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The Family of Frederick Douglass

In the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave: Written by Himself*, Douglass recounts his life as a slave, hints at his escape from slavery and describes the beginning of his life as a free man. He shows readers the conditions in which slaves had to live and how slaves were treated. One fundamental thing that almost every slave lacks is a family. This essay will discuss who at least partly replaced those familial relationships for Frederick Douglass.

Before discussing the replacements, his biological parents should be established. Frederick Douglass is a son of a slave woman from whom he was separated at a very young age. His biological father is probably his original master - Captain Anthony. However, it is never ascertained. To compare characters in Douglass' narrative to parental figures, it should be determined what ideal parents should do.

Firstly, they should provide for their child, for example, clothes and food. With this approach, one could link the father figure to Douglass' current master because the master is the, though immensely bad, provider. This way, at one point, his biological father actually acts as a father.

Secondly, parents should care for their children and attend to their needs when they are little. The woman who took care of little Frederick Douglass was his grandmother – Betsy Bailey. She has a place in Frederick's heart, and he thinks back to her during his later life. Betsy Bailey is the primary mother figure and is also the only biological relative towards which Frederick Douglass holds positive feelings.

Thirdly, parents should pass on some knowledge to their children. According to this approach, the mother figure could be compared to Sophia Auld. She was Frederick Douglass' mistress in Baltimore. And even though she later turned into a vicious monster, she was at one point very kind-hearted and understanding and most importantly, she began teaching Frederick to read.

And finally, a parent should act as an advisor, a guide through the child's life. Here, two candidates can be found. Sandy Jenkins, a fellow slave, gave Frederick advice when in trouble with his master and even gave him a 'magical' root for protection. And more likely, it is Nathan Johnson who guided Frederic Douglass through the beginning of his newly acquired free life.

Regarding Frederick Douglass' potential siblings, there are also several possibilities. Taking into consideration what was said above, if the current master can be compared to the father, other slaves belonging to the same master could be compared to siblings. They share similar experiences, live together, and have sympathy for each other. However, the slaves from William Freeland's plantation stand out. Frederick becomes particularly close with them. He teaches them how to read, and they even conspire to escape together.

Apart from fellow slaves, few white people could also be qualified as Frederick Douglass' siblings. Firstly, Daniel Lloyd, the son of Douglass' original owner, somewhat acted as his older brother. Daniel protected young Douglass from the older boys and even gave him parts of his cakes. And later, in Baltimore, Frederick Douglass befriended little white boys who helped him learn how to read and write. At first, he had to give the boys bread in return, but later, he used tricks on them to learn new letters. Those young boys are very dear to Frederick, and he feels grateful to them. When leaving Baltimore, the most painful thing for Frederick was leaving those little teachers.

There is not much information in Frederick Douglass' narrative concerning his romantic relationship. When he escapes to the North, he is already engaged to Anna Murray, a free black woman. The reason for the lack of information could be Anna's help during his escape from slavery, however, this is only a speculation. Frederick Douglass' immediate start of his own family suggests that he longs to finally establish the thing that has not been complete his whole life.

To conclude, the two parent figures cannot be associated with only two people in Frederick Douglass' life. There is also a lot of sibling-like figures. At various points in his life, those positions are occupied by various people, and it is always only temporary. Still, after combining all the replacements, the father, mother, and sibling roles are not complete. Slaves are deprived of a family, and no one can fully replace it for them. Those who are lucky enough to somehow become free men can be successful in finally establishing their own family. Therefore, they can make sure that their children will never have to go through the same lonely experience.