

A Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave

STUDY GUIDE

NOTE: As you read through Douglass's "Narrative", take note of the various rhetorical devices that he uses and to what effect. In addition to annotating your book based on your knowledge of the Rhetorical Triangle (PIGSAC), consider also the manner in which Douglass attempts to persuade his audience.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Chapter 1:

1. What is the effect of Douglass beginning the chapter with what he does NOT know? Considering the genre, why is this ironic?
2. Why were slaves who were fathered by their masters likely to be treated more harshly? Why would Douglass make this point?
3. Describe Mr. Plummer. What is his job?
4. Consider Douglass's account of the treatment of his Aunt Hester by applying PIGSAC. Take special notice of intention, audience, and context. What are a few reasons why he would place this account at the beginning of the book?

CHAPTER 2

1. According to Douglass, is there a hierarchy (pecking order) among the slave population?
2. When describing the slaves' allowances, what goals in reaching his audience might Douglass have in mind? Is he successful in reaching his goals? How?
3. Describe Douglass's childhood reaction to the slave songs. How does he describe them? What explanations does he give for their singing? How did this contrast with the popular understanding of why slaves sang?

CHAPTER 3

1. What was the greatest attraction at the Home Plantation? How does Douglass use metaphor effectively here?
2. Briefly summarize the anecdote about the slave who told the truth about his master. What is Douglass's intention here?

Context for Conflict

The role of slavery in bringing on the Civil War has been hotly debated for decades. One important way of approaching the issue is to look at what contemporary observers had to say. In March 1861, Alexander H. Stephens, Vice President of the Confederate States of America, was quoted in the Savannah Republican:

“The new constitution has put at rest, forever, all the agitating questions relating to our peculiar institution African slavery as it exists amongst us, the proper status of the negro in our form of civilization. This was the immediate cause of the late rupture and present revolution. Jefferson in his forecast, had anticipated this, as the ‘rock upon which the old Union would split.’ He was right. What was conjecture with him, is now a realized fact.

“[Our] foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery, subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition.”

Savannah Republican, March 21, 1861

Today, most professional historians agree with Stephens that slavery and the status of African Americans were at the heart of the crisis that plunged the U.S. into a civil war from 1861 to 1865. That is not to say the average Confederate soldier fought to preserve slavery or the average Union soldier went to war to end slavery. Some fought on moral grounds. Some fought because they felt their way of life and prosperity were threatened. Others fought to preserve the Union. Soldiers fight for many reasons—notably to stay alive and support their comrades in arms. The North’s goal in the beginning was the preservation of the Union, not emancipation. For the 180,000 African Americans who ultimately served the U.S. in the war, however, emancipation was the primary aim.

The roots of the crisis over slavery that gripped the nation in 1860-1861 go back well before the nation's founding. In 1619, slavery was introduced to Virginia, when a Dutch ship traded African slaves for food. Unable to find cheap labor from other sources, white settlers increasingly turned to slaves imported from Africa. By the early 1700s, in British North America, slavery generally meant African slavery. Southern plantations using slave labor produced the great export crops—tobacco, rice, forest products, and indigo—that made the American colonies prosperous. Many Northern merchants made their fortunes either in the slave trade or by exporting the products of slave labor. African slavery was central to the development of British North America.



Although slavery existed in all 13 colonies at the start of the American Revolution in 1775, a number of Americans (especially those of African descent) sensed the contradiction between the Declaration of Independence's ringing claim of human equality and the existence of slavery. Reacting to that contradiction, Northern states decided to phase out slavery following the Revolution. The future of slavery in the South was debated, and some held out the hope it would eventually disappear there as well.

NPS/RICHARD SCHLECHT

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.

Declaration of Independence

CHAPTER 4

1. How does Douglass describe the new overseer, Mr. Gore? How does he use irony to enhance the effectiveness of his description?
2. What is Douglass's purpose in relating the story of Demby? What techniques does Douglass use when comparing/contrasting concepts of justice between the slaves and their masters? Does he do this effectively?

CHAPTER 5

1. What was Douglass's life like on the plantation? Support your answers with textual evidence.

2. Find three (3) examples of rhetorical techniques used in this chapter.

CHAPTER 6

1. To what does Douglass attribute the kindness of Mrs. Auld? Why would he write about this?

3. Research The Columbian Orator. List three facts you discover about this topic. How is it significant to Douglass's narrative, as well as his life beyond the narrative?

CHAPTER 8

1. What happened to Frederick's grandmother after the deaths of Lucretia and Andrew? How does this anecdote help explain the value of slaves?

2. How are slaves valued when compared to livestock? The ironic comparison of slaves to livestock is a continuous theme of the narrative. Find three (3) examples of dehumanization in Chapter 8 to back this up.

CHAPTER 9

1. What rule of slaveholding does Thomas Auld, Douglass's new master, violate? What rhetorical techniques does Douglass use to communicate this situation to his readers?

Slavery and the Economy

All realistic hope slavery might eventually die out in the South ended when Massachusetts native Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin—a simple machine that enabled textile mills to use the type of cotton grown in most of the South. At the same time, the world demand for cotton exploded. By 1840, cotton produced in the American South earned more money than all other U.S. exports combined. Many white Southerners came to believe that the viability of cotton as a crop depended on slave labor. Over time, most took for granted that their prosperity, even their way of life, was inseparable from African slavery.

Slavery was not the only source of dispute. The North and South were very different in nature, and wanted different things from their government. In the North, society was fast becoming industrial. Immigrants in search of work were arriving by the thousands. In addition, women began to leave the farms seeking opportunity in the cities. Immigrants and women provided an abundant source of inexpensive labor to fuel the factories. Industrialization increased the amount of textiles produced and therefore, the demand for more slave labor. Entrepreneurs looking to develop these new industries demanded protection from cheap manufactured goods imported from Europe.

*Women and immigrants
at New England mills
(Homer Lithograph)*



NPS/LOWELL NHP

The South, on the other hand, remained a region of small towns and large plantations. The great cotton empire depended on slave labor and cheap European imports. Southerners began to fear that if the North ever gained control in Congress, it would create taxes on imports, known as tariffs, which would ruin the South.

Southerner John C. Calhoun, Vice President under John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson, was among the first to voice this concern. Though he opposed secession, Calhoun argued that a state could protect its interests by simply nullifying any act by the federal government it considered unconstitutional and unfair. Southerners began to rely on the concept of states' sovereignty as a means of self-protection.



2. According to Douglass, What happens to Auld after his conversion to Christianity? What rhetorical device is at play here?

3. Who is Mr. Covey? Compare him to Thomas Auld. How is he similar? Different?

CHAPTER 10

1. Describe life for Douglass at Covey's farm. To what does Douglass compare himself? What rhetorical techniques does Douglass use to appeal to his audience?

2. Apply 'PIGSAC' to Douglass's great oration on the white sails: "*You are loosed from your moorings . . . There is a better day coming*". Analyze for rhetorical devices. Is this speech effective? How? Why?



The Underground Railroad—the resistance to enslavement through escape and flight, through the end of the Civil War—refers to the efforts of enslaved African Americans to gain their freedom by escaping bondage. Wherever slavery existed, there were efforts to escape, at first, to maroon communities in rugged terrain away from settled areas, and later across state and international borders. While most began and completed their journeys unassisted, each subsequent decade in which slavery was legal in the United States saw an increase in active efforts to assist escape. The decision to assist a freedom seeker may have been spontaneous. However, in some places, particularly after the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, the Underground Railroad was deliberate and organized. Freedom seekers went in many directions – Canada, Mexico, Indian territory, the West, Caribbean islands and Europe.

In 1853, a free black man, upon entering the State of Maryland, was sold into slavery and died trying to escape. In a letter to the leader of the Underground Railroad movement in Philadelphia, African American woman and Anti-Slavery Society organizer, Frances Harper wrote: Upon that grave I pledge myself to the Anti-Slavery cause.

IHT Rendezvous

JUNE 20, 2013, 1:28 AM

27 Million People Said to Live in 'Modern Slavery'

By **DIDI KIRSTEN TATLOW**

BEIJING — **7:37 p.m.** | **Updated** On Monday, [we wrote about human trafficking and forced labor](#) — or modern slavery, as it's often called — and said the United Nations defines it as a fast-growing problem.

Two days later, on Wednesday in the United States, the State Department released a report that gives another, higher figure for how many people are working in slavery in our world today — as many as 27 million (as opposed to the International Labor Organization's 21 million), and it placed [three more countries](#) in the worst offenders category, bringing the total to 21: Russia, China and Uzbekistan. Already in the category: Algeria, Libya, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, among others.

The “[Trafficking in Persons Report](#)”, dated June 2013, provides 415 pages of stories, analysis and photographs, showing a kind of human suffering and inhumanity that is hard, perhaps, to grasp as coexisting alongside the tweeting, iPad-tapping, well-fed comfort of much of the developed world, but is a reality for millions of poor people, the report made clear. It affects women, men, girls and boys, and includes sexual slavery as well as a wide range of other labor, from child soldiering to domestic servitude to gold mining.

In an introduction to the report, Secretary of State John Kerry, wrote: “Ending modern slavery must remain a foreign policy priority. Fighting this crime wherever it exists is in our national interest. Human tracking undermines the rule of law and creates instability. It tears apart families and communities. It damages the environment and corrupts the global supply chains and labor markets that keep the world's economies thriving.”

Mr. Kerry spoke of the “moral obligation” to end a practice that contravenes our “human dignity.”

By identifying three more countries as so-called “Tier 3” countries on human trafficking, the U.S. is saying they are “countries whose governments do not fully comply with the minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so.”

This opens them up to sanctions. Will that happen?

If there's a moral obligation to end the problem, [there's also politics](#), as my colleague in Washington, Steven Lee Myers, suggested.

“In the past, the White House has routinely waived potential sanctions for countries with important strategic value to the United States, including Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, which the latest report again cited for poor records on forced labor, child labor, prostitution and, in Yemen’s case, the remnants of chattel slavery,” Steve wrote.

“Countries clearly at odds with American policy including — Cuba and North Korea — have been subject to sanctions.”

In the report, officials said China had shown “modest signs of interest in anti-trafficking reforms” but “the Chinese government did not demonstrate significant efforts to comprehensively prohibit and punish all forms of trafficking and to prosecute traffickers.”

So far, the White House has not commented on whether it would impose sanctions on the three countries. And there was no immediate comment from China, where key types of human trafficking include brides from other Asian nations, children for childless couples (especially boys) and the mentally disabled, for their free labor.

UPDATE: Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying has said China attached “[great importance to fighting all crimes of trafficking](#)”, the BBC reported.

“We believe that the US side should take an objective and impartial view of China’s efforts and stop making unilateral or arbitrary judgements of China,” Ms. Hua said.