The Narrative of Frederick Douglass

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS

Douglass was born a slave in Maryland. His father was an unknown white man who may have been his master. Douglass endured decades in slavery, working both as a field hand in the countryside and an apprentice in Baltimore. While enslaved in Baltimore, Douglass managed to teach himself to read and write—a miraculous feat, especially given that his endeavors were actively opposed by his master and mistress, Hugh and Sophia Auld. Douglass successfully escaped and made his way to the free state of Massachusetts. There, he began to follow William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, which inspired him to become deeply involved with the anti-slavery cause. Douglass's intelligence and articulateness made him an obvious spokesman for the abolition movement. Later in his life, Douglass served as an adviser to President Lincoln during the Civil War, and, after the war's conclusion, carried out diplomatic roles in the United States government.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The United States was deeply divided by the slavery issue at the time that the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* was published. While abolitionists like Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, and Wendell Phillips demanded the eradication of slavery, many worked hard to preserve the institution, and official U.S. policy merely postponed the inevitable conflict. This caused tensions to seethe even further—one pro-slavery American senator literally beat an abolitionist senator on the senate floor. Fans were only flamed further by the U.S. Supreme Court's controversial decision in the 1857 *Dred Scott* case, which invalidated the Missouri Compromise of 1820's efforts to balance slave-owning and free states. The ideological issues Douglass tackles in his autobiography came to a head at the start of the American Civil War in 1861, sixteen years after the book's publication.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Douglass's autobiography is a centerpiece of the abolitionist literary canon. Other prominent abolitionist activists include William Lloyd Garrison, who published a newspaper called *The Liberator*; John Greenleaf Whittier, a poet who dedicated himself to the abolitionist movement; Theodore Dwight Weld, a minister whose *American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* became a definitive antislavery work; and Harriet Beecher Stowe, who wrote the seminal antislavery book *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*
- **When Written:** 1845
- **Where Written:** Massachusetts
- **When Published:** 1845
- **Literary Period:** Abolitionist
- **Genre:** Autobiography
- **Setting:** Maryland and the American Northeast
- **Climax:** [Not exactly applicable] Douglass's escape from slavery
- **Antagonist:** Slaveholders and religious hypocrites
- **Point of View:** First person

EXTRA CREDIT

Prove It! Douglass's autobiography was written in part as a response to critics who believed that Douglass was far too articulate to have actually been a slave.

Renaissance Man: After his fame and success as an abolitionist leader, Douglass went on to serve several high-ranking positions in the U.S. government, including head of the Freedman's Savings Bank, U.S. Marshall and Registrar of Deeds for the District of Columbia, and diplomatic envoy to Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

PLOT SUMMARY

In approximately 1817, Frederick Douglass is born into slavery in Tuckahoe, Maryland. His mother is a slave named Harriet Bailey, and his father is an unknown white man who may be his master. Douglass encounters slavery's brutality at an early age when he witnesses his first master, Captain Anthony, give a brutal whipping to Douglass's Aunt Hester. Captain Anthony is employed by Colonel Edward Lloyd, and Anthony lives in a house on Lloyd's sprawling property with his sons, Andrew and Richard; his daughter, Lucretia; and Lucretia's husband, Captain Thomas Auld. Lloyd himself lives in the middle of his plantation on a property called the Great House Farm, which is so majestic that some slaves feel honored to work there.

Lloyd is an unkind master, and, like other slaveholders, he will discipline the slaves if they speak honestly about the discomfort of their circumstances. One of Lloyd's overseers, Mr. Austin Gore, is a particularly cruel disciplinarian. His killing of a slave named Demby, which goes unpunished, illustrates that killing or harming a black person is not treated as a crime.

To Douglass's delight, he is moved to Baltimore at age seven or eight to work for Mr. Hugh Auld, brother of Captain Thomas Auld. Hugh's wife, Sophia Auld, is at first a kind and loving mistress who begins teaching Douglass to read. However, Hugh emphatically puts a stop to Douglass's education. Hugh's intervention only makes Douglass more determined to learn how to read, viewing education as a path to freedom. Sophia is warped by the power that owning slaves gives her. She becomes mean-spirited and works to thwart Douglass's attempts to become literate. Douglass lives with the Aulds for seven years, and in this time he teaches himself to read. Douglass reads books that present arguments against slavery, and he begins to lose hope as he realizes the extent of his powerlessness. He resolves to attempt an escape.

Captain Anthony dies, and Douglass is sent back to Lloyd's plantation to be humiliatingly evaluated alongside Anthony's livestock. Douglass is inherited by Lucretia Auld and sent back to Baltimore, and Douglass is sent to live with Thomas and his new wife in the town of St. Michael's, Maryland in 1832. Thomas is a cruel master and a religious hypocrite. He and Douglass do not get along, and Douglass is sent to work for Edward Covey, a farmer who has a reputation for breaking the spirits of difficult slaves.

Douglass spends six hellish months working for the malevolent Mr. Covey. Douglass's spirits are broken by the work, and he goes to Thomas Auld to protest his treatment, but is sent back to Covey's farm. Another slave, Sandy Jenkins, gives Douglass a mystical root to protect himself. Douglass stands up to Covey and stops receiving whippings. After a year with Covey, Douglass is sent to live with William Freeland. Douglass and four other slaves attempt to escape from Freeland's, but their plan is betrayed and Douglass ends up in jail. After some time in prison, Douglass is sent back to Baltimore to work again for Hugh Auld.

In Baltimore, Douglass works for a shipbuilder, and is assaulted on his jobsite. Hugh apprentices him to another shipbuilder, and Douglass learns how to caulk. Douglass's caulking skills allow him to earn good money for Hugh. Hugh temporarily allows Douglass to work for his own pay, but later revokes this permission. Douglass then decides to plan an escape.

Douglass escapes successfully. To protect those who helped him and enable future slaves' escapes from slavery, Douglass does not describe his escape in detail. Once free, Douglass ends up in New York, and is helped by Mr. David Ruggles. In New York, Douglass weds a free woman named Anna. The newlyweds then make their way to New Bedford, where Douglass is aided by a man named Nathan Johnson. Douglass is amazed by the prosperity the north has achieved without slaves. After some time in New Bedford, Douglass begins reading *The Liberator*, an abolitionist newspaper. This inspires Douglass to speak at an anti-slavery convention in 1841, which launches his career as an anti-slavery advocate.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Frederick Douglass –Douglass, the *Narrative*'s author and protagonist, was born a slave in Tuckahoe, Maryland, to a woman named Harriet Bailey. His father was an unknown white man who may have been his master. Douglass begins life belonging to Captain Anthony, who is a steward on Colonel Edward Lloyd's plantation. Later, Douglass is moved Baltimore to live with Hugh Auld and Sophia Auld, relatives of Anthony's son-in-law, Thomas Auld. Douglass believes that education is a path to self-emancipation, and for this reason, he teaches himself to read and write in Baltimore. Douglass then suffers as a slave to Thomas Auld, then Edward Covey and, after Covey, William Freeland. Under Freeland, he attempts his first escape, which fails. Throughout his enslavement, Douglass finds that the most religious masters are, hypocritically, often the cruelest to their slaves. Douglass spends his final months of slavery in Baltimore with Hugh, where he learns the trade of caulking ships. Douglass successfully escapes to New York, where he marries Anna Murray, and then makes his way to Massachusetts, where he becomes an antislavery advocate.

Hugh Auld – The brother of Thomas Auld. He lives in Baltimore with his wife, Sophia Auld. Douglass comes to work for Hugh when he is fairly young. Hugh prevents his wife from teaching Douglass to read and write because he understands that the institution of slavery perpetuates itself by keeping blacks uneducated, and this, in turn, impresses upon Douglass the importance of educating himself.

Edward Covey – A farmer renowned for his ability to "break" disobedient slaves. He cannot afford to own many slaves himself, so other masters will lease him their slaves in exchange for him "breaking" them. Covey uses deceit to ensure that slaves are fearful and hardworking. Thomas Auld sends Douglass to work for him for a year because Douglass is difficult to control. Douglass's first six months with Covey are miserable, but Douglass then stands up to Covey and is never whipped again.

Sandy Jenkins – A slave who works with Douglass. He briefly takes Douglass in after Douglass flees Covey's farm. Sandy also gives Douglass a special root, which he superstitiously believes will protect Douglass from being harmed by his master. Initially, Sandy also plans to escape William Freeland's farm with Douglass and several other slaves, but he backs out of the plan, which suggests that he may have been the one who betrayed Douglass to his master.

Captain Thomas Auld – – Thomas, the husband of Lucretia Auld, is a very cruel owner who puts on airs because he hasn't owned slaves from birth. Douglass lives with him after his first stint in Baltimore; by this time, Lucretia has died and Thomas has remarried to Rowena Hamilton. Thomas becomes deeply

religious while Douglass works for him, but this only makes him a crueler master.

Betsy Bailey – – Douglass's grandmother. She raised Douglass because his mother was sold away. She spent her entire life working for Captain Anthony and his family. Douglass is indignant when he hears that after Anthony's death, Betsy isn't emancipated, but is instead put out in a shed in the woods to live out her final days alone.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Sophia Auld – Hugh Auld's wife. She is initially kind and generous to Douglass. However, once her husband forces her to stop teaching Douglass to read and write, her power over Douglass starts to corrupt her. She becomes cruel and begins to actively thwart Douglass's attempts to educate himself.

Colonel Edward Lloyd – Anthony's employer. He is exceedingly wealthy, and owns hundreds of slaves on a number of farms; his personal homestead is called the "Great House Farm." Lloyd is unfair to his slaves, particularly Old Barney and Young Barney, who work in his stable.

Captain Anthony – – Captain Anthony, so called because he used to captain ships in the Chesapeake, is Douglass's first owner. Anthony is a superintendent for Colonel Edward Lloyd, and his family lives on Lloyd's property. Douglass's first experience of the horrors of slavery was watching Anthony brutally whip Douglass's Aunt Hester.

Aunt Hester – Douglass's aunt. Watching Captain Anthony whip her for associating with another man stands out to Douglass as his first encounter with the cruelty of slavery.

Harriet Bailey – Douglass's mother. He was separated from her very early on, and Douglass only sees her a handful of times in his life. Douglass laments that he never felt very attached to her.

Austin Gore – One of Colonel Lloyd's overseers. He is exceedingly cruel, and his murder of **Demby** illustrates whites' ability to kill blacks with impunity.

Mr. Severe – The first of Colonel Lloyd's overseers that Douglass remembers. Like his name suggests, he treats slaves poorly, and the slaves are relieved when he dies.

Old Barney and Young Barney – This father-and-son pair is in charge of the upkeep of Colonel Lloyd's stable. Lloyd has unreasonable expectations for the two slaves, and holds them accountable for problems that they cannot control. The Barneys symbolize slaves' inability to speak truthfully or in their own defense without being punished.

Lucretia Auld – – The daughter of Captain Anthony, married to Captain Thomas Auld. After Anthony dies, Douglass is passed on to her. Fairly soon after inheriting Douglass, Lucretia herself dies.

William Freeland – – Douglass is leased to Freeland for two years after spending a year with Covey. Freeland is Douglass's most evenhanded master.

William Hamilton – The father of Thomas Auld's second wife, Rowena Hamilton. William Hamilton captures Douglass before he attempts his escape from Freeland.

Rowena Hamilton – Thomas Auld's second wife, whom he marries after Lucretia Auld's death.

William Gardner – The first shipbuilder to whom Douglass is apprenticed in Baltimore. His shipyard is too busy for Douglass to learn any skills.

Nathan Johnson – An abolitionist who helps get Douglass and Anna settled in Massachusetts. Douglass honors him by letting him choose Douglass's last name.

Anna Murray – – The free black woman that Douglass marries in New York after escaping bondage.

David Ruggles – A black New Yorker, journalist, and abolitionist who helps Douglass get on his feet after his escape from slavery.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

THE SELF-DESTRUCTIVE HYPOCRISY OF CHRISTIAN SLAVEHOLDERS

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass is full of blistering critiques of slave owners who feign religious piety. Douglass's experience often shows that the white southerners who participate most zealously in religious activities are often the same ones who treat slaves most inhumanely. These reprehensible people are quick to condemn slaves for the slightest violations of biblical principles, but are all too willing to twist scripture into justifying their own horrifyingly irreligious acts. For example, during Douglass's time at St. Michael's, a white man named Mr. Wilson starts up a Sabbath school designed to teach slaves how to read the New Testament. This reading group is violently broken up by Mr. West and Mr. Fairbanks, two men who led classes to teach scripture to whites, on the grounds that they don't want slaves to learn to read at all. One of Douglass's masters, Thomas Auld, even quotes scripture to justify giving a brutal whipping to a crippled woman: "He that knoweth his master's will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes."

While this hypocrisy is extraordinarily harmful to the slaves themselves, it is also damaging to the masters. Religious

slaveholders believe they have divine moral sanction for the atrocities they perpetuate, which further compromises their already-diminished ability to discern right from wrong and encourages them to sink to even more reprehensible depths. For example, male slaveholders rape their female slaves and sell their own children into slavery, all while nominally condemning such actions through their religious devotion. By rationalizing such actions with illogical religious workarounds, the slaveholders' moral reasoning deteriorates even further, even faster. Throughout the autobiography, Douglass uses ironic language to condemn the two-faced "piety" of his oppressors. However, in an appendix to the book, he is careful to clarify that he objects not to Christianity proper, but to what he calls the "slaveholding religion," which uses Christianity to justify atrocities. In fact, Douglass himself appears to possess a great deal of faith in a more humane Christianity; he writes, "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." Ultimately, through his narrative Douglass is making the case that slavery is incompatible with true Christianity, and in doing so making the case against slavery on religious grounds.

KNOWLEDGE AND IGNORANCE

Douglass writes, "I have found that, to make a contented slave, it is necessary to make a thoughtless one. It is necessary to darken his moral and mental vision, and, as far as possible, to annihilate the power of reason. He must be able to detect no inconsistencies in slavery; he must be made to feel that slavery is right; and he can be brought to that only when he ceases to be a man." Throughout his experience as a slave, Douglass finds that masters consistently seek to deprive their slaves of knowledge, in order to crush slaves' wills to be free, or to make it so that the slaves cannot even comprehend of being free. When Hugh Auld finds his wife, Sophia, teaching Frederick how to write, he demands that she stop, saying that "learning would *spoil* the best nigger in the world."

The institution of slavery seems to depend on keeping slaves as unenlightened as possible. Masters encourage slaves to revel and drink excessively during their annual Christmas holidays, so that the slaves sicken themselves when left to their own devices and come to think of themselves as unable to be responsible for themselves. Sinister slave owners contrive situations that force slaves to develop a distorted understanding of the nature of freedom. This way, slaves come to believe that they cannot handle an independent existence. Even Douglass, upon first reading about the full nature and extent of slavery, loses the little hope he had for bettering his circumstances.

However, Douglass becomes dedicated to educating himself and his fellow slaves because he sees it as a route to longer-term empowerment. The information that Douglass encounters through literacy broadens his understanding of the dehumanizing institution of slavery and the slaveholders' strategies for promoting the ignorance of their slaves, and strengthens his desire to emancipate himself. Once he is free, Douglass's literacy lets him advance the abolitionist cause far more than he could without the ability to read and write. This literacy is in itself a refutation of many arguments in favor of slavery: Douglass's intelligence and eloquence prove that slaves are human beings capable of meaningful thought, despite racist slaveholders' arguments to the contrary.

TRUTH AND JUSTICE

Douglass's autobiography is created out of the belief that exposing the truth will eventually bring about justice. To Douglass, a straightforward depiction of the true nature of slavery is one of the most effective ways to combat the injustice of the institution. His story is delivered matter-of-factly, and Douglass rightly judges that he doesn't need to embellish or editorialize on his story in order to persuade readers of the horrors of slavery. In the text, one moment defines Douglass's veneration of truth: after teaching himself to read, Douglass pores over an anti-slavery book called **The Columbian Orator** and concludes that "the moral which I gained from the dialogue was the power of truth over the conscience of even a slaveholder." The value Douglass places on truthfulness becomes still clearer when he reveals that it pains him to be unable to describe the facts of his escape in meaningful detail (even though he must keep it secret in order to protect those who helped him escape).

The significance of Douglass's ability to write truthfully should not be underestimated. One of the many injustices of slavery that Douglass recounts is the inability to speak truthfully, which seems like it should be a basic human entitlement. While enslaved, he and other slaves would be punished severely for simply speaking honestly about the discomfort of their situations. Douglass's freedom not only affords him an escape from these miserable conditions, but also an opportunity for honest, public reflection on the miseries he endured.

THE INEXPRESSIBILITY OF ENSLAVEMENT

Douglass's commentary throughout the book suggests that someone who has the fortune never to be enslaved can never truly understand slavery. The hardship of slavery is inexpressible. For example, when recounting his escape, Douglass writes, "I say, let him be placed in this most trying situation,—the situation in which I was placed,—then, and not till then, will he fully appreciate the hardships of, and know how to sympathize with, the toil-worn and whip-scarred fugitive slave." Moreover, intellectual means

may not be the most effective way to understand this hardship: when he remembers the songs that the slaves used to sing, Douglass reflects that merely hearing these songs could do more to help one understand the abominable nature of slavery than years of reading about the institution could ever accomplish.

FELLOWSHIP

Slave owners do everything they can to undermine any basic ties of kinship that could unite their slaves. Families are broken up; much to Douglass's dismay, he barely gets to know his mother, Harriet Bailey, and his siblings are utterly alienated from him. However, in spite of their masters' cruel designs, slaves develop profound attachments to one another: writes Douglass, "I was…somewhat indebted to the society of my fellow-slaves…I loved them with a love stronger than any thing I have experienced since. It is sometimes said that we slaves do not love and confide in each other. In answer to this assertion, I can say, I never loved any or confided in any people more than my fellow-slaves." This fellowship brings Douglass comfort, and when he is on the run and unable to trust anyone, he suffers greatly. Conversely, by enslaving their fellow man, the slave owners fail to grasp the extent and importance of the communal fellowship that sustains the slaves.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

OLD BARNEY AND YOUNG BARNEY

The father-and-son pair of slaves who maintain Colonel Lloyd's stable represent the unpredictable and unreasonable demands slaveholders make of their slaves. The Barneys are held accountable for everything that displeases the Colonel, and cannot speak up to defend themselves or their conduct.

THE COLUMBIAN ORATOR

After teaching himself to read, Douglass studies books that deal with oppression. He reads *The Columbian Orator*, in which a slave presents compelling arguments for emancipation. The book also includes speeches from the Catholic Relief movement in England, in which activists successfully campaigned for the removal of restrictions on Roman Catholics. These literary experiences persuade Douglass that the truth is powerful enough to overcome even the most bigoted slaveholder's views.

DEMBY

Demby is a slave who is killed by Mr. Gore, one of Colonel Lloyd's overseers. Demby runs away from the brutal whipping he is receiving from Gore and takes refuge in a stream. Gore threatens to shoot Demby if the slave does not leave the stream by the count of three, and when Demby remains in the stream, Gore kills him. Gore is not punished for his actions. This story illustrates that the murder of a slave is not treated as a punishable offense in the slaveholding south.

THE WHIPPING OF AUNT HESTER

Aunt Hester is Douglass's aunt and a slave of Captain Anthony's. She receives a merciless whipping from her master, accompanied by degrading slurs, because she spends time with a male slave. Douglass witnesses this beating at a very young age, and it affects him greatly. The assault was Douglass's first view of the cruelty of slavery, as well as the irrational jealousy and sexual greed that characterizes male masters' relations with female slaves.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dover Publications edition of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Dougless* published in 1995.

Chapter 1 Quotes

"The whisper that my master was my father, may or may not be true; and, true or false, it is of but little consequence to my purpose whilst the fact remains, in all its glaring odiousness, that slaveholders have ordained, and by law established, that the children of slave women shall in all cases follow the condition of their mothers; and this is done too obviously to administer to their own lusts, and make a gratification of their wicked desires profitable as well as pleasurable; for by this cunning arrangement, the slaveholder, in cases not a few, sustains to his slaves the double relation of master and father."

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

When Frederick Douglass introduces himself at the opening of his autobiography, his narrative is already constrained by his slavery; because he is a slave, he has been kept

"ignorant" of the fundamental details of his life: the date of his birth, the identity of his father, the personality of his mother. Douglass cannot even begin his story without explaining the "law" and custom which governs interactions among slaveowners and slaves.

Yet Douglass *can* express his personal reaction to these laws. As Douglass admits the existence of these regulations, he also describes their inherent "odiousness."Douglass even uses the slaveowners' own values and morals to illustrate the immorality of their laws; their rule that slave women's children always become slaves allows slave owners to freely have sexual intercourse with their slave women. Their law permits and fosters their "lust" -- a feeling which leads to sin, according to the slaveowners' own Christian tradition.

"On watching Captain Anthony whip Aunt Hester: "I remember the first time I ever witnessed this horrible exhibition. I was quite a child, but I well remember it. I never shall forget it whilst I remember any thing. It was the first of a long series of such outrages, of which I was doomed to be a witness and a participant. It struck me with awful force. It was the blood- stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which I was about to pass. It was a most terrible spectacle. I wish I could commit to paper the feelings with which I beheld it."

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker), Captain Anthony, Aunt Hester

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

As Douglass recalls his life under his first master, he describes how the overseer Mr. Plummer was "hardened" by his "long life of slaveholding"; slavery damages its slaveholders as well as its slaves. Captain Anthony, the master himself, was such a malicious individual that he whipped Douglass's Aunt Hester, drawing blood and screams from her, until he was too tired to continue. For Douglass, this anecdote is the first of a lifetime's worth. By only detailing one of these whippings, Douglass suggests how the horrors of slavery evade easy comprehension; evenreaders of his narrative can only ever be partial witnesses to the wholly unChristian and torturous behavior of the individuals who enforce the systems of slavery.

Chapter 2 Quotes

"The slaves selected to go to the Great House Farm, for the monthly allowance for themselves and their fellow-slaves, were peculiarly enthusiastic. While on their way, they would make the dense old woods, for miles around, reverberate with their wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness...I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do."

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

Douglass gives a more detailed explanation of his master Lloyd's many properties, which included a home plantation ("the seat of government for the whole twenty farms") and over twenty other farms. Within this description, he also lists slaves' meager monthly and yearly allowances of a little food and clothing; the stark contrast is apparent although Douglass does not directly mention it. He does, however, mention the ways slaves would sing, vibrantly, as they went to the home plantation to collect their provisions and apparel. It is in these human voices, which reflected the "highest joy and deepest sadness," that Douglass locates the "horrible character of slavery." Douglass implies that the cruelty of enslavement can only be expressed in intangible, fleeting human voices and real, personal experiences, which are more removed from his contemporary white reader than the "volumes of philosophy" which Douglass mentions as well.

"I have often been utterly astonished, since I came to the north, to find persons who could speak of the singing, among slaves, as evidence of their contentment and happiness. It is impossible to conceive of a greater mistake. Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy."

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

After Douglass reflects on the singing which enlivened

slaves' walks to the home plantation on allowance day, he briefly stops recounting his experiences in the South to acknowledge the setting in which he writes: the North. He rightly accuses Northerners of misinterpreting slaves' songs; as Douglass explains, slaves do not sing when they are happy, but rather when are unhappy and isolated. Their songs are akin to the songs a man might make while alone on an island; they are communal expressions of sadness and alienation. By reinterpreting slaves' singing, Douglass continues to advocate that Northerners forget their old beliefs about slaves and adopt truer, and often more negative, views of slaves' lives. By changing the ways Northerners perceive little daily events such as songs, Douglass may change the way they understand slavery as a whole.

Chapter 3 Quotes

"On Old Barney and Young Barney: "No excuse could shield them, if the colonel only suspected any want of attention to his horses—a supposition which he frequently indulged, and one which, of course, made the office of old and young Barney a very trying one. They never knew when they were safe from punishment. They were frequently whipped when least deserving, and escaped whipping when most deserving it."

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker), Old Barney and Young Barney, Colonel Edward Lloyd

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

In addition to recounting stories of inhumane cruelty towards slaves, Douglass tells anecdotes in which cruelty was spurred by lies and arbitrary whims. Any slave with tar found on his or her person was accused of attempting to enter the fruit garden (which had a tarred fence). Similarly, the two slaves who took care of Lloyd's excellent horses were often accused of negligence, regardless of whether they neglected Lloyd's horses or not. Their master was able to falsely accuse them of shirking their duties whenever that suited his whims. This story does not only illustrate the uncertainty that plagued slaves' daily lives; it also exposes the falsehoods delivered by slaveowners, and it suggests that Douglass's writing is in a separate moral sphere, one devoted to truth as well as justice.

"…slaves, when inquired of as to their condition and the character of their masters, almost universally say they are contented, and that their masters are kind. The slaveholders have been known to send in spies among their slaves, to ascertain their views and feelings in regard to their condition. The frequency of this has had the effect to establish among the slaves the maxim, that a still tongue makes a wise head. They suppress the truth rather than take the consequences of telling it, and in so doing prove themselves a part of the human family."

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

Douglass recounts a story that is "reported of" Colonel Lloyd, admitting that this particular anecdote may be a rumor as he continues to attempt to only express the truth in his narrative. According to this story, Lloyd once met one of his slaves and asked him how he was treated by his master. The slave replied honestly, saying that he was worked too hard and not treated well. Then, a few weeks afterwards, this particular slave was apparently sold to a slave-trader in Georgia, forever severed from his family and friends. This demonstrates how slaves were treated when they told the truth.

After this anecdote, Douglass explains that many slaves must lie when they are asked how they are doing; they claim that their master treats them kindly because they are afraid of such punishment. This illustrates how the sins of slave-owners compound; slaves are forced into morally questionable activities (perhaps the least of which is simple lying) because of the way their owners are allowed to treat them.

Chapter 4 Quotes

"I speak advisedly when I say this,—that killing a slave, or any colored person, in Talbot county, Maryland, is not treated as a crime, either by the courts or the community."

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

Douglass relates how another overseer, the solemn young man Mr. Gore, shot the slave Demby while Demby was submerging himself in a creek, in an attempt to assuage his pain after receiving wounds from the whip. Just as Mr. Gore coldly completed this murder, Lloyd calmly accepted it; Gore claimed that Demby was setting a dangerous example of uncontrollable conduct for the other slaves, and Lloyd determined that this explanation justified the murder. After presenting this specific instance, Douglass reminds the reader that such murders are not considered murders in Maryland -- "courts" as well as the "community" equally allow slaveowners to kill a slave without consequences. This simple description of the legal and social situation is thus grounded in a particular incident, allowing the reader to realize the emotional and powerful force of such law and social custom.

Chapter 5 Quotes

"The ties that ordinarily bind children to their homes were all suspended in my case. I found no severe trial in my departure. My home was charmless; it was not home to me; on parting from it, I could not feel that I was leaving any thing which I could have enjoyed by staying...I looked for home elsewhere, and was confident of finding none which I should relish less than the one which I was leaving."

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

Although Douglas begins Chapter 5 by describing his special relationship to his master -- who served as a sort of "protector" to him and felt particularly attached to him because Douglass helped Lloyd find the birds he shot -- we quickly realize that Douglass was as deprived of domestic attachments as many slave children were. Indeed, when Douglass left his "home," he felt that it was not actually a home; he found he could not imagine a worse one. Slaves such as Douglass were not only deprived of material comforts and freedom, but rather they were also deprived of familial experiences which others may take for granted, and which Douglass only retrospectively realizes he was missing as a slave. Douglass here removes Northerners' mistaken perceptions that slaves could enjoy their lives despite the hardships and build supportive attachments to the spaces of their enslavement; their songs were not songs of joy, and their living spaces were not homes.

"From my earliest recollection, I date the entertainment of a deep conviction that slavery would not always be able to hold me within its foul embrace; and in the darkest hours of my career in slavery, this living word of faith and spirit of hope departed not from me, but remained like ministering angels to cheer me through the gloom. This good spirit was from God, and to him I offer thanksgiving and praise."

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

Douglass reflects that he was the only slave child to be sent to Baltimore -- he was "the first, last, and only choice." Ever dedicated to the truth, Douglass admits that he interprets this choice as an act of Providence in his favor. Douglass feels that God sent him faith and hope that he would be removed from slavery. According to Douglass, he was divinely ordained to be freed from slavery -- and, perhaps, to share his former experiences as a slave with the rest of humanity. Douglass implies that his narrative was inspired by God; it is grounded in the Christian faith, the faith which many of his readers claim. As a good Christian (and unlike the hypocritical "Christian" slaveowners), Douglass then directly offers "thanksgiving and praise" to God, and this act reveals a piety which might allow many of his readers to connect with him as well as his mission.

Chapter 6 Quotes

On Sophia Auld's transformation of character: "But, alas! this kind heart had but a short time to remain such. The fatal poison of irresponsible 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."

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker), Sophia Auld

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

Although Douglass' next mistress, Sophia Auld, initially appeared to be a virtuous slave owner ("of the kindest heart and finest feelings"), her quick transformation demonstrates that virtuous slave owners hardly exist for long; the mere fact of owning a slave causes individuals to become cruel ("red with rage," or with "harsh and horrid discord," like a "demon"). Essentially, slavery destroys slaveowners as well as slaves (although in a less physical and extreme way, of course), proving the adage that "absolute power corrupts absolutely." Yet Douglass does not begrudge Auld for this; he pities her, introducing his description of her new temperament with "But, alas!" He refrains from accusatory language, revealing his own moral goodness while also indicating that he is more antagonistic towards slavery itself than towards slave-owning individuals.

"I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty—to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man... The very decided manner with which he spoke, and strove to impress his wife with the evil consequences of giving me instruction, served to convince me that he was deeply sensible of the truths he was uttering... and the argument which he so warmly urged, against my learning to read, only served to inspire me with a desire and determination to learn. In learning to read, I owe almost as much to the bitter opposition of my master, as to the kindly aid of my mistress. I acknowledge the benefit of both."

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker), Sophia Auld, Hugh Auld

Related Themes:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

Shortly after arriving in Baltimore, Mrs. Auld begins to teach Douglass how to read. She only is able to explain up to "words of three or four letters," however, before Mr. Auld learns about this endeavor and forbids Mrs. Auld from continuing. In his vehement declaration that Douglass must not become literate, Mr. Auld unwittingly provides Douglass with the most useful lesson of all: literacy is the key to freedom. Through denying slaves the right to read or write, slaveowners deprive slaves of the knowledge they need to attain freedom from their bondage. Most slaves cannot realize this, however, because few slaveowners describe this phenomenon as directly as Mr. Auld did when he found Mrs. Auld teaching Douglass. This explains why Douglass has uniquely been able to attain literacy, which suggests that Douglass is a genuine representation of all slaves. In his wisdom, Douglass reveals the particular reason for his triumph, as well as crediting both Mr. and Mrs. Auld.

Chapter 7 Quotes

On reading *The Columbian Orator*: "The moral which I gained from the dialogue was the power of truth over the conscience of even a slaveholder."

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

After Douglass managed to learn to read, through piecing together lessons in the street from various white children ("hungry little urchins") whom he gave bread, he becomes fascinated with the book *The Columbian Orator*. This text includes a variety of "interesting matter," especially a dialogue between a slaveowner and slave which displays the slave's intelligence and eloquence (through "smart" and "impressive" remarks) and results in the slave's emancipation. For Douglass, this conversation gives voice to sentiments inside himself; it articulates his feeling that he craves and deserves freedom and liberty. The slave in this dialogue also serves as a model for Douglass: he speaks the "truth" in order to exert power and contradict his owner's seemingly guiltless yet morally culpable "conscience." Douglass will echo this achievement in his own narrative.

"The reading of these documents enabled me to utter my thoughts, and to meet the arguments brought forward to sustain slavery; but while they relieved me of one difficulty, they brought on another even more painful than the one of which I was relieved. The more I read, the more I was led to abhor and detest my enslavers. I could regard them in no other light than a band of successful robbers, who had left their homes, and gone to Africa, and stolen us from our homes, and in a strange land reduced us to slavery."

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

Douglass explains that he read certain passages of *The Columbian Orator*many times, such as the dialogue between slave and master and Sheridan's speech about Catholic emancipation, and he analyzes how these readings affected him in multiple ways. Yes, they allowed him to articulate his innate sentiments in opposition to slavery and replaced his ignorance with understanding; they also, however, made him gain additional feelings -- of hostility and even hatred towards the slaveowners that he came to "abhor" and "detest." As these readings allowed Douglass to truthfully come to terms with his condition as slave, the truth threatened Douglass' moral virtue (making him loathe his slaveowners as much as he deplored his own position) although it also allowed him to develop his abolitionist perspective and argument. In learning the "truth," Douglass not only works towards his own freedom and that of others, but also must accept the harsh reality that even the "kindest" of slaveowners are complicit in an impossibly evil institution.

"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."

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

As Douglass continues to reflect on the way *The Columbian Orator* influenced his development, he more directly articulates the negative aspects of realizing the truth about his position (his "wretched condition") as a slave. After reading the work, had a more refined perspective, but still lacked the political or social means to improve his circumstance. He began to have a liminal sort of existence; he was still a slave, but he saw the ignorance (what he called the "stupidity") of his "fellow" slaves, which prevented him from fully belonging to their community. He even wished he was a "beast," feeling that it would be better to live ignorant of the full evils of his position than to be aware of them and still unable to change them.

Chapter 8 Quotes

"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...at this moment, I saw more clearly than ever the brutalizing effects of slavery upon both slave and slaveholder."

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

Shortly after Douglass arrives in Baltimore, his first master dies without a proper will. All of his first master's property must therefore be valued, in order to determine how this property can be equally divided between the master's children, Andrew and Lucretia. As one piece of this extensive evaluation process, Douglass is called back to Baltimore. This suggests the power of slavery; masters can control a slave's actions even when this slave now belongs to someone else. Masters exert influence in their death, as in their life.

This anecdote also underscores how Douglass, like all of his fellow slaves, is treated as a mere piece of property; slaveowners have "horses and men, cattle and women, pigs

and children, all holding the same rank in the scale of being." When a man owns a slave, he treats a fellow human being like an animal, without engaging in any kind of shared humanity. In this way, slavery is "brutalizing" for "both slave and slaveholder." Douglass harnesses a striking visual -- an immense gathering of creatures and people -- to make memorable this structural criticism of the practice of slavery.

"at this time, this most needful time, the time for the exercise of that tenderness and affection which children only can exercise towards a declining parent—my poor old grandmother, the devoted mother of twelve children, is left all alone, in yonder little hut, before a few dim embers. She stands—she sits—she staggers—she falls—she groans—she dies—and there are none of her children or grandchildren present, to wipe from her wrinkled brow the cold sweat of death, or to place beneath the sod her fallen remains. Will not a righteous God visit for these things?"

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker), Betsy Bailey

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

Soon after Douglass' first master dies, his children die as well, which causes all of his slaves to be divided from each other and their familial bonds, "in the hands of strangers." Douglass implies that his grandmother is treated the worst, however; she is sent to a desolate hut in the woods, to supposedly provide for herself for the rest of her days. Just as her present owners fail to acknowledge her present state (she has no hope of caring for herself, in her enfeebled condition), they also fail to recognize her prior experiences. She not only took care of her master throughout his life, but she also brought him a fair portion of his wealth: her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Douglass can only imagine how his "poor old" grandmother spent her last moments in "yonder little hut." He briefly lists the possibilities ("she stands—she sits—she staggers—she falls—she groans—she dies"), in order to fictionally be present with his grandmother, and to give at least a posthumous audience to her isolated suffering. Once again he appeals to the justice and truth of God, and wonders how he could allow such things to take place.

Chapter 9 Quotes

"A great many times have we poor creatures been nearly perishing with hunger, when food in abundance lay mouldering in the safe and smoke-house, and our pious mistress was aware of the fact; and yet that mistress and her husband [Rowena Hamilton and Thomas Auld] would kneel every morning, and pray that God would bless them in basket and store!"

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker), Rowena Hamilton, Captain Thomas Auld

Related Themes:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

While Douglass was living at St. Michael's, he and the other three slaves were each only allowed to eat "less than a half of a bushel of corn-meal" each week. As this depressingly exact description suggests, Douglass and the others were deprived of the variety and quantity of food necessary to comfortably sustain an individual. Yet, as they worked in this household, they were surrounded by abundance ("in the safe and the smoke-house"), and they were able to observe their owners' greedy and hypocritical prayers for further prosperity. Unlike slaves who work the fields, these slaves were in direct daily contact with their owners, and so could see the stark realities of their masters' hypocrisy.

"In August, 1832, my master attended a Methodist camp-meeting held in the Bay-side, Talbot county, and there experienced religion...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. Prior to his conversion, he 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."

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker), Captain Thomas Auld

Related Themes:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

As Douglass continues to describe his experiences under the service of Thomas Auld at St. Michael's, he describes how "adopted slaveholders" such as Auld, who acquired

their slaves later in life through means such as marriage, were actually the worst sort. A similar contradiction applies for religious slaveholders; when Auld "experienced religion," this actually made him a more cruel (and, thus, less Christian) owner. Here, Douglass continues to unpack the paradoxes of slavery that might be unapparent to a reader in and from the North, as he also elicits questions about the significance of religion as a kind of "experience" rather than a doctrine, and as a phenomenon that is adapted to suit one's other interests and ideas. Douglass illustrates how fellowship, in particular contexts such as the religious communities which Auld joins, can paradoxically breed harshness and cruelty.

Douglass also provides the example of Mr. Wilson's "little Sabbath school," a religious undertaking which did indeed provide religious comforts to those in need (particularly, the slaves at St. Michael's). In dong so, Douglass situates the cruelty of slaveowners with slavery, not merely with religion. He is a Christian himself, but condemns the use of Christianity to uphold and justify slavery.

Chapter 10 Quotes

"If at any one time of my life more than another, I was made to drink the bitterest dregs of slavery, that time was during the first six months of my stay with Mr. Covey...I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute!"

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker), Edward Covey

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

Douglass then works as a field hand for Mr. Covey, his most brutal master yet. Under Covey's demanding, and often furtive, watch, Douglass and his fellow slaves are relegated to a life of "work, work, work." Douglass claims that even his innate intellectual curiosity is extinguished under this man's control, as Douglass loses his passion for literacy also with his optimistic outlook. Furthermore, he feels himself fundamentally broken, transformed from a man into a "brute" -- essentially experiencing the underlying project of slavery itself (the dehumanization of an entire race of people). Yet Douglass also describes how, during this period of his life,he would often deliver "an apostrophe to the moving multitude of ships" -- eloquent declarations about freedom and bondage that serve as tribute to his enduring human spirit.

"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...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 had 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."

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker), Edward Covey

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

Douglass experiences a "glorious resurrection ... to the heaven of freedom" during his time under Mr. Covey's watch. One hot August afternoon, at the Biblically significant time of 3pm (the same time of Christ's crucifixion), Douglass finally loses his physical strength. When he is whipped by Mr. Covey, as expected, he decides to complain to his master about Mr. Covey's behavior -- which he later does. On his way back from his master's house (his journey after complaining to his master), Douglass receives a superstitious root from the slave Sandy Jenkins. The root seems to prevent Douglass from being beaten; as Douglass carries it, Mr. Covey speaks to him kindly. Then, the next day, when Mr. Covey attempts to whip Douglass, Douglass engages in a physical combat with Mr. Covey.

Douglass successfully fights Covey off; they brawl, and Covey does not whip Douglass as he intends to do. With this physical victory, Douglass has reclaimed his "manhood." He is a slave in "form," but not in "fact." He has taken one step towards freedom, and this progression begins to suggest how complicated and difficult the process to attaining freedom must be -- it doesn't just mean physically escaping the South, but also rebuilding one's identity as a human being in full possession of one's self.

"For of all slaveholders with whom I have ever met, religious slaveholders are the worst. I have ever found them the meanest and basest, the most cruel and cowardly, of all others."

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

Douglass moves on January first, 1934, and then comes under the control of William Freeland, who replaces Covey. In Douglass's estimation, Freeland is not as nefarious as Covey; he does not maintain a pretense of Christian piety, which serves as a protective barrier (a "dark shelter") which can most powerfully cover "the darkest,foulest, grossest, and most infernal deeds of slaveholders." Here, Douglass redefines who the worst slaveowners are; they are not merely "adopted slaveowners," who receive slaves later in life, but they are the Christian owners who attempt to justify their deeds (the most foul actions) with the covering of hypocritical piety.

"I held my Sabbath school at the house of a free colored man, whose name I deem it imprudent to mention; for should it be known, it might embarrass him greatly, though the crime of holding the school was committed ten years ago. I had at one time over forty scholars, and those of the right sort, ardently desiring to learn...I look back to those Sundays with an amount of pleasure not to be expressed. They were great days to my soul. The work of instructing my dear fellow-slaves was the sweetest engagement with which I was ever blessed."

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

While working for Freeland, Douglass begins to share his literary experience (and the knowledge and freedom which these experiences provide him) with his "dear fellow-slaves." This, more than any other item Douglass has shared, most effectively captures how Douglass's ability to read and write is not exceptional, and all slaves deserve the treatment which Douglass receives as a freed man.

Yet, even as Douglass reveals the events of this "Sabbath school" (a school which spreads Douglass's gifts with others in Christian fellowship), Douglass captures the still-present need for secrecy. He reluctantly refrains from revealing the freed man who hosted these literary sessions (despite his usual commitment to total truth), emphasizing how slaves are still struggling under social structures which restrain the improvement of their circumstance.

"The impression which I had received respecting the character and condition of the people of the north, I found to be singularly erroneous. I had very strangely supposed, while in slavery, that few of the comforts, and scarcely any of the luxuries, of life were enjoyed at the north, compared with what were enjoyed by the slaveholders of the south...The people looked more able, stronger, healthier, and happier, than those of Maryland. I was for once made glad by a view of extreme wealth, without being saddened by seeing extreme poverty."

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 66-67

Explanation and Analysis

After Douglass arrives in New Bedford, he receives his name ("Douglass") from Nathan Johnson and realizes that many of his impressions about Northerners were wrong. Douglass explains that, previously, he believed that because Northerners lacked slaves, they must also have lacked the luxury and comforts enjoyed by Southerners. He is surprised, however, by the profound well-being of Northern people, which seems to even surpass that of Southerners.

This indicates that slavery is indeed not essential to economic or other sorts of prosperity, thus mitigating an enduring, implicit argument in favor of slavery. It also suggests that an individual's perspective can easily be misguided; Douglass indirectly implies that Northerners' opinions about Southerners might be as wrong as his own prior opinions about Northerners.

"The [*Liberator*] paper became my meat and my drink. My soul was set all on fire. Its sympathy for my brethren in bonds—its scathing denunciations of slaveholders—its faithful exposures of slavery—and its powerful attacks upon the upholders of the institution—sent a thrill of joy through my soul, such as I had never felt before!"

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 69

Explanation and Analysis

Following his move to New Bedford, Douglass has another literary discovery: *The Liberator*, an abolitionist newspaper. Just as *The Columbian Orator* spurred Douglass's individual development and honed his personal beliefs against slavery, *The Liberator* fosters Douglass's impulse to support and participate in the abolitionist movement. First, reading brought personal convictions to Douglass; now, it allows him to share in the collective convictions which encouraged him to write this narrative at all. Finally, we see literature's power to connect individuals in the pursuit of justice -- the very power which Douglass is relying on in this narrative. Finally, Douglass's sympathy for the fellowship of all slaves merges with the broader social project and progress of the abolitionist movement.

Appendix Quotes

"What I have said respecting and against religion, I mean strictly to apply to the *slaveholding religion* of this land, and with no possible reference to Christianity proper; for, between the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference—so wide, that to receive the one as good, pure, and holy, is of necessity to reject the other as bad, corrupt, and wicked."

Related Characters: Frederick Douglass (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

Douglass provides an Appendix here in order to clarify certain points which he feels he may have misrepresented in his narrative. Firstly, he comments on religion; as a Christian man himself, Douglass clarifies that he is not against Christianity, but is only opposed to the hypocritical form of Christianity common among slaveowners. After the narrative proper, Douglass directly praises Christian doctrine itself -- as "good, pure, and holy," and as essential to life. He thus aligns his narrative with the Christian audience from the North, allying himself to his likely audience through the medium of religion, while also avoiding any criticisms that he is "unchristian" because of his condemnation of religious slaveowners. Indeed, this critique of people who twist and corrupt religion for their own cruel purposes is one of the most enduring lessons of Douglass's narrative.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

Douglass was born in Tuckahoe, Maryland. Like most slaves, he does not know when he was born, because masters usually try to keep their slaves from knowing their own ages.

From the outset of the book, Douglass makes it clear that slaves are deprived of characteristics that humanize them, like birthdays.

Douglass's mother is named Harriet Bailey, and his father is an unknown white man rumored to be Douglass's own master. When Douglass was only an infant, he was separated from his mother, as is commonly done to destroy the bond enslaved children feel towards their mothers. Douglass was only able to see his mother four or five times, when she journeyed over from her plantation to his and spent the night with him. When Douglass is only about seven years old, his mother dies, and he reacted to "the tidings of her death with much the same emotions [he] should have probably felt at the death of a stranger."

Douglass and his mother are further dehumanized by being unable to cultivate one of the most fundamental human relationships: the bond between mother and child. By reducing this relationship, slaveholders are better able to dictate their slaves' emotions and to ensure that strong family emotions don't interfere with slaves following their master's commands.

Because of his separation from his mother, and her untimely death, Douglass has no idea who his father is. Ultimately, this fact makes little difference, since slaveholders have prescribed that children of mixed parentage always follow the status of their mothers. This allows slave owners to take advantage of their female slaves sexually without reducing their workforce. The mixed-race "mulatto" offspring are frequently abused because the slave owner's white family resents their existence. To avoid these tensions, a master will often sell his own children to a trader.

Slavery is detrimental not only to the enslaved, but also to the enslaver: the system for "inheriting" enslavement is designed to cater to the greedy, sexual impulses of male slaveholders. Worse yet, slavery distorts the bond between father and son, as fathers frequently own their own children and, further, sell their children to other slave owners.

If this mulatto population keeps growing, Douglass observes that slavery will no longer be able to persist under its so-called biblical justification, which states that all descendants of Ham are cursed and deserve enslavement.

By pushing the logical limits of slavery's allegedly biblical rationalization (that blacks are the descendants of Ham, a cursed son of Noah), Douglass underscores the dubiousness of the grounds used to justify slavery.

Douglass has had two masters. The first was a sailor from the Chesapeake named Captain Anthony. Anthony was not a rich slaveholder, and only owned thirty slaves for his handful of farms. Anthony was a barbarous slave owner, and had a still more barbarous overseer named Plummer. Douglass cannot forget witnessing Anthony brutally **whip** one of Douglass's aunts, Hester. Seeing the master draw blood and screams until he is too tired to continue is, to Douglass, "the first of a long series of such outrages, of which I was doomed to be a witness and a participant." In other words, this is Douglass's first encounter with the abominable nature of slavery. He cannot describe the horror it evoked in him, writing only that "I wish I could commit to paper the feelings with which I beheld it."

As he matures, Douglass gradually begins to comprehend the scope of the injustice perpetuated by slavery. His first encounter with the brutality of slavery was obviously deeply traumatic—the horror he felt when he witnessed Hester's whipping is too great for him to convey to a reader.

Aunt Hester was being **whipped** by Anthony for spending time with a slave from a nearby plantation, named Ned. Douglass remembers that Hester was very attractive. Anthony seems to be jealous of her spending time with men, and calls her a string of misogynistic names as he whips her.

Anthony's violence is grounded in nothing more than petty jealousy and sexual desire, and his punishment of Hester, like many slaveholders' actions, borders on hypocritical.

Fearful that he may be next, the young Douglass hides in a closet after witnessing the whipping. This was his first real glimpse of the horror of slavery, as he lived with his grandmother on the outskirts of the plantation.

When he sees Hester whipped, the young Douglass's illusions of happiness are quickly destroyed, and his future suffering is foreshadowed.

CHAPTER 2

Captain Anthony's family is made up of two sons, Andrew and Richard, a daughter, Lucretia, and her husband, Captain Thomas Auld. Together, they live on a single house on the plantation of Colonel Edward Lloyd, for whom Anthony serves as a superintendent.

Despite having—and abusing—absolute authority over his slaves, Anthony himself is also a cog in a larger structure of power.

Colonel Lloyd's plantation generates so much tobacco, corn, and wheat that a ship must travel constantly to and from Baltimore in order to sell the goods. This ship is captained by Thomas Auld and manned by a small group of slaves. The slaves who worked on the ship were esteemed by the plantation slaves, as it was considered a privilege to get to visit Baltimore.

Social hierarchies exist even among the slaves. Despite their universal misery, the ability to go to Baltimore is viewed as a clear symbol of status.

Colonel Lloyd owned three or four hundred slaves, and his operation also includes over twenty farms that neighbor his plantation. Overseers of the farms report to the central plantation, and errant slaves are sent there to be disciplined. The central plantation also provides slaves with their monthly food and yearly clothing. For food, the slaves received eight pounds of meat and a bushel of corn meal. The slaves' annual clothing consists of two linen shirts, one pair of linen pants, a jacket and trousers for the winter, and a single pair of shoes and socks. Children are given only two linen shirts, and must go naked if their clothes fail.

Colonel Lloyd's extravagant wealth contrasts sharply with the utterly inadequate supplies his slaves are given for subsistence.

The slaves are not given proper beds, but they hardly have time to sleep anyway. What little time they don't spend working in the fields is often taken up by domestic chores. Any slave late for work will be whipped by the overseer, Mr. Severe.

The slaves' lack of comfort hurts them less than the deprivation of their basic human needs, like sleep.

Mr. Severe was a cruel and profane overseer who had no qualms whipping a slave bloody in front of her own children. He died soon after Douglass arrived at Colonel Lloyd's. Severe was replaced by the less sadistic Mr. Hopkins, who was seen by the slaves as a good overseer.

Even after being worked hard and forced to live in miserable conditions, the slaves face gratuitous violence from Severe. The slaves feel genuine relief when this violence is diminished under Mr. Hopkins.

Colonel Lloyd's plantation looked like a small village, and was called "The Great House Farm" by the slaves. Working at the Great House Farm was seen as an honor by the slaves: it showed the master's confidence in them, and allowed them to avoid the slave-driver's lash in the fields.

Working at the Great House Farm is another way that slaves differentiate themselves and develop stratification within their ranks.

The slaves selected to retrieve the monthly allowances at the Great House Farm perform the job enthusiastically. On their way to the farm, they sang incoherent-seeming songs of woe and prayer that filled Douglass with an inexpressible sorrow whenever he heard them. To Douglass, these songs indicate the dehumanizing nature of slavery, and better express slaves' misery than the written word can. Douglass is aghast when he hears people cite the singing as evidence of the slaves' happiness, because, to Douglass, there is no more miserable sound.

To Douglass, words can be inadequate to encapsulate the horrors of enslavement, especially when compared to the visceral emotion of the slaves' singing.

CHAPTER 3

Colonel Lloyd keeps a lush and tempting garden, and slaves are often whipped for stealing fruit from it. In order to prevent theft from the garden, the encircling fence was coated in tar. Any slave who had tar on his body, for whatever reason, would be punished, and slaves began to fear tar itself.

Under the justice of the plantation, slaves are presumed guilty. Douglass's anecdote about the tar shows how such a system results in both terrible fear and ridiculous inefficiency, as slaves feel they will be punished for simply using a substance while the workings of the farm are therefore affected by slaves trying to avoid using tar.

Colonel Lloyd also kept a luxurious stable, under the care of a father-and-son team of slaves named **Old Barney and Young Barney**. Whenever the Colonel notices the slightest problem with his riding equipment, he blames the Barneys, and the slaves receive a whipping regardless of whether or not they could have controlled the problems. Douglass has even seen Old Barney, a sixty-year-old man, forced to kneel and receive thirty lashes. When the Colonel complains, the slaves cannot answer a word in reply or attempt to justify their actions. The Colonel demands that the slaves stand silently and fearfully in his presence.

The experience of Old Barney and Young Barney symbolizes the terrible uncertainty and unreasonableness that slaves face. The slaves' inability to speak truthfully in their own defense strips them of yet another quality that seems like a basic human entitlement.

The Colonel is unimaginably wealthy. He was rumored to have a thousand slaves—so many that the Colonel could not recognize them all. On the highway, the Colonel came across a slave he did not recognize and asked him whom he belonged to and how his master treats him. The slave, not recognizing his master, explained his origins and complained of his treatment. A few weeks later, this slave was sold to a Georgia trader as punishment for his truthful responses. This, according to Douglass, is the sort of fate that befalls any slave who speaks truthfully.

Slaves are compelled by fear to obscure the truth of the miseries they endure, lest they end up like the Colonel's slave who was sold to a Georgia trader. This underscores the importance—and the rarity—of Douglass's ability to speak candidly and truthfully in his memoir. He is not just speaking for himself—he is speaking for all slaves, because they themselves cannot.

Because slaves who speak the truth of their condition are so often punished, slaves will nearly universally report that they are happy and contented. The slaves adopt the maxim, "a still tongue makes a wise head," because it is considered better to suppress the truth than to face the consequences of telling it. Douglass himself remembers lying about his happiness when asked.

Because his exposé is read primarily by free people, Douglass is careful to emphasize that slaves' professed contentment is not to be taken seriously, because they have no choice other than to say they are happy. If they say they aren't happy, worse will happen to them.

Like free people, slaves are just as susceptible to prejudiced thinking. They tend to think their own masters are better than others', and will sometimes fight amongst themselves about the goodness of their masters. Douglass writes that "it was considered as being bad enough to be a slave; but to be a poor man's slave was deemed a disgrace indeed!"

Douglass drives home the point that slaves are not a homogenous mass, but distinct individuals—with the same foibles as free people. Slaves still compete with one another and find ways to elevate themselves relative to others.

CHAPTER 4

Mr. Hopkins, the more humane overseer, is quickly replaced by Mr. Austin Gore. Gore is sadistic and prideful, and he can twist any action into a punishable act of impudence. According to Douglass, Gore lives by the maxim, "It is better that a dozen slaves should suffer under the lash, than that the overseer should be convicted, in the presence of the slaves, of having been at fault." Ironically, Gore mercilessly debases the slaves, then turns around and grovels before his own master.

Gore illustrates the self-perpetuating hypocrisy of slaveholding culture. He makes no attempt to mask the fact that he punishes slaves even when they are not at fault. Gore's groveling before his master illustrates the way that those who abuse slaves are themselves forced into degrading interactions.

Gore once began to whip one of Colonel Lloyd's slaves named **Demby**. Demby runs into a creek to ease the burns of the lash and refuses to come out. Gore draws his rifle and tells Demby that he will shoot him if the slave doesn't comply. After three calls, Gore does not hesitate to shoot and kill Demby.

Demby's justified disobedience, and Gore's harsh retaliation, are yet another example of the grave consequences slaves face simply for acting like rational humans.

Gore defends his murder of Demby to Colonel Lloyd as a necessary means of setting an example, as Demby had become "unmanageable." Lloyd finds his explanation satisfactory and Gore is allowed to retain his position without even being investigated for his crime, and his fame as an overseer spreads.

When a slave has been wronged, the white establishment does not even pretend to carry out justice—just as they fail to investigate Gore in the death of Demby.

Douglass observes that killing a black person, slave or free, is not treated as a crime in Talbot, Maryland. Douglass recalls several brutal murders of slaves, all of which went unpunished: Thomas Lanman killed two slaves and boasted of his actions, and Mrs. Giles Hicks beat an adolescent female slave to death.

Demby's death, along with Douglass's other anecdotes, symbolizes how little blacks' lives are valued.in the slaveholding south.

Lastly, Douglass recounts the story of Colonel Lloyd's neighbor, Mr. Beal Bondly, who killed one of Lloyd's slaves for accidentally crossing onto his property. Bondly visited Lloyd's the next day and nothing came of the murder. Douglass concludes with the observation that "it was a common saying, even among little white boys, that it was worth a half-cent to kill a 'nigger,' and a half-cent to bury one."

Slaves are not viewed as morally valuable entities—they are nothing more than financial. This mindset causes slaveholders to deal with slaves unjustly.

CHAPTER 5

While a child on Colonel Lloyd's plantation, Douglass wasn't subjected to much hard labor, and only had to perform a few chores. He also managed to befriend the master's young son, Daniel, whose affection for Douglass gave the slave some small benefits. However, Douglass still suffered greatly from hunger and cold. The slave children are fed cornmeal mush from a shared trough, and only the strongest manage to eat their fill; Douglass's linen shirt does nothing to protect him from the cold. His saving grace is a small bag used for carrying cornmeal, which he steals from the mill. He sleeps on the floor with his head and upper body in the bag; the frost causes his exposed feet to develop large fissures.

Douglass's friendship with the master's son affirms that slaves and free whites can interact on an equal footing. That such interactions happen between children shows how slavery is not intrinsic, as white slave owners would suggest, but rather something learned and enforced by an unjust society. In addition, this glimpse of equality between children only exaggerates the outrageous inadequacy of the living conditions Douglass endures.

At age seven or eight, Douglass is sent away from the Lloyd plantation in order to live in Baltimore with Mr. Hugh Auld, the brother of Captain Thomas Auld. Douglass leaves joyfully, and eagerly cleans himself up in order to receive a pair of trousers. Douglass is immensely excited to see the big city, and for several reasons feels no sadness about leaving the plantation. He feels no attachment to the Great House Farm as a home, in the way that many children might feel towards their childhood homes. Moreover, Douglass is confident that everything he finds in Baltimore will be better than what he leaves behind at the Great House Farm; his cousin, Tom, has stoked his enthusiasm by telling him at length of the city's majesty.

Douglass's excitement to go to Baltimore shows just how miserable his life was on the Great House Farm. The fact that the place of his upbringing means nothing to him is a heartbreaking indictment against his childhood. On the other hand, Douglass's eagerness to leave is evidence of the steadfast optimism that will help him through his years in bondage.

On the boat ride over to Baltimore, Douglass stops in Annapolis, the state capital. He is awed by the city's size, though he adds that it was likely less impressive than some factory villages in New England.

Though Annapolis is unimpressive in comparison with New England, Douglass's humble upbringing leaves him amazed by any *town of even middling size.*

Douglass arrives in Baltimore and is taken to his new home in Fells Point, near a shipyard. He meets Mr. and Mrs. Auld and their young son, Thomas, whom Douglass is to care for. Douglass is immediately taken aback by the kindness that radiates from the face of his new mistress, Sophia Auld, and cheerfully enters his new duties with a feeling of indescribable rapture.

Sophia's pleasant appearance seems to be a good omen for Douglass's time in Baltimore. This encounter is significant, as it is likely the first time that Douglass was treated kindly by a white person.

To Douglass, his move to Baltimore laid the foundations for his freedom. He believes it quite possible that he would still be languishing in slavery if he had not been moved to the city. Even though Douglass is aware of how ridiculous and arrogant it may sound, he confesses that he genuinely regards his move to Baltimore as a gift from divine providence. He admits this feeling because he prefers to be true to his feelings than to stay silent to avoid ridicule. Douglass goes on to confess that he had always entertained a deep confidence that he would one day free himself from slavery, and he views this constant hope as a gift from God.

Douglass clearly possessed a deep faith in a benevolent God. He writes directly about his belief in the divine origins of his good fortune because he values his ability to speak truthfully, and wants his Narrative to be as honest as possible a representation of his experience as a slave.

CHAPTER 6

Sophia Auld is, at first, everything Douglass expected her to be. Her dedication to her trade as a weaver has left her unaccustomed to owning slaves and unaware of the way slaves are usually treated. She is disturbed when Douglass grovels wretchedly in front of her, and prefers to be looked at in the eye.

Sophia Auld's exceptional kindness comes from her willingness to treat Douglass like a fellow human being and dispense with the debasing manners most slave owners require.

However, Mrs. Auld is soon warped by the corrupting power of owning slaves. After Douglass moves in, she generously begins teaching him his ABC's, but just as Douglass is beginning to learn to spell, Mr. Auld intervenes. He instructs his wife to prevent slaves from learning at all costs, as it is both illegal and unsafe to teach a slave to read. Mr. Auld emphasizes that a literate slave will become an unmanageable slave.

Hugh's strong opposition to Douglass's education shows that slaveholders rely on their slaves' ignorance in order to keep them oppressed. The transformation in Sophia shows how slavery corrupts the slave owners—they become used to power, they come to rely on slavery, and so they expect and need complete obedience and do whatever is necessary to ensure it.

Mr. Auld's words affect Douglass deeply, and he realizes that Mr. Auld's exhortations against educating slaves must mean that learning carries with it some degree of empowerment. He begins to understand the white man's power to enslave the black man, and starts to regard literacy as a path to freedom. Because Douglass and Mr. Auld have such opposite goals, Douglass takes the thing Mr. Auld finds most abhorrent and esteems it highly.

Douglass understands that slavery hinges upon stifling slaves' mental understanding and freedom. His extraordinary determination to free himself prompts him to resolve to expand his knowledge and autonomy of mind.

In Baltimore, Douglass notices that slaves are treated much more humanely, and live almost like freemen. City-dwelling slaveholders are reluctant to look bad in front of their neighbors by malnourishing or beating their slaves. However, Douglass concedes that this general rule doesn't hold in all cases: across the street from Hugh and Sophia Auld live the Hamiltons, who own two female slaves, Mary and Henrietta. Mrs. Hamilton whips her slaves cruelly and deprives them of food; Mary is regularly seen fighting with pigs to eat the waste thrown in the street.

Slaveholders are eager to conform: social pressures prove to be enough to make city slaveholders treat their slaves humanely—in most cases, at least. Mrs. Hamilton's barbarism shows that while some slaveholders' cruelty is a product of social norms, others' is simply caused by sadism.

CHAPTER 7

Douglass spends seven years living with Master Hugh's family. During this time, he manages to teach himself to read and write, despite lacking any formal teacher. Mistress Sophia, having been reprimanded by her husband for teaching Douglass how to read, resolves not only to stop teaching Douglass but also to stand in the way of him acquiring knowledge by any means. This, Douglass says, she is able to do readily once she gets a taste of the irresponsible exercise of power.

Douglass goes to great lengths to teach himself how to read because he sees education as a step towards emancipation. Sophia, meanwhile, continues to be corrupted by slave ownership.

Douglass observes that slavery has harmed mistress Sophia Auld as much as it has damaged him. She was initially a kind and charitable woman who went out of her way to help the needy, and who didn't understand that she was supposed to treat slaves as mere property. Quickly, however, she becomes more and more malicious. After ceasing to teach Douglass, she realizes that slavery and education cannot exist together, and begins to go out of her way to quash any of Douglass's opportunities to learn. For example, she confiscates any newspaper she sees her slave reading and makes him check in with her regularly to ensure that he isn't reading when left unsupervised.

Sophia's evolution from caring mistress to malicious slaveholder illustrates the way that slavery harms both master and slave. In order to preserve her own power, she deprives Douglass of any learning opportunity that she can.

Sophia's efforts to stifle Douglass's education fall short, because Douglass is determined to educate himself. His most successful ploy is to befriend the white boys in his neighborhood, some of whom were poor and hungry, and bribe them with extra bread from the Auld household in exchange for brief reading lessons. These young boys are sympathetic to Douglass's enslavement, and Douglass refrains from thanking them by name so as to save them the embarrassment of having aided a slave.

Douglass's experience being taught by the altruistic white boys shows that a human bond can develop even in slavery's extremely unjust conditions. Douglass's ability to bribe the boys with bread also highlights the inequalities present even in white society—Douglass, a slave, is better fed than the poorest whites. And yet, he knows that trying to forge a truly equal relationship—including sharing names—would make any such interaction with those boys impossible.

After Douglass learns to read, he comes across two books that he reads over and over. The first is called *The Columbian Orator*, and in it a slave addresses his master with a compelling case for emancipation. The slave's argument proves convincing, and his master elects to free him. In another book, Douglass reads arguments against laws that restricted Catholics' rights. These two texts convince Douglass that the truth can be powerful enough to overcome slavery, and they give him an opportunity to hone his arguments against the inhumane practice.

By successfully educating himself and using his knowledge to investigate the injustice of his condition, Douglass affirms Hugh's thesis: that an educated man cannot be effectively enslaved.

While Douglass's reading brings him an intellectual means of confronting his enslavement, it also forces him to further abhor his enslavers. This painful awareness occasionally makes Douglass see his literacy as a curse rather than a blessing, and wish to be an unthinking beast. Now that Douglass is aware of freedom, he is tormented by his enslavement.

The more Douglass understands his situation, the less justifiable the actions of his oppressors seem. Douglass's evolving understanding illustrates that slavery hinges upon keeping slaves unenlightened.

Douglass becomes miserable, and begins to regret his existence and wish himself dead. Meanwhile, he listens intently to any discussion of slavery that he can overhear, and he becomes aware of the concept of *abolition*. He doesn't understand precisely what the word means, but the context in which he hears it used clues him in to its great importance. Finally, Douglass gets his hands on a newspaper that describes a petition to abolish slavery, and he understands the word's significance.

While Douglass languishes in pessimism for a short time, he never gives up hope entirely, and his determination to continue to learn the truth about his situation pays off with his discovery of the abolition movement.

Douglass encounters two Irish dockworkers, who sympathize with his life of enslavement and encourage him to run away to the north. Douglass pretends to be uninterested in what the men tell him, fearful that they might try to betray him and capture him for bounty if he shows enthusiasm for running away. Privately, though, Douglass resolves to run away.

Douglass's duplicitous behavior in front of the dockworkers shows that he is unable to safely confide in anyone else and reaffirms the tragic slave maxim, "a still tongue makes a wise head." This is a critical moment for Douglass, as this is the moment he dedicates himself to gaining freedom.

Before he runs away, Douglass's primary goal is to learn how to write. His initial technique is to watch the carpenters in the shipyards, who label pieces of wood with letters that correspond to their position in the ship. Once he has mastered the four letters the shipyard can teach him, Douglass challenges white children to writing contests. The white children invariably best Douglass, but in so doing, they teach him letters he did not know before. Douglass takes advantage of time he spends around the house unsupervised, and completes the empty pages in spelling books that belong to the Aulds' son, Thomas. After years of effort, Douglass learns to write in a script that resembles Thomas's.

Part of the arguments for slavery put forward by slaveholders was that blacks were incapable of freedom or learning. Douglass's resourcefulness in learning how to write, and his monumental success, would have proven to white readers that blacks are in fact capable of operating at the same intellectual level as whites. Douglass is presenting himself as a truth that white slave owners can't deny—the truth that blacks can learn, and can be just as eloquent as white men. Douglass establishes himself as a living argument against slavery.

CHAPTER 8

When Douglass is roughly ten or eleven, his old master, Captain Anthony, dies. Douglass is summoned back to the plantation he was born on, so that Anthony's children can divide up his property. At the valuation, slaves young and old are ranked alongside livestock. The humiliation of being inspected like an animal makes Douglass further detest the way slavery corrupts both slave and master.

Douglass's experience at the valuation represents yet another facet of the degradation slaves must tolerate. Douglass's humiliation shows that slaves are very much aware of their circumstances, in the ways the animals they are equated to are not.

After being inspected, the slaves are to be divided among Anthony's heirs. Their futures will be determined by this moment, over which they have no control, and they may be separated from their friends and family. The slaves fear being taken by Anthony's son, Andrew, who is a cruel drunkard.

The slaves' anguish is multiplied—and their status as human beings further diminished—by the fact that they have no control over their own fates.

Because Douglass knows what it is like to be treated kindly, the evaluation makes him even more anxious than his fellow slaves. Fortunately, he is not passed to Andrew, as he feared. He thanks providence that he is assigned to Mrs. Lucretia Auld. He will be sent back to Baltimore to live with Master Hugh and his family. Douglass returns to Baltimore after a psychologically taxing month on the plantation.

Once again, Douglass's expanded knowledge proves to be somewhat of a burden. Throughout the narrative Douglass shows his own Christian faith even as he endures the horrors of slavery. Here he thanks providence, or God, when he ends up with Lucretia. Douglass's own Christian faith stands in stark contrast to the hypocritical faith of slave owners, who practice and profit from a cruelty that their religion does not support.

Shortly after Douglass returns to Baltimore, his mistress, Lucretia, dies. Soon after, Master Andrew dies as well. The masters' slaves are passed along to strangers; none is set free. Douglass is disgusted by the way his grandmother is treated: after serving her master for his entire lifetime, she is simply passed into the hands of strangers without a word of gratitude. Her new owners do not find her useful, and she is sent out in the woods to live alone. Douglass laments that his grandmother was forced to finish her life suffering in loneliness, mourning the loss of her children and grandchildren. After imagining the horror his grandmother faces, Douglass asks, "Will not a righteous God visit for these things?"

Douglass's grandmother's experience shows the way that slavery breaks down the basic principles of reciprocity that should govern human interactions. The manifest injustice of his grandmother's fate so distresses Douglass that he questions the power that governs the universe. Douglass's cry to God mirrors the cries of other afflicted people's in the Bible (for instance the Jews in Egypt).

Master Thomas remarries a woman named Rowena Hamilton. Thomas and Hugh have a falling-out, and as a consequence, Douglass is taken from Hugh and sent to live with Thomas in St. Michael's, a town near his birthplace in rural Maryland. Douglass feels he has little to lose from this change, because owning slaves has made Hugh and Sophia into cruel people, but he laments having to leave the young boys he befriended in Baltimore. Douglass also regrets not attempting to escape before he was transferred to Thomas, because it is easier to escape the city than the country. However, on his way to St. Michael's, he studies the countryside and transportation and resolves to make an attempt to escape.

This transition in Douglass's life recalls his earlier move to Baltimore: his situation is abysmal, but he is persistently optimistic about its potential to improve. For the first time, however, Douglass has actually developed attachments to the people who surround him—the young boys of Baltimore. Douglass's careful observation during the train trip shows that he never passes up an opportunity to educate himself, and uses his journey to the country to improve his understanding of an escape route.

CHAPTER 9

At this point, Douglass can now give accurate dates when describing his experience. He left Baltimore and arrived at St. Michael's in March of 1832. It has been seven years since Douglass lived with Master Thomas Auld, and Douglass is soon reminded of the cruel spirit of Thomas and his wife. Thomas does not adequately feed his slaves. Douglass and the other slaves—his sister, Eliza; his aunt, Priscilla; and a woman named Henny—are forced to beg and steal in order to subsist. While the slaves starve, the Aulds' storeroom overflows with bounty, and they pray for still more.

Thomas and Rowena are archetypes of the hypocritical Christian slaveholder. While they withhold their plentiful food from their slaves, who are reduced to utter wretchedness, the masters feign piety and pray for more bounty.

Thomas Auld is particularly mean and immoral because he gained his slaves by marriage. He attempts to adopt the mannerisms of people who were brought up owning slaves, but ends up relating to his slaves in an awkward and inconsistent manner. Because of this, the slaves hold him in contempt, and do not even address him as "master."

Even the slaves themselves recognize the awkward status that Thomas's slave ownership has conferred upon him. Their knowledge of their master's insecurity is enough to dash what little respect they may have had for him.

In August of 1932, Thomas Auld goes to a Methodist camp-meeting and returns with strong religious faith. Douglass hopes that this faith might make Thomas emancipate his slaves, or at least treat them more humanely, but Thomas instead becomes a crueler man. Thomas now uses religion to justify owning slaves, and prays enthusiastically.

The Christianity of the slaveholders is not a genuine Christianity, as it only makes the slaveholders crueler to their fellow human beings.

Preachers routinely come to Thomas Auld's house, and eat well while the slaves starve. However, not all of the white people Douglass meets are unkind: one of the preachers, Mr. Cookman, is sympathetic to the slaves, and the slaves respect him for it. Another white man named Mr. Wilson sets up a Sabbath school to teach the slaves to read the new testament, but the school meets only three times before it is broken up by some of the most pious men in the town who dislike the idea of slaves learning to read anything, and who storm in wielding sticks.

The selfishness of the preachers and the destruction of the Sabbath school highlight the hypocrisy of the "Christian" slaveholders. Slaves are violently forbidden to learn to study the Bible solely because literacy threatens to empower them. The white Christians are trying to stop others from coming closer to Christ because they want to ensure nothing interferes with slavery.

Master Thomas is particularly abusive to Henny, whose deformed arms prevent her from doing any work but bearing burdens. He brutally whips Henny and then quotes scripture to justify his actions.

Even though Henny as an invalid is most deserving of Christian charity, Thomas finds the most excuses to treat her inhumanely.

Douglass and Master Thomas do not get along, because Thomas thinks Douglass's city upbringing has made him headstrong. Douglass regularly lets Thomas's horse escape so that he can go to a neighboring farm and get something to eat. Thomas tries to discipline Douglass, but his whippings fail. Thomas decides to lend Douglass for a year to a farmer named Edward Covey, who is known for his ability to break slaves. Douglass is once again glad to for the change in ownership, as he hears that Covey will feed him well.

Douglass's taste of relative freedom has given him the courage to defy his master's authority. When he is to be given to Covey, Douglass's optimism again prevails to help him negotiate changing circumstances

CHAPTER 10

On January 1st, 1833, Douglass leaves Master Thomas's to work as a field hand for Mr. Covey. Douglass's city upbringing makes him unfit for this labor. In the first few days, Covey sends Douglass with a team of oxen into the forest to retrieve some wood. Douglass does not know how to manage the oxen, and they startle and upset the cart. Douglass narrowly escapes injury. He is stranded in the middle of the woods with a damaged cart and a team of oxen tangled in their own reins. Douglass manages to re-yoke the oxen and sets off again, but they quickly become frightened for a second time, and nearly run Douglass into a gate. After Douglass reports his troubles to Covey, Covey whips him savagely.

Douglass's experience trying to manage the team of oxen demonstrates the unfair expectations masters have of their slaves. Covey can't be bothered to teach Douglass to handle the oxen, and Douglass assumes a task at great physical risk—but nevertheless, Covey blames Douglass when things go wrong, and whips him for the accident.

During Douglass's first six months living with Covey, he was whipped roughly once a week. Covey works his slaves from before dawn till after dusk, and while he gives them enough food to eat, he does not give them enough time to eat it. To ensure productivity, Covey labors alongside his slaves, and Covey will often sneak up on his slaves in order to make sure they work even when unsupervised. Covey often uses elaborate ruses to trick the slaves into thinking he has disappeared, only to watch his slaves from a hidden vantage point. This forces the slaves to work constantly, from fear of constant surveillance.

Covey is Douglass's most sinister master. Not only does he make extraordinary physical demands of his slaves, he also uses trickery and deceit to erode their mental strength. Life on Covey's farm consists of nothing but constant work and constant paranoia.

Covey's sinister powers of deception also extend into his religious practice. He prays frequently, but only in ways that do not give the slaves a break from fieldwork. Covey often sings hymns with his family, but is not a strong reader, and Douglass is usually required to read the hymns. However, Douglass often refuses, which unsettles Covey, and forces him to read haltingly to show his independence from the slave.

Covey is the worst sort of religious hypocrite—he feigns intense Christian faith, but only when it is advantageous for him to do so. Douglass's refusal to read is a small act of rebellion that affirms that Covey hasn't broken him completely.

Covey is a poor man, who can only afford to own one slave (he "rents" the others from different slave-owners). This slave was a twenty-year-old woman named Caroline, whom Covey bought as a "breeder." He compels another man to sleep with Caroline nightly, and after some time, Caroline gives birth to a pair of twins.

"Breeding" slaves is one of the most morally outrageous practices of slavery, and it further refutes Covey's professed commitment to Christianity.

Douglass is broken by his six months with Covey. He is forced to work in every weather condition, no matter how hot or cold. The constant toil erodes Douglass's hope and destroys his interest in intellectual pursuits. He spends Sundays—his only leisure time—in a dream-like stupor, unable to think clearly. He entertains the idea of killing himself or Mr. Covey, but cannot follow through out of a combination of hope and fear.

Under Covey, Douglass reaches his lowest point. His enslavement is so total that he can no longer use the one thing he retains full control of: his mind. The stupor Covey's practices induce in Douglass illustrates the dulling of slaves' minds that allows slavery to continue. Slave owners treat slaves this way on purpose—only with such inhumane treatment can they beat their slaves down enough to keep slaves down.

Covey's house is on the Chesapeake Bay, and Douglass's regular sight of the far-ranging ships in the harbor makes him fearful and sad about his wretched condition. The sight of the ships inspires him to attempt to run away and seek freedom.

To Douglass, the ships in the Chesapeake symbolize freedom of movement and control over one's destiny.

While fanning wheat for Covey in August of 1833, Douglass collapses from heat exhaustion and is unable to continue working. Covey hits Douglass and demands he continue working. Douglass rises and resumes work, but he vows to complain to Master Thomas about Covey's treatment. After work, a disoriented Douglass ignores Covey's orders to stay put and stumbles seven miles to Thomas's house. Thomas ignores Douglass's complaints, and says that Covey is a good man who poses no danger of killing Douglass.

Douglass's choice to appeal to Thomas shows how desperate he has become. The trip to Thomas's surely required a good deal of effort from the exhausted slave, and, besides, Douglass already knew that Thomas was an uncompassionate master.

Douglass spends the night in St. Michael's, and returns to Covey's the next day. He sees Covey running out to whip him and successfully hides in the cornfields. Douglass spends the day in the woods, and meets a slave named Sandy Jenkins, who is on his way to the house where his free wife lives. Jenkins takes Douglass home with him. There, he tells Douglass to return to Covey, but to always carry with him a special root on his right side. This root, Jenkins says, will prevent a master from hitting any slave that carries it. Douglass is skeptical, but agrees to follow Sandy's insistent advice.

Sandy in several ways represents a commonly held negative stereotype of the slave. He is superstitious—he believes in the powers of a mystical root—and he is very deferential to his master, which shows in his recommendation to Douglass that he return to Covey.

The next day, Sunday, Douglass returns to Covey's carrying the root on his right side. On his way back, he passes Covey, who is headed to church. Covey speaks to Douglass kindly, and Douglass begins to believe in the root's powers. The next morning, Douglass is given an early chore, and as he works, Covey catches Douglass off guard and ties his legs up. Douglass falls down, but resolves to fight Covey, and seizes his master by the throat. Another farmhand, Hughes, comes to help Covey, but Douglass incapacitates him with a kick to the ribs. The two fight for two more hours, and Covey finally gives up without having whipped Douglass.

Regardless of the actual merit of Sandy's superstitious beliefs about the root, Douglass's rebelliousness and self-confidence has been restored. By responding in kind to Covey's violence, Douglass intimidates his master and keeps Covey's abuse in check.

The fight with Covey renews Douglass's self-confidence and his desire to be free, and he experiences a satisfaction that could only be understood by someone who has himself repelled slavery. Though Douglass remains a slave for four years after the fight, he is never again whipped.

This event marks a turning point in Douglass's life, as he now understands the value of standing up to protect himself.

Douglass is at first surprised that Covey doesn't have him whipped by a constable. Douglass theorizes that Covey doesn't want to lose his reputation as a slave-breaker, and having Douglass whipped in public would discredit Covey.

Douglass's defiance exploits Covey's insecurities. While Covey holds more power than Douglass, he is clearly a weaker man both physically and spiritually, and his reputation as a slave breaker makes him vulnerable to those slaves he can't break. He has to keep them from revealing his failure, and can only do that by giving in to them.

Douglass's year of service to Mr. Covey ends on Christmas Day of 1833. Slaves are given the days between Christmas and New Years off as holidays. Some spend this time preparing industriously for the coming season, but most simply revel. Douglass sees these holidays not as an illustration of the slaveholders' benevolence, but as a calculated attempt to prevent insurrection. Slaveholders encourage the slaves to drink heavily and sicken themselves, so that the slaves will believe they cannot live independently. Part of the inhumane fraud of slavery, Douglass says, is to disgust the slave with his freedom.

The debauchery of the holidays illustrates the slaveholders' despicable methods of ensuring slaves' complacence. By keeping slaves ignorant of what true freedom is like, the slaveholders convince them that they do not deserve the privilege. The malicious trickery of the holiday season is a strong example of the way slave owners perpetuate slavery through ignorance and deception.

On January 1st, 1834, Douglass is sent to live with William Freeland, who lives near St. Michael's. Freeland is a more honorable man than Covey, and does not deceive his slaves. Douglass is also relieved that Freeland does not try to use religion to justify owning slaves, because Douglass has found religious slaveholders to be the most cowardly and cruel. For example, Mr. Weeden and Mr. Hopkins, two ministers who live near Mr. Freeland, regularly whip their slaves for no reason other than to assert their own authority.

Freeland is, to Douglass, a less objectionable slaveholder because he does not use religion to engineer a moral justification for his ownership. Ironically, his de-emphasis of religion makes him a more humane master.

Mr. Freeland treats Douglass more fairly than Covey did, giving his slaves both enough to eat and enough time to eat. Freeland himself owns only two slaves, Henry and John Harris. Douglass is a hired hand, along with Sandy Jenkins and Handy Caldwell. Douglass instills in his fellow slaves the desire to learn to read, and he spends his Sundays teaching them. The school expands—Douglass remembers teaching over 40 people at one point. Douglass is touched by the risks the slaves take in order to educate themselves, and looks back on his teaching days with great pleasure and pride.

Douglass's belief that education can bring empowerment—and his dedication to his fellow slaves—is made clear in his commitment to teaching the reading class. It also shows how a slave who can read is a threat to slavery, because that slave can pass both knowledge and the skill onto other slaves, who can then pass on their knowledge and the skill, etc., breaking down the ignorance that keeps slaves from thinking critically about their enslavement.

Douglass passes a relatively easy year with Mr. Freeland. He attributes some of his comfort to the love that he shares with his fellow slaves. In 1835, at the end of his first year, Douglass is taken again for a second year with Freeland. Douglass decides that he would rather live "upon free land" than "with Freeland," and resolves that 1835 will not come and go without an attempt to escape.

The human connection Douglass experiences with his fellow slaves makes his experience at Freeland's easier to endure. However, Douglass is not content with his relative comfort, and will finally make good on his promises to attempt an escape.

It is important to Douglass to convince his fellow slaves to escape with him. They meet frequently to plan their flight, and are intimidated by the dismal odds they face. Finally, they become determined to run away—to Douglass, this is more impressive than Patrick Henry's trademark cry of "give me liberty or give me death," as the slaves were faced with the prospect of dubious liberty or certain death.

Again, Douglass's compassionate concern for his fellow slaves compels him to include them in his escape plans, likely at greater risk to himself. Symbolically, it's noteworthy that Douglass's decision to seek liberty is seen as a more profound choice than the founding fathers'.

Douglass's escape plan involves his group of slaves paddling a canoe up the Chesapeake to reach the north. The group of escapees consists of Henry Harris, John Harris, Henry Bailey, and Charles Roberts. Sandy Jenkins was initially going to come, but backed out. To give their escape some plausibility, Douglass forges written travel passes from a master.

Douglass's ability to read and write gives the escaping slaves a strategic advantage. Because their intelligence is constantly underestimated, nobody will guess that they could have forged their own passes.

On the day the slaves had planned to flee, Douglass goes to work as usual. However, he is overcome with an inexplicable feeling of betrayal. Then, without warning, Douglass and his co-conspirators are tied up and brought to jail in Easton. Douglass manages to destroy the pass he had written, and he and his co-conspirators agree to deny their plot.

Sandy's last-minute choice to back out of the escape suggests that he may have been the one who betrayed his fellow slaves.

In jail, slave traders appraise and demean the imprisoned slaves. After some time in jail, all the slaves except Douglass are taken home; this separation pains Douglass dearly. Douglass believes that he will be the only one sold, because he was the ringleader of the escape plan.

Notably, what hurts Douglass most about his time in jail is his separation from his fellow slaves.

While languishing in jail, Douglass abandons hope. His master, Thomas Auld, announces plans to send him to Alabama. However, Thomas decides instead to send Douglass back to Baltimore to live with Hugh Auld.

Once again, it seems as though providence has intervened to improve Douglass's luck.

When Douglass arrives in Baltimore, he is apprenticed to a ship-builder named William Gardner, who will teach him how to caulk ships. However, because the shipyard is scrambling to meet a tight deadline, Douglass is overwhelmed with simple errands and cannot learn any new skills. After eight months working in the shipyard, Douglass is assaulted by a group of four white apprentices. The white carpenters have become disgruntled working with blacks, because they fear that the blacks will take their jobs. Douglass tries to fight back, but is badly beaten. Despite there being many witnesses to Douglass's assault, nobody comes to his aid.

When he is assaulted by the white carpenters, Douglass is targeted simply because he is an unwilling part of an unfair system. Douglass doesn't represent any meaningful threat to the carpenters' jobs, and, more importantly, it isn't even his choice to work. Nevertheless, racist insecurities prevail over logic, and the blameless Douglass is beat up.

Douglass returns to Master Hugh that day, and Sophia cares for his wounds. Hugh is outraged at the violence done to Douglass, and speaks to a lawyer. The lawyer informs Hugh that he has no legal recourse, unless a witness will step forward on Douglass's behalf. No blacks can testify, and no whites—even those who sympathize with Douglass—will testify for Douglass and against a fellow white man.

Douglass's beating exemplifies the injustice that slaves face. He is beat in front of numerous witnesses, but individual and institutional racism prevents his case from being handled fairly by the law.

With no chance for redress, Hugh nurses Douglass back to health in his home, and then apprentices the slave to another caulker, Mr. Walter Price. Douglass learns the trade, and is soon able to earn wages of six or seven dollars per week. Douglass now routinely earns money, but is compelled to turn it all over to Master Hugh at the end of each week. This "piracy" of his pay makes Douglass resent slavery still more: he realizes that every improvement in his condition only makes him desire freedom further, because slavery depends on keeping the enslaved in moral and intellectual darkness, so that slaves cannot see the inconsistencies of slavery.

Douglass is beginning to develop more and more of the characteristics that freemen have. He has learned a trade and cultivated his intellect. This worldliness only makes Douglass more aware of the unfairness of his situation—he has the same skills as others who can make a living for themselves. But Douglass's money goes to his masters. The better equipped he is to recognize the hypocrisy of slavery, the more acutely Douglass recognizes it.

CHAPTER 11

Douglass introduces this chapter as a description of his successful escape. However, he says that he is unable to give a complete account of his flight, because disclosing all the facts of the escape would compromise those who helped him and make it more difficult for other slaves to escape.

This is one of the only sections of the novel where Douglass does not to attempt to fully recount the truth, and he only withholds this information because the truth would threaten people he cares about. In explicitly acknowledging that he is not giving the whole truth, he both frees himself from others charging him of not telling the full truth and also shows how slavery makes it impossible for slaves to be truthful about everything because to be truthful can lead to death.

Douglass also expresses his frustration with the very public way in which the underground railroad—a network of people who aid escaping slaves—operates. While he appreciates the bravery of those who run the underground railroad, he thinks their indiscretion makes it much more difficult for slaves to escape bondage. Douglass recommends keeping the slaveholder ignorant of the means by which slaves escape, so that the oppressors will torment themselves with all sorts of imaginary threats.

By proposing to keep the underground railroad secret, Douglass uses the slaveholders' oppressive techniques against them: he seeks to keep slaveholders unenlightened to exploit their vulnerability, just as slaveholders try to keep their slaves as ignorant as possible.

In 1838, Douglass grew dissatisfied with forfeiting all of his earnings to Master Hugh. Sometimes, Hugh would let Douglass keep a tiny fraction of his pay, which only affirmed to Douglass that he had a right to keep all of it.

Douglass's burgeoning knowledge of free life only makes his enslavement harder to bear—keeping some of his earnings only sharpens the pain of forfeiting the majority.

Master Thomas comes to Baltimore, and Douglass requests that he be allowed to work for pay. Thomas refuses this request, and tells Douglass to be complacent and obedient, and not to overthink his role. Douglass is not deterred, and soon asks Master Hugh for the privilege of finding his own freelance work and keeping some of his earnings. Hugh grants Douglass this ability, but demands that Douglass pay him three dollars per week off the top of his earnings. This arrangement is very good for Hugh: Douglass has to pay for his own room and board, while still paying money to his Master. However, Douglass accepts his new responsibilities as a step towards freedom.

Getting to keep most of his earnings is a dramatic step towards freedom for Douglass. Douglass's willingness to accept this undoubtedly more difficult arrangement shows his determination to emancipate himself.

After a few months of this arrangement, Douglass neglects to pay Hugh his weekly tribute on time because he has gone to spend time with friends outside Baltimore. Hugh thinks Douglass is planning an escape and retracts the permission he gave Douglass to work on his own, and in retaliation, Douglass does no work for an entire week. When his next payment to Hugh is due, his master is furious, and the two men almost come to blows.

Douglass's time working for his own earnings emboldens him to stand up in defiance of his master.

After this confrontation, Douglass decides to attempt an escape on the third of September. He works extremely diligently in the meantime, to dispel any of Hugh's suspicions about an escape attempt.

Douglass keeps Hugh ignorant of his plans by acting as if he has no such plans. That Douglass can now keep his master ignorant shows that he now sees himself as the equal of his "master."

Douglass has mixed feelings about escaping, because he will be forced to part with the beloved friends he has made in Baltimore. His past failure also discourages him. However, he sticks to his resolution and successfully escapes.

That the simple, elemental desire to be free should force Douglass to give up his friendships is yet another indictment of slavery.

Douglass reaches New York City on September third, and initially feels great relief. However, this relief soon turns to further anxiety when he realizes that he still can be recaptured. He also experiences a crushing loneliness in the foreign city because he is unable to trust anyone.

Far from home and unable to trust anyone, Douglass can no longer enjoy the fellowship of his friends, and this deprivation takes a toll on his mental health.

Fortunately, Douglass is aided by a free black abolitionist and journalist, Mr. David Ruggles, who takes the fugitive slave into his boarding house and instructs him to go work as a caulker in New Bedford. While Douglass is in New York, he writes to and is joined by his fiancée, a free black woman named Anna Murray, whom he marries at a ceremony attended by Ruggles and conducted by the Reverend J.W. Pennington.

Finally, Douglass is treated like a human being. His marriage to Anna leaves him able to enjoy human fellowship at a level greater than he ever could while enslaved. Ruggles is the beginning of Douglass's move to become an activist against slavery—the educated black free men feel a duty of fellowship to the slaves left behind.

Douglass and his new wife board a steamboat for Newport, Rhode Island. Despite having no money to pay for transportation to New Bedford, they board a stagecoach and arrive at the house of Mr. Nathan Johnson, who treats them well and pays for their coach fare.

The altruism that Douglass encounters on his journey to Massachusetts paints a picture of the free north as generous and fraternal, and implies that this spirit may come from the area's rejection of slavery.

Douglass begins to feel safe with Johnson. Douglass realizes that the name he had picked for himself, "Frederick Johnson," is too common. Because "Frederick" is a large part of his identity, Douglass lets Johnson pick a new surname for him; Douglass now officially changes his name to "Frederick Douglass."

Douglass's transition into status as a full human is completed by his abandonment of his slave name. Taking on a new name is like a kind of baptism, a gaining of a new free self, untainted by slavery.

The comfort and splendor of life in New Bedford astounds Douglass, because he didn't think such prosperity would have been possible without owning slaves. He had mistakenly assumed that all non-slaveholders would be as poor as the southerners who couldn't afford slaves. Douglass is amazed that New Bedford lacks the destitution that some experience in the south, and is especially impressed that many free blacks in the north live more comfortably than some slaveholders in the south.

As his worldview expands, Douglass's ignorance shrinks, and he loses the last of the misconceptions forced on him by enslavement—namely, the misconception that prosperity cannot exist without slavery. In fact, he comes to see the utter pointlessness of slavery—not only is it cruel and anti-Christian, but it produces a society that is less *well off than the non-slaveholding north.?*

On his third day in town, Douglass finds work loading oil onto a ship. He is unable to make use of his artisanal skills, because blacks are forbidden from doing caulking work in New Bedford, but he is nonetheless pleased to be working.

The racist laws that inhibit Douglass show that the free north is by no means perfect; however, Douglass is as optimistic and industrious as ever.

After a few months spent in New Bedford, Douglass begins to read the *Liberator*, the abolitionist newspaper run by William Lloyd Garrison. Douglass becomes dedicated to the abolitionist cause, and ends up speaking at an anti-slavery convention in August of 1841. He speaks little, because he is nervous of addressing white people, but he realizes that he has articulated himself well. With this small speech, Douglass began his role as an anti-slavery speaker and advocate, and dedicated himself to that cause.

Since his energies are no longer consumed by devising an escape, Douglass devotes his extraordinary passion to the abolitionist cause in the belief that the truthful exposition of his horrible experiences can help bring about the abolition of slavery.

APPENDIX

Douglass realizes that his tone in the body of his narrative may have resembled a condemnation of all religion. The appendix is designed to set the record straight: Douglass is not opposed to all religion; he only takes issue with the religion that slaveholders use to justify their inhumane actions. In fact, Douglass "loves the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ." It is only the distortion of Christianity that he experienced as a slave that he hates.

Douglass's references to divine providence show him to be a firm believer in a benevolent, Christian God. What he finds intolerable is certainly not *Christianity.It's the hypocritical distortion of Christianity, the religion in which he believes and worships, to condone the atrocities of slavery.*

Douglass condemns the hypocrisy of so-called Christians who brutally beat slaves, use them for prostitution, disband their families, and steal from their fellow humans. Oftentimes, Douglass notes, the ill-gotten gains of slavery are funneled back into the church. Douglass uses Bible verses to support his arguments, and compares the immoral slaveholding Christians to the Pharisees who persecuted Christ. He also invokes abolitionist poetry and ironically lampoons Southerners' own songs in order to drive his point home.

Slavery and the corrupt church help sustain one another, and, in turn, amplify the vices of each institution. Douglass's treatment of the issue highlights the irony of a situation in which those who are supposedly the most pious encourage the most inhumane activity.

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