

*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*

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English 2130  
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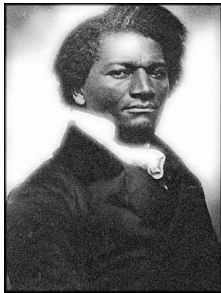
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19th-Century Escaped Slave  
Narratives: Form and Structure

- Arouse the sympathy of readers in order to promote humanitarianism.
  - Slavery depicted as condition of extreme physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual deprivation. (948, 951)
- Traditional Christian religious ideas.
  - Impelled by faith in God, commitment to liberty, & human dignity, slave undertakes the road to freedom. (chs. ix to end)
- Acceptance of the ideals of the dominant white society.
- Cruelty of individual slave owners.
  - Personal crisis precipitates narrator's decision to try for freedom. (955)



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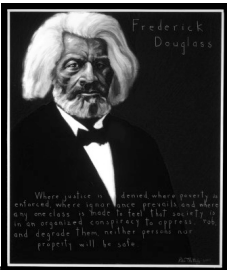
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Beyond the  
Slave  
Narrative



- 19th-c. American "Great Man" biographies and autobiographies
  - development of personal independence & knowledge (923, 945, 967, 969)
  - Formative experiences Douglass focuses on life as part of a community (931, 960, 961)
- Rejects common belief that slavery is financially beneficial (973)

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## Motifs in Douglass's *Narrative*

- ❑ **The failure of Southern Christianity**
  - ❑ Holidays (956) and Slave-holding Christians (957)
- ❑ **Importance of Education & Knowledge**
  - ❑ limited access to “traditional” sources of knowledge--mom’s dead, father’s unknowable...
  - ❑ Like Rousseau, argues freedom must exist in the mind before it can motivate the body. (959)
- ❑ **Women within the System of Slavery**
  - ❑ Brutality to black women (925)
  - ❑ Mrs. Auld & cruelty of white women (937, 938-939, 945)

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## Two-fold role of music in Douglass's *Narrative*

- A way to speak about pain when your access to language arts is restricted (928-9)
- Code: used to teach pathways to freedom from the South and join the underground railroad.
  - Douglass and the Railroad (968)



Big Mama Thornton

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## Women



Mother /  
virgin:  
reproducer of  
dominant  
caste



Reproducer of  
Capital  
(caretaker of  
capitalists)

- ❑ Barbara Welter's definition of 'the Cult of True Womanhood':
  - ❑ "...the attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society, could be divided into four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity...With them she was promised happiness and power."
- ❑ Hazel Carby: "Within the economic, political, and social system of slavery, women were at the nexus of its reproduction."
  - ❑ White Women: reproducers of the dominant caste.
  - ❑ Black Women: source of capital reproduction.
  - ❑ Both serve to consolidate the power of the white male patriarchy of the antebellum South.

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