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Depiction of Slavery in Slave Narratives

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Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Studentka s použitím relevantní sekundární literatury nejprve nastíní historický kontext otroctví v US, dále vysvětlí pojem slave narrative a stručně představí zvolené autory/ zvolená vyprávění. Jádrem této práce z oblasti kulturních studií bude analýza slave narratives vzniklých v období 1750-1870, v níž se studentka zaměří na vybraná témata, jako např. rodinné zázemí a vztahy mezi otroky, vztahy mezi rasami, důvody vedoucí otroky k útěku, způsob útěku z otroctví, život na svobodě, případná angažovanost uprchlých otroků v boji proti otroctví, apod. Závěrem studentka analýzu shrne, texty ze zkoumaného hlediska porovná a pokusí se vyslovit obecnější závěry o významu této specifické americké podoby ego-dokumentu pro abolicionistické hnutí.

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Souhlasím s prezenčním zpřístupněním své práce v Univerzitní knihovně.

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ANNOTATION

The aim of the bachelor thesis is to examine the issue of slavery in the United States in 1750-1870. The first part theoretically recounts the origins and development of the institution of slavery. The second part is based on the analysis of selected slave narratives reflecting direct experience of life in the bondage. The attention is focused especially on slaves' family life and relationships between slaves and slave owners. In conclusion, a comparison of the narratives and their importance for the abolitionist movement are discussed.

Keywords

Slavery, slaves, slave narratives, slave owners

NÁZEV

Zobrazení otroctví v životních příbězích otroků

ANOTACE

Cílem této bakalářské práce je zmapovat problematiku otroctví ve Spojených státech v letech 1750-1870. První část teoreticky popisuje počátky a rozvoj otrokářského systému. Druhá část je založena na analýze vybraných životopisů, které zrcadlí přímou zkušenost života v zajetí. Pozornost je zaměřena především na rodinný život otroků a na vztahy mezi otroky a otrokáři. Závěrem je uvedeno porovnání životopisů a jejich význam pro abolicionistické hnutí.

Klíčová slova

Otroctví, otroci, životopisy otroků, otrokáři

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Introduction

The autobiographical narratives of ex-slaves represent a deeply influential literary tradition which was established in colonial America during the eighteenth century. The moving stories vividly depicting the real nature of slavery significantly contributed to the abolitionist movement. Its key aim was to prohibit slavery in order to achieve emancipation for slaves and eliminate discrimination of all African Americans. With abolitionists' assistance, hundreds of narratives were published and distributed throughout North America. Due to the increasing popularity with public, personal accounts of former slaves became essential texts for the movement. Documenting slave life from the perspective of first hand experience, slave narratives are regarded as valuable historical sources, as well as a unique means of getting glimpse into tormented souls of enslaved people who had to fight hard to gain their freedom.

The paper is divided into two parts. The first one covers the origins and development of slavery which culminated with revolts and the establishment of antislavery organizations. Furthermore, the term "slave narrative" is clarified and the purpose, historical value and general structure of this form of literature are summarized. Lastly, the crucial autobiographies for forming a foundation of the analytical part are introduced.

The main part of the thesis is divided into three chapters where different aspects of slaves' lives are explored. The central topics are childhood and family life, methods of gaining control over slaves and their reaction to the process of enslavement. This part is constructed in regard to the primary literature sources, i.e. the selected slave narratives and supported by the secondary literature.

The aim of the last chapter is to summarize the analysis and to make a comparison of the selected narratives. Finally, the importance of the personal autobiographies for the abolitionist movement is reflected.

1 Historical Background

As James Oliver and Lois E. Horton claim, the institution of slavery was crucial for the making of the United States. Slavery has its roots in Virginia in 1619, where the first African workers landed. As the institution grew, there were approximately four millions of African Americans bounded in bondage before the beginning of American Civil War in 1861. Generations of these people produced an enormous wealth that was transformed into an extraordinary political power. In addition, African Americans living under the oppressive system of slavery represent an ultimate symbol of bitter fight for freedom.¹

According to Coelho and McGuire, European colonialists were confronted with the problem of obtaining labour to utilize local resources in America. Initially, Native Americans used to work for them. By the time, more labour was needed and thus bound labour workers were imported from Europe to the Americas. Except for bad living and working conditions, these migrations had damaging impact on the Native inhabitants because new and unknown diseases were brought there. When Europeans discovered the nature of the disease climate, the islands came to be inhabited almost exclusively by imported African slaves.²

As Encyklopedia Britannica states, the history of blacks in the United States began in 1619, when about twenty Africans were imported to the English colony of Virginia. The Africans seemed to have been treated as indentured servants, i.e. they were contract-bound to their employers for designated periods and paid off the debt of their travel costs. Servants worked in the fields and homes of Virginians. They were not paid wages but provided with food, accommodation and clothing instead. During this early colonial period, slavery had no racial connotations. However, by the time, Africans were made visible targets for enslavement because of their easily recognizable skin colour. They did not work as slaves in that time because the laws delineating the civil status of African labourers did not exist in the first half of the seventeenth century.³

¹ James Oliver Horton, Lois E. Horton, *Slavery and the Making of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7.

² Philip R. P. Coelho, Robert A. McGuire, "African and American Bound Labor in the British New World: The Biological Consequences of Economic Choices," *The Journal of Economic History* (1997):83-84, accessed December 3, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2951108>.

³ "African Americans," *Encyklopaedia Britannica*, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/67474/African-Americans>, accessed December 3, 2012.

As Shaw says, the situation was changed in 1641, when Massachusetts became the first colony to legalize slavery. Slavery by statute was recognized also in Connecticut and Virginia subsequently. In 1662, Virginia declared that children born would have the same status as their mother. In other two years, slavery is legalized in Maryland, New York and New Jersey.⁴

According to Encyklopedia Britannica, southern colonies depended upon crops, therefore, slavery made an enormous contribution to the state's economy. Initially, slaves were mostly occupied on vast tobacco and sugar plantations. In 1793, the cotton gin was invented and the demand of slaves enormously increased, especially in states such as Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. Growing profits from cotton in the United States stimulated planters' desire to extend their dominions. By 1850 nearly two-thirds of the plantation slaves were engaged in the production of cotton.⁵ As Dukel and Spielvogel claim, despite the fact that up to one third of people died due to the fast spread of diseases, lack of food and clean water and other deplorable conditions during transport, it has been estimated that as many as ten million African slaves were transported to America in total.⁶

According to the slave codes, slaves were completely subordinated to the master, who seized a complete control over the slave. They were pieces of property and a source of labour, which could be bought and sold like an animal: "The slave was allowed no stable family life and little privacy. Slaves were prohibited by law from learning to read or write. The meek slave received tokens of favour from the master, and the rebellious slave provoked brutal punishment."⁷

Eisenstark and Veber mention that these conditions provoked a number of revolts which, nonetheless, attained no massive success. Slavery was considered a normal part of life and very few white men questioned morality of slavery. The first anti-slavery group was founded in the late 1600s by the Religious Society of Friends, also called Quakers. They believed that slavery was immoral and should be phased out gradually so that the economy would not be disrupted. At the beginning, a lot of opponents supported the idea of

⁴ Charles E. Shaw, *A Different Perspective: Slavery and Its Affect on the African-American Way of life in America* (USA: Xlibris Corporation, 2007), 22.

⁵ "Slavery," Encyklopaedia Britannica. <http://www.britannica.com/blackhistory/article-24158>, accessed December 3, 2012.

⁶ William J. Duiker and Jackson J. Spielvogel, *World History* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2010), 413.

⁷ "African Americans," Encyklopaedia Britannica, accessed December 3, 2012.

colonization, which meant freeing all slaves and sending them into a colony in Africa. By the 1830, the American abolitionist movement changed its focus. The change brought William Lloyd Garrison who required an immediate freeing slaves and equal rights for African Americans. The establishment of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833, led to the creation of other hundreds antislavery societies in the North. Their goal was to make people aware of the immorality of slavery via various ways such as mailing pamphlets and newspapers denouncing slavery and sending antislavery petitions to the U.S. Congress.⁸

According to Franklin and Moss, other famous organizations included The Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Society or the New England Anti-Slavery Society, which was led by an elected president Frederick Douglass. Other prominent agents were for instance Theodor S. Wright, William Wells Brown, Henry Highland, William Jones or Sojourner Truth. The abolitionists wrote as well as spoke in favour of emancipation. Most of the black newspapers founded before the Civil War were abolitionist sheets. One of the most outstanding journalists was Samuel Cornish, who with John Russwurm had established the first black newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, in 1827. Cornish with Charles B. Ray and Phillip A. Bell edited the *Colored American*. Other black abolitionist newspapers were the *National Watchman*, edited by William G. Allen and Henry Highland Garnet; the *Mirror of Liberty*, a quarterly issued by David Ruggles; and of course, the *North Star* of Frederick Douglass.⁹

Referring to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Douglass managed to escape and became a prominent anti-slavery activist. Due to his ability to read and write, he developed into a charismatic public speaker. His oratory skills were recognized by William Lloyd Garrison, who decided to cooperate with Douglass in 1841. Thus, Douglass started to work for the Massachusetts Antislavery-Society. He also maintained a close relationship with another abolitionist, John Brown. Brown was well known for his violent tactics, specifically for his unsuccessful raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry. Although Brown's revolt was crushed, the high moral tone of his action hastened the Civil War declaration.¹⁰

⁸ Reyna Eisenstark, Jennifer L. Weber, *Abolitionism: Key Concepts in American History* (New York: Chelsea House Pub, 2010), 4-5.

⁹ John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African-Americans* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 181-182.

¹⁰“Frederick Douglass,” *Encyklopaedia Britannica*,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/170246/Frederick-Douglass#ref267258>, accessed February 6, 2013.

As Sieber notes, one part of the antislavery movement formed an organized system called the Underground Railroad. It was a secret network of routes and safe houses of individuals, predominantly black, who assisted runaways to escape from slavery. The system extended through all the northern states as far west as Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa. Some slaves found refuge in Boston, New Bedford, Connecticut, etc., however, the biggest wish of slaves was to reach Canada, the slaves' "promised land."¹¹

According to Franklin and Moss, at the beginning, most of fugitives were men who traveled on foot. In the course of time various vehicles such as wagons, closed carriages and farm wagons were provided for them. For instance, Henry Box Brown was put in a box and shipped from Richmond to Philadelphia by the Adams Express Company. Slaves most often traveled during the night because the danger of capture was lower. Conductors and fugitives were guided by the North Star, by the tributaries of the Ohio river, and by mountain chains. During the day, they were hidden in barns or attics of homes, where they could eat and rest on their trip northward. More than 3,200 active workers were engaged in the Underground Railroad. For instance, Harriet Tubman is considered one of the greatest conductors. She hired herself as a domestic servant and the money she collected were spent on food and clothing, which fugitives required, or on transportation and other similar purposes. Other people who contributed to business of freeing slaves were Calvin Fairbanks and Miss Webster, who helped three slaves escape by posing as her servants, John Fairfield, already mentioned John Brown, Jane Lewis, John Rankin, Josiah Henson, Elijah Anderson, the general superintendent of the Underground Railroad in northwestern Ohio, John Mason, one of the most astute conductors, and a lot of others.¹²

As Encyklopedia Britannica states, the first opposition to slavery transformed into a wide-spread action was so called the American Revolution. It created opportunity for the slaves to fight for their freedom. From 1773 to 1774, Massachusetts slaves presented petitions for freedom to colonial authorities. In 1787, the Northwest Ordinance prohibiting slavery in the area known as Midwest was declared. In 1820, equal number of slaves and so called free states were admitted to the Union due into the Missouri Compromise. Later, all the territories were opened to slavery on the base of Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 and the Supreme Court's

¹¹ Willbur H. Sieber, "The Underground Railroad in Massachusetts," *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (1936): 447-448, accessed February 10, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/360280>

¹² John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*. 183-184.

Dred Scott decision of 1857. By the end of 1850s, the South believed that the North having complete control of the country by slaveholding interests wanted to destroy their recent way of life. In 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected as president on the antislavery platform. In response to this fact, the southern states seceded from the Union and formed the Confederate States of America.

The Civil war began in 1861. The Lincoln's aim was to preserve the Union, not abolition of slavery. In September 1862, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed the slaves of the Confederate states in rebellion against the Union.¹³

1.1 The term “slave narrative”

A slave narrative is a type of autobiography that emerged in the United States by the end of eighteenth century. It became immensely popular mostly in the first half of nineteenth century. Slave narratives are considered historical documents depicting slave life primarily in the American South from the perspective of first hand experience. Chris Baldic in *The Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines the term as a written account by an escaped or freed slave of his or her experiences of slavery. The slave narrative is a special form of autobiography, which appeared as an important kind of abolitionist literature in the period preceding the Civil War.¹⁴

As Publishers' Bindings Online states, from a literary point of view, the narratives represent one of the most influential traditions in African American literature and culture. They were written in order to attract white audience who were believed to realize the real nature of slavery as an institution and, on the other hand, the humanity of black African Americans as individuals deserving of full human rights. Autobiographies were based on presenting evils of slavery, and therefore the stories had a huge impact on people's emotions. It created a platform for a national debate over slavery.

Some former slaves were able to read and write. As a result, they were able to produce the narratives by themselves. However, most of them were illiterate and they had to cooperate with abolitionists who recorded their stories.

¹³ “American Civil War,” Encyklopaedia Britannica, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/19407/American-Civil-War/229869/The-high-commands>, accessed December 4, 2012.

¹⁴ Chris Baldick, *The Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* (New York: Oxford 2001), 238.

One of the most important narratives' features was the veracity and reliability. Provided the autobiographies were truthful, nobody could assault them. The problem was the general belief that black slaves were incapable of thinking. Stemming from this, doubts about the authenticity and the reliability were raised. The slaves who wrote their stories by themselves were often harmed and given pain to demonstrate the authenticity of their work. To support the truthfulness of the autobiographies, the editors working with the illiterate slaves contacted important whites and got their endorsement with the truthfulness and veracity of the autobiographies. Furthermore, various diaries, letters, local government records, newspapers etc. represent independent sources that prove the reliability of information included in the narratives. All around the world, the issue concerning slavery has been discussed exhaustively and slaves narratives represent a tool that raises consciousness of American identity. It is a kind of testimony denoting the importance of freedom that could not be always taken for granted.¹⁵

A typical feature for slave narratives is a fairly formulaic structure. On the title page, a name of the author is written and series of prefaces and letters confirming accuracy follow. As Bubíková mentions, the typical feature of the narratives is that they usually begin with the phrase "I was born" subsequently specifying the place and approximate date of birth. Next, the description of their childhood, growing up and the first notifying of racial difference are described. Recalling vivid memories of cruel master's and overseer's behaviour and extreme forms of punishment, the author continues with the story of their escape from the horrors of slavery. Finally, the former slave both expresses his gratitude for the chance to live a new life in freedom and, at the same time, he comes to a painful realization that a huge number of people like him are remaining in slavery throughout the United States.¹⁶

As it has already been mentioned, autobiographies depicting the nature of life in slavery were written especially during the decades preceding the Civil War. For instance, the personal experiences in the narratives authored by Charles Ball, Austin Steward, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Anne Jacobs, William Wells Brown, Henry W. Bibb or Frederick Douglas are reflected.

¹⁵ "True Tales of Bondage and Freedom: Nineteenth Century Slave Narratives," Publishers Bindings Online, http://bindings.lib.ua.edu/gallery/slave_narratives.html#other, accessed December 3, 2012.

¹⁶ Šárka Bubíková, "Dětství v otroctví pohledem dobových ego-dokumentů," *Theatrum historiae* 8 (2011): 208. My translation.

Charles Ball (cca 1780 - ?) was born on a tobacco plantation in Calvert County, Maryland. At the age of four, he was separated from his mother, who was sent to another plantation. Ball stayed in Maryland and he got married. Eventually, the couple was separated and Ball was forced to go, bound with other slaves in neck irons, handcuffs and chains, from Maryland to Columbia to work on cotton plantations. He escaped from slavery because of unbearable cruelty of his master's son, who Ball worked for when the master died. Although he lived as a free man for a while, he was captured and returned to slavery later. He managed to run away again and moved to Pennsylvania to minimize the chance of recapturing. His autobiography *Ball's Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball* was written with the help of Isaac Fischer and published in 1836.

Austin Steward (1794-1860) recorded his memories in the autobiography called *Twenty-Two Years a Slave* published in 1857. He was born to slave parents in Prince William County, Virginia. When his master sold the plantation, he was hired out for a number of employers. Then, Steward escaped to Canandaigua, where he attended a Farmington academy. Although the whites tried to forbid him to run his own business in Rochester, Austin was finally successful and established a grocery around 1820. Steward was involved in antislavery movements and served as a vice-president at the first black national convention.

Sojourner Truth (cca 1799-1883), originally named Isabella Baumfree, she was auctioned off to an Englishman named John Nealey at the age of nine. Over the next few years she was owned by a fisherman and then by John Dumont, a plantation owner from New York County. She had five children with a fellow slave. One of her sons was sold to a plantation owner in Alabama and, after Truth was freed, she obtained her son's freedom too. In 1843, she took the name Sojourner Truth and published her book *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth*.

Harriet Ann Jacobs (1813-1897) realized that she was considered nothing more than property at the age of six, even though she was taught to read as white children. Later, Jacobs was hired out to James and Maria Norcom and was subjected to sexual abuse. In her autobiography *Incidents in the life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet describes slave market observed in North Carolina.

William Wells Brown (1814-1884) born in Lexington, was the son of a slave woman and a white relative of his owner. He escaped and worked on a steamboat on lake Erie and helped fugitive slaves get to Canada. He became a member of the abolitionist movement by

giving antislavery lectures, speaking at abolitionist gatherings and attending meetings of the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society. In 1847, he published the narrative of his life *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave. Written by Himself*.

Henry W. Bibb (1815-1854) had one long-held dream, which was to escape from slavery and live as a free and fully-fledged person. Eventually, when he made his escape, Bibb began to hold lectures focused on slavery and became a well-known African American activist. His story of life is recorded in the book called *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave*.

Frederick Douglas (1818-1895) is probably the most important African American leader of the nineteenth century. He became an agent and lecturer for the American Anti-Slavery Society. During the Civil War, he tried to convince President Abraham Lincoln of allowing former slaves to join the Union Army. Moreover, he overwhelmingly supported campaigns for full civil rights for former slaves. Douglas was also known as a supporter of women's suffrage. His autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, was published in 1845.

2 Childhood in Slavery

Considering the sameness of slave narratives' structure, the stories are written in a chronological order. Therefore, this chapter deals with the issue of childhood and other related topics such as relationships in family and the impact of slavery on family life.

As King mentions, reproduction of slaves was crucial for the population growth in the United States since 1808, when the transatlantic slave trade was banned.¹⁷ Slave owners needed workforce and any new child would add to their wealth. Therefore, slaves began to have the possibility to get married because creating a family unit meant creating a reproduction cycle. As narratives declare, even though slaves were allowed to get married with their master's agreement, marriages were not legally recognized:

“Isabella was married to Thomas--she was, after the fashion of slavery, one of the slaves performing the ceremony for them; as no true minister of Christ can perform, as in the presence of God, what he knows to be a mere farce, a mock marriage, unrecognized by any civil law, and liable to be annulled any moment, when the interest or caprice of the master should dictate.”¹⁸

Slaveholders hold ultimate power over their slaves and it was common to make a woman to marry a man she did not want to, and vice versa. A married couple also could be separated by transferring one of the couple to another plantation. William W. Brown encountered this problem: “[...] He sold a man named Ben, to one of the traders. He also owned Ben's wife, and in a few days he compelled Sally (that was her name) to marry Peter, another man belonging to him.”¹⁹ When he enquired Sally about the reason that would explain the second marriage, she allegedly answered that her “master made her do it.”²⁰ Slaves were obliged to be obedient in every aspect and husband of a slave woman wielded no power to protect his wife from the master's and overseer's inappropriate and abusive behaviour. In his narrative, Henry Bibb confessed the painful feeling of being absolutely powerless to do anything against rude manners of his wife's master:

¹⁷ Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Childhood in Nineteenth-Century America*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), xvii.

¹⁸ Olive Gilbert, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth, a Northern Slave, Emancipated from Bodily Servitude by the State of New York, 1828* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2000), 37.

¹⁹ William W. Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1996), 88.

²⁰ Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 88.

“[...] I was compelled to stand and see my wife shamefully scourged and abused by her master; and the manner in which this was done, was so violently and inhumanly committed upon the person of a female, that I despair in finding decent language to describe the bloody act of cruelty.”²¹

African American women were sexually abused, stalked and harassed or they were used as concubines of their masters and overseers. William W. Brown recounted a story of a woman called Cynthia. Her master made her a vile proposal and she rejected. However, he began to threaten her. In case of declining his offers, she would send her to the worst plantation. Brown “foresaw too well what the result must be”²² and Cynthia became her master’s mistress. Eventually, she had four children with him, and she was sold with all of them into “hopeless bondage!”²³ As Harriet A. Jacobs noted in her autobiography, when she was told that her new-born baby was a girl, her “heart was heavier than it had ever been before” because “slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women.”²⁴ She also mentions that her “lover was an intelligent and religious man”²⁵ and says:

“Even if he could have obtained permission to marry me while I was a slave, the marriage would give him no power to protect me from my master. It would have made him miserable to witness the insults I should have been subjected to. And then, if we had children, I knew they must “follow the condition of the mother.”²⁶

As King notes, slave owners were more concerned about the value of slave children than about who children’s fathers were or the conditions under which their mothers became pregnant because children born in slavery brought an increase in mother’s owner wealth.²⁷

Douglas did not try to hide his disgust over a slaveholder, Mr. Covey:

“After buying her, he hired a married man of Mr. Samuel Harrison, to live with him one year; and him he used to fasten up with her every night! The result was that, at the end of the year, the miserable woman gave birth to twins. [...] The children were regarded as being quite an addition to his wealth.”²⁸

²¹ Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2000), 43.

²² Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 46.

²³ Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 46.

²⁴ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 64.

²⁵ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 37.

²⁶ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 37.

²⁷ King, *Stolen Childhood*, 41.

²⁸ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (New York: Penguin Books USA, 1982), 105.

From the perspective of Henry Bibb they “were all claimed and held as property” because “the father and mother were slaves!”²⁹ William W. Brown reflects the same experience. He regards his master as “the man who stole me as soon as I was born” and who “recorded the births of all the infants which he claimed to be born his property, in a book which he kept for that purpose.”³⁰

However, the child mortality rates were twice as high among slave children as among southern white children. As Mintz says, according to the study of slave children, the main contributor to the high death rate was a chronic undernourishment. Pregnant women were provided no extra rations and were obliged to undertake demanding field work even few days before they gave birth.³¹ Both men and women “received, as their monthly allowance of food, eight pounds of pork, or its equivalent in fish, and one bushel³² of corn meal.”³³ Austin Steward specifies the amount of food provided on his plantation:

“The amount of provision given out on the plantation per week was invariably one peck of corn or meal for each slave. [...]The slaves on our plantation were provided with very little meat. In addition to the peck of corn or meal, they were allowed a little salt and a few herrings.”³⁴

Concerning children, their allowance “was given to their mothers, or the old women having the care of them.”³⁵ As Bubíková says, slave women returned to their regular and daylong labour after a few days or weeks of a “maternity leave” at the maximum.³⁶ As a result, mothers brought their children on plantations with them. They worked with the children on their back or they devised alternative means:

“When Isabella went to the field to work, she used to put her infant in a basket, tying a rope to each handle, and suspending the basket to a branch of a tree, set another small child to swing it. It was thus secure from reptiles, and was easily

²⁹ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 43.

³⁰ Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 13.

³¹ Steven Mintz, “Childhood and Transatlantic Slavery,” *Children & Youth in History*, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/cyh/case-studies/57>, accessed February 26, 2013.

³² a unit of capacity in the British Imperial and the United States Customary systems of measurement. A U.S. level bushel is made up of 4 pecks, or 32 dry quarts.

³³ Douglas, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas*, 54.

³⁴ Austin Steward, *Twenty-Two Years a Slave, and Forty Years a Freeman; Embracing a Correspondence of Several Years, While President of Wilberforce Colony, London, Canada West* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1997), 14.

³⁵ Douglas, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas*, 10.

³⁶ Bubíková, “Dětství v otroctví pohledem dobových ego-dokumentů,” 215. My translation.

administered to, and even lulled to sleep, by a child too young for other labors.”³⁷

Another possible solution for working mothers was to put their newborns in charge of old women who were not able to perform demanding fieldwork. When the children grew older, it was fairly common that they raised one another.³⁸

As most of the narratives document, childhood in slavery was fearful, rough and full of pain, suffering and humiliation. Hiner and Howes state that children already in their early lives had to perform simple chores such as carrying water to the field hands, cleaning up the yards, fetching wood, tending the family garden, and feeding livestock.³⁹ According to Douglas, children who were unable to work in the field “had neither shoes, stockings, jackets, nor trousers, given to them,” they only got “two coarse linen shirts per year” and when they grew out of them, they “went naked until the next allowance-day.”⁴⁰

The poor housing could be considered the next aspect illustrating the extreme poverty of slaves’ lives. As Franklin and Moss allege, slaves lived in small, rude huts without floors or windows. Some cabins were equipped with a few items of furniture but usually even beds were absent there.⁴¹ Austin Steward remarks that it “was the usual custom” to live in “a small cabin, built of rough boards, with a floor of earth, and small openings in the sides of the cabin,” which were “substituted for windows.”⁴² Austin Steward “always slept upon the floor, without a pillow or even a blanket, but, like a dog, lay down anywhere I could find a place.”⁴³ Sojourner Truth remembers that “all the slaves he possessed of both sexes, sleeping (as is quite common in a state of slavery) in the same room:

“[...] its only lights consisting of a few panes of glass, through which she thinks the sun never shone, but with thrice reflected rays; and the space between the loose boards of the floor, and the uneven earth below, was often filled with mud and water, the uncomfortable splashings of which were as annoying as its noxious vapors must have been chilling and fatal to health.”⁴⁴

³⁷ Gilbert, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, 38-39.

³⁸ N. Ray Hiner and Joseph M. Hawes, *Growing up in America: Children in Historical Perspective* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 175.

³⁹ Hiner, Hawes, *Growing up in America*, 175.

⁴⁰ Frederick Douglas, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas*, 54.

⁴¹ Franklin, Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 131.

⁴² Steward, *Twenty-Two Years a Slave*, 13.

⁴³ Steward, *Twenty-two Years a Slave*, 27.

⁴⁴ Gilbert, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, 14.

Douglas describes that he had no bed and suffered from cold during winters because he was kept almost naked. He had no bed so he “perished with cold” and during the coldest nights, he used to steal a bag, which was used for carrying corn to the mill. He “would crawl into this bag and there sleep on the cold, damp, clay floor” with his “head in and feet out.”⁴⁵ Therefore, he had to cope with serious physical illnesses and damages: “My feet have been so cracked with the frost that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes.”⁴⁶ As it was written in his narrative, He not only suffered from cold, he was also kept half starved.

Children were not supplied with food regularly. The food was poor, they were provided with so called *mush*,⁴⁷ which was “put into a large wooden tray or through, and set down upon the ground.”⁴⁸ He compares the poor children to “pigs” because “some ate the mush with “oyster-shells, others with pieces of schingle, some with naked hands, and none with spoons.”⁴⁹ According to Hiner and Hawes, older boys accompanied by their fathers could sometimes vary their diet by collecting berries, nuts and trapping small game animals and catching fish in streams. Slaves had not many opportunities to spend time together as family, thus men appreciated the chance to teach their children the intricacies of hunting.⁵⁰

Under the oppressive system of slavery, children were often emotionally deprived. Most of them did not come into close contact with their parents. Especially fathers remained mostly unknown. As it has already been mentioned, they were separated from mothers of their children by sending them to another plantation or mothers felt no need to tell anything about them. Usually, it was caused by the fact that the fathers were children’s white masters: “[...] for thousands are ushered into the world, annually, who, like myself, owe their existence to white fathers, and those fathers most frequently their own masters.”⁵¹ Mothers maintained closer relationships with their children but it was not a rule. Douglas briefly summarizes the issue of children being separated from their mothers in the age of twelfth month as “a common custom.”⁵² The departure hindered the development of the child’s affection toward its mother, and destroyed the natural affection of the mother for the child. Douglas saw his

⁴⁵ Douglas, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas*, 71-72.

⁴⁶ Douglas, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas*, 27.

⁴⁷ boiled coarse corn meal

⁴⁸ Douglas, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas*, 27.

⁴⁹ Douglas, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas*, 72.

⁵⁰ Hiner, Hawes, *Growing up in America*, 175-176.

⁵¹ Douglas, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas*, 50.

⁵² Douglas, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas*, 2.

mother only “four or five times” in his life and only for “a short time and during the night.”⁵³ He appreciated that his mother made her journeys to see him after performing daylong work, however, he had never recognized her as mother as such.⁵⁴

A number of black women undertook long night journeys on foot in order to lie down with their children and lull them to sleep. These few minutes represented the most precious moments in desperate mothers’ lives. On the basis of narratives, the importance of the journeys was so enormous that women made them even in spite of the threat of corporal punishment. When they did not return before the sunrise, they were whipped or punished in a different way. It happened also in case that mother had a special permission form her master. When Harriet A. Jacobs was transferred to another plantation, she did not make an exception. Her children had to stay at the former place at her grandmother’ and because she missed them so much she performed the journey, despite all of her fears of being caught by patrols. Allegedly, the personal encounter was deeply emotional. When she came to the grandmother’s cabin, she admitted that “the tears fell” as she “leaned over them.”⁵⁵ Jacobs illustrates that her son woke up, and was profoundly sad when she had to leave him again: “I laid Benny back in his bed, and dried his tears by a promise to come again soon.”⁵⁶

Henry Bibb confessed that if there were something in his life that he regretted, it would be “being a father and a husband of slaves.”⁵⁷ He did not want his child to experience the same horrors as he did: “She is bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh; poor unfortunate child. She was the first and shall be the last slave that ever I will father, for chains and slavery on this earth.”⁵⁸ Harriet A. Jacobs wrote about her son that she “could never forget that he was a slave” and that she “sometimes wished that he might die in infancy.”⁵⁹ Nevertheless, when the child became ill, she changed her mind and “prayed for his life,” although, “death is better than slavery.”⁶⁰

Actually, loosing children was the worst nightmare for African American women because children provided a great consolation for them. In slavery, black mothers had no

⁵³ Douglas, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas*, 2.

⁵⁴ Douglas, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas*, 48.

⁵⁵ Jacobs: *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 134.

⁵⁶ Jacobs: *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 72.

⁵⁷ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 43.

⁵⁸ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 43.

⁵⁹ Jacobs: *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 53.

⁶⁰ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 53.

assurances. They could be separated from their babies any time. The most feared day was 1st January, which was determined as so called Hiring-day at the South. Contrasting experiences with this day from white women' and women slaves' point of view, Jacobs claims that free mothers have nothing to be worried about whereas slave mothers suffer tremendously:

“Children bring their little offerings, and raise their rosy lips for a caress. They are your own, and no hand but that of death can take them from you. But to the slave mother New Year's day comes laden with peculiar sorrows. She sits on her cold cabin floor, watching the children who may all be torn from her the next morning; and often does she wish that she and they might die before the day dawns. She may be an ignorant creature, degraded by the system that has brutalized her from childhood; but she has a mother's instincts, and is capable of feeling a mother's agonies.”⁶¹

Austin Steward describes departure as taking one after another “from the block, until all are disposed of, amid the agonized wail of heartbroken wives and mothers, husbands and fathers, and the piercing screams of helpless children, torn from a parent's embrace, to be consigned to the care of strangers.”⁶² Sometimes, women who could not endure excruciating agony any longer, they rather killed themselves. “We lost one woman who had been taken from her husband and children, and having no desire to live without them, in the agony of her soul jumped overboard, and drowned herself.”⁶³

According to Hiner and Hawes, when children had spare time, they were free to visit their peer group or wander through neighbouring plantations. The only condition imposed by their parents was to be back before nightfall. To relieve anxieties and fears closely related to the life in slavery, children involved in imitative play. For example, they played the game “Auction” and number of others. It helped them to cope with the institution of slavery in their early childhood.⁶⁴ The interesting thing is that slave children played together with the white. “I once saw two beautiful children playing together. One was a fair white child; the other was her slave, and also her sister.”⁶⁵ However, as black children grew older, they began to realize that they were treated in a different way than their white playmates. Henry Bibb noted that he was “young and small”⁶⁶ he did know anything about his condition of a slave. He played with

⁶¹ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 17.

⁶² Steward, *Twenty-Two Years a Slave*, 339.

⁶³ Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 39.

⁶⁴ Hiner, Hawes, *Growing up in America*, 178.

⁶⁵ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 27.

⁶⁶ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 14.

a girl “who was said to be the legitimate owner of my mother, and all her children.”⁶⁷ Then, he continues that when he was taken away from his mother, he was “hired out to labour for various persons, eight or ten years in succession” and all the wages “were expended for the education of Harriet White, my playmate.”⁶⁸

In summary, children had to get used to tough living conditions since their earliest age. Although their parents or other family members, who took care of them, invested a great deal of effort to make them as happy as possible, children had to carry out hard work and cope with constant hunger and emotional tension. In their free time, they had the chance to spend their time with their playmates. However, in case that the friends were white, they began to despise black children for their racial distinction according to the cultural habits as they grew old. The situation like this one could have been the first sign indicating black children that their lives would completely differ from the lives of their white peers.

⁶⁷ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 14.

⁶⁸ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 14.

3 Resistance to Slavery

In regard to the previous chapter, black people were not allowed to get formal education. Fearing that slaves would realize that literacy is vital for their search for equality, laws forbidding slaves to read and write were passed. Anyone who would help slaves with education would be charged a fee because teaching them was considered a crime as the South Carolina Slave Code clearly stated:

“And whereas the having of slaves taught to write, or suffering them to be employed in writing, may be attended with great inconveniences; Be it enacted, that all and every person and persons whatsoever, who shall hereafter teach, or cause any slave or slaves to be taught to write, or shall use or employ any slave as a scribe in any manner of writing whatsoever, hereafter taught to write; every such person and persons shall, for every such offence, forfeit the sum of £100 current money.”⁶⁹

Slaves, however, were perfectly aware of the importance of education. It represented means through which they handle the inhumane acts and degradation by the whites without losing their own spirits. And literate slaves had probably the best chance of making it from the South to the Northern States. Therefore, black parents who managed to read or write taught their children the letters of alphabet in their leisure time.

A great majority of slave owners firmly opposed the idea of slaves being educated. Henry Bibb declares that “slaves were not allowed books, pen, ink, nor paper to improve their minds.”⁷⁰ When Frederick Douglass was sent to Baltimore, his new mistress commenced to teach him spell words. After a while, his master Mr. Auld discovered these attempts and he strictly forbade their lessons. He claims that “it was unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave read.”⁷¹ He expressed the opinion that “a nigger should know nothing but to obey his master -- to do as he is told to do.”⁷² He was afraid that Douglass would become unmanageable and would not respect him anymore: “It would forever unfit him to be a slave.”⁷³ On this account, Douglass realized the fact that education represents one of the means of gaining

⁶⁹ “South Carolina Slave Code,” The Free Dictionary, <http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/South+Carolina+Slave+Code>, accessed March 14, 2013.

⁷⁰ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 15.

⁷¹ Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 33.

⁷² Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 33.

⁷³ Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 78.

power over black people. Therefore, he determined to proceed with learning to read: “[...]I set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read.”⁷⁴ This was a common method for slaves of recognizing right and wrong. When a slave owner proclaimed something right, slaves automatically considered it right and vice versa. When Steward’s master discovered that he attempted to read using a spelling book, he sent him to a sugar plantation. Steward took the book with him and continued in his attempts. After being caught again, he was flogged but instead of giving up his learning, he says that he “determined to learn to read and write, at all hazards.”⁷⁵ As Jacobs describes in her narrative, she knew a black man, who was keen on acquiring basic education to read the Bible, in order to serve the God better. He was willing to do it, despite the danger of being imposed the fee for breaking the law.⁷⁶

As Lester asserts, slaves were taught to think that it is in their best interest to do the kind of work that their masters commenced them to do and were repeatedly reminded that they are naturally inferior to the whites. Provided a slave owner succeeded in brainwashing a slave and destroying his mind, which was replaced with the mind of the master eventually, the slave enslaved himself without his master’s constant supervision. A powerful instrument used for controlling black people’s minds represented religion. The only approved preaching was that which would make the slave happy to be a slave. As a result, slaves were allowed to attend such sermons that were delivered by a white preacher, a master himself or a trusted slave. A preacher’s duty was to ensure slaves’ gratitude for having such a “good” master and prevent them from launching an insurrection.⁷⁷ Jacobs captured a part of Mr. Pike’s sermon which delivers the message to slaves that unless they were faithful, hard-working and obedient servants, always telling the truth, they would be punished in the heaven:

“[...] God is angry with you, and will surely punish you, if you don't forsake your wicked ways. [...] Instead of serving your masters faithfully, which is pleasing in the sight of your heavenly Master, you are idle, and shirk your work. God sees you. You tell lies. God hears you. [...] You must forsake your sinful ways, and be faithful servants. Obey your old master and your young master-your old mistress and your young mistress. If you disobey your earthly master, you offend your heavenly Master. [...].”⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Douglas, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas*, 79.

⁷⁵ Steward, *Twenty-two Years a Slave*, 83.

⁷⁶ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 61.

⁷⁷ Julius Lester, *To Be a Slave*, (New York: The Dial Press, INC. New York, 1968), 76-78.

⁷⁸ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 58.

Lester further mentions that slaves rarely found these and other similar arguments convincing. Thus, they adopted a different kind of religion, to which they turned in times of need. It was based on the Old Testament story of the enslavement of the Hebrews by Egyptians. For slaves, the figure of Jesus Christ meant someone who understood them and offered rest from sufferings.⁷⁹ In the evening, when all the work was completed, Sojourner Truth gathered her children and talked about “the only Being that could effectually aid or protect them.”⁸⁰ Allegedly, the character of conversation could be as the following one: “My children, there is a God, who hears and sees you.' 'A God, mau-mau! Where does he live?' asked the children. 'He lives in the sky,' she replied; 'and when you are beaten, or cruelly treated, or fall into any trouble, you must ask help of him, and he will always hear and help you.'”⁸¹ Harriet Tubman, known as the “Moses,”⁸² expressed the “pilgrimage from Maryland to Canada” as “from Egypt to de land of Canaan.”⁸³ Religious motives were even used in her so called *hymns*. When she arrived at a place where slaves who desired to run away waited for her, the hymns sang were interpreted as a sign whether it is safe for them to come out from their hiding place:

“[...] De first time I go by singing dis hymn, dey don't come out to me," she said, "till I listen if de coast is clar; den when I go back and sing it again, dey come out. But if I sing:

Moses go down in Egypt,
Till ole Pharo' let me go;
Hadn't been for Adam's fall,
Shouldn't hab to died at all,

den dey don't come out, for dere's danger in de way.”⁸⁴

As Lester claims, music reflected slave’s frame of mind and were used in every aspect of their lives. Singing represented the way of reducing their deep troubles caused by the hard work and helped them to free their minds partly:

⁷⁹ Lester, *To Be a Slave*, 79.

⁸⁰ Gilbert, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, 17.

⁸¹ Gilbert, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, 17-18.

⁸² Tubman, leading hundreds of slaves to freedom, was made a parallel to the biblical story where the Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt.

⁸³ Sarah H. Bradford, *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2000), 29.

⁸⁴ Bradford, *Scenes in the Life*, 26-27.

“They sang to ease the burden of work. They sang for dancing. They brought several African instruments to this country – notably the banjo – and made others when they got there. They used music as means of expressing their joys and they could make music with practically anything that was available.”⁸⁵

Douglas mentions that it was typical for “the slaves selected to go to the Great House Farm”⁸⁶ to sing spontaneous songs on their way: “They would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune. The thought that came up, came out--if not in the word, in the sound; --and as frequently in the one as in the other.” He also confirms that the more they were desperate, the more they sang: “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.”⁸⁷ The importance of music in resistance to slavery was described well by Austin Steward:

“[...]we will rejoice, though sobs interrupt the songs of our rejoicing, and tears mingle in the cup we pledge to Freedom; our harps though they have long hung neglected upon the willows, shall this day be strung full high to the notes of gladness. On this day, in one member at least of this mighty Republic, the Slavery of our race has ceased forever!”⁸⁸

Another effective means of gaining control over slaves was to grant them no name of their own. Slaves were named after their masters or had no name. According to Lester, a slave was never asked who he was. Concerning his identity, he was usually addressed the question *who's nigger* he was. Having no separate identity, slaves identified with their owner much more easily.⁸⁹ A letter written by the former slave William W. Brown to his master Wells Brown proves that slaves obtained no names of themselves: “[...] Even a name by which to be known among men, slavery had denied me. You bestowed upon me your own.”⁹⁰ As Brown describes later in the narrative, he was sold to another master whose nephew was called William too. On account of this similarity, Brown acquired a completely new name:

“My master’s family consisted of himself, his wife, and their nephew, William Moore. He was taken into the family when only a few weeks of age. His name being that of my own, mine was changed for the purpose of giving precedence to his, though I was his senior by ten or twelve years.”⁹¹

⁸⁵ Lester, *To Be a Slave*, 112.

⁸⁶ the expression denoting the master’s residence

⁸⁷ Douglas, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas*, 57.

⁸⁸ Steward, *Twenty-two Years a Slave*, 157.

⁸⁹ Lester, *To Be a Slave*, 77.

⁹⁰ Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, i.

⁹¹ Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 37.

To continue, Douglas describes his experience with Mrs. Hamilton, a slave owner's wife. They owned two slaves named Henrietta and Mary. However, as Douglas reflects, Mrs. Hamilton ordinarily called them "black gip." He adds that "so much was Mary kicked and cut into pieces, that she was oftener called "*pecked*" than by her name."⁹²

Apart from these methods of enslavement, African Americans were controlled by force. To be obedient, slaves were made to live in constant fear. As it is vividly pictured in most of the narratives, they were flogged and punished, even for breaking the slightest rule or when the accusations were absolutely groundless. As Lester claims, the typical slave experience was based on cruel treatment. Slaves were "whipped for the most trifling incidents" and the whip was "often wielded by the slave owner's wife as the slave owner himself." Steward notes that "those cruelties are daily occurrences, and so degrading is the whole practice of Slavery" and in his view, it "not only crushes and brutalizes the wretched slave, but it hardens the heart, benumbs all the fine feelings of humanity, and deteriorates from the character of the slave-holders themselves, - whether man or woman." He was appalled by the slave owners' wives attitude:

"Slaveholding ladies can not only look on quietly, but with approbation; and what is worse, though very common, they can and do use the lash and cowhide themselves, on the backs of their slaves, and that too on those of their own sex!"⁹³

Douglas shared the same opinion on transformation of humans into cruel and heartless creatures under the system of slavery. When he came to Baltimore, he was grateful for his new mistress whom he considered "a woman of the kindest heart and finest feelings." He characterized her as a woman whose "face was made of heavenly smiles, and her voice of tranquil music." In his narrative, Douglas, nevertheless, continues with disappointment:

"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."⁹⁴

⁹² Douglas, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas*, 80.

⁹³ Steward, *Twenty-two Years a Slave*, 26.

⁹⁴ Douglas, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas*, 77-78.

Another person who administered corrections was the plantation overseer. Overseers were assisted by a trusted slave sometimes. The slave was called a driver and was administered to give whippings.⁹⁵ Mostly, drivers were harsh but there were also some exceptions. Northup recollected that having eight years of experience as a driver, he “learned to handle the whip with marvellous dexterity and precision, throwing the lash within a hair's breadth of the back, the ear, the nose, without, however, touching either of them.”⁹⁶ According to Franklin and Schweninger, overseers were often not able to punish slaves for every incident but punishments were always systematic and severe.⁹⁷ Often, slaves were punished already early in the morning. As Northup says, the overseer's horn was blown an hour before daylight. This was a signal for slaves to get up, prepare their breakfast and other carry out their duties before they had to hasten to the field.⁹⁸ On account of being overworked, slaves sometimes did not manage to get up in the morning and they overslept. Therefore, they were whipped: “It is the fear of oversleeping in the morning. Such an offence would certainly be attended with not less than twenty lashes.”⁹⁹

Brown claims that there was nothing more heart-rending than to see beloved members of his family being tortured. He explains that his mother overslept and came to the plantation few minutes later and he was punished so harshly that although the field was distant from the place where he served, he witnessed her sufferings: “I could hear every crack of the whip and every groan and cry of my poor mother.”¹⁰⁰ Steward reflects that slaves, who were imposed punishment, were obliged to take their clothes off to uncover their back. Then, their hands were tied with a rope before them and the end of the rope was passed over a bar. Consequently, a slave was forced to stand on the tips of his toes. Brown adds that another possibility of punishment was to tie slave's legs together and place a rail between them. The victim was absolutely powerless to defend themselves so an overseer could perform his duty. Approximately forty lashes were inflicted for the petty offence.¹⁰¹ Douglas witnessed

⁹⁵ Lester, *To Be a Slave*, 33.

⁹⁶ Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1997), 226.

⁹⁷ John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 9.

⁹⁸ Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 171.

⁹⁹ Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 170.

¹⁰⁰ Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 15.

¹⁰¹ Steward, *Twenty-two Years a Slave*, 16-17.

whipping of Aunt Hester. She was stripped from her neck the waist to have shoulders and back naked. Then, she was made to stand on her toes with her hands tied to a hook in a joist. In this position, she was whipped.¹⁰² Mr. Hick's wife was another person who committed a crime. She murdered a cousin of Frederick's wife. The girl was exhausted from the day's work and, therefore, she overheard a crying baby that she was supposed to take care of during the night. Her mistress broke her nose and breastbone with a stick and the girl died in a few hours.¹⁰³ Sojourner Truth was punished so harshly that she bore the consequences for the rest of her life: "He whipped her till the flesh was deeply lacerated, and the blood streamed from her wounds--and the scars remain to the present day, to testify to the fact."¹⁰⁴

In the narratives, various methods of punishment are described. Franklin and Schweninger assert that they were beaten, chained, incarcerated, ironed and whipped. The only exception made house servants.¹⁰⁵ In contrast to the field workers, house servants worked under more favourable conditions. As Ball exemplifies, he was given better clothes than other children of his age and he was promised to become his master's overseer. Stemming from this, house servants were trained to their duty from the earliest age and, according to Ball, this status often represented "the highest points of honour and greatness in the whole world."¹⁰⁶ As Lester notes, the house servants were, however, hated by the field workers. They not only had better living conditions, but they were considered the "model slaves." They came into closer contact with their master and his entire family and, therefore, house servants were used as a tool for uncovering and revealing slave insurrections.¹⁰⁷ For these reasons, the house servants were often hated by the field workers:

"House servants were of course, "the stars" of the party [...] The field hands, and such of them as have generally been excluded from the dwelling of their owners, look to the house servant as a pattern of politeness and gentility. [...] they are ever regarded as a privileged class; and are sometimes greatly envied, while others are bitterly hated. And too often justly, for many of them are the

¹⁰² Frederick Douglas, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself* (Chapel Hill: University of Carolina, 1999), 7.

¹⁰³ Douglas, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 24-25.

¹⁰⁴ Gilbert, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, 27.

¹⁰⁵ Franklin, Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 42.

¹⁰⁶ Charles Ball, *Slavery in the United States. A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball, a Black Man, Who Lived Forty Years in Maryland, South Carolina and Georgia, As a Slave Under Various Masters, and was One Year in the Navy with Commodore Barney, During the Late War* (Chapel Hill: University of Carolina, 1999), 25.

¹⁰⁷ Lester, *To Be a Slave*, 89.

most despicable tale-bearers and mischief-makers, who will, for the sake of the favor of his master or mistress, frequently betray his fellow-slave, and by tattling, get him severely whipped.”¹⁰⁸

Nevertheless, Lester continues that apart from the servants spying on the fellow slaves, there were also numbers of those who, on contrary, used their position inside the “great house” to spy *on* the master. With their help, a lot of slaves managed to escape from slavery. Susan Broadus in Lester notes that she overheard her master to “spell out names G-A-B-E and R-U-F-U-S,” slaves that were supposed to be sold. Next morning, as Broadus declares, Gabe and Rufus “were gone – they had run away.”¹⁰⁹

In fact, slave owners tried to make the slaves their puppets without any free will. Despite these attempts, slaves were, however, in many cases aware of this fact and refused to exist as someone’s property. Bibb tried to escape from slavery after the first time he was badly treated: “She was every day flogging me, boxing, pulling my ears, and scolding, so that I dreaded to enter the room where she was.”¹¹⁰ He explains that he always believed that “every man has a right to wages for his labor; a right to his own wife and children; a right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness; and a right to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience.” Franklin and Schweningen recorded that slaves committed “crimes” against property to defend themselves. They pulled down fences, sabotaged farm equipment, damaged boats, vandalized wagons, ruined clothing and committed a lot of other similar acts. They even stole sheep, dogs, cattle etc. and often set fires to barns, stables and mistreated livestock.¹¹¹ As Lester says, slaves who struggled against slavery did as little work as possible and get as few whippings as possible. The most common way was to appear to be stupid and ignorant. When a master was convinced that his slave is dumb and not able to do more work, he did not have so high level of demands.¹¹² This is confirmed by Olmstead in Lester: “[...] but is mostly owing to the stupidity of mind and insensibility of the nerves induced by the disease. Thus they break, waste, and destroy everything they handle; abuse horses and cattle; tear, burn, or rend their own clothing.”¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Steward, *Twenty-two Years a Slave*, 31-32.

¹⁰⁹ Lester, *To Be a Slave*, 92-93.

¹¹⁰ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 16.

¹¹¹ Franklin, Schweningen, *Runaway Slaves*, 2.

¹¹² Lester, *To Be a Slave*, 98.

¹¹³ Lester, *To Be a Slave*, 99.

As Lester further notes, the sabotage could not end slavery as such but it significantly undermined it. Moreover, provided slaves worked as hard as they could, they were punished and remained slaves. Sabotaging the plantation work helped them to make their lives more enjoyable and easier.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Lester, *To Be a Slave*, 99-101.

4 Escape from Slavery

Apart from the methods of expressing disapproval of living in the bondage, which were described in the previous chapter, escape could be considered as another, and probably the most serious, form of resistance.

As Franklin and Schweninger say, there is an endless list of reasons prompting slaves to escape: “work routine; food allotments; spousal visitations; clothing; housing; Sunday work; incentive payments; hiring arrangements; being sold, transferred, traded to another plantation; or having a family member sold, transferred or traded.”¹¹⁵ Despite this fact, slave owners believed that slaves working for them had no simple reasons to be unhappy. As Douglas mentions, to make sure that their slave would not complain, slave owners had their spies who were assigned the task of discovering the real nature of slaves’ attitude toward their masters. They usually pretended to be slaves’ friends and asked innocent questions concerning living standards. To protect themselves, slaves answered that they were happy and that they had a kind master. Provided that their answer was truthful, slaves could be sold and separated from their family forever.¹¹⁶

Memories of cruel punishment, violent behaviour and hard work in the fields are vividly recorded in slave narratives. It could be estimated that the inhumane treatment was a significant cause for slaves to run away. Franklin and Schweninger claim that marks of the whip *on* slaves’ backs, irons on their limbs, with marks on their foreheads and cheeks and often without fingers and toes¹¹⁷ clearly demonstrate the seriousness of the situation. Bibb admitted that “ill treatment” provoked him to run away for the first time¹¹⁸ and he explains that running away represents “the most effectual way by which a slave could escape cruel punishment.”¹¹⁹

Another strong reason for escape presented sexual liaisons. Wives of slave owners often suspected slave women from maintaining relationships with their husbands. Jacobs remarks that her mistress had no sympathy for women among her slaves:” They were the

¹¹⁵ Franklin, Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 19.

¹¹⁶ Douglas, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 18-19.

¹¹⁷ Franklin, Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 43.

¹¹⁸ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 16.

¹¹⁹ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 28.

objects of her constant suspicion and malevolence.”¹²⁰ In her narrative, Jacobs further claims that she was always trying hard to be virtuous and to be a good servant to her mistress. However, the mistress was jealous because her husband paid too much attention to Jacobs. Finally, Jacobs decided to run away to hide from him. Franklin and Schweninger highlight that marital problems were not unique in times of slavery. Planters and wives argued about children, money, social events and slaves.¹²¹

Franklin and Schweninger further note that slaves observed the life of their slave owners carefully and due to watching and listening to fights among family members, they quickly learnt to recognize all their difficulties. They knew well when masters drank to excess, had some health problems or faced marital or financial problems. They were witnesses of arguments based on jealousy, hatred and hostilities that sometimes even lead to the domestic violence. All of these conflicts culminated in inability of masters to take proper care of their slaves who took advantage of the situation and manage to run away.¹²²

Dorothy and Carl J. Schneider claim that most African slaves run away for a short period of time. They were often confronted with problems such as ignorance of terrain. Some runaways lived out of the plantation for a longer period. To avoid punishment and heavy work or to meet their beloved living on another plantation and to disturb the monotony of their lives, slaves hid in nearby woods and swamps for a few days. A special group of runaways presented fugitives. Fugitive slaves ran to escape the bondage completely. They headed towards the northern states and territories. The most common destination where to go was Canada.¹²³ Franklin and Schweninger claim that most prominent opportunity for slaves to flee was the accident location. African Americans living near to Pennsylvania line, along the Ohio River, in the west or near the Indian nations, on the border with Florida or in the southern Texas, were strongly tempted to escape.¹²⁴ Bibb confirms this theory. From his point of view, Canada represented a place with “no clanking of chains, no captives, no lacerating of backs, no parting of husbands and wives; and where man ceases to be the property of his fellow man.”¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Chapel Hill: University of Carolina, 2003), 49.

¹²¹ Franklin, Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 25.

¹²² Franklin, Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 91.

¹²³ Dorothy Schneider, Carl J. Schneider, *Slavery in America* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007), 138

¹²⁴ Franklin, Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 25.

¹²⁵ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 29.

As Dorothy and Carl J. Schneider further mention, for those slaves, who were imported, the escape was hardest. The main reasons were foreign language and having no idea where they were and in which direction to proceed. But even slaves born on a plantation did not know the surroundings well. Usually, they had not many opportunities to explore the area where they lived. Therefore, the best advice for most of them was to “follow the North Star.”¹²⁶ Brown and his mother were not the exception. As it is mentioned in the narrative, they had “no guide but the NORTH STAR”¹²⁷ on their way to freedom.

Dorothy and Carl J. Schneider note, that runaways needed to be very smart whether they wanted to get away from slavery. Therefore, they used a lot of tricks. For instance, slaves travelling on foot used pepper to throw dogs off their trails. Some of them escaped on boats where they often were helped by black sailors. Women run away pretending to be men and the other way around or even there were some cases when one of slaves escaped by posing as a master.¹²⁸ When Jacobs was on the run, she experienced similar situation because she had to pretend to be someone else to confuse people who were familiar with her:

“I wore my sailor’s clothes, and had blackened my face with charcoal. I passed several people whom I knew. The father of my children came so near that I brushed against his arm; but he had no idea who it was.”¹²⁹

Fugitives were also assisted by family members and their friends often. It was common to hide them in secret rooms located in the attics and basements. For instance, Jacobs was hidden in the attic of her grandmother’s cabin for seven years. When fugitive slaves managed to escape from the plantation, they were assisted by other people on their way to the Northern States sometimes:

“These kind friends gave me something to eat, and started me on my way to Canada, with a recommendation to a friend on my way. This was the commencement of what was called the under ground rail road to Canada.”¹³⁰

Harriet Tubman, who is known for helping former slaves on the run, always traveled during the night and as she refers “many times on foot, over mountains, through forests, across rivers, mid perils by land, perils by water, perils from enemies, perils among false

¹²⁶ Schneider, *Slavery in America*, 135.

¹²⁷ Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 68.

¹²⁸ Schneider, *Slavery in America*, 138.

¹²⁹ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 172.

¹³⁰ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 51.

brethren.” When members of her party become exhausted and refused to continue, she would not hesitate to kill them: “[...] the revolver carried by this bold and daring pioneer would be pointed at their heads. "Dead niggers tell no tales," said Harriet; "Go on or die;" and so she compelled them to drag their weary limbs on their northward journey.” As she claims in her narrative, the slaves who would give up and return back represented enormous danger for the whole system of the Underground Railroad.¹³¹

Running away was difficult for slaves. They often had to abandon their friends and families and risk harsh punishment for trying to escape in case they were caught. Most of runaways managed to escape after multiple attempts. For instance William W. Brown always desired to escape but he did not want to do it and leave his siblings and dearest mother in the bondage of slavery. His sister, however, supports him in his attempts to run all alone: “I beseech you not to let us hinder you. If we cannot get our liberty, we do not wish to be the means of keeping you from a land of freedom.”¹³² Family ties were so strong that when a member of family had the chance to flee, they supported them to do it even for the risk they would never meet each other again. The fact that family was willing to make sacrifices confirms Brown’s mother who refused to run with him: “She said, as all her children were in slavery, she did not wish to leave them.”¹³³ Eventually, Brown convinced his mother and they commenced their journey. Unfortunately, the fugitives were caught and brought back to the “land of whips, chains and Bibles.” As he notes, he was sent to the jail and, afterwards, back home. Then, he was obliged to work in the fields and as he describes, he was “closely watched by the overseer during the day, and locked up at night.” Although, he was severely punished several times by an overseer, he decided not to surrender without a struggle and, by the time, made another attempt.

Another person who dealt with the same issues was Henry Bibb. He confirms that he was too aware of all the potential dangers connected to the attempt of running away and was struggling with the fact that he would leave all his friends and relatives, to whom he felt “strong attachments.”¹³⁴ Even though he did not want to leave his birthplace and was scared of potential punishment, he concluded that the attempt to escape is worth it:

¹³¹ Bradford, *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman*, 24-25.

¹³² Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 32.

¹³³ Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 66.

¹³⁴ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 47.

“And withal, the fear of being pursued with guns and blood-hounds, and of being killed, or captured and taken to the extreme South, to linger out my days in hopeless bondage on some cotton or sugar plantation, all combined to deter me. But I had counted the cost, and was fully prepared to make the sacrifice.”¹³⁵

When slaves managed to escape, they often headed cities. As Franklin and Schweninger suggest, cities provided opportunities for fugitives to hide their identities, to create new ones, live with their relatives and mingle with others. They get a chance to earn money and relative autonomy, new arrivals intended to settle in big cities such as Baltimore, District of Columbia, Richmond, Louisville, Charleston, New Orleans and St. Louis. The reason is that as cities grew, it became more difficult for local authorities to monitor the movements of incoming runaways. They usually lived in sections with working-class whites, near white residential areas etc. To make a living, they worked as butlers, cooks, house - servants, gardeners etc.¹³⁶

According to Andrews, after her escape from North Carolina, Jacobs found a place to live in New York. As she depicted in her narrative, her major worries were to obtain an employment. The problem resulted from having no certificates and recommendations from families to which she used to serve. Despite this fact, she finally found a job and worked as a nursemaid. Constant fear of getting caught by her former owner in the South forced her to change her whereabouts often. When Jacobs moved to Rochester, she worked with her brother in a Rochester antislavery reading room and bookstore. Jacobs and her brother joined the abolitionist movement and during one of the abolitionist lectures, she met a Quaker reformer and feminist Amy Post. She encouraged Jacobs to write her own autobiography, which is considered one of the most significant female antebellum slave narratives.¹³⁷

Another prominent abolitionist was Frederick Douglass. His narrative is closed by a description of his new life in Massachusetts, which covers a very important event of being introduced to members of William Lloyd Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society. According to Blight, Douglass was the most important black American leader of the nineteenth century. He edited newspaper *The North Star*, which was the most influential black

¹³⁵ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 47.

¹³⁶ Franklin, Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 129-130.

¹³⁷ William L. Andrews, “Harriet A. Jacobs (Harriet Ann), 1813-1897,” *Documenting the American South*, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/bio.html>, accessed May 20, 2013.

newspaper. Except for The North Star, he wrote for Frederick Douglass' Paper and The Douglass Monthly. Due to his influential lectures aimed against slavery and extraordinary orator skills, Douglas achieved international fame. His bitter fights against slavery and racism, getting immersed in antislavery politics and preaching his own American ideals, Douglas represented a great hope for all his people.¹³⁸ After several unsuccessful attempts, Brown finally made his escape from a boat, with help of a Quaker Wells Brown. He felt so dedicated to the Quaker that he added the name to his own. As DocSouth state, living as a free person, Brown began to work on a steamboat and helped other fugitive slaves in their journey to Canada. In Buffalo, where he moved, began to work for the Western York Anti-Slavery Society. He and other members of the Society held antislavery lectures at Brown's apartment, he actively attended abolitionist gatherings and he also investigated emigration possibilities by traveling to Cuba and Haiti. When he was hired as a Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society lecture agent, he published a Narrative of his life in 1847.¹³⁹

The first action of Sojourner Truth as a free woman was to sue Solomon Gedney for illegal selling of her son Peter successfully. This made her the first African American woman to win a lawsuit. As Hutchins says, Truth moved with the son to New York and became a preacher. She traveled through the countryside and preached to wait for the Christ's Second Coming. Later, she became an outspoken advocate of the abolition and women's suffrage movements.¹⁴⁰

The issue of freedom is typical for all the slave narratives discussed. Slaves had to cope with unbearable suffering during their life and, as the authors of narratives recorded, they were treated as property without any rights on their own life. From the perspective of slave owners, slaves' only importance was to produce wealth. As a result, the main life-long aim of slaves was to be freed from the life in the bondage. Therefore, numbers of them made their escape, often with the help of other people opposing the institution of slavery. After reaching the intended destinations in the north, fugitive slaves tried to mingle with local people and some of them made decision to actively fight against slavery. One of the most

¹³⁸ David W. Blight, "Frederick Douglass, 1818-1895," Documenting the American South, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/bio.html>, accessed May 20, 2013.

¹³⁹ "William Wells Brown, 1814?-1884," Documenting the American South, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/brownw/bio.html>, accessed May 20, 2013.

¹⁴⁰ Zachary Hutchins, "Sojourner Truth: The Libyan Sibyl," Documenting the American South, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/highlights/sojournertruth.html>, accessed May 20, 2013.

effective ways was to put and spread life stories recollecting all slaves' memories of the South throughout the United States.

5 Conclusion

Slave narratives, which were designed as a reflection of inhumanity of the institution of slavery, are characterized by their sameness. Although narratives were created under different circumstances and their stylistic forms are diverse, most of them have a fairly formulaic structure.

On the title page, an assertion about the authorship is made. Provided that a narrator was illiterate, a name of the person who helped him to put the narrator's life story in writing was added. A preface and letters exchanged between the author and his master or between the author and a person who helped him on his path to freedom, precede the actual autobiography. The crucial function of the attached prefaces and letters was to verify the accuracy of narratives. Narratives themselves are introduced by information providing knowledge of the former slave's birth. In case that the author knew his parents, some basic facts about them are given. It could be assumed that vivid descriptions of family background served as a kind of connection between an author and his readers because it manifests slaves' deep feelings and sense of belonging.

Having made this kind of introduction, other aspects of the slave's life are presented. A great emphasis was laid on a detailed description of master. Picturing horrible life conditions such as lack of rest and food favourably contrasted with excessive workload and cruel and severe punishment inflicted upon slaves. Together with detailed description of brutal treatment, unacceptable methods of punishment and consequent health effects, narratives had a profound impact on readers' feelings and sense of humanity.

Even though the narratives range to a certain extent in terms of number of pages, the thematic consistence is basically the same. One of the most important issues covered in the analytical part of the thesis is the importance of family. Children were often brought up by their grandmothers, or by other close relatives who were not able to carry out hard work in the fields, and therefore they even did not know their mother. Based on this, the time spent together as a family was incredibly precious for both parents and children. There was, however, also a huge number of those who had no idea about who their mother and father were. It was caused by transferring father to another plantation or when a white man was responsible for making a black woman pregnant. Ordinarily, these children had status of a slave like others and had to work for the white master, their biological father. Throughout the

narratives, it is obvious that parents' love for children was boundless and represented an invaluable source of power.

Another aspect emphasised in slave narratives is the matter of religion. As former slaves testified, they were treated as animals without souls. Therefore, the Bible was misused to justify slavery and presented a unique means of keeping African Americans in bondage. Fortunately, there were some exceptions among slaves refusing the control over their minds. In order to be able to read the Bible on their own, some slaves managed to acquire basic literacy skills. Thus, they could create their own kind of religion, which helped them during tough times. In general, literacy meant an incredible advantage for slaves. According to the selected narratives, white masters decisively rejected the idea of slaves to be educated. The main reason was that literate slaves had better opportunity to escape from slavery. It was a lot easier for them to mingle with ordinary people, find a job and hide their real identity.

To live as a free person was a lifelong dream of a huge number of African Americans captured in the bondage of slavery. The desire to be free was so intense that slaves launched insurrections and in many cases tried to escape from a plantation forever. They did not surrender even after several unsuccessful attempts, even though slaves caught were severely punished and imprisoned. Provided that slaves eventually reached the desired destination, they did everything in their power to help their relatives abandoned in the Southern territories.

To conclude, the expanding abolitionist agenda in the first half of the nineteenth century encouraged ex-slaves to collect their stories. Demonstrating horrors committed by white people including separation of family members, sexual abuse of women, demanding work in the fields and poor living conditions etc., slave narratives enormously contributed to the abolitionist movement. Ex-slaves' personal accounts completely contradicted slave owners' claims supporting the whole system of slavery and white readers were forced to open their eyes and to view the system of slavery from a different point of view. Due to the narratives, white people were offered a view about the real nature of slavery and therefore, they could join those who decided to fight against the extreme brutality of the institution of slavery.

6 Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá analýzou vybraných životopisů uprchlých otroků, jež měly za úkol vykreslit realitu života v otroctví v rozmezí let 1750-1870 v jižní části Spojených států amerických. Práce je rozdělena do čtyř hlavních kapitol, které popisují dětství a rodinné zázemí otroků, způsoby vzdoru a útěk z otroctví.

První kapitola sleduje počátky vzniku otrokářství na území tehdejší kolonie Virginie na počátku sedmnáctého století. Rozvoj kolonií byl z počátku závislý na práci původních obyvatel. Ti však s postupem času přestali na obhospodařování místních zdrojů stačit a začali být postupně nahrazováni lidmi z Evropy a Afriky, kteří zpočátku pracovali jako tzv. smluvní služebníci. Protože Afričané disponovali dobrými fyzickými předpoklady pro vykonávání náročné práce na plantážích jižní části Spojených států a navíc byli díky svému odlišnému zabarvení kůže snadno rozpoznatelní v případě, že chtěli ze služby utéct, postupně Evropany nahradili. S objevem bavlny, která se začala pěstovat na většině zemědělského území, se poptávka po Afričanech neustále zvyšovala. Massachusetts se stal první kolonií, která v roce 1641 zlegalizovala otroctví.

Druhá kapitola je zaměřena na samotnou analýzu životopisů otroků z hlediska vzájemných vztahů mezi otroky a vlivu otrokářského systému na děti a rodinný život. Afroameričané byli díky svému odlišnému vzhledu přirovnáváni k divokým zvířatům a pro otrokáře měli pouze majetkovou hodnotu. Z tohoto důvodu jim nebyla přiznávána žádná základní lidská práva a svobody. Dokonce ani manželství uzavíraná mezi otroky tak neměla nejmenší právní význam. Jejich hlavní smysl tkvěl v zajišťování nového potomstva, a tím další pracovní síly nezbytné pro ekonomický rozvoj jižanských států závislých na zemědělství.

Jak dokládá většina životopisů, dětství dětí bylo naplněno hrůzou, strachem a obavami. Nedostatek jídla, vetché oblečení, těžké tresty a nepřiměřené množství práce negativně ovlivňovaly vývoj dětí a celý jejich budoucí život. Jak již bylo zmíněno, děti měly šanci udržovat pouze minimální kontakt se svými rodiči. Tato skutečnost navíc zapříčinila jejich emocionální deprivaci. Za světlé body v životě by mohly být považovány vzácné chvíle, kdy si mohly hrát se svými vrstevníky nebo trávit drahocenný volný čas se svými blízkými.

Třetí kapitola reflektuje způsoby získávání kontroly nad samostatnými lidskými bytostmi, za které se samotní Afroameričané považovali. To šlo ovšem proti mysli všem

otrokářům, jejichž zájmem bylo vlastnit poslušné a oddané služebníky. Za účelem získání nadvlády nad myslí otroků byla využívána široká škála prostředků. Mezi ty nejvýznamnější patřil zákaz vzdělání, neboť negramotní jedinci představovali snadněji zmanipulovatelný cíl. K účelu manipulace byla dále zneužívána Bible. Bílí vlastníci otroků ve svých kázáních propagovali názory typu, že by otroci měli být vděční za to, jakého mají dobrého pána, kterému by měli na oplátku věrně a oddaně sloužit. Přestože se určité množství Afroameričanů nechalo touto nenápadnou formou nátlaku ovlivnit, byli zde i tací, kteří se začali proti nadvládě bránit. Prostřednictvím simulace nemoci, ničení pracovního náradí, pálení stodol, krátkodobých útěků z plantáže apod., vyjadřovali svůj nesouhlas a do jisté míry se jim podařilo systému otroctví vzdorovat.

Nejúčinnější formou odporu však pravděpodobně znamenal dlouhodobý útěk, a to na sever do svobodných států, především Kanady. Tato problematika je podrobněji rozebrána v poslední kapitole práce. K útěku vedla zotročené Afroameričany celá řada důvodů. Mezi ty hlavní byly neúnosné pracovní podmínky zkombinované s katastrofálním nedostatkem potravy a těžkými tresty. Díky nezištné pomoci lidí, kteří uprchlíkům během jejich cesty poskytovali přístřeší a potravu, se postupně dařilo čím dál více otrokům úspěšně dosáhnout vytouženého cíle. Tento způsob asistence je označován jako tzv. *Underground Railroad*. Uprchlí otroci ze strachu z polapení a navrácení do otroctví cestovali především v noci. V tuto dobu jim na putování směrem na sever významně napomáhala hvězda Severka. Podle ní byl později pojmenován slavný tisk Fredericka Douglose, jednoho z nejznámějších uprchlých otroků významně se podílejícího na abolicionistickém hnutí. Mezi další, kteří se podíleli na vyvrácení falešného obrázku obhajujícího systém otroctví patřili např. William W. Brown, Harriet Anne Jacobs, Sojourner Truth a mnozí další. Tito lidé začali sepsávat a zveřejňovat své životní příběhy, což významně napomohlo v přesvědčení široké veřejnosti o škodlivosti a nelidskosti dlouhodobě zakořeněného systému otroctví v jižních teritoriích Spojených států Amerických.

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