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Lectures on Liberation

Angela Y. Davis

Introduction to the 1970 Pamphlet Published by the N.Y. Committee to Free Angela Davis

By UCLA Professors

Presented here are Professor Angela Davis's initial lectures for "Recurring Philosophical Themes in Black Literature," her first course at UCLA, taught during the fall quarter of 1969. At the time she was beginning a two-year appointment as acting assistant professor in philosophy, an appointment duly recommended by the Department of Philosophy and enthusiastically approved by the UCLA administration. The first of the two lectures was delivered in Royce Hall to an audience of over fifteen hundred students and interested colleagues. At the lecture's end Professor Davis was given a prolonged standing ovation by the audience. It was, we thought, a vindication of academic freedom and democratic education. For the lectures are a part of an attempt to bring to light the forbidden history of the enslavement and oppression of black people and to place that history in an illuminating philosophical context. At the same time, they are sensitive, original and incisive; the work of an excellent teacher and a truly fine scholar.

Now Professor Davis is a prisoner of the society that should have welcomed her talents, her honesty, and the contribution she was making toward understanding and resolving the most critical problem of that society—the division between its oppressors and its oppressed. First she was attacked by the regents of the University of California, who attempted to dismiss her from the university on the patently illegal ground of her membership in the Communist Party. When this attempt was overruled by the Superior Court of Los Angeles, the regents denied her the normal continuation of her appointment for a second year, in spite of recommendations from a host of review committees and the chancellor of UCLA that she be reappointed. During the summer of 1970, she was charged with kidnapping, murder, and unlawful flight to avoid prosecution and was placed on the FBI most wanted list. When apprehended, she was held on excessive bail, then denied bail, and subsequently has been kept in isolation from other prisoners.

In her first lecture Professor Davis points out that keeping an oppressed class in ignorance is one of the principal instruments of its oppression. Like Frederick Douglass, the black slave whose life and work she surveys here, Professor Davis is one of the educated oppressed. Like him, she has achieved full consciousness of what it is to be oppressed and has heightened this consciousness in her own people and in others. There can be little doubt that her effectiveness in blunting the oppressive weapon of ignorance was the chief motive for her removal from the University of California and a major motive in the harsh treatment she has since received.

These are lectures dealing with the phenomenology of oppression and liberation. It is one thing to make the elementary point that millions are still oppressed in what is advertised as the world's most free society. It is much more difficult to lay out the causes of that oppression and the ways in which it is perpetuated; its psychological meaning to the oppressor and the oppressed; the process by which the latter becomes conscious of it; and the way in which they triumph over it. This was the task Professor Davis set for herself. She brings to her work a rich philosophical background, a piercing intellect, and the knowledge born of experience.

It was perhaps inevitable that Professor Davis should become a symbol for conflicting groups and causes. But it is well to remember that behind the

symbol lies the human being whose thoughts are recorded here and that when she stands trial, not only a human cause but also a human life will be tried. In the meantime, we take pride in presenting these two lectures by a distinguished colleague and friend. May they everywhere contribute to the defeat of oppression.

Signed,
Matthew Skulicz, English
Peter Orleans, Sociology
David Gillman, Mathematics
Sterling Robbins, Anthropology
Marie Brand, Nursing
J. C. Ries, Political Science
Jerome Rabow, Sociology
Donald Kalish, Philosophy
Evelyn Hatch, English
Kenneth Chapman, German
Laurence Morrissette, French
Temma Kaplan, History
Peter Ladefoged, Linguistics
D. R. Mccann, German
Robert Singleton, Business Administration
Richard Ashcraft, Political Science
John Horton, Sociology
Paul Koosis, Mathematics
Patrick Story, English
Alan E. Flanigan, Engineering
Roy L. Wolford, Medicine
Albert Schwartz, History
Wade Savage, Philosophy
Tom Robinson, Education
Barbara Partee, English
Carlos Otero, Spanish
Alex Norman, Urban Affairs
Henry McGee, School of Law
E. V. Wolfenstein, Political Science

First Lecture on Liberation

The idea of freedom has justifiably been a dominating theme in the history of Western ideas. Man has been repeatedly defined in terms of his inalienable freedom. One of the most acute paradoxes present in the history of Western society is that while on a philosophical plane freedom has been delineated in the most lofty and sublime fashion, concrete reality has always been permeated with the most brutal forms of unfreedom, of enslavement. In ancient Greece, where, so we are taught, democracy had its source, it cannot be overlooked that in spite of all the philosophical assertions of man's freedom, in spite of the demand that man realize himself through exercising his freedom as a citizen of the polis, the majority of the people in Athens were not free. Women were not citizens, and slavery was an accepted institution. Moreover, there was definitely a form of racism present in Greek society, for only Greeks were suited for the benefits of freedom: all non-Greeks were called barbarians and by their very nature could not be deserving or even capable of freedom.

In this context, one cannot fail to conjure up the image of Thomas Jefferson and the other so-called Founding Fathers formulating the noble concepts of the Constitution of the United States while their slaves were living in misery. In order not to mar the beauty of the Constitution and at the same time to protect the institution of slavery, they wrote about "persons held to service or labor," a euphemism for the word *slavery*, as being exceptional types of human beings, persons who do not merit the guarantees and rights of the Constitution.

Is man free or is he not? Ought he be free or ought not he be free? The history of Black literature provides, in my opinion, a much more illuminating account of the nature of freedom, its extent and limits, than all the philosophical discourses on this theme in the history of Western society. Why? For a number of reasons. First of all, because Black literature in this country and throughout the world projects the consciousness of a people who have been denied entrance into the real world of freedom. Black people have exposed, by their very existence, the inadequacies not only of the practice of freedom, but of its very theoretical formulation. Because if the theory of freedom remains isolated from the practice of freedom or rather is contradicted in reality, then this means that something must be wrong with the concept—that is, if we are thinking in a dialectical manner.

The pivotal theme of this course will thus be the idea of freedom as it is unfolded in the literary understanding of Black people. Starting with Frederick Douglass, we will explore the slave's experience of his bondage and thus the negative experience of freedom. Most important here will be the crucial transformation of the concept of freedom as a static, given principle into the concept of liberation, the dynamic, active struggle for freedom. We will move on to W. E. B. Du Bois, to Jean Toomer, Richard Wright, and John A. Williams. Interspersed will be poetry from the various periods of Black History in this country and theoretical analyses such as Fanon and Du Bois's *A. B. C. of Color.* Finally I would like to discuss a few pieces by African writers and poems by Nicolás Guillén, a Black Cuban poet, and compare them to the work of American Blacks.

Throughout the course, I have said, the notion of freedom will be the axis around which we will attempt to develop other philosophical concepts. We will encounter such metaphysical notions as identity, the problem of self-knowledge. The kind of philosophy of history that emerges out of the works we are studying will be crucial. The morality peculiar to an oppressed people is something we will have to come to grips with. As we progress along the path of the unfolding of freedom in Black literature, we should retrieve a whole host of related themes.

Before I get into the material, I would like to say a few words about the kinds of questions we ought to ask ourselves when we delve into the nature of human freedom. First of all, is freedom totally subjective, totally objective, or is it a synthesis of both poles? Let me try to explain what I mean. Is freedom to be conceived merely as an inherent, given characteristic of man, is it a freedom that is confined within the human mind, is freedom an internal experience? Or, on the other hand, is freedom only the liberty to move, to act in a way one chooses? Let us pose the original question as to the subjectivity or objectivity of freedom in the following manner: Is freedom the freedom of thought or the freedom of action? Or more important, is it possible to conceive of the one without the other?

This leads us directly to the problem of whether freedom is at all possible within the bounds of material bondage. Can the slave be said to be free in any way? This brings to mind one of the more notorious statements that the French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre has made. Even the man in chains, he says, remains free, and for this reason: he is always at liberty to eliminate his condition of slavery even if this means his death. That is, his

freedom is narrowly defined as the freedom to choose between his state of captivity and his death. This is extreme. But we have to decide whether or not this is the way in which we are going to define that concept. Certainly, this would not be compatible with the notion of liberation, for when the slave opts for death, he does much more than obliterate his condition of enslavement, for at the same time he is abolishing the very condition of freedom, life. Yet there is more to be said when we take the decision to die out of an abstract context and examine the dynamics of a real situation in which a slave meets his death in the fight for concrete freedom. That is to say, the choice, slavery or death, could either mean slavery or suicide or, on the other hand, slavery or liberation at all costs. The difference between the two situations is crucial.

The collective consciousness of an oppressed people entails an understanding of the conditions of oppression and the possibilities of abolishing these conditions. At the end of his journey toward understanding, the slave finds a real grasp of what freedom means. He knows that it means the destruction of the master–slave relationship. And in this sense, his knowledge of freedom is more profound than that of the master. For the master feels himself free, and he feels himself free because he is able to control the lives of others. He is free at the expense of the freedom of another. The slave experiences the freedom of the master in its true light. He understands that the master's freedom is abstract freedom to suppress other human beings. The slave understands that this is a pseudoconcept of freedom and at this point is more enlightened than his master, for he realizes that the master is a slave of his own misconceptions, his own misdeeds, his own brutality, his own effort to oppress.

Now I would like to go into the material. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* constitutes a physical voyage from slavery to freedom that is both the conclusion and reflection of a philosophical voyage from slavery to freedom. We will see that neither voyage would have been possible alone; they are mutually determinant.

The point of departure for this voyage is the exclamation Frederick Douglass makes as a child, "O God, save me! God, deliver me! Let me be free! Is there any God? Why am I a slave? I will run away. I will not stand it. Get caught, or get clear, I'll try it. . . . It cannot be that I will live and die a slave."[1] His critical attitude when he fails to accept the usual answer—that God had made Black people to be slaves and white people to be masters—

is the basic condition that must be present before freedom can become a possibility in the mind of the slave. We must not forget that throughout the history of Western society there is an abundance of justifications for the existence of slavery. Both Plato and Aristotle felt that some men were born to be slaves, some men are not born into a state of freedom. Religious justifications for slavery are to be found at every turn.

Let's attempt to arrive at a philosophical definition of the slave. We have already stated the essence: he is a human being who, by some reason or another, is denied freedom. But is not the essence of the human being his freedom? Either the slave is not a man, or his very existence is a contradiction. We can rule out the first alternative, although we should not forget that the prevailing ideology defined the Black man as subhuman. The failure to deal with the contradictory nature of slavery, the imposed ignorance of reality is exemplified in the notion that the slave is not a man, for if he were a man, he should certainly be free.

We all know of the calculated attempts to rob the Black man of his humanity. We know that in order to maintain the institution of slavery, Black people were forced to live in conditions not fit for animals. The white slave owners were determined to mold Black people into the image of the subhuman being that they had contrived in order to justify their actions. A vicious circle emerges in which the slave owner loses all consciousness of himself.

The vicious circle continues to turn, but for the slave, there is a way out: Resistance. Frederick Douglass had one of his first experiences of this possibility of a slave becoming free upon resisting his own whipping:

> Covey at length let me go, puffing and blowing at a great rate, saying that if I had not resisted, he would not have whipped me half so much. The truth was, that he had not whipped me at all. . . . 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. He can only understand the deep satisfaction which I experienced, who has himself repelled by force the bloody arm of slavery. I felt as I never felt before. It was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom. My long-crushed

> spirit rose, cowardice departed, bold defiance took its place; and I now resolved that, however long I might remain a slave in form, the day passed forever when I could be a slave in fact. I did not hesitate to let it be known of me, that the white man who expected to succeed in whipping, must also succeed in killing me.[2]

Already we can begin to concretize the notion of freedom as it appeared to the slave. The first condition of freedom is the open act of resistance—physical resistance, violent resistance. In that act of resistance, the rudiments of freedom are already present. And the violent retaliation signifies much more than the physical act: it is refusal not only to submit to the flogging but refusal to accept the definitions of the slave master; it is implicitly a rejection of the institution of slavery, its standards, its morality, a microcosmic effort toward liberation. Douglass later wrote, "That slave who had the courage to stand up for himself against the overseer, although he might have hard stripes at first, became while legally a slave virtually a free man."[3]

The slave is actually conscious of the fact that freedom is not a fact, it is not a given, but rather something to be fought for; it can exist only through a process of struggle. The slave master, on the other hand, experiences his freedom as inalienable and thus as a fact: he is not aware that he too has been enslaved by his own system.

To begin to answer a question we posed earlier—Is it possible for a man to be in chains and at the same time be free?—we can now say that the path toward freedom can only be envisioned by the slave when he actively rejects his chains. The first phase of liberation is the decision to reject the image of himself that the slave owner has painted, to reject the conditions that the slave owner has created, to reject his own existence, to reject himself as slave.

Here the problem of freedom leads us directly into the question of identity. The condition of slavery is a condition of alienation. In a later autobiography he wrote, "Nature never intended that men and women should be either slaves or slaveholders, and nothing but rigid training long persisted in, can perfect the character of the one or the other." Slavery is an alienation from a natural condition; it is a violation of nature that distorts both parties—the slave and the slave owner. Alienation is the absence of authentic identity; in the case of the slave, he is alienated from his own freedom.

This nonidentity can exist on a number of levels: it can be unconscious—the slave accepts the master's definition, renders himself *unfree*

in seeing himself as inherently unfit for freedom. Or it can be conscious; knowledge can strike a blow at it. We are most concerned with the second alternative, for it constitutes a stage in the voyage toward freedom.

The most extreme form of human alienation is the reduction to the status of property. This is how the slave was defined: something to be owned. "We were all ranked together at the valuation. Men and women, old and young, married and single, were ranked with horses, sheep, and swine. There were horses and men, cattle and women, pigs and children, all holding the same rank in the scale of being, and were all subjected to the same narrow examination. Silvery-headed age and sprightly youth, maids and matrons, had to undergo the same indelicate inspection. At this moment, I saw more clearly than ever the brutalizing effects of slavery upon both slave and slaveholder."[4]

Black people were treated as things, they were defined as objects. "The slave was a fixture," Douglass later remarked. His life must be lived within the limits of that abjectness, within the limits of the white man's definition of the Black man. Forced to live as if he were a fixture, the slave's perception of the world is inverted. Because his life is relegated to that of an object, he must forge his own humanity within those boundaries. "We had no more voice in that decision than the brutes among whom we were ranked."[5] The slave has no determination whatsoever over the external circumstances of his life. One day a woman could be living on a plantation among her children, their father—family, friends. The next day, she could be miles away with no hope of ever meeting them again. The idea of the journey loses its connotation of exploration; it loses the excitement of learning the unknown. The trip becomes a journey into hell, not away from the thingness of the slave's existence, but an even sharper accentuation of his nonhuman external existence. "A single word from the white men was enough—against all our wishes, prayers, and entreaties—to sunder forever the dearest friends, dearest kindred, and strongest ties known to human beings."[6] Frederick Douglass gives a moving account of the last days of his grandmother, who having faithfully served her master from his birth to his death, having had children and grandchildren for him, is looked upon in disdain by her then present owner—the original master's grandson. She is sent into the woods to die a solitary death.

Frederick Douglass's owner reveals to him unwittingly the path toward the consciousness of his alienation:

> "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 would spoil the best nigger in the world. Now," said he, "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 discontented and unhappy."[7]

The slave is alienated totally insofar as he accepts his master's will as the absolute authority over his life. The slave has no will, no desires, no being—his essence, his being he must find entirely in the will of his master. What does this mean? It is partly with the slave's consent that the white man is able to perpetuate slavery—when we say consent, however, it is not free consent, but consent under the most brutal force and pressure.

Frederick Douglass learns from his owner's observations precisely how he is to combat his own alienation: "I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty—to wit, the white man's power to enslave a black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom."[8] If we look closely at the words of Frederick Douglass, we can detect the theme of resistance once again. His first concrete experience of the possibility of freedom within the limits of slavery comes when he observes a slave resist a whipping. Now he transforms this resistance into a resistance of the mind, a refusal to accept the will of the master, and a determination to find independent means of judging the world.

Just as the slave has used violence against the violence of the aggressor, Frederick Douglass uses the knowledge of his owner—i.e., that learning unfits a man to be a slave and turns it against him: he will set out to acquire knowledge precisely because it unfits a man to be a slave. Resistance, rejection, on every level, on every front, are integral elements of the voyage toward freedom. Alienation will become conscious through the process of knowledge.

In combating his ignorance, in resisting the will of his master, Frederick Douglass apprehends that all men should be free and thus deepens his knowledge of slavery, of what it means to be a slave, what it means to be the negative counterpart of freedom: "I would sometimes say to them,

I wished I could be as free as they would be when they got to be men. 'You will be free as soon as you are twenty-one, but I am a slave for life! Have not I as good a right to be free as you have?' These words used to trouble them; they would express for me the liveliest sympathy, and console me with the hope that something would occur by which I might be free. I was now about twelve years old, and the thought of being a slave for life began to bear heavily upon my heart."[9]

His alienation becomes real, it surfaces, and Frederick Douglass is going to existentially experience all that is entailed by being bound to a state of unfreedom materially, while mentally finding his way toward liberation. The tension between the subjective and the objective will eventually provide the impetus toward total liberation. But before that goal is reached, a whole series of phases must be traversed.

The slave, Frederick Douglass, thus mentally transcends his condition toward freedom. Herein lies the consciousness of alienation. He sees freedom concretely as the negation of his condition—it is present in the very air he breathes.

> As I read and contemplated the subject, behold! That very discontentment which Master Hugh had predicted would follow my learning to read had already come, to torment and sting my soul to unutterable anguish. As I writhed under it, I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out. In moments of agony, I envied my fellow-slaves for their stupidity. I have often wished myself a beast. I preferred the condition of the meanest reptile to my own. Anything, no matter what, to get rid of thinking! It was this everlasting thinking of my condition that tormented me. There was no getting rid of it. It was pressed upon me by every object within sight or hearing, animate or inanimate. The silver trump of freedom had roused my soul to eternal wakefulness. Freedom now appeared, to disappear no more forever. It was heard in every sound, and seen in everything. 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.[10]

He has arrived at a true recognition of his condition. That recognition is at the same time the rejection of that condition. Consciousness of alienation entails the absolute refusal to accept that alienation. But the slave's predicament, by its very contradictory nature, is impossible: enlightenment does not bring happiness, nor does it bring real freedom—it brings desolation, misery, i.e., as long as the slave does not see a concrete path out of enslavement. In speaking of the slave owner's wife, Frederick Douglass says: "If I was in a separate room any considerable length of time, I was sure to be suspected of having a book, and was at once called to give an account of myself. Mistress, in teaching me the alphabet, had given me the *inch*, and no precaution could prevent me from taking the *ell*."[11]

Moreover, it is not just his individual condition that the slave rejects, and thus his misery is not just a result of his individual unfreedom, his individual alienation. True consciousness is the rejection of the institution itself and everything that accompanies it. "It was slavery and not its mere incidents that I hated," he later wrote.[12] To foreshadow Frederick Douglass's path from slavery to freedom, even when he attains his own freedom, he does not see the real goal as having been attained. It is only with the total abolition of the *institution* of slavery that his misery, his desolation, his alienation will be eliminated. And not even then, for there will remain remnants, and there still remain in existence today the causes that gave rise to slavery.

On this road to freedom, Frederick Douglass experiences religion as a reinforcement and justification for his desire to be free. Out of the Christian doctrine, he deduces the equality of all men before God. If this is true, he infers, then slave masters must be defying the will of God by suppressing the will of human beings and should be dealt with in accordance with God's anger. Freedom, the abolition of slavery, liberation, the destruction of alienation—these notions receive a metaphysical justification and impetus through religion. A supernatural being wills the abolition of slavery: Frederick Douglass, slave and believer in God, must accomplish God's will by working toward the goal of liberation.

Douglass was not the only person to infer this from the Christian religion. Nat Turner received an important part of his inspiration from his faith in Christianity. John Brown was another example.

We all know that from the perspective of white, slave-owning society, Christianity was supposed to serve quite another function. The overriding

idea behind exposing the slaves to religion was to provide a metaphysical justification not for freedom, but rather for slavery.

One of Karl Marx's more notorious statements is that religion is the opium of the people. That is—religion teaches men to be satisfied with their condition in this world—with their oppression—by directing their hopes and desires into a supernatural domain. A little suffering during a person's existence in this world means nothing compared to an eternity of bliss.

Marcuse likes to point out that we often ignore the fact that Karl Marx also said that religion is the wish-dream of an oppressed humanity. On the one hand, this statement means, of course, that wishes become dreams projected into an imaginary realm. But on the other hand, we have to ask ourselves: Is there anything else implied in Marx's statement about the notion of wish-dreams of an oppressed humanity? Think for a moment. Real wants, needs, and desires are transformed into wish-dreams via the process of religion because it seems so hopeless in this world: this is the perspective of an oppressed people. But what is important, what is crucial, is that those dreams are always on the verge of reverting to their original status—the real wishes and needs here on earth. There is always the possibility of redirecting those wish-dreams to the here-and-now.

Frederick Douglass redirected those dreams. Nat Turner placed them within the framework of the real world. So there can be a positive function of religion because its very nature is to satisfy very urgent needs of people who are oppressed. (We are speaking only of the relation of oppressed people to religion, not attempting to analyze the notion of religion in and for itself.) There can be a positive function of religion. All that need be done is to say: let's begin to create that eternity of bliss for human society here in this world. Let's convert eternity into history.

Why is it that more Black people did not shift the emphasis from the other world to concrete reality—to history? There was a calculated effort on the part of white, slave-owning society to create a special kind of religion that would serve their interests, that would serve to perpetuate the existence of slavery. Christianity was used for the purpose of brainwashing, indoctrinating, pacifying.

In his work *The Peculiar Institution*, Kenneth Stampp discusses extensively the role of religion in creating methods of appeasing Black people, of suppressing potentia1 revolt. At first, Africans were not converted to Christianity because this may have given slaves a claim to freedom. However, the

various slaveholding colonies passed laws to the effect that Black Christians would not automatically become free men by virtue of their baptism. Stampp formulates the reasons why it was finally decided to let slaves through the secret door of Christianity: "Through religious instruction, the bondman learned that slavery had divine sanction, that insolence was as much an offense against God as against the temporal master. They received the biblical command that servants should obey their masters and they heard of the punishments awaiting the disobedient slave in the hereafter. They heard, too, that eternal salvation would be their reward for faithful service and that on the day of judgment God would deal impartially with the poor and the rich, the black man and white."

Thus, those passages in the Bible that emphasized obedience, humility, pacifism, patience were presented to the slave as the essence of Christianity. Those passages, on the other hand, that talked about equality, freedom, the ones Frederick Douglass was able to discover because, unlike most slaves, he taught himself to read—these were eliminated from the sermons the slave heard. A very censored version of Christianity was developed especially for the slaves. A pious slave therefore would never hit a white man; his master was always right, even when he was by all human standards wrong. This use of religion was one of the most violent acts against humanity. It was used to teach a group of people that they were not human beings; it was used in an attempt to abolish the last remnant of identity that the slave possessed. But, in the long run, this project was not entirely successful, as can be witnessed by Frederick Douglass, Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner, and countless others who turned Christianity against the missionaries. The Old Testament was particularly helpful for those who planned revolts—Children of Israel were delivered out of bondage in Egypt by God—but they fought, they fought in order to carry out the will of God. Resistance was the lesson learned from the Bible. Christian spirituals created and sung by the masses of slaves were also powerful songs of freedom that demonstrate the extent to which Christianity could be rescued from the ideological context forged by the slaveholders and imbued with a revolutionary content of liberation.

Frederick Douglass's reaction to Nat Turner's revolt is revealing. In his later autobiography, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass,* he writes, "The insurrection of Nat Turner had been quelled, but the alarm and terror which it occasioned had not subsided. The cholera was then on its way to

this country, and I remember thinking that God was angry with the white people because of their slaveholding wickedness, and therefore his judgments were abroad in the land. Of course it was impossible for me not to hope much for the abolition movement when I saw it supported by the Almighty and armed with death."

I'd like to end here by pointing to the essence of what I have been trying to get across today. The road toward freedom, the path of liberation, is marked by resistance at every crossroad: mental resistance, physical resistance, resistance directed to the concerted attempt to obstruct that path. I think we can learn from the experience of the slave. We have to debunk the myth that Black people were docile and accepting and the extreme myth, which by the way I read in my high school history texts in Birmingham, Alabama, that Black people actually preferred slavery to freedom. If you will begin to get into Frederick Douglass, at the next meeting we can try to continue our investigation into the philosophical themes of Black literature.

Second Lecture on Liberation

Before I continue the discussion of Frederick Douglass, I would like to say a few words about the course in general. Black Studies is a field that has long been neglected in the universities. We are just beginning to fill that vacuum. And we must be very careful because we do not want Black History, Black Literature, to be relegated to the same stagnant, innocuous, compartmentalized existence as, say, the history of the American Revolution. I could talk about Frederick Douglass as if he had the same relevance as, say, the so-called discovering of America by Columbus. History, Literature should not be pieces in a museum of antiquity, especially when they reveal to us problems that continue to exist today. The reasons underlying the demands for Black Studies programs are many, but the most important one is the necessity to establish a continuum from the past to the present, to discover the genesis of problems that continue to exist today, to discover how our ancestors dealt with them. We can learn from the philosophical as well as concrete experience of the slave. We can learn what methods of coming to grips with oppression were historically successful and what methods were failures. The failures are crucial because we do not want to be responsible for the repetition of history in its brutality. We learn what the mistakes were in order not to duplicate them.

We ought to approach the content in this course not as frozen facts, as static, as meaningful only in terms of understanding the past. We are talking about philosophical themes, recurring philosophical themes. Philosophy is supposed to perform the task of generalizing aspects of experience, and not just for the sake of formulating generalizations, of discovering formulas, as some of my colleagues in the discipline believe. My idea of philosophy is that if it is not relevant to human problems, if it does not tell us how we can go about eradicating some of the misery in this world, then it is not worth the name of philosophy. I think that Socrates made a very profound statement when he asserted that the raison d'être of philosophy is to teach us proper living. In this day and age "proper living" means liberation from the urgent problems of poverty, economic necessity and indoctrination, mental oppression.

Now—let me continue with the course. At our last meeting, I attempted to use the narrative of Frederick Douglass as the occasion for variations on the salient philosophical themes that we encounter in the existence of the slave. The transformation of the idea of freedom into the struggle for liberation via the concept of resistance, this sequence of interdependent themes—freedom, liberation, resistance—provides the groundwork for the course. Within this structure, we discussed last time the extent to which freedom is possible within the limits of slavery. We determined that the very existence of the slave is a contradiction: he is a man who is not a man—that is, a man who does not possess the essential attribute of humanity: freedom. White, slaveholding society defines him as an object, as an animal, as property. The alienation that is thereby produced as the reality of the slave's existence must surface—it must become conscious, if he is to forge a path toward liberation. He must recognize at first the contradictory nature of his existence, and out of the recognition, rejection emerges. We saw that recognition of alienation becomes a prerequisite of and entails rejection, resistance. Religion can play both a positive and a negative role in that road toward self-knowledge. It can thwart liberation—and this is the express purpose for converting the slave—or it can provide powerful assistance, as was the case in Frederick Douglass's first experience of religion.

I'd like to begin today by continuing that discussion of religion. Now, we will discover that Frederick Douglass's interest in and enthusiasm about religion wanes when he apprehends the hypocrisy that accompanied it in the thoughts and actions of the slaveholder. It is important to recognize

that the transition from spiritual elevation to disillusionment is ushered in by an actual physical change in the conditions of Frederick Douglass, slave. During the time he developed fervent inclinations toward Christianity as a result of his learning to read, he lived in relatively comfortable circumstances—that is, if anything can be termed comfortable under slavery. His disenchantment occurs when he is forced to live under conditions of actual starvation—when he is given to Captain Thomas Auld.

A critical experience occurs when he observes his brutal and sadistic slave master's conversion to Christianity: "I indulged a faint hope that his conversion would lead him to emancipate his slaves, and that, if he did not do this, it would, at any rate, make him more kind and humane. I was disappointed in both these respects. It neither made him to be humane to his slaves, nor to emancipate them. If it had any effect on his character, it made him more cruel and hateful in all his ways; for I believe him to have been a much worse man after his conversion than before."[13]

These philosophical inferences from what Douglass took to be the essence of Christianity—the demonstration of Christian thoughts by Christian deeds—are refuted by the master's subsequent conduct. For the oppressed, for the slave, religion serves a quite positive purpose: it is a much needed medicine that helps to allay suffering, and at the same time it is an inverted consciousness of the world, projection of real needs and desires into supernatural domain. The slaveholder's experience of religion as it is exemplified in the behavior of Captain Auld has an entirely different texture. Religion, for him, is pure ideology that is totally contradictory to his real, day-to-day behavior. The slaveholder must constantly work to maintain that contradiction; his very existence is based on the rigid separation of his real life from his spiritual life. For if he takes the precepts of Christianity seriously, if he applies them to his daily life, then he would negate his own existence as an oppressor of humanity. Douglass explains: "Prior to his conversion, [Auld] relied upon his own depravity to shield and sustain him in his savage barbarity; but after his conversion, he found religious sanction and support for his slaveholding cruelty."[14]

At least on an unconscious level, there must be some awareness of these contradictions in the mind of the slaveholder. This is indicated by an actual sharpening of the contradictions by Auld himself. The more intense his religious involvement becomes, the more intense becomes his cruelty toward his slaves. An unrelatedness between his religious life and his real

life becomes a predictable discontinuity. His increased practice of religion seems to be both an excuse and an expiation before the fact of his increased perpetration of misery among his slaves. Long and loud prayers and hymns justify long and hard flogging, justify outright starvation of the slaves.

What can we infer from this analysis of the slaveholder's relation to religion? As I stated in the last lecture, Western society and particularly the era of the rule of the bourgeoisie have been characterized by the gap between theory and practice, particularly between freedom as it is developed conceptually and the lack of freedom in the real world.

The fact that somewhere in one of the foundational documents of this country there is the statement that all men are created equal, and the fact that social and political inequality have never been eradicated cannot be regarded as unrelated to the relative nonchalance with which Master Auld discusses the gap between his religious ideas and his day-to-day precepts. The slaveholder's own words reveal to us the brutality that underlies not only his particular situation but that of society in general. We sometimes have to resort to the most extreme examples in order to uncover veiled meanings of the more subtle example.

Frederick Douglass's recognition of the contradictions between religious ideas and the behavior of his master brings him to a critical disposition toward the relevance of religion itself: "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. Were I to be again reduced to the chains of slavery, next to that enslavement, I should regard being the slave of a religious master the greatest calamity that could befall me."[15]

Last time we pointed to Marx's interpretation of the role that religion plays in the society. I would like to point to some further observations he makes concerning religion in the *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's* Philosophy of Right. I think that Marx's analysis of religion helps us to understand the state of Frederick Douglass when he begins to turn away from religion. I quote a passage from that work: "*Religious* suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a *protest* against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.

The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of men, is a demand for their *real* happiness. The call to abandon their illusions about their condition is a *call to abandon a condition which requires illusions*."

Frederick Douglass existentially experiences what Marx theoretically formulates. He sees through the veil of illusion in observing the rather schizophrenic behavior of his master relative to his religion and his daily life. It is not insignificant that this enlightenment emerges, as I have indicated before, at a time when his physical suffering becomes practically unbearable. We can infer that in seeing through the hypocrisy of his master, he attains a certain self-consciousness, self-knowledge. The master becomes a mirror of his own past escape. Situated in relative comfort, he had the luxury to think in metaphysical categories. Now he must come face to face with the absolute necessity to eradicate, to destroy his suffering. "Religion," Marx says, "is only the illusory sun about which man revolves so long as he does not revolve about himself."

Frederick Douglass gathers the courage to resist the slave breaker to whom he is sent for domestication, for taming—the slave breaker who is infinitely more brutal than any of his previous masters. He finds this courage when he is able to free himself of his religion. "I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ: I therefore hate the corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land. Indeed, I can see no reason, but the most deceitful one, for calling the religion of this land Christianity."[16]

So we find that the role of religion during the era of slavery is not homogenous: it is extremely complex. The function of religion continually reverts from one extreme to the other. No one formula can suffice. If we saw at the last meeting that religion can play a positive role, now we are uncovering the detrimental aspects, how it suppressed the slave in the person of the slaveholder, how it provided internal control, and thus how it must often be transcended in order for real change to take place. Religious leaders of slave revolts found inspiration in religion; they found courage in it. Frederick Douglass, at this point in his life, as well as countless other people saw the necessity to cancel out illusions in order to transform the real world, in order to arrive at a total commitment to resist oppression.

I concur with Marx that one must overcome religion in order to regain one's reason, that the sigh of the oppressed creature in order to become an effective protest against oppression, must be articulated and acted upon

in a political context. Yet I do not deny that to a certain extent the illusory nature of religion may well be transcended within the limits of religion—I gave Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, Gabriel Prosser as examples last time. By the way, someone brought to my attention that I did not mention any women among these examples. I was not on my toes. The accomplishments of Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and many others can never be overestimated.

I would like to leave the discussion of religion now—perhaps we will take it up again at a further point in the life of Frederick Douglass. I would like to continue to develop the notion of alienation and how the slave experiences the world and history. We said that the extreme formulation of the slave's alienation is his existence as property, as capital, as money. There is a relatively long quotation from Douglass's later work, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass,* that I would like to take the time to read because I feel it epitomizes by its very concreteness the notion of alienation.

> I am, thought I, but the sport of a power which makes no account either of my welfare or of my happiness. By a law which I can comprehend, but cannot evade or resist, I am ruthlessly snatched away from the hearth of a fond grandmother and hurried away to the home of a mysterious old master; again I am removed from there to a master in Baltimore; thence am I snatched away to the Eastern Shore to be valued with the beasts of the field, and with them divided and set apart for a possessor; then I am sent back to Baltimore, and by the time I have formed new attachments and have begun to hope that no more rude shocks shall touch me, a difference arises between brothers, and I am again broken up and sent to St. Michaels; and now from the latter place I am footing my way to the home of another master, where, I am given to understand, like a wild young working animal I am to be broken to the yoke of a bitter and lifelong bondage.

For the slave, the world appears as a hostile network of circumstances that continually are to his disadvantage. History is experienced as a cluster of chance events, accidental occurrences that, though far beyond his control, act in a way that is usually detrimental to his personal life. A trivial quarrel between brothers is enough to wreak and mutilate the slave's life—Frederick Douglass is brought back to the plantation of his real owner, one who is

infinitely more sadistic than the brother with whom he had been living, as a result of such a banal disagreement.

Yesterday one of the white students in the class came to my office and wanted to know how I was going to conduct the course. He asked whether or not I was going to limit the course to the philosophical experiences of the slave, of the Black man in society, or whether I was going to talk about *people.* Now, aside from the fact that slaves and Black people are people, there is something in my mind that I think you should be aware of—and it is not unrelated to what I was just saying about alienation. Oppressed people are forced to come to grips with immediate problems every day, problems that have a philosophical status and are relevant to all people. One such problem is that of alienation. It is my opinion that most people living in Western society today are alienated, alienated from themselves, from society. To provide an objective demonstration of this would require some discussion, and if you like, we can take this up in one of the discussion periods. The point is that the slave, the Black man, the Chicano, and oppressed whites are much more aware of alienation, perhaps not as a philosophical concept, but as a fact of their daily existence. The slave, for example, experiences that alienation as the continual hostility of all his daily surroundings. During the era of slavery, I suppose it was common opinion that the slave was in bondage and the white man was free, the Black man was non- or subhuman and the white man was the apex of humanity. Again, let us take a look at the extreme example of the white man in slaveholding society—the slave breaker. There is something that I think we might call the concept of the slave breaker, and we can unfold this concept according to the concrete behavior of Covey, the Negro breaker under whose authority Frederick Douglass lives for a year.

Now, what do we mean by the concept of the slave breaker? His existence is the sine qua non of slavery, an indispensable fact for the perpetuation of slavery. At the same time, the slave breaker finds himself almost on the margin of slavery, the last barrier between physical enslavement and physical liberation. He is the one designated to tame impudent slaves, slaves who refuse to accept for themselves the definition that society has imposed upon them. He must break, destroy the human being in the slave before it succeeds in upsetting the whole balance present in the system of slavery. His instrument is violence. He does violence to the body in order to break the will. Not only continual whipping but work, labor not fit for a beast of burden, were the manifestations of that violence.

> Just as I got into the woods, he came up and told me to stop my cart, and that he would teach me how to trifle away my time, and break gates. He then went to a large gum-tree, and with his axe cut three large switches, and, after trimming them up neatly with his pocket-knife, he ordered me to take off my clothes. I made him no answer, but stood with my clothes on. He repeated his order. I still made him no answer, nor did I move to strip myself. Upon this he rushed at me with the fierceness of a tiger, tore off my clothes, and lashed me till he had worn out his switches, cutting me so savagely as to leave the marks visible for a long time after. This whipping was the first of a number just like it, and for similar offences. I lived with Mr. Covey one year. During that first six months, of that year, scarce a week passed without his whipping me. I was seldom free from a sore back. My awkwardness was almost always his excuse for whipping me. We were worked fully up to the point of endurance. Long before day we were up, our horses fed, and by the first approach of day we were off to the field with our hoes and ploughing teams. Mr. Covey gave us enough to eat, but scarce time to eat it. We were often less than five minutes taking our meals. We were often in the field from the first approach of day till its last lingering ray had left us; and at saving-fodder time, midnight often caught us in the field binding blades.[17]

One of the lessons we can learn from the dialectical method is that in the process of functioning in the world, man undergoes changes himself that are consonant with his actions. That is, man cannot perform a task in the world without himself being affected by that performance. Now, what does this mean for Covey, the Negro breaker? His task is to mutilate the humanity of the slave. The question we must ask ourselves is whether he can perform that task without mutilating his own humanity. We ought to be able to infer, from the answer to this question, what happened to the humanity of the white man in general during the era of slavery.

We don't have to engage in any unnecessary philosophizing in order to answer that question. Frederick Douglass says it outright; he calls the slave breaker by his name.

> There was no deceiving him. His work went on in his absence almost as well as in his presence; and he had the faculty of making us feel that

> he was ever present with us. This he did by surprising us. He seldom approached the spot where we were at work openly, if he could do it secretly. He always aimed at taking us by surprise. Such was his cunning, that we used to call him, among ourselves, "the snake." When we were at work in the cornfield, he would sometimes crawl on his hands and knees to avoid detection, and all at once he would rise nearly in our midst, and scream out. . . . His comings were like a thief in the night. He appeared to us as being ever at hand. He was under every tree, behind every stump, in every bush, and at every window, on the plantation.[18]

Who is the nonhuman here? Who lowers himself to the depths? Aside from the biblical imagery of the serpent as the representative of evil, the image of the snake, his very posture, crawling around on the ground, is symbolic and revealing. In order to induce the slaves to labor, the slave breaker lies; he is forced to lie, he is inhuman and is forced to be inhuman. He takes on the characteristics of the very task he sees himself as performing. I would go so far as to say that he is even more profoundly affected than the slave, for the slave can see what is occurring—he is aware of the fact that there is an external power dedicated to the suppression of the slave's basic human existence. He sees it, feels it, hears it in every act of the slave breaker.

The slave breaker on the other hand is unaware of the change he himself is undergoing as a result of his sadistic actions: "Mr. Covey's *forte* consisted in his power to deceive. His life was devoted to planning and perpetrating the grossest deceptions. Everything he possessed in the shape of learning or religion, he made conform to his disposition to deceive. He seemed to think himself equal to deceive the Almighty."[19]

This tendency toward unconscious self-annihilation was not confined to the slave breaker, to those who stood at the boundaries of slavery in order to maintain those boundaries. These characteristics were direct results of the system itself and could be attributed to slaveholders in general. As Douglass would later write, "Mean and contemptible as all this is, it is in keeping with the character which the life of a slaveholder was calculated to produce."[20]

And in referring to the naturalness of Mr. Covey's trickery and inclination to lie, Frederick Douglass later wrote, "It was an important system essential to the relation of master and slave."[21]

Let's continue to discuss this relation of master and slave and its effects on the master. As we were saying, the master is thought to be free, independent; the slave is thought to be unfree, dependent. The freedom and independence of the master, if we look at it philosophically, is a myth. It is one of those myths that, I was saying at the last session, we have to uncover in order to reach the real substance behind it. How could the master have been independent when it is the very institution of slavery that provided his wealth, that provided his means of sustenance? The master was dependent on the slave, dependent for his life on the slave.

In the *Phenomenology of Mind,* Hegel discusses the dialectical relationship between the slave and the master. He states, among other things, that the master, in reaching a consciousness of his own condition, must become aware that his very independence is based on his dependence on the slave. This might sound a bit contradictory, but then dialectics is based on discovering the contradictions in phenomena that can alone account for their existence. Reality is permeated through and through with contradictions. Without those contradictions, there would be no movement, no process, no activity. I don't want to go off on a theoretical tangent about dialectics, so let us get back to the slave and the master and see the dialectical relationship as it is actually practiced in reality. The independence of the master, we were saying, is based on his dependence on the slave. If the slave were not there to till the land, to build his estates, to serve him his meals, the master would not be free from the necessities of life. If he had to do all the things that the slave does for him, he would be just as much in a state of bondage as the slave. Only, the slave is the buffer zone, and in this sense the slave is somewhat of a master—it is the slave who possesses the power over the life of the master: if he does not work, when he ceases to follow orders, the master's means of sustaining himself has disappeared.

So, at this point we can make the following statement—and I hope it is clear. The master is always on the verge of becoming the slave, and the slave possesses the real, concrete power to make him always on the verge of becoming the master.

I don't want this to sound like a whole lot of philosophical word games. Sometimes, when one reads Hegel, one has the impression that this is what he is doing—playing with our minds: things are themselves, but they are constantly becoming other than themselves, they are constantly becoming their own contradictions.

I think I can demonstrate the truth of the proposition that the master is always on the verge of becoming the slave and the slave is always on the verge of becoming the master. Let's look at what I think is the most crucial passage in the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass.* It can be found in chapter 10. Frederick Douglass has just had the harrowing experience of being driven to work until the point when he physically collapses. At this point he has been broken—mentally his will is gone. Covey, refusing to accept his illness as a valid excuse for failure to continue, beats him while he is lying on the ground unable to move. Frederick Douglass decides to return to his master but, finding no form of compassion in the reaction of his master, returns. Fortunately, it is on a Sunday when he finally reaches the slave breaker's house, and because of his devoutness Mr. Covey does not beat him—or, as Sandy, a slave who has helped Frederick Douglass would like us to believe, Mr. Covey does not beat him as a result of the magical powers of a root that he has given to him. At any rate, the slave breaker does not enter into the person of Mr. Covey until after the Sabbath is over. Instinctively, unconsciously, Frederick Douglass fights back when the slave breaker attempts to beat him: "Mr. Covey seemed now to think he had me, and could do what he pleased; but at this moment—from whence came the spirit I don't know—I resolved to fight; and, suiting my action to the resolution, I seized Covey hard by the throat; and as I did so, I rose."[22]

What is the reaction of Mr. Covey? One would think that because, after all, he is the master, he is white, he would have no problems conquering a sixteen-year-old boy. The slave breaker, who has the reputation of being able to tame the wild-animal slaves from all around, trembles and calls for help: "Covey at length let me go, puffing and blowing at a great rate, saying that if I had not resisted, he would not have whipped me half so much. The truth was, that he had not whipped me at all."[23] He unsuccessfully calls upon a slave who is not under his authority for aid. He eventually attempts to command his own slave, a woman, to conquer Frederick. She refuses, and he is left helpless.

We have to ask ourselves what is happening here. Covey is certainly physically strong enough to overpower Frederick. Why is he unable to cope with that unexpected resistance? That act of open resistance challenges his very identity. He is no longer the recognized master; the slave no longer recognizes himself as slave. The roles have been reversed. And think about this as a concrete example of that proposition I put forth earlier—that the master is always on the verge of becoming the slave, and the slave is always

on the verge of becoming the master. Here, it has happened. Covey implicitly recognizes the fact that he is dependent on the slave not only in a material sense, not only for the production of wealth, but also for the affirmation of his own identity. The fact that he appeals to all the slaves around him to help him overpower Frederick indicates that he is dependent on that affirmation of his authority—they all reject it, and he is left in a vacuum—alienated from himself. This has the effect of sapping whatever physical strength he may have needed in order to win the battle.

After having obviously lost the battle, with no substantial basis for his own identity, his own role, he nonetheless attempts to reassert his authority: "Covey at length let me go, puffing and blowing at a great rate, saying that if I had not resisted, he would not have whipped me half so much. The truth was, that he had not whipped me at all. I considered him as getting entirely the worst end of the bargain; for he had drawn no blood from me, but I had from him."[24]

Covey never again attempted to whip him. Frederick Douglass describes this incident as the turning point in his life as a slave.

Notes

Previously published as Angela Y. Davis, "Lectures on Liberation" from *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself: A New Critical Edition* edited by Angela Y. Davis.

1. The original lecture quoted from *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*: "O God, save me! God, deliver me! Let me be free! Is there any God? Why am I a slave?" [*Volume editor's note:* The notes given in this chapter were inserted by the publisher, City Lights, in Davis's critical edition of *Narrative,* and they are silently amended here for clarity.]

2. The original lecture quoted from *Life and Times:* "That slave who had the courage to stand up for himself against the overseer, although he might have many hard stripes at first, became while legally a slave virtually a free man. 'You can shoot me,' said a slave to Rigby Hopkins, 'but you can't whip me,' and the result was he was neither whipped nor shot."

3. From *Life and Times.*

4. The original lecture quoted from *Life and Times:* "Personality swallowed up in the sordid idea of property! Manhood lost in chattelhood! . . . Our destiny was

to be fixed for life, and we had no more voice in the decision of the question than the oxen and cows that stood chewing at the haymow."

5. The original lecture quoted from *Life and Times:* "He had no choice, no goal, but was pegged down to one single spot, and must take root there or nowhere."

6. The original lecture quoted from *Life and Times:* "His going out into the world was like a living man going out of sight and hearing of wife, children, and friends of kindred tie."

7. The original lecture quoted from *Life and Times:* "'If you give a nigger an inch he will take an ell. Learning will spoil the best nigger in the world. If he learns to read the Bible it will forever unfit him to be a slave. He should know nothing but the will of his master, and learn to obey it.'"

8. The original lecture quoted from *Life and Times:* "'Very well,' thought I. 'Knowledge unfits a child to be a slave.' I instinctively assented to the proposition, and from that moment I understood the direct pathway from slavery to freedom."

9. The original lecture quoted from *Life and Times:* "When I was about thirteen years old, and had succeeded in learning to read, every increase of knowledge, especially anything respecting the free states, was an additional weight to the most intolerable burden of my thought—'I am a slave for life.' To my bondage I could see no end. It was a terrible reality, and I shall never be able to tell how sadly that thought chafed my young spirit."

10. The original lecture quoted from *Life and Times:* "Liberty, as the inestimable birthright of every man, converted every object into an asserter of this right. I heard it in every sound, and saw it in every object. It was ever present to torment me with a sense of my wretchedness, the more horrible and desolate was my condition. I saw nothing without seeing it, and I heard nothing without hearing it. I do not exaggerate when I say that it looked at me in every star, smiled in every calm, breathed in every wind and moved in every storm."

11. The original lecture quoted from *Life and Times:* "She aimed to keep me ignorant, and I resolved to know, although knowledge only increased my misery."

12. Quoted from *Life and Times.*

13. The original lecture quoted from *Life and Times:* "If he has got religion, thought I, he will emancipate the slaves. . . . Appealing to my own religious experience, and judging my master by what was true in my own case, I could not regard him as soundly converted, unless some such good results followed his profession of religion."

14. The original lecture quoted from *Life and Times:* "I will teach you, young man, that though I have parted with my sins, I have not parted with my sense. I shall hold my slaves and go to heaven, too."

15. The original lecture quoted from *Life and Times:* "Captain Auld could pray, I would fain pray; but doubts arising, partly from the sham religion which

everywhere prevailed, there was awakened in my mind a distrust of all religion and the conviction that prayers were unavailing and delusive."

16. [*Volume editor's note:* Davis cites this passage in the appendix to the *Narrative*.]

17. The original lecture quoted from *Life and Times:* "I was whipped, either with sticks or cowskins, every week. Aching bones and a sore back were my constant companions. Frequently as the lash was used, Mr. Covey thought less of it as a means of breaking down my spirit than that of hard and continued labor. He worked me steadily up to the point of my powers of endurance. From the dawn of day in the morning till the darkness was complete in the evening, I was kept hard at work in the fields or the woods."

18. The original lecture quoted from *Life and Times:* "His plan was never to approach in an open, manly and direct manner the spot where his hands were at work. No thief was ever more artful in his devices than this man Covey. He would creep and crawl in ditches and gullies, hide behind stumps and bushes, and practice so much of the cunning of the serpent, that Bill Smith and I, between ourselves, never called him by any other name than 'the snake.'"

19. The original lecture quoted from the *Life and Times:* "With Mr. Covey, trickery was natural. Everything in the shape of learning or religion which he possessed was made to conform to the semi-lying propensity. He did not seem conscious that the practice had anything unmanly, base or contemptible about it."

20. From *Life and Times.*

21. From *Life and Times.*

22. The original lecture quoted from *Life and Times:* "I do not know; at any rate, I was resolved to fight, and what was better still, I actually was hard at it. The fighting madness had come upon me, and I found my strong fingers firmly attached to the throat of the tyrant, as heedless of consequences, at that very moment, as if we stood as equals before the law. The very color of the man was forgotten."

23. The original lecture quoted from *Life and Times:* "He was frightened, and stood puffing, and blowing, seemingly unable to command words or blows."

24. The original lecture quoted from *Life and Times:* "'Now, you scoundrel, go to your work; I would not have whipped you half so hard if you had not resisted.' . . . The fact was, he had not whipped me at all. He had not, in all the scuffle, drawn a single drop of blood from me. I had drawn blood."