

READING BETWEEN THE LINES:  
FREDERICK DOUGLASS'S ALLEGORICAL NARRATIVE

by

STACY MARIE JOHNSON

(Under the Direction of R. Baxter Miller)

ABSTRACT

Frederick Douglass's 1845 autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*, depicts the life of a young man who survived enslavement by escaping to the North. Because of his vulnerability as an escaped slave, Douglass, at first, refused to provide names; however, in effort to further the abolition cause, he provides names and places to prove his tale to skeptical audiences. The names in Douglass's text are true but contain elements of fiction due to their allegorical construction within the text. Naming, therefore, becomes a valuable key to social, historical, and genealogical readings of Douglass's work and of nineteenth century Americans.

INDEX WORDS: Frederick Douglass, *Narrative*, Names, Slave narratives, Nonfiction, Allegory, African-American literature

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STACY MARIE JOHNSON

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STACY MARIE JOHNSON

Major Professor:	R. Baxter Miller
Committee:	Kristen Boudreau Douglas Anderson

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso  
Dean of the Graduate School  
The University of Georgia  
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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Names are translatable texts that allow society a look into personal lives through onomastic definitions. Common sources of names are family traditions, religious or ethnic customs, current fashions or fads, aesthetic considerations, psychological connotations, desires to display uniqueness, real or fictitious eminent persons, or cognitive connotations (Brender 127-130). The reasons for naming demonstrate the desire to create names that generate personal expression. “What is at stake in the naming process is no less than an act of possession” (Ragussis 7); although this act of possession is referring to the self, it also applies to masters’ possessions of their slaves, as displayed in names. Whether it is a name of a slave, a literary character, or a child, names hold the key for self-expression.

The role of names in fiction derives from a systematic format of name giving. Fictional names consist of an author’s cunning use of allegory and symbolism. Authors use names to shape the readers’ responses of the characters.

What names were supposed to do used to be a trifle clearer in fiction, back in the days of transparently *redende Namen* (significant names) which telegraphed the allegory or other points in didactic writing, clarified comic characters, gave greater dimension to representative tragic heroes, made the author’s message unmistakable in the ear when people wrote as communication, not as therapy, and were anxious to express ideas even more than to express themselves. (Ashley 199)

Authors of fiction choose names for their characters and have the choice to have names representative of their characters' personalities. "An artist's naming of his or her characters frequently involves calculated and conscious choices in order to deliver a message through the onomastic medium" (Nuessel 39). In other words, "authors choose names, consciously or unconsciously, with a reason, some more or less carefully or deliberately than others" (Ashley 203). Naming, once again, is a method of creativity and control over others, whether in fiction or in life.

Americans in the nineteenth century were still forming the foundation of America, and along with new governments and laws, new names were also being created as an expression of change. Although immigrants arrived in the States with clearly formulated and defined last names, many wished to start with a clean slate and changed their names. Professional positions in life traditionally formed last names in this culture, such as Sawyer and Taylor. Elsdon Smith in *Dictionary of American Family Names* states that there are four common origins for last names: "from the man's place of residence," "from the man's occupation," "from the father's name," and "from a descriptive nickname" (xvii-xix). Slaves, however, were not able to form their last names for the most part. For the majority of slaves, last names were transferred from master to slave as a mark of ownership and property. The historical references of masters' last names become the meaningless last names for slaves. This is the case of the early nineteenth century when Frederick Douglass was writing. During this time, slaves were emancipated and at liberty to form their own names. "The act of naming, which had originally been a brand of enslavement, becomes a means for arriving at the nexus of private and public intention" (Benston 162). These slaves no longer had to keep the

reference to their masters through their names; it was their time to form a new self through name. According to Debra Walker King, among others, the tradition of emphasizing names and naming in African-American literature originates in slave narratives (56). Slave narratives, being the prime source for retelling the struggles and victories of the African-American community, show the desires of emancipated slaves and their free families to create names.

The tradition of naming in African-American literature continues with Frederick Douglass, ex-slave and author. As a writer, he does not have the choice of naming his characters. His story and the people included are real. There are no fictitious names to boggle the reader in looking for insights of the characters. Nevertheless, names in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* strangely give insight to real people's actions. "Douglass moves through what is virtually an allegorical landscape, beset by creatures whose names, though presumably real, are also appropriately symbolic, as Douglass himself notes. Douglass thus sees *himself* as a representative figure negotiating a world of pitfalls, snares, temptations, and false hopes on the way to true, if elusive, goals" (Porte 219; Porte's emphasis). Thus, the reading of slave narratives offers conclusions concerning slaves' conditions, education, and family histories. Douglass's fascination with names is apparent in his *Narrative* due to his multiple name changes and determination to name those involved in his life. Douglass uses names in the *Narrative* to prove his enslavement, to punish those who kept him enslaved, and to honor those who showed sincerity. By looking at his masters' and overseers' names, you are provided a readable text of social and professional customs. Their formal names, ringing with family lineage, should be in stark contrast to the slaves'



names. However, this is not always the case. Slaves' names, both formal and nicknames, allow for a sociological reading of people searching for their own identity. Moreover, Douglass is able to focus on Christianity in his *Narrative* as he has witnessed it in his life, and because of his devotion to this topic, it is interesting to note the Christian symbols and metaphors found throughout the *Narrative*, which only add another dimension to the overall allegorical characteristics of the autobiography.

Names, whether formal or nicknames, carry significance among most nineteenth century Americans. Just as Douglass's heritage was marked on him through his surname, so was his birthplace, Tuckahoe, Maryland. Douglass's birthplace was named after former inhabitants: the Tockwhogh Indians. The phonic pronunciation allowed for John Smith to rename the creek where the Tockwhogh Indians resided as Tuckahoe Creek (Preston, *Talbot County* 45). Ironically, Tuckahoe is named after another race that Eastern Europeans enslaved.

The symbolism contained in formal names continues in nicknames. Douglass, throughout much of his enslaved life, was reduced to a mere nickname, and most of the time those nicknames were not terms of affection. He subtly addresses the concept of nicknames when he referred to Nat Turner's rebellion. When Douglass spoke of Turner, he used his given name, Nathaniel Turner (McFeely 37). Obviously, Douglass had an understood respect for Turner. By choosing not to refer to him by his nickname, Douglass demonstrates the importance of names.

Once Douglass began his career as an orator, he was not granted the respect of even his own name. More specifically, "he was frequently introduced to the audiences as a 'chattel,' a 'thing,' a 'piece of property,' and Mr. Collins [then the general agent of the

Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society] invariably called their attention to the fact that the speaker was a ‘graduate from an institution whose diploma was written upon his back’” (Washington 73). Even though Douglass escaped from the harsh conditions of slavery, he is still deduced to an object, something of ownership. His awareness of discriminations in names, I believe, is an undercurrent theme throughout the *Narrative*. Before Douglass mustered the courage and found the encouragement to record his life story, he took to the podium in attempt to convince Northern audiences of his enslaved past and of the intelligence of the black race, keeping in mind that he is still a slave and could at any time be sold down South. Therefore, “his reluctance to disclose specific information about his slavery past as a means of confirming his fugitive status encouraged the skeptics, many of whom claimed he had never been inside the peculiar institution” (Ripley 6). Although his goal was to promote the abolishment of slavery, his tales of vague places and people were not convincing skeptical northern audiences. Peter Ripley provides an explanation of these vague references of slave life: "Douglass, who had changed his name from Frederick Bailey, worried about revealing his slave name, or the name of his master, or the scene of his bondage for fear it would result in his arrest and re-enslavement. [However] the issue was persistent and important enough for Douglass to give [...] the essential facts to the officers of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society" (6-7). Again and again, the importance of naming emerges in Douglass's life. No longer can he hide behind the symbolic names in his life; he must write them into his *Narrative*.

In the 1845 edition of his autobiography, Douglass records his life from birth to his early years in New York; before his death in 1895, Douglass will write two more

autobiographies that include more details from his life. Douglass first wrote for the abolition cause; therefore, his focus was on the inhumane treatment of slaves and the proficiency of blacks outside the slave system. In order to convince skeptical audiences that his story was true, he had to list the names and places of his past. Douglass understood that the power of naming could force him back into slavery. Naming his masters could cause him his freedom and perhaps his life. “When Wendall Phillips had first read Douglass’ manuscript, he had advised the author to burn it before it went to the press, fearing that since the book unmistakably divulged his identity and that of his master, he would no longer be safe in the United States” (Douglass, *Letters* 60). This fear is reflected in Douglass’s autobiography<sup>1</sup> when he writes about a slave who was honest about his living and working conditions: “He was immediately 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” (21). Nevertheless, Douglass’s oratory mission was for the abolition of slavery; thus he provided names.

Even though Douglass signs his name at the end of the *Narrative*, he must have respectable white men pledge their names as a testimony to Douglass’s authenticity. In the preface to the *Narrative*, William Lloyd Garrison writes: “Mr. Douglass has frankly disclosed the place of his birth, the names of those who claimed ownership in his body and soul, and the names also of those who committed the crimes which he has alleged against them. His statement, therefore, may easily be disproved, if they are untrue” (8). Garrison points out the obvious danger in naming but also the necessity in having these names, which are proof of Douglass’s story, included in his autobiography. As easy as it

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, quotes from Douglass are from the *Narrative*.

was for Douglass to recall his former masters' and overseers' names, Douglass has difficulty in putting together the scattered puzzle of his family. Without the knowledge of his father's identity and with little contact with his mother and siblings, Douglass struggles throughout his early life for familial connections. "For the Afro-American, then, self-creation and reformation of a fragmented familial past are endlessly interwoven: naming is inevitably genealogical revisionism. All of Afro-American literature may be seen as one vast genealogical poem that attempts to restore continuity to the rupture or discontinuities imposed by the history of black presence in America" (Benston 152). Even on the first page of his *Narrative*, Douglass states "a want of information concerning my own was source of unhappiness to me even during childhood" (12). The lack of information concerning his family and his heritage plagues him throughout his life. The desire for filling in the gaps of his past can be seen in his meticulous need to name throughout his *Narrative*. Although he needed persuasion to begin to name people of his past, once started Douglass takes almost every opportunity to name. Even when Douglass's memory refuses to conjure the name of certain people, he always tries to give names when he can: "a woman slave, whose name I have forgotten" (Douglass 53). Naming is another method of giving his text an authoritative voice, but, more importantly, naming allows for Douglass to twist his nonfiction text into an allegorical text with symbolic names. Just as Douglass literally wrote between the lines of little Tommy's schoolbooks, he encourages his readers to read between the lines of his text.

## CHAPTER 2

### FIGURES OF AUTHORITY

As an escaped slave, Douglass reveals his masters' names, which symbolize authority and freedom. Captain Anthony, Captain Auld, and Colonel Lloyd have military titles attached to their names. The high rank of captain and colonel portrays the positions of commanders in a military establishment. However, these three men, these three masters, were in fact seamen. Unlike Auld's father, Lieutenant Colonel Hugh Auld, Sr., who gained his title while fighting the British, Anthony, Auld, and Lloyd are "courtesy colonels" (Preston<sup>2</sup> 62). Nevertheless, these titles represent authority over their crews on the ships. The title of colonel has a military reference as a commissioned officer, but colonel is also defined as "a honorific title especially in southern or midland US." This term has cultural implications of status and an understood power in the South. These military titles carry an undertone of power as masters of plantations due to the origins of the titles. If slaves revolted against these masters, they were not only revolting against men but against the institutions of power in the South.

Colonel Lloyd was the fifth to carry the title of colonel and the name of Edward Lloyd. "All Edward Lloyds became militia colonels as soon as they took the title to the family estates" (Preston 26). Colonel Lloyd was known also as "the Governor" around the plantation. This title of power originates from the three terms Lloyd spent as Governor of Maryland and his two terms in the Senate. Douglass does not explicitly

mention Lloyd's political career but refers to it several times. When talking about the Great House Farm, Douglass writes:

It was associated with greatness. A representative could not be prouder of his election to a seat in the American Congress, than a slave on one of the out-farms would be of his election to do errands at the Great House Farm [...] The competitors for this office sought as diligently to please their overseers, as the office-seekers in the political parties seek to please and deceive the people. The same traits of character might be seen in Colonel Lloyd's slaves, as are seen in the slaves of the political parties. (18)

His strategic diction allows for his political stance on elected officials to emerge and Lloyd's title of "Governor" does not escape mockery. Although Lloyd's name was well known, his presence was not so. Douglass describes an encounter between Colonel Lloyd and a "colored person" (21).

Colonel Lloyd owned so many [slaves] 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, boy, 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." (Douglass 21)

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, quotes from Dickson Preston are from *Young Frederick Douglass*.

Douglass lived on the farm with the multi-titled Edward Lloyd, and in his retelling of the misidentification, Douglass presents the irony of having several titles, which denote power, yet still being unrecognized.

Aaron Anthony gained his respectable title of captain on Colonel Lloyd's ships. "My first master's name was Anthony. I do not remember his first name. He was generally called Captain Anthony — a title which, I presume, he acquired by sailing a craft on the Chesapeake Bay" (Douglass 14). Douglass's assumption about the origin of Anthony's title is correct; Anthony was a seaman not a man in the military. By disclosing information about Anthony's title of power, Douglass does not allow for room to misread Anthony's title as a military one. Preston gives a more detailed explanation of Anthony's acquired title of captain:

Aaron Anthony learned seamanship well; by this time he was 27 he was ready for one of the most prestigious commands on the Chesapeake Bay. Not only did it carry a good salary and the title of captain (which Anthony would carry for the rest of his life), but it was aboard the *Elizabeth & Ann*, the most luxurious schooner on the bay. (25)

Anthony became a captain through skill and mastery of the waters, unlike Lloyd who gained his title through his family lineage. The fact that Anthony keeps his title after his life on the waters may be him implying position of power instead of the reality of a plantation owner. Though once in command of a ship, Anthony's title on the plantation is no more than a superficial declaration of power. He wishes to keep the same statue on the plantation as he had onboard the ships. As a captain on the sea, he had command of his ship and his crew; his crew must respect his orders. With his enforced slaves,

Anthony wishes to continue as the unquestioned authority figure, and for him, this means keeping the title of captain even on the plantation.

Captain Thomas Auld married Lucretia Anthony, Captain Anthony's daughter, and through this marriage he became captain of the *Sally Lloyd*. Lawrence Levine makes reference to Captain Auld's military title in that Auld was married into the title, thus does not know how to use the power (126), and Douglass hints at his inability to govern slaves when he states: "My master's son-in-law, Captain Auld, was *master* of the vessel. Captain Auld was not born a slaveholder. He had been a poor man, *master* only of a Bay craft. He came into possession of all his slaves by marriage; and of all men, adopted slaveholders are the worst" (Douglass 16, 39-40; my emphasis). Interestingly enough, Douglass refers to Auld as the master of the *Sally Lloyd* but later in the *Narrative* will retell of the resistance the slaves gave in calling Auld master on the plantation.

Authoritative titles became well used throughout the plantation whether or not the power was properly implicated and properly used. Auld's second wife, Rowena Hambleton, wished for the slaves to call Captain Auld Master Auld because she believed the title of captain was too personal. However, out of rebellion Douglass and the other slaves refused to submit to her instructions and "forgot" to call Captain Auld master. In the *Narrative*, Douglass states: "We seldom called him 'master;' we generally called him 'Captain Auld,' and were hardly disposed to title him at all. He wished to have us call him master, but lacked the firmness to command us to do so. His wife used to insist upon our calling him so, but to no purpose" (40). Douglass and the other slaves defied the naming process by referring to Auld without any title.



Just as slaves were given derogatory nicknames so were slaveholders. This is seen in the mockery tone Douglass uses when addressing Lloyd's political career and more specifically in the outright rejection of title of master among the slaves on Captain Auld's plantation. Moreover, Douglass is able to do so in the appendix of his *Narrative*. After Douglass makes his slave life an allegory of early American life through names, he turns his remaining pages of his *Narrative* into a clarification concerning religion. "We have men-stealers for ministers, women-whippers for missionaries, and cradle-plunderers for church members" (Douglass 75). In his appendix, Douglass points his finger at the established religion of the South that seeds the barbarous profession of slaveholding. Using names like "men-stealers," "women-whippers" and "cradle-plunderers" to describe the clergy of the Church is another method of Douglass rejecting symbols of power. More often than not, however, Douglass does not have to create titles and nicknames to degrade his slaveholders; sometimes surnames, however horrible they may seem, are just the right ingredient in Douglass's allegorical text.

Connotations of names hold power, as shown in the military titles of masters, but the names of Mr. Severe, Mr. Gore, and Mr. Freeland also imply authority over the slaves. Mr. Severe's name and its figurative meaning are a paradox; his name and the definition of his name are the same. Douglass writes:

Mr. Severe was rightly named: he was a cruel man. I have seen him whip a woman, causing the blood to run half an hour at the time; and this, too, in the midst of her crying children, pleading for their mother's release.

Added to his cruelty, he was a profane swearer. It was enough to chill the

blood and stiffen the hair of an ordinary man to hear him talk. His death was regarded by the slaves as the result of a merciful providence. (17-18)

The cultural inference of the name Severe is not for pleasant assumptions. The correct spelling is Sevier, though the pronunciation of the phonic spelling Douglass creates is the same (Preston 70). The powerful implications of Douglass perhaps knowingly changing the spelling the Sevier's name demonstrate Douglass's awareness of his readership concerning allegorical names. Although both spellings produce the same sound, the published spelling of Severe creates a harsher and more noticeable reference and coincidence to his severe actions as an overseer. Although the *Dictionary of American Family Names* does not list Severe's (Sevier) name in either of those spellings, it does state that the name Seaver, Sever, Severs is English meaning one with a grave and austere demeanor (Smith 192). Past generations bore the name for a particular reason; generation after generation carried this horrific name with pride as family members lived up to their family surname. This conclusion reinforces the terrible connotation that the name, Severe, may have upheld for years.

Parody in names continues in the figure of Austin Gore. His last name contains the markings of a cruel and gory man who wishes harm on the slaves. Douglass reinforces the symbolism of Gore's last name by writing: "[Gore] was artful, cruel, and obdurate. He was one of those who could torture the slightest look, word, or gesture, on the part of the slave, into impudence, and would treat it accordingly" (22-23). When describing the unlawful murder of Demby, one of Colonel Lloyd's slaves, Douglass states: "His savage barbarity was equalled only by the consummate coolness with which he committed the grossest and most savage deeds upon the slaves under his charge" (23).

Being that Douglass is aware of the consistencies in Gore's name and his actions, these two descriptions reinforce the allegorical tone found throughout the *Narrative*. As well as Gore's name portraying his harsh treatment on slaves, Douglass also assigns the title of "first-rate overseer" (22) to Gore: "Mr. Gore, a man possessing, in an eminent degree, all those traits of character [that are] indispensable to what is called a first-rate overseer" (Douglass 22). This title demonstrates Douglass's sarcastic use of naming. According to this description, a "first-rate overseer" must unlawfully murder and cause great harm to the slaves. Here Douglass is mocking the system of not only overseers, but also the desire for titles denoting honorific positions.

William Freeland was a slaveholder who did not bear the unattainable title of a military officer but possessed the goal of Douglass and many slaves – freedom. The paradox of Mr. Freeland's last name culminates the life of American slaves. To own your own free land, to live on your own free land, and to raise a family on your own free land are the simple desires of slaves. In reference to these desires, Douglass states: "I began to want to live *upon free land* as well as *with Freeland*; and I was no longer content, therefore, to live with him or any other slaveholder" (Douglass 56; Douglass's emphasis). The name Freeland sparks in Douglass the idea of escaping. Moreover, Douglass plays on the name of Freeland when he writes, "Mr. Freeland had many of the faults peculiar to slaveholders, such as being very passionate and fretful; but I must do him the justice to say, that he was exceedingly *free* from those degrading vices to which Mr. Covey was constantly addicted" (53; my emphasis). Robert Stepto states that playing upon names is an effective writing style (20) to remind readers of the constant desire of freedom, Douglass's goal throughout the *Narrative*. This name creates Douglass's

restlessness. However, as documented in the *Dictionary of American Family Names*, Freeland is an English name meaning a dweller, or worker, on land held without obligation of rent or service (Smith 71). This definition is quite opposite from Douglass's perception of the name meaning freedom — whereas the name means free from charge. The name does not signify Freeland as a master but strikes the ironic tone in literary readers because of the powerful implications it has over Douglass. Mr. Freeland's power differs from Captain Auld, Captain Anthony, and Colonel Lloyd in that his name does not have power over Douglass himself but has the power to initiate a plan of escape.

Covey's name, often mispronounced by modern readers, instills another dynamic in Douglass's naming phenomena, which occurs throughout the *Narrative*. "Before [Covey's] marriage he had worked as an overseer, which may have been when he got his reputation for handling rebellious slaves. Incidentally, his name was pronounced 'cove-ee,' as in *cove*, not 'covey,' as in a flock of quail" (Preston 118; Preston's emphasis). To cove means to brood, cover over, or sit over, as birds do concerning their eggs; ironically, Covey, known as a "nigger-breaker," does meticulously watch over his slaves but not in the gentle fashion of birds' guarding their young. Douglass, known for playing on the phonic pronunciation of names, continues to do so in his description of his fight with Covey: "his courage quailed" (50).

As well as toying with Covey's surname, Douglass in his *Narrative* tells of several nicknames given to Covey by slaves. "He seldom approached the spot where we were at work openly, if he could do it secretly. He always aimed at taking us by surprise. Such was his cunning, that we used to call him, among ourselves, 'the snake'" (Douglass 44). By placing Covey in the same category as animals, he is inviting an animalistic reading

of Covey. This animalistic quality continues in the nickname “nigger-breaker.” Because Covey harshly enforces slavery, "Frederick Douglass spoke of [Covey] as a 'nigger-breaker,' using the term as if it referred to an established profession, though he was simply describing this particular man's reputation" (McFeely 44). Like that of captain or colonel, Douglass treats the nickname, “nigger-breaker,” as a method of showing the power distinctions on plantations. Although the titles of captain and colonel carry the honorific implications of a military establishment, all these titles, including Covey's, convey the enforced lifestyle of slaves.

As well as Douglass refusing to submit to the fear of enslavement by naming, there are some names that he chooses to keep secret and others he cannot name because of lack of information. During his stay in Baltimore with Hugh Auld and family, Douglass learns of the importance of an education through Hugh Auld's insistence that his [Hugh's] wife stop teaching young Freddy to write. Once Douglass got "an inch," he took "an ell" (Douglass 29) and turned to the boys on the streets of Baltimore to continue his education. Although they gave him the key to learning how to read and write, he leaves only traces of their teachings:

I am strongly tempted to give the names of two or three of those little boys, as a testimonial of the gratitude and affection I bear them; but prudence forbids; — not that it would injure me, but it might embarrass them; for it is almost an unpardonable offence to teach slaves to read in this Christian country. It is enough to say of the dear little fellows, that they lived on Philpot Street, very near Durgin and Bailey's shipyard.

(Douglass 32)

Keeping in tune with the connotations of the mid-nineteenth century, embarrass means to encumber, hamper, or impede. Even though Douglass knows what he is up against by speaking and recording his narrative and accepts the consequences, he gives special consideration to those whom treated him well. He provides names out of compassion for the abolition cause, and perhaps with a bit of vengeance, but also omits them out of respect for the situations that may arise.

When Douglass refers to his father as his master, the reading audience takes it as meaning Anthony. At the time of his escape, however, Auld was his master. Also, there is reason to believe that Harriet Bailey could have attracted the attention of Lloyd's sons or guests on the plantation. At the time of his conception, Harriet was hired out to Mr. Stewart. However, when Douglass mentions his undetermined father it is during his time with Anthony. Although the question of who Douglass's father was will forever go unanswered, his father was likely a white man and there were rumors that he was Anthony's son. Though Douglass and subsequent historians never discovered the name of his father, he does give what information he knows:

My father was a white man. He was admitted to be such by all I ever heard speak of my parentage. The opinion was also whispered that my master was my father; but of the correctness of this opinion, I know nothing; the means of knowing was withheld from me. [My mother] left me without the slightest intimation of who my father was. The whisper that my master was my father, may or may not be true.

(Douglass 12,13)

Not being able to name his father causes Douglass to search his whole life for the missing link in his heritage, the name that would give closure to his questionable parentage.

"Douglass could not escape the conclusion that he was born of an act that may not have been rape but in any event had no legal sanction, gave him no name or inheritance, and stripped him of the genealogical property of manhood" (Sundquist 94). Even though Douglass cannot name his father because of technicalities, he does not purposefully omit the information, as with the Baltimore boys. "In slave narratives, [...] we find most explicitly the need to resituate or displace the literal master/father by a literal act of unnamings" (Benston 12). Douglass does not have the option of unnamings his father. Instead, by attempting to name him, the autobiographer demonstrates the inconclusive nature of slave life; this is in contrast to the ironic names of his masters and overseers.

It is believed that Captain Aaron Anthony, Douglass's presumed father, was buried near Harriet, Douglass's mother, with an unmarked grave (Preston 30). The ironies abound when considering the lasting impression Captain Anthony had on Douglass as his owner, and perhaps as his father, and the unnamings that does finally occur with Captain Anthony. However, his unnamings is not caused by a strategic literary move on Douglass's part; instead his unmarked grave is poetic justice for Douglass and the cause.

## CHAPTER 3

### SLAVES AND THEIR NAMES

What's in a name? To repeat, Douglass uses names in the *Narrative* to prove his enslavement, to punish those who kept him enslaved, and to honor those who showed sincerity. Names can also burden those who are left behind in the slave states. While on Freeland's farm, Douglass does not name the man in whose house they assembled for Sunday meetings. "I held my Sabbath school at the house of a free colored man, whose name I deem it imprudent to mention; for should it be known, it might embarrass him greatly, though the crime of holding the school was committed ten years ago" (Douglass 55). As with the naming of the Baltimore boys, Douglass states the reason he does not name his companion as "embarrassment." Notice that the two sections where names are not given have to do with people outside the slave system. They are not masters nor overseers nor slaves; the Baltimore boys and the "free colored man" are bordering a fine line on the edges of slavery. With one quick mention of their names, Douglass would have put them in danger; he would have "embarrassed" them.

In the retelling of Douglass's failed escape, he and the other slaves decide who the one was that betrayed them, but Douglass does not disclose the name. "We found the evidence against us to be testimony of one person; our master would not tell who it was; but we came to a unanimous decision among ourselves as to who their informant was" (Douglass 60). Perhaps Douglass does not name the accuser because he does not have



proof or perhaps Douglass does not wish to emphasize dishonesty among his fellow black slaves. "Neither Aunt Katy nor her black counterpart in cruelty, Uncle Issac Copper, makes an appearance in the *Narrative*. In 1845 Douglass preferred to emphasize the corrupting nature of power in the hands of white slave owners alone" (Andrews 220). Because the goal of the *Narrative* was to prove that blacks would be intelligible citizens if emancipated, Douglass has the authoritative control of when and whether or not to name.

When retelling of his escape, Douglass does not offer many details; of those omitted details are the names of people who aided in his escape to the north. Douglass realizes his omission may give rise to questions and he addresses his non-naming as thus:

But before narrating any of the peculiar circumstances, I deem it proper to make known my intention not to state all the facts connected with the transaction. My reasons for pursuing this course may be understood from the following: [...] were I to give a minute statement of all the facts, it is not only possible, but quite probably, that others would thereby be involved in the most embarrassing difficulties [...] I deeply regret the necessity that impels me to suppress any thing of importance connected with my experience in slavery. (Douglass 65)

Douglass again, for the third time in the *Narrative*, gives the explanation of embarrassment for not naming involved parties. However, this time he states that the difficulties, instead of the people, would be embarrassing.

Even though Douglass does not give the details of his escape, he does provide clues about the escape throughout the *Narrative*. On his first trip onboard a ship,

Douglass states: "Going to live at Baltimore laid the foundation, and opened the gateway, to all my subsequent prosperity" (28). Douglass, now knowing the importance his trip to Baltimore will make on his life, writes this sentence early in the *Narrative*; it is from Baltimore that he will finally escape from. During his stay on Covey's plantation, Douglass inserts a powerful soliloquy when looking at the Chesapeake and wishing to escape; he refers to his envy of ships as such: "you are loosed from your moorings, and are free; I am fast in my chains, and am a slave! You move merrily before the gentle gale, and I sadly before the bloody whip! You are freedom's swift-winged angels, that fly round the world; I am confined in bands of iron! O that I were free! Oh, that I were on one of your gallant decks, and under your protecting wing!" (Douglass 46). Although Douglass's first escape plan was to flee by water, he actually escaped by using the identification of a sailor on a train. Because of his time working in the shipyards in Baltimore, Douglass was able to pass as a sailor. He knew "sailor lingo." Incidentally, the ships Douglass was working on in Baltimore were slave ships, but he never mentioned this (McFeely 63). After telling a minimum of details of his escape, he alludes to his relationship with the sea: "I have been frequently asked how I felt when I found myself in a free State [...] I suppose I felt as one may imagine that unarmed mariner to feel when he is rescued by a friendly man-of-war from the pursuit of a pirate" (Douglass 69).

Although many slaves' nicknames differ from the slave owners' nicknames or titles by way of power, some slaves' nicknames held authority just as the military titles of Anthony, Auld, and Lloyd. The power struggle adults, both white and black, faced with each other is continually shown in the constant goal to achieve power through names.

The masters in Douglass's *Narrative* keep their titles as a symbol to their slaves dictating the power they once had over white men aboard their ships. However ridiculous the titles of these masters may seem, slaves also played the power game with fellow slaves. Titles were given to slaves to show age and authority over the younger slaves.

Just as whites fancied such honorary titles as 'captain,' 'colonel,' 'master,' and 'mistress,' so older blacks, especially those in skilled positions, insisted that the younger ones call them 'uncle' and 'aunt' as a token of respect. Later these titles were adopted by whites with faintly derisive connotations, but according to Douglass their origin was in strictly observed black African tradition. (Preston 60)

These titles were given out of respect. They also demonstrate the powerful implications of names that extend from the white slave-owners to the slaves; the slaves, too, had an implicated system of power through names.

The previously mentioned masters' and overseer's names are formal last names that have an authoritative power; however, the names of slaves are normally first names or nicknames, both having negative connotations, and slaves, in turn, are diminished to figures without names or identities. "In general, nicknames (whether self- or other-imposed) project a picture of the person to society. Thus, the name selected or received can have a profound impact and lifelong effect on a person" (Nuessel 30). This is seen in the case of Mary, a mistreated slave in Baltimore, "called 'pecked'" (Douglass 30). The habits of her mistress and the appearance of her ragged body reduce Mary to a nickname. Richard Skinner, owner of Douglass's grandfather, gave name to all of his horses as well as his slaves; "Dragon, Lyon, Squirrel, Maloony, Fenia, Bony, and Sorrel"

(Preston 5) were the names of his horses. This act of naming clearly demonstrates the position and importance of rank slaves had in relation to animals. “By far the larger part of the slaves knows as little of their ages as horses know of theirs” (Douglass 12). This continuous comparison of slaves to animals shows the reduction of humanity that occurred on plantations.

Ned Roberts, owned by Colonel Lloyd, has a proper name containing both a first and a last name. However, his identity is stripped from him as he is reduced to a piece of property. “The young man’s name was Ned Roberts, generally called Lloyd’s Ned” (Douglass 15). Slaveholders had no concern for their slaves as humans as shown in the unjust working and living conditions, but to take away the one thing a slave could own, his or her name, diminishes a person to a mere object. Lloyd’s Ned sounds like a reference to a horse or pet dog and to be called that is inhumane. This name shows not only Colonel Lloyd’s ownership of the slave but also of the classification of slaves in the chain of life.

Douglass also experienced names of ownership through various nicknames. Around Captain Anthony’s plantation, Douglass was known as “Cap’n Ant’ney Fed” (Preston 85). Like Ned Roberts, Douglass is reduced to a piece of property through this nickname. Not only does Anthony own Douglass but there also are rumors that Douglass’s father was Anthony; this information allows for a slightly ironic reading of the nickname in that Douglass is one of Anthony’s slaves and perhaps one of his sons as well. In Baltimore, “little Thomas was told, there was his Freddy” (Douglass 27-28). Douglass is brought to Baltimore to be a playmate to Tommy Auld; he would be Tommy’s. It is because of slavery and ownership that this nickname cannot bear much

weight in affection. Although the level of ownership varies from that with Anthony, “his Freddy” still places Douglass in the category of another piece of property.

Lloyd’s Ned and Douglass must adhere to their nicknames of ownership while Douglass must also endure the name calling due to his skin color. Douglass, a mulatto, is the son of a white slaveholder and a black slave. After a failed escape, Douglass undergoes scrutiny from white slaveholders. “*“You devil! You yellow devil! it was you that put it into the head of Henry and John to run away. But for you, you long-legged mulatto devil! Henry nor John would never thought such a thing”*” (Douglass 60; Douglass's emphasis). Not only is Douglass’s name left out of the reprimand; he is humiliated into a wicked being because of the color of his skin. This is the first occasion that Douglass’s questionable birth surfaces through another person and it is juxtaposed with the word “devil.”

Douglass’s father’s identity remains a mystery and a cause for nicknames, and it does not stop with Douglass’s questionable parentage. Douglass’s son, Lewis, writes to his father in 1865: “Your cousin, Tom Bailey [...] told me that your grandmother [, Betsey Bailey,] was of Indian descent” (Preston 9). His light, yellow skin may not be only because of his parentage; it also may be due to his grandmother’s Native American heritage. Even Captain Anthony called Douglass “little Indian boy” (Preston 9).

Although later confirmed that Douglass did contain Native American blood, Anthony, the suspected father of Douglass, may have been concealing the mysterious birth of Douglass through the nickname. Whether due to his parents’ or grandmother’s heritage, Douglass’s past becomes a target for nicknames.

However, not all of Douglass's nicknames were derogatory. Douglass's relationship with his mother was brief due to slavery and her early death, but her love for him was shown in a special nickname, "Valentine" (Preston 63). Douglass never learned that his birth date was in February, but his mother, who was an educated slave and closely connected to the master, may have known the month of his birth that she declared to him in her nickname. It is due to this nickname that family members celebrate his birthday on February 14th, Valentine's Day (Preston 63).

However, not all slaves have nicknames, but as in Ned's, Douglass's, and Sandy Jenkin's cases, slaves' names represent an oppressed race of people. Although Sandy is a popular name in the twenty-first century, the natural undertones of it are apparent. Sandy's first name is a reminder of the conditions of the slaves' living quarters. Sandy's name's natural origin may be mere speculation, but the coincidence that his name is in accordance with his natural actions is noteworthy. After Douglass is severely beaten by Mr. Covey, his hired master, Sandy offers him a totemic remedy as a method of protection. "Before I went, I must go with him into another part of the woods, where there was a certain *root*, which, if I would take some of it with me, carrying it *always on my right side*, would render it impossible for Mr. Covey, or any white man, to whip me" (Douglass 49; Douglass's emphasis). Sandy's relationship with nature as a superstition confers the appropriateness of his name. Sandy does not offer Douglass a chant or a prayer; instead it is a root, grown in the sandy soil of the earth, that will cure his dilemma.

These slaves' names and nicknames represent the simplistic and harsh references to blacks. They are bound to the white man with no liberties, not even their own name.

This is the case for most slaves, but not for Douglass's grandparents, Isaac and Betsey Bailey. "Nothing of Africa was left in the given names [in Douglass's family] repeated in affirmation of a sense of family continuity generation after generation, but 'Bailey' may have had an African source" (McFeely 5). In the nineteenth century, on Sapelo Island, Georgia (where Baileys still reside), there was a man named Belali Mohomet, who had twelve sons. "'Belali' slides easily into the English 'Bailey,' a common African American surname along the Atlantic coast. The records of Talbot County list no white Baileys from which the slave Baileys might have taken their name, and an African origin, on the order of 'Belali,' is conceivable" (McFeely 5). Though, the first record of Douglass's lineage is in 1797 when Anthony lists "Isac Baley, free negrow" in his records (Preston 18). Because his wife, Betsey Bailey, was a slave so were her children, which included two females, both named Bailey, Harriet, Jennie, and Hester<sup>3</sup>. The two daughters named Bailey can be assumed to have died early in life, thus given no first name. The linear succession of the family name Bailey is remarkable in that at least three generations kept the last name of Bailey; it was not until Douglass changed his name after freedom that the tradition ended. This is noteworthy because slaves normally took the last name of their masters and did not keep their heritage alive through their last names.

Douglass emerges from the tradition of naming as shown in his grandparents' keeping of the last name Bailey. During most of Douglass's life, his name is a formal and respectable one. Douglass was born as Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey to Harriet Bailey and an unnamed white father. The grandness of Douglass's name is astounding as a slave's name. The only record of the origin of Douglass's name is the

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<sup>3</sup> Douglass refers to his aunt as Hester, but there is conflicting documentation that her name was Esther. I will use the name Hester, as did Douglass.

name Augustus, which is the name of his deceased uncle (Preston 6). The long, elaborate name depicts another life for Douglass than for Sandy Jenkins, for example. Douglass is not degraded by the mere sound of his name. His name resembles that of a white man's – long, patriot, and educated. His name indicates the possibility of some level of education on his parents' part; it is too large and too grand to be a common slave name without any history behind the giving of this name. "The very pretentiousness of the name he bore, Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey, was a possible indication of something unusual and promising in his appearance and demeanor" (Washington 16). It is believed that Douglass's mother was the only slave in Tuckahoe who could read. It can be assumed that his mother had some experience with the format of white people's name because Douglass's name contains middle names. His name is not short or simple like most slaves' names; instead it easily could belong to a white person.

Douglass's knowing his full name and his relatives' names on his mother's side is remarkable due to the constraints on the amounts of information told to slave children. "I have no accurate knowledge of my age, never having seen any authentic record containing it" (Douglass 12) and Douglass is restricted from knowing his father's identity as well. Yet his name, mother's name, and maternal grandparents' names are given to him as recorded in the *Narrative*. Because Douglass's maternal grandmother raised him, there is good reason to believe she told Douglass about his family. Betsey would have information concerning his family and their names considering that she was in the middle of his known genealogy. However, her knowledge of his family and her educating Douglass about his family do not explain why she did not tell Douglass his birth date. It may be because she did not know, or it may be something that was too taboo; birthdays



that celebrate years in slavery hardly seem worth celebrating. This may be the reason Douglass's and so many slaves' have questionable ages. There were records of Douglass's birth; however, he never saw them. An ancestor<sup>4</sup> of Anthony attempted to send these records to Douglass, but they arrived after his death (Preston 9). And what's in a name that's not in a birthday?

What's in a name? This question follows Douglass throughout his *Narrative* as his name changes several times in accordance with the location. "In the narratives of Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown, for example, the moment when freedom is finally felt to be irrevocably coincides precisely with a ceremonious exchange of slave surname for an agnomen designating a literally liberated 'self'" (Benston 152). Douglass gives an explanation of his name changes as follows.

The name given to me by my mother was, "Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey." I, however, had dispensed with the two middle names long before I left Maryland so that I was generally known by the name "Frederick Bailey." I started from Baltimore bearing the name of "Stanley." When I got to New York I again changed my name to "Frederick Johnson," and thought that would be the last change. But when I got to New Bedford, I found it necessary again to change my name. The reason of this necessity was, that there were so many Johnsons in Bedford, it was already quite difficult to distinguish between them. (71-72)

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<sup>4</sup> Douglass met Dr. Sears, Thomas Auld's grandson, and wanted to get in contact with Thomas Auld. Dr. Sears was the last living relative of his former master of which he was in contact (Walker 211).

Douglass clarifies any misconception of the reasons for his name. These reasons are not mystical or romantic; they are simply the reasons of a black man attempting to form an identity in an already formulated society of names.

He gives no exact explanation of choosing the names “Stanley” or “Johnson” but does so in the final renaming. After deciding the last name Johnson was overused, he changes his name to what will become one associated with abolitionists. He turns to a friend to give him the name Douglass. "I gave Mr. Johnson the privilege of choosing me a name, but told him he must not take from me the name of 'Frederick.' I must hold on to that, to preserve a sense of my identity. Mr. Johnson<sup>5</sup> had just been reading the 'Lady of the Lake,' and at once suggested at my name be 'Douglass'" (Douglass 72). “The ‘great character’ Douglass, the book’s hero, so impressed Johnson that he pressed Frederick to take it as a surname symbolic of his nascent identity” (Martin 15). Booker T. Washington in his biography on Douglass argues that Johnson believed that "Douglass was a name of poetic and historical significance; [Johnson] was sure it be further glorified by its new owner" (64). Douglass preserves his slave identity through his first name. Douglass wishes to start fresh with a new name in his newly freed life but refuses to leave behind all traces of his past and his heritage.

This final naming of Douglass contains several interesting ironies. Douglass, who will presently find his passion in anti-slavery oratory, reduces himself to a mere character out of a book; books that were kept away from slaves because of the fear of intelligence were naming a former slave. However, it was during this time that Douglass, “already well acquainted with the Bible and The Columbian Orator, a book of speeches by orators such as Thomas Sheridan, William Pitt, and Charles Fox, added Sir Walter Scott, John

Greenleaf Whittier, and Combe's 'Constitution of Man' to the scope of his reading" (Dudley 14). It is not known how hard Johnson had to press Douglass to take on the new name because of the extent of his proficiency in literature.

Frederick, without looking to see what Douglas was up to in the poem, or how the name was spelled, like its sound. With astonishing casualness, he gave himself the name, spelled as prominent black families in Baltimore and Philadelphia spelled it, that became one of the nineteenth century's most famous. Even when it would have been safe to do so, he did not reclaim Betsy's or old Baly's name. (McFeely 78)

Andrews and McFeely, editors of Douglass's *Narrative*, state that Douglass was not only named after a character in a book; it was after "the wrongfully exiled Lord James of Douglas, a Scottish chieftain revered for his bravery and virtue" (72). This gesture of naming Douglass may be perhaps the result of good book still on Mr. Johnson's mind, or did Mr. Johnson realize the connotations this name would have for Douglass? Did Douglass realize the symbolism in his newly given name alongside his newly obtained freedom?

Although it will never be certain the extent this historical name had on Douglass, it is certain that his pledge to the anti-slavery revolt stands for his passion for slaves' freedom and his commitment to his new identity. As the final remark to his *Narrative*, Douglass signs his name as a statement of devotion to abolitionism. Years earlier, John Hancock and many others signed the Declaration of Independence and understood the danger of doing so. The recognition of such persons' committing blasphemy against England could have been punished by death, yet Hancock signed his name plainly to

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<sup>5</sup> Johnson is the only black member of Taber's library society (McFeely 76).

show his commitment to the colonies and the future of the United States. Just as Hancock and others placed their lives in danger, so did Douglass in the signing and authorship of the *Narrative*. He states: “and solemnly pledging my self anew to the sacred cause, - I subscribe myself, Frederick Douglass” (80). This declaration of identity gave his prior masters knowledge of his whereabouts; his signing of his name placed an escaped slave in an open field vulnerable for removal back into slavery. “Douglass subscribing himself evokes patriots who declared freedom” (Dudley 20), which is similar to Hancock’s signature evoking the colonist. Despite the fact that Douglass “subscribes himself” to his *Narrative*, he must have distinguished white abolitionists defend his name and his integrity to the reading public. William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips begin the *Narrative* with their testimony that Douglass is telling the truth and can be trusted. What’s in a name that the public cannot trust an autobiography of a young man who subscribes himself to it? Douglass continually fights to gain power over white people, who will later become his reading audience. The power struggle Douglass has during his life remains a reminder of the era he lived in and the conditions he fought to change.

## CHAPTER 4

### IN THE NAME OF RELIGION

Sophia Auld read the Bible to Douglass during his first stay in Baltimore, and the religious teachings did not end there. Once he became a plantation hand, Douglass formed his own Sabbath schools in order to teach other slaves how to read. For much of his enslavement, men, who claimed to have found religion, controlled his life and did so in the name of God. Religion and its role in slavery, therefore, become a character in Douglass's symbolic text. His advantage is that his name derives from the textual history of English prose that is a secular romance rather than the Bible, hence helping him to critique the biblical text in which his own name is in no way embedded. Subconsciously, the secular tradition of his name enables him to critique the biblical text of Christianity and the democratic text of the American nation.

In accordance with his authoritative position on naming, Douglass inserts religion as another method of writing allegorical nonfiction, by which I mean a form that mirrors symbolism often found in fiction. Though naming is most often associated with African-American works, its significance dates back to the time of Abraham and Sarah, as told in *Genesis*, 17: "'No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.' [...] And God said to Abraham, 'As for Sar'ai your wife, you shall not call her name Sar'ai, but Sarah shall be her name.'" God ordains the changing of their names, hence a new era taking place in their lives.

New names suggest a new beginning — a familiar justification for change of name.

Douglass revises his name during and after his escape in order to protect himself and also to create a new identity for his life of freedom.

However merciful Douglass's inclusion of name changing in relation to Christianity may appear, the overwhelming majority of the *Narrative* makes for a scolding indictment of its hypocrisy. After Auld attends a Methodist camp meeting, Douglass has hope for a kinder owner. He believes in the forgiveness and mercy that comes from the teachings of the Bible. After Auld's conversion, Douglass writes, "If it had any effect on his character, it made him more cruel and hateful in all his ways; for I believe him to have been a much worse man after his conversion than before. Prior to his conversion, he relied upon his own depravity to shield and sustain him in his savage barbarity; but after his conversion, he found religious sanction and support for his slaveholding cruelty" (40). This is just the first of Douglass's encounters with men who enforce horrible penalties and conditions among slaves in the name of religion. He even goes so far to state, "the religion in the south is a mere covering for the most horrid crimes. [...] For of all the slaveholders with whom I have ever met, religious slaveholders are the worst. I have ever found them the meanest and basest, the most cruel and cowardly, of all others. It was my unhappy lot not only to belong to a religious slaveholder, but to live in a community of such religionist" (53). Douglass, writing for the emancipation of his fellow slaves, is not subtle about the conditions in the South; he wishes for truly pious Christians to hear how the words of God have been turned into blasphemy. He realizes he is writing to a certain audience and wants their hearts and ears to open up to the crimes of slavery committed by "religious" men.

However, to compensate for his up-front beliefs about Christianity in the South, Douglass adds an appendix as an apologetic gesture. He does not ask for forgiveness for the issues he raised; instead he clarifies his definition of religion in the South. Douglass writes:

I have, in several instances, spoken in such a tone and manner, respecting religion as may possibly lead those unacquainted with my religious views to suppose me an opponent of all religion. [...] What I have said respecting and against religion, I mean strictly to apply to the *slaveholding religion* of this land, and with no possible reference to Christianity proper; for, between Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference. (75; Douglass's emphasis)

It is here that Douglass clarifies his previous seemingly judgmental and anti-religious position. Just as he took the authoritative control and added sympathy when needed to arouse certain readers, he adds this clarification to mend any offences he may have caused certain readers.

As well as Douglass's *Narrative* ending with on a religious note, it begins with a preface by William Lloyd Garrison who alludes to religion in the life of Douglass. Garrison describes Douglass as "created but a little lower than the angels" (Douglass 4). The editors note that in Psalms 8.5 God created people "a little lower than the angels" and that Paul tells the Hebrews in Hebrews 2.7 that Christ was made "a little lower than the angels" (Douglass 4). It is because of this preface, which foreshadows Douglass's positive involvement with the church, that his readers should realize his misgivings about religion are focused on one group of blasphemous people, not on religion as a whole.

While the beginning and the ending of the *Narrative* reflect Douglass's views concerning religion, his text contains metaphors of a religious allegory. As with Moses in the Old Testament, Douglass enacts his textual role, a biblical one of being chosen to be a leader who wishes to lead his people to freedom. Similarly both characters leave their mark through writings, whether with the Ten Commandments or personal narratives. Just as Moses questioned his leadership because of his speaking skills, for he stuttered, Douglass apologized for "his ignorance, and remind[ed] the audience that slavery was a poor school for the human intellect and heart" (5). And although Douglass does not give the memorable line of "Let my people go" as recorded in *Exodus*, he does end his *Narrative* with the hope that his autobiography will be a means to an end. Douglass writes: "Sincerely and earnestly hoping that this little book may do something toward throwing light on the American slave system, and hastening the glad day of deliverance to the millions of my brethren in bonds" (80). Just like Moses leading his people to the Promised Land, land that was promised to their forefather Abraham, Douglass demonstrates the leadership qualities and religious determination comparable to Moses. Although Harriet Tubman will later bear the title of Black Moses, Douglass, through his speeches and writings, demonstrates that he, too, is comparable to Moses<sup>6</sup>.

Although the act of comparing oneself to Moses seems pompous, Douglass must attribute his blessing of providence to something or someone, and he attributes it to God. Douglass understands his great luck and the divine intervention in relocating to Baltimore:

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<sup>6</sup> In *My Bondage My Freedom*, Douglass compares Garrison to Moses by saying, "You are the man, the Moses, raised by God, to deliver his modern Israel from bondage, was the spontaneous feel of my heart" (363).



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; and in the darkest hours of my career in slavery, this living word of faith and spirit of hope departed not from me, but remained like ministering angels to cheer me through the gloom. This good spirit was from God, and to him I offer thanksgiving and praise. (28)

Because this scene occurs early in his life, he once again allows his readers to get a glimpse of and to understand the spiritual side of him. Although this was written on the hindsight, it can be assumed that Douglass understood the graciousness of a greater being. He does not hide his religious affiliates in his *Narrative*, although at times his readers must dig through the religious critiques in order to read the poetic lines of mercy.

Because of the obvious connections and stances on religion throughout the *Narrative*, it is also important to note the format of the text is comparable to the history of Christianity. Douglass begins his life as a slave on Lloyd's plantation where fruit and wealth abound, much like the Garden of Eden. The *Narrative* continues with Christian references to Christmas and Easter, which occur during his stay with Covey and Freeland. "The unity of black autobiography in the antebellum era is most apparent in the pervasive use of journey or quest motifs that symbolize multiple layers of spiritual evolution" (Andrews 7). By analyzing the structure of the *Narrative*, it can only add another dimension to his complex metaphorical text. Not only are names to be read "between the lines" so is the format of the text.

In retrospect, Douglass began his enslaved life on one of Colonel Lloyd's plantations, a plantation Douglass associates with the Garden of Eden. The temptation of

the luscious fields and orchards provides a harsh climate to the starving slaves. As with the first sin of Eve eating the forbidden fruit, slaves were tempted to eat Lloyd's fruit.

Douglass described the situation as thus:

Colonel Lloyd kept a large and finely cultivated garden. [...] This garden was probably the greatest attraction of the place. [...] Its excellent fruit was quite a temptation to the hungry swarms of boys, as well as the older slaves, belonging to the colonel, few of whom had the virtue or the vice to resist it. Scarcely a day passed, during the summer, but that some slave had to take the lash for stealing fruit. (20)

As a whole, Lloyd's garden seemed to be the manmade Eden by which the masters mistook themselves for God. Although eating Lloyd's fruit does not cause the fall of humankind, it does inflict fear onto the slaves on the plantation.

The Christian allegory continues with the birth of the idea of escaping, which occurred during Douglass's stay with Covey. Douglass decides to escape to the North, using the North Star as his guide. As with the Wise Men using the star in the east to guide them to the Messiah, Douglass decides to use the northern star to lead him to freedom. This plan of escape is in combination with Douglass's final days with Covey; his service to Covey ended on Christmas day. With the Christmas story as a symbolic backdrop, Douglass shows his deliverance from Covey's and to Freeland's.

Douglass's religious allegory ends during the Easter season of 1835 when the betrayal of a fellow slave, who confesses the plan of escape, endangers the others' lives. As previously discussed, Freeland's name adds fuel to the flames of Douglass's impatience of escaping to freedom. Douglass and four other male slaves, along with

Sandy Jenkin's encouragement, agree on an escape plan. "The plan we finally concluded upon was, to get a large canoe belonging to Mr. Hamilton, and upon the Saturday night previous to Easter holidays, paddle directly up the Chesapeake Bay" (Douglass 57). Douglass explains the reasoning behind their plan as thus: "Our reason for taking the water route was, that we were less liable to be suspected as runaways; we hoped to be regarded as fishermen" (58). Like the professions of many of Jesus's disciples, Douglass and his friends wished to disguise themselves as fisher of men. The comparison to Jesus's ministry continues in the betrayal scene. "Early in the morning, we went as usual, to the field [...] I was overwhelmed with an indescribable feeling, in the fulness of which I turned to Sandy, who was near by, and said, 'We are betrayed!' 'Well,' said he, 'that thought has this moment struck me.' We said no more. I was never more certain of any thing'" (Douglass 59). Just as one man betrayed Jesus to Pilate, one man betrayed Douglass and the other slaves to the slaveholders<sup>7</sup>. "We found evidence against us to be the testimony of one person" (Douglass 60). Although Douglass is not crucified, instead Auld sends him back to Baltimore, the betrayal scene, combined with Douglass's awareness of biblical stories, interestingly mirrors that of Passover.

Because Douglass learned Christian tales and taught slaves to read under the guise of religion, his formatting intentions cannot be conclusive but seem to allow for a religious reading of not only certain scenes but also the format of the text. As previously shown, names have proven to be symbolic of oneself; consequently, with the secular name of Frederick Douglass in combination with the Americanized name of Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey, he is able to interpret the Bible into his own tale of

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<sup>7</sup> Douglass will later clarify the betrayal scene as one comparing to Judas to Sandy in *My Bondage My Freedom*.

survival. Douglass, therefore, is not only appealing to abolitionist readers but also to religious men and women. He is not offering a tale of vague places and people; instead he records names and places in accordance to his religious undertones and themes.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Frederick Douglass's name is recognized as an abolitionist pioneer and as a brilliant author; his name is recognized more often than his picture. Names have the power of controlling others and forming identities, and even in an autobiographical narrative, names share an allegorical aspect most commonly seen in fiction. Nineteenth century Americans wished for individualism and for a sense of heritage, causing their names to represent their professions with a simple word or a compound noun, now known as last names. Culture defined who they were and what their names said about them. There are no names in Douglass's *Narrative* that sound or are spelled foreign; these new Americans were attempting to form their own identity as Americans, just as Douglass and so many other slaves were striving to distant themselves away from the slaveholders through names. They wish to be individuals with formal names representing a new freedom. Just as Douglass was referred to as "Fred" on the shipyard and Ned Roberts as "Lloyd's Ned," the insult of having a nickname reduces the authority of the person; thus their identity is diminished to a lesser quality. Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* symbolizes the founding of a new and equal nation through the creation and formation of names. "Douglass was acutely sensitive to the linguistic system of slave society, of the ways in which language was used – and withheld – by one human being to enslave another" (Kibbey 163), and his reenactment of his slave life with the inclusion of

symbolic and allegorical names and nicknames demonstrate his knowledge of the double-sided edge of naming that played such a huge role in his life. Although Douglass lived through the emancipation of his fellow slaves, he will never know the complete impact his story had and will continue to have on Americans and that his name holds the power of justice that he so deserves. However liberal Douglass seems in his beliefs and his conquers over unjust systems of society, he once said, "I am an Eastern Shoreman, with all that name implies" (Preston 3). What's in a name? For Douglass, names are a symbol of personal expression however allegorical they may sound.

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