

AFRO-AMERICAN LITERATURE FROM SLAVE NARRATIVES TO RECENT FICTION

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Abstract:

Slave tales were an important way to start a conversation between blacks and whites about slavery and freedom in the late 18th and early 19th century. A lot can be learned about African American history and literature from stories about people who were and were not slaves. They also show how whites and blacks have talked about each other in the United States, especially for African Americans, over the last two centuries. This paper gives a quick look at how Afro-American literature has changed over time, from slave stories to modern fiction. Another thing that is explained in this part of the introduction are the goals of this study and the method used, which is a Black feminist perspective.

Keywords: *Afro-American, slave, black-women, identity, freedom.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Slavery, in any form, is an unquestionable evil in the eyes of the modern individual. Although slavery has not been abolished entirely, it is no longer commonly accepted on a superficial level in our society, as it was in early America. Slavery is, nevertheless, a topic that has preoccupied many people for millennia, and the United States of America was no exception. The slave narrative, which has been called "the form that inaugurated the African-American literary tradition in prose," was the most beneficial and thought-provoking component of slavery in America (Mobley 357). Slave tales ceased to be written after the abolition of slavery and the thinning of the final generation of ex-slaves, but this did not mean that the slaves' presence in literature had ended. Several contemporary black female writers continue the practise of studying slavery and ensuring that it is not forgotten. Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Octavia Butler are among the women who have revitalised the slave tradition in their attempt to expose its dark underside and ongoing repercussions on people. Just as slave narratives were during their time, fictionalised slave tales can demand an awareness of the history and institution of slavery in America. Fantasy may have the effect of disclosing a topic in a way that makes it accessible to a wider audience, which is exactly what these authors are doing to keep slavery knowledge alive and well. Their work is similar to black female slave narratives like some events in Harriet Jacobs's life as a slave. The writing of all of these women has been used to talk about a wide range of slavery-related things. In their works, they talk about jealous mistresses, sexual exploitation, intelligence as a blessing or a curse, community, motherhood, and even issues and decisions that black women have to make when they write and when they publish their work. Ex-slaves' autobiographical stories are one of the most common and powerful forms of literature in African American literature and culture. Slave stories were more popular than African American books until the Great Depression. The stories of slaves have had a big impact on some of the best-known works of

American literature, like Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Harriet Beecher Stowe." *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1884), as well as prize-winning contemporary novels like William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). Slave stories have been used in some of the most important revisionist studies on American slavery in the last 40 years. It's been a long time since the United States was founded, but slave stories and their fictional descendants have been a big part of the country's debates about slavery and American identity. They have challenged the country's conscience and historical memory. Slave tales were an important way to start a conversation about slavery and freedom in the late 18th and early 19th century. The most well-known slave narratives of the antebellum era were written to teach white people about both the facts of slavery and the humanity of black people as people who deserve full human rights. The fact that slave narratives were read and used widely in nineteenth-century America and Great Britain shows that they can make people think and debate about issues of race, social justice, and the meaning of freedom. This is why they are still used in literature and history classes in American universities today.

2. SLAVE NARRATIVES

Early Afro-American literature dates from the time when the United States gained independence. The origins of Afro-American literature can be traced back to slave narratives. Slaves who had been oppressed by White racism began writing their recollections. New printing processes had made writing more affordable, so people were able to write about their feelings of racial oppression for the first time." Slave stories are always about how they escaped when they were young. What slave narrators say about how they feel about writing backs up George Orwell's claim that "no writer, and especially no slave autobiographer, can write except as a fleeing child who has never fully escaped." " (Fleischener 1). Slave stories give a sense of the historical setting of the United States under slavery. They show the oppressed Black slaves' illogical, unreasonable, and unequal connection with White slaveholders. "Former, sometimes runaway slaves' tales convey individual and community history as well as arguments against slavery itself" (Dixon 11). The denial of economic and social rights to the black-black community elicited strong emotions and reactions from African-Americans. Individual Black people discovered a common aim among themselves that may serve as a unifying factor. Although the freedom for freedom was a unifying theme among Afro-American community members, the means by which they achieved it differed among Black Diaspora. "From the standpoint of literature, former slaves' autobiographical narratives are one of the most widespread and powerful traditions in African American literature and culture." Before the Great Depression, slave stories were more popular than African-American stories (Andrews). Among freed slaves, there was a strong desire to tell their stories. This was not only a historical footnote in Afro-American literature, but also a turning point in American literature."Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, as well as prize-winning modern books like William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, bear the direct influence of the slave narrative," says the author (Andrews).

Apart from Phillis Wheatley and Frederick Douglass, there were a number of other notable writers in the slave narratives sub-genre. For four generations, Jupiter Hammon was Lloyed's family slave. The effect of religious inspirations on Hammon's works can be seen in his poem "Evening Thought," which contains a religious topic. Jupiter Hammon's final essay, "An Address to the Negroes of the State of New York," (1787), instructs young Black negroes to be on the lookout for their freedom. His desire to abolish slavery is shown in the majority of his writings. Despite persuading the younger He wanted the next generation to be able to start being free and end slavery, but he wanted them to improve slowly. In the early history of Afro-American poetry, the three writers named above played a big role. To write stories, William Wells Brown and Victor Séjour were the first two people to do so to bring Afro-American literature to prominence by authoring the first works of Black fiction. Victor Séjour's debut novel was written in French; hence he had minimal impact on Afro-American fiction. Wells, William Brown, then again, was an exceptionally powerful person who explored different avenues regarding a few abstract classes. In the primary lines of his self-portraying paper "Narrative of William Brown, a runaway Slave Written by Himself," Brown demonstrates his virtuosity with words. "I was born in Lexington, Kentucky," he writes. In a journal he kept for that purpose, the man who took me as soon as I was born chronicled the births of all the infants he claimed to be his property. Elizabeth was the name of my mother. She was the mother of seven children. We were not all the children of the same father" (Brown 1). In the year 1874, William Brown passed away. He cleared the door for a new generation of Black writers to tell their own stories.

3. SLAVE AND EX-SLAVE NARRATIVES IN LITERARY CONTEXTS

Slave stories delineate the development of racial oppression in the South from subjugation in the eighteenth century to isolation and disfranchisement in the mid 20th century. These personal histories give voice to ages of individuals of color who, regardless of being underestimated by white southern writing, have passed on a scholarly tradition of massive aggregate worth toward the South and the United States. Many slave storytellers become I-witnesses, sharing their difficulties, sufferings, goals, and accomplishments in compellingly personal narrating. Subjection is regularly portrayed by the prewar slave storyteller as a condition of horrendous physical, scholarly, passionate, and otherworldly hardship, much the same as terrible. An individual disaster, for example, the offer of a friend or family member or a dim evening of the spirit in which expectation fights despair for the slave's soul, accelerates the storyteller's decision to go. The slave, driven with a supernatural conviction in God and a guarantee to freedom and human nobility likened to that of America's Founding Fathers (as the slave account oftentimes accentuates), sets out on an unsafe excursion to opportunity that finishes in their appearance in the North. In numerous prior to the war accounts, accomplishing opportunity is represented by arriving at the Free states, yet in addition by transforming one's name and committing one's fate to abolitionist activity.

A significant number of prewar slave stories went through numerous releases and sold during the many thousands in the wake of being publicized in the abolitionist press and sold at abolitionist gatherings all through the English-speaking world. This popularity was not only

due to the antislavery movement's promotion of the narratives. Readers could perceive that "the slave who attempts to restore his freedom is associating with himself no small part of the romance of the period," as one reviewer phrased it in 1849. The most famous before the war accounts, composed by creators like Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, and Harriet Jacobs, sold during the many thousands and zeroed in on how African Americans endure subjection by finding an exit from no chance, frequently inconspicuously opposing double-dealing, and once in a while retaliating and escaping to better possibilities somewhere else in the North, Midwest, Canada, or Europe. Of course, the most important of these accounts mirror the public legend of the American person's quest for opportunity and a general public based on "life, freedom, and the quest for bliss" time permitting and in our own.

Douglass, Brown, what's more, Jacobs, among other slave storytellers, composed with a reasonable feeling of their topographical way of life as southern exiles (the trailblazers, straightforwardly, of more well known scholarly southerners in the 20th century who passed on the South to write in the North). Southern-conceived slave storytellers were regularly anxious to differentiate the high common freedoms vision of Jefferson's "Revelation of Independence" with his true status as a slaveholder, realizing that the place where there is their starting point had created any semblance of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. While self-portrayals of nineteenth-century Southern men of force and honor are not broadly understood today, the slave story's emphasis on the contention between distanced people and the harsh social request of the Old South has provoked the re-assessment of many recently disregarded southern personal and account structures, such as white women's diaries.

Slavery is depicted as a kind of crucible in most post-Emancipation slave narratives, where the slave's resilience, industry, and inventiveness were tried and eventually recognised. As a result, the slave narrative asserted that freedmen and freedwomen were ready to fully participate in the post-Civil War social and financial framework. Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* (1901), an exemplary American achievement story, was the smash hit slave account of the late nineteenth and mid 20th century's. Since *Up from Slavery* celebrated dark accomplishment and interracial collaboration after freedom, it got undeniably more consideration from southern whites than previous slaves whose life accounts uncovered the post war South's tradition of treacheries. One reasoning for ordering an exhaustive assortment of post-Civil War ex-slave diaries is to give voice to the numerous previous slaves who didn't share Washington's equivalently harmless point of view of servitude and isolation, or his hopeful vision of African Americans' possibilities in the South. One more motivation to push the slave story assortment along well into the 20th century is to give people of color's slave accounts, by far most of which were distributed after 1865, their due as supporters of the custom.

4. GLORIA NAYLOR AND PAULE MARSHALL

We could never have had the option to name the rundown of Afro-American ladies journalists who have been distributed somewhat recently fifteen years prior: Toni Morrison, Audre Lorde, Paule Marshall, June Jordan, Gloria Naylor, Ntozake Shange,

Joyce Carol Thomas, Toni Cade Bambara, and others are among the authors included (qtd. in Holt 14)

Barbara Christian's comment in her book, *Black Women Novelists*, shows the development of a custom, as Christian characterizes it. The acknowledgment that Black ladies authors have gotten is the consequence of countless Afro-American ladies cooperating. The individual and aggregate character of Afro-American ladies has been the focal point of most books written by Black women writers in recent years. Contemporary Black women writers have also focused on the mutual influences of sexism and racism. The two most important writers in the Black development tradition are Gloria Naylor and Paule Marshall. Despite the fact that their literary styles and portrayals of Afro-American women differ, their expertise in featuring the quarrelsome issues in their Black female local area should be regarded. Coming up next are the models that prompted Gloria Naylor and Paule Marshall being picked for the current review inside the setting of Black women's activist idea:

The importance of the concepts of self and identity in their books

- i. Demonstrating sexism and racism as key oppressive factors for Black women.
- ii. Introducing resistance as a tool for Afro-American women's empowerment

The previously mentioned rules were utilized in the choice of the books. *Earthy colored Girl*, *Brownstones*, *The Chosen Place*, *the Timeless People*, *Praise melody for the Widow*, and *Daughters* are the Marshall books picked for this study. Although some critics feel Marshall's novels reveal sexism to be more repressive than racism, the four novels cited do not show this preference. *The Ladies of Brewster Place*, *Bailey's Café*, *Linden Hills*, and *Mama Day* are the four Gloria Naylor books picked for study. The flow research centers around the idea of self and character among Afro-American ladies in Gloria Naylor's and Paul Marshall's chosen works. The review's technique, a Black women's activist viewpoint, and the subjects to be examined, self and character, make the review's objective more obvious to any peruser. The theory's principle objective is to investigate the chosen books to check whether there is an association among individual and aggregate personality among Afro-American ladies. The connection between Black female people and their aggregate Black character is the subject of this top to bottom examination. The second objective of this examination is to check whether orientation relations and bigotry affect Afro-American ladies' mind and brains with regards to building another Black female aggregate character. This examination will show how racial and misogynist persecution fosters an aggregate Black obviousness among Afro-American ladies, which permits them to battle mistreatment and become self-realized. The current study's final, but not least, goal is to look into the manner in which this results in Afro-American women's empowerment.

5. BLACK WOMEN'S OPPRESSION: RACE, CLASS AND GENDER

As far as Ah have been able to discover, de white man is the ruler of everything. Perhaps it's somewhere far out in the ocean where the black man reigns supreme, but

we don't know anything except what we see. As a result, de white man throws down his burden and instructs the nigger man to pick it up. He takes it up because he has to, but he doesn't carry it around with him. He gives it to his female women. So far as Ah can tell, the nigger woman is the mule of the world (Hurstons 16).

In Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, an elderly Black woman laments the suffering and awful situation of Black women to her granddaughter. In her own words, the elderly woman describes how race and gender injustice are passed down to Black women. Oppression of Black women manifests itself in a variety of ways at employment, in housing, in neighbourhoods, in schools, and in any other setting where Black women aspire to better themselves and their family. Nanny, an elderly Black woman, refers to Black women as "mules" who are used by both racist Whites and sexist Blacks in the above-mentioned phrases. Dehumanizing Black women to the level of a mule demonstrates the extent to which they are exploited in both their personal and professional lives. "Your work, and this applies for white people and black people, is what you are... your work is your life," Corine Cannon observes as a mill worker (qtd. in Byerly 156). The expression "race" is utilized to order individuals in light of their actual contrasts, for example, skin tone in African individuals or phenotypic contrasts in Jewish individuals. Since race, similar to orientation and class, is a theoretical term that doesn't exist in reality, the association and connection that race makes with different ideas and articles creates an orderly reasoning in the brain. Race, as a methodical idea that can be valuable in arranging individuals for better agreement, has been contorted by political systems to take advantage of different countries and gatherings that are different apparently yet are helpful in turning the wheel of their economy. Although prejudice can influence an assortment of countries and races that have been colonized by settler Whites, the new meaning of bigotry principally applies to Black populations. "An anti-racist politics that excludes black voices is unlikely to be effective, either in articulating the issues to be addressed or mobilising political will to do so." Since 1983, the question of black representation has dominated labour race politics and is still unresolved" 141 (Knowles). Racism has had two important impacts on the lives of Afro-American women. One form of racism targets Black individuals solely because of their skin colour. Overt racism is a term used to describe this sort of racism. "The most obvious form of racism is overt racism. It works on a personal basis, where one person despises another due of their ethnic origins, or where a group of people despises another just because of who they are. One group concluded that the members (individuals) of the second group were somehow inferior at some point in the past" (Wilson xi). This is a form of racism in which members of one group or community regard members of another group or community as inferior because of their racial origin. Individuals from the presumed superior group attach to the inferior group some negative attributes that are not true. These conventional views serve as controlling images for the Afro-American community, particularly Black women, in the United States, where Black and White confrontations have always occurred. To develop such stereotypes and controlling images, prejudiced Whites in the United States have extended an individual's poor behaviour to the entire community. The clearest instances of this stereotype trend are the terms "mammies," "matriarchs," "welfare mothers," "lazy people," and so on. The period of slavery is also a prime example of overt racism.

6. CONCLUSION

From the early nineteenth century onwards, the slave narrative served as a forum for discourse between whites and blacks in the North and South about slavery and racial concerns. African-American slave women were shown as animals and whores. The derogatory images of black Jezebel were imposed as a result of this treatment. Numerous of literary depictions and treatment of black-skinned people as the "Other" by putting negative meaning and stereotypes on them were done in an effort to legitimise the hierarchy of races and justify oppression in white-heavy American society. When white southern writers and regional boosters spread myths about slavery and the moonlight-and-magnolias plantation to a white northern readership in the 1880s and 1890s, the narratives of former slaves were one of the few resources that readers of the late 1800s could use to get a reliable, first-hand picture of what slavery was like.

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