Slavery in Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs

Jurić, Talia

Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet Osijek

Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i pedagogije

Talia Jurić

Prikazi ropstva u autobiografijama Fredericka Douglassa i Harriet Jacobs

Završni rad

Mentorica: doc. dr. sc. Ljubica Matek

Osijek, 2019.

Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet Osijek

Odsjek za engleski jezik i književnost

Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i pedagogije

Talia Jurić

Prikazi ropstva u autobiografijama Fredericka Douglassa i Harriet Jacobs

Završni rad

Znanstveno područje: humanističke znanosti

Znanstveno polje: filologija

Znanstvena grana: anglistika

Mentorica: doc. dr. sc. Ljubica Matek

Osijek, 2019.

J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Study Programme: Double Major BA Study Programme in English Language and Literature and Pedagogy

Talia Jurić

Slavery in Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs

Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: Ljubica Matek, Ph.D., Assistant Professor

Osijek, 2019

J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department of English

Study Programme: Double Major BA Study Programme in English Language and Literature and Pedagogy

Talia Jurić

Slavery in Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs

Bachelor's Thesis

Scientific area: humanities

Scientific field: philology

Scientific branch: English studies

Supervisor: Ljubica Matek, Ph.D., Assistant Professor

Osijek, 2019

IZJAVA

Izjavljujem s punom materijalnom i moralnom odgovornošću da sam ovaj rad samostalno napravio te da u njemu nema kopiranih ili prepisanih dijelova teksta tuđih radova, a da nisu označeni kao citati s napisanim izvorom odakle su preneseni. Svojim vlastoručnim potpisom potvrđujem da sam suglasan da Filozofski fakultet Osijek trajno pohrani i javno objavi ovaj moj rad u internetskoj bazi završnih i diplomskih radova knjižnice Filozofskog fakulteta Osijek, knjižnice Sveučilišta Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku i Nacionalne i sveučilišne knjižnice u Zagrebu.

U Osijeku, 27.8.2019.

Talia Jurić, 0122224372

ime i prezime studenta, JMBAG

Abstract

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave is an autobiography published in 1845. Frederick Douglass tells a story about his life, describing his childhood, his life as a slave and his struggles to become a free man. Similarly, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, an autobiography of Harriet Jacobs published in 1861, shows the struggles she faces throughout the process of attaining freedom. These two narratives are deeply fraught with depictions of slavery and horrific experiences of African American slaves. The autobiographies thoroughly describe the hideous conditions the slaves were forced to live in and the consequences such conditions had on their lives. Both Douglass and Jacobs later contributed to the anti-slavery movement with their stories and writings. These narratives, written from a point of view of a man and a woman respectively, show the difficulties of slavery for both genders, with some differences, but also with many similarities. The aim of this paper is to show the struggles the slaves face in trying to attain freedom and tries to prove that slavery was equally bad for both men and women.

Keywords: Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, slavery, freedom, autobiography

Contents

Introduction

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs are two autobiographies which immaculately describe the brutality of slavery and slaveholders and as such serve as both a record of and an appeal against such abuse. This paper is organized in five chapters and each chapter describes a certain theme and the way it is connected to Douglass' and Jacobs' experience of slavery.

In the first chapter both Douglass' and Jacobs' childhood is briefly explained. Since they were born as slaves, the paper shows their way of thinking in the early years of their lives. Also, it shows their relationships with the family members, which is slightly stronger in Jacobs' case, especially because of her grandmother, whom she admired deeply. Douglass, however, because of the early separation from his mother, has no significant contact neither with his grandmother nor his brother or sisters.

The second chapter deals with the education of slaves and specifies strategies Frederick Douglass used to educate himself. Also, it shows both Douglass' and Jacobs' views on education and their awareness that education is the only way to freedom.

The paper goes further with the explanation of religion and the way slaves and slaveholders perceive religion. It shows that both Douglass and Jacobs questioned the existence of God, but at the same time believed that God would help them and that the horrors of slavery would reach their end one day. Furthermore, it describes Douglass' views and references on religion in his later life.

The next chapter shows the harsh conditions of slaves' lives on plantations, what they ate and wore and how they survived. Moreover, this chapter additionally considers the Fugitive Slave Law and its impact on their lives.

The paper ends with the explanation of Douglass' and Jacobs' plans to escape and start their lives as a free man and woman. Also, it explains their contributions to the anti-slavery movement.

1. Childhood and family relationships

Frederick Douglass was born in Tuckahoe in 1817 or 1818. Douglass claims he is not sure of his age, but guesses "from hearing [his] master say, some time during 1835, [he] was about seventeen years old" (Douglass 19). Not much is known about Frederick Douglass' family and his relationship with them. He informs us briefly about his mother, Harriet Bailey, a woman of "a darker complexion than either [his] grandmother or grandfather" (Douglass 19). He states he was separated from her at a very young age:

> Frequently, before the child has reached its twelfth month, its mother is taken from it, and hired out on some farm a considerable distance off, and the child is placed under the care of an old woman, too old for field labour. For what this separation is done, I do not know, unless it be to hinder development of the child's affection toward its mother, and to blunt and destroy the natural affection of the mother for the child. This is the inevitable result. (Douglass 20)

Douglass addresses he only saw his mother a couple of times, mostly during the night when "she made her journeys to see [him] in the night, travelling the whole distance on foot, after the performance of her day's work" (Douglass 20). This is the reason Douglass struggled "to 'know' his mother or find out more about his family's history" (Hansen 16) and precisely "an absence of Douglass's family history further reveals his lack of a legal personal identity and the powerlessness he has over his own life" (Hansen 15). When he was seven years old, his mother died, but Douglass states he "received the tidings of her death with much the same emotions [he] should have probably felt at the death of a stranger" (Douglass 21). This shows how slavery dehumanizes people as it prevents them from keeping and nurturing even the closest ties such as those between a child and its parents.

When it comes to his father, Douglass assumes, by all he heard, that his father was his master but since "the children of slave women shall in all cases follow the condition of their mothers" (Douglass 21), his master being his father would not affect his life at all. In addition to this, these children often "suffer greater hardships, and have more to contend with, than others" (Douglass 21). Douglass mentions his grandmother who took care of him and other children when he was younger, but states he does not see her often and the relationship with his two

sisters and one brother is basically non-existent because of the early separation from their mother and from each other.

He had two masters, Captain Anthony and Hugh Auld. Captain Anthony owned around thirty slaves and both his slaves and farms were run by Mr Plummer, who is "a miserable drunkard, a profane swearer, and a savage monster" (Douglass 22). His other master was Hugh Auld with whom he spent most of his life as a slave. Naturally, when he had to leave his old master, he did not object to the idea:

> I looked for home elsewhere, and was confident of finding none which I should relish less than the one which I was leaving. If, however, I found in my new home hardship, hunger, whipping, and nakedness, I had the consolation that I should not have escaped any of them by staying. Having already had more than a taste of them in the house of my old master, and having endured them there, I very naturally inferred my ability to endure them elsewhere, … (Douglass 44)

This family, Mrs Auld specifically, awakens his interest in reading, writing, and education in general and, though forbidden to instruct him, she contributes to further his self-education, which Douglass uses in order to prepare his plan and his biggest wish**:** to escape slavery and become a free man.

Although Harriet Jacobs was also born a slave, unlike Douglass, she spent the early years of her childhood in a blissful atmosphere with her family. She writes *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* under the pseudonym of Linda Brent and explains her reasons for it in the preface:

> I have not exaggerated the wrongs inflicted by Slavery; on the contrary, my descriptions fall far short of the facts. I have concealed the names of places, and given persons fictitious names. I had no motive for secrecy on my own account, but I deemed it kind and considerate towards others to pursue this course. (Jacobs 2)

When she was six years old, her mother passed away and "for the first time, [she] learned, by the talk around [her], that [she] was a slave" (Jacobs 10). Unlike Douglass, Jacobs has, even though she was a slave, joyous memories of her parents. However, she starts

experiencing the atrocity of slavery when her mother's mistress dies and Jacobs, despite the promise that "her children should never suffer for any thing" (Jacobs 10), becomes the property of Dr Flint's young daughter. Jacobs soon loses her father and experiences the fear of "the breaking up of families and keeping the living apart from each other" (Blidariu 32):

> He had died so suddenly I had not even heard he was sick. I went home with my grandmother. My heart rebelled against God, who had taken from me mother, father, mistress, and friend. The good grandmother tried to comfort me. "Who knows the ways of God?" said she. "Perhaps they have been kindly taken from evil days to come." (Jacobs 12)

The loss of family also meant a loss of protection from the circumstances and the awareness of the cruelty of slave life. When Mr Flint becomes interested in Jacobs, she soon realizes what her master wants from her:

> But I now entered on my fifteenth year – a sad epoch in the life of a slave girl. My master began to whisper foul words in my ear. Young as I was, I could not remain ignorant of their import. I tried to treat them with indifference or contempt. The master's age, my extreme youth, and the fear that his conduct would be reported to my grandmother, made him bear this treatment for many months. (Jacobs 26)

Her grandmother knows what is happening and does all she can to buy and save her, but Mr Flint is well aware that she is his daughter's property and thus cannot be bought until she turns eighteen and gives her permission. Rather, he continues with his attempts despite the jealousy of his wife. In order for the reader to better understand the complexity of familial relationships in the South at the time, Jacobs gives a profound explanation:

> Southern women often marry a man knowing that he is the father of many little slaves. They do not trouble themselves about it. They regard such children as property, as marketable as the pigs on the plantation; and it is seldom that they do not make them aware of this by passing them into the slave trader's hands as soon as possible, and thus getting them out of their sight. I am glad to say there are some honorable exceptions. (Jacobs 33)

Jacobs soon realizes her only way to escape Mr Flint's lustful eyes is to "choose a lover, Mr. Sand, as means of avoiding physical exploitation by her master and [find] in motherhood a means to regain her lost self-respect" (Nardi 8). Mr Sand was a white man and Jacobs "was not proud of her decision and "even felt shame because acting in this way was a direct betrayal of the principles taught by her rigidly moral grandmother" (Blidariu 33). Thus, it was clear that a woman slave could only hope for the chance to choose the lesser evil, as Jacobs did, since generally women slaves could not make any kinds of decisions about their life. Paradoxically, by accepting another white man (of her choice) as a lover, Jacobs exhibits unusual agency.

2. Eagerness to learn

With the help of his mistress, who unconsciously and selflessly helps him, Douglass learns how to read and write and "for Douglass, attaining literacy is an important stage in the process of his dramatic transformation" (Hansen 14). However, when his master warns his wife about the dangers of giving education to a slave, he is left to self-educate himself. Douglass addresses his master's words on this subject:

> If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master – to do as he is told to do. Learning will spoil the best nigger in the world. Now," he said, "if you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master. As to himself, it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him disconnected and unhappy. (Douglass 48)

Despite Mrs Auld's refusal to continue to teach him after her husband's warning, Douglass still manages, with the help of various strategies, to learn how to read and write. Later, he "continues to actively pursue his passion and acquisition of literacy" (Hansen 18) which helps him carry out his plan to run away. He had a plan "of making friends of all the little white boys whom [he] met in the street" (Douglass 52) and acted as if they were his teachers. He would give poor little boys bread and expected them to give him "that more valuable bread of knowledge" (Douglass 53). When it comes to writing, Douglass learns it by spending time in a shipyard and seeing ship carpenters write on the timber. Also, he uses little Master Thomas' copy-book and fills in spaces that were left empty, "until [he] could write a hand very similar to that of Master Thomas" (Douglass 57). Douglass soon realizes that "learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing" (Douglass 54):

> Freedom now appeared, to disappear no more forever. It was heard in every sound, and seen in every thing. It was ever present to torment me with a sense of my wretched condition. I saw nothing without seeing it, I heard nothing without hearing it, and felt nothing without feeling it. It looked from every star, it smiled in every calm, breathed in every wind, and moved in every storm. (Douglass 55)

His whole life is a journey which he starts to "overcome the oppression of slavery, attain literacy, and to write and master language" (Hansen 21). This is why he recognizes knowledge is the only way he can become free and "education in the eyes of Frederick Douglass offers undeniable ways and means to hold the right end of the stick when anyone shows commitment in facing and fulfilling a challenge" (Ahouangansi 2).

Just like Douglass, Jacobs only had informal education, and like "many enslaved African Americans yearned to gain knowledge" (Baumgartner 53). Jacobs' father's "strongest wish was to purchase his children" (Jacobs 8) and save them. Thus, he instilled in his children the fact that an African American is a person like every other. Hence, "the white slaveholder's teachings collided with the teachings of her father" (Baumgartner 53) and that is why she, like Douglass, "learned to challenge the conception of African American slaves as merely 'property,' and thus inferior" (Baumgartner 54). Jacobs is aware that many slaves do not see that "freedom could make them useful men, and enable them to protect their wives and children" (Jacobs 39). Thus, they cannot see that education could teach them that "liberty is more valuable than life" (Jacobs 39) and that only by gaining knowledge they would be able "to understand their own capabilities, and exert themselves to become men and women" (Jacobs 39) since life without freedom is no life at all. Jacobs, just like Douglass, often expresses her anger about the slavery system and the ignorance they are forced to live in:

> I admit that the black man *is* inferior. But what is it that makes him so? It is the ignorance in which white men compel him to live; it is the fierce bloodhounds of the South, and the scarcely less cruel human bloodhounds of the north, who enforce the Fugitive Slave Law. *They* do the work. (Jacobs 40)

Both Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs in their narratives show how "education permits human beings to divulgate sentiments" (Ahouangansi 6) and how it "can positively change human beings by awakening his consciousness and motivate toward adequate actions to be taken" (Ahouangansi 6).

3. Religion

Religion undoubtedly plays a role in the slaveholders' and slaves' lives. According to Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Southern conservatives have long argued that the Old South should be seen as a religious society whose values have been based on Christianity (1). Both Douglass and Jacobs express their doubts about God and religion, but at the same time show their strong belief and rely on God for a better future.

Douglass' views on religion are strong and strict and he, like many other slaves, knows that the religion of the slaveholders is false and just an attempt to delude God and everyone else:

> I assert most unhesitatingly, that the religion of the south is a mere covering for the most horrid crimes,– a justifier of the most appalling barbarity,–a sanctifier of the most hateful frauds,–and a dark shelter under which the darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal deeds of slaveholders find the strongest protection. (Douglass 86)

Douglass gives an example of Mr Covey, who prayed in the morning and at night and "such was his disposition, and success at deceiving, [he] [does] verily believe that he sometimes deceived himself into the solemn belief, that he was a sincere worshipper of the most high God" (Douglass 73). Douglass often questions God: "O God, save me! God, deliver me! Let me be free! Is there any God? Why am I a slave?" (Douglass 75) and wonders why God let slavery happen. Still, he is determined to be free one day and never loses hope assuring himself "there is a better day coming" (Douglass 76) and hoping that the "misery in slavery will only increase [his] happiness when [he] [gets] free" (Douglass 76).

Later in life, Douglass "integrated natural rights philosophy into a Judeo-Christian foundation, and even when he abandoned formal ties to the church, the moral language remained" (Stephens 179). The concept of moral is important for Douglass and he assumes "moral forces … could be separate from politics or religion" (Stephens 179). In order to fight against slavery, Douglass "tried to incorporate religious aspects into his speeches in order to show people that slavery was a moral sin" (Caesar 24). Throughout his life, Douglass "shows his knowledge of the Bible, uses scriptural idiom, and gives suitable professions of his own belief

and his incredulity at the perversions of ostensible Christian" (Matlack 18). However, Douglass presents himself as a Christian merely "to expose the sham piety of slave masters" (Matlack 18).

Similarly, Jacobs sees the wrongful acts of the slaveholders who are hypocritical and pretend to be religious only for the sake of their status, although they do not live in accordance with Christian mercifulness and love. Again, Jacobs questions God and why he allows such injustice towards African Americans: "What a libel upon the heavenly Father, who 'made of one blood all nations of men!'" (Jacobs 40). The slaveholders "satisfy their consciences with the doctrine that God created the Africans to be slaves" (Jacobs 40) but Jacobs sees iniquity in every sphere of the slaves' lives:

> If a man goes to the communion table, and pays money into the treasury of the church, no matter if it be the price of blood, he is called religious. If a pastor has offspring by a woman not his wife, the church dismiss him, if she is a white woman; but if she is colored, it does not hinder his continuing to be their good shepherd. (Jacobs 64)

The two autobiographies show that slaveholders have a hypocritical attitude to religion and use it merely for their own benefit.

4. Surviving the harsh treatment and conditions

Both Douglass and Jacobs experience harsh treatment from their masters, in one way or another. They go through different, yet similar situations on their ways to freedom. Douglass had first encounters with the brutality of slaveholders at a very young age when his aunt Hester was severely whipped for not being present when her master wanted to see her. That is when Douglass realized this was "the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which [he] was about to pass" (Douglass 23). After that day the ruthlessness towards slaves becomes even heavier. As each day passes by, he becomes sadder and when the slaves are sad, they sing. Douglass profoundly describes the singing of slaves since they sang on their way to the Great House Farm "revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness" (Douglass 29). Those songs were "safe because whites mistook their often sprightly manner as evidence of happiness among the blacks" (Matlack 19). However, Douglass sees no happiness in those songs and observes that "slaves sing most when they are most unhappy" (Douglass 30) and that "the songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears" (Douglass 30).

The turning point in Douglass' life as a slave is the fight with Mr Covey who was cruel and whipped him, "cutting [his] back, causing the blood to run, and raising ridges on [his] flesh as large as [his] little finger" (Douglass 70):

> 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. It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again with a determination to be free. The gratification afforded by the triumph was a full compensation for whatever else might follow, even death itself. (Douglass 82)

After this, Douglass knew that "however long [he] might remain a slave in form, the day had passed forever when [he] could be a slave in fact" (Douglass 82) and "became individually visible to himself as a human with dignity" (Sokoloff 11).

Jacobs, as a female slave, "was almost a victim of sexual abuse" (Blidariu 33) but managed to save herself by getting involved with Mr Sands, a white man who was a friend and whom she believed would buy her eventually. She hoped that once she gives birth to their

children, she "could ask to have [her] children well supported" (Jacobs 49). She recognizes this as the only solution to save herself and especially her children. Jacobs states that "the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others" (Jacobs 49):

> Pity me, and pardon me, O virtuous reader! You never knew what it is to be a slave; to be entirely unprotected by law or custom; to have the laws reduce you to the condition of chattel, entirely subject to the will of another. You never exhausted your ingenuity in avoiding the snares, and eluding the power of a hated tyrant; you never shuddered at the sound of his footsteps, and trembled within hearing of his voice. (Jacobs 49)

Giving birth, however, does not soften Mr Flint's heart. He still wants her around him, which only adds to the jealousy of Mrs Flint. Mrs Flint, like other mistresses, "would rather torture their female slaves and vent their anger on them than confront their husbands for their sexual promiscuity" (Khan and Shahila 2). Mrs Flint sees Jacobs as "the one responsible for arousing her husband's lust" (Khan and Shahila 2) and "cannot blame her husband directly and stop him from pursuing a teenager, fearing that her pride and dignity are at stake" (Khan and Shahila 2). Jacobs is thus traumatized and feels constant fear:

> At last, I began to be fearful for my life. It had been often threatened; and you can imagine, better than I can describe, what an unpleasant sensation it must produce to wake up in the dead of night and find a jealous woman bending over you. Terrible as this experience was, I had fears that it would give place to one more terrible. (Jacobs 31)

In addition to these burdens, Jacobs, in order to run away from the atrocious Mr Flint, spends seven years in a small garret at her grandmother's house. Her uncle Philip "made a concealed trap-door, which communicated with the storeroom" (Jacobs 96). This place was full of mice and rats but she was contented because she could hear her children. However, it was hard for her to stay in the same position all day and with no light. To make things worse, she was "tormented by hundreds of little red insects, fine as a needle's point, that pierced through [her] skin, and produced and intolerable burning" (Jacobs 97). With the help of her grandmother and medicine, she recovered from that as well. Even though she could hear her children and

occasionally got visited by her grandmother and other relatives, Jacobs addresses how hard it was for her to stay there for so long:

> I hardly expect that the reader will credit me, when I affirm that I lived in that little dismal hole, almost deprived of light and air, and with no space to move my limbs, for nearly seven years. But it is a fact; and to me a sad one, even now; for my body still suffers from the effects of that long imprisonment, to say nothing of my soul. (Jacobs 122)

Though Mr Flint and his family spend many years searching for Jacobs, it never crosses their minds she is at her grandmother's house: "Had the least suspicion rested on my grandmother's house, it would have been burned to the ground" (Jacobs 98). However, Jacobs was not afraid and she knew "there was no place, where slavery existed, that could have afforded [her] so good a place of concealment" (Jacobs 98).

In addition to these experiences, Douglass and Jacobs mention the limitations the slaves had when it comes to food and clothing. Every month they would get food and every year they would get new clothing. The food they received monthly consisted of "eight pounds of pork, or its equivalent in fish, and one bushel of corn meal" (Douglass 26). Douglass states that the clothing they received was probably less than seven dollars and it included "two coarse linen shirts, one pair of linen trousers, like the shirts, one jacket, one pair of trousers for winter, made of coarse negro cloth, one pair of stockings, and one pair of shoes" (Douglass 26). However, this was not enough considering that Douglass still suffered from cold and hunger:

> I suffered much from hunger, but much more from cold. In hottest summer and coldest winter, I was kept almost naked – no shoes, no stockings, no jacket, no trousers, nothing on but a coarse tow linen shirt, reaching only to my knees. I had no bed. I must have perished with cold, but that, the coldest nights, I used to steal a bag which was used for carrying corn to the mill. I would crawl into this bag, and there sleep on the cold, damp, clay floor, with my head in and feet out. (Douglass 42)

The New Year's Day is a "hiring day at the south" (Jacobs 16), which means that on 2 January the slaves are offered to other masters who can hire them if they choose to do so. During

that process, it is easy to see "who clothes and feeds his slaves well; for he is surrounded by a crowd, begging, 'Please, massa, hire me this year. I will work *very* hard, massa.'" (Jacobs 16). Needless to say, the slaves witnessed "the harsh, brutal, demeaning conditions" (Tanritanir and Yildiz 164) during that time. The slaves had some time for themselves between Christmas and New Year's day when they were "not required to perform any labor, more than to feed and take care of the stock" (Douglass 83). However, Douglass acknowledges "these holidays serve as conductors, or safety-valves, to carry off the rebellious spirit of enslaved humanity" (Douglass 84):

> The holidays are part and parcel of the gross fraud, wrong, and inhumanity of slavery. They are professedly a custom established by the benevolence of the slaveholders; but I undertake to say, it is the result of selfishness, and one of the grossest frauds committed upon the down-trodden slave. They do not give the slaves this time because they would not like to have their work during its continuance, but because they know it would be unsafe to deprive them of it. (Douglass 84)

Thus, effectively, the masters did not give any concessions to slaves, but rather all their decisions were made for their own benefit.

4.1. The Fugitive Slave Law

Jacobs dedicates one chapter in her autobiography to the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 which was "devoted to the tasks of capturing fugitive slaves and returning them to their owners" (Basinger 308). This worsened the situation of fugitive slaves or free black people not only in the South, but also in the North. People who wanted to earn money could kidnap any black person and sell them to slave-owners or slave traders in the South. When the Fugitive Slave Law was passed**,** Harriet Jacobs was still a runaway slave hiding in the Free States and thus the rancour built up inside her:

> What a disgrace to a city calling itself free, that inhabitants, guiltless of offence, and seeking to perform their duties conscientiously, should be condemned to live in such incessant fear, and have nowhere to turn for protection! This state of

> things, of course, gave rise to many impromptu vigilance committees. Every colored person, and every friend of their persecuted race, kept their eyes wide open. (Jacobs 156)

Douglass, however, at the time, was trying to fight against this law and said the following in one of his speeches:

> It is nevertheless a degradation and a scandalous outrage on religious liberty; and if the American people were not sunk into degradation too deep for one possessing so little eloquence as I do to describe, they would feel it, too. This vile, infernal law does not interfere with singing of psalms, or anything of that kind, but with the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. It makes it criminal for you, sir, to carry out the principles of Christianity. It forbids you the right to do right—forbids you to show mercy—forbids you to follow the example of the good Samaritan. (Frederick Douglass, speech, 1852)

This instance of legislature confirms the exploitative nature of slavery and shows that money was valued more than an individual's freedom.

5. Finally free

After seeing and experiencing his worst days as a slave, Douglass decides to make a plan with several other slaves. They were all ready to run away but their "knowledge of the north did not extend farther than New York" (Douglass 92) and that seemed to be a problem at first. Still, they decided to get a large canoe from Mr Hamilton and leave before Easter holidays. However, their plan fails and they are all put in jail soon afterwards. After Douglass was out of jail, his master sends him to Baltimore which only makes it easier for Douglass to further plan his escape. Douglass had a friend, who was a free sailor so he used his papers to deceive the conductor on a train to New York and so his life as a free man finally began:

> My free life began on the third of September, 1838. On the morning of the fourth of that month, after an anxious and most perilous but safe journey, I found myself in the big city of New York, a free man -- one more added to the mighty throng which, like the confused waves of the troubled sea, surged to and fro between the lofty walls of Broadway. (Douglass 127)

Douglass, however, realized "that New York was not quite so free or so safe a refuge as had supposed, and a sense of loneliness and insecurity again oppressed [him] most sadly" (Douglass 128) and soon his biggest struggle, the one against slavery as a social system, began.

Jacobs had somewhat different struggles because of the horrendous seven years spent in her grandmother's garret. However, she knew she was doing it all for her children: "I was dreaming of freedom again; more for my children's sake than my own. I planned and I planned. Obstacles hit against plans. There seemed no way of overcoming them; and yet I hoped" (Jacobs 70). She waits for the opportunity for so long, and it all turns out to be worthwhile when her friend Peter comes with the great news: "'I have found a chance for you to go to the Free States. You have a fortnight to decide'" (Jacobs 124). After some resentment and thinking, Jacobs goes with him and her fight for freedom begins. Because of the Fugitive Slave Law, Jacobs is still in danger but, thankfully, she has a friend in Mrs Bruce who decides to buy her freedom:

> I felt grateful for the kindness that prompted this offer, but the idea was not so pleasant to me as might have been expected. The more my mind had become enlightened, the more difficult it was for me to consider myself an article of

> property; and to pay money to those who had so grievously oppressed me seemed like taking from my sufferings the glory of triumph. (Jacobs 162)

Though she had "objected to having [her] freedom bought" (Jacobs 163), she "felt as if a heavy load had been lifted from [her] weary shoulders" (Jacobs 163) when that had been done. She continues working for her friend Mrs Bruce pointing out "it is a privilege to serve her who pities [her] oppressed people, and who has bestowed the inestimable boon of freedom on [her] and [her] children" (Jacobs 164). This instance highlights the difference between a slave and a servant (maid), as the first one has no personal integrity and is forced to endure all sorts of abuse, whereas being a servant is a job, however menial and underpaid it may be.

5.1. Later contributions

It is undisputable that both Douglass and Jacobs had impact on the anti-slavery movement. Douglass "was passionate about his cause and stopped at nothing until he lived to see the day that slavery was abolished" (Caesar 24). He had a strong relationship with Abraham Lincoln that "impacted the future of race relations in the United States" (Caesar 24). During the Civil War, "Douglass challenged the policies of Lincoln in hopes of pushing him towards a definitive and immediate emancipation policy" (Caesar 24). For Douglass, "the root cause of the war was slavery" (Caesar 25) and he was determined to prove this to Lincoln. He believed the emancipation could end the war. Abraham Lincoln eventually issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 but there was still a problem with the ex-slaves: "Douglass and Lincoln met on several occasions to discuss the situation of the ex-slaves and their future in the United States" (Caesar 28). Thereafter, Douglass' efforts paid off when Lincoln finally "was giving the ex-slaves more rights, such as including them in the military" (Caesar 28). The relationship between these two "was a milestone in American history that would positively influence the future of race relations" (Caesar 28).

Jacobs soon "realized that she had to do many efforts to acquire a good literacy which would allow her to write a well-crafted autobiography" (Belaidouni 32). It helped that she was close to Douglass' offices so she could easily get information about his "struggles, his enthusiastic abolitionist companions, and his writings such as his autobiography" (Belaidouni

32). However, it took her about “a decade of trying, struggling, and extreme tiredness” (Belaidouni 34) to publish her autobiography. Still, she was determined to contribute to the anti-slavery movement:

> In revealing personal details about her story of enslavement, degradation and sexual harassment Jacobs risked her reputation, and she did it in the hope to appeal to a northern female readership that might sustain the anti-slavery movement and sympathize with the plight of black mothers in bondage (Nardi 82).

Douglass and Jacobs largely contributed to the anti-slavery movement and raised awareness of the wrongs of slavery.

Conclusion

These two autobiographies show the harshness of slavery and its impact on the slaves' lives. Douglass and Jacobs have similar ways of thinking, especially about education and religion. They show their awareness of the injustice inflicted on them and the immorality of slaveholders and slavery in general. Owing to their plans and inexhaustible efforts to escape the cruelty of their masters, they manage to write these two imposing autobiographies. Also, they contribute to the anti-slavery movement not only with their writings but also with their meetings and speeches at numerous important events. Their lives were evidently not easy and both of them suffered because of the brutality of slavery system. Thus, these two narratives prove that both men and women suffered badly and that both Douglass and Jacobs strongly fought to attain freedom.

Works Cited

Ahouangansi, Raoul S. "Education and Freedom in Frederick Douglass's the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave." *Rilale*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2018, https://www.academia.edu/38182389/EDUCATION_AND_FREEDOM_IN_FREDERICK_DOUGLASS_S_THE_NARRATIVE_OF_THELIFE_OF_FREDERICK_DOUGLASS_AN_AMERICAN_SLAVE.pdf. Accessed 26 July 2019.

Basinger, Scott. "Regulating Slavery: Deck-Stacking and Credible Commitment in the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850." *Journal of Law Economics and Organization*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2003, pp. 307-342, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5214064_Regulating_Slavery_Deck-Stacking_and_Credible_Commitment_in_the_Fugitive_Slave_Act_of_1850. Accessed 13 Aug. 2019.

Baumgartner, Kabria. "*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Education and Abolition." *Ethnic Studies Review*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2009, pp. 52-78, https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/esr/vol32/iss2/7/. Accessed 6 Aug. 2019.

Belaidouni, Tasnim. *Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl; a Literary Weapon Against Slavery*. 2016/2017. Faculty of Letters and Languages, dissertation, http://dspace.univ-tlemcen.dz/bitstream/112/11536/1/tasnim-belaidouni.pdf. Accessed 6 Aug. 2019.

Blidariu, Şerban Dan. "The Other Half of the Truth: Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, A First-Hand Account of Slavery from a Woman's Perspective." *Gender Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2017, pp. 29-39, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323887871_The_Other_Half_of_the_Truth_Incidents_in_the_Life_of_a_Slave_Girl_A_First-Hand_Account_of_Slavery_from_a_Woman's_Perspective. Accessed 5 Aug. 2019.

Caesar, Rebecca. "Frederick Douglass' Relationship with Abraham Lincoln." *Journal of Undergraduate Research*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2007, pp. 24-30, https://sa.rochester.edu/jur/issues/fall2007/fall2007.pdf. Accessed 27 July 2019.

Douglass, Frederick. *My Escape from Slavery*. *The Century Illustrated Magazine*, 1881, pp. 125-131, http://xroads.virginia.edu/~drbr/douglas.html. Accessed 8 Aug. 2019.

---. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. Penguin, 1997.

---. The Fugitive Slave Law, speech to the National Free Soil Convention at Pittsburgh, August 11, 1852, https://rbscp.lib.rochester.edu/4385. Accessed 7 Aug. 2019.

Genovese, Eugene D. and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese. "The Religious Ideals of Southern Slave Society." *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, vol. 70, no. 1, 1986, pp. 1-16. JSTOR, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40581464?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents. Accessed 19 Aug. 2019.

Hansen, John. "Frederick Douglass's Journey from Slave to Freeman: An Acquisition and Mastery of Language, Rhetoric, and Power via the Narrative." *Mohave Community College*, 2012, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286931893_Frederick_Douglass's_Journey_from_Slave_to_Freeman_An_Acquisition_and_Mastery_of_Language_Rhetoric_and_Power_via_the_Narrative. Accessed 8 Aug. 2019.

Jacobs, Harriet Ann. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Dover Publications, 2001.

Khan, Zaved and Shahila Zafar. "The Images of White Womanhood in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*." *Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 1, no. 8, 2010, pp. 1-4, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/50934199_The_Images_of_White_Womanhood_in_Incidents_in_the_Life_of_a_Slave_Girl. Accessed 5 Aug. 2019.

Matlack, James. "The Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass." *Phylon*, vol. 40, no. 1, Clark Atlanta University, 1979, pp. 15-28, JSTOR https://public.wsu.edu/~hughesc/The_Autobiographies_FD_Matlack.pdf. Accessed 27 July 2019.

Nardi, Paola. "Runaway Women Slaves: From Slave Narratives to Contemporary Rewritings." https://www.researchgate.net/publication/291753460_Runaway_Women_Slaves_From_Slave_Narratives_to_Contemporary_Rewritings. Accessed 10 Aug. 2019.

Sokoloff, William. “Frederick Douglass and the Politics of Rage.” New Political Science, vol. 36, no. 3, 2014, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264244770_Frederick_Douglass_and_the_Politics_of_Rage. Accessed 27 July 2019.

Stephens, Gregory. “Frederick Douglass’ multiracial abolitionism: “Antagonistic cooperation” and “redeemable ideals” in the July 5 speech.” *University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez*, 1997, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241716770_Frederick_Douglass'_multiracial_abolitionism_Antagonistic_cooperation_and_redeemable_ideals_in_the_July_5_speech. Accessed 11 Aug. 2019.

Tanritanir, Bülent C. and Yildiz, Fırat. “The Way to Freedom in Harriet Ann Jacobs’s *Incidents In The Life of A Slave Girl*.” *The Journal of International Social Research*, vol. 4, no. 17, 2011, pp. 160-165, http://www.sosyalarastirmalar.com/cilt4/sayi17pdf/1diledebiyat/tanritanirbulent_firatyildiz.pdf. Accessed 12 Aug. 2019.