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SLAVE NARRATIVES: LIFE OF A FEMALE SLAVE

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ANNOTATION

This bachelor thesis analyzes slave narratives of African American women in the United States during the 19th century. Its goal is to examine aspects of female slaves' lives depicted in Harriet A. Jacobs's *Incidents in a Life of a Slave Girl*, and Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley's *Behind the Scenes: Or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House*. The thesis details family lives, slave marriages, focuses on motherhood and the sorrows of mothers separated from their children, and the influence of religion on slaves' lives as they were portrayed in those selected works. Also, it draws attention to the suffering and torturing, including whippings, beatings, sexual abuse as well as emotional torment, enslaved women had to endure while they were in bondage. Furthermore, the thesis deals with issues concerning gaining freedom and authors' lives after that.

KEYWORDS

Afro-Americans, female slave, slave abuse, slave narrative, slavery

ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce analyzuje příběhy afro-amerických zotročených žen ve Spojených Státech během 19. století. Cílem této práce je zkoumat aspekty života otrokyň vyobrazené v dílech Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in a Life of a Slave Girl*, a Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes: Or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House*. Tato práce vystihuje rodinný život, manželství otroků, zaměřuje se na mateřství a utrpení matek odloučených od svých dětí, a také na vliv víry na životy otroků, tak jak byly vylíčeny ve vybraných dílech. Také upozorňuje na trápení a týrání, jež zahrnovalo bičování, bití, sexuální obtěžování stejně jako citové vydírání, se kterým se během svého života otrokyně musely potýkat. Kromě toho se tato práce zabývá problémy spojenými se získáním svobody a autorkami – Harriet A. Jacobs a Elizabeth Keckley – a jejich životy na svobodě.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Afroameričané, otrokyně, zneužívání otroků, příběhy otroků, otroctví

Table of contents

INTRODUCTION	8
1 THE BACKGROUND	10
1.1 HISTORICAL CONTEXT	10
1.2 SLAVE NARRATIVE	12
1.3 ABOUT AUTHORS.....	13
1.3.1 <i>Harriet Jacobs</i>	13
1.3.2 <i>Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley</i>	14
2 FAMILY LIFE.....	17
2.1 MASTERS' STANCE HELD TOWARDS SLAVE FAMILIES AND MARRIAGE.....	17
2.2 MOTHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIP	20
2.3 IMPACT OF RELIGION ON SLAVES' LIFE	25
3 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ENSLAVED WOMEN AND THEIR MASTERS	28
3.1.1 <i>Cruel physical punishments</i>	28
3.1.2 <i>Emotional suffering of slaves</i>	30
3.1.3 <i>Sexual exploitation of women in bondage</i>	30
3.1.4 <i>A few exceptions of graceful relationships between slaves and their masters</i>	31
4 ESCAPING FROM SLAVERY/PURCHASING FREEDOM	34
4.1 ESCAPING SLAVERY	35
4.1.1 <i>Harriet Jacobs's escape</i>	35
4.1.2 <i>Elizabeth Keckley's purchase of freedom</i>	38
4.1.3 <i>Punishments for failed attempts to escape from bondage</i>	39
5 ENGAGEMENT AGAINST SLAVERY AND LIFE AS FREED WOMEN	41
6 CONCLUSION	44
7 RESUMÉ	47
8 BIBLIOGRAPHY	50

INTRODUCTION

Slavery in America was and still is undoubtedly a rather extensive and fundamental part of its history. Many slaves had to bear mostly cruel, harsh treatment along with violence, and sexual exploitation. It affected many lives, both the lives of African American slaves, as well as the lives of their white masters. Slavery, perhaps the most dreadful crime committed on human beings, also had an immense impact on slave families, for they were frequently separated by their slaveholders, including the mother-child relationship, which suffered horribly. Thus, it is hardly surprising that slaves who escaped from the chains of slavery later actively fought to abolish it. One of the attempts to end slavery was to publish literature reporting the horrible crimes against humanity to raise sympathy and compassion from others, which would provoke them into taking action toward abolishment.

This bachelor thesis is focused on the life work of Harriet Jacobs, and her life depicted in *Incidents in Life of a Slave Girl*, as well as on the slave narrative of Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley, *Behind the Scenes: Or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House*. These two slave narratives deal with the authors' personal experiences, which they mainly endured under the chains of slavery, and their lives after they obtained freedom. It should be noted that this thesis is not strictly analytical but also descriptive since it concerns ego slave narratives, cultural studies, and history, too. The purpose of this bachelor thesis is to demonstrate how slavery is depicted in the slave narratives of Harriet Jacobs and Elizabeth Keckley and to compare them. Moreover, this thesis aims to draw in detail motherhood and family bonds under the chains of slavery, as well as examine authors' revelations about the hardships and abuse they personally suffered through. This text analyzes relationships between slaveholders and slaves, especially different cruel ways of exploitation slaves had to bear, however, even notable exceptions of kind behavior towards slaves are mentioned. Apart from the family life of slaves and master-slave relationships, this thesis looks into the issue of escaping from slavery, and, after breaking away, joining the battle for abolishing it.

The theoretical part provides a historical overview, primarily the context concerning slavery in the United States of America, from defining the term "slavery" to a brief introduction of abolitionism in the USA. Moreover, it covers the classification of what "slave narrative" means and its typical features. Besides that, this part deals with the circumstances of the lives of authors selected for this thesis.

The analytical part consists of four main sections. The first one looks into details of Jacob's and Keckley's lives concerning their families. It is to be noted that Jacobs portrays her

life in slavery more broadly than Keckley since Keckley devoted her narrative to her life with the Lincoln family. This part is focused on mother-child relationships, the influence of religion on slave lives, and masters' attitude towards marriage and families of slaves. The second part of the thesis portrays what inhumane treatment slaves received, discussing violence, sexual abuse as well as other ways by which slaves were tormented. The third chapter considers the process of gaining freedom. Since the two main authors of the works examined obtained their freedom differently, the subchapters describe Jacobs's escape firstly, and then Keckley's process of purchasing freedom as the second. The fourth and last chapter depicts how Jacobs and Keckley directed their lives as free black women, and also their engagement against slavery.

1 THE BACKGROUND

1.1 Historical context

Slavery existed in some form in almost all countries. First references to slavery were, according to Encyclopedia Britannica, mentioned in antiquity.¹ As Colin A. Palmer states, slavery is a way of treating people as property. To have a slave means to exploit a "weaker" person, based on race, religion, etc., for economical gain.² Slave owners did not pay the slaves any money or provide education. It was easier for the masters to keep their slaves illiterate because if they had no knowledge of the world, they did not have anything to build on to rebel against their masters. Slaves usually either served in a household, on plantations or farms. W.E.B. Du Bois notes: "I do not think any of us had been very far from the plantation, and the taking of a long journey into another state was quite an event."³ Unless their masters did not move somewhere else, people in bondage usually stayed in one place for their whole lives.

While there were some exceptions, a common slave had to work many hours a day, ate very little food, then slept in a cottage, and the next day it all started again. As Encyclopedia Britannica states, sometimes, the slave owners let the slaves have families and live together because if they had families, the slave owners had more people to work for them. Contrarily, Encyclopedia Britannica comments that slaveholders had no problem selling someone strong, capable and good-looking to make money, even if it meant to separate them from their family.⁴

It was common that masters took advantage of slave women, abusing them not only verbally but also sexually. Many slave narratives are describing such violation against enslaved women, as a list of quotes on the webpage "On Slaveholders' Sexual Abuse of Slaves" well documents. If the female slaves were compliant, masters might have rewarded them with some benefits and favors. On the other hand, if they were not being obedient, the master could brutally punish them. It usually depended on how much a master thought about those poor slaves as about things, and how much he was able to remain humane. Children who had fathers amongst white men became also slaves, even though part of a white persons' blood ran through their

¹ "Historical survey: Slave-owning societies," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed November 19, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070223090720/http://www.britannica.com/blackhistory/article-24156>.

² Colin A. Palmer, *Passageways: An Interpretive History of Black America*, (Wadsworth Publishing, 1998; Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 2002), 61.

³ W.E.B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, Booker T. Washington, *Three Negro Classics: Introduction by John Hope Franklin* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1965), 51.

⁴ "The Sociology of Slavery," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed November 18, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/slavery-sociology/The-sociology-of-slavery>.

veins. As it is commented on in "On Slaveholders' Sexual Abuse of Slaves," some of the masters were also forcing the strongest people of color to "breed" together, and to do it repeatedly, to produce strong good-looking children that the masters could sell for a lot of money.⁵

Slavery in America began with the year 1619 when the first few people had been kidnapped from their families and taken to America against their will. This is known thanks to John Smith, who is commonly recognized for establishing and governing the Jamestown colony, Virginia, and who wrote *The True Travels, Adventures, and Observations of Captain John Smith*, which revealed the first twenty black slaves were brought to the British Colony. As an article on "Black History" mentions, they were abducted from a Portuguese ship *Sao Jao Bautista* and sold to the governor by a Dutch slave trader.⁶

From the first twenty slaves brought to the United States in 1619, the number of people held in bondage severely increased. According to James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, there were approximately four million African Americans used as slaves until the beginning of the Civil War in 1861.⁷ In those years before the Civil War, slaves were an integral part of social and political hierarchy, and most importantly, the then economy.⁸ Slave trade provided an immense part of the labor force, and their products, especially cotton, helped to secure the wealth of the United States. The institution of slavery represented the power and stability of America as a nation, as the Hortons note.⁹

A digital publishing initiative, "Documenting the American South," provides information that after the North won the Civil war and subsequently the institution of slavery was abolished in 1865, it restored hope for Afro-American people. However, the former slaves were caught in an unfavorable situation, since for the previous part of their lives they were only used to the following instructions. Many freed slaves were illiterate and left without resources. Although their nature and endurance enabled them to pull it together eventually, they were

⁵ "On Slaveholders' Sexual Abuse of Slaves, Selections from 19th to 20th century Slave Narratives," National Humanities Center, accessed November 10, 2019, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/enslavement/text6/masterslavesexualabuse.pdf>.

⁶ "Black History," History, accessed November 19, 2019, <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/slavery>.

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

⁸ "An Introduction to the Slave Narrative," Documenting the American South, accessed November 19, 2019, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/intro.html>.

⁹ Horton et al., *Slavery and the Making of America*, 7.

never able to reach the American dream. White supremacy and racial segregation continued to discountenance their integration into society.¹⁰

1.2 Slave narrative

Slavery is a fundamental part of American history that shaped the USA to how it is now. There are many ego slave narratives describing slaves' lives, either written by themselves or because slaves commonly did not receive any education, somebody close to them.

Encyclopedia Britannica defines the slave narrative as a type of literary genre, an open confession about the life of a former slave or a person who escaped from captivity. It is usually written by the slave himself or, because slaves did not always have the opportunity to learn how to write and read and additionally, it was forbidden by law, it was passed down orally and written down by somebody else. That could have been for example a white educated abolitionist. Slave narratives comprehend a significant part of American history. The majority of the stories are written by Afro-Americans, but many others wanted to share their stories with the public as well.¹¹ Some of the currently famous writers published their biography just to present how slavery looked like in reality. For example, both Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs published their autobiographies concerning their escape and newly gained freedom.

Slave narrative has some typical features that are usually abided. As Bubíková notes, these narratives were written chronologically, describing the life of a slave since his birth, beginning with the phrase "I was born" and mentioning the date and place of his birth.¹² They subsequently continue with childhood, a life of their family and commonly one can also read about their religious beliefs. A major part of author's slave narrative concerns the relationships of them and their master, and their master's behavior, particularly portraying the wrongs and injustice their masters committed, such as torture and sexual exploitation. These ego stories frequently describe escaping from slavery or purchasing freedom, and some of these narratives mention former slaves joining the abolitionist movement.

¹⁰ Documenting the American South, "An Introduction to the Slave Narrative."

¹¹ "Slave narrative," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed November 18, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/art/slave-narrative>.

¹² Šárka Bubíková, "Dětství v otroctví pohledem dobových ego-dokumentů," *Theatrum historiae*, trans. Martina Hricinová, Vol. 8, No. 1 (2011): 208.

1.3 About authors

1.3.1 Harriet Jacobs

Harriet Jacobs, some sources even say Harriet Ann Jacobs, was born into slavery in the year 1813. She lived with her mother and her brother, and because they lived in a comfortable home, with good masters, she had a happy childhood and she almost did not even realize that she lives as a slave. "I was born a slave; but I never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away."¹³ Her mother died when Harriet was six years old and even then, she had an enjoyable life. Her mistress taught her to read, write and sew. Unfortunately, her pleasant life did not last forever, the mistress died when Harriet was 12 years old. Since then, she was mistreated, tortured and later many years persecuted by her new slave master, Dr. James Norcom. As Encyclopedia Britannica states,¹⁴ Jacobs had two children – Joseph and Luisa – with her neighbor, Samuel Tredwell Sawyer. She was very young when she had them, Joseph was born in 1829 and Luisa in 1833, as it was common at that time for women of her condition. She was one of few slaves who managed to escape from their horrible master and conditions slavery made them live in. Afterward, she was hiding for seven years in her grandmother's home. Her children were sold to their father and freed. Later, when she accomplished to evade Dr. Norcom and flee, she worked as a nursemaid in New York City and later in Rochester, New York, in an abolitionist feminist movement. She was given freedom in 1852 by her employer Mary Willis, mainly to evade Norcom's continuing efforts to recapture her. During the American civil war, she lived in Washington, D.C., where she was "assisting contrabands, nursing black troops and teaching."¹⁵ During her life, she traveled many times to England to raise funds for some of her postwar projects, an orphanage and home for elderly people.¹⁶ Harriet Jacobs died in 1898 and is buried in the Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, MA.

She wrote a book called *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, which is a straightforward testimony about her experiences under the chains of slavery. There were some speculations that Jacobs's narrative could have a larger impact on abolition movement and other slave fugitives if the story was written by a well-known author like Harriet Beecher Stowe, but Stowe refused

¹³ Harriet A. Jacobs, Nellie Y. McKay, and Frances Smith Foster. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Contexts, Criticism*. (Norton Critical Edition. New York: Norton, 2001), 9.

¹⁴ "Harriet Jacobs," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed November 19, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Harriet-Jacobs>.

¹⁵ "Harriet Jacobs Writer," New Bedford Historical Society, accessed December 1, 2019, <http://nbhistoricalsociety.org/Important-Figures/harriet-jacobs-writer/>.

¹⁶ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, xi.

to write a whole book just about Jacobs's life. Additionally, Jacobs did not want it to be a part of Stowe's *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, thus she decided to write her life story herself, under the pseudonym Linda Brent.¹⁷ However, Jacobs was not a writer, and as "Harriet Jacobs Writer" specifies, so she tried to improve her writing skills by working with Amy Post, publishing letters in the New York *Tribune*.¹⁸ She wrote her book in secrecy just to be safe and it took her five years, starting 1853, to finish writing the manuscript. Though Jacobs had some doubts about publishing her book, she was a slave for 27 years and thus she wanted to add her testimony about misfortunes of her slave life on behalf of other enslaved men and women. It was published in 1861. In the mid-19th century, sexual abuse of women slaves was a forbidden topic and Jacobs, even though she had her reservations, wanted to put it all out there. As indicated before, she did not always meet with understanding. For instance, several people claimed Jacobs's narrative is a fiction, and namely Jean Fagan Yellin insisted that Jacobs is an "impure woman" and her description of sexual abuse by her master is a "forbidden subject."¹⁹ Moreover, during the 20th century, the book *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* was not thought of as an autobiography of an African American woman but as a novel produced by a white writer. According to the New Bedford Historical Society, it is nowadays considered to be one of the most influential stories of slave narratives in American literature.²⁰

1.3.2 Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley

Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley was born enslaved in Dinwiddie County, Virginia, probably in 1818 (some sources claim it had to be later, but it was not common to document the date of birth of a slave). She had a troublesome childhood, which, apart from sexual abuse from a white man, also included physical violence. From a young age, Keckley worked as a nursemaid for children of her master. Her mother taught her to sew and during her early adulthood, she became a master seamstress. She helped her mother to make quilts for plantations and was a seamstress for her masters, the Burwell family. After she turned fourteen, she had to move to work for Robert Burwell, the eldest son, who was a Presbyterian minister. She remained there for four

¹⁷ Jean Fagan Yellin, "Written by Herself: Harriet Jacobs' Slave Narrative." *American Literature* 53, no. 3 (1981): 482-483. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2926234?seq=5#metadata_info_tab_contents.

¹⁸ "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl," *Africans in America*, accessed December 1, 2019, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h2924.html>.

¹⁹ Yellin, "Written by Herself," 486.

²⁰ New Bedford Historical Society, "Harriet Jacobs Writer."

years and it was the worst of times of her life. She mentioned that "the years passed slowly,"²¹ she was raped by a white man and had her first and only child – a son named George, during her stay at Robert Burwell's household. Later, she moved again from St. Louis to Virginia to stay with her master's daughter, Anne. The economic situation at that time made Keckley support the whole household of Anne Burwell and her husband, Mr. Garland, for over two years with her seamstress skills. She served this family for thirty years, then she, with the financial help of her generous and "kind patrons,"²² bought her freedom in 1855 for herself and her son for 1,200 dollars. She got married to James Keckley, but only after her master agreed to sell her and her son because she did not want any more children to be born into slavery.²³ Keckley's marriage was not a happy one, therefore, after eight years of struggling, she left her husband. Then Keckley relocated to Washington, D.C., where she worked as a seamstress and dressmaker for the Jefferson Davis household. Soon after, the family had to move to the South because of their political beliefs, Elizabeth Keckley opened her own dressmaking shop in 1860 which was very prosperous and visited by powerful families. This had given her the opportunity to get acquainted with Mary Todd Lincoln and thereupon she became her closest confidant as well as her dressmaker. Keckley was actively engaging against slavery, at first by organizing her church friends into the Contraband Relief Association to help to navigate the newly freed slaves who arrived in Washington, D.C., and later she established the Ladies' Freedmen and Soldier's Relief Association. After the public disapproval and because of the consequences it brought, she relocated "to teach domestic skills at Wilberforce University."²⁴ She died in 1907 in the National Home for Destitute Colored Women and Children, which she helped to fund during her lifetime.²⁵

While she was working for Mary Todd Lincoln, Keckley managed to write her own autobiography, *Behind the Scenes: Or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House*. Not only it describes the hardships she had to endure as a slave and her path to becoming

²¹ Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes. Or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House*, (New York: G.W. Carleton & Co., Publishers, 1868), 32.

²² Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes. Or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House*, 1868, Reprint (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 44-5.

²³ Peg A. Lamphier, Rosanne Welch, *Women in American History: A Social, Political, and Cultural Encyclopedia and Document Collection [4 volumes]*, (ABC-CLIO, 2017), 224–225.

²⁴ "Elizabeth Keckley, ca. 1818-1907," Documenting the American South, accessed December 1, 2019, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/keckley/summary.html>.

²⁵ Henry Louis Gates Jr., Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *African American Lives*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 494.

https://books.google.cz/books?id=3dXw6gR2GgkC&pg=PA494&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false.

a businesswoman, and, as Carolyn Sorosis suggests, "climbing the social ladder,"²⁶ but it also consists of portraying the First Family, the Lincoln's, and especially her friend and confidante Mary Todd Lincoln. She published her autobiography in 1868 to help financially support Mary after the assassination of her husband, the President. Unfortunately, the book was not well accepted at that time because the general belief was that Keckley crossed a line when she revealed such private information about the First Family. Lincoln's rejected it as well, Mary Todd Lincoln ended their friendship.²⁷ To add up, all of these circumstances draw Keckley's career as a dressmaker to an inevitable end.²⁸

²⁶ Carolyn Sorosis, "Unmasking the Genteel Performer: Elizabeth Keckley's Behind the Scenes and the Politics of Public Wrath." *African American Review* 34, no. 1 (2000): 21.

²⁷ Gates Jr. et al, *African American Lives*, 494.

²⁸ Documenting the American South, "Elizabeth Keckley, ca. 1818-1907."

2 FAMILY LIFE

2.1 Masters' stance held towards slave families and marriage

Naturally, it always depended on the master himself whether he let the slave families be together or not. For example, Harriet Jacobs states her mistress did not consider slaves having families. "My mistress, like many others, seemed to think that slaves had no right to any family ties of their own; that they were created merely to wait upon the family of the mistress."²⁹ To add up, masters or mistresses let slave families take care after each other until their children grew up a little and then decided if they have any monetary value. Frederick Douglass in regard to reproduction of people held in bondage and their families remarks: "I have known what it is to be dragged fifteen miles to the human flesh market and be sold like a brute beast. I am from a slave-breeding state—where slaves are reared for the market as horses, sheep, and swine are."³⁰ As Douglass implies, it was ordinary the slave masters desired to profit from their slaves. A number of them used to pick a truly strong enslaved man and made him "breed" with many of his female slaves to acquire as many slave babies as possible, and therefore afterward profit from selling them. According to Colleen A. Vasconcellos, since small children were susceptible to disease and not capable of accomplishing as much work as the adults, moreover, they were not able to take part in reproduction, they had a greater financial value after "they came of age."³¹ Therefore, it can be assumed that slave masters allowed children of slaves to grow up in their families, with regard to their future profit.

As it is mentioned in Jacobs's book, it did not matter if it was a child of two slaves or whether it was an offspring of a slave and her master. Unfortunately, it was very common that masters had sexual intercourse with slaves against their will.³² Unfortunately, it was very common that masters had sexual intercourse with slaves against their will. Harriet Jacobs wrote: „if we had children, I knew they must follow the condition of the mother,“ meaning that the status (slave or free) of the child was determined by her or his mother, not father, who was, as mentioned before, frequently a white privileged man. As Keckley was raped and also had a child with a white man, just like Jacobs, she adopts a stance on the inequity. "The Anglo-Saxon blood as well as the African flowed in his veins; the two currents commingled – one singing of

²⁹ Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 34.

³⁰ Ned Sublette and Constance Sublette, *American Slave Coast: A History of the Slave-Breeding Industry*, (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2015), 31.
<https://books.google.cz/books?id=iwCKCgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

³¹ Colleen A. Vasconcellos, "Children in the Slave Trade," accessed January 7, 2020,
<http://chnm.gmu.edu/cyh/items/show/141>.

³² Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 37.

freedom, the other silent and sullen with generations of despair."³³ She does not comprehend why her blood should be a burden for her son.

Why should not the Anglo-Saxon triumph – why should it be weighed down with the rich blood typical of the tropics? ... By the laws of God, as interpreted by man, one-half of my boy was free, and why should not this fair birthright of freedom remove the curse from the other half – raise it into the bright, joyous sunshine of liberty?³⁴

As stated before, children of slaves were sold in order to earn money for their masters. Slaveholders did not care that they were dividing families. Keckley reports she was just a seven-year-old girl when she experienced her first trade of a slave. The slave mother was ordered to make her son wear the best "Sunday" clothes. The slaveholder tricked her into believing her son is going to town and will be back the next morning, but he never came back. She died, never seeing her child again. Obviously, this was not the only case. As Keckley in her book well describes, her master owned over seventy slaves, and every one of them was sold, families became separated, husbands from wives, as well as children from their parents.³⁵

Harriet Jacobs, writing under the pseudonym of Linda Brent, brought up the issue of marriage in slavery in her book. She felt significantly unhappy about not being able to marry whom she loved. She fell in love with a young colored carpenter who was born as a free man. She hoped that there is something amazing awaiting her in her life, something better than just being treated like a piece of property. Unfortunately, she was under Dr. Norcom's surveillance and though she truly wanted to marry her lover, it was not possible. Dr. Norcom would never sell her to her lover because he wanted to conquer her. His excuse was that Jacobs belongs to his daughter. Anyway, Harriet Jacobs considered the possibility of being married and still belong to Dr. Norcom. Unsuitably, as she pointed out that at that time even though marriage was holiness, it did not mean anything while she was a slave, as it seemed to be applicable only to white supreme Americans. Her husband would not be able to protect her since she would be the property of Dr. Norcom and he could do whatever he pleased with his property. "For his sake, I felt that I ought not to link his fate with my own unhappy destiny."³⁶ Her future husband would be powerless, while Jacobs would be treated poorly just like she was until that time. Regardless, when she asked Dr. Norcom through his friend for permission to marry her lover,

³³ Keckley, *Behind The Scenes* (New York: G.W. Carlson & Co., Publishers, 1868) 47, https://books.google.cz/books?id=fs4BpUX9mj0C&dq=elizabeth+keckley&hl=cs&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

³⁴ Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 1868, 47.

³⁵ Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 1868, 15-16.

³⁶ Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 37.

she got punched into her face for the first time. "You are my slave, and shall always be my slave. I will never sell you, that you may depend upon." She was forbidden to ever speak to her lover again.³⁷

While Jacobs was in a way auspicious to live with her closest relatives until her escape, Keckley was not fortunate enough to have her immediate family together during her childhood. Although they did not live together, their family bond was strong. Keckley's father had shown his wife and daughter much affection. "I dun no which I like best, you [his wife] or Lizzie, as both are so dear to me."³⁸ At first, Keckley's father was a slave of a different slaveholder than her mother, so Keckley and her mother got to see him only twice a year, for Easter and Christmas. However, Mrs. Burwell, the slaveholder of her mother, arranged a deal with the master of Keckley's father for them to all live together "to reward" Keckley's mother.³⁹ But their happiness did not last long, Keckley's father received a letter stating his master is moving and wants to take him with him. Then they never saw him again. "The last kiss, the last goodbye and he, my father, was gone, gone forever."⁴⁰

Keckley's old mistress appeared to be very insensitive towards the separation of Keckley's parents. Her attitude on Keckley's mother's broken heart was rather dreadful. She told her:

Stop your nonsense; there is no necessity for you putting on airs. Your husband is not the only slave that has been sold from this family, and you are not the only one that has had to part. There are plenty more men around here, and if you want a husband so badly, stop your crying and go and find another.⁴¹

The mistress was not considerate enough to at least let them visit each other once again, as many other slaveholders were not. As affirmed above, Keckley's parents never saw each other again. This only confirms that it never occurred to the majority of white slaveholders that their slaves had feelings as well, and they were not only a chattel.

It was ordinary that the family lives of slaves, on top of everything else, were disrupted by sexual exploitation. There are not many sources describing what was happening to enslaved

³⁷ Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 33-38.

³⁸ Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind The Scene: Formerly a Slave, But More Recently Modiste, and Friend to Mrs. Lincoln Or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 12,

https://books.google.cz/books?id=_AgwTjqijikC&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs#v=onepage&q&f=false.

³⁹ Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 2001, 12.

⁴⁰ Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 2001, 13.

⁴¹ Keckley, *Behind the Scenes*, 2001, 13.

men, as there is so many that deal with the sexual abuse of women slaves. Unfortunately, girls were abused since they started to grow mature, so the molestation frequently began about the age of twelve. Sadly, children were not spared of these horrifying experiences. Ann Cossin even claims it was considered to be ordinary. "In previous centuries, sexual practices with children were socially and legally tolerated, if not, at times, openly condoned, indicating that the 'deviant' child sex offender of the 1990s was, in the 1890s, a man who was considered to be expressing a 'natural' masculine sexual desire."⁴² Unfortunately, since slave parents were not legally protected and therefore had no right for their children, they were not able to intervene and protect them.

A common premise would be that white women were not participating in disruptive behavior, but the opposite is the truth. For instance, Keckley thought her mistress "seemed to be desirous to wreak vengeance" on her and claimed: "During this time my master was unusually kind to me; he was naturally a good-hearted man, but was influenced by his wife."⁴³ Jacobs, similarly to Keckley, encountered comparable behavior from her mistress. It can be said that, usually, mistresses had a passive attitude towards sexual abuse of slaves by their white husbands, moreover, they blamed the enslaved women for their husbands' infidelity, just as it was happening to Jacobs. In *Incidents*, she depicts Mrs. Norcom had "no sympathy" for the innocent young slaves, furthermore, they "were the objects of her constant suspicion and malevolence."⁴⁴

2.2 Mother-child relationship

Elizabeth Keckley had lived with her mother until she was fourteen years old and they created a rather strong emotional bond. In a letter to her mother, Keckley expresses her love for her mother and family: "I love you all very dearly."⁴⁵

⁴² Anne Cossin, *Masculinities, Sexualities, and Child Sexual Abuse* (Netherlands: Kluwer Law International, 2000), 4.

https://books.google.cz/books?id=YrYQjtPdiUIC&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs&source=gbs_atb#v=onepage&q&f=false.

⁴³ Keckley, *Behind the Scenes*, 2001, 19.

⁴⁴ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 18.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes, or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House: Electronic Edition*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1999) 40.
<https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/keckley/keckley.html#keckley228>

Keckley depicts her deep feelings for her mother, especially when she comes to the understanding her old mother might be dismissed from duty because of the lack of money in her master's family.

The necessities of the family were so great, that it was proposed to place my mother out at service. The idea was shocking to me. Every gray hair in her old head was dear to me, and I could not bear the thought of her going to work for strangers. She had been raised in the family, had watched the growth of each child from infancy to maturity; they had been the objects of her kindest care, and she was wound round about them as the vine winds itself about the rugged oak...My mother, my poor aged mother, go among strangers to toil for a living! No, a thousand times no! I would rather work my fingers to the bone, bend over my sewing till the film of blindness gathered in my eyes; nay, even beg from street to street. I told Mr. Garland so, and he gave me permission to see what I could do. I was fortunate in obtaining work, and in a short time I had acquired something of a reputation as a seamstress and dress-maker.⁴⁶

She would do anything to assure her mother will not live with unfamiliar people and work for them and potentially receive inadequate treatment since she spent her whole life working for the family.

While Elizabeth Keckley expresses deep emotions towards her mother, seldom does she mention much information about the love for her own child, George. Sari Edelstein highlights that Keckley wrote only a few pages about herself and her slave narrative. She also supports her statement by saying that "Dana Luciano and other critics have noted the lack of narrative attention Keckley devotes to her own personal sufferings, especially in relation to the loss of her only child, George."⁴⁷

While Keckley does not dedicate much of *Behind the Scenes* to her own son, she seems to be held up by the thought of her mistress's daughters, especially little Nannie Garland.

My mother took care of my son, and Miss Nannie Garland, the fourth daughter, when a wee thing, became my especial charge. She slept in my bed, and I watched over her as if she had been my own child. She called me Yiddie, and I could not have loved her more tenderly had she been the sister of my unfortunate boy.⁴⁸

Jacobs was not as fortunate as Keckley, her mother died when Harriet was just six years old and thus there is no sufficient information revealed about the relationship between Harriet

⁴⁶ Keckley, *Behind the Scenes*, 1868, 44-45.

⁴⁷ Sari Edelstein, "Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley (1818-1907)," *Legacy*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (2012): 150. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.5250/legacy.29.1.0148.pdf?ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_SYC-5152%2Ftest&refreqid=search%3A5d59673051bb69ca2fcf9ecadc3a1ccd.

⁴⁸ Keckley, *Behind the Scenes*, 1999, 239.

Jacobs and her mother. Nonetheless, Jacobs had a deep relationship with her mistress, Margaret Horniblow. She mentions:

My mistress was so kind to me that I was always glad to do her bidding, and proud to labor for her as much as my young years would permit. I would sit by her side for hours, sewing diligently, with a heart as free from care as that of any free-born white child. When she thought I was tired, she would send me out to run and jump; and away I bounded, to gather berries or flowers to decorate her room. Those were happy days I — too happy to last.⁴⁹

Just as Harriet Jacobs remarks, she was good taken care of and her first mistress was very kind. "I loved her; for she had been almost like a mother to me."⁵⁰

Nevertheless, Jacobs was lucky to have a close relationship with her grandmother as well as with the rest of her family in general. Her grandmother treated her like her own child since Jacobs lost her mother. Jacobs's grandma always tried to protect her from Dr. Norcom, and Jacobs declared many times in her book, that if it was not of her grandmother, she would be dead already. "It was natural and motherlike that she should try to defend me; but it only made matters worse."⁵¹ She remarks that she was grateful to have such support from her family.⁵² Not every slave has been so fortunate. "On one of these sale days, I saw a mother lead seven children to the auction-block. She knew that some of them would be taken from her; but they took all."⁵³ It was common that families of slaves were sold separately to masters that offered the best price for each individual and never saw each other again. That is how the families were torn apart.

Jacobs often indicates the advantages of living in a small community. One of those advantages is that everybody knows everybody, as Jacobs states in her book: "How often did I rejoice that I live in a town where the inhabitants knew each other! If I had been on a remote plantation, or lost among the multitude of a crowded city, I should not be a living woman at this day."⁵⁴ Her grandmother was well-known and feared in the neighborhood. That is principally the reason for Jacobs having a pretty good childhood, additionally, just like she mentions in her

⁴⁹ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 11.

⁵⁰ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 11.

⁵¹ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 64.

⁵² Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 37.

⁵³ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 16.

⁵⁴ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 31.

book: "I was born a slave; but I never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away,"⁵⁵ not being aware of the fact that she is a slave until the age of six.

The author of *Incidents* was so lucky, that not only did she have one mother-like figure, but as a matter of fact two. The first one was, as previously mentioned, her grandmother, and the other one was her grandmother's daughter, Betty. What is more, Betty was the twin sister of Jacobs's late mother. Jacobs states they had a bond that was "very strong."⁵⁶ This Jacobs's aunt fostered her and when Jacobs decided to run away, she only supported and reassured her. When Jacobs was hiding in her grandmother's attic, her aunt came to visit her again and again, bringing news and cheering her up. Jacobs informed her that she would always remember her as "the good friend who had been the comfort of my [Jacobs's] life."⁵⁷

The relationship of Harriet Jacobs and her children can be determined already from the names of chapters in her book in which she describes the birth of her two children. The first one is called "The New Tie to Life" and the other "Another Link to Life." As the names of these chapters indicate, Jacobs gained a new reason to live when she gave birth to her children. She depicts that only because of her desire for freedom and for the possibility of being able to protect her children from the influence of Dr. Norcom, she was willing to risk her life by escaping, and then for seven years, she was capable of concealing herself in her grandmother's attic. "I was so weary of my long imprisonment that, had I it not been for the hope of serving my children, I should have been thankful to die; but, for their sakes, I was willing to bear on."⁵⁸

In the *Incidents*, Jacobs discusses the hardships of being a mother. Especially, if a slave trader wanted to purchase a child and then take it away from his mother. "Could you have seen that mother clinging to her child, when they fastened the irons upon his wrists; could you have heard her hearts-rending groans, and seen her bloodshot eyes wander wildly from face to face, vainly pleading for mercy; could you have witnessed that scene as I saw it, you would exclaim, Slavery is damnable!"⁵⁹ Because she undertakes such resolute steps later in her narrative to defend her children from everything that was wrong with slavery, it may be argued this scene impressed on her mind particularly intensely.

⁵⁵ Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 9.

⁵⁶ Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 113.

⁵⁷ Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 114.

⁵⁸ Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 101.

⁵⁹ Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 23.

Subsequently, Jacobs repeatedly declares she would have rather not had children than to let them lead such miserable lives as slaves of Dr. Norcom. She comments on that "I loved to watch his infant slumbers; but always there was a dark cloud over my enjoyment. I could never forget that he was a slave. Sometimes I wished he died in infancy." Then her child got sick and she prayed for his death to spare him life in slavery, as well as she prayed for his life. "Alas, what a mockery it is for a slave mother to try to pray back her dying child to life. Death is better than slavery."⁶⁰ One would say that proves her unconditional love for them. Her heart broke apart and she indicates that there is nothing worse than being a mother and seeing the dark future for her children. "When I lay down beside my child, I felt how much easier would it be to see her die than to see her master beat her about, as I daily saw him beat other little ones."⁶¹

After she escapes to the northern states, Jacobs reunites with her son and daughter, and so she does with her brother. The depth of their relationships within the slave family is demonstrated after Jacobs explains her daughter the incidents that led to her birth. Jacobs was just a teenage girl when a white man raped her repeatedly. Louisa Matilda, Jacobs's daughter, understanding the persecutions of her mother and subsequently, her rape, expresses sympathy and love for her, too.⁶² Nellie Y. McKay in her journal article, *The Girls Who Became the Women: Childhood Memories in the Autobiographies of Harriet Jacobs, Mary Church Terrell, and Anne Moody*, points out that "young people must learn to protect themselves and to survive in a hostile society. In these environments, relationships between parents and their offspring are often more open, honest, and mature than in traditional middle-class American homes."⁶³ As this topic is several times mentioned in the *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, it is clear that slave families under the institution of slavery and therefore under their shared misery caused by their white masters developed remarkably strong, loving relationships. "There are no bonds so strong as those which are formed by suffering together."⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 53.

⁶¹ Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 71.

⁶² Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 146.

⁶³ Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 238.

⁶⁴ Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 133.

2.3 Impact of religion on slaves' life

Religion, no matter what kind, seemed to have a positive effect on slave lives in general. Jacobs mentions that they seemed happy during religious services, almost like they would be free. After Nat Turner's insurrection in 1831 showed up a new priest mainly for colored people and they liked him very much. He performed simple services which could be understood by uneducated slaves. Even slaves who were not used to going to the church started going every Sunday, thanks to the new priest.⁶⁵ Harriet Jacobs shares her thoughts about why so many slaves started to go to church: "Moreover, it was the first time they had been addressed as human beings."⁶⁶ Since slaves were usually treated like a piece of property, this was very invigorating. The preacher encouraged them to behave well: "Try to live according to the word of God, my friends. Your skin is darker than mine; but God judges men by their hearts, not by color of their skins."⁶⁷

On the other hand, it was only one hour a week that made them feel like that. Jacobs occasionally felt ungrateful to God, not able to figure out why would God let her suffer so much. "At other times, it seemed to me there was no justice or mercy in the divine government I asked why the curse of slavery was permitted to exist, and why I had been so persecuted and wronged from youth upward."⁶⁸

Both Jacobs and Keckley mention their belief in God frequently in their books. As it seems, they were turning to him in prayers for themselves, and their loved ones. For instance, Keckley, after her father's departure, declares she believes there is another, better life awaiting her after the mortal one on earth.

The parting was eternal. The cloud had no silver lining, but I trust that it will be all silver in heaven. We who are crushed to earth with heavy chains, who travel a weary, rugged, thorny road, groping through midnight darkness on earth, earn our right to enjoy the sunshine in the great hereafter. At the grave, at least, we should be permitted to lay our burdens down, that a new world, a world of brightness, may open to us. The light that is denied us here should grow into a flood of effulgence beyond the dark, mysterious shadows of death.⁶⁹

Jacobs, as well as Keckley, seem to cannot wrap their heads around the issue of slaveholders being Christians. Jacobs thought that they went to church at least once a week and

⁶⁵ Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 59-60.

⁶⁶ Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 60.

⁶⁷ Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 61.

⁶⁸ Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 98.

⁶⁹ Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 1999, 24.

then seemed to forget about the Bible and Christian values for the rest of the week.⁷⁰ She repeatedly notes that the behaviors of her master and mistress do not correspond with Christianity at all. Slaves had to suffer through not only physical and psychological abuse and torment, but also their masters did not wish them anything good in general and managed to show that ostentatiously. For instance, when Jacobs's son was bitten by a dog, her mistress said: "I'm glad of it. ... I wish he had killed him. It would be good news to send to his mother Her day will come. The dogs will grab her yet." Jacobs marks the statement of Mrs. Norcom as ironic, and that she was using such "Christian words."⁷¹

Keckley points out, that yet both Christian, Mr. and Mrs. Burwell had their share on Keckley's misfortune and weakened, beaten body. "Mr. Burwell, he who preached the love of Heaven, who glorified the precepts and examples of Christ, who expounded the Holy Scriptures Sabbath after Sabbath from the pulpit, when Mr. Bingham refused to whip me any more, was urged by his wife to punish me himself."⁷² The fact that Mr. Burwell was a preacher seemed too angry Elizabeth Keckley the most, as she was referring to it in her book many times.

Jacobs claimed that religion in the South diverged from Christianity. "If a pastor has offspring by a woman not his wife, the church dismiss him, if she is a white woman; but if she is colored, it does not hinder his continuing to be their good shepherd."⁷³ Jacobs, not being able to get used to this idea, mentioned that similar things were happening because slaves were treated as property, and thus it did not matter whether white men abused female slaves or not. Nobody cared and, besides that, there was no law to protect slaves.

On top of everything, not every slaveholder was happy to see his slaves practicing Christianity. Raboteau comments on this problem: "They felt that Christian fellowship between master and slave, unless very carefully regulated, would corrode the proper social hierarchy – the essential inferiority of blacks and superiority of whites – upon which the system rested."⁷⁴ Some slaveholders were worried that this belief, that in front of God it does not matter on the

⁷⁰ Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 43.

⁷¹ Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 99.

⁷² Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 1999, 37.

⁷³ Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 63-64.

⁷⁴ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 168-169,

https://books.google.cz/books?id=WV_Oq1ztC50C&q=Christian&dq=isbn:0195174127&hl=cs&source=gbs_wor_d_cloud_r&cad=6#v=snippet&q=Christian&f=false.

color of a person's skin, just their heart, as well as those slaves, were seen as human beings, might threaten the position of the supremacy of the white people.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 1999, 57-63.

3 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ENSLAVED WOMEN AND THEIR MASTERS

As it is often said, with great power comes great responsibility and slavery is an extreme example of how to not handle it. Jacobs depicts how the power over their slave's life affects the white masters. (Jacobs 2001, 45) "It makes the white fathers cruel and sensual; the sons violent and licentious; it contaminates the daughters, and makes the wives wretched. ... Yet few slaveholders seem to be aware of the widespread moral ruin occasioned by this wicked system."

3.1.1 Cruel physical punishments

The slave masters used to do horrifying things to their slaves. Violence was quite an ordinary matter. For instance, if a slave would decide to run away from his master, "The whip is used till the blood flows of his feet; and his stiffened limbs are put in chains, to be dragged in the field for days and days!"⁷⁶ Keckley even describes that when she was borrowed to Mr. Bingham, who was not her master, she received a whipping for no reason, and it was particularly merciless.

Then he picked up a rawhide, and began to ply it freely over my shoulders. With steady hand and practiced eye he would raise the instrument of torture, and with fearful force the rawhide descended upon the quivering flesh. It cut the skin, raised welts, and the warm blood trickled down my back.⁷⁷

Elizabeth Keckley describes her struggles growing to adulthood, reflecting on the horrible events that were done to "subdue" her "proud."⁷⁸ She was repeatedly beaten by Mr. Bingham until he declined to whip her anymore when he saw her severely bleeding. Then Mrs. Burwell pushed her husband to beat Keckley, driven by her jealousy, and he heard her out. "One morning he went to the woodpile, took an oak broom, cut the handle off, and with this heavy handle attempted to conquer me. I fought him, but he proved the strongest. ... I was so badly bruised that I was unable to leave my bed for five days."⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Jacobs, *Incidents*, 17.

⁷⁷ Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 1999, 34.

⁷⁸ Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 1999, 38.

⁷⁹ Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 1999, 36-38.

Not only did slaveholders use to beat women and men, they even did not mind laying a hand on little children. Keckley documents, in *Behind the Scenes*, that she was first punished by receiving a few blows when she was just four years old, for letting little Elizabeth whom she was supposed to take care of fall on the floor. "The blows were not administered with a light hand, I assure you, and doubtless the severity of the lashing has made me remember the incident so well."⁸⁰ Jacobs, seeing what her masters did to small children, as a matter of fact thought it would be less painful for her if her daughter had died. "I felt how much easier it would be to see her die than to see her master beat her about, as I daily saw him beat other little ones."⁸¹

After Nat Turner's insurrection in 1831, on top of all that unspeakable events and behavior which slaves had to contend with, the low white who had no "negroes" (as it was common at that time to call them – it was not offensive) scourged their homes. Not only the poor slaves were robbed of their little clothes and other belongings, but the violators also:

scattered powder and shot among their clothes, and then sent other parties to find them, and bring them forward as proof that they were plotting insurrection. Every where men, women, and children were whipped till the blood stood in puddles at their feet. Some received five hundred lashes; others were tied hands and feet, and tortured with a bucking paddle, which blisters the skin terribly.⁸²

Unlike Keckley, Harriet Jacobs was one of a few exceptions, spared of a frequent violent behavior caused by her master or anybody else who might want to lay a hand on her. Dr. Norcom had a special treatment for her and wanted to conquer her in a different way than by using violence. She only encountered two violent incidents. The first happened when she asked Dr. Norcom if she could marry her lover, a freed black man, as mentioned above. When the other incident occurred, Jacobs mentioned she fell down the stairs and she was so severely injured "that I was unable to turn myself in bed fore many days."⁸³ Furthermore, Miller generalizes that "House servants were often protected from the more grotesque displays of physical violence associated with slavery."⁸⁴ He explains that slaves who worked in fields and plantations were more exposed to potential violence. Thus, because Jacobs was born as a house servant and never went to work on a plantation or a field, she was provided with less opportunity

⁸⁰ Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 1999, 21.

⁸¹ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 71.

⁸² Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 54.

⁸³ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 85.

⁸⁴ Jennie Miller, "Harriet Jacobs and the Double Burden of American Slavery," *International Social Science Review*. 78, no. 1/2 (2003): 33.

for her master to be violent. Unfortunately, that did not stop him from abusing her in other ways.

3.1.2 Emotional suffering of slaves

Besides violence, slaves had to suffer through torturing, not only physical but also psychological, which could have been even worse. As Jacobs mentions in *Incidents*, she was living in fear basically her whole life. Some days were worse than others – after she asked permission to marry her freed slave lover, she was tortured mentally for days, not knowing what will Dr. Norcom do with her. As another example of the emotional torture of slaves, she refers to threats received from Dr. Norcom. "He threatened me with death, and worse than death, if I made any complaint to her. [Jacobs's grandmother]"⁸⁵ Additionally, he used to blackmail her, saying he would sell her child, to try to make her humble.⁸⁶ Jacobs was in such a state of mind that she would rather see her children dead. "O my child! perhaps they will leave you in some cold cabin to die, and then throw to into a hole, as if you were a dog."⁸⁷

3.1.3 Sexual exploitation of women in bondage

It was very common for a slave master to use more types of exploitation of a slave than just one. Therefore, not only were the slaves punished in a physical way such as beatings, whippings, etc., and mental way like threats and therefore the fear of their family, but they also encountered sexual abuse. Jacobs draws attention to the fact that beauty was more of a curse than a fortune for a female slave. When a girl began to grow mature her master and other men started to notice. "When she is fourteen or fifteen, her owner, or his sons, or the overseer, or perhaps all of them, begin to bribe her with presents. If these fail to accomplish their purpose, she is whipped or starved into submission of their will."⁸⁸ As it is well known, slaves were often abused and sexually taken advantage of by their masters as well as their masters' sons, etc. Since slaves were considered only as a property, it did not matter for the masters whether the slave

⁸⁵ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 29.

⁸⁶ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 64.

⁸⁷ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 64.

⁸⁸ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 44.

girl had any moral or religious principles, a lover, or simply just her own will. They just took what they wanted no matter what.⁸⁹ Jacobs refers to her age of fifteen as a sad epoch of her life:

My master began to whisper foul words in my ear. Young as I was, I could not remain ignorant of their import. I tried to treat them with indifference or contempt. The master's age, my extreme youth, and the fear that his conduct would be reported to my grandmother, made him bear this treatment for many months. He was a crafty man, and resorted to many means to accomplish his purposes. Sometimes he had stormy, terrific ways, that made his victims tremble; sometimes he assumed a gentleness that he thought must surely subdue. ... He peopled my young mind with unclean images, such as only a vile monster could think of. I turned from him with disgust and hatred. But he was my master.⁹⁰

Harriet Jacobs confesses that while she would love to come clean about her master's behavior and relieve her soul, she felt helpless because she had nobody to turn to. She could not tell even her grandmother. Regardless, she was forbidden to tell anybody about this. "Dr. Flint swore he would kill me, if I was not silent as a grave."⁹¹

Regarding the subject of beauty being a curse for a female slave, Keckley agrees with Jacobs. Elizabeth Keckley confesses she was repeatedly sexually assaulted by force and it lasted for four years.⁹² Just as she notes in the preface of her book, *Behind the Scenes: Or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House*, "much has been omitted, but nothing has been exaggerated,"⁹³ she refused to mention any further information about her rapist or the incidents itself, and by that provide more profound insight. The only fact she was willing to share was that she became a mother because of it.

3.1.4 A few exceptions of graceful relationships between slaves and their masters

While Harriet Jacobs had a vehement hostility and a clear idea what slavery brings out in white slaveholders and mistresses, and illustrated it with a straightforward comment by saying that "hot weather brings out snakes and slaveholders, and I [Jacobs] like one class of the

⁸⁹ Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 44.

⁹⁰ Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 26.

⁹¹ Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 27.

⁹² Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 1999, 39.

⁹³ Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 1999, xi.

venomous creatures as little as I [Jacobs] do the other,"⁹⁴ Elizabeth Keckley's opinion about slavery and her time spent as a slave is more reserved.

If I portrayed the dark side of slavery, I also have painted the bright side. I have kind, true-hearted friends in the South as well as in the North, and I would not wound those Southern friends by sweeping condemnation, simply because I was once a slave. They were not so much responsible for the curse under which I was born, as the God of nature and the fathers who framed the Constitution for the United States.⁹⁵

Jacobs, though she for the most of her autobiography focused on portraying the wickedness of slavery, acknowledges that there was one good mistress in their town who treated her slaves like human beings. She was so kind to them, Jacobs thought "that the whole town did not contain a happier family." The mistress, before she got married, offered to give her slaves to freedom because she had no idea what would happen when she weds. Because as it was common at that time, once a woman got married, her husband had all the power and his wife had to be obedient. This is well illustrated by Jacobs in the *Incidents*: "They refused to take their freedom, saying that she has always been their friend, and they could not be so happy anywhere as with her."⁹⁶

Keckley was, unlike Jacobs, blessed in this respect. One of the chapters in her autobiography, *Behind the Scenes: Or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House*, regarding her slaveholders, is called "Old Friends." This name of a chapter is an explicit example of how their relationship was unique. Keckley, after meeting one of the members of the family of her former masters, decided to visit them. She overcomes obstacles appearing on her way to their home and reunites with them once again. Additionally, besides showing fondness toward her former slaveholder's family, Keckley expresses mother-like feelings for her mistress's daughters. In retrospect, she returns to her youth when she used to take care of the five daughters of Mrs. Garland.

I used to take pride in dressing the two eldest, Miss Mary and Miss Carrie, for parties. Though the family labored under pecuniary embarrassment, I worked for these two young girls, and they were always able to present a good appearance in society. They were much admired, and both made the best matches of the season. Miss Mary married Dr. Pappan, and Miss Carrie, Dr. John Farrow. I loved them both tenderly, and they were warmly attached to me. Both are now dead, and when the death-film was gathering in the eyes, each called for me and asked to die in my arms.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 136.

⁹⁵ Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 1999, xi.

⁹⁶ Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 43-44.

⁹⁷ Keckley, *Behind the Scenes*, 1999, 228.

Keckley seldom marks feelings towards her own son with such detail in her book. To add up, she writes about her favorite child of Mrs. Garland and even speaks of loving her as her own. "I could not have loved her more tenderly had she been the sister of my unfortunate boy."⁹⁸

That the deep affectionate bond was mutual can be read from the following excerpt describing a happy reunion of Jacobs and her former masters and mistresses. Only in a few cases, when necessary, as Keckley reflects on her recollections, she addresses them as "slaveholders" or as "master and mistress." She preferably uses the term "friends," which was somewhat unusual for the relationship between a slaveholder and his slave.

As we drove up to Rude's Hill, I observed a young man standing in the yard, and believing it to be Spot, whom I had not seen for eight years, I beckoned to him. With an exclamation of joy, he came running towards me. His movements attracted the attention of the family, and in a minute the door was crowded with anxious, inquiring faces. "It is Lizzie! It is Lizzie!" was the happy cry from all parties. ... Spot reached me first and picked me up, only to put me into the arms of Miss Nannie, her sister Maggie, and Mrs. Garland. Could my friends of the North have seen that meeting, they would never have doubted again that the mistress had any affection for her former slave. I was carried to the house in triumph.⁹⁹

As she confirms in the text, her friends in the North tried to discourage Keckley from meeting with her former master's family that lived in the South. Since slavery mostly brought back bad memories in freed slaves, including violence, sexual abuse, etc., it comes as no surprise most of them did not want to come back to see their former masters. However, it has become evident that a few rare exceptions occurred. For her startling friendship with her old slaveholders and their children as well as her profound relationship with Mary Todd Lincoln depicted later in her slave narrative, Elizabeth Keckley could perhaps be marked as the woman of unlikely friendships.

⁹⁸ Keckley, *Behind the Scenes*, 1999, 239.

⁹⁹ Keckley, *Behind the Scenes*, 1999, 250.

4 ESCAPING FROM SLAVERY/PURCHASING FREEDOM

There is no doubt escaping from slavery was incredibly hazardous, especially because it did not put in danger only the escaping slave, but also his whole family. However, probably every slave at least once during their lifetime thought about the possibility of either escaping from slavery to the Free States up in the North or about procuring his freedom by purchasing it.

Seldom were there cases of slaves wanting to be slaves forever. If so, it was caused by their masters who fooled them into believing that there is an even worse fate awaiting them and that they have a satisfactory life as slaves. Jacobs depicts slaveholders making up stories about slaves who ran away to the North and afterward led miserable lives, were starving and "in the most deplorable condition."¹⁰⁰

Jacobs depicts slavery very vividly, in order to portray the suffering of the poor slaves. When the Reverend Nehemiah Adams of Boston comes to town to collect data for his upcoming book, *A South-South View of Slavery*, she is angered by his declaration that slavery is everywhere represented exaggeratedly and that it does not seem as bad after all. Jacobs, irritated by such an incorrect presumption, states:

What does he know of the half-starved wretches toiling from dawn till dark on the plantations? of mothers shrieking for their children, torn from their arms by slave traders? of young girls dragged down into moral filth? of pools of blood around the whipping post? of hounds trained to tear human flesh? of men screwed into cotton gins to die?¹⁰¹

Slaves were not allowed to inform him how slavery looked like in reality, under the threat of punishment. No need to say more about why slaves wanted to be free. Who would want to live like that, under constant fear, not being able to obtain enough food for themselves and their family, under the threat of abuse and death?

¹⁰⁰ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 38.

¹⁰¹ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 62.

4.1 Escaping slavery

4.1.1 Harriet Jacobs's escape

As was mentioned before, Jacobs was as a slave mentally tortured and living in constant fear, thus, it is no wonder she wanted to get out of that. When she was preparing to leave, her grandmother saw her packing and, though Jacobs made a believable excuse, her grandmother had a foreboding that Harriet wants to vanish and become free, and she was sad and angered. "Linda, do you want to kill your old grandmother? Do you mean to leave your little, helpless children? I am old now, and I cannot do for your babies as I once did for you."¹⁰² Harriet Jacobs promised her to lay low and not take anything from her grandmother's house. But she wanted to try to flee anyway. The only problem was that she was afraid of what might Dr. Norcom do to her family. She mentions (1846) she would rather die than spent life hiding in her shed, however, for her children she would do anything. "I should have been thankful to die; but, for their sakes, I was willing to bear on."¹⁰³

As a matter of fact, Jacobs managed to escape with the help of her friends and family. She was at first hidden at her friend's attic, later she moved to her grandmother's house where she stayed in a small hole in between a roof and a ceiling. It was clearly a purgatory to endure such suffering, but just like Jacobs points out in her book, it was no worse than being a slave in Dr. Norcom's family.

Not only Jacobs had to settle with being holed up in a small space for most of the days of those seven years she had to spend in hiding in her grandmother's attic, being able just to have a tiny, brief stretch maybe once a day, but also, she had to face Dr. Norcom's unrelenting endeavors to catch her and forcefully hold her as his slave. Many times, she had to struggle with the thoughts of coming home officially, of holding her children in her arms once again. Dr. Norcom offered that to her grandmother, but they all knew it was just one of his baits he came up with to capture her. As Jacobs states, he was remarkably slick in his behavior. Every once in a while, he came to her grandmother and claimed that Jacobs can come home, and when she comes, she can obtain her freedom by being bought by one of her relatives.¹⁰⁴ But Jacobs was aware of his wicked strategies to put cuffs on her once again. "I knew his cunning nature too well not to perceive that this was a trap laid out for me; and so all my friends understood it.

¹⁰² Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 75.

¹⁰³ Jacobs et al, *Incidents*, 101.

¹⁰⁴ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 101.

I resolved to match my cunning against his cunning."¹⁰⁵ Her consciousness was admirable considering that she spent many years in hiding in a small hole, and still managed to remain sane. She plotted against Dr. Norcom to cover her tracks. Though it was incredibly dangerous, she wrote two letters, one for him and the other for her grandmother, and let her friend send them to them. However, Dr. Norcom was so foxy that he rewrote her grandmother's letter, stating that Jacobs wants to come home and be purchased by her family. Fortunately enough, as it is mentioned before, nobody fell for his lie.¹⁰⁶

It was obviously not uncomplicated to escape from slavery, and while Jacobs somehow managed to break away from it, there were some consequences for her, too. For example, after her escape when she had to spend many years in hiding in order to cover her tracks, and she described most of those days were spent in agony. Particularly for the reason that she had to contend with rats running over her bed, as well as with mosquitos, in summers her shed was too hot, in winters, there was chilliness crawling into her body, furthermore, she could not stand in erected position and her limbs and muscles were slowly losing strength. She and her family were afraid she might be crippled for the rest of her life.¹⁰⁷

Dr. Norcom was so desperate to catch and enslave Jacobs once again, that he wrote a flyer declaring he would give 100 dollars to a person who would deliver Jacobs to him or secure her in any prison in the United States. For the person who would help Jacobs escape or hid her, there would be fine for 300 dollars and imprisonment for up to 6 months, that was the state law.¹⁰⁸ His endeavors repeated many times after that, he especially liked to write her letters in his or his children's names, stating that some of her friends or family could purchase her and she would be free if only she came home.¹⁰⁹ In other letters, he tried to trick her into going home by using her grandmother's health condition.

Furthermore, Jacobs was incredibly lucky to have loyal friends in the South. They kept her informed about the potential arrival of Dr. Norcom or his family in order to persecute her in New York by writing her letters.¹¹⁰ While Jacobs was well informed by letters from her

¹⁰⁵ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 101.

¹⁰⁶ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 102-103.

¹⁰⁷ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 92-101.

¹⁰⁸ Jean Fagan Yellin, *The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 2015) 37, https://books.google.cz/books?id=XmE3CwAAQBAJ&dq=punishment+for+escaping+slavery+jacobs&hl=cs&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

¹⁰⁹ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 134-135.

¹¹⁰ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 135.

friends and family and reading newspapers every day, where they announced new arrivals to hotels, she was anyway living in constant fear of recapture and having to go back to slavery.¹¹¹

Although Jacobs held a different opinion than Cornelia Grinnell Willis, whom Jacobs worked for after she escaped to the Free States and though she despised the idea she is a piece of property to be bought, Mrs. Willis purchased Jacobs's freedom for 300 dollars from Dr. Norcom's daughter, who came to New York looking for her. Jacobs's opinion was ambivalent about having to purchase her freedom. "I had objected to having my freedom bought, yet I must confess that when it was done I felt as if a heavy load had been lifted from my heavy shoulders. When I rode home in the cars I was no longer afraid to unveil my face and look at people as they passed."¹¹²

Despite the fact Harriet Jacobs dedicated her life to a fight for freedom, though she officially obtained it, she never found the freedom in its true sense. To confirm the fact, there is an example of what Jacobs wrote in reply to one of her letters to Amy Post Jacobs:

I thank you for your kind expressions in regard to my freedom; but the freedom I had before the money was paid was dearer to me. God gave me that freedom; but man put God's image in the scales with the paltry sum of three hundred dollars. I served for my liberty as faithfully as Jacob served for Rachel. At the end, he had large possessions; but I was robbed of my victory; I was obliged to resign my crown, to rid myself of a tyrant.¹¹³

Jacobs expresses her conviction repeatedly throughout the *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. She does not believe that she, as well as other people of color, should be treated as property and what is more, differently than white people. Likewise, Amy Post indicates Harriet Jacobs's spirit "could never acknowledge itself to be a chattel."¹¹⁴ Additionally, Venetria K. Patton in *Women in Chains: The Legacy of Slavery in Black Women's Fiction* states one of the reasons Jacobs could never be truly free is she would never be able to repay the deed Mrs. Bruce did for her.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 152.

¹¹² Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 155.

¹¹³ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 158.

¹¹⁴ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 158.

¹¹⁵ Venetria K. Patton, *Women in Chains: The Legacy of Slavery in Black Women's Fiction*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 75, https://books.google.cz/books?id=BGSf8E_QfoC&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

4.1.2 Elizabeth Keckley's purchase of freedom

Unlike Jacobs, Keckley did not have to escape from slavery. Though her master expressed objections at first and Keckley "was commanded never to broach the subject again,"¹¹⁶ she was relentless and after a certain time she won him over. Her master, after many hours of Keckley's persuasions, agreed to give her freedom for her and her son, if she pays 1200 dollars.¹¹⁷

Because it was a tremendous amount of money, it took years before Keckley obtained her freedom.¹¹⁸ She had to work tirelessly and still did not earn the money she needed. Her mistress, Mrs. Garland, instructed Keckley she needs the promise of "six gentlemen who would vouch for my [Keckley's] return, and become responsible for the amount at which I [Keckley] was valued."¹¹⁹ The author of *Behind the Scenes* had no problem with acquiring the support she needed, except for one gentleman, Mr. Farrow, for he did not believe she would ever come back. "When you reach New York the abolitionists will tell you what savages we are, and they will prevail on you to stay there; and we shall never see you again."¹²⁰ Keckley's hope for becoming free began to fade away and she illustrates it very vividly. "I had dreamed such a happy dream, in imagination had drunk of the water, the pure, sweet water of life, but now – now – the flowers had withered before my eyes; darkness had settled down upon me like a pall, and I was left alone with cruel mocking shadows."¹²¹

By a felicitous chance, Mrs. Le Bourgois, who was one of Keckley's patrons, heard about Elizabeth's plans to go to New York "beg for money to buy your [Keckley's] freedom."¹²² She managed to raise money for Keckley, and thanks to Mrs. Le Bourgois, Keckley was shortly able to purchase the freedom of herself and her son George. She was determined to pay all of it, and soon, by hard work, she managed to accomplish her resolution.¹²³

¹¹⁶ Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 1999, 46.

¹¹⁷ Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 1999, 49.

¹¹⁸ Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 1999, 50.

¹¹⁹ Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 1999, 51.

¹²⁰ Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 1999, 52.

¹²¹ Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 1999, 53-54.

¹²² Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 1999, 54.

¹²³ Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 1999, 54-62.

4.1.3 Punishments for failed attempts to escape from bondage

Although Jacobs managed to escape, she was one of few who got away with that. Others who tried to break themselves free from slavery had to face the consequences of their failed attempt. Both Jacobs and Keckley do not dedicate much of their slave narratives to this topic, so this is just a brief depiction.

As already indicated, if a slave fled from his master and sought liberty, not only him but also his whole family was in danger. Jacobs experienced the consequences of her escape at first hand. She portrays Dr. Norcom sought revenge and threw her brother together with her children, though her daughter was just two years old, to prison.¹²⁴

In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, she depicts her uncle's escape, follow-up recapture, and imprisonment. He was held in prison for six months, chained alongside other prisoners who were "covered with filthy rags" and "with vermin."¹²⁵ Jacobs announces that to punish him even more, his master forbade her uncle visits from his family. Since he was determined not to apologize, in order to discipline him, his master decided to sell him. It is noteworthy to mention that when he was ten years old, his price was 720 dollars. After he suffered from starvation and was much weakened by the long imprisonment, he was sold for only 300 dollars.¹²⁶

Article describing "The Largest Attempted Slave Escape in American History" states that after failed attempt to escape it was common to send slaves to plantations as punishment, to be separated from their families and forced to perform hard labor.¹²⁷

Jacobs portrays the cruelty of masters if a slave decided to flee from them and they managed to recapture him. She indicates extreme brutality was used: "The whip is used til the blood flows at his feet; and his stiffened limbs are put in chains, to be dragged in the field for days and days!"¹²⁸ Harriet Jacobs states that such a transgression could have also been punished by death.¹²⁹

Fugitive Slave Act, which passed in the year of 1850, made it compulsory for enslaved people to return to their masters even though they were in one of the Free States as well as

¹²⁴ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 82.

¹²⁵ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 22.

¹²⁶ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 23.

¹²⁷ "The Largest Attempted Slave Escape in American History," History, accessed March 20, 2020, <https://www.history.com/news/the-largest-attempted-slave-escape-in-american-history>.

¹²⁸ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 17.

¹²⁹ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 40.

denied the right to a jury trial. The punishment was not only for slaves who tried to escape but also for people who helped them to do so. According to an article on "Black History," person who assisted with hiding a fugitive was obliged to pay a 1,000-dollar penalty and to serve six months in prison.¹³⁰ However, as Jacobs reported in regard to her uncle, it was common a long time before the passing of the law that runaway slaves were caught and returned to their masters, especially if the master announced a reward for delivering his slave.¹³¹

¹³⁰ "Fugitive Slave Acts," History, accessed March 20, 2020, https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/fugitive-slave-acts#section_4.

¹³¹ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 21.

5 ENGAGEMENT AGAINST SLAVERY AND LIFE AS FREED WOMEN

Elizabeth Keckley clearly states that while she gained valuable lessons and had friends "in the South as well as in the North,"¹³² she had strong opinions against slavery. "And yet a wrong was inflicted upon me a cruel custom deprived me of my liberty, and since I was robbed of my dearest right, I would have not been human had I not rebelled against the robbery."¹³³

Though thrilled for finally obtaining her freedom, Keckley was at that time working so hard to repay her debts she had to contend with ill health and exhaustion. She reports that instead of her husband being a helpful partner, he was more of "a source of trouble" as well as "a burden."¹³⁴ Elizabeth Keckley made a decision to break up with her husband, and she informed him she would live with him once again under the condition of his reformation. She relocated to Baltimore for six weeks to teach women of her race her seamstress skills, but since it was not as profitable as she thought, she moved to Washington.¹³⁵ There she worked as a seamstress for many powerful ladies like Mrs. Davis or Mrs. Lincoln. She climbed the social ladder, moreover, she became a business-woman when she established her company for making dresses. Most of her book is focused on her life after meeting Mary Todd Lincoln and on Lincoln's personal life since Keckley became her confidante.

In her piece on Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley, Sari Edelstein explains that Keckley was well-aware of her position with the Lincoln's and that she "took on the role as a gatekeeper."¹³⁶ Edelstein discusses the incident Keckley painted in *Behind the Scenes*. A woman sought out Keckley, then let her create a dress, and afterward desired to be introduced to Mary Todd Lincoln, the wife of the President. Later on, Keckley realized the woman was a hired actress, and she aspired to work in "the White House as a servant, learn its secrets, and then to publish a scandal to the world."¹³⁷ In the book, Keckley reflects on many incidents that occurred during

¹³² Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 1999, 117.

¹³³ Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 1999, xii.

¹³⁴ Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 1999, 63.

¹³⁵ Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 1999, 64.

¹³⁶ Edelstein, "Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley (1818-1907)," 151.

¹³⁷ Edelstein, "Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley (1818-1907)," 151.

her stay with the Lincoln family. Multiple people desired to get through her to the White House. Some of them even offered her bribes.¹³⁸

After the assassination of the President, Mrs. Lincoln found herself without resources and Keckley as her companion desired to help her. In order to raise some funds, she published *Behind the Scenes*. However, when Elizabeth Keckley published her book, it was not well accepted and as Sari Edelstein remarks in her article,¹³⁹ she was no exception, and "like many successful nineteenth-century women writers, Keckley was derided and mocked in the mainstream press after the publication of her book."¹⁴⁰ According to Sari Edelstein, *Behind the Scenes: Or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House*, was despised because the general opinion was that the book is too revealing, too inappropriate, and pieces of information that Keckley dared to share about Lincoln family were private. Edelstein also draws attention to the fact that in addition to the general opinion, was created a racist parody named "Behind the Seams; by a Nigger Woman who took work in from Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Davis and signed with an 'X,' the mark of Betsey Keckley (nigger)."¹⁴¹

Since her memoir was published after the Civil War, Keckley did not need to draw attention to the horrors of slavery to abolish it. However, Dana Luciano suggests Keckley's autobiography was published in order to show "forward-thinking freemen and women as keeping up with a solidly balanced, progressively middle-class and nationally responsible pace of productivity."¹⁴²

Harriet Jacobs was, unlike Keckley, actively working against slavery since she ran away from Dr. Norcom, her master, to one of the Free States – New York. Though it was a small act to join the battle for abolitionism, every day, she studied the newspapers to make sure that the Southerners who came to New York are not a threat to her or her acquaintances, other fugitive slaves. She insisted she needed "to give information to others, if necessary; for if many were 'running to and fro,' I resolved that 'knowledge should be increased.'"¹⁴³

¹³⁸ Keckley, *Behind The Scenes*, 95.

¹³⁹ Edelstein, "Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley (1818-1907)," 150.

¹⁴⁰ Edelstein, "Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley (1818-1907)," 150.

¹⁴¹ Edelstein, "Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley (1818-1907)," 151.

¹⁴² Dana Luciano, *Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-century America*, (New York: NYU Press, 2007), 248.

https://books.google.cz/books?id=7sSxNSqbjj4C&dq=keckley+engagement+against&hl=cs&source=gbs_navlinks_s

¹⁴³ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 148.

Jacobs, even though she escaped from slavery, was for a long time persecuted by Dr. Norcom and his family. She lived in fear and slavery left its consequences as Post depicts. After purchasing her freedom, Jacobs was involved in the battle to end slavery as much as she could. As it is written on the last page of her book, her "The dream of my [Jacobs's] life is not yet realized."¹⁴⁴ She desired to live with her children in one home. Later, she joined her friend, Amy Post, and became a member of a feminist movement. Later, as it is mentioned above, she handled contrabands and established a home for elderly people.

Amy Post, a dear friend of Harriet Jacobs, stated that Jacobs was not certain whether to publish her story. "You know a woman can whisper her cruel wrongs in the ear of a dear friend much easier than she can record them for the world to read."¹⁴⁵ Even though Jacobs was hesitant to share her painful memories of the past, persistent urge and endorsement of Post eventually led to Jacobs publishing her personal slave narrative. It is a testimony of what slavery did to people of color and their struggle. As Jacobs had written to the preface of *Incidents*, she desired to publish her story on behalf of the people still imprisoned under the chains of slavery.

I do earnestly desire to arouse the women in the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions of women at the South, still in bondage, suffering what I suffered, and most of them far worse. I want to add my testimony that of abler pens to convince the people of Free States what Slavery really is. Only by experience can any one realize how deep, and dark, and foul is that pit of abominations. May the blessing of God rest on this imperfect effort in behalf of my persecuted people.¹⁴⁶

And as Jean Fagan Yellin suggests, Jacobs's narrative "enriches our literary history by presenting us with a unique chronicle of the efforts of an underclass black woman to write and publish her autobiography in antebellum America."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 156.

¹⁴⁵ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 157.

¹⁴⁶ Jacobs et al., *Incidents*, 5.

¹⁴⁷ Yellin, "Written by Herself," 480.

6 CONCLUSION

To sum up, the theoretical part of the bachelor thesis consists of a historical overview, dealing with the origins of slavery and its abolition in the United States. Subsequently follows the definition of slave narratives as a literary genre and introduction of the lives of Harriet Jacobs and Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley, the authors selected for this work. Then a brief presentation of their autobiographies, Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Keckley's *Behind the Scenes: Or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House*, is mentioned.

Slave narratives are a fundamental source of depicting the horrors African Americans had to endure when they were held in bondage in the then America. Even though slave narratives are diversified by the details of the slave's everyday life, they are similar in the form of their recording, usually starting with describing childhood, growing up into a woman and subsequent sexual abuse, and brutality, too. Then, a way to freedom and possible engagement for abolition slavery is presented. Whereas some of the slave narratives were written directly by slaves or freed slaves, others were documented by white writers who frequently were abolitionists at the same time, since the majority of Afro-Americans were illiterate.

According to the selected slave narratives, the institution of slavery had an enormous negative impact on slave families. It was common to divide them and sell slaves far from their families so that they had never seen each other again. What is more, since slaves were considered property, masters could do whatever they desired, and there was no law to punish them. One of the crimes committed against humanity slavery allowed was breeding of slaves like cattle. Owning them primarily for profit, some slaveholders chose a strong male individual and forced them into having sexual intercourse with several female slaves to produce plenty of healthy, competent offspring later sufficient for selling at the slave market.

With regard to slave families, both in Elizabeth Keckley's and Harriet Jacobs's autobiographies are vividly depicted strong bonds between families and friends, especially mother-children relationships, or the ones very much alike. Although Keckley does barely reflect on her recollections concerning her son, Jacobs shares a lot of her despair when distant from her children. As it is depicted in her story, a mother would do anything for her children to ensure their freedom. Jacobs personally spent seven years hidden in a small place in her grandmother's attic to free her children and herself from their master. However, Keckley's and Jacobs's opinions on child condition regarding slavery do not differ, as they were both irritated

by the custom that slave babies had to follow the condition of the mother, no matter if their father was a white man, a freed slave or a slave.

Moreover, both authors address issues regarding marriage. According to their narratives, if the master allowed his slave to marry, though it was not always the case, marriage was somewhat challenging, especially if the couple did not belong to the same slaveholder. They had to overcome obstacles such as distance, no frequent visits, etc. From these two works, however, it can be deduced that under all the suffering the majority of slaves went through, counting both physical and emotional, their mutual love and family bonds were more profound than ever.

Furthermore, as every single decision was dependent on the slaveholder himself, relationships between enslaved women and their masters were determinative. Unfortunately, though there were a few bright exceptions of a master-slave profound relationship, it was almost typical for a slaveholder to be violent, and to sexually abuse his female slaves. Quite unbelievably, for some masters, it was not a problem to lay a hand on little children. While Elizabeth Keckley colorfully portrays how she was repeatedly beaten and whipped so much her skin opened and blood fleshed out, Jacobs dedicates most of her pages to emotional suffering, as well as to the relentless persecutions she experienced from her master.

Another aspect repeated in narratives of African American women was the effort to obtain freedom. Escaping from slavery was not always a smart step, given the fact that a failed attempt could lead to harsh punishment and sometimes even death. Additionally, it did not affect only the slave seeking freedom but his close family as well. As it is known from her autobiography, Jacobs escaped from slavery, and several years later her freedom was bought by her kind employer. Keckley paid for her freedom with the guidance of a friend who recommended her to raise funds.

After the liberation from bondage, Jacobs helped former slaves to get on their feet. Keckley lived a life full of adventures, became a business-woman and befriended Mary Todd Lincoln, the wife of President Lincoln.

To examine women's slave narratives, Jacobs's and Keckley's works were chosen. Harriet Jacobs devoted most of her story to her suffering and all the misfortunes she faced while held in bondage, especially focusing on the sorrows she experienced whenever she was separated from her children. In contrast, Elizabeth Keckley describes her misery rather briefly and instead focuses on her life after receiving freedom, particularly after befriending Mrs.

Lincoln. Though they vividly portray what was happening to them during their time as slaves, Keckley shortened much of her slave narrative to leave space for the depiction of her friend, Mrs. Lincoln.

In conclusion, based on the analysis of selected slave narratives is suitable to note that Afro-Americans in bondage suffered the worst deeds, including separation of their families, purposeful reproduction, brutal violence, and sexual abuse, thus the institution of slavery represents the worst transgression against humanity in the whole history of the United States.

7 RESUMÉ

Tato bakalářská práce analyzuje příběhy bývalých otrokyň, které se buď útekem nebo zakoupením své svobody vymanily z řetězů otroctví. Pro tuto práci byla vybrána díla Harriet Ann Jacobs a její *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, společně s autobiografií Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley, *Behind the Scenes: Or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House*. Práce se zaměřuje hlavně na specifika životů Harriet Jacobs a Elizabeth Keckley, které žily v 19. století ve Spojených Státech amerických. Tato práce je rozdělena do několika kapitol, které se zabývají rodinným životem, vztahy mezi otrokyněmi a jejich pány, specifickými způsoby, kterými se autorky dostaly na svobodu, a krátce také jejich následným životem na svobodě.

Teoretická část bakalářské práce řeší počátky otroctví, které vzniklo v roce 1619 dovezením hrstky afro-amerických otroků do Spojených Států. Lehce se dotýká i občanské války, následného zrušení otroctví a životů bývalých otroků po roce 1865. Vyprávění bývalých otroků byly a jsou důležitým zdrojem vyobrazení otroctví, a to primárně negativních aspektů, které ovlivnily život mnoha Afroameričanů. Ačkoli se samozřejmě vyprávění bývalých otroků a otrokyň lišily v detailech jejich životů, forma vyprávění byla podobná. Ve většině případů jejich příběhy začínaly frází "narodil/a jsem se" a datem a místem narození. Následoval popis jejich dětství, dospívání, bývalé otrokyně často zmiňovaly násilí, psychické vydírání a sexuální zneužívání. To doprovázely myšlenky na svobodu a snahy vymanit se z nadvlády jejich pánů. Když se otrokyně za poplatek pánovi nebo útekem dostaly na svobodu, některé z nich vylíčily, jak žily se vzpomínkami na otroctví, a jejich případné zapojení se do boje pro zrušení otroctví.

Je jisté, že instituce otroctví měla obrovsky negativní vliv na afroamerické rodiny. Vzhledem k tomu, že otrokáři vnímali své otrokyně jako majetek, většina z nich se i tak chovala. Díky obchodu s Afroameričany mnozí otrokáři získali prosperitu a bohatství, nadto na něm byl postaven ekonomický prospěch Spojených Států. Jacobs a Keckley ve svých memoárech uvádí, že se majitelé otroků nebáli rozprodat každého člena rodiny jinam za účelem zisku. Někteří dokonce vybrané jedince nutili k pohlavnímu styku s několika otrokyněmi, aby nabyli další, dobře vypadající a schopné otroky, které by mohli rozprodat. Dítě otrokyně totiž automaticky přejalo sociální status po své matce. Nezáleželo tedy na tom, jestli otrokyně měla potomka s jiným otrokem, s osvobozeným mužem nebo jako důsledek znásilnění bílým mužem, ve všech těchto případech bylo dítě otrokyně novým otrokem. Obě díla vyobrazují trýznivé utrpení otrokyň, které prožívaly, když jim jejich pán prodal děti nebo muže, a křivdu a bezmoc, kterou cítily. Manželství otroků bylo možné, avšak jen s povolením jejich pánů. Nemělo ale žádnou právní hodnotu. Keckley například čtenáře provází příběhem jejich rodičů, kteří se mohli vídat

dvakrát do roka. Později se otrokář jejího otce odstěhoval do vzdáleného města, vzal ho s sebou, a tak se rodiče Elizabeth Keckley už nikdy znovu nesetkali. Jacobs se zaměřuje více na své utrpení a snahu obstarat svobodu pro své děti. Stráví tak několik let vyčkáváním na správnou příležitost k útěku schováváním se v malé skrýši v domě své babičky. Jacobs zdůrazňuje zármutek a bolest primárně při odloučení od svých dětí, avšak láska pro její děti jí dodává kuráž bojovat za naději na svobodu. Obě autorky poznamenávají, že není silnějších pout než těch, které se utvořily kvůli sdílenému utrpení prožitému v otroctví.

Jedním z dalších aspektů, které knihy sdílejí, je vyobrazení víry. Nejen dílem Elizabeth Keckley, ale i příběhem Harriet Jacobs provází čtenáře modlitby a výkřiky k bohu. Spiritualita byla významným poskytovatelem naděje, autorky se na víru obracely nejen v nejtěžších životních situacích. Někteří otrokáři ale vnímali víru jako hrozbu, protože kněží hlásali rovnost všech lidí před bohem, nehledě na barvu kůže.

Kromě odloučení od rodin se otrokyně často musely potýkat s násilím, psychickým týráním, a dokonce se sexuálním zneužíváním. Ačkoli existovalo pár světlých výjimek, kdy se otrokáři chovali ke svým otrokyním jako k lidem, a dokonce se s nimi přátelili, byla jich jen minorita. Bylo téměř typické, že otrokář používal k dosažení poslušnosti své otrokyně alespoň jeden z těchto způsobů. Jak zobrazují příběhy bývalých otrokyň, někteří otrokáři se v bití a bičování vyžívali a používali brutalitu jen proto, že mohli, aniž by k tomu měli sebemenší důvod. Nebylo výjimkou, že ze zbičované osoby tekla krev proudem a visely z ní cáry masa. Citové vydírání používali otrokáři také často, pokud měly otrokyně rodiny, vyhrožovali jejím rozprodáním, zavřením dětí do vězení apod. Dále se otrokyně obávaly znásilnění. Už od mladého věku, kdy dívky "dozrávaly" do žen se jim dostávalo lichotek a nevhodných návrhů. Pokud se dívka nenechala přemluvit, došlo k použití násilí a znásilnění. Ať už byl násilníkem kdokoliv – majitel otrokyně, jeho syn, jiný otrok, nebo běloch ze sousedství – otrokyně se nemohla nijak bránit, jelikož neexistoval žádný zákon na ochranu otroků.

Násilí, ponižování a znásilňování byly často důvodem pro pokus o získání svobody. Ačkoliv řešením mohl být útek, byl velmi nebezpečný, a pokud se nezdařil, mohl mít až fatální následky. Navíc útek otrokyně neměl dopad jen na uprchlici, ale i její blízké. Otrokáři se mohli pomstít na její rodině a blízkých apod. tím, že je zavřeli do vězení, kde otroci dostávali jen malé příděly jídla a skomírali v nelidských podmínkách, přičemž po nich lezla havěť. Dalším východiskem vymanění se z otroctví mohlo být zakoupení svobody, což bylo ale velmi obtížné s ohledem na to, že otroci nedostávali žádné peníze za odvedenou práci. Nicméně někdy se i

našli lidé, kteří otrokyním pomohli vydělat si peníze na zakoupení svobody, nebo jim je přímo půjčili. Někteří otrokáři ale dělali otrokyním problémy a nechtěli jim jejich svobodu prodat.

I když se nakonec otrokyně dostaly na svobodu, stále je pronásledovaly myšlenky o minulosti a hrůzy, které zažily. Tato bakalářská práce se věnuje mimo jiné i specifickým životům autorek literárních děl vybraných pro tuto práci a zkoumá i jejich konkrétní osudy. Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley po zakoupení své svobody odešla od manžela, po dobu pár týdnů učila na univerzitě způsoby, které používala k vykonávání své práce švadleny. Po tom, co usoudila, že si peníze na živobytí tímto způsobem neobstará, odstěhovala se do Washingtonu, D. C., kde si založila vlastní živnost jako švadlena. To jí také dalo příležitost se seznámit s významnými ženami tehdejší doby, mezi nimiž byla paní Davisová, manželka senátora, a paní Lincolnová, manželka prezidenta. Keckley vydala knihu *Behind the Scenes: Or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House*, aby paní Lincolnové pomohla s výdaji po atentátu na prezidenta Lincolna. Zatímco Keckley si svou svobodu mohla koupit, Jacobs takové štěstí neměla. Její pán ji nechtěl prodat, a tak Jacobs utekla, aby se pokusila zajistit lepší život pro sebe a své děti. Po skrývání a následném útěku do svobodných států na severu země pracovala jako chůva. Nicméně pronásledování od Dr. Norcoma, jejího bývalého otrokáře, a jeho rodiny neustalo, několikrát se za ní vydali, aby ji našli. Tyto pokusy byly neúspěšné, avšak Jacobs žila v neustálém strachu. Po smrti Dr. Norcoma, o které se Jacobs dozvěděla z dopisů od svých blízkých, jí její zaměstnavatelka koupila svobodu. Jacobs publikovala svou autobiografii, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, jako otevřené svědectví o hrůzách, které museli otroci přetrpět, aby podpořila abolicionistické hnutí.

Na základě analýzy primárních děl vybraných pro tuto bakalářskou práci je možné konstatovat, že na Afroameričanech v otroctví byly spáchány ty nejhorší skutky, včetně rozprodávání rodin, cíleného "množení" otroků, brutálního násilí a sexuálního zneužívání, a otroctví tak představuje nejhorší provinění proti lidskosti v historii Spojených Států amerických.

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