

ENG 182 Final Paper

Hongtao Zhang

I Introduction

TODO

II School of Slavery

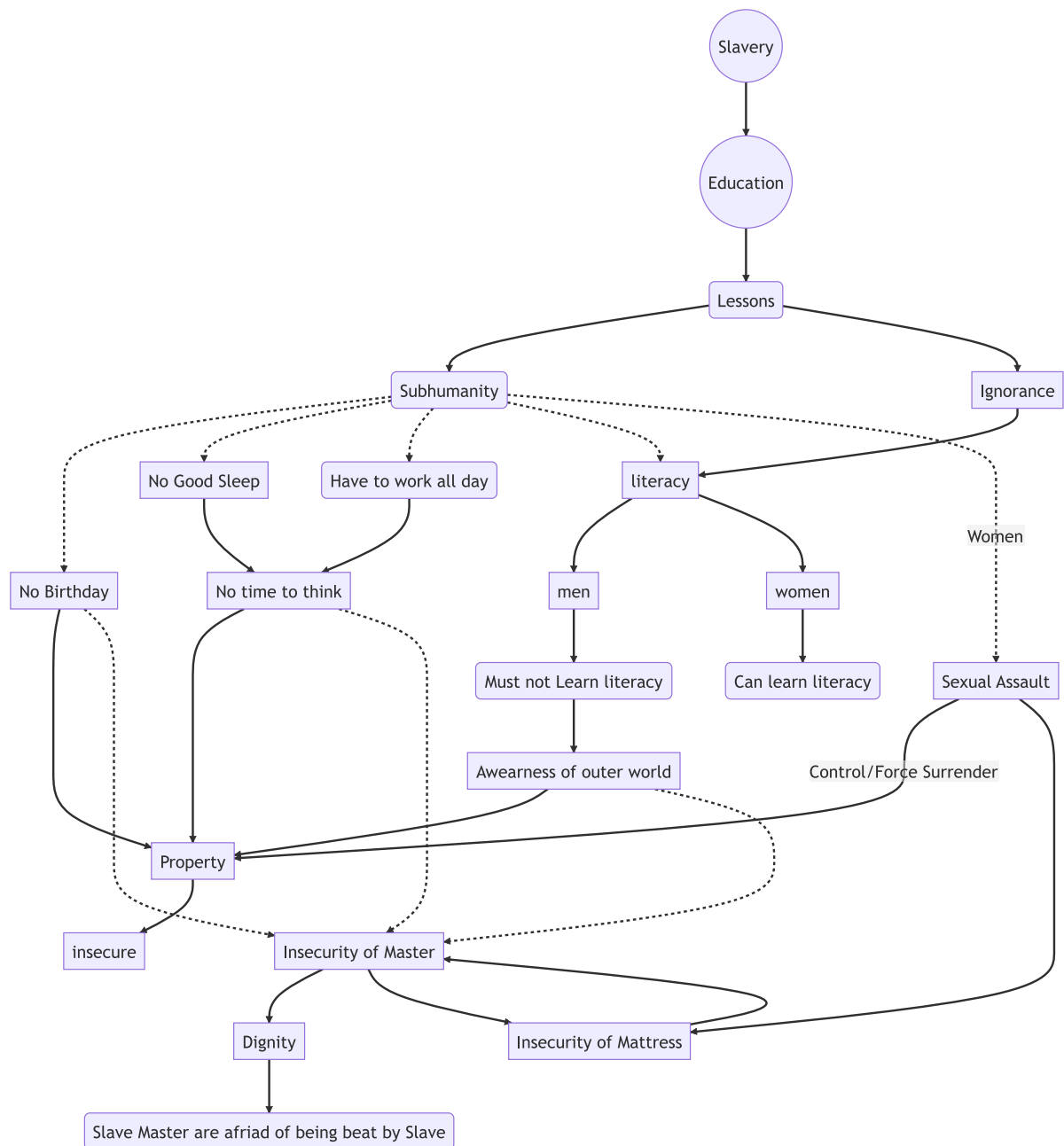


Figure 1: Schooling for Slavery

Slavery is not natural, which means that it requires a special curriculum of maintaining the current state of slavery. The curriculum is designed to make slaves believe that they are born to be slaves, and they should not fight back. This curriculum mainly include two parts: one to convince them as subhuman, and the other to promote their ignorance.

II.i Subhumanity

The first part of the curriculum is to convince slaves that they are born as slaves. In the autobiography by Frederick Douglass, slaves are not allowed to know his birthday (Matlack 1979, p. 1). Any inquiry about birthday will result in serious punishment. By depriving the privilege of knowing birthday, slaves are deprived of the ability of knowing their growth as a human. This treatment is effective in making them feeling that they are as animal in the house, as animals are also not “allowed” to know their birthday. Further, whenever slaves are born, they must be separated from their mother for a couple of years. Therefore, slaves are being deprived of the privilege of having a family. For example, Douglass are having very little memory of his mother (Matlack 1979, p. 2). Even though Douglass’s mom tried her best to get in touch with Douglass, spending the whole night walking miles to see him, Douglass is not able to have a beloved impression from his mom. Further, when his mother are sick and finally die, Douglass is not allowed to present, or even know the information (Matlack 1979, p. 3).

This lesson has a special variant for female slaves. The ability to perform sexual assault has provided the slaveholder an effective weapon to convince female slaves that they are their property. As an example, Dr. Flint has performed various sexual abuse on the young

Linda, polluting her young mind with the unclean image, where “only a vile monster can think of” (Jacobs 2022, p. 39). Dr. Flint consistently asserting that Linda is his property, and she is forced to live under the same roof as Dr. Flint, and also bear with his suffocative surveillance. All this creates a deep impression on Linda that she is a property of Dr. Flint.

II.ii Ignorance

Simply teaching slaves that they are subhuman is not enough. It is also important to teach them that this is the life that they can achieve, and they already achieve a very good life. This is the second part of the curriculum, which is to promote ignorance of the slaves.

The one and most important thing about teaching slaves about ignorance is to deprive their potential of learning literacy. As a old saying, the more we learn, the more we find that we don't know. By depriving the potential of learning literacy, slaves will not be able to learn the outer world, which means they will be satisfied by their current environment. In other words, they are being ignorant about their living environment.

In particular, one of the most implicit but effective method of teaching slaves ignorance is to bind their master's greatness to their dignity. This is greatly demonstrated in the *Great Horse Farm*. Slaves who have a chance to go to work on the *Great House Farm*, even though with minimal extra privilege, will sing songs to celebrate that they are going to work for the *Great House Farm* (Matlack 1979, p. 10). The *Great House Farm* are associated with greatness in slaves' mind. Furthermore, the greatness of masters are associate with the greatness of slaves. For example, “Colonel Lloyd's slaves contending that he was the richest, and Mr. Jepson's slaves that he was the smartest” (Matlack 1979, p. 16-17). According to Douglass, slaves “seemed to think that the greatness of their masters was transferable to

themselves” (Matlack 1979, p. 17). This is very effective in controlling slaves, as they will both be ignorant and would like to work harder to make their master greater. The claim will be revisited in Section IV.

II.iii Insecurity of Slaveholders

It is also worth noting this schooling also emphasizes the insecurity of slaveholders. Slaves are not natural for human, which is why it requires special schooling. However, the education of slaves also triggers fear and anxiety among slaveholders. They realized that educated slaves might question their authority, rebel against their oppressors, and demand their freedom. Slaveholders believed that slavery was a natural and necessary institution, and they went to great lengths to justify their actions and maintain their power. The idea that slaves could be educated and become more than just property challenged this belief and threatened their way of life.

For example, Mr. Auld said “A n*****r should know nothing but to obey his master—to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best n*****r in the world” (Matlack 1979, p. 29). If slaves are naturally slaves, then why would education be such a threat? The answer is that slaves were not naturally inferior or subservient, but were made to believe so through a system of oppression and dehumanization.

While the system of slavery places an immense burden on the enslaved, it also creates significant challenges for the slaveholder. In the upcoming Section III.ii, several examples will be explored that demonstrate how slaves were able to use the insecurity of their masters to fight back against their oppression.

III Revolt

III.i War against Ignorance

The first thing slaves have to do in order to revolt is to resolve their ignorance. Slaves can never be free without understanding what freedom means. They will be satisfied with their current life, and will not have the motivation to fight back. For example, Douglass has discussed the example that slaves are celebrating that they are able to work in the Great House Farm, even though it does not provide much privilege. This is because they are ignorant about the outside world, but mainly because they have no way to understanding the outside world. Therefore, the first thing slaves have to do is to resolves their ignorance, and the most effective way to do this is by learning literacy.

There are several examples of how slaves are trying to learn literacy, even though they are not allowed to do so. After Mrs. Auld teaches Douglass the alphabet, Mr. Auld forbids her from teaching him any further. However, Douglass is not giving up. He is trying to learn literacy by himself. He learn reading and writing by talking to poor white children (Matlack 1979, p. 34). After he learned literacy, he is also trying to teach other slaves to learn literacy. He is also trying to organize a meeting for slaves to learn literacy (Matlack 1979, p. 70). This is a very important step for slaves to revolt, as they are able to understand the outside world, and also understand that they are not born as slaves. Linda also learn literacy herself, which resolves her ignorance about the outside world.

Many enslaved individuals sought education as a means of resisting oppression, despite being forbidden to learn. Frederick Douglass is a notable example of this, as he was taught the alphabet by Mrs. Auld but was forbidden by Mr. Auld from continuing his education. However, Douglass persevered and taught himself to read and write by speaking with poor

white children (Matlack 1979, p. 34). He even taught other slaves and organized meetings to help them learn (Matlack 1979, p. 70). Literacy was incredibly important for enslaved people, as it allowed them to comprehend the world outside of slavery and to recognize their inherent worth. Linda's pursuit of literacy also allowed her to resist her enslavement and communicate with others. The transformative power of education for the oppressed cannot be overstated.

III.ii Fight by loophole

Another strategy that is very effective for slaves to fight back is by exploiting the insecurity of slaveholders. Slaveholders are very insecure about their slaves, as they are afraid that slaves will rebel against them. For example, after being treated cruelly by Mr. Covey, Douglass decides to fight back. This really triggers the insecurity of Mr. Covey, as he is afraid of being viewed as a weak overseer. "Mr. Covey enjoyed the most unbounded reputation for being a first-rate overseer and negrobearer (Matlack 1979, p. 63)." Mr. Covey is really afraid of losing his reputation, and therefore he is not able to reveal that Douglass is fighting back, as it will reveal his weakness.

Similarly, Linda decides to have children with Mr. Sand, and want to marry Mr. Sand to reject Dr. Flint sexual abuse and advance. This is strategic as a fight toward the control of Dr. Flint, even though Linda is not really falling in love with Mr. Sand but only think he is a good man. Linda is really exploiting the insecurity of Dr. Flint, as he is afraid of losing his control over Linda.

III.iii Family and Community

Even though most slaves are deprived with family. For example Douglass are not allowed to contact his mother when he was very young, and can only have contact with his mother. However, this deprivation of family formulate the slave community to forfeit a new kinship with their community. Further, the cruel life gives slaves a more solid heart. The most noticeable example is how Linda is able to get help from her friends and neighbors. Even though Linda is separated from her mother very early, her grandma has provided her enormous help. Further, her friends provides various help her when she wants to marry the men she loves, and eventually help her escape from Dr. Flint. The support and assistance provided by friends and family was crucial in helping slaves to resist their oppressors and assert their own agency. Their world is full of darkness but their friends really reveal them a light of the beauty of world.

IV Implication

A

- School (Chinese Education)
 - Control through ignorance and limited access to education:
 - Slavery history: Enslavers deliberately kept enslaved people in a state of ignorance by denying them access to education and limiting their exposure to the world beyond their plantation.

- Chinese education: While education is highly valued in Chinese culture, the traditional system has been characterized by strict adherence to authority and a focus on rote memorization, which can limit critical thinking and creativity.
- Collective sense of honor
- IV. The balance between conformity and individualism:
 - Slavery history: The institution of slavery aimed to strip enslaved people of their individuality and reduce them to mere property, compelling them to conform to the demands of their enslavers.
 - Chinese education: While Chinese culture often prioritizes collectivism and social harmony, it can sometimes lead to conformity and suppression of individual expression, particularly in the context of education.
- Obedience
- Prison
- Davis's idea about prison industrial complex (Davis 2011)

Bibliography

Davis, Angela Y. *Are Prisons Obsolete?*. Seven stories press, 2011.

Jacobs, Harriet Ann. "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl."

Matlack, James. "The Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass." *Phylon* (1960-), vol. 40, no. 1.