Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Frederick Douglass' *Narrative in the Life of Frederick Douglass:* A Comparison of Religious Journeys

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Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass were two fugitive slaves who write narratives during the abolitionist movement. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* was published in 1845 and Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* was published in 1861. These stories are both written with purpose, and both of them use religion as part of their strategy. At first glance, these two former slaves seem to have a similar view of religion, mainly, they both expose and condemn the hypocrisy of Christian slave owners. And yet, they diverge in their personal attitudes toward religion and God. Douglass claims to only condemn slave-holding Christianity, yet the progression of his faith throughout his narrative doesn't commend Christianity either. Following Douglass through his life as a child with blind faith to his freedom while studying closely his retrospective voice reveals that his story is rather one of finding atheism. Jacobs, on the other hand, maintains a strong relationship with God throughout — or does she? In between her praises of God and unwavering belief, lies some anger at God for the situation she's in, and she's unable to keep that fully hidden from her readers. However, Jacobs is different than Douglass because, despite the way she questions God's doings, she never gets to the point of disbelief. Although their religious outcomes are different, they are once again parallel in their mission: to gain followers for the abolitionist movement through the use of religion, presenting their deviances from it as a result of slavery.

What causes these differences in religious outcomes? Looking at the impact of gender and gender roles reveals why slave women may have a stronger hold on religion and belief in God than slave men. Yet there may be another reason why Jacobs had an advantage in staying religious, and that was her close relationship with her pious grandmother. Comparing Douglass' narrative to *Night* by Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel shows how Douglass' lack of a religious role model — and lack of family in general — plays a major role in his eventual atheistic beliefs;

Wiesel *is* able to hold onto his beliefs as he goes through Auschwitz with his father, despite the major hardships he endures. And yet, Benjamin, who, like Jacobs, had a close relationship with Grandmother, did not remain religious. Perhaps the serious way Jacobs took her responsibilitias a mother, connected with the values of religion her grandmother imparted, enabled her to hold on to what was important to her, including religion and God. Gender, upbringing and familial responsiblities all contribute to strong values, and those two things are what lead to Jacobs' continued devoutedness despite the difficulties of slavery.

Both Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass point out the hypocrisy of Christian slave owners who seemed to believe that morality and religious prohibitions did not extend to how they should treat their slaves. Jacobs is heartbroken to learn that her kind mistress doesn't leave her free, saying "My mistress had taught me the precepts of God's Word: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.' But I was her slave, and I suppose she did not recognize me as her neighbor" (Jacobs 11). Jacobs learned about God from her mistress, but she learns when her mistress dies that the ways of God do not apply to a slaveholder. Not only did Southern slaveholders think that slavery was okay, but these slave owners considered themselves extremely pious and good people. Jacobs recounts horrific stories of abusive slave owners who weren't held accountable for the murders of slaves they committed, ending her story with the fact that "He also boasted the name and standing of a Christian, though Satan never had a truer follower" (Jacobs 45). Another example given is Mrs. Flint's response to Benny getting hurt, when she says "'I'm glad of it…I wish he had killed him. It would be good news to send to his mother. Her day will come. The dogs will grab her yet.' With these **Christian** words she and her husband departed, and, to my great

satisfaction, returned no more" (Jacobs 105, my emphasis). Here Jacobs sarcastically uses the word "Christian" to show how Mrs. Flint calls herself a Christian but acts sinful.

Douglass, too, describes how one of his masters was so good at deception that he "sometimes deceived himself into the solemn belief, that he was a sincere worshipper of the most high God; and this, too, at a time when he may be said to have been guilty of compelling his woman slave to commit the sin of adultery" (Douglass 47). Douglass also describes slave owners ironically as "pious" and "Christian" to further highlight the hypocrisy. "A great many times have we poor creatures been nearly perishing with hunger, when food in abundance lay mouldering in the safe and smoke-house, and our **pious** mistress was aware of the fact; and yet that mistress and her husband would kneel every morning, and pray that God would bless them in basket and store!" (Douglass 41, my emphasis); in this passage, Douglass uses the word "pious" sarcastically to show that his mistress was not so. Douglass and Jacobs were surrounded by religious people who gave religion a bad name.

Not only were the slave owners not treating the slaves according to Christian values, but they often even used religion as a justification for treating slaves badly. Douglass goes as far as to say that those "of all slaveholders with whom I have ever met, religious slaveholders are the worst" (Douglass 56). In the name of religion, slave owners owned, starved, and beat slaves. Douglass describes a lame woman who was beaten by her master, and "in justification of the bloody deed, he would quote this passage of Scripture—"He that knoweth his master's will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes" (Douglass 43). Jacobs also brings in another sin of the slave owners: rape. "They seem to satisfy their consciences with the doctrine that God created the Africans to be slaves. What a libel upon the heavenly Father, who 'made of one blood all nations of men!' And then who are Africans? Who can measure the amount of Anglo-Saxon

blood coursing in the veins of American slaves?" (Jacobs 41). Female slaves are often subject to rape, yet this ironically dilutes the African genes in their illegitimate children. Religion was used to say that Black people are cursed, and yet due to rape there is so much white in these black people. Jacobs herself has two mulatto parents.

It's not that slaves hate religion. In fact, Jacobs in particular points to slaves who are extremely devout despite the abuse received from their slavemasters. Jacobs refers to slaves as "God-breathing machines" (Jacobs 12). She uses Fred, a black man, as an example of someone who wants to serve God but is inhibited by his inability to read the Bible. She teaches him to read even though it's against the law to teach another slave to read. When she notices that Fred read The New Testament exceptionally well that day, he tells her "'You nebber gibs me a lesson dat I don't pray to God to help me to understan' what I spells and what I reads. And he does help me, chile. Bress his holy name!' (Jacobs 65). Fred is the quintessence of suppressed piety in Jacobs The most obvious religious figure that Jacobs looks up to is her grandmother, who is constantly and consistently telling Linda and her brother to pray and think of God. Jacobs clearly thinks very highly of her grandmother, for reasons other than her religious devotion; yet her admiration for her grandmother and her inclusion of her grandmother's devotion to God in her narrative show that this was an aspect of her grandmother that Jacobs highly respected.

And what about Frederick Douglass? Douglass speaks often about how slave owners are religious people and how they use religion in the wrong way; however, Douglass is adamant to differentiate between slaveholding Christianity and real, pure Christianity. He ends his Narrative with an appendix in which he clarifies that although he often spoke negatively about Christianity, the Christianity he is referring to is specifically that of a slaveholding one. Douglass recognizes that portraying Christians in the way he does may "possibly lead those unacquainted with my

religious views to suppose me an opponent of all religion," and so he feels it's necessary to differentiate between the "pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ" and "the corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land" (Douglass 79). By doing so, he differentiates between the good Christians of the North and the cruel Christians of the South. Douglass brilliantly separates yet unequivocally intertwines the Christians of the North and South in a way that causes the Northern Christians to be offended that their own religion was distorted and used as a means to carry out immoral actions against slaves. Douglass hopes to impart that Christianity, a religion he perceives as "good, pure, and holy," is being corrupted by slave owners to become something evil (Douglass 79).

But does Douglass truly believe that Christianity is "good, pure, and holy?" Douglass' story from slavery to freedom can also be seen as a religious journey — that is, a journey *away* from religion. Douglass first talks about his individual religious life when he mentions the songs he and the other slaves would sing on the way to the Great House Farm. Although Douglass recounts that he "did not, when a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs," he writes that he understands now that these songs were "a prayer to God for deliverance from chains." As a slave, Douglass was religious and took part in praying because that's what everyone else was doing.

As a child, Douglass exhibits a proactive belief in God rather than only doing as everyone around him does. When he gets moved to a new master that will end up changing his life for the good, Douglass says "this good spirit was from God, and to him I offer thanksgiving and praise" (Douglass 30). In the "earliest sentiments of [his] soul," Douglass clearly attributes to God the good in his early years that led him to freedom (Douglass 29). The new master he was taken to enabled him to learn on his own to read and write, a skill Douglass believes is what freed his

mind and led to his freedom from slavery. He admits that at a young age, he played the role of a devoted Christian and thought that God was good, even though he experienced tremendous suffering as a slave.

But while his mentioning of divine providence in his early life denotes obvious religiosity, Douglass still prefaces it by saying "I may be deemed superstitious, and even egotistical, in regarding this event as a special interposition of divine Providence in my favor" (Douglass 29). Despite acknowledging God and proposing that He may be involved in his life, there is a certain hesitancy Douglass demonstrates when referring to God looking out for him. While one could say that this hesitancy is part of the slave mentality — that slaves have a hard time thinking that God would care about them since they've been told over and over again by their masters that He doesn't — what this really shows is that Douglass had trouble actually *believing* in God. 'Egotistical' may refer to the slave mentality, but Douglass starts with 'superstitious,' a word that generally implies gullibility in believing in something that isn't real. Reflecting on the time when he, as a young boy, thought that God was looking out for him, Douglass uses the word 'superstitious' to mock his younger self for his naivety.

As life progresses, Douglass begins his antireligious journey by questioning if God is good, and then progresses to questioning if a God exists at all. When his grandmother is left to die by herself, Douglass asks "will not a righteous God visit for these things?" (Douglass 40). At this point in time, Douglass believes that there is a God, but based on the circumstances and watching the people he loves suffer, he begins to question the integrity of this God he grew up with. Douglass includes this question after the heart-wrenching story of his grandmother, who, despite being a devoted slave to her multiple masters throughout her entire life, is cast away to the woods without a smidgen of gratitude. Further along in his journey, Douglass goes even as

far as to cry “O God, save me! God, deliver me! Let me be free! Is there any God?” (Douglass 48). The last time Douglass mentions God in his Narrative is when he asks “does a righteous God govern the universe” as he thinks about how some slaves risked extreme punishment in order to learn to read so they could “learn how to read the will of God” (Douglass 58). And finally, in contrast to the timid proclamation of “Divine providence” having a role in his freedom discussed earlier, when Douglass becomes free he asserts “which I am alone responsible,” removing God entirely from the picture (Douglass 70).

Zachary McLeod Hutchins furthers this argument in his article “Rejecting the Root: The Liberating, Anti-Christ Theology in Douglass’ Narrative.” The ‘root’ here refers to a physical symbol of good luck Douglass was told to keep on his right side in order to be able to return, sans a whipping, to the reputable slave-trainer Mr. Covey. Hutchins claims that “Douglass’s familiarity with and use of common biblical interpretive practices does not confirm his belief in their conclusions. On the contrary, these obvious references constitute a smokescreen of religious respect behind which Douglass conceals his distrust of both the Bible and Christianity itself” (Hutchins 298). Hutchins supports this by arguing that the root symbolizes Jesus, who is described as “the root of David” and “a root out of dry ground (Rev. 5:5, Isa. 53:2). Before returning to Mr. Covey, his fellow slave Sandy Jenkins gives Douglass a root that he promises “would render it impossible for Mr. Covey, or any other white man, to whip me” (Douglass 52). “The virtue of the root was fully tested” that night when he comes into contact with Mr. Covey, and though he does win the fight, the root did not protect him from being hit (Douglass 52). Furthermore, Douglass addresses this in a footnote in which he says that Jenkins “would claim my success as the result of the roots which he gave me. This superstition is very common among the more ignorant slaves. A slave seldom dies but that his death is attributed to trickery”

(Douglass 57n1). Again, Douglass uses the word 'superstitious' to imply that believing in the root, a representation of Jesus, is putting one's trust in something that is false. Knowing full well that the root is a metaphor for Jesus, Hutchins explains that Douglass informs his readers of his rejection of said root as symbolism for rejecting not just slaveholding Christianity, but Christianity itself.

Harriet Jacobs' religious journey takes a much different route. Unlike with Douglass, God is part of Jacobs' everyday vernacular. There is a strong belief that God is behind everything and everything is the will of God. She describes her brother's spirit as "God-given nature" and she pronounces herself as "one of God's most powerless creatures" (Jacobs 20). These are just a few examples of how even when Jacobs isn't talking directly about God, He is very much a part of her way of thinking. This is also clearly something Jacobs picks up in other people as well since she often recounts other people mentioning God as well. For example, when a mother's child is dying, the mother says "the baby is dead, thank God," and the mother of seven sold children says "Gone! All gone! Why *don't* God kill me?" (Jacobs 16, 18). The first example is where the woman is morbidly grateful to God for ending the suffering of her child and the second example is where the woman is angry at God. Either way, this is how Jacobs remembers these two stories and how she chooses to tell them: with God at the forefront.

Yet Jacobs doesn't always think so positively of God. When she learns of her father's death, her words are "my heart rebelled against God" (Jacobs 13). This is the first instance we see where Jacobs shows that while she believes in God, she is not always thankful for everything He does. Another example of this is when she questions "for what wise purpose God was leading me through such thorny paths" (Jacobs 21). After experiencing hardships, Jacobs can't help herself and questions why God has given her this lot in life.

It's no surprise that even the most religious would question God after enduring slavery, but what's different about Jacobs and Douglass is that Jacobs never crosses that line to question God's existence. Yes, she is extremely angry at God, but she never loses faith that He is there. Douglass gets angry at God and his immediate question is "is there any God?" but Jacobs never gets to that point (Douglass 48). Even in the darkness of the attic, Jacobs still thinks about God, wondering if "God was a compassionate Father, who would forgive my sins for the sake of my sufferings" or if "there was no justice or mercy in the divine government" (Jacobs 104). Her faith in God didn't falter depending on if she thought He was merciful or not.

It's important to keep in mind the audience that Jacobs is writing for. Jacobs portrays her character Linda as religious because she is trying to gain the support of the religious Northern women. Jacobs frames her story to make it seem like she is talking directly to her audience, often calling them "reader." When she describes how she was tortured by Dr. Flint, she says "Reader, it is not to awaken sympathy for myself that I am telling you truthfully what I suffered in slavery. I do it to kindle a flame of compassion in your hearts for my sisters who are still in bondage, suffering as I once suffered" (Jacobs 29). Jacobs appeals to the Northern women because she hopes that their sympathy will bring them to join the abolition movement.

Religion is one tactic Jacobs uses to gain the sympathy of Northern women. Northern women are religious, and so Jacobs is trying to show that she is just like them. She is trying to show that she is religious and worthy of being saved. She shows how religious other slaves are to show that they too are worthy of being slaves. But what Jacobs tries most to connect with the Northern women is their shared womanhood. Jacobs specifically portrays herself as the ideal woman of the time, according to the principles of "The Cult of True Womanhood" by Barbara Welter. Welter states that "the attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself

and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues--piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity" (Welter 152). These four virtues are part of Jacobs' core beliefs. As a Christian, Jacobs goes to Church even though she "always went with fear, expecting at every turn to encounter Dr. Flint, who was sure to turn me back, or order me to his office to inquire where I got my bonnet" (Jacobs 61). Church is a risk that Jacobs is willing to take. In addition to Linda's unwavering faith in God, Linda strongly believes that a woman should remain pure. Maintaining purity proves to be very hard for Linda as Dr. Flint "met [her] at every turn, reminding [her] that [she] belonged to him, and swearing by heaven and earth that he would compel [her] to submit to him" (Jacobs 28). Linda avoids giving in to Dr. Flint in order to sustain her purity and self-respect, even as a slave. And as a slave, submissiveness comes naturally. As a child, Linda tells William that "we, who were slave-children...could not expect to be happy. We must be good; perhaps that would bring us contentment" (Jacobs 19). And lastly, even while in hiding Linda doesn't forsake her domestic duties to her children. Before Christmas, she "busied [herself] making some new garments and little playthings for [her] children" (Jacobs 100). Linda believes in these expectations set for women and believes herself to be virtuous as well, proclaiming to Dr. Flint that the man she wants to marry "would not love me if he did not believe me to be a virtuous woman" (Jacobs 37).

Though Jacobs agrees with the expectation for women to fully commit to piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, she doesn't always perfectly implement those values. Even though Jacobs is a slave, she constantly talks back to her master in a very unsubmissive manner. When Dr. Flint tells her "you would do well to join the Church, too, Linda," she retorts back "there are sinners enough in it already" (Jacobs 67). Jacobs combats her master's power by

answering him defiantly because she knows that “my master had power and law on his side; I had determined will. There is might in each” (Jacobs 75). Concerning domesticity, Jacobs shirks her responsibilities as a mother when she runs away from Dr. Flint and hides in the attic, leaving her children in the care of her grandmother. But her biggest sin of all is when she becomes pregnant with the child of another man because she “knew it would enrage Dr. Flint so much as to know that [she] favored another; and it was something to triumph over [her] tyrant even in that small way” (Jacobs 50).

Since Jacobs isn’t a true woman regarding purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, she isn’t a true woman regarding piety since religion is interconnected to all the others. Purity and piety go hand in hand because religion was thought of “as a kind of tranquilizer for the many undefined longings which swept even the most pious young girl, and about which it was better to pray than to think” (Welter 153). Religion, essentially, is used as a tool to keep women pure. Domesticity is connected to religion because “As no sensible woman will suffer her in- tellectual pursuits to clash with her domestic duties” she should concentrate on religious work “which promotes these very duties” (Welter 153). And of course, the Bible was used to prove that slaves should be submissive to their masters; Reverend Mr. Pike says at the Church of the slaves, “if you disobey your earthly master, you offend your heavenly Master” (Jacobs 62). As a result of Jacobs veering from being pure, submissive, and domestic, she, therefore, is going off the path of piety as well. Why would Jacobs include the way she veers from being a “true woman” if she wants the women of the North to support her?

Jacobs appeals to her readers to understand that being a slave woman doesn’t leave enough room to be a true woman. When Jacobs sleeps with Mr. Sands to avoid submitting to Dr. Flint, she is distraught by it. However, she stresses that it was her circumstances that caused her

to sin; “I know I did wrong. No one can feel it more sensibly than I do...Still, in looking back, calmly, on the events of my life, I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others” (Jacobs 51). Jacobs even asks the reader to “pity me, and pardon me, O virtuous reader” because “you never knew what it is to be a slave; to be entirely unprotected by law or custom; to have the laws reduce you to the condition of a chattel, entirety subject to the will of another” (Jacobs 51). Jacobs tries her best to “be virtuous, though I was a slave. I had said, ‘let the storm beat! I will brave it till I die.’ And now, how humiliated I felt” (Jacobs 51). Unfortunately, due to her circumstances, it’s impossible for her to do so. Either she has to submit to Dr. Flint, or cunningly avoid it by becoming impregnated by someone else, and so she chooses the lesser of two evils. She asks her readers “who can blame slaves for being cunning? They are constantly compelled to resort to it. It is the only weapon of the weak and oppressed against the strength of their tyrants” (Jacobs 87). Jacobs is writing to the true women out there and asking them to “not judge the poor desolate slave girl too severely!” because “if slavery had been abolished, I, also, could have married the man of my choice” (Jacobs 49). Jacobs hopes that Northern women will read her story and realize that since slavery stands in the way of a true woman, it must be abolished. When Jacobs says “if I could be allowed to live like a Christian, I should be glad,” she is begging Northern women to help enable her to be virtuous and religious (Jacobs 67).

Douglass is also writing for a Northern audience, both men and women who are devout Christians. And yet he seems to go back and forth between praising Christianity (with the exception of slaveholding Christianity) as he does in his appendix and presenting himself as a heretic who, over the course of his lifetime, moves to reject God. How do these two conflicting ideas make sense together? Donald Gibson tries to reconcile these two supposedly different

outlooks through his article "Reconciling Public and Private in Frederick Douglass' *Narrative*." Gibson argues that Douglass is telling over two stories, "one, public and social, setting forth to correct the moral and political ills arising from the fact of slavery; the other, personal and private, expressing Douglass' own thoughts, feelings, reactions, and emotions" (Gibson 549). These two stories are sometimes at war with each other and sometimes work together. An example Gibson brings is at the beginning of the *Narrative* when Douglass says:

> I was born in Tuckahoe, near Hillsborough, and about twelve miles from Easton, in Talbot County, Maryland. I have no accurate knowledge of my age, never having seen any authentic record containing it. By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their age as horses know theirs, and it is the wish of most masters within my knowledge to keep their slaves thus ignorant. I do not ever remember to have met a slave who could tell of his birthday. (Douglass 13)

Gibson states that here the two sides are shown, with the first two sentences being exclusively about Douglass and therefore expressing the private focus, and the third and fourth sentences being about slavery as a whole, thus expressing the public focus. These two foci are brought together in the last sentence, "repeating and buttressing the truth of the generalization again by placing it within the confines of his own experience" (Gibson 552). Therefore it must be that his aspect of religiosity follows this as well, with a public persona praising non-slaveholding Christianity a private identity that deals with internal religious struggles.

Similar to Jacobs, Douglass begs the question of why he would include his religious struggles in his story if he wants to gain the support of Northern Christians. Sharon Carson addresses this in her article "Shaking the Foundation: Liberation Theology in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass,*" in which she discusses how "Douglass invites white Christian

readers into familiar territory, then radically rearranges the theological landscape" (Carson 20). Douglass uses religious diction and biblical references to bring Christians into his story and then turns the story upside down by claiming "divine authority and religious sanctification for not only his opposition to slavery, but more important, for his own life, for his self definition over and against any other definitions proffered to him by white society" (Carson 22). Carson claims that in the passage where Douglass talks about divine providence, he is justifying and sanctifying actions that need to be taken to abolish slavery, even violence. He also justifies the action he took to get to freedom, as Carson says, "yes, Providence will still help him, but Douglass stands clearly here as the acting force in his own liberation" (Carson 27). While "prayer is resistance" and "an existential link between the slave and the holy," Douglass acknowledges that prayer is not the answer, and decides that since God isn't listening it's time to take things into his own hands (Carson 21). Unlike Hutchins who claims the "root" didn't work because Covey still managed to hit him, Carson thinks the "root" actually did protect Douglass from Covey since he survived the fight. She says that the root is a break from Christian beliefs and instead alludes to African practices. The root, combined with action, is what protected Douglass and that is exactly what he put his faith in after: definitely not in God, rather in himself. The public side of Douglass' religious life is used to call in Christians so they'll read his book and be exposed to his personal religious life.

One could say that it is risky for Douglass to include his religious struggles in a book catered to Northern Christians. Though condemning slaveholding Christianity is putting Christianity in a negative light, the purpose of it is clear in that it causes Northern Christians to feel offended for their religion's sake. Meaning, slave owners are appropriating the Bible to fit slavery into morality; Northern Christians will read Douglass' *Narrative* and feel the need to

defend their religion and Bible and restore it to be the definition of morality, thus increasing the urgency of abolition. But if he casts off Christianity entirely, wouldn't that offend the Northern Christians as well? Wouldn't they be less inclined to help slaves if they deemed them heretics?

On the contrary; Douglass is hoping that not only will they see slaveholding Christianity as an appropriation of the Bible, but they will also see slaveholding Christianity as a threat to a slave's relationship with God. Douglass makes it clear that slavery is what is the cause of his deviance from Christianity by constantly juxtaposing the two. The times that Douglass questions God he says "Is there any God? Why am I a slave?" and "When I think that these precious souls are to-day shut up in the prison-house of slavery, my feelings overcome me, and I am almost ready to ask, 'Does a righteous God govern the universe?'" (Douglass 58). Douglass is transparent about the source of his religious struggles. Even the first instance Douglass talks about taking part in a prayer to God is in juxtaposition with slavery and his intense suffering. "Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains." This was said about the songs he sang as a child, before he had the thought to question God. That fact in particular is extremely powerful because it shows that even from a young age, slaves associate God with the power to keep or take away slavery. Douglass shows that slavery prevents a slave from being religious and from believing in God.

What Douglass has essentially done by revealing his questions and rejection of God is turned the issue of slavery into a call to Christian missionaries. This is not just about freeing humans anymore, this is about freeing souls. Christianity is meant to be for everyone, but slavery prevents slaves from respecting God and believing in Him, thereby indirectly stealing their emotional capability to be religious. The public and the private foci used by Douglass are intertwined to reach out to his audience in different ways to accomplish the same goal: seeing

slavery as bad for religion. An aspect of the Christian faith is spreading the truth of Jesus and converting everyone to Christianity. When Christians see Douglass' struggle with God specifically because he's a slave, they will see slavery as getting in the way of their mission of spreading Christianity.

And yet, as mentioned earlier in the essay, Douglass' *Narrative* includes an appendix in which he condemns slaveholding Christianity and slaveholding Christianity only. After brilliantly working to insert his true feelings about God and Christianity, he tears it all down with an appendix in which he claims to "love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ" (Douglass 79). Perhaps after writing his story, Douglass was worried that his plan to use his religious struggles as a call to abolish slavery would instead work against him. As much as Douglass wants to spread the truth about what slavery does to a slave's religious state, he understands that Christians relate to Christians. While Northern Christians will want to save enslaved Christians, they might not feel the urgency to help those who so blatantly reject their God. This is why Douglass feels the need to specify that slaveholding Christians are the evil ones and Christians who don't own slaves, basically saying "Christians like you," are the good ones and will restore good in the world.

It's also possible Douglass wants to communicate to his audience in his appendix that despite his struggle with religion as a slave, he is able to return when he is free. In future speeches Douglass gives, such as "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July," he often references God and continues to condemn only slaveholding Christianity, though forcefully calls to action for all Christians to take the proper strides toward abolishing slavery by saying "the feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God

and man must be denounced" (Douglass 124-125). Restoring God's name and reinstating the authority of the Bible unsupportive of slavery are crucial to Douglass' argument for the abolition of the slaves. Even if his readers catch his religious identity crisis, they will dismiss it as a result of slavery and believe that Frederick Douglass, a free man, is a God-fearer as he is supposed to be.

Although the religious journeys of Douglass and Jacobs seem different from a peripheral view, a closer look at the core of their religious beliefs and motives reveals many similarities. Much of their stories center around religion, such as their own religious journeys, as well as the religiosity of other slaves, and the hypocritical Christianity of the slave owners. There is no denying the fact that God and religion are part of their pursuit of freedom, whether they see Him as an obstacle or a supporter. And despite their polarity in the end, Jacobs and Douglass have a similar trajectory, from true faith as young children to religious struggles as teenagers and young adults. It's crucial to note that despite the fact that Jacobs remains religious, she too questions God at certain, dark points in her life.

But the most significant similarity between these two former slaves is that they both present their deviance from God as a result of their circumstances. What's important about this is that it's indicative that this is a political tactic used to gain the support for the abolition movement. As mentioned previously, both writers had a target audience. Christianity was an integral value of the people of the North, and Jacobs and Douglass used that to their advantage. Douglass expresses that his inability to believe in God comes from his suffering as a slave, and Jacobs bemoans how Dr. Flint's intense sexual pursuit caused her to sin by becoming impregnated out of wedlock. This is not to say that they weren't at all connected to religion and

God; rather this is to point out that they purposely emphasized this connection in order to catch the attention of the Northern men and women.

However, this doesn't rectify their incredibly different outcomes with regard to religion. Why is Harriet Jacobs able to remain religious despite her struggles as a slave while Frederick Douglass isn't? Furthermore, when Jacobs' daughter is born she says "slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own" (Jacobs 68). Jacobs, of course, is referring to the sexual predation that female slaves are subject to, an affliction most slave men do not have to suffer. If slavery is even worse for women, how is Jacobs able to retain her belief and God while Douglass throws it all away?

Perhaps this can be better understood through the article "Christian Violence and the Slave Narrative" by Sally Ann H. Ferguson. In her article, Ferguson argues that part of the goal of Christian slaveholders was to overpower the souls of the black slaves so that the slaves would view the slaveholders as a diety. She claims that the intense, religious violence used against slaves was "to try imposing upon colored people an absolute power and control rivaling that of the Maker Itself" (Ferguson 298). The Christians use the slaves to atone for their own sins by punishing them violently; "a similar moral perversion enables the slave owner to claim that his violence saves those he abuses" (Ferguson 300). An example Ferguson brings of the slaveholders' desire to be godlike is that they used themselves to dilute the pigment of black people; "In fact, these mostly male re-creators were so successful that one would be hard pressed to find among the heirs of millions of American slaves one family tree left untouched by white blood. Through an amalgamation privileged by the slave theocracy, these Americans became

‘gods’ who stubbornly rejected the Creator's world by genetically altering the black African ‘evil’ of the Christian Eden” (Ferguson 304).

Ferguson points out that slave resistance shows the extent the slaves are able to reject human deities. Men are more susceptible to the “psychological compromise with the slave theocracy” than their female counterparts (Ferguson 302). What makes women less susceptible? Slave owners attempt to use sexual dominance as a type of godlike control, hoping to reduce the spirit of the women. Ferguson points out that Flint tries to define himself as a god, “when Linda tells Flint of her desire ‘to live like a Christian,’ he defines her Christian womanhood as concubinage to a god who is himself, saying, ‘You can do what I require; and if you are faithful to me, you will be as virtuous as my wife’” (Ferguson 312). But because Linda stops Flint from raping her, she also prevents him from redefining providence in her mind. Ferguson said that “Slave women like Jacobs remain spiritually strong because the slave patriarchy so degrades them that they have little else left except the souls that link them to their Creator, the source of their humanity” (Ferguson 313). It’s the suffering that these women endure that enables them to continue to believe in God rather than cast the divinity to the slave-owning humans.

Ferguson proposes a compelling argument; however, another focus on the difference between male and female slave narratives presents another powerful idea. Winifred Morgan’s article “Gender-Related Related Difference in the Slave Narratives of Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass” asks and answers why Jacobs revolves much of her story around her grandmother. Morgan argues that the main difference between male slave narratives and female slave narratives is that males like Douglass focused on their right to autonomy through the use of language, while females like Jacobs focused on their relationships. She notes that “While male fugitives stressed their individuality, their ability to stand alone and assume adult male

responsibility for themselves, women fugitives generally saw themselves as part of their communities" (Morgan 83). Douglass is trying to show his worth through his ability to conquer language on his own. But Jacobs doesn't focus on her mastery of language, though this was clearly a big feat; instead, she tells her journey through her relationships with others. She starts her narrative with her parents and continues to mention all the white and black people who helped her along the way. Of course, as Morgan points out, "She respects and fears but, above all, she loves, her grandmother" (Morgan 84).

Evidence of Morgan's argument is seen in the openings of both of these narratives. After Douglass asserts that he does not know his age, he talks about his parents. The only fact he knows about his father is that he is white, but of his mother he knows quite a lot. And yet, his "mother and I were separated when I was but an infant—before I knew her as my mother" (Douglas 13). Douglass was not privileged to know his mother well, which led to a decreased affection for her, as evident from the way he describes receiving the news of her death; "Never having enjoyed, to any considerable extent, her soothing presence, her tender and watchful care, I received the tidings of her death with much the same emotions I should have probably felt at the death of a stranger" (Douglass 14). On the other hand, in the first paragraph of her narrative, Jacobs relates the vast information she had about her father, and describes the house she grew up in with her parents as "comfortable" (Jacobs 9). It's clear that Jacobs' childhood was very different from Douglass,' as she was not aware that she was a slave until she was six years old. Douglass talks about his parents to show how he was alone in the world basically from the time he was an infant, and Jacobs talks about her family to show the support system she was fortunate to have.

Aside from her parents, Jacobs spends a great deal talking about the "great treasure in my maternal grandmother" (Jacobs 9). As Morgan said, "She respects and fears but, above all, she loves, her grandmother" (Morgan 84). Jacobs' parents both die relatively early in her life, yet she maintains a close connection to her family mainly through her grandmother, who serves as a constant throughout her journey. Her grandmother is the one who hides Linda in her home when she's running away from Dr. Flint for seven years. Her grandmother provides for her when she is young, filling in the gaps of her mistress. Jacobs attests that she was "was indebted to *her* for all my comforts, spiritual or temporal. It was *her* labor that supplied my scanty wardrobe" (Jacobs 13).

"Spiritual or temporal" (Jacobs 13): Jacobs makes it clear that it wasn't just basic necessities such as food and clothing that her grandmother provided for her; rather, she also fulfilled her spiritual and religious needs. Her grandmother was well respected both by the black and white communities, and she set a notable example of piety to her children and Jacobs. It was apparent to Jacobs even as a young child that "most earnestly did she strive to make us feel that it was the will of God: that He had seen fit to place us under such circumstances; and though it seemed hard, we ought to pray for contentment" (Jacobs 18). It was the will of her grandmother that her children and grandchildren should have a good relationship with God and she tried her best to instill that value in those who grew up in her household. And she displays this reverence throughout the good times and the bad; although "great was her sorrow" when her youngest son had run away, "with characteristic piety, she said, 'God's will be done'" (Jacobs 22). This piety is termed characteristic because this was a trait her grandmother embodies throughout her entire life.

Many of the religious practices Jacobs adopted explicitly come from her grandmother. For example, Jacobs and her grandmother constantly reference God, as part of their vernacular. The night that Jacobs leaves for the North, her grandmother says to her "Linda, let us pray" (Jacobs 131). Jacobs then describes the uplifting scene: "We knelt down together, with my child pressed to my heart, and my other arm round the faithful, loving old friend I was about to leave forever. On no other occasion has it ever been my lot to listen to so fervent a supplication for mercy and protection" (Jacobs 131). This was truly an inspirational moment for Jacobs, as the faith exuded from her grandmother overcame her, "[thrilling] through my heart, and inspired me with trust in God" (Jacobs 131). Unlike the wayward ways of Frederick Douglass, the pious ways of her grandmother are able to penetrate Jacobs' heart as she embarks on her journey toward freedom.

But more than anything, Jacobs learned from her grandmother that God is the only constant, even in times of sorrow. When Grandmother's daughter Nancy dies, Jacobs said about her grandmother, "she had always been strong to bear, and now, as ever, religious faith supported her" (Jacobs 124). Jacobs herself acts this way even as she heads to the Northern states. When Mr. Durham — after questioning Linda about her background — tells her kindly that she ought to be more cautious before revealing so much of her story to strangers, Jacobs responds "God alone knows how I have suffered; and He, I trust, will forgive me" (Jacobs 135). Like her grandmother, Jacobs views God as a constant in her life. Despite the sin she committed as a slave, she believes God is all-knowing and she trusts Him to acquit her based on her circumstances. Faith is what allows Jacobs to forgive *herself*, and enables her to get through even the most difficult and trying times.

The conclusion of Douglass' religiosity can be better understood in comparison to *Night* by Elie Wiesel another narrative that talks about obscenities to mankind by mankind, albeit a very different form of slavery. Elie Wiesel's *Night* follows Elie and his father through being taken to Auschwitz all the way to liberation, though Elie's father does not live to the end. A common theme, similar to Douglass, is Wiesel's struggle to keep his faith, as he watches many prisoners around him lose their faith along with their humanity. Wiesel was an orthodox Jew and had a strong faith in God before coming to the concentration camp. Wiesel's religious journey through the camp shares a lot of similarities to Douglass' story. At the beginning of his imprisonment, Wiesel exhibits a devotion to God by giving thanks and praying for survival; "Oh God, Master of the Universe, in your infinite compassion, have mercy on us" (Wiesel 20). Yet, as time goes on, Wiesel's faith starts to dwindle. He says "I had ceased to pray. I concurred with Job! I was not denying His existence, but I doubted His absolute justice" (Wiesel 45). This is comparable to the path Douglass took; he also does believe in God but is not sure of his justice, saying "will not a righteous God visit for these things?" when reflecting on his grandmother being left to die alone (Douglass 40). And then they both go through the path of thinking that there is no God, with Wiesel stating in response to the question of where is God with "This is where—hanging here from this gallows…" and with Douglass questioning "is there any God?" (Wiesel 65, Douglass 48). Wiesel thinks that God must have figuratively died and Douglass questions if God ever existed at all.

But the one thing that is very different in these two stories is the fact that Wiesel is able to come back to his faith while Douglass never seems to return to it. What accounts for this difference? Wiesel, like Jacobs, has a role model in his life: his father. Clearly, his father is someone who he respects, since the first reason he explains he doesn't fast on Yom Kippur is

"First of all, to please my father who had forbidden me to do so" (the second reason being that he "turned that act into a symbol of rebellion, of protest against Him") (Wiesel 69). It was not always easy to be with his father in the camp, since his father often drew attention to himself and was beaten by the SS officers. Yet his father is the one who keeps Wiesel human; when Wiesel realizes that another man tried to lose his father whose weakness was endangering both of them, he vows never to do that and "a prayer formed inside me, a prayer to this God in whom I no longer believed. 'Oh God, Master of the Universe, give me the strength never to do what Rabbi Eliahu's son has done'" (Wiesel 91). It's his close relationship with his father that brings him to call out to God again. Being able to be near his father, his support system, is what gives him the strength to keep going. Despite his wavering faith, after the war, Wiesel continues to believe in God. Douglass had no family, no support system. Unlike Wiesel, he is unable to return to believing in God after what he's been through.

Like Wiesel, Jacobs did have a support system, and a religious one at that. This is why she not only remains religious after becoming free but even is religious throughout her tribulations. But other people in Jacobs' narrative are not as susceptible to the faith Grandmother teaches. Benjamin (Grandmother's son and Jacobs' uncle) had a similar upbringing to Jacobs. He was very close with his mother (Jacobs' grandmother), and she provided him with many necessities and lots of love. Jacobs and Benjamin both grow up sharing jealousy for Grandmother, who was able to have her own home and be free. When she tried to impose her faith on the two kids, "I, and Benjamin, her youngest boy, condemned it. We reasoned that it was much more the will of God that we should be situated as she was. We longed for a home like hers" (Jacobs 18). As demonstrated throughout the essay, this condemnation of good faith is outgrown by Jacobs; yet it doesn't seem to be outgrown by Benjamin. When he is recaptured

after trying to run away, Grandmother asks him “if he did not also think of God. I fancied I saw his face grow fierce in the moonlight. He answered, “No, I did not think of him. When a man is hunted like a wild beast he forgets there is a God, a heaven. He forgets every thing in his struggle to get beyond the reach of the bloodhounds” (Jacobs 23). This is the opposite of what Grandmother is trying to impart; she believes that when there is no one else to turn to, one can only turn to God, while Benjamin determines that in those types of situations, man loses trust in God and only relies on himself.

“She told him she had not always been so; once, she was like him; but when sore troubles came upon her, and she had no arm to lean upon, she learned to call on God, and he lightened her burdens. She besought him to do likewise” (Jacobs 23). To this Benjamin does not respond, indicative of his true feelings toward her view of God.

However, Benjamin does maintain a relationship with God during the good times. Once free land was in sight, “he prayed that he might live to get one breath of free air,” and after he was free he says “If I die now…thank God, I shall die a freeman!” (Jacobs 25, 26). When things are positive and independence is within reach, that’s when Benjamin falls upon the values his mother tried so hard to instill in him.

Frederick Douglass did not have a religious role model like Jacobs, but Benjamin did! How could it be that he refuses to look to God during tough times? This goes back to Ferguson’s argument on the difference between slave men and slave women. But this argument can be taken even further by looking at Jacobs’ additional roles and responsibilities. In Thomas Doherty’s article “Harriet Jacobs’ Narrative Strategies: Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,” Doherty points to Jacobs’ agenda of gaining Northern supporters, specifically her use of her role as a mother. “Jacobs ingeniously inducts "women's literature" into the cause of women's politics in

her tale of sex-determined destiny under slavery" (Doherty 80). Jacobs is clear from the beginning that her audience is specifically women, as she states in her introduction to her narrative "I do earnestly desire to arouse the women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions of women at the South, still in bondage, suffering what I suffered, and most of them far worse" (Jacobs 5). Doherty writes that "the strategy is both demographically and rhetorically astute. Northern women, largely from leisured middle-class households, were among the abolitionist movement's most dedicated participants" (Doherty 81). Doherty even quotes Frederick Douglass, who, in his later book titled The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, predicted that "When the true story of the anti-slavery cause shall be written, women shall occupy a large space in its pages; for the cause of the slave has been peculiarly women's own" (Doherty 81).

Jacobs' focus, Doherty explains, is the fact that she is a mother. "Linda is handicapped in her battle — and Jacobs in her narrative — by the female's usual complication, children" (Doherty 89). She knows that Dr. Flint can use her children against her, but her children are also her source of strength. Doherty quotes *Incidents:* "I had a women's pride, and a mother's love for my children; and I resolved that out of the darkness of this hour a brighter dawn should rise for them. My master had power and law on his side; I had a determined will. There is might in each" (Doherty 89). Throughout her narrative, Jacobs never forsakes her children, even while she is in hiding. Doherty points out that her plan to fully escape to the North is only executed once her daughter is safely on the other side, so she can continue her maternal duties when she joins her there.

Benjamin doesn't have the responsibilities of a mother, which allows him to be more flexible and risk more. This fits into Doherty's argument that "the slave husband or father who

left his family to escape North could justify his desertion as a necessary tactical and personal move. In freedom, he could better fight slavery, more easily earn the money to emancipate his family, and, above all, be his own man" (Doherty 89). Although Benjamin is not a father, he feels a similar sense of responsibility toward his close-knit family, as shown when he begs Uncle Phil to stay and work with him in the North "till they earned enough to buy those at home" (Jacobs 26). But Jacobs was not able to run away — at least, not in good conscious. Doherty explained, "speaking the harsh truth, Linda's grandmother reminds her of the double standard: 'Nobody respects a mother who forsakes her children' (93). If Linda is to escape slavery unburdened by guilt, and if Jacobs is to retain the reader's unqualified sympathy, she must first faithfully discharge her maternal responsibilities," and Jacobs proves she is not willing to do that (Doherty 89).

What made Jacobs stronger in her religious beliefs? Of course, her grandmother played an integral role in this, but it was strengthened by her responsibility as a mother. This responsibility, which was likely seen as a burden to most, is the reason Jacobs maintained her faith in God. Her declaration of "my story ends with freedom; not in the usual way, with marriage" is indicative of the way she values her children and, by extension, her family (Jacobs 167). She views her story not as a freedom story, but rather as a story about the importance of family (even though she doesn't get married in the end). This devotion to her children gave her something to pray for. The last letter Jacobs receives from her grandmother shows how this value of family, tied to God, comes from her; "strive, my child, to train them for God's children" (Jacobs 167). Jacobs ends her narrative with reflecting on the "tender memories of my good old grandmother, like light, fleecy clouds floating over a dark and troubled sea," illustrating that

Grandmother was her saving grace, keeping her undeviatingly connected to her children and to God (Jacobs 167).

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