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The family of Frederick Douglass

Family relationships are fundamental for a human; however, they were hard to keep for a slave since the system of slavery discouraged the development of any intimate relations among slaves and since a considerable amount of slaves had their masters for fathers. So, slaves had to resort to replacing those relationships. And as it is known from his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave: Written by Himself*, Frederick Douglass was no exception. This essay will look at how successful was Frederick Douglass at replacing the family relationships.

As it is known from the beginning of the Narrative, Douglass did not really know his biological parents, and therefore did not develop any bond with them. Instead, the place of his mother – who died when he was just a child – was taken by one of his mistresses, Sophia Auld. When he first met her in his new his new home in Baltimore, Douglass thought of her as a woman nothing like any other white woman he has ever met (26). She had a kind heart and not owning a slave ever before, being horrified of the thought of doing otherwise, treated Douglass as any other child of his age. And most importantly for the development of Douglass's life, she thought him how to read. Although her character changed drastically over the time Douglass lived in Baltimore, it is evident that she still was a very important figure in Douglass's life. But parents are not the only family he sought to replace.

Although Frederick Douglass had several biological siblings, he did not recognize them as such in the term of the relationship in family. In the Narrative, there are several examples of people Douglass might have considered siblings more than his biological ones. First are his fellow slaves, who he served with under the care of their master Mr. William Freeland; namely Henry and John Harris, Sandy Jenkins, Henry Bailey, or Charles Roberts. He himself proclaims that “I loved them [fellow slaves] with a love stronger than any thing I have experienced since.” (Douglass, 49), proving that by doing everything with them, trusting them with his secrets and his life, trying to escape from slavery with them, and being willing to die with or for them. While probably not as intimate, there is also his relationship with the people he taught to read on his Sunday sabbaths. It can be easily spotted that he was very fond of them as well as they were of him, their brave teacher: “We loved each other, and to leave them at the close of the Sabbath was a severe cross indeed.” (Douglass, 48) In both of these examples his love for them was amplified by their shared fate and by the sympathy and understanding among them.

And lastly there is also non-biological family wanted to be found. And It was found indeed; in the shape of his first wife, Anna Murray. As Frederick Douglass describes in his Narrative, they got married in New York, shortly after Douglass found a shelter there, after his successful escape from slavery. However, nothing more is mentioned of his relationship with Anna – in the form of their meeting or how they got into the relationship. Even without that, though, it is safe to say, purely based on the fact that Douglass got married, that his search for a relationship was successful.

In conclusion, Frederick Douglass was successful in replacing his estranged family and finding a new one; in the form of a (at least at the beginning) kind hearted

motherly figure, Sophia Auld, siblings in the shape of his very dear and beloved fellow slaves, and a kind wife, Anna Murray.