The Slave Narrative: Literature and the Pursuit of Liberty

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Existing as a legal institution since 1659 (Ringer, 1983, 65), slavery permeated the fabric of American society. Accounts both literary and oral left behind by those who experienced first-hand what it meant to live in bondage in the "land of the free and home of the brave" (Ferris, 2012, 122) are collectively known as Slave Narratives. These narratives reveal the profound inhumanity of owning human beings as slaves to the white American public. This dissertation will analyse the central role played by the Slave Narrative in the Abolition Movement in America, illustrated by two cases studies; *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave Written by Himself* (1845) by Frederick Douglass and *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853) by Solomon Northup. It will begin with a brief overview of the origins of slavery in America and a discussion of the context in which the Abolition Movement emerged as a significant political force. In late August 1619, a Dutch ship sold twenty kidnapped Africans to English settlers in Jamestown, Virginia (Rose, 1999, 16). Initially deemed "indentured servitude", this essentially established the beginning of black slavery in the Americas (Fisch, 2007, xiii). Hereafter, a labour force characterised by racial slavery evolved rapidly and became a central aspect of American society (Eltis et al, 2010, 40), (Roediger, 2010, 5). Slavery was thus a significant presence in American society both before and after the Revolutionary War (Ringer,1983, 158). Just over 240 years later in 1863 when slavery was abolished, an estimated 1,775,515 slaves were living in the United States of America (Faculty.weber.edu., 2018). The narratives that were written by those who experienced life as human chattel provide us with a glimpse of what it meant to be a part of this vast number and thus, provide a voice to represent the voiceless.

Written in 1776, the opening statement of the Declaration of Independence affirms the value of "the blessings of liberty". The document declares that: "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" (National Archives, 2015). The inspirational and progressive language of this document was cherished and appraised by the American people, who boasted of their nation being the "land of the free and home of the brave" (Ferris, 2014, 122). Paradoxically, this inspiring document also supported the institution of human slavery which contradicted its core principles. At the time these words were written, more than 500,000 black Americans were slaves; a figure that amounts to one-fifth of the population (Costly 2011). The incompatibility of slavery and the ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence became a key argument of antislavery forces and slave narratives.

When Founding Father of the US George Washington denounced slavery as "repugnant" he personally owned hundreds of slaves. Similarly, Founding Father Thomas Jefferson stated that he considered slavery to be a "hideous blot" on America, when owning more than 100 slaves at the time (Costly, 2011). Despite Jefferson's assertions regarding the immorality of slavery, he considered black people to be inherently inferior to whites "both in body and soul" (Smith Foster, 1979, 8). He disregarded black writing as being of any value, using the poetry of Phillis Wheatley (which had attained international attention as the first African American work of literature) as an example of the inherent inferiority of her race (Gould, 2007, 22), (Gates and McKay, 2004, 129). This is indicative not only of the difficulties faced by black writers but also of the time and change required in American society before the ideals expressed in the foundational documents of this great republic would

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be considered applicable to black people. The Founding Fathers of the US may have denounced slavery, but nonetheless, it remained a legal institution for over 240 years after the Constitution they created ascertained equality and the right to freedom as fundamental principles to which all American citizens were entitled.

Legislation played a key role in supporting slave ownership. By the first decade of the eighteenth century, legislation had been established to dehumanise black slaves; classifying them as "real estate" (Ringer, 1983, 66). The following section will briefly discuss a number of laws designed to support and legitimize the institution of slavery. Virginia was one of the first states to legally acknowledge slavery. In 1661, legislation entitled "Negro Women's children to serve according to the condition of the mother" was introduced as law, stating that any child born in Virginia: "shall be held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother" (Day and Sinclair, 2001). This meant that the offspring of a black woman and a white man would automatically be born into slavery. Many states emulated Virginia and enacted similar laws. This legislation, as we shall see in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, meant that when white slaveholders raped black women, the resulting children (of which Frederick Douglass was one) were automatically slaves.

The education of slaves was considered by slave masters to pose a menacing threat to the system (Meusberger et all, 2015, 33). Thus, legislation was introduced preventing slaves from learning to read or write. In 1740, South Carolina was the first state to enact such a law, known as a "compulsory ignorance law". It stated that: "… all and every person or persons whatsolver, who shall hereafter teach, or shall use or employ any slave as a scribe in any manner of writing/hereafter taught to write/ shall forfeit the sum of one hundred pounds current money" (Williams, 2005, 384). By 1780 numerous southern states followed suit and by the 1840s virtually every slave state had compulsory ignorance laws (Meusburger et al, 2015, 33).

The ignorance of slaves was a key instrument of control for slave masters who feared literate slaves were more likely to question the justification of their status and therefore rebel or escape. Slaves who attempted to pursue literacy were threatened with sale, punishment or worse (Wright, 2009, 21), (Franklin and Schweninger, 1999, 66, 207). Despite this, some slaves did achieve a level of literacy. Frederick Douglass is one example. After his southern mistress was scolded by her husband for teaching him to read, warning her that; "learning would spoil the best nigger in the world", Douglass described reading as "the pathway from slavery to freedom" (Douglass, 1995, 20). It is a legacy of the widespread suppression of reading and writing, that literacy has great significance in African American history and contemporary literature (Morse, 2016).

Like most legislation, slavery laws and regulations were determined by individual states. The first legal steps toward emancipation began in 1777 when Vermont adopted a new constitution outlawing slavery. By 1804, every Northern state had enacted similar measures to abolish it (Foner, 2011, 14). However, the Southern states were among the wealthiest in America and relied heavily on slavery: their strong economy depended on slave labour (Rodriguez, 2007, 110, 250). In the US, the south set itself apart from the rest of the nation and increasingly, the rest of the world as it continued to support slavery (Foner, 2010, 15).
The US Constitution contained several protections for slavery, notably "The Fugitive Slave Act of 1793". Article four, section two read:

"No Person held to Service or Labour in one State, under the Laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any law or Regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labour, but shall be delivered up on Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due" (Johnson, 1921, 161).

This act gave slave masters and their "agents" authority to recapture any runaway slaves in any state and "transport him or her to the state or territory from which he or she shall have

fled" (Johnson, 1921, 161). Following major criticism and backlash from Northern free states, the law was generally neglected. Some Northern states even passed "Personal Liberty Laws" which granted suspected fugitive slaves the right to a jury trial (Rodriquez, 2007, 414). Southern lawmakers were dissatisfied with the lack of the Act's enforcement and after significant pressure, in response to strong lobbying by slaveholders intending to counteract abolitionist forces federal congress enacted a revised, harsher act (Weinstein, 2007, 119). The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 criminalised those who aided runaway slaves (Sinanan, 2007, 75). Penalties were imposed on anyone who could be proven to have purposely failed to report a known runaway and imprisonment and torture awaited anyone convicted of aiding one (Sinanan, 2007, 75). This legislation resulted in many free blacks being unlawfully kidnapped and sold into slavery. One victim of this injustice was Solomon Northup, who spent twelve years in bondage after he was kidnapped and accused of being a "runaway from Georgia" (Northup, 2014, 20).

In his 1825 speech entitled "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" Frederick Douglass condemned The Fugitive Slave Act as "one of the grossest infringements of Christian Liberty" and described how it had nationalised slavery "in its most horrible and revolting form" (Douglass, 2014 135, 136). Paradoxically, however the Act increased abolitionist activity. It was at this time that *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, by Harriet Beecher Stowe, written as a response to the fugitive slave laws, became an effective weapon of abolitionist forces. The laws and their repercussions became a central theme in numerous slave narratives (Fisch, 2007, 120, 129, 181, 239). When introduced to President Abraham Lincoln in 1862, it is believed that he greeted Stowe by saying "So you're the little woman who wrote the book that made this great war" (Vollaro, 2009, 18). Although the validity of this anecdote has been contested by historians, it is worth noting as indicative of the perceived impact antislavery literature on American society.

The campaign for the abolition of slavery emerged prominently in American society in the late eighteenth century. It during this time of "Enlightenment" ideology that social mobilisation for the movement proved strongest (Bader- Zaar, 2011). Historian David Brion Davis has outlined the main societal developments that occurred in this period that have been described as having "facilitated the rise of antislavery movements" (Gould, 2007, 11). These developments included the influence of secular social philosophy (found in thinkers such as John Locke), the rise of sentimentalism in popular culture and literature, and finally, attitudes toward natural rights and authority becoming increasingly more radical (Gould, 2007, 11). The discourse employed by antislavery supporters drew upon moral objections of Enlightenment thinkers, the natural rights philosophy of freedom and equality, and the incompatibility of slavery and Christianity (Bader-Zaar, 2011). The first antislavery associations were founded in 1775 in several American cities such as New York and Philadelphia (Bader-Zaar, 2011). In the 1780s new political organisations dedicated to the abolition of slavery emerged, such as the Pennsylvania Abolition Society.

More radical organisations emerged in the 1830s and 1840s calling for the immediate emancipation of slaves and no reparations to be paid to slave owners (Gould, 2007, 12). These demands for immediate changes conflicted with others within the movement who preferred a more gradual move to emancipation and in some cases, colonisation of black people back to their native continent of Africa. William Lloyd Garrison, one of the leading voices of the abolition movement, considered slavery to be the worst of all history's moral crimes and demanded that it be immediately abolished (Gould, 2007, 18). The differing opinions resulted in a split within the antislavery movement. The more radical became known as "Garrisonian abolitionists" and committed themselves to building a biracial nation (Bruce, 2007, 19), (Foner, 2011, 19). In 1832 Garrison began publishing the prominent antislavery newspaper *The Liberator* which became an important tool for disseminating the abolitionist

message (Wright, 2009, 161). A controversial figure, Garrison was known for his "radical and uncompromising voice" (Wright, 2009, 158). Along with Frederick Douglass, he would bring white and black people together in the fight against slavery, progressing his Abolition Movement into a powerful voice in American politics (Gould, 2007, 18). Garrison co-founded the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833 along with over sixty other delegates of both races and genders (Foner and Garraty, 1999, 2), (Bruce, 2007, 28). The society became the most prominent and main activist division of the American Abolition Movement under the leadership of Garrison, when it grew stronger than ever. They held lectures across the north, sent letters and petitions to Congress, disseminated publications and attracted more than 150,000 members throughout their hundreds of branches in the North (Badar-Zaar, 2011), (Foner and Garraty,1999, 2).

Garrison was intensely opposed to slavery, but as a pacifist he was also opposed to resorting to violence to achieve emancipation. He believed that "moral suasion" was the only way to influence the American public, persistently articulating the immorality of slavery in the eyes of God and the hypocrisy of the US Constitution (Gould, 2007, 18). At an antislavery meeting on June 15th, 1840 Garrison denounced the Constitution as "a covenant with death and an agreement with hell" (Garrison, 1974, 14). He further accentuates this as he implores the audience to consider: "Is America to shake her star spangled banner, and boast of liberty, while she is conscious that the banner floats over the heads of slaves?" (Garrison, 1974, 15). Garrison's unapologetic and determined dialogue was one of the reasons Abolitionists encountered a hostile reception from slavery's defenders.

The Slave Narrative became an integral instrument of the abolitionist campaign in the 1830s (Bader-Zaar, 2011). Garrison described the slave narrative as the only truly American form of literature (Smith, 2007, 190), and considered their primary function to be for "blacks to write themselves into being" (Sinanan, 2007, 68). As the Abolition Movement grew in strength the narratives simultaneously underwent a transformation in form and style (Scott, 2017, 2). Instead of the story of an African freeborn narrator, which had been the case in popular memoirs such as Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789), the antebellum Slave Narrative now became the story of the American citizen who had been born into bondage in his or her own nation. The narratives provide a window into American slavery, from the first-hand experience of the former slave. As autobiographies, the slave narrative gave a voice to a previously voiceless portion of the American population despite the substantial barriers designed to deter them from ever being heard.

Contemporary reception of the stories of former slaves serve as evidence of the impact they had on the American public and their attitudes toward human bondage. A reviewer of former slave Henry Bibb's narrative wrote in 1849:

"This fugitive slave literature is destined to be a powerful lever. We have the most profound conviction of its potency. We see in it the easy and infallible means of abolitionising the free states. Argument provides argument, reason is met by sophistry. But narratives of slaves go right to the heart of men." (Scott, 3, 2017)

Another example, provided by nineteenth-century Unitarian minister Theodore Parker, encapsulates not only the social impact of the narratives, but their significance as a distinct literary genre:

"there is one portion of our permanent literature, if literature it may be called, which is wholly indigenous and original.… I mean the Lives of Fugitive Slaves. But as these are not the work of the men of superior culture they hardly help to pay the scholar's debt. Yet all the original romance of Americans is in them, not in the white man's novel." (Scott, 2017, 5).

The American Anti-Slavery Society played a significant role in the dissemination of slave narratives (Goddu, 2014, 157, 158). Largely consisting of Garrisonian or radical abolitionists, members wrote prefaces and letters verifying authenticity for narratives. Frederick Douglass' *Narrative* for example is introduced by a Preface from William Lloyd Garrison and a letter from Wendell Phillips, in which they relay their personal relationship to the author as a means of authenticating his story (Douglass, 1995, vii, xv). By selling at low prices, printing extracts in newspapers and producing narratives as short pamphlets, abolitionists achieved widespread awareness for narrators and their stories (Goddu, 2014, 157). The appearance of black writers on the literary scene was of great social and literary significance (Gates and McKay, 2004, 126). The phrase "Written by Himself" or "Herself" can be found in the title of many Slave Narratives. This statement alone challenged the widespread belief in both Europe and America, that black people were incapable of literary expression and rational thought (Gates and McKay, 2004, 128).

The institution of slavery caused Slave Masters to become tyrannical, demoralised, and to teach tyranny to their children (Storing, 1988, 56). Hence, it comes as no surprise that in their introduction to the section on "The Literature of Slavery and Freedom 1746-1865", Gates and McKay describe "resistance to human tyranny" and "dedication to human dignity" as being key concepts in African American literature (Gates and McKay, 2004, 127). They explain how early African American writers articulated the "spiritual and political ideals of America to inspire and justify the struggle of blacks for their birth-right as American citizens" (Gates and McKay, 2004, 127). Autobiographical accounts of slaves persistently exhibited these qualities and in doing so, challenged and increasingly negated any prevailing ideas concerning black people's inability of literary expression and innate inferiority.

These autobiographical accounts depicted both the spiritual and physical journey from bondage to freedom (Scott, 2017, 1), however they were unlike any other standard autobiography. The following section will present an overview of key characteristics, themes and style of the Slave Narrative. As historical documents, these narratives provide us with a deeper understanding of the evolution of white supremacy in the South from eighteenth century slavery up until the racial segregation of the twentieth century (Andrews, 2004). With over 6,000 narratives in existence, from a literary standpoint, they constitute one of the most influential and extensive traditions in African American culture (Wright, 2009, 21), (Ernest, 2014, 344).

These narratives served as a channel between black and white people, exposing both the inhumanity of slavery and the humanity of black people from a first-hand perspective (Andrews, 2004). Former slaves attempted to tell their stories of life in bondage, to "represent the unrepresentable" (Ernest, 2014, 4). These stories became a powerful weapon in the Abolition Movement's arsenal. The narratives were sold at antislavery meetings around the globe, many went through several editions and sold tens of thousands of copies (Ernest, 2014, 26, 155), (Andrews, 2004). In 1846, just a year after its original publication in the US, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* by Frederick Douglass was already in its second Irish edition (Roedinger, 2010, 149). Within five years, Douglass' narrative had sold over 30,000 copies and became and international bestseller (Scott, 2017, 3). In 1861, Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave*, sold over 30,000 in just two years after publication and subsequently went through several editions (Churchwell, 2014).

Early black writers such as Olaudah Equiano, David Walker and Frederick Douglass: "exhorted their white readers like preachers imploring a backsliding congregation to live up to the standards of their reputed religion and their professed political principles" (Gates and McKay, 2004, 77). This appeal to the core values of Christianity and the founding principles of the US constitution became such a frequent and prominent feature of the slave narrative

that they became almost formulaic. James Olney, writer and critic of the slave narrative genre, described the antebellum narratives as;

"trained on one and the same objective reality, they have a coherent and defined audience, and have behind them and guiding them an organized group of "sponsers" and they are possessed of very specific motives, intentions and uses" (Ernest, 2014, 6).

It is accurate to observe that slave narratives were relatively formulaic in structure. However, this was a deliberate strategy designed to reinforce their central message. They were works of literature written with a specific goal and purpose; to demand the abolition of the institution of slavery (Bruce, 2007, 28). In her book, *Witnessing Slavery*, Frances Smith Foster echoes the views of James Olney as she describes the narratives as "didactic writings created as a response to the specific needs of a specific society" recognisable by their "form, content and relation to the cultural matrix" (Smith Foster, 1979, 4, 5). One common feature mentioned was the preface or letter written by a white writer in the first pages of the book, verifying the authenticity of the narrative and advocating the character of the narrator. Examples of this can be seen in Frederick Douglass and Olaudah Equiano's narratives. Sometimes narratives were edited by a white writer, as was the case with Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and in Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* (Ernest, 2014, 78). This contribution from a white person is a characteristic featured in most narratives and its significance lies in that it served as verification that the account was worthy of acceptance by a white readership. The widespread prejudice that black people, and especially former slaves, were incapable of literary expression meant that this verification was important for the narratives to be read by a white audience and thus challenging, if not dispelling, any preconceived beliefs concerning black people's intellectual and emotional capabilities.

Another characteristic making up the formulaic structure of the narrative was its polemic features, appealing to the constitutional values esteemed so highly by the American people. By identifying themselves as American Citizens, former slaves were able to critique the inherent injustice of slavery in a nation whose foundational document declared all men to be born equal with the treasured "unalienable rights" of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness". Along with this polemic characteristic, the appeal to moral values and to Christianity is an integral feature of many narratives. Through the graphic depictions of their treatment at the hands of white self-professed Christian slave holders, and by imploring readers to consider the true values and morals of the Christian faith, narrators were able to expose the incompatibility of slavery with Christianity and thus critique the hypocrisy of one calling themselves a Christian and allowing such an institution to exist.

This dissertation will conclude by examining two well-known examples of the antebellum slave narrative in order to assess how closely they conform to the key characteristics of the genre and thus, how effective such characteristics were in conveying the abolitionist message. Although the narratives of Solomon Northup and Frederick Douglass are similar in their depiction of the cruelty of slavery, they differ in their perspective on the experience of being a slave due to their very different backgrounds. Solomon Northup's experience of slavery as related in his narrative is unique. Having been born a free man, Northup was kidnapped and sold into bondage and sent to the South where he would remain enslaved for twelve years. A husband, father and successful violinist, Solomon Northup provides an insight into American slavery from the perspective of a free, American citizen, whose only crime was the colour of his skin. It allows the reader to view slavery through the lens of someone they could relate to on a closer level than most narrators, who had been born into slavery. Frederick Douglass on the other hand, was born a slave and held no knowledge of his age, who his father was and had only met his mother several times during his early childhood. Douglass had virtually no identity other than that of a slave. Despite a white

reader not being able to relate to Douglass in the way they could to Northup, Douglass' Narrative exposes the inhumanity of slavery even to someone who knows no alternative way of life.

The original title of Northup's narrative at the time of publication in 1853 was: *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, A Citizen of New York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853, From a Cotton Plantation Near the Red River in Louisiana.* This original title is important as it displays a key characteristic of slave narratives. By establishing from the very title that the author was a "Citizen of New York", the reader, or potential reader, is immediately made aware that slavery has permeated the free states of America and taken a "citizen" who by very definition, has the "unalienable" right to "liberty". This sense of injustice is amplified by the following words "Kidnapped in Washington City". For a free US citizen to be unlawfully kidnapped and sold into slavery in the very capital that produced the inspiring American Constitution would be deplorable to any American who was in any way familiar with the foundational ideals of their nation.

At the time of publication, Frederick Douglass narrative was entitled *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (docsouth.unc.edu, 2018). Again we see an immediate expression of the key characteristics of the genre in the words "American Slave" and "Written by Himself". The former indicates to the reader or potential reader that the slave is first and foremost a self- identifying American citizen, and simultaneously the word slave immediately after seems to contradict the definition of an American citizen. "Written by Himself" reveals the narrator's literacy despite being a slave and thus, challenging the hegemonic conception that black people and especially slaves, were not capable of literary expression.

Northup's narrative was edited by white lawyer David Wilson. Wilson's Preface confirms that the statements found throughout the account have been "corroborated by abundant evidence" and assures the reader that Northup has "adhered strictly to the truth", repeated the same story "without deviating in the slightest" (Northup, 2014, xxi). Similarly, in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, we see both a Preface written by William Lloyd Garrison and a Letter from Wendall Philips, two of the most well-known Abolitionist figures in America at that time. Garrison affirms in the preface that he is "confident" that the narrative is "true in all its statements" and that "nothing has been set down in malice" and nothing has been "exaggerated" (Douglass, 1995, x, xi). The veracity of the account is again reaffirmed by Philips in the form of a letter, written as though it were intended to be read by Douglass alone. Philips states: "I am confident every one who reads your book will feel persuaded that you give them a fair specimen of the whole truth" (Douglass, 1995, xv). These features in both slave narratives were instrumental in verifying their authenticity to a white readership. By challenging preconceived ideas one may have held regarding a black person's ability for literary expression, the impact of the narrative in shedding light on the realities of slavery would be substantially more effective in conveying the abolitionist message.

We see the appeal to the constitutional values throughout both narratives. In Douglass' narrative the constitutional language becomes apparent toward the end, after he has become literate and thus better educated on the injustice of his enslavement. After he had become a skilled reader, Douglass states that "the silver trump of freedom had roused my soul" (Douglass, 1995, 24), effectively reminding the reader that this desire for freedom is a taken for granted right of every American citizen. When commenting on his master's name Mr. Freeland, Douglass states "I began to want to live upon free land as well as with Freeland" and then proceeds to divulge how he began to plot how he could "secure" his "liberty" (Douglass, 1995, 49). By using the lexicon of the foundational documents of America, Douglass is shedding light on the inherent contradiction of a human being living in the "land of the free", professing his desire to live on free land. Douglass then explains how

even if he did escape the South, he would still remain under threat of enslavement in the North: "Our knowledge of the north did not extend further than New York; and to go there, and be forever harassed with the frightful liability of being returned to slavery- with the certainty of being treated tenfold worse than before- the thought was truly a horrible one" (Douglass, 1995, 50). This statement is a direct reference to the Fugitive Slave Act and by articulating this, Douglass reveals the reality of American law, and how it reinforces slavery in the north and the south. Again, we see the terminology of the Constitution when Douglass reveals "we would certainly start in pursuit of freedom" (Douglass, 1995, 52). These carefully chosen words are reminiscent of the phrasing of the Constitution's assertion of "inalienable rights" of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness". Upon reading this statement, the reader could not help but be reminded of such constitutional values and thus perhaps be further persuaded of the immense injustice of enslaving citizens of America.

In *Twelve Years a Slave*, Northup portrays slavery from the perspective of a formerly free man, for whom all his life, the constitutional values of America were just as applicable as any white person. This is apparent from the very opening line of the narrative: "Having been born a freeman, and for more than thirty years enjoyed the blessings of liberty in a free state …" (Northup, 2014, 1). Later in the account he expresses how other slaves he encountered "cherished a secret desire for liberty" (Northup, 2014, 24) which effectively establishes to the reader that his appreciation for liberty is not solely from having been born free, that the desire for liberty is a weight carried by all Americans, whether enslaved or free. Perhaps the most notable instance of Northup drawing on the American constitutional values and its inherent hypocrisy is when he is describing the slave pen in Washington where he was held:

"Strange as it may seem, within plain sight of this same house, looking down from its commanding height upon it, was the Capitol. The voices of patriotic representatives boasting of freedom and equality, and the rattling of the poor slave's chains, almost commingled. A slave pen within the very shadow of the capitol" (Northup, 2014, 48).

This description illustrates the incompatibility and hypocrisy of owning human beings as slaves in America. The uniting of voices professing freedom and the sound of slaves in chains strikes the reader as indefensible, further verifying the abolitionist message. Just as strikingly, when relating his departure from the slave pen to be sold, Northup chillingly recalls how the slaves:

"passed, hand-cuffed and in silence, through the streets of Washington through the Capital of a nation, whose theory of government, we are told, rests on the foundation of man's inalienable right to life, LIBERTY, and the pursuit of happiness! Hail! Columbia, happy land, indeed!" (Northup, 2014, 68).

Both these statements are unapologetic, scathing critiques on the hypocrisy of slavery in America when the inspiring language of their Constitution contradicts such a concept in every way. Northup's emphasis on liberty and sardonic praise of America encapsulates the sadness and bitterness he felt at this moment and thus, to a white reader, conveys the intense betrayal he felt as a citizen of America.

When Northup is expressing the injustice and inhumanity of slavery he again draws upon the language of the Constitution to reinforce his argument. He explains how nobody can truly understand the tormenting condition of slavery until they have spent every waking minute alongside a slave;

"let them sit by him in the silent watches of the night- converse with him in trustful confidence, of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," and they will find that ninety-nine out of every hundred are intelligent enough to understand their situation, and to cherish in their bosoms the love of freedom, as passionately as themselves." (Northup, 2014, 296)

Northup, by drawing upon constitutional language, conveys the injustice of slavery while simultaneously demonstrating that slaves are human beings capable of rational thought and aware of the conditions they are subjected to.

An appeal to Christian values, another feature of the genre, is used in both texts to establish the narrators as Christians and therefore, by definition, rendering them worthy of love and respect from fellow Christians as children of God. It is also used as a means to illustrate the incompatibility of slavery and Christianity. In *Twelve Years a Slave*, when Northup describes his first night in the slave pen after his kidnapping he states that his "cup of sorrow was to overflowing" (Northup, 2014, 100). This is reminiscent of the biblical account of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane where he tells the Apostles that his "soul is full of sorrow" and then proceeds to cry out to God to "take this cup away" from him (Matthew 36:8-29). This reveals the torment felt by Northup in that moment but also establishes to the reader that the narrator had knowledge of the Bible and implies that he was a Christian. Northup then expresses how that night he "begged for mercy" to "the Almighty Father of us all- the freeman and the slave" (Northup, 2014, 100). This statement effectively articulates the Christian belief that all are equal in the eyes of God and thus imploring his white readership to consider how enslaving another human being contradicts the core principles of Christianity.

Perhaps the narrative's appeal to Christian values is best exemplified when Northup discusses his previous master William Ford, a Baptist teacher who is regarded by "fellow citizens" as a "worthy minister of God" (Northup, 2014, 121). Northup articulates to the reader:

> "In many Northern minds, perhaps, the idea of a man holding his brother man in servitude, and the traffic in human flesh, may seem altogether incompatible with their conceptions of a moral or religious life" (Northup, 2014, 121).

This statement articulates the key argument used by numerous slave narrators: slavery being irreconcilable with Christianity. It also embodies the "moral suasion" approach employed by Garrisonian abolitionists as Northup specifies that enslaving a fellow man is not exclusively a religious issue but a "moral" one too.

Just like Northup, Douglass also focuses on the spiritual equality of all mankind in the eyes of God. This is evident as he recalls an incident whereby a fellow slave was killed by their overseer simply for having not responded to his call. The overseer was not reprimanded or punished in any form for taking the slave's life. Douglass, whilst reflecting on this asserts that the overseer is likely to currently be living "as though his guilty soul had not been stained with his brother's blood" (Douglass, 1995, 14). This specific choice of wording encapsulates the Christian belief that all human beings are brothers and sisters, and their souls are of equal worth to their "common Father" (Douglass, 1995, 64). As we have seen in *Twelve Years a Slave*, drawing upon the Christian belief of all people being equal in the eyes of God effectively conveys to the reader that enslaving a fellow man and considering him "human chattel" is not only incompatible with Christianity but also must be answered for to their "common Father" who, according to the Christian teachings, sees no hierarchy between a white man and a black man.

Throughout *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, the author continuously illustrates his biblical knowledge and Christian values and uses this to appeal to his readership. We see an example of exposing the hypocritical nature of southern Christianity when Douglass refers to the increasing mixed-race population in the South; resulting from the common practice of male slaveholders impregnating their female slaves. He states that if any good is to come from this, it will be to "do away with the force of the argument that God cursed Ham and therefore American slavery is right" since if the lineal descendants of Ham

are to be the only ones enslaved then those who agree with this justification will surely see how slavery will "soon become unscriptural" (Douglass, 1995, 3). By shedding light on this critical flaw found in the dominant religious discourse validating slavery, Douglass is challenging common religious justification for enslaving black people and thus, imploring his white readership to do the same.

The Appendix of the *Narrative* consists entirely of Douglass expressing his revulsion at the hypocrisy of southern Christianity (Douglass, 1995, 71). The narrator contrasts the southern Christians to the hypocritical Pharisees in the time of Jesus' life who professed to "love God whom they have not seen, whilst they hate their brother whom they have seen" (Douglass, 1995, 71). Douglass effectively exposes the binary oppositions between the Christianity present in America and authentic Christianity when he expresses; "between the Christianity of this land and the Christianity of Christ, I see the widest possible difference" (Douglass, 1995, 75). By highlighting the astonishing hypocrisy of American Christianity, Douglass is articulating to white readers, the corruption of Christianity necessary to justify the practice of slavery. The Appendix closes with Douglass stating that he hopes his story may shed "light on the American slave system" and thus, lead to a "glad day of deliverance to the millions of my brethren in bonds". He concludes by stating that he will rely on the "power of truth, love, and justice"; all of which are core principles in the teachings of Christianity (Douglass, 1995, 76). Therefore, Douglass lends the authority of all slave's fate to his white Christian readers by subtly imploring that true Christian values are essential to their freedom.

A vivid insight into the plight of the slaves and the inhumanity of the slaveowners is provided by both narratives to appeal to the emotions of white readers. Arguably the most effective examples of this can be seen in the descriptions of mothers being separated from their children. In *Twelve Years a Slave*, Northup's account of a slave named Eliza, witnessing her five-year-old son being sold and thus, taken from her forever:

"Eliza was crying aloud, and wringing her hands. She besought the man not to buy him, unless he also bought her self and Emily. She promised (…) to be the best slave that ever lived. The man answered that he could not afford it, and then Eliza burst into a paroxysm of grief, weeping plaintively. Freeman turned round to her, savagely, with his whip in his uplifted hand, ordering her to stop her noise or he would flog her" (Northup, 2014, 107, 108).

The inhumanity of the slaveholder is apparent in this description as well as the strikingly inhumane act of forcibly separating a mother from her child. This is significantly reinforced when the reader learns of Eliza's last moment with her young son:

"Then Eliza ran to him; embraced him passionately kissed him again and again; told him to remember her – all the while her tears falling on the boy's face like rain. Freeman damned her, calling her a blubbering, bawling wench, and ordered her to go to her place" (Northup, 2014, 108).

Northup described the scene as "mournful", stating "I would have cried myself if I had dared" (Northup, 2014, 108). The factual tone of Northup's narration is effective in illustrating the unexplainable pain felt by the woman in that moment. It could certainly be argued that this exemplifies the power of the narratives in appealing to the emotions of white readers and particularly in this case, to the white female reader.

Northup draws upon the inhumanity of slaveholders to evoke an emotional response from white readers as he explains the detrimental effects of such an institution on the slaveholder. He states that slavery; "has a tendency to brutalize the humane and finer feelings of their nature." That by being exposed, daily to "human suffering" and "listening to the agonizing screeches of the slave" that they inevitably become "brutifed and reckless of human life" (Northup, 2014, 294). In this statement, we see Northup drawing upon the inherent characteristics of slavery to not only depict the torment experienced by the slave

himself, but also to reveal the detrimental effects of such a practice on the one enforcing it. He further reinforces this as he articulates that it is "not the fault of the slaveholder that he is cruel, so much as it is the fault of the system under which he lives. He cannot withstand the influence of habit and associations around him. Taught from earliest childhood" (Northup, 2014, 294). By exposing the corrosive effects of slavery on the slaveholder and all those exposed to this system, the reader is implored to consider that perhaps such an institution is as unfavourable to white people as it is to black people.

The separation of mother and child is depicted in Douglass' *Narrative* on the very first page. Douglass describes how he was separated from his mother when he was an infant and explains how this was a "common custom" in Maryland at the time (Douglass, 1995, 1, 2). He elaborates on this point stating that "before the child has reached its twelfth month, its mother is taken from it" and implies the motive behind such an act being to "hinder the development of the child's affection toward its mother, and to blunt and destroy the natural affection of the mother for the child." (Douglass, 1995, 2). Again we see the matter-of-fact tone being used by the narrator to explain a striking practice which only further enables the reader to ponder this revelation and thus, question whether the affection a mother has for her child could ever truly be eradicated. Douglass then relates how his own mother would travel twelve miles at night in secrecy just to lie with him as he fell asleep (Douglass, 1995, 2). This conveys to the reader that the natural affection and love between a mother and her child was not blunted or destroyed in this instance, and thus the reality of this "common custom" of separation is subtly exposed for its inherent inhumanity by Douglass.

The dehumanising influence of slavery on the slaveholder is also a feature seen in Douglass' *Narrative*. The most effective example of this is evident when Douglass describes the transformation of his mistress who before Douglass' arrival, had never owned a slave. Initially, the mistress is described by Douglass as "a woman of the kindest heart and finest feelings" with a face "made of heavenly smiles" who had been "preserved from the blighting and dehumanising effects of slavery" (Douglass, 1995, 19). Immediately the reader is made aware that this seemingly compassionate woman, would be transformed in some respect, by owning a slave. Douglass states that she was initially "disturbed" at the sight of him crouching before her and had no objections to him making eye contact with her (Douglass, 1995, 19). Even the depiction of a slave crouching before their master, afraid to look them in the eye, is a striking image, again appealing to the emotions of the reader through vivid descriptive language. As Douglass explains how his mistress changed drastically, the language he employs conveys a demonic image:

> "The fatal poison of irreconcilable power was already in her hands, and soon commenced its infernal work. That cheerful eye, under the influence of slavery, soon became red with rage; that voice, made all of sweet accord, changed to one of harsh and horrid discord; and that angelic face gave place to that of a demon" (Douglass, 1995, 19).

This description suggests that the influence of slavery on a good, kind soul is not unlike being possessed by a demonic force. As a white reader, it could certainly be suggested reading such a description would evoke a deeply emotional response and challenge any preconceived ideas about the existence of truly compassionate slaveholders.

For slavery to be abolished in America, the realities of the system needed to be exposed to the public. By providing the people of America with a window into the life of a slave, the Slave Narrative revealed the profound inhumanity of the system. As we have examined, the legislation designed to tyrannize and oppress slaves throughout American history, was embedded in the nation's foundational documents. Therefore, the development of the Abolitionist Movement and their strategically chosen methods of disseminating their central message, significantly impacted the development of the Slave Narrative and its

availability to the public. Without the merging of former slaves and abolitionist forces, the success of the slave narratives would undoubtedly have been impeded and perhaps, so too would the possibilities of emancipation. Considering this, the key role played by the slave narrative genre in the Abolition Movement is a testimony to the power of literature in the pursuit of liberty.

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