

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass

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Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass
In learning about the history of America from the colonization to the reconstruction I decided to read The Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass. Frederick was one of the very few literate slaves. He was an incredibly important character in American and African-American history. Though he was blessed with intelligence most slaves were not, he still lived the same kind of life of the typical slave. Frederick Douglass was born in Maryland; he does not know the date of his birth, as did most slaves. He never really had a chance to know his mother, only having seen her four or five times. Frederick taught himself how to read and write despite it being against his slave-owners wishes. He could not let his knowledge be known to anyone except for other slaves. Frederick saw his knowledge of words both as a blessing and a curse. White men were given supreme power over their black slaves and it corrupted their character. Most African Americans of the early to mid-nineteenth century experienced slavery on plantations similar to the experiences described by Frederick Douglass; the majority of slaves lived on units owned by planters who had twenty or more slaves. The planters and the white masters of these agrarian communities sought to ensure their personal safety and the profitability of their enterprises by using all the tactics-physical and psychological-at their command to make slaves obedient. Even Christianity was manipulated in a way that masters communicated to their slaves that God had commanded them to obey their

masters. People like Frederick Douglass who preached abolition of slavery, only had to nurture the already existing spirit within slaves to strive for freedom. Only a tiny fraction of all slaves ever took part in organized acts of violent resistance against white power. Most realized as Frederick Douglass did that the odds against a successful revolt were very high, and bitter experience had shown them that the usual outcome was death to the rebels. Consequently, they devised safer ways to resist white dominance. For Frederick Douglass, it was clear that his way of fighting the power was to become educated so that he may better understand his situation. However, he described that knowing that: "wit...[was] the pathway from slavery to freedom." (Pg. 20) "...Reading... enabled me to utter my thoughts, and..... middle of paperobey his master-to do as he is told to do." (Pg. 57) He was referring to the wrongfulness of his wife's attempt to educate Frederick Douglass. This was the view held by most whites toward African Americans. Consequently, other adjectives such as: lazy, irresponsible, childlike, and simple-minded were used by whites to describe the African American character. This portrayal stole the African American sense of independence and created the false image of black childlike dependence on their white masters. That combined with the fact that most African Americans were born into slavery disallowed them any experience of freedom or of Africa by which they may make comparisons to their situation of total bondage. The slave owners struggle to control the slave brought out an evil in them that cannot be brought out by any things. The slaves' struggle for freedom and the suppression by their masters broke their spirit, which is a large part of human character. America would not have grown to be so great in such a short time without slavery, because of the economic value of it. But, it would not have been such a violent society then or such a violent society now if slavery had never existed.

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