darker than he, were of less value."³⁸ Douglass himself did not see his marriage in this light. In his career as a speaker, Douglass is close to a number of white women like Amy Post, Julia Griffiths, Ottila Assing and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, intelligent, articulate women and very different from his illiterate and inarticulate wife, Anna. A vital, intelligent and charismatic man, Douglass needed a companion who could stimulate his creativity and challenge his ideas and beliefs, something which his wife is incapable of providing. After her death in August 1882, Douglass, lonely and depressed finds friendship and companionship with Helen Pitts, a copyist in his office.

In *America's Black Past*, Eric Foner writes:

Racial prejudice, as we have seen, was part of the cultural heritage which English colonists brought to the New World, and white supremacy has been a feature of American society from the very beginning. But it was not until the nineteenth century that racism emerged as a full-blown ideology, a comprehensive view of the world which holds that a person's race is the determinant of all his other capacities and qualities, and that the subordinates of "inferior" races by "superior" ones is necessary for the preservation of social order.³⁹

In the Northern states, racial attitudes are extraordinarily complex. Most whites in the North did not accept the idea of black equality and social segregation is common. However, when fugitive slaves are seized, whole towns will pour out into the streets to protest. Even non-abolitionists will risk incarceration or fines to help fugitive slaves.⁴⁰ This attitude perhaps explains to a certain extent the Garrisonians' behaviour towards Frederick Douglass when he first joined their movement as a lecturer. During the 1830's and 1840's fugitive slaves who were willing to speak about their life under slavery were not many. When Douglass agrees to join William Lloyd Garrison and his group of abolitionists, it is a godsend because a fugitive slave's word is far more effective and authentic than any uttered by a white abolitionist because it is a first-hand account. "The black abolitionist was generally moved by compelling personal need, his white cohort acted more from the abstractions of conscience".⁴¹ Though the abolitionist movement started by Garrison and Theodore Weld is founded upon black support, yet blacks are often marginalized by their white Anti-slavery friends much to their chagrin. Martin R. Delaney writes in 1852, "and thus did we expect much. But in all this, we were doomed to disappointment.... Instead of realizing what we had hoped for, we find ourselves occupying the very same position in relation to our Anti-slavery

friends, as we do in relation to the proslavery part of the community – a mere secondary, underling position.”⁴²

Aware that he is a “brand new fact”, Douglass submits to being introduced by the chairman of anti-slavery meetings as a “chattel”, a thing”, a piece of southern “property” amid assurances that “it” can speak. Mr. John A. Collins, the general agent of the Massachusetts anti-slavery society usually introduces Douglass as a graduate from the peculiar institution with “my diploma written on my back”.⁴³ Whites expect the ‘Negro’ to act the clown and to be childish, carefree, and irresponsible because this is the image that they have always carried with them. Since the abolitionists function within a society racked by racial tensions, it is only natural that these tensions and suspicions will spill over and precipitate division between black and white abolitionists. White abolitionists started raising questions about black membership in abolitionists’ societies and race mixing at anti-slavery functions. Questions were also raised about intercourse between blacks and whites outside the official gatherings. Samuel Ward writes with regret, “Too many...best love the coloured man at a distance”.⁴⁴ Blacks were also increasingly annoyed with the condescending attitude of white abolitionists because it is suggestive of his inherent inferiority.

For the first three or four months working with the Garrisonians, Douglass simply narrates his own personal experiences as a slave because his audience wanted to hear facts. When it becomes difficult for Douglass to simply narrate his story night after night without giving vent to his moral indignation for the perpetrators of slaveholding villainy, he is advised by Collins, "Give us the facts, we will take care of the philosophy".⁴⁵ To Collins and his fellow white abolitionists, Douglass's rapid intellectual development is a cause for concern. To reign him in, they advise him to have a little of the plantation manner of speech since it is best that he must not seem too learned. White America carries a preconceived notion that Blacks do not have the capacity to transcend their traditional lowly position in the social strata resulting in Douglass being accused of lying about his slave past. He writes, "They said I did not talk like a slave, and that they believed that I had never been South of Mason and Dixon line".⁴⁶ As an act of repudiation, Frederick Douglass decides to write out the facts connected with his life under slavery, giving names of persons, places and dates, in direct contrast to the usual practice among slave narrators not to give the specifics. Through the title of his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*, Douglass not only claims the authorship for

himself but most importantly he claims an American identity, something which white America is not ready to bestow on the sable race.

Refusing to be drawn to a racist setting where a free Negro has “no rights that a white man was bound to respect”,⁴⁷ the restive Frederick Douglass decides to break out on his own and start his own newspaper after returning from his first tour of England, in the hope of sending slavery and oppression to the grave. As Douglass progresses intellectually, he cannot feign ignorance anymore about certain Garrisonian practices and beliefs. He contends that they start to free the slave but end by leaving the slave to free himself. They start with imbuing the heart of the nation with sentiments favorable to the abolition of slavery, and by seeking to free the North from all responsibility of slavery.⁴⁸ Some Blacks are of the opinion that racial equality has been relegated to a position of secondary importance in the abolition crusade. But a more serious charge leveled against the American Anti-Slavery Society is that in their strong zeal and fiery indignation against slavery in the South, they half overlook slavery in the North.

Douglass himself has first-hand experience about Northern racism at its worst. Three days after arriving in New Bedford he sets out in search of a job to support himself and his new wife, Anna. After completing his first job stowing a sloop with a load of oil, he goes in

pursuit of a job of calking. To his consternation, all the white calkers already on the job refuse to work with him because of his colour. In the North, Blacks have to face economic discrimination and exploitation. Not only are they employed in the lowest-paid unskilled jobs, but they also have to face hostile native and immigrant white workers and their exclusionist trade unions. For three years in New Bedford, Douglass performs all kinds of labour available to him and none is beneath him. From sawing wood to shoveling coal and sweeping chimneys Douglass does it all with a cheerful heart because there is no Hugh Auld to take away his hard earned money. Throughout his life, Frederick Douglass is always brought face to face with discrimination and racism yet he is able to transcend all his disabilities as a Black man to emerge as one of the lions of Black history.

In Douglass's three autobiographies, we see the evolution of the author from a fugitive slave to an influential writer, speaker and a holder of some of the highest political offices ever held by a Black man. His transition from a slave to a leader of a race of people has not been an easy one and it is the sheer force of his personality, intelligence and charisma which has carried him so far. In March 1874, Douglass is appointed as the President of the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company and a few years later, he is named the Marshall of the District of Columbia,

although he did not get the whole job. One of the duties of a Marshall is to attend formal receptions in the White House and present each guest to the President. Since it is unthinkable to bestow such an honour to a former slave, Douglass is exempted from this particular job. McFeely writes that Douglass might have been acceptable dressed in gaudy livery and made to stand at the door of the Blue Room but as the insolent Negro, he is not.⁴⁹ In 1889, Douglass is offered the post of Minister to Haiti, which he accepts. This appointment however creates some controversy because Douglass's old abolitionist friends like Martha Greene and Julia Griffiths Crofts counsel him not to take it, as it is a bit insulting.

In the *Narrative* Douglass recreates the slave as an evolving self-bound for mental as well as physical freedom and forges a new identity for himself on his own terms. His mostly white audience is confronted with an articulate, intelligent and handsome man who is far removed from the inarticulate and shuffling stereotypes propagated by proslavery advocates. There is nothing apologetic or tentative about Douglass and he uses this advantage to establish the dignity of all Black people. *My Bondage and My Freedom* is an extraordinary reassessment of his life from the standpoint of almost fifteen years of freedom. In this second autobiography, Frederick Douglass very candidly writes about issues plaguing the Garrisonians and the North. What sets his autobiographies

apart from that of the other slave narrators who simply narrate their story is that Douglass challenges institutions like religion, slaveholding and issues like Northern racism. He is a man who does not believe in following the conventions. In the *Narrative* his portrayal of Christianity as practiced by Southern slaveholders is so bitter that at the end of the book in an Appendix he clarifies that his attack is not against Christianity proper but against the slaveholding Christian South, the corrupt, women whipping, cradle plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of the South.

In his speech entitled *What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July? : An Address Delivered in Rochester, New York on 5th July 1852* Douglass celebrates the principles of the founding fathers, but then he goes on to contrast the immeasurable distance between the conditions of Whites and Blacks in the United States. This speech is a wake-up call to Black people to take action because Douglass believes that if there is no struggle there is no progress. He asserts in “Progress is yet possible”,⁵⁰ which implies that there are still miles to go towards achieving a black heroic identity.

His third and last autobiography *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* did not sell as well as his first two. A reason is that the public believed that the time of slavery has passed and that Douglass is simply retelling old tales. What the public missed is the book’s real message

which is that the story of slavery must not be purged from America's memory. By the end of the nineteenth century many Americans, both White and Black have grown weary of the subject. Many Black Americans wanted to move away from their slave past especially after Reconstruction. *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* is a revelation of the man that Douglass has been able to recreate, a man of heroic proportions, a man who has emerged as the most visible, persuasive and influential African American of the nineteenth century. As Kareem Abdul-Jabbar writes, "A life, ironically, that could have happened only in America".⁵¹

End Notes

- ¹ Frederick Douglass, "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself", *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, eds. Gates and McKay, (New York: Norton, 2004), p. 423.
- ² ---. *My Bondage and My Freedom*, (New York: Miller, Orton and Mulligan, 1855), p. 333-34.
- ³ Douglass, *Narrative*, p.443.
- ⁴ Kenneth Estell, *African America: Portrait of a People*, (Detroit: Visible Ink, 1994), p. 15.
- ⁵ Harriet Jacobs, "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl", *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, eds. Gates and McKay, (New York: Norton, 2004), p. 307.
- ⁶ William Wells Brown, "Narrative of William Wells Brown, a Fugitive Slave", *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, eds. Gates and McKay, (New York: Norton, 2004), p. 316.
- ⁷ Sojourner Truth, "Introduction", *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, eds. Gates and McKay, (New York: Norton, 2004), p. 245.
- ⁸ Douglass, *Narrative*, p. 423.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p.413.
- ¹⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Souls of Black Folk", *A Twentieth Century American Reader*, eds. Jack Lane and Maurice O' Sullivan, Vol I, (Washington D.C: United States Information Agency, 1999), p. 694.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 694.
- ¹² Douglass, *My Bondage*, p. 360.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 361.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 362.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 362.
- ¹⁶ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks*, p. 695.
- ¹⁷ Estell, *African America*, p. 17.
- ¹⁸ James O. Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Hard Road to Freedom: The Story of African American*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001), p. 132.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 132.
- ²⁰ Richard Barksdale and Kenneth Kinnamon, *Black Writer of America: A Comprehensive Anthology*, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1972), p. 66.
- ²¹ Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times*, (Hartford: Park Publishing Co, 1881), p.293.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 274.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 275.

- ²⁴ Douglass, *Narrative*, p. 424.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 423
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 427.
- ²⁷ Douglass, *My Bondage*, p. 247.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 246.
- ²⁹ Douglass, *Life and Times*, p. 282.
- ³⁰ Douglass, *Narrative*, p. 400.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 403.
- ³² *Ibid.*, p. 443.
- ³³ Dorothy Schneider and Carl J. Schneider, *Slavery in America: From Colonial Times to the Civil War*, (New York: Facts on File Inc, 2000), p. 93.
- ³⁴ Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, (New York: Norton, 1999), p. 131.
- ³⁵ Colin A. Palmer, ed. *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History: The Black Experience in the Americas*, 2nd ed, (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), p.2047.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2047.
- ³⁷ Leon F. Litwack, "From North of Slavery", *America's Black Past*, ed. Eric Foner, (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 156.
- ³⁸ William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass*, (New York: Norton, 1991), p. 320.
- ³⁹ Eric Foner, *America's Black Past*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 142.
- ⁴⁰ Paul Finkleman, "Slavery and Race", *Encyclopedia of American Cultural and Intellectual History*, eds. Mary Kupiec Cayton and Peter Williams, (New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 2001), p. 318.
- ⁴¹ Leon F. Litwack, "The Emancipation of the Negro Abolitionist", *America's Black Past*, ed. Eric Foner, (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 176.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 167.
- ⁴³ Douglass, *My Bondage*, p. 359.
- ⁴⁴ Litwack, "The Emancipation", p. 173.
- ⁴⁵ Douglass, *My Bondage*, p. 361.
- ⁴⁶ Douglass, *Life and Times*, p. 219.
- ⁴⁷ Barksdale and Kinnamon, *Black Writers of America*, p. 55.
- ⁴⁸ Litwack, "The Emancipation", p. 174.
- ⁴⁹ McFeely, *Frederick Douglass*, p.292.
- ⁵⁰ Douglass. *My Bondage*, p. 405.
- ⁵¹ Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Alan Steinberg, *Black Profiles in Courage: A Legacy of African American Achievement*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1996), p. 73.

Chapter-IV

AUTHENTICATING THE SELF

All art involves self-projection to a certain extent and in the novel or the drama, the writer projects his own personality into the characters that he creates. As a result, self-projection is inevitable in literature. Through the ages, man has always been fascinated with his 'self' and in almost every age autobiographical writing is evident.¹ We have the diary, memoir, letters which all fall under autobiographical writing but each is different from the other.

In the diary we have a faithful and minute recording of a person's daily life but a disadvantage of this kind of writing is that it does not have a long-range perspective which only time can bring. A further disadvantage of the diary is that it does not have the coherence of a journal, which is usually written to a plan. A journal unlike the diary, usually has specific objectives but both are interesting because they provide a wealth of detail about their times.²

A memoir is very closely related to the autobiography and there is a very fine line which separates the two. Though both the memoir and autobiography are based on personal experience yet in the memoir, the memoirist concentrates more on recording public events rather than on the 'self'. A significant difference between the two is that the memoir is

usually written by a person after he or she has played a distinguished role in life or has contributed to and witnessed history in the making. A memoirist focuses more on external life and not on the inner self and as a result a memoir is more like a chronicle. Autobiography on the other hand illumines the author's inner self using external descriptions and what makes it unique is that it is a retrospective account of the autobiographer's life, written with affirmed fidelity.³

The term autobiography was coined in 1809 when Robert Southey commented on the life of a Portuguese painter Francisco Vieira in the Quarterly review.⁴ The word autobiography can be described in terms of the three constituent elements – autos (self), bios (life), and graphe (writing).⁵ Autobiography has its birth in the desire to explain and justify the self according to William L. Andrews,⁶ and Georges Gusdorf has explained it as a need to do away with misunderstandings and to restore an incomplete or deformed truth. He exhorts the autobiographer to take up the telling of his own story.⁷ In America it is only in recent years that autobiographies have received scholarly attention. Earlier, autobiographies were not considered works of imagination and therefore English departments of the 1950's and 60's derided them as an inferior kind of literature.⁸ It is only in the 1970's that Frederick Douglass's three autobiographies were accepted as works of literature.

An examination of Black American literary tradition reveals that it began with the oral tradition with its roots in Africa. Some of these stories were very popular with both Blacks and Whites of the time.⁹ These stories about the experience of capture and enslavement were passed on from mouth to mouth throughout the antebellum period. Black American autobiography is a continuation of this creative literary tradition and these writings are a reflection of the epic experience of this group. For Black autobiographers, autobiography fulfills their need for a rhetorical mode to do battle against racism. Writing their story allows them to give a first-hand account of the horrors they have had to endure and these stories go right into the hearts of men. Though other types of writing like treatises, pamphlets, addresses and appeals thrived during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries yet it is only Black autobiography which is capable of having a mass impact on the conscience of ante-bellum Americans.¹⁰ William L. Andrews believes that the history of Black autobiography is one of increasingly free storytelling and that it signals the ways black narratives address their readers and reconstruct personal history.¹¹ Freedom is a mark of Black autobiography since it is the Black people's desire to demonstrate their freedom through the oral form or through written storytelling that leads them to writing autobiographies.

In the 1840's and 50's American autobiographical writing becomes diverse and original. In White autobiography the convention is to write the success story, in Black autobiography however the convention is to focus more on the escape from bondage to freedom. Experienced abolitionists recognise that autobiography or first person narrative is the most effective tool in their fight against slavery in the South. A reason is because these writings offer an in-depth and intimate look into a world which before stood as an enigma. The story of a runaway slave is bound to be more compelling than any oratory or pamphlet by a white abolitionist. When we look at the history of Black autobiography we find its roots in the Slave Narrative. A closer look at the slave narrative reveals that it is the antebellum¹² slave narratives which assume a position of privilege unlike the postbellum¹³ slave narratives. However slave narratives have a problem with historicity and this has been a topic of heated debate over the years. Early historians of the slave narratives have always believed in the weakness of factual substance of these writings since they were merely an arm of abolitionist propaganda. John W. Blassingame, however, dismisses this earlier belief and contends that most of the accounts written by former slaves not only have a ring of truth but they can also be verified by independent sources.¹⁴ However it

must be remembered that even when we speak of a verifiable fact, it is still interpreted by the narrator and the facts do not speak for themselves.

Autobiography without a doubt is one of the most difficult forms of literary art. Not only must it be a retrospective account of the autobiographer's life but it must also be written with the utmost honesty.¹⁵ In autobiography the nature of truth is very complex because it is subjective rather than objective, since the autobiographer presents the truth of life as seen from inside. In American autobiography, slave narratives have been accepted with great skepticism and resistance precisely because of this. Another reason is because Black slaves have always been perceived to be liars, thieves and drunkards in the North, therefore whatever they have to say or write is always viewed with suspicion. Frederick Douglass's act of writing his own autobiography is the result of accusations that he had never been a slave because he did not speak in the slave dialect. Douglass's revelation of his master's identity and place of birth in his autobiography is looked at askance by his fellow Blacks who consider it to be a folly since his master will learn of his whereabouts. But Douglass is convinced that without these revelations his book will be worthless as no one will take his word as the truth. For Douglass it is imperative that he must be believed. Therefore if his act of

disclosing personal details about himself and his owners puts his hard earned freedom in jeopardy, so be it.

On the other hand, in White autobiography, truth is viewed very differently. Henry David Thoreau declares at the beginning of his experience at Walden Pond, “I, on my side, require of every writer, first or last, a simple and sincere account of his own life.”¹⁶ When we compare this statement to the extent Douglass goes to establish the authenticity of his story, we immediately discern the bias of the White readers. For one, Thoreau did not bother to explain how one might prove one’s sincerity because for a White autobiographer the establishment of the truth is not of much importance. This is so because they believe that their readers will grant them peer status and their sincerity is assumed. So given this relationship that exists between a White autobiographer and his readers, the author’s letter to the world always have social, cultural and linguistic sanction. In White autobiography, literary egoism may be praised as self-reliance but in Black autobiography the same is termed as impudence. Perhaps the greatest challenge to Black autobiographers is to find devices and strategies that will bestow the stamp of authenticity to their writings. When we look at Douglass’s autobiographies in this light, it is clear that he is one of the first Black autobiographers whose books have successfully overcome this challenge.

In his first autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*, Douglass has to conform to the traditions of the slave narrative by having two white men, William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips, write the Preface to the book. The two men's role is to authenticate that the book had really been written by Douglass:

Mr. Douglass has very properly chosen to write his own Narrative, in his own style, and according to the best of his ability, rather than to employ someone else. It is, therefore, entirely his own production; and, considering how long and dark was the career he had to run as a slave... it is in my judgement, highly creditable to his head and heart.¹⁷

In the second book, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass breaks away from tradition by having Dr. James McCune Smith, a black physician and abolitionist write the Preface. This is done deliberately because after fifteen years of freedom he is forced to reassess his philosophy and goals as a reformer following a split with Garrison. By this time however, Douglass is convinced that he doesn't need a white man to authenticate his literary act and his selfhood. His last autobiography too carries a preface by George L. Ruffin, the first Black American to graduate from Harvard Law School in 1869 and the first to serve on the Massachusetts state legislature, as a reiteration of this belief.

In autobiography the writer depends wholly on his memory which at times can be treacherous and misleading. This is so because he has no control over his memory and memory sometimes can be selective and

also creative. In his autobiographies, Douglass often makes no mention about certain people and incidents in his life. His childhood friendship with Daniel Lloyd is given only a brief mention and even more surprising is that he makes no mention at all about his courtship with Anna Murray in Baltimore before announcing his marriage to her in New York a few days after his escape. All that we know about Anna before her marriage to Douglass is that she helped him financially when he made his escape to the North. Douglass deliberately plays down his association with Daniel Lloyd because within its boundaries he was the lowly slave boy, an impression which does not sit well with the image that he now wants to show the world. His wife Anna, an illiterate, dark-complexioned and coarse woman did not fit into Douglass's world filled with outspoken and militant personalities. By keeping silent about them, Douglass tries to uphold only his heroic qualities.

For Frederick Douglass it is vital that he must be seen as a truth teller because Blacks have always been seen as depraved and vicious by white America. American standards insist that autobiography must be factual which means that in Black autobiography the self must be situated on the periphery while the 'facts' must be the centre of attention. Douglass on the other hand believes in giving both the 'facts' and the 'self' equal importance because one cannot do without the other if a

balanced view is to be achieved. Since autobiography is an assessment of the significance of one's life, Douglass is determined that the 'self' he reveals to the world must be worthy and complete and deserving of the name truth teller because it is only then that he will achieve full manhood.

The inhumanity of man on man and the continuation of slavery and human bondage have given rise to various forms of protest and Black autobiography is one such example.¹⁸ Douglass's three autobiographies can also be called protest literature because he protests against attempts by the white dominant race to suppress his voice and reduce him to a mere puppet whom they can manipulate. Other autobiographies such as W.E.B. Du Bois's *Dusk of Dawn*, the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, and a few others are also examples of black protest in literature. Black protest comes in different forms, it started on the slave ships with the slave rebellions and it matured into the act of seizing an education in the face of white opposition which is one of the most powerful forms of protest. Other forms of protest range from a deliberate work slowdown to oratory and even religion when Black slaves inscribe Christianity with certain African forms of worship such as the calling out which is very popular in Black churches.¹⁹

A recurring theme in most Black autobiography is the Black man's protest against the cruelty and injustice imposed on him by White

America. This theme is seen not only in the autobiographies of the slave narrators of the 18th and 19th centuries, but also in 20th century autobiographies such as *Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965). A comparison between Frederick Douglass and Malcolm X reveals that the two men have a lot in common though they belong to different centuries. Both of them are charismatic leaders and also orators of their time. Like Douglass, Malcolm is a man of complete integrity and he is not afraid to tell it as it is.²⁰ Whereas Douglass believes in social integration, Malcolm is a believer of Black separatism, where the sable race will have economic, political and social independence. That issues of oppression and racism have remained the same in America from the 19th century to the 20th century is indicative of the collective failure of the American nation in providing basic civil and human rights to a race of people whose forefathers were forcibly brought across the ocean against their will.

For Douglass a potent weapon against the debilitating effects of slavery is a deliberate misreading of everything that the slaveholder stands for. A study of his life reveals that Douglass has always done the opposite of what others want him to do. In many slave narratives, the ability to read, the acquisition of literacy is treated as equivalent to the achievement of physical freedom. In the *Narrative*, Frederick Douglass speaks of reading as the way he begins to define himself via defiance of

his master. When Hugh Auld learns of Douglass's lessons with his wife Sophia he becomes apprehensive lest Douglass becomes uncontrollable. Yet when Douglass realizes this, he goes to great lengths to educate himself, risking punishment along the way. In the *Narrative* he writes that he owes his ability to read not only to Sophia but also to Hugh Auld's bitter opposition to his education.

As he puts it, "What he most dreaded, that I most desired. What he most loved, that I most hated"²¹ Though Douglass is rare among Black autobiographers in representing himself as a radical misreader of the teachings of his master, yet he is not alone because Walker's *David Walker's Appeal in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World* is also a misreading of the US constitution. However this misreading in Black American autobiography is not an act of social commentary or moral criticism. It is a fundamental part of the act of self-creation.

It is only through autobiography that Douglass feels he can authenticate his own self. William L. Andrews writes that autobiography is "spurred by many motives, perhaps the most important of which is the need of an 'other' to declare himself through various linguistic acts..."²² For Douglass, autobiography is the only genre which can provide him with the platform to reveal to the world the man that he is, a hero.

End Notes

1. Sarojini, "Autobiography: A Literary Genre," *Women's Writing*, ed. Jasbir Jain, (New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2004), p. 199.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 200.
3. *Ibid.*, p.201.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
5. William L. Andrews, "Introduction." *African American Autobiography*, ed. William L. Andrews, (USA: Prentice-Hall, 1993), p. 2.
6. William L. Andrews, "The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography: Theory and Explication (1984)." *African American Literary Criticism, 1773 to 2000*, ed. Hazel Arnett Ervin,(New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999), p.223.
7. *Ibid.*, p.223.
8. Robert E. Sayre, "The Proper Study: Autobiographies in American Studies." *The American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Albert E. Stone, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc, 1981), p.12.
9. Dickson D. Bruce Jr, "Slave Culture and Consciousness," *Encyclopedia of American Cultural and Intellectual History Vol I*, ed. Cayton and Williams, (U. S. A: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2001), p.322.
10. William L. Andrews, "The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography: Theory and Explication(1984)," *African American Literary Criticism, 1773 to 2000*, ed. Hazel Arnett Ervin, (New York: Twayne Publishers,1999), p. 226.
11. William L. Andrews, "A Poetics of Afro-American Autobiography", *Afro-American Literary Study in the 1990's*, ed. Houston A. Bakerr, Jr. and Patricia Redmond, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), p.89.
12. Period in US history before the Civil War.
13. Period in US history after the Civil War.
14. William L. Andrews, "The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, Theory and Explication," *African American Literary Criticism, 1773 to 2000*, ed. Hazel Arnett Ervin, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999), p.232.
15. Sarojini, "Autobiography: A Literary Genre", *Women's Writing*, ed. Jasbir Jain, (New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2004), p. 203.
16. Quoted in William L. Andrews, "The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, Theory and Explication," *African American Literary Criticism, 1773 to 2000*, ed. Hazel Arnett Ervin, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999), p.224.
17. Frederick Douglass, "Narrative oof the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself," *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. Gates and McKay, (New York: Norton, 2004), p.490.
18. Sarojini, "Autobiography: A Literary Genre," *Women's Writing*, ed. Jasbir Jain, (New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2004), p. 209.

- ¹⁹ Aldon Morris, "Centuries of Black Protest: Its Significance for America and the World," *Race in America. The Struggle for Equality*, ed. Hill and Jones, (USA: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), p. 26.
- ²⁰ William Griffen, "The Autobiography of Malcolm X," *Masterpieces of African-American Literature*, ed. Frank N. Magill, (USA: Harper Collins, 1992), p. 24.
- ²¹ Frederick Douglass, "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself," *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. Gates and McKay, (New York: Norton, 2004), p.410.
- ²² William L. Andrews, "The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, Theory and Explication," *African American Literary Criticism, 1773 to 2000*, ed. Hazel Arnett Ervin, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999), p.228.

Chapter-V

CONCLUSION

When we look back at Frederick Douglass's life as revealed in his three autobiographies we see the evolution of the slave to a man. Though it may appear simplistic to suggest that the evolving sense of selfhood is the key theme of his autobiographies, yet such a suggestion is not far from the truth. Douglass's reasons for writing his life story is not only to silence the critics who doubt his former life as a slave but it is also because of his need to define himself publicly. A lot of thought has obviously gone into the title of his first autobiography because *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* is definitive of the kind of man Douglass wants to become. His sufferings in the past have added to the aura of the man and the title, *an American Slave*, adds to the portrait of Douglass as the heroic slave.

A study of his life reveals a man who is remarkable for his accomplishments. From an ignominious beginning as a fatherless mulatto slave, Frederick Douglass is able to overcome all social and intellectual disadvantages to emerge as a kind of Moses for his people. An admirable quality in him is his ability to focus on the goal that he has set for himself. Not many young boys of thirteen years appreciate the role that education can play in freeing a person physically and psychologically

from the shackles of slavery. Yet at this young age, Douglass is mature enough to see far into the future, to understand things which ought to have been beyond his grasp. It is because of his foresight, that he is able to understand the implication of Hugh Auld's tirade against his wife Sophia for teaching Douglass the alphabet. Whereas another might have been cowed down by this show of domination by Auld, in the case of Frederick Douglass, it only serves to whet his appetite to know more, convinced now that it is only ignorance and illiteracy which is keeping the slave in fetters. It is only when both the body and mind are free that true liberation can be achieved. With this intelligence to guide him, Douglass embarks on a remarkable journey that few have been able to emulate.

What shines through in Douglass's personality is his optimism and grittiness and his never say die attitude. These qualities have enabled him to overcome all the disadvantages of slavery where a man's head, limbs and body belong not to himself, but to another. It is because of the sheer dynamism of his character that Douglass is able to shed the stupor and numbness inflicted upon him by slavery, to rise up once again like the Sphinx, to continue his self education and share it with his fellow slaves who are eager to receive some of these drops of knowledge. He tries to break the shackles of slavery with his first attempt to run away with some

of his friends while living with Mr. Freeland. Though thwarted in his attempt by a friend's betrayal, yet his desire for freedom, the freedom to be his own man, to own himself continue to burn like embers in his heart. This desire to be free is compounded by his master's action of sending him to Baltimore instead of selling him down South.

Frederick Douglass is a strategist of the first order. He is not one who will let an opportunity slip through his fingers, therefore when he is sent to live again with Hugh Auld in Baltimore to learn a trade, he uses this chance to make his way to the North and freedom. Hugh Auld is deliberately lulled into a feeling of complacency by Douglass who pretends to be a model slave, giving up all his earnings to Auld. Yet it is exactly at this time that Douglass is feverishly planning his escape which is finally executed when he takes the train to New York, disguised as a sailor and with a sailor friend's pass in his pocket.

In the North Frederick Douglass is able to forge a road that will ultimately lead him to the corridors of power in Washington D.C. Through the sheer dynamism of his character he is able to carve a place for himself in the annals of his country. His travels to England, Ireland and Scotland, where he is able to drum up support for the abolitionist movement in America, serve to enhance his store of knowledge. In America Douglass is used to hearing "we don't allow niggers in here"

when he tries to gain entrance to certain institutions but in England he is treated as an honoured guest wherever he goes. These interactions with some of the leading figures in English society stimulate Douglass's intellect and broaden his perspective. During his first visit, Douglass is able to impress his English hosts to such an extent with his verbal powers and agility of mind that they buy his freedom from Auld for seven hundred and eleven dollars so that he can return back to America a free man and continue his battle against slavery without fear of being captured by slave hunters.

Through the sheer force of his character he is able to emerge as a spokesman for his people. His work as an abolitionist, as an editor of *The North Star* an abolitionist paper and as a Superintendent of the Rochester Underground Railroad serves as credentials for his later work. Douglass is also able to play a role during Abraham Lincoln's tenure as President of the United States, which also saw the beginning of the Civil War between the North and the South. To Douglass the War is a welcome event because for him it is a war against slavery. Therefore he lobbies President Lincoln on two fronts: to abolish slavery and to let Blacks join the war. When President Lincoln agrees to allow Blacks to fight against the Southern rebels Douglass labours tirelessly to recruit Black men to the Union army.¹

In his long career as an abolitionist, a speaker, a voice for his people, Douglass has had to face a number of hurdles but remarkably he always manages to emerge unscathed. An example is the Freedmen's Savings and Trust Company to which he is appointed as President in 1874.² Though some critics blame Douglass for not turning things around, yet many understand that it was humanly impossible for him to change the fortunes of an irresponsibly run institution like the Freedmen's Bank. The greatest deterrent in Douglass's career has always been his skin colour. So many doors have been deliberately closed in his face because the White men in power cannot bear the thought of rubbing shoulders with a former slave. Douglass however never allows these deprivations to hinder his tenacious climb towards self improvement. In fact Frederick Douglass's greatest conquest is over himself, that slavish part of him. What is important to him is not his personal success story, what matters to him is that his people, the tormented sable race, must achieve equality and that they must be given the same opportunities as everybody else. Douglass scorns pity; sympathy is what he wants White America to feel for his people.

White, western philosophers like Hegel, Kant and Hume have dismissed Blacks as inferior to the white race in intelligence, morality and spirituality.³ This comes as no surprise because White men have always

wondered whether the African is a species of man or not or whether they can even master the arts and sciences. Scottish philosopher David Hume wrote in a footnote to his essay, *Of National Characters*:

I am apt to suspect the negroes, and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than whites, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturers amongst them, arts, no sciences.⁴

Immanuel Kant, the German philosopher wrote further:

The negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling.... So fundamental is the difference between these two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in colour.⁵

In spite of these dismissive comments passed against their race, slave narrators have been able to prove through their stories and writings that they are not so obtuse as to be unconscious of the wrongs committed against them. Frederick Douglass's autobiographies stand as proof to these statements. Through his books, Douglass has emerged as a lion of his race, a man whose intellect has taken him to heights never before imagined. Frederick Douglass presents himself not only as a deliverer of his people from the jaws of slavery but he also presents himself as a leader who has fought tirelessly for their citizenship and equal rights. It is appropriate that in his last autobiography, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, Douglass should express his confidence that his life has been a "life of victory, if not complete, at least assured."⁶

Frederick Douglass's importance and influence in African American literature is immeasurable. Of Douglass's three autobiographies it is the *Narrative* which has received the most critical attention as well as the highest critical acclaim. The inclusion of the *Narrative* in Hennig Cohen's *Landmarks of American Writing* in 1969 signifies its acceptance into the American canon. In his essay *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Benjamin Quarles calls the *Narrative*, "a landmark in the literary crusade against slavery."⁷ After years of obscurity, it is only now that the second autobiography *My Bondage and My Freedom* is being recognised as one of the crucial 'I-narratives' of the 1850's in America. Frederick Douglass's books are now compared to the first-person writings of stalwarts like Thoreau and Walt Whitman. William L. Andrews considers the *Narrative* as 'the' central text in Afro-American autobiography studies and he also asserts that this book is one of the five canonical texts in Afro-American autobiography, the others being Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery*, Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Birds Sings*.⁸

In spite of the popularity of his books, particularly the *Narrative*, Frederick Douglass makes no claim to literary greatness even though his writings have been recognised as more meritorious than his speeches.

Generally speaking, his writings fall into three groups: the editorial essays written for his journals *The North Star*, *Frederick Douglass's Paper*, and *The Douglass Monthly* his speeches and orations and his autobiographical writings. His autobiographical writings, especially the *Narrative*, are noted for its literary qualities but more than this, his writings are able to strike a chord with the mood of the age. In an age which is characterized by reformist movements – women's rights, peace, public school education and others, Douglass's writings are seen as the most unsettling and revolutionary of all reforms.⁹

A discussion of Frederick Douglass will not be complete without mentioning his speeches. Douglass manages to hone his skill as an orator while working as a general agent for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society or the Garrisonians from 1841 to 1854. His brilliant command and use of language, his intellectual brilliance quickly made him one of the more popular speakers in antislavery meetings. Some of his most famous and popular speeches are *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July*, *Self-Made Men*, *Lessons of the Hour* and others. As an orator Frederick Douglass is second to none and many times he is able to control an unruly crowd through the sheer magnetism of his voice. A memorable incident occurs on August 25, 1893 on Coloured People's Day when Douglass was 85 years of age. As Douglass begins to read his written address

called *The Race Problem in America* inside the Festival Hall, white hecklers started interrupting him with their jeers and catcalls. After faltering in his speech for a minute, Douglass suddenly throws down his papers and with flashing eyes begins to speak extempore about the Negro problem in America. “Full, rich and deep, came the sonorous tones, compelling attention, drowning out the catcalls as an organ would a penny whistle.”¹⁰

A significant detail about Douglass’s disposition is that he never made the mistake of considering his education as completed. Sophia Auld sets the ball in motion by introducing him to the world of knowledge but when these lessons come to an abrupt end Douglass himself takes the initiative to further his self-education. It must have been a painstaking task to teach himself how to read and write, but Douglass perseveres in this endeavour by surreptitiously copying the letters of the alphabet from Tommy Auld’s *Webster’s Spelling Book*. Frederick’s education proceeds even further with his acquisition of *The Columbian Orator*, a book that he buys with his hard saved money. McFeely writes, “Seldom has a single book more profoundly shaped the life of a writer and orator.”¹¹ This fascination with education will remain with him throughout his life. Douglass’s obvious intellectual superiority is even more amazing when we consider that he has never had a day’s formal schooling. Whatever he

knows has come from his own sheer hard work and dedication to self-improvement. To Douglass, his education is a continuous process and he doesn't believe that learning can only take place within the four walls of a classroom. Maybe it is because of this belief that none of his children attended college after graduating from high school. Because Douglass believes that education is continuous he becomes involved in a number of causes because each one of these causes contributes to his knowledge. In 1848 he becomes involved with the Women's Rights Movement, an association which will endure till his death in 1895. What makes Frederick Douglass so unique is his incessant thirst to know further and towards the closing years of his life he is a stronger man intellectually than ever before.

Douglass's portrayal of his life and times in all his three autobiographies has had a profound effect on all who have read his books. James McCune Smith has correctly said that Frederick Douglass is more than an American hero. He is a Black American hero whose achievements stand as convincing witness not only to his racial heritage but also to his affiliation to all that is good about America.¹² Frederick Douglass has been correctly called the Father of the Civil Rights Movement in America and the rhetoric of the *Narrative* works in tandem with the Black experience of the 1960's. Douglass has been able

to provide a Black perspective through his writings because his thoughts have come from within him and they are embellished in his own words. No matter how much he embraces universal humanistic ideals as the motive of his writing, Douglass cannot run away from his colour because for the man who was born a chattel, he will always be a Negro first, a representative of Black America. Therefore in his last autobiography, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, Douglass presents his life as a symbol of Black success, having accomplished a number of firsts in his lifetime. However Douglass is not without his critics who accuse him of having been co-opted by affluence, self-interest, political debts and an undue regard for white acceptance. In spite of these accusations, Douglass continues to be the most illustrious representative of the sable race in America. Moreover, Douglass's appeal is not limited to his own race or to Americans alone. He has the ability to touch the conscience of mankind as a whole and that power can be felt even today, more than a hundred years after his death. The sable race's sacrifice and struggle through the centuries finally yielded fruit when on January 2009, Barack Obama became the first Black President in the history of the United States of America.

Douglass has been able to sustain his role as a model for later Black leaders and in his writings he has projected himself not only as a

leader of his people but also as a kind of messiah. Because he is truly a hero, a man who upholds his principles no matter what, later Black writers from Booker T. Washington to W.E.B. Du Bois have all sought to “appropriate their own autobiographical self-portraits the African American culture hero first created and projected by Frederick Douglass.”¹³

End Notes

- ¹ William L. Andrews, *The Oxford Frederick Douglass Reader*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.12.
- ² After discovering that the institution is insolvent, Douglass tries to reorganize it with the help of John Sherman, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, but on June 28 the trustees vote to close the bank. The bank's failure causes thousands of freed people to lose their savings.
- ³ Andrews and Foster, "The Literature of Slavery and Freedom, 1746-1865," *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. Gates and McKay, (New York: Norton, 2004), p. 155.
- ⁴ Quoted in Andrews and Foster, "Introduction: Talking Books," *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. Gates and McKay, (New York: Norton, 2004), p.xl.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p.xl.
- ⁶ Andrews and Foster, "Frederick Douglass, 1818-1895," *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. Gates and McKay, (New York: Norton, 2004), p. 387.
- ⁷ Benjamin Quarles, "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass," *Landmarks of American Writing*, ed. Hennig Cohen, (N.p: United States Information Service, 1970), p. 101.
- ⁸ William L. Andrews, "Towards a Poetics of Afro-American Autobiography," *Afro-American Literary Study in the 1990's*, ed. Houston A. Baker and Patricia Redmond, (USA: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 81.
- ⁹ Benjamin Quarles, "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass," *Landmarks of American Writing*, ed. Hennig Cohen, (N.p: United States Information Service, 1970), p.108.
- ¹⁰ William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass*, (New York: Norton, 1991),p. 371.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- ¹² William L. Andrews, ed. *The Oxford Frederick Douglass Reader*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 3.
- ¹³ Andrews and Foster, "Frederick Douglass 1818-1895," *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. Gates and McKay, (New York: Norton, 2004), p.387.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Douglass, Frederick. "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself". *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie Y. Mc. Kay. New York: Norton.2004.

---. *My Bondage and My Freedom*. New York: Miller, Orton and Mulligan, 1855. docsouth.unc.edu/fpn. Web. 10 March, 2010.

---. *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass His Early Life as a Slave, His Escape from Bondage, and His Complete History to The Present Time*. Hartford: Park Publishing Co, 1881. docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglasslife/douglass.html. Web, 1 April, 2010.

Secondary Sources

Abdul-Jabbar, Kareem, and Alan Steinberg. *Black Profiles in Courage: A Legacy of African American Achievement*. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1996.

Altman, Susan. *Encyclopedia of African-American Heritage*. 2nd ed. New York: Facts on File Inc, 1997.

Andrews, William L. "The First Century Of Afro-American Autobiography: Theory And Explication (1984)". in *African American Literary Criticism, 1773 to 2000*. Ed. Hazel Arnett Ervin. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999.

---. *The Oxford Frederick Douglass Reader*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

- Andrews, William L. "Towards a Poetics of Afro-American Autobiography". *Afro-American Literary Study in the 1990's*. eds. Houston A. Baker Jr. and Patricia Redmond. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Andrews, William L. and Frances Smith Foster," Introduction". *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Norton, 2004.
- Barksdale, Richard, and Kenneth Kinnamon. *Black Writer of America: A Comprehensive Anthology*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1972.
- Brown, William Wells, "Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave", *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Gen eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Norton, 2004.
- Bruce Jr, Dickson D. *Politics and political philosophy in the slave narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Web. 26 Nov, 2007.
- Chander, Harish. "Frederick Douglass (1818-1895)". *African American Autobiographers: A Sourcebook*. ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002.
- Cox, James M. "Autobiography and America", *Aspects of Narrative*. ed. J. Hillis Miller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1971.
- Douglass, Frederick. "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?: An Address Delivered in Rochester, New York, on 5th July 1852". *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Gen Eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. Mc Kay. New York: Norton, 2004.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. "The Souls of Black Folk". *A Twentieth Century American Reader*. Eds. Jack Lane and Maurice O' Sullivan. Vol I. Washington D.C: United States Information Agency, 1999.
- Elkins, Stanley. "Slavery and Personality". *America's Black Past*. ed. Eric Foner. New York: Harper and Row, 1970.

- Elliot, Emory. gen. ed. *Columbia Literary History of the United States*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.
- Equiano, Olaudah. "The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa the African, Written by Himself". *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Gen eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Norton, 2004.
- Estell, Kenneth. *African America: Portrait of a People*. Detroit: Visible Ink, 1994.
- Finkelman, Paul. "Slavery and Race". *Encyclopedia of American Cultural and Intellectual History*. eds. Mary Kupiec Cayton and Peter W. Williams. Vol. I. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2001.
- Foner, Eric. Ed. *America's Black Past*. New York: Harper and Row, 1970.
- Gates Jr, Henry Louis, and Nellie Mc Kay, gen eds. Introduction. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. New York: Norton, 2004.
- Horton, James Oliver, and Lois E. Horton. *Hard Road to Freedom: The story of African America*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001.
- Jackson, Blyden. *A History of Afro-American Literature: The Long Beginning, 1746-1895*. Vol.1. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989.
- Jacobs, Harriet. "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl", *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Gen eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Norton, 2004.
- Jordan, Winthrop. "White Over Black". *America's Black Past*. ed. Eric Foner. New York: Harper and Row, 1970.
- Litwack, Leon F. "From North of Slavery". *America's Black Past*. ed. Eric Foner. New York: Harper and Row, 1970.
- . "The Emancipation of the Negro Abolitionist". *America's Black Past*. ed. Eric Foner. New York: Harper and Row, 1970.

- McDonald, Sheila J. "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave". *Masterpieces of African-American Literature*. ed. Frank N. Magill. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.
- McFeely, William S. *Frederick Douglass*. New York: Norton, 1991.
- Meyer, Michael, ed. Introduction. *Frederick Douglass: The Narrative and Selected Writings*. New York: Random House, 1984.
- Palmer, Colin A, ed. *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History; The Black Experience in the Americas*. 2nd ed. Vol. 5. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA.2005.
- Piersen, William D. *Black Legacy: America's Hidden Heritage*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1993.
- Ploski, Harry A., and James Williams, eds. *The Negro Almanac: A Reference Work on the African American*. 5th ed. Detroit: Gale Research Inc, 1989.
- Quarles, Benjamin. "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass". in *Landmarks of American writing*. ed. Hennig Cohen. N.p.: United States Information Service, 1970.
- Samuels, Shirley, ed. *A Companion to American Fiction 1780 – 1865*. USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
- Sarojini. "Autobiography: A Literary Genre" in *Women's Writing*. ed. Jasbir Jain. Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2004.
- Schneider, Dorothy, and Carl J. Schneider. *Slavery in America: From Colonial Times to the Civil War*. New York: Facts on File Inc, 2000. An Eyewitness History. Scholes, Robert, and Robert Kellogg. *The Nature of Narrative*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.
- Stauffer, John. *Frederick Douglass's Self-Fashioning and the Making of a Representative American Man*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Web. 26 Nov, 2007.

Truth, Sojourner. "Introduction", *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Gen eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Norton, 2004.

Twain, Mark. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. 3rd ed. New York: Norton, 1999.

Valade III, Roger M., ed. *The Schomburg Center: Guide to Black Literature, From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*. New York: Gale Research Inc, 1996.

Walker, David. "David Walker's Appeal in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to The Coloured Citizens of the World". *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Gen eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Norton, 2004.

Whitfield, James M. "America". *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. Mc Kay. New York: Norton, 2004.

BIO-DATA

Name: **Amanda Khyriem**

Community: Khasi

Nationality: Indian

Academic Qualification: M.A. (English), 1999

Present Status: Assistant Professor, Union Christian College,
Umiam, Ri Bhoi District.

PARTICULARS OF THE CANDIDATE

Name of Candidate : Amanda Khyriem
Degree : Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.)
Department : English
Title of Dissertation : From a Slave to a Man: A Critical Study of Frederick Douglass and His Autobiographies
Date of payment of Admission : 6th July, 2009
Commencement of 2nd Sem./ Dissertation : 20th April, 2010
Approval of Research Proposal
1. BPGS : 8th April, 2010
2. School Board : 20th April, 2010
Registration No. & Date : 338 of 25.6.2010
Date of Submission : 29th Oct, 2010
Extension (if any) :

NEHU LIBRARY
Acc. No. 104077
Acc. # 104077
Date 15/7/2011
Class by _____
Sup - Heading by _____
Entered by _____


Head of Department

