



Black Aggressions and Resistance in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* by Frederick Douglass

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Abstract - This article is interested in black aggressions and resistance in Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: an American slave*. Going from physical, moral and intellectual aggressions undergone by Negroes on the masters' plantations, it shows how Douglass performs an intellectual resistance against Whites' oppression, and how he contributes to the rehabilitation of black culture in America. In fact, education is Douglass's most important weapon to liberate himself as well as his black community from white domination and supremacy. He settles himself in learning how to read and write, first from his mistress Mrs. Auld, then from all little white boys he meets in the streets. In his ambition of learning, he faces a lot of obstacles. Mr. Auld, for example, like many other slaveholders in the South, is deeply convinced that Negroes should not be taught how to read and write. He believes that reading and writing could only cause them harm because they will no longer feel at ease in their status of slave. He therefore dissuades his wife, Mrs. Auld to teach Douglass. But the latter does not feel discouraged. Instead, he is so optimistic about the importance of education that he has committed himself in teaching his fellow-slaves how to read and write. In doing so, he rehabilitates black culture through his writing which perpetuates African American history that is part and parcel of American historical agenda.

Keywords : Domination, education, liberation, oppression, rehabilitation,

INTRODUCTION

Many African American writers have tackled the issue of negro aggressions during slavery. In *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass : an American slave*, written by Frederick Douglass himself, the emphasis is put on the dismantling of black families by White masters. In the very beginning of Douglass's writing, the reader can clearly observe the hard living conditions in which the masters have plunged their slaves. Separated from parents and families, and deprived of any rights including the right to possess even their own children, Negroes are forced to stay all their lives in the hands of slaveholders who, not only, can sell and force them to work to death on the plantations but also endow themselves with the right to kill slaves for any reason. As for women slaves, they are victim of rape and sometimes they do not know the fathers of their children who never claim them as is the case with Frederick Douglass himself.

Observing all these rules imposed to Negroes, the attitude of white masters in *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass : an American slave* seems to be dictatorial



because they scatter black families without their consent. While being institutionalized, slavery is transmitted from mothers to children or from one generation to the next because as it is clearly stated, in substance, in the novel under study, it is an obligation for the children of slave women to follow the condition of their mothers. It is too dangerous because it praises the superiority of Whites on Blacks, with the consequences of creating discrimination and hatred among races, hence the perpetual struggle between Douglass and his masters.

Douglass embodies a figure of resistance in the novel so as to liberate himself and the black race from the bad conditions of bondage. As a good strategist, he uses many techniques to get rid of slavery in order to create a suitable life for him and his community. Education is the key he uses to install truth in the society and put Blacks as well as Whites at the same level of equality and justice. In this point of view, he can be taken as a source of inspiration and resistance against the white supremacy and domination. In writing an autobiographical novel about his bondage experiences, he distinguishes himself from all others. Unlike many African American writers dealing with slavery, like Toni Morrison, Shirley Anne Williams, Charles Johnson, to name but a few, he uses his personal experience to report how the Negroes have been attacked physically and morally during the period of enslavement.

In this article, our objective is to show how Douglass emphasizes education which is the best weapon for black people to liberate themselves from White harassment and aggressions. Douglass has shown that no freedom and liberation are possible without knowledge and good education. Negroes are not kept into slavery because of their physical weaknesses but their enslavement is mainly referring to their masters' cultural background but not their own. Any successful resistance should be based on the acquisition of knowledge as the first weapon because it is what distinguishes masters from slaves and this position seems to be well-understood by Douglass. Going from the physical, moral and intellectual aggressions undergone by Negroes, we will try to shed light on how Negroes have resisted against Whites' oppression and how Douglass, through writing and teaching has contributed to the rehabilitation of black culture.

1. The Negro, Facing Physical, Moral and Intellectual Aggressions

In all directions, the institution of slavery does not offer any chance of survival to the Negroes. Dominated by the white masters, black people taken from Africa were physically, morally and intellectually attacked. This situation has generated many deadly consequences. In *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: an American Slave*, Douglass insists on the dismantling of the black families by the masters because of many reasons.



In fact, agriculture and slave-trade are at the origin of black families scattering or dispersion. Because of these two factors, Negroes are victims of a lot of injustices. Not only are they separated from parents and families, but they are also forced to work hard without payment for the count or benefit of the masters. As Negroes have no right, they are simply taken for talking chattel, good for the farms and the plantations of the masters. Most of them have suffered all their existence without hope of relief.

Douglass then insists on the relationship existing between parents and their children. As inspired by his own history, he shows that masters are endeavouring to prevent parents from falling in love with their children and vice-versa. They are separated at a moment when the infant is too young to recognize or distinguish good from evil. For instance, at a very early age, Douglass is separated from his mother and is not claimed by his father who is supposed to be his master. He accordingly depicts the situation as follows:

My father was a white man. He was admitted to be such by all I ever heard speak of my parentage. The opinion was also whispered that my master was my father, but of the correctness of this opinion, I know nothing, the means of knowing was withheld from me. My mother and I were separated when I was but an infant_ before I knew her as my mother. It is a common custom, in the part of Maryland from which I ran away, to part children from their mothers at a very early age (Douglass, 1999, p. 15).

Because of slavery which can be assimilated to evil, the lives of the black characters in *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: an American slave* are endangered. In fact, not only does bondage separate and dismantle the families, but it forces them to live as a minority group by sending them on different plantations and farms and by selling them to different masters just to avoid that they live next door. The spirit of this separation is to prevent any family contact able to create love and solidarity among the members.

In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, for example, there is a physical aggression which is at the origin of the separation between a mother, Sethe and her daughter, Beloved. This attack has caused many negative consequences such as the assassination of Beloved who, eighteen years later, has come back, in the flesh, to take her revenge on her mother. This event is a way for Morrison to, not only, show the hardships lived by slaves, but also to express the uncertainty and paradoxical conditions they have been living during these moments. Morrison seems to suggest that the past be left behind and the focus be put on the future, despite the numerous aggressions undergone by black people. She uses these terms:



Daily life took as much as she [Sethe] had. The future was sunset; the past something to leave behind. And if it didn't stay behind, well, you might have to stomp it out. Slave life; freed life--every day was a test and a trial. Nothing could be counted on in a world where even when you were a solution you were a problem (Morrison, 1987, p. 256).

Black characters in *Beloved* encounter a lot of problems even if they are often the answers to masters' questions or issues. All the same, in *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: an American slave* they represent both situation. In fact, by their physical contributions they are the key to the economical progress masters who strive daily to keep them around and avoid possible flights. By preventing slaves to learn, the masters' intention is to avoid troubles in terms of rebellion. Quoting his master's words, Douglass witnesses:

If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master_ to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world. Now, said he [Mr. Auld], "If you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable and of no value to his master. As to himself, it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm (Douglass, 1999, p. 39).

The democratization of education and knowledge during slavery was problematic since both were founded on racial discrimination meaning that no colored children should go to school, instead their places are on the masters' plantations.

By keeping the Negroes ignorant of their culture and their masters' one, the system of slavery contributes to erase part of their history because they have no way of transmitting knowledge and experiences. It has deliberately maintained them into an inferior position for long. To stop this situation, Douglass makes all possible efforts to learn how to read and write despite the many hindrances he has encountered. His main objective is to combat evil and liberate the black race, which can only pass by education. According to T. Sowell, an American economist, author and social commentator whose writing range from social policy on race, ethnic groups, education and decision-making, to classical and Marxican economics, to the problems of children perceived as having disabilities, ignorance, dependence and fear are used in the antebellum South to prevent slaves from escaping. He puts it in these terms:

The central feature of any slave system_ preventing escape_ was accomplished in the antebellum South, not by fences or guards, but by keeping the slave ignorant, dependent, and in fear. The overwhelming majority of slaves could neither read nor write, and most Southern states made it a crime to teach them (Sowell, 1981, p. 187).

Establishing ignorance for Negroes is encouraged in the antebellum South. It expresses, to a certain extent, an attitude of racism which, far from causing slavery, is the result of it. E. Williams (1966, p. 5) states: "Slavery was not born



of racism: rather, racism was the consequence of slavery. Unfree labor in the New World was brown, white, black, and yellow; Catholic, Protestant and pagan''

Because of this racist issue, the dimension of slavery takes another direction by targetting most of the time negroes to turn them into slaves by keeping them ignorant all their lives. In the purpose of avoiding rebellion and an uneasy situation on his plantation, Mr. Auld in *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: an American slave*, dissuades his wife to teach their black slave, Douglass himself. He is deeply convinced that being educated would cause him a lot of harm. For him, no slave should be taught how to read and write, which shows another intellectual aggression that nearly all masters imposed to their slaves.

While E. Williams defends that racism is the consequence of slavery, Morrison goes further. In an interview by the Colbert Report, she declares:

Racism is a construct; a social construct. And it has benefits. Money can be made off of it. People who don't like themselves can feel better because of it. It can describe certain kinds of behavior that are wrong or misleading. So [racism] has a social function. But race can only be defined as a human being. (www.essence.com, consulted on September 10, 2022).

Slavery could be seen as the absence of freedom but also as an abuse of it. It pushes the enslaved Negroes encounter a lot of social and moral troubles. Deprived of any right including the right to possess, they have no integrity and fail to be taken for citizens. That's the reason why, after the Civil War (1861-1865) which grants a freedom status to all slaves in America, there is a serious problem within the sovereign mission of the State which is to protect all people all over the country. Douglass, being pessimistic about Negroes's protection by the American nation asks full of questions. She puts them in these terms:

The true problem is not the negro, but the nation. Not the law-abiding blacks of the South, but the white men of that section, who by fraud, violence and persecution, are breaking the law, trampling on the Constitution, corrupting the ballot-box, and defeating the ends of justice. The true problem is whether these white ruffians shall be allowed by the nation to go on their lawless and nefarious career, dishonoring the Government and making its very name a mockery. It is whether this nation has in itself sufficient moral stamina to maintain its own honor and integrity by vindicating its own Constitution and fulfilling its own pledges, or whether it has already touched that dry rot of moral depravity by which nations decline and fall, and governments fade and vanish. The United States Government made the negro a citizen, will it protect him as a citizen? This is the problem. It made him a soldier, will it honor him as a patriot? This is the problem. It made him a voter, will it defend his right to vote? This is the problem. This, I say, is more a problem for the nation than for the negro, and this is the side of the question far more than the other which should be kept in view by the American people (Douglass, 1890, p. 2).

In *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: an American slave*, Negroes encounter a lot of moral and psychological devastations due to the attitude of slaveholders. In fact, most black characters of the novel like Douglass inherit their suffer and pain from their mothers who transmit slavery to them, because it is clearly stated that



“the children of slave women shall in all cases follow the condition of their mothers” (Douglass, 1999, p. 16). Also, the white masters are doing all their best to keep children away from parents just “to hinder the development of the child’s affection toward its mother, and to blunt and destroy the natural affection of the mother for the child” (Douglass, 1999, p. 16).

Many characters, as depicted by Douglass, are morally and psychologically affected. Are they only the enslaved black men or the enslaver white masters who, because of their will of supremacy and domination, fears to be equalized or dominated by the black men? A few years after the liberation of the black slaves, Douglass seems to indicate the direction of the fearful characters by declaring these words:

And what are the reasons they [Rebellious and slave-holding South] give for demanding of the nation this retreat from its advanced position? They are these: They tell us that they are afraid, very much afraid : they are alarmed, very much alarmed, by the possibility of negro supremacy over them. This is the calamity from which they would be delivered, and with eloquent lips and lusty lungs they are calling out: “Men and brethren, save us from this threatened and terrible danger!” (Douglass, 1890, p. 3).

The economic purposes of the masters are, in reality, at the origin of many aggressions lived by Negroes in *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: an American slave*. For instance, by depriving Douglass and his fellow-slaves of any possibility of possession, masters plunge them into a deep financial and moral crisis which prevents them from being independent. They are deprived them of their dignity which makes of them worthy human beings. The only concern of the masters is how to get rich by using a black labor force. They seem to be specifically described by M. Weber (1958, p. 2) when he writes that “Man is dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of his life.” The manner of getting money or richness matters a bit for these people who never hesitate to kill or murder, sell or separate, whip or punish by using different methods.

White people whose interests seem to be in the keeping of slavery may see it as a good thing especially for people they think should be civilized. William Gilmore Simms, who spoke for a substantial body of Southern opinion in 1852, defended that:

Slavery is a wisely devised institution of heaven devised for the benefit, improvement, and safety, morally, socially, and physically of a barbarous and inferior race, who would otherwise perish by famine or by filth, by the sword, by disease, by waste, and destinies forever gnawing, consuming, and finally destroying (Blair, Hornberger and Stewart, 1964, p. 124)

Comparing slavery to an institution of heaven is trying to hide or justify the physical, moral and intellectual aggressions done on Negroes. It could not be



shared by slaves who, not only, are the white masters' properties but are also daily exposed to illtreatments, separation from family members or death. In *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: an American Slave*, the emphasis is put on the violences inflicted to the Negroes, the murders, the flights to escape death, the moral devastations through the intimidations by the white masters, the whipping as Douglass puts it down:

Mr. Severe was rightly named: he was a cruel man. I have seen him whip a woman, causing the blood to run half an hour at the time, and this, too, in the midst of her crying children, pleading for their mother's release (Douglass, 1999, p. 22).

Referring to the quotation above, the idea of heaven alluding slavery cannot be accepted. Heaven is supposed to be a place of peace, of rest, of quietness, of love, of goodness. It cannot go with aggression or violence, neither physically nor morally. It cannot go with the life of slaves on the plantation with its cruelties. In *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: an American slave* Mr. Severe embodies cruelty. He is so cruel that his death is considered a "merciful providence" (Douglass, 1999, p. 22) by his slaves who are obliged to wage a battle of liberation and resistance against white oppression.

2. Black Resistance against Whites' Oppression

In *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: an American slave*, Negroes are victims of many aggressions which end by weakening them. Some of them died without assistance from parents, relatives or children. It is the case of Douglass's mother who died away from her child. Douglass relates this event of his life in these terms: "She [Frederick Douglass's mother] died when I was about seven years, on one of my master's farms, near Lee's Mill. I was not allowed to be present during her illness, at her death, or burial. She was gone long before I knew anything about it" (Douglass, 1999, p. 16).

After the death of his mother and the numerous humiliations and physical tortures he has lived on the plantations, Douglass wages a battle of liberation of the black race. Liberating himself and his people under white domination becomes a necessity for him. He then settles himself on this task and uses many strategies and techniques to resist the injustice and cruelties imposed on him by his masters. As a young slave, his master who is supposed to be his biological father separates him from his mother at a very early age. He wages a difficult struggle to learn how to read and write despite the opposition of his mistress, Mrs. Auld who believes that "education and slavery were incompatible with each other" (Douglass, 1999, pp. 42-43). But Douglass seems to be convinced that only education can be the weapon for the black race to resist white domination and liberate himself from the chains of slavery. His strategy to be educated is to



make friends of the little white boys whom he turns into teachers. He declares in this sense:

The plan which I adopted, and the one by which I was most successful, was that of making friends of all the little white boys whom I met in the street. As many of these as I could, I converted into teachers (Douglass, 1999, p. 43).

The little knowledge Douglass gets from these little white boys makes him uncomfortable with slavery. Being aware of his hard conditions he hates his enslavers and prepares a plan for his liberation. Education has opened his minds and urged him to try to break the chain of bondage. Unlike the other slaves who are not educated, all his present life turns around how to get rid of the evil of slavery in terms of alienation of all sorts and obtain his total freedom. He defends, "Freedom now appeared, to disappear no more forever. It was heard in every sound, and seen in every thing. It was ever present to torment me with a sense of my wretched condition (Douglass, 1999, p. 45).

Douglass's most important word at a given time of his life is freedom which constitutes in many regards a human aspiration for the well-being and legal affirmation of decent life. However, one may ask the following questions: what is the use of freedom if the free person has nearly lost all the members of his family in slavery? What does freedom mean if he is homeless, houseless and without any relatives? What does freedom mean if he is morally and psychologically affected by bondage conditions? Despite all the above-mentioned hardships, Douglass proves optimistic and keeps on fighting to implement his plan of resistance for the liberation of his race. He turns himself into a teacher to better motivate his fellow-slaves as it clearly appears in this statement with his own words:

Henry and John were quite intelligent, and in a very little while after I went there, I succeeded in creating in them a strong desire to learn how to read. This desire soon sprang up in the others also. They very soon mustered up some old spelling books, and nothing would do but that I must keep a sabbath school. I agreed to do so, and accordingly devoted my Sundays to teaching these my loved fellow-slaves how to read (Douglass, 1999, p. 74).

Apart from education, Douglass uses other techniques to face the aggressions of his masters. As an educated slave, he can no longer live without a specific purpose because the period of slavery demands determined and very committed men for the black cause or the explosion of reality related to unrevealed fallouts of slavery on Blacks and mainly on leaders like him. Convinced that his fellow-slaves are shut up in mental darkness, he teaches them as he says : " I taught them, because it was the delight of my soul to be doing something that looked like bettering the condition of my race" (Douglass, 1999, p. 75). For the same reason, Andrew Hawkins, a black character and slave in Charles Johnson's novel, *Oxherding Tale* states:



For the men of my period the dream of contributing to the Race, of Great Sacrifice and glory, drew us back from desire. We wanted to do something difficult-see? -like tame the West, spearhead a revolution, or pin the universe down like a butterfly on the pages of book. We wanted trials. Tests of faith. We could not live, the men of my age, without a cause. A principle. Something greater than merely living from day to day, and to which we could devote ourselves entirely (Johnson, 1982, p. 43).

In addition to learning and teaching his fellow-slaves in English, the language of his masters, Douglass knows that writing is an appropriate way for participating to the sensitization of both slaveholders and enslaved people. For long, the history of black folks has been narrated by white writers because there were nearly no black intellectuals to stand for the cause of their community. By knowing how to write, Douglass can simply be seen like a good politician for the black cause. His role as a writer can be mingled with his political cause and this position fits well this assertion by Morrison during an interview when she defends: "I don't believe any real artists have ever been non-political. They may have been insensitive to this particular plight or insensitive to that, but they were political because that's what an artist is, a politician" (Black Creation Annual, 1994, p. 4).

The strategy of Douglass consists in using intellectual arguments to face the white slaveholders who, because of economic reasons, pretend that slavery is good for the black people as William Gilmore Simms declares previously, in substance, that slavery is a wisely devised institution of heaven for the benefit of Negroes. As a minority group, no means can be used by slaves to liberate themselves from bondage except intelligence to have the support of the abolitionists. For this reason, Douglass uses Civil War to attract solidarity of the North deciders. In fact, he encourages all the Negroes to side with the North which objective is to abolish slavery and gather the nation around the notions of liberty, equality, justice and dignity for all human beings as stated by young Virginian Thomas Jefferson during the declaration of independence in 1776:

We hold these truths to be self evident; that all Men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with inherent & inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (Ramson, 1989, p. 18).

Through his writing, Douglass calls for collective resistance to improve the living conditions of the black race. For instance, the fact of urging his fellows to flee together to the North is a way of motivating the victims of slavery to be united and create an antislavery alliance for the emergence of the black cause. But he may encounter many obstacles because, even some white people of the South who are aware of the immorality of slavery are not ready to support a fight which may lead to the equality between the white and black races. Ramson, U. S Professor specialized in American economic history, in 19th century U. S history with an emphasis on the Civil War and in 20th World History, declares:



Many people in the South as well as the North, abhorred the immorality of slavery. Yet their deep-seated racial antagonisms towards blacks caused them to resist strongly any suggestion of equality for blacks. Consequently, it was extremely difficult to forge an antislave alliance that would actively resist the continuation of the slave system in the South (Ramson, 1989, p. 12).

Douglass has used many techniques to change positively the living conditions of the black community in America. The first one consists in learning how to read and write using all the means and ways because he is aware that nothing can change without education: the unavoidable key to success in every field of socio-economic and even political life. The same belief in education seems to be shared later by Martin Luther King, Jr when he puts his faith in the students of his community to make his campaign against racial discrimination successful. He declares:

I called my staff together and repeated a conviction I had been voicing ever since the campaign began. If our drive was to be successful, we must involve the students of the community... But now it was time to enlist the young people in larger numbers. Even though we realized that involving the teen-agers and high-school students would bring down upon us a heavy fire of criticism, we felt that we needed this dramatic new dimension. Our people were demonstrating daily and going to jail in numbers, but we were still beating our heads against the brick wall of the city's officials' stubborn resolve to maintain the status quo (King Jr, 1963, pp. 96-97).

After getting educated, Douglass then teaches his fellow-slaves because he knows that the struggle of improving the living conditions of the black race cannot be won if all the Negroes are not involved in the acquisition of knowledge. To better spread his cause, he finally starts writing to imply a lot of people, black as well as white, in the defense of the Negroes conditions.

3. Douglass's Contribution to the Rehabilitation of Black Culture

In writing *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: an American slave*, not only does Douglass describe the hard living conditions of Negroes on the plantations, but he also gives his contribution for the rehabilitation of the black culture. This contribution consists in raising awareness by teaching how to read and write to his fellow-slaves often kept into slavery because of ignorance of their rights. When one refers to the American Constitution, all men are created equal with the right to live, be free and pursue their happiness. In the Declaration of Independence in 1776, Young Virginian Thomas Jefferson reports "We hold these truths to be self evident; that all Men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with inherent & inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Regarding everything that he has achieved for the liberation of the black community in America, Douglass can simply be taken as a source of resistance. If today slavery is a bad remembrance, it is thanks to freedom fighters like him.



He is deeply convinced of the equality of all people regardless of their races, colors or ethnic groups. He has faithfully played an important role in the abolition of slavery. To show people how slaves are unhappy, he relates their songs during their moments of sadness in these terms:

Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy. The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears (Douglass, 1999, p. 24).

Through these songs, Douglass tries to rehabilitate black culture which often based on orature or oral literature. Not only does he show how oral tradition is valuable, but he also put the emphasis on how slaves express their anger because as he says, "Every tone {of their songs} was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains" (Douglass, 1999, p. 24). Those songs, in substance, help him better understand the dehumanizing character of slavery which is based on torture and humiliation of the slaves. He defends:

To those songs I trace my first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery. I can never get rid of that conception. Those songs still follow me, to deepen my hatred of slavery, and quicken my sympathies for my brethren in bonds (Douglass, 1999, p. 24).

Douglass is so conscious of the unfair character of slavery that he has settled himself to eradicate it despite the many hindrances he has encountered on his way. For him, bettering the living conditions of his race deserves a lot of sacrifices. Despite the numerous physical, moral and intellectual oppositions he has encountered in his life as a slave, he is much more motivated to continue the combat for the rehabilitation of black culture. He is, most of the time, victorious in front of all his challenges and one may feel optimistic as for the black conditions which remain the main object of his struggle.

Douglass can be a source of inspiration and resistance when one considers the manner with which he gives much importance to knowledge. He fights day and night to achieve an appropriate education in order to get rid of his status of innocent and ignorant person and put his feet in the world of lights. He then moves from a simple student to a teacher for his fellow-slaves to a famous writer known all around the world. He is the symbol of an optimistic person who never gives up and who deeply believes that things can change positively for the black community. He is so hopeful as with regards to the future of the African American people.

Things have been hard for black people regarding their living conditions as slaves on the American plantations but it is not a reason to lose hope. From their very first arrival to the New World to their current social, economical and political situation, a lot of evolution has occurred regarding their lives. Even though they have been victim of racial discrimination, they are no longer slaves



in the real sense or consideration. They have become free and can more or less lead their lives according to their understanding while respecting regulation. That's why, Douglass, after reaching the North, endeavours to learn how to calk. This new competency offers him job while making him independent financially. His living conditions become much more acceptable as he declares:

After learning how to calk, I sought my own employment, made my own contracts, and collected the money which I earned. My pathway became much more smooth than before; my condition was now much more comfortable (Douglass, 1999, p. 87).

Douglass is a kind of self-made man who strives to change not only his social status but that of his fellow-slaves in a country that takes black people like simple chattel, good for labor and other activities which may be profitable to the masters. In the very beginning, slavery seems difficult indeed impossible to eradicate, but thanks to the many efforts made by slaves and sympathizers, it was abolished after a very deadly or bloody struggle between the North and the South of the United States of America. Black people got victoriously out of that struggle by having the right to freedom among other human rights.

The future of the African American people cannot be jeopardized even if it encounters many difficulties. For example, the life of the black slaves after freedom is not easy at all. It means being a homeless person in a strange land. Douglass, who feels lonely after reaching the North, relates his catastrophic situation in these terms:

There I was in the midst of thousands, and yet a perfect stranger; without home and without friends, in the midst of thousands of my own brethren_ children of a common Father, and yet I dare not to unfold to any one of them my sad condition (Douglass, 1999, p. 93).

However, thanks to the many struggles waged by Douglass, his life has drastically witnessed a positive evolution and he is preparing a brighter future with Anna, his intended wife. The fact of ending the book with freedom and probably marriage is very meaningful. It means that days to come are very promising for black people, that there is no reason for them to lose hope, they have just to keep on fighting for the improvement of their living conditions.

Freedom means working for oneself, having the possibility to acquire profits or properties, getting rich and having one's richness protected by the American State. It also means having the possibility or opportunity to get married to the person of one's choice and create a family which cannot be sold on behalf of any legislation. Freedom is the opposite of slavery. Marc Kleijweg, specialist on Social History in the department of History at University of Wisconsin-Madison, defines both terms as follows: "For freedom is the power of autonomous action, but slavery is the lack of autonomous action." In short, freedom, which goes with autonomy, should be very promising for slaves even if, like Douglass, they



should struggle to reach it. After his arrival to the North, Douglass (1999, p. 98) says : “Every thing looked clean, new, and beautiful.” He pursues declaring: “ I found many [former black slaves], who had not been seven years out of their chains, living in finer houses, and evidently enjoying more of the comforts of life, than the average of slaveholders in Maryland (Douglass, 1999, p. 98).

Many slaveholders are afraid of the liberation of black people, which constitutes a menace for them. They believe that, if slaves are free, they will, not only, have difficulties in finding a good labor, but their economic opportunities will be threatened. It is one of the reasons why, by the turn of twentieth century, many discriminatory laws were voted in the South to prevent any equality between Whites and Blacks in every aspect of life. Michelle Alexander, an American writer and civil rights activist sums up this situation in *The New Jim Crow*. She writes:

By the turn of the twentieth century, every state in the South had laws on the books that disenfranchised Blacks and discriminated against them in virtually every sphere of life, lending sanction to a racial ostracism that extended to schools, churches, housing, jobs, restrooms, hotels, restaurants, hospitals, orphanages, prisons, funeral homes, morgues and cemeteries (Alexander, 2012, p. 35)

Taking into account his beginning as a slave child and his final destination as a free man living with his wife in North America, Douglass’s life and struggle are but a source of inspiration. His resistance in front of the oppressor, his intelligence in any situation, his determination to learn and get to freedom, his perseverance and conviction to better the living conditions of his community make of him a reference and a great leader in the combat for the installation of truth, justice and equality among the communities.

CONCLUSION

Many physical, moral and intellectual aggressions have been observed in slave narratives in general but some cases prove quite particular and really essential for black freedom with lessons to be learned and inspiration to be grasped. In *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: an American Slave*, Douglass shows how the Negro has been treated and exposed by slavery, which, while being institutionalized, has ended disturbing all black families in America. Some racial and horrible conflicts have been witnessed and they have all endangered peace and harmony in the American society.

Because of this uncomfortable position, Douglass, who has early understood the unfair character of slavery in terms of justice and equality among white and black races, puts his life at risk by challenging intelligently his masters for his own liberation and that of his community, in general. For the well-being of



all human creatures, Douglass is deeply convinced that slavery must be abolished.

The most powerful weapon for Douglass to stop masters' cruelty is education. He is conscious that Blacks are kept into bondage not because of lack of physical strength but by ignorance. After learning to read and write, his next combat is the teaching of his fellow-slaves because he wants to accede to freedom en masse. But to better spread his struggle for black freedom and make Negroes conditions well-understood all around the world, he publishes his first autobiographical novel *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: an American Slave*, which contributes to change his life and the destiny of the black community in the area of the United States of America and beyond.

As a slave, nothing was obvious for Douglass to succeed in contributing greatly to the eradication of slavery and the installment of equality among races. One can surely affirm that he stands as an embodiment of American belief of self-confidence, perseverance, commitment and determination. He has suffered a lot during his struggle, but the final resolution of the book is the proof that changes only happen for people who fight. The lie that Whites are superior to Blacks and that slavery is normal disappears thanks to his actions combined to those of the other abolitionists. In this regard, he can incarnate a symbol of resistance and inspiration not only for many African Americans, but for people around the world who are victim of injustice and oppression.

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