

Narrative Life of Fredrick Douglass

Significant Quotations

Chapter 1

"By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs, and it is the wish of most masters to keep their slaves thus ignorant."

"He was a cruel man, hardened by a long life of slaveholding"

"It was the blood-stained gate, the entrance to hell of slavery, through which I was about to pass"

Chapter 2

"The same traits of character might be seen in Colonel Lloyd's slaves, as are seen in the slaves of the political parties"

"Crying for joy, and singing for joy, were alike uncommon to me while in the jaws of slavery"

"He whipped, but seemed to take no pleasure in it. He was called by the slaves a good overseer."

"The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart"

Chapter 3

"It was considered as being bad enough to be a slave; but to be a poor man's slave was deemed a disgrace indeed!"

Chapter 4

"...Mr. Austen Gore, a man possessing, in eminent degree, all those traits of character indispensable to what is called a first-rate overseer."

"I speak advisedly when I say this, - that killing a slave, or any coloured person, in Talbot county, Maryland, is not treated as a crime, either by the courts nor the community."

Chapter 5

"My feet have been so cracked with the frost, that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes."

"I had something of the feeling about Baltimore that is expressed in the proverb, that "being hanged in England is preferable to dying a natural death in Ireland."

"From my earliest recollection, I date the entertainment of a deep conviction that slavery would not always be able to hold me within its foul embrace..."

Chapter 6

"The fatal poison of irresponsible power was already in her hands, and soon commenced its infernal work."

"I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom."

"A city slave is almost a freeman, compared with a slave on the plantation."

"...and scarce an hour passed during the day but was marked by the blood of one of these slaves."

Chapter 7

"Slavery soon proved its ability to divest her [Mrs. Auld] of these heavenly qualities. Under its influence, the tender heart became stone, and the lamblike disposition gave way to one of tiger-like fierceness"

"The first step had been taken. Mistress, in teaching me the alphabet, had given me the inch, and no precaution could prevent me from taking the ell"

"I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out"

"Freedom not appeared, to disappear no more forever."

"White men have been known to encourage slaves to escape, and then, to get the reward, catch them and return them to their masters"

Chapter 8

"We were all ranked together at the valuation. Men and women, old and young, married and single, were ranked with horses, sheep, and swine."

"At this moment [valuation of the property], I saw more clearly than ever the brutalizing effects of slavery upon both slave and slaveholder"

"The hearth is desolate. The children, the unconscious children, who once sang and danced in her presence, are gone. She gropes her way, in the darkness of age, for a drink of water. Instead of the voices of her children, she hears by day the moans of the dove, and by night the screams of the hideous owl. All is gloom. The grave is at the door"

[On running away]: "...the chances of success are tenfold greater from the city than from the country."

Chapter 9

"After his conversion, he found religious sanction and support for his slaveholding cruelty"

"He would quote this passage of Scripture—'He that knoweth his master's will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes'"

"Mr. Covey had acquired a very high reputation for breaking young slaves, and this reputation was of immense value to him."

"Master Thomas was one of the many pious slaveholders who hold slaves for the very charitable purpose of taking care of them"

Chapter 10

"Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute!"

"Those beautiful [sailing] vessels, robed in purest white, so delightful to the eye of freemen, were to me so many shrouded ghosts, to terrify and torment me with thought of my wretched condition"

"You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man"

Chapter 11

"He [Master Thomas, Frederick's owner] told me, if I would be happy, I must lay out no plans for the future. He said, if I behaved myself properly, he would take care of me. Indeed, he advised me to complete thoughtlessness of the future, and taught me to depend solely upon him for happiness"

"He [Master Hugh] received all the benefits of slaveholding without its evils; while I endured all the evils of a slave, and suffered all the care and anxiety of a freeman. I found it a hard bargain"

"The motto which I adopted when I started from slavery was this- 'Trust no man!'"

"I had very strangely supposed, while in slavery, that few of the comforts, and scarcely any of the luxuries, of life were enjoyed at the north, compared with what were enjoyed by slaveholders of the south. I probably came to this conclusion from the fact that northern people owned no slaves. I supposed that they were about upon a level with the non-slaveholding population of the south. I knew they were exceedingly poor, and I had been accustomed to regard their poverty as the necessary consequence of their being non-slaveholders. I had somehow imbibed the opinion that, in the absence of slaves, there could be no wealth, and very little refinement"

"I went in pursuit of a job of calking; but such was the strength of prejudice against color, among the white calkers, that they refused to work with, and of course I could get no employment"

"It [speaking publicly against slavery] was a severe cross, and I took it up reluctantly. The truth was, I felt myself a slave, and the idea of speaking to white people weighed me down. I spoke but a few moments, when I felt a degree of freedom and said what I desired with considerable ease"