

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave

Frederick Douglass



ABOUT THE READING As a boy, Frederick Douglass was given as a slave to a family in Baltimore, where he learned to read and write. He eventually escaped slavery and became a speaker and writer for the abolitionist movement. *Narrative* is an account of his experiences as a slave as well as an argument against slavery.



*As you read the passage below, pay attention to what slaves did to protect themselves and to have a sense dignity. The following words might be new to you: **sundered, ascertain, execrate**. You may want to use a dictionary to look them up.*

To describe the wealth of Colonel Lloyd would be almost equal to describing the riches of Job. He kept from ten to fifteen house-servants. He was said to own a thousand slaves, and I think this estimate quite within the truth. Colonel Lloyd owned so many that he did not know them when he saw them; nor did all the slaves of the out-farms know him. It is reported of him, that, while riding along the road one day, he met a colored man, and addressed him in the usual manner of speaking to colored people on the public highways of the south: "Well, boy, whom do you belong to?" "To Colonel Lloyd," replied the slave. "Well, does the colonel treat you well?" "No, sir," was the ready reply. "What, does he work you too hard?" "Yes, sir." "Well, don't he give you enough to eat?" "Yes, sir, he gives me enough, such as it is."

The colonel, after ascertaining where the slave belonged, rode on; the man also went on about his business, not dreaming that he had been conversing with his master. He thought, said, and heard nothing more of the matter, until two or three weeks afterwards. The poor man was then informed by his overseer that, for having found fault with his master, he was now to be sold to a Georgia trader. He was immediately chained and handcuffed; and thus, without a moment's warning, he was snatched away, and forever **sundered**, from his family and friends, by a hand more unrelenting than death. This is the penalty of telling the truth, of telling the simple truth, in answer to a series of plain questions.

It is partly in consequence of such facts, that slaves, when inquired of as to their condition and the character of their masters, almost universally say

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

A Push for Reform

Biography

The manuscript of a book on the Italian revolution was thought to be among Fuller's things on the ship. Emerson sent his friend Henry David Thoreau to walk the beaches of the island in search of the book. The manuscript was never found.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. **Recall** Review Margaret Fuller's professional life. What positions did she hold in her lifetime?

2. **Analysis** How did Fuller influence the women of her day?

ACTIVITY

Learn more about the transcendentalists as a group. Read some of the writings of Emerson, Thoreau, and others. Identify key themes in the works of the transcendentalists, and write a short paper discussing the influence of these ideas in Fuller's life.

A Push for Reform**Literature**

they are contented, and that their masters are kind. The slaveholders have been known to send in spies among their slaves, to **ascertain** their views and feelings in regard to their condition. The frequency of this has had the effect to establish among the slaves the maxim, that a still tongue makes a wise head. They suppress the truth rather than take the consequences of telling it, and in so doing prove themselves a part of the human family. If they have any thing to say of their masters, it is generally in their masters' favor, especially when speaking to an untried man. I have been frequently asked, when a slave, if I had a kind master, and do not remember ever to have given a negative answer; nor did I, in pursuing this course, consider myself as uttering what was absolutely false; for I always measured the kindness of my master by the standard of kindness set up among slaveholders around us. Moreover, slaves are like other people, and imbibe prejudices quite common to others. They think their own better than that of others. Many, under the influence of this prejudice, think their own masters are better than the masters of other slaves; and this, too, in some cases, when the very reverse is true. Indeed, it is not uncommon for slaves even to fall out and quarrel among themselves about the relative goodness of their masters, each contending for the superior goodness of his own over that of the others. At the very same time, they mutually **execrate** their masters when viewed separately. It was so on our plantation. When Colonel Lloyd's slaves met the slaves of Jacob Jepson, they seldom parted without a quarrel about their masters; Colonel Lloyd's slaves contending that he was the richest, and Mr. Jepson's slaves that he was the smartest, and most of a man. Colonel Lloyd's slaves would boast his ability to buy and sell Jacob Jepson. Mr. Jepson's slaves would boast his ability to whip Colonel Lloyd. These quarrels would almost always end in a fight between the parties, and those that whipped were supposed to have gained the point at issue. They seemed to think that the greatness of their masters was transferable to themselves. It was considered as being bad enough to be a slave; but to be a poor man's slave was deemed a disgrace indeed!

ANALYZING LITERATURE

1. **Main Idea** Why did slaves say, "a still tongue makes a wise head"?

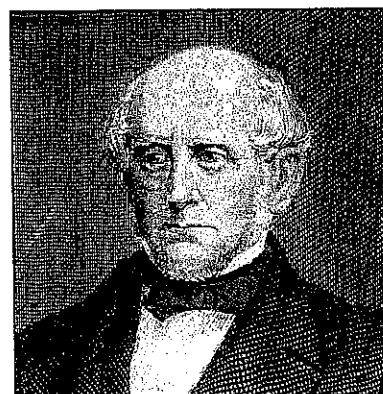
2. **Critical Thinking: Analysis** What did slaves gain from quarreling with other slaves about their masters?

Charles Francis Adams

1807–1886



WHY HE MADE HISTORY Charles Francis Adams was the son of President John Quincy Adams. A politician and diplomat, he helped form the antislavery Free Soil Party, and was influential in keeping Britain neutral during the U.S. Civil War.



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As you read the biography below, think about why Charles Francis Adams opposed the expansion of slavery. Why do you think he worked so hard to keep the British neutral during the Civil War?

When Texas became an independent nation, it moved one step closer to becoming part of the United States. The debate over Texas statehood was heated. Many Americans, in the spirit of manifest destiny, supported annexing Texas. Texas, though, allowed slavery. As a new slave state, it would tip the balance of power in Congress. Charles Francis Adams believed the movement to annex Texas was part of a conspiracy to expand slavery and increase the influence of slave-holding states in government. Adams helped lead the movement opposing Texas annexation.

Charles Francis was born in 1807 in Boston, Massachusetts. He was the son of President John Quincy Adams and the grandson of President John Adams. Adams graduated from Harvard University in 1825 and practiced law in Boston. Adams married in 1829 and devoted himself to literature and study, writing on historical topics. He edited and published the letters and papers of his grandparents, Abigail and John Adams.

In 1832 Adams decided to take an active role in Massachusetts politics. He had always believed that slavery was protected by the Constitution. His position changed when pro-slavery forces in the state tried to deny free speech to abolitionists and prevent his father from presenting antislavery petitions to Congress. Adams became convinced that slavery was a threat to constitutional rights. When the Republic of Texas sought statehood in 1837, Adams stood opposed, believing that pro-slavery forces were trying to gain power. Because of his antislavery views, Massachusetts Whigs asked Adams to run for the state House of Representatives. Adams was elected in 1840 and served until 1843. He then served two years in the state senate.