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BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

American Slavery from a Male and Female
Perspective in Selected Slave Narratives

Americké otroctví z pohledu mužů a žen ve vybraných
otrokářských povídkách

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Abstrakt

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá literárním žánrem otrokářských povídek, konkrétně pak analýzou dvojice publikací napsaných osvobozenými afroamerickými otroky v devatenáctém století. Hlavním cílem práce je zejména srovnání rozdílného vnímání otroctví muži a ženami, jejich různých rolí v systému otroctví a přístupu k celé problematice. Úvodní kapitoly práce se věnují obecné historii otroctví a charakteristice otázky otroctví ve Spojených státech amerických, navazující části pak postupně rozpracovávají obraz mužských a ženských otroků, jejich různé role ve společnosti, význam rodiny, jejich pracovní a celkové životní podmínky. Poslední část se pak věnuje detailní analýze autobiografií Fredericka Douglassa a Harriet Ann Jacobsové.

Klíčová slova Otroctví; otrok; otrokářská povídka; rasová diskriminace; gender; Frederick Douglass; Harriet Jacobs

Abstract

This thesis deals with the literary genre of slave narratives, specifically with the analysis of two narratives written in the nineteenth century by fugitive African-American slaves, Frederick Douglass and Harriet Ann Jacobs. The main aim of this thesis is to describe the different perception of slavery between male and female slaves, their roles in the whole system of slavery and their approach to the problem. The first chapters of the thesis are dedicated to a general history of slavery and the characterization of slavery in the United States, its following parts define progressively the differences between the male and the female perception of slavery, their roles in the American slave society, the importance of families, their general work and life conditions. The last part deals with detailed analyses of the autobiographies written by Frederick Douglass and Harriet Ann Jacobs.

Keywords Slavery; slave; slave narrative; race; racism; gender; Frederick Douglass; Harriet Jacobs

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I hereby declare that I have completed this thesis on my own and used solely the sources cited in the text and included in the bibliography list.

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1 Introduction

The institution of slavery has played an important part in the history of most societies of the world. It has been practised on the American continent since the first European colonizers settled on the Eastern coast, and slaves remained a significant constituent of the American society until its abolition in 1865. That is more than 200 years of oppression and degradation of mostly African and African-American slaves, that shall never be erased. Hence, the study of slavery is crucial to interpret the events that formed the current American society, and to fully understand the racial segregation that persisted for another century after the abolition, and the subsequent racism and gender-related issues that it faces nowadays.

Therefore, this thesis introduces a general evolution of the institution of slavery and the particularities of slavery in America, its development and the experience and consequences that enslavement brought to African-American men and women. In order to present a balanced account of the impact that slavery had on the enslaved, the thesis focuses on personal accounts of ex-slaves who compiled their experience in autobiographic texts. Focus is laid primarily on the differentiation of a male and female viewpoint; how did the perception of slavery differ for men and women and how is this experience reflected in their writing.

The first chapters are dedicated to an overall history of slavery of the ancient cultures, its European tradition and characteristics. The process of colonization of newly discovered territories of the 15th and 16th centuries is also described, because it caused a higher demand for slaves, and boosted the evolution of sophisticated Transatlantic trades. Since then, American slavery became a question of race: exclusively black slaves from Africa were imported to the colonies in massive quantities. Therefore it is important to portray how the first Africans reached the American shores, and the kind of dehumanizing conditions that were set for them aboard the slave vessels. A thorough study of the mentioned historical facts is essential for a better understanding of the position of blacks in the American system of slavery, and the complexity of their fight for freedom, after two centuries of constant degradation.

After this initial description of historical facts, general life conditions of slaves are brought into focus. This general characterization is intended to be achieved by a thorough study of historical sources and contemporary studies of the matter, as well as slave narratives written by survivors of slavery who managed to collect their experience in literary texts. Even though slavery might seem equally degrading for

both genders, there were several factors that marked a difference in their perception of slavery and their struggle for a decent life. This differentiation is the main aim of this thesis and is supported by the detailed analysis of two representative texts: Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* [1] and Harriet Ann Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* [2].

In order to achieve an easily comprehensive and coherent outcome, the detailed analyses of selected slave narratives have been placed to the last chapter of this thesis. These analyses are based on the inner experience of both authors, rather than on a factual analysis of the events of their lives. They focus on common traits that can be found in both narratives, as well as highly personal incidents, confessions and perceptions of their surroundings. Through these accounts the readers are able to see slavery from a very intimate perspective and compare the experience of a man and a woman who were born into slavery in the antebellum American South.

2 Origins of slavery

In order to understand better the evolution of American slavery, it is important to be aware of the general origins of the so-called peculiar institution. The practice of slavery has been almost ever-present since the beginnings of humankind and the development of a system of social stratification: the stronger always tended to use the weaker for their own benefit. With the rise of big civilizations, like the ancient Egypt, Greece or Rome, this system became a standard. In fact, these were among the first genuine slave societies, since slavery played an important role in their expansion and growth [3]. However, slavery at that time was usually not a question of race.

Ancient Egyptians held many slaves of different cultures. Without them such a significant progress, expansion, and construction of colossal cities, temples and other symbols of wealth and power would probably be impossible. For instance, as it is described in the Bible, a black Pharaoh may have enslaved Israelite, together with many others, usually prisoners and soldiers defeated in war [4]. If we proceed with some more examples from the Bible, especially the Old Testament, we can see that slavery was considered a habitual form of punishment: Noah cursed the children of his son Ham into permanent enslavement, Joseph was sold to slavery by his own brothers, Moses let the Exodus of Israelites from a ten years long enslavement in Egypt.

In Grecian culture, the slave system changed slightly depending on the city where it was practiced, but we can generally state that the Greek system of slavery was based on the idea that it was a relationship of property. According to Aristotle's theory of natural slavery, there were people who were predestined to serve to others. Greeks distinguished several types of slaves, depending on their bondage to the master, the land or a house, and the time they were supposed to spend in service: whether it had to be limited or lifelong. Anybody could gain slave status by birth or during the lifetime, if born a free man, by becoming captive in war or by simple economic and social misfortune. The slave condition was mostly heritable. Sometimes abandoned orphans became slaves automatically. In ancient Rome, similar rules applied. Slaves were still considered property of their masters, and they could be acquired by different means. The rapid expansion of Roman territories implied an accelerated increase in numbers of slaves. They were used as house servants for rich citizens, it can be said that the number of slaves owned by somebody directly indicated his level of wealth. These slaves were generally

devoted to their owners, showed them gratitude and accepted their role with grace since masters provided them for food, clothing, and housing. Such a relationship was not usually common in following eras. When plantations were installed in the South, slaves labored there alongside other free workers [5].

The first society that began to make large use of single-racial slaves (sub-Saharan black Africans), was the Arab. By the seventh century, they have dominated the trade across the whole African north. They began to sell slaves to other countries and continents and before long they managed to develop a sophisticated long-distance trade network, that later comprised trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean roads. These facilitated the later evolution of a trans-Atlantic slave trade that was used on a large scale by Europeans in the newly colonized areas [3].

During medieval times, in Christian Europe, slavery was generally accepted by the Church, slaves were common even in churches and monasteries. Christian rulers saw enslavement as a better form of punishment for war prisoners than execution. Neither then slavery was a question of race, but with the advancement of monotheistic religion, it became focused almost exclusively on aspects of faith. The only practice considered immoral and punishable at that time was the selling of Christians to infidels; however, vice versa it was almost required [4]. As European medieval superpowers started to prosper and expand, also grew their need for servants and field workers that could be employed on large sugar cane plantations that were installed in Southern Europe during the Arab rule. Since it was forbidden to enslave people of the same faith, Europeans brought slaves from Baltic and Slavic regions; hence the word *slave* (lat. *sclavus*), that originally referred to people of Slavic origins [6]. With the Christianization of Slavic countries, the number of Muslim slaves began to prevail.

The first Christian Prince to take slaves from Africa was Henry of Portugal, known as Henry the Navigator. On one of his voyages in 1444, he landed on the coast of Sierra Leone for the first time and brought some “Negroes” and gold back to Europe. Since then he carried out more expeditions to Africa, where his only goal was to capture and transport more black slaves to Europe. The gold that Prince Henry and his contemporaries found and seized was supposed to be some kind of godly reward for the fact that they gave that “savages” the chance of Salvation, the first moment in history when European Christians tried to justify enslavement [4].

A few years later, in 1453, when the Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople, Europe lost its most important slave trade center, so they had to look for alternatives: African slaves imported directly from Africa and bought from the Arabs

were the best choice, and they slowly began to outnumber Slavic, North African and Muslim slaves [3].

2.1 Colonization of the New World

By the end of the 15th century the Spanish and Portuguese, strong naval forces, began to colonize undiscovered islands in the Atlantic, like the Canary Islands or Madeira [3]. After the voyages of Christopher Columbus and the colonization of the Caribbean islands and mainland America, these colonizers began to trade natives and their gold and riches for material supplies with Europe. Later they started enslaving them and forcing them to work for their benefit.

According to historical sources, these natives were predominantly physically weak and non-immune to diseases that the colonizers dragged in, which led to a sharp decline in local population. Horrible work conditions that were set for the Indians helped to elevate the already incredibly high mortality rates. By the beginning of the 16th century the local laboring population had almost disappeared [7].

While mining and slave export were the primary sources of income in the colonies, they failed to prosper. Only the newly introduced cultivation of sugar cane changed that situation: colonies began to flourish and the remaining enslaved Indians were shifted from the mines to the fields. European colonizers faced a deficit of labour force, so around the year 1500 they began to import time-proven African slaves to America and the Caribbean [7]. They used the already existing markets in the African west coast and established new trans-Atlantic trade routes. The numbers of imported slaves from the African continent grew dramatically. “Historian Phillip Curtin estimates that the total number of imported slaves was about 9.5 million people, the largest forced migration in history.” [8]

As for the British colonists, they first became involved in the system of slave trade in 1619, when the first ships carrying Africans disembarked in Jamestown, Virginia. At that time, Virginia did not have a law of slavery and the newly arrived automatically became indentured servants. One important difference between these servants and regular slaves was that their servitude could end after an accorded period, usually from five to eight years, but slavery could not. Servants worked in tobacco fields, iron plantations or did any other necessary tasks and chores alongside white servants that came from Europe. They all contributed equally in the development and rise of the thirteen British colonies, often working hard beside their own masters [6]. The system of indentured servitude was probably much more

fair and just, but it was certainly not as efficient and productive as slavery, that is why servitude was gradually shifted by slavery in the colonies. The increasing demand for goods bounded the blacks to their American masters for centuries.

2.2 Justifying the enslavement of Africans

The reasons why solely Africans became imported in such great numbers were various. As mentioned above, Europeans already had a tradition of using sub-Saharan Africans, and according to historical sources, Africans made some of the best slaves available: thanks to specific character traits they were loyal, obedient, physically healthy and robust. Some even stated that Africans were predestined to serve, because the African climate did not allow them to develop intellectually [7].

What is more, the image of a black serf or slave was probably carved in the minds of non-black public since earlier times. Greco-Roman art often depicted caricatures of African slaves, Aristotle even stated in one of his philosophical speeches that some people were naturally slavish and predestined to serve to others. Medieval peasants were also represented with dark skin, because of working outside on the sun and in the dirt. Black colour was considered the synonym for death, sin, and poverty. There is no wonder why the association of African blacks with a universal image of slave became so widespread [6].

People also found justification for slavery in their holy books, primarily in The Bible and Quar'an. In the case of European explorers, as it is mentioned before, they always justified the enslavement of blacks by stating that they were approaching their black pagan souls to Salvation. Not only the blacks were about to be saved after being enslaved and serving for the "one true God", but also the souls of these Christian pilgrims, who sacrificed themselves so much, travelled long distances to find new unconquered territories and took the burden of converting infidels to Christianity. Even though this justification was the most relevant for most of the colonists, merchants and slaveholders, a really valid shift of the Africans to Christianity did not really take place. This so-called Christianization of slaves originally took the form of a religious teaching of about two years, that consisted of reciting prayers and chants, often led by illiterates. Logically, it did not have the requested effect. In their private lives, Africans remained loyal to their own non-Christian beliefs [4].

Another early justification of enslavement that also became very popular among Europeans came from the Spanish missionary and colonist Bartolomeo de las Casas,

who at that time claimed, that “Negroes had no souls” [4]. However, we must consider that this statement was based entirely on his subjective opinion and view of the blacks, but still many identified themselves with Las Casas’ idea.

In the era after the American and French revolutions, new concepts of the human rights were arising, so time came to look for new reasonable justifications that could balance out the growing Abolitionist movement. It was the theory of superiority of races, formulated by the French diplomat Comte Arthur de Gobineau. His ideas were based on the fact that different races evolved differently, according to their surroundings, and these inequalities could not be changed by will or intent. He stated in his essays that it would be almost ridiculous to consider all men equally intelligent and perfect: for instance, only the white race was capable of creating culture. Houston Steward Chamberlain later worked with this popular theory and wrote about the sacredness of pure race (meaning the white race), that has become mixed over time and lacks perfection. Despite these imperfections, it is still the race that evolved far more than the others and is the one to be considered superior. Chamberlain based this thesis on the consideration that the dark skin colour of non-Europeans is closer to the colour of most apes, therefore they have not yet reach a higher evolutionary level [4].

3 American system of slavery

A genuine American system of slavery began to develop as early as the first European colonists disembarked ashore Mainland America. Indentured servants from diverse origins were employed at first, but they resulted not as profitable as slaves. As it was mentioned before, the first slaves from Africa were imported already at the beginning of the 17th century, to the Jamestown settlement.

3.1 Atlantic slave trade

The evolution of stable slave trades that could supply America with considerable quantities of slaves was the key factor to success in establishing the profitable system of American slavery. The first ships that landed at the central-African coast and returned regularly to export slaves were the Portuguese, and in no time, other nations followed: the Dutch, Spanish, and British. Soon the newly built harbours on African coasts were transformed into important slave trade centres. The volume and region of export varied depending on many conditions; captains logically preferred markets that offered a larger volume of slaves in a shorter period of time.

The slave trades were triangular, with chief centres in the West Indies, New England and Africa. Ships crossed the Atlantic carrying rum, iron bars, jewellery and other manufactured goods to trade them in Africa for slaves. Afterwards they headed towards the West Indies or the Southern plantation colonies to trade the slaves for molasses, sugar, cocoa and other crops to be transformed in New England [9]. It is not the purpose of this thesis to describe the different processes of enslavement or the mechanisms of trade, so this subsection will further focus mainly on the conditions that were set for the captured slaves in the markets and aboard.

During the 18th century, the Puritan colonies of New England became the greatest slave-trading communities in America. The conditions on their slave vessels were inhumane, very often lethal for the transported. Traders treated the purchased Africans as non-living goods, therefore they already expected a high percentage of mortality in transportation and took it into consideration when setting the prices per slave. To cut the overhead cost of each voyage, the captains used medium-sized ships with minimum equipment and crew. This way they were able to reduce the weight and be able to fit on deck the maximum number of slaves possible [9]. A typical example of the distribution of slaves on a ship is visible on

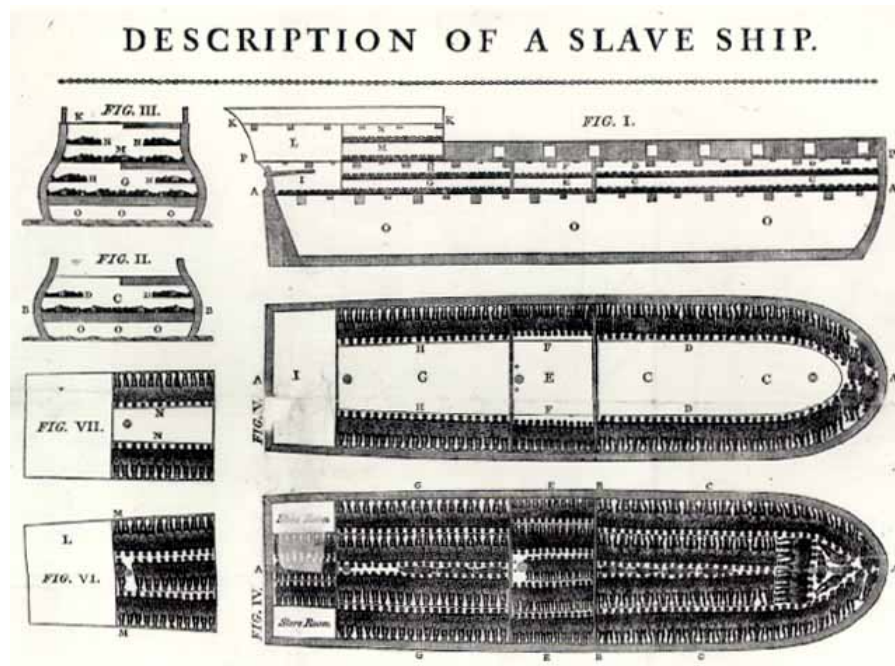


Figure 1: Slave ship packing. 1801 [10].

Figure 1, depicting the plan of a British slave ship that sailed from Africa in 1801 to the Caribbean with 609 enslaved men, women and children on board [10].

Merchants made almost no difference in the treatment of men and women and children aboard, but they made them travel separately. Men were chained in pairs to make any attempts of revolt impossible. They were all fitted in the holds between decks of the ship, in a space so low that the slaves could not sit upright. This way the capacity of the ship could be augmented and the slaves did not have any chance of rebellion and possible escape. They were packed in horizontal position on the wooden planks, lying on their side, naked, one right next to each other; as the ship moved through the Atlantic waters their bodies rubbed until the floor was covered in blood. Frequently, the small openings in the hull of the ships had to be closed in a storm or at night, preventing fresh air from flowing. Many slaves died from suffocation. Sometimes, under the condition of good weather and behaviour, male slaves could spend the day on the upper deck [11]. Women and children mostly travelled separated from men on the quarter and half decks, sometimes chained. On the long journeys, women were very often sexually abused and raped by the crew [12].

Smallpox, gastrointestinal diseases, fevers or simple seasickness rose the mortality index abruptly. However, the most frequent causes of death were starvation and dehydration, when the journeys took longer than expected and the crew ran

out of food and water. Sailors on their daily rounds had to sort the living from the dead and remove the corpses to reduce the load. Not even in these moments the captains and sailors felt much guilt, they still believed that the slaves did die for a godly matter, therefore they would meet Salvation [9].

The suffering of Africans on the vessels was so dreadful and the vision of enslavement in America terrified the Africans so much, that many of them organized conspiracies, rebelled openly and tried to avoid it by any means. When they failed and had to embark anyway, they still fought against their white enslavers or tried to end their suffering by throwing themselves overboard or by committing suicide by any other possible means. There have been many recorded cases of mothers who killed their children in order to release them from their pain and a future in chains [11]. The crew had to be very prudent and cautious in order to minimize the risks of any additional losses.

Traders speculated about the profitability of the slave trade and tried to investigate if better conditions on the ships, especially more space per slave and a better treatment, would reduce the mortality rate. They did not utter a unanimous verdict. Diseases still killed many of them, even when they worked with more square feet per slave, moreover, it was easier for the slaves to rebel and escape when they had enough space to move, that meant more additional losses. When introducing more personal space for slaves, the ship was not charged fully, so the total cost of the voyage had to be divided between less slaves to be sold and the final profit was reduced [13]. That is why the conditions described before remained a standard.

Once ashore, the slave sale methods differed, usually depending on the port of landing and if the cargoes were delivered with or without a previous contract. When a contract was settled between the captains and a trade company, the slaves were sold for a steady rate that reflected the medium price of all sales. This method was practical when the quality of slaves fluctuated. When the slaves were of a higher quality, it was favourable for the navigators to sell their slaves in auctions, for they could set a higher opening bid. The sales without contract were usually advised in advance in the port, after the arrival of ships. This kind of cargo was often sold on board at a scheduled hour: the planters and dealers who arrived first could purchase the finest slaves [7]. On-board sales were alternated with public outdoor or indoor auctions, an example of which is seen on Figure 2.

North of the Chesapeake Bay, an area where plantation workforce was not as necessary as in the South, the demand for slaves was in lower numbers but in higher quality. They preferred sophisticated and intelligent slaves fit to work as



Figure 2: Slave auction at Richmond, Virginia. 1856 [14].

house servants or in other jobs that required close contact with the Whites. That is the reason why almost only private slave sales were performed there, often with the presence of a physician. The sales in the South were much more massive, planters bought slaves in large quantities and did not care that much about their health [7]. Families were usually split on the markets, mothers were just rarely bought together with their children. Although the importation of slaves to the United States had been prohibited since 1808, the trade continued illegally until the outbreak of the Civil War.

3.2 Life on plantations

The hideous conditions that were set aboard the slave vessels often remained and in many cases were aggravated on plantations, but we must take in consideration that these circumstances depended always on the planter and the habits he had in treating his property. Most American slaveholders borrowed some of the successful methods used in Ancient Greece and Rome: after the purchase, they often addressed the slaves anonymously, just “boy” or “girl”, and after that, for a better distinction on the plantation, named them classical English names or their diminutives [6]. Family names were rarely employed and if so, they only served to identify property of the enslaver. Slaves had to address their owners as Master or Mistress, and the slaves were among Whites by rule referred to as Negars or Negroes. This was the first step of dehumanization, since the slaves did not have the right to keep

their original names or to speak their native languages.

Southern plantations usually looked alike, whether they grew tobacco, cotton or cane, they only varied in size. They comprised a white household that was in charge of a diverse number of black families. Their relationship varied, some slaveholders preferred to keep distance from their slaves, others considered them as part of the family and treated them better, but the masters were always superior to their slaves, because they owned them. Slaves lived in cabins, sometimes made of bricks, sometimes wooden, usually away from the masters' house (see Fig. 3). They frequently consisted of one or two rooms where several slaves lived together. The cabins were usually not equipped and the slaves had to provide for some minimal furnishing by themselves, in their free time. The masters' settle usually stood in the middle of a garden or forest, its size depended on the wealth of the planter and the size of his plantations. It was surrounded by detached buildings like the kitchen, laundry, the poultry house, or the rooms for domestic servants. Apart from the fields, most plantations included orchards and gardens, the settlements used to be completely self-sufficient. The masters were supposed to provide their slaves for food, simpler than the one that was served in the main house, enough clothing, and basic health care [7]. The quality and quantity of the provided goods differed, but it was generally perceived as immoral among slave owners when somebody did not provide the minimum food and clothing, however could not be sanctioned in any way because the slaves had no legal rights and no rules for their treatment existed.

According to Basil Hall's 1828 travel diary, cited in Phillips' *Slavery*, the plantation and slave owners of the Southern states generally had "a desire to manage their estates with the least possible severity." He claims that excessive austerity and unnecessary violence were rather rare. Planters preferred to employ discipline to support their authority, because without discipline the system of slavery would not be functional and effective [7]. The question of how they achieved this kind of extreme control should be considered.

Masters sometimes contributed to the slaves' education, only religious, and activities for their free time. Slaves ought to be illiterate, so their owners usually did not allow them to learn to read, and especially write. Literacy was a danger to the whole system, as Douglass cites one of his owners in his *Narrative*, a black must know nothing but obey his master. Hence he would be unfit to be a good slave, he would become unmanageable and eventually run away. He could read abolitionist texts and acquire knowledge that would make him doubt his slave status, write a slave's pass and manage to escape to the free states of the north.



Figure 3: Slave quarters in Hermitage, Savannah, Georgia. 1903 [15].

It was generally known that the best way of preventing trouble was by eliminating the occasions for it. If slaves complained about the difficulty of any task, the best solution was to ease it or cut the schedule. Otherwise, when planters and overseers tired the slaves excessively and did not give them the right conditions for a healthy life, they were more keen to rebellion, sabotage or running away—since the slaves were the planters' property and part of his capital, planters wanted to prevent that from happening. When tired excessively, slaves were also weaker, not capable of work or able in just a fraction of the usual, epidemics were more likely to outbreak and slaves' death again meant a significant loss for the owners [7]. When the plantations were so vast that they could not be controlled just from one centre, the planters hired overseers to watch over the slaves and the quality of daily production. These were often considerably tough in their behaviour and did not feel any compassion with the slaves, since they were not their own chattel.

When the slaves were not content with their situation and masters did not have any will to improve it, slaves engaged in group or individual rebellions. The most common were attempts of escape that predominantly ended in the individuals' repeated capture. Patrols that searched the South for runaways were very numer-

ous, the slave owners rewarded them for returning fugitives back to the plantation. Sometimes they would tie them behind a horse and make them run behind it for long distances, if they fell from exhaustion, the riders just dragged them behind their horse until reaching the plantation. The treatment the returned escapees received afterwards was inhumane. The overseers or plantation owners imposed on the slaves exemplary punishment in order to avoid similar situations in the future. The most habitual form of punishment was whipping, some of which were unquestionably barbarous. Again, they always depended on the rules of each plantation and the will of every individual master or overseer. Many realistic descriptions of cruel whippings, sometimes unrighteous, have been given in the authentic and honest testimonies of freed slaves. The most unmanageable slaves were sold away in markets.

4 The slave experience

It is essential for the purpose of this thesis to get to know the authentic African-American point of view of the events that defined the institution of slavery in America, in opposition to its descriptions given by white scholars of that time. The reason for this differentiation lies in the fact that white men who have never experienced the outrageous practices of slavery, could never understand the psychology of the slaves or even see the suffering of the blacks in all its terror. Many of them were even supporters of slavery, so their depictions show the institution as a beneficial system for both groups, blacks and whites equally, because according to them, blacks enjoyed the patriarchal bond between them and their masters, who arranged for their supposed life satisfaction [16]. In order to present a credible and balanced account, the following chapters will focus on sources with an internal point of view of the problematic. This is well represented in autobiographies, the slave narratives, that were written by runaway slaves themselves or accounts that have been gathered after the emancipation and abolition. Also researches that have been made by black scholars in the late 20th century and the 21st offer this perspective. That is why they have been chosen in the first place to support the principal ideas of the following sections.

4.1 Slave narratives

The literary tradition of slave narrative extends back to the eighteenth century, when the earliest autobiographies and stories began to appear. The purpose of such narratives was the intention of giving an honest description of the conditions that prevailed in the antebellum plantation South, in order to support the abolitionist ideas. They wanted to prove that slavery was not a benevolent system and that slaves did not have a satisfactory and respected position as the wage workers in the Northern free states [16]. We should take into account that publishing anti-slavery narratives before the Civil War by slave fugitives from the South must have been a great hazard for them, and so appreciating their unbelievable courage for the fight for freedom is necessary. Many of the slaves who managed to escape were not even literate, so their stories had to be recorded by transcribers. In these cases it must be considered that mostly whites transcribed the stories and may have altered them, voluntarily or not, by focusing on specific topics, or somehow subtly imprinting their personal opinions in the texts.

Another remarkable collection of knowledge of slavery has been assembled dur-

ing the years 1936-38 thanks to the Federal Writers' Project; a project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) funded by the United States government to support American writers and new written work after the Great Depression. This *Slave Narrative Collection* comprised more than two thousand interviews with ex-slaves who were liberated after the emancipation. As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, the treatment that slaves received in Southern plantations was widely varied; as Yetman claims in *The Background of the Slave Narrative Collection*, it "ran from the most harsh, impersonal and exploitative to the extremely indulgent, intimate and benevolent" [16]. In this case it should be considered that the credibility of the collection is often questioned due to several facts: the former slaves were interviewed seventy years after the emancipation, and when freed, they were children or young adults. This indicates that they might have seen slavery differently at that early age. In addition, they recalled it from a not optimal life position; the interviewed were age-old and mostly impoverished by the economic depression [16]. Hence their accounts and recalls might be affected by that matter and result in more positive depictions than might differ from reality [17].

Even after considering this weakness of the WPA's *Slave Narrative Collection*, it still has to be confirmed that the massive quantity of knowledge and experience that has been gathered in the narratives serves the purpose of this work greatly. In the *Collection*, the readers get to compare different episodes from the lives of Southern plantation ex-slaves, both male and female. Several accounts have been used to illustrate the conditions on plantations described in the next parts of this chapter. The focus has been laid specifically on the different characteristics of male and female enslavement. It is obvious that the work was equally backbreaking for men and for women, but it differed in some specific aspects, mainly in the perception of the institution from both genders and a different attitude from their masters.

4.2 Gender differentiation

As it has been mentioned before, it is known that historical or literary sources dealing with the topic of slavery that were written by white scholars, when focusing on the description of slaves' conditions, life or work, they did not usually differentiate between sexes. Often the descriptions were even masculinized, and the female experience was not considered that important. We have to take in consideration that the overall female position, even of the whites, was still far below the male and the quest for women's rights or equality had still a long way to go.

In literature, all slaves, men and women equally, were generally portrayed as sexless “Sambos”; childlike, passive, devoted and perfectly loyal individuals with no higher ambitions, whose only role was to serve their masters for life [12]. Most antebellum whites firmly believed in this homogeneous characterization of blacks, because it fitted perfectly their necessities in the slave business and plantations. Of course, this image was generalized and many captive men and women just preferred to hide behind it their personal aspirations and qualities. It was simply easier for many to fit an undemanding behavioural pattern than having higher goals or thoughts of freedom and failing in the attempt of achieving them, just because there were no circumstances and opportunities for it. Blacks just worked, behaved and acted as the whites wanted them to, to ease themselves of the suffering that would follow if they disobeyed, and the whites used it as a justification for the enslavement of blacks, a confirmation of their weak will and their only applicability in subordination and servitude for the whites [18]. There were of course exceptions for this behavioural patterns, slaves that did not conform with a life in chains and were devoted to the idea of freedom and racial equality. Many of these brave stories were described on the pages of the most famous slave narratives, including the ones that are part of the analyses presented further.

The truth is that both men and women acted similarly in many ways, they were all hidden behind the anonymous image of “Sambo”, but under the surface of this general image of slave there were many nuances that differentiated the experience of male and female captives. These were mostly related with a different overall approach to life, and of course the approach that the slaveholders had towards the slaves.

4.2.1 Work characteristics

The division of work between men and women always depended on the specifics of each plantation, on its crops type and size, and on the personal preferences of each owner. Both genders were supposed to work as much and as well as they could, otherwise severe punishment would follow. Generally, men were designated to employ tasks that required more physical power and resistance. Therefore they were employed on the most backbreaking tasks that were performed on the fields. When women worked in the fields together with men, they usually still had to care for their own domestic chores and look after children, when men rested [12].

According to most accounts of ex-slaves in the WPA Collection, all field hands had to work as hard as they could, from dusk to dawn, gender indifferent. Many

times they did not even have time to eat or rest, and were controlled by cruel overseers. Slaves often died in the fields, many of them got sick from being overworked. Further in the South, where winters were not as cold and crops could be planted all year long, the field slaves suffered the most. The work was physically very demanding and the never-ending cycle of plantation work was exhausting for all. In places where cold winters came, the blacks worked in the whites' households during the winter, or had the chance to improve their own cabins when field work was not possible. Slaveholders also needed house servants to work in the kitchen or to do other house chores. These were almost exclusively reserved for black women: cooking, cleaning, doing laundry or assisting whenever the owners needed their service. As Sarah Gudger, a former slave from South Carolina, stated in her utterance, the rich whites never had to work, because they had blacks to do anything for them [19].

Even though it might seem that the conditions of housemaids and cooks in the white dwellings were far better for female slaves, the contrary is the case. It has to be considered, that these slaves were usually supervised directly by their masters and mistresses. This fact facilitated the constant pressure to which house servants were exposed, be it from their mistress who usually controlled and distributed all the housework, or their master who very often abused the female slaves. We can find evidence of this behaviour in many slave narratives, sadly most slave women were sexually abused by white men at least once in their lives.

4.2.2 White men, black women and rape

Since the main power on the plantations were male planters and overseers, their instincts and passions often made them change the attitude towards female slaves. A general belief existed, that black women were exceptionally libidinous, lascivious and promiscuous, so the degradation of women and their turning in objects of sexual desire could be pontificated. This false prejudice rumoured amongst white men since their first experience with African women: very often their bodies were exposed naked on the public auctions, so that the buyers could examine the offered slaves, a thing that was unthinkable for a decent woman of that time – all respectable white ladies would never expose their legs or arms to public view. The black woman's body commanded no respect of such kind. The characteristics of some tasks, for instance the work on inundated rice fields or doing the laundry, required the slave women to work with their skirts pulled up high, otherwise the long skirts would impede them in performing the tasks well [12]. And again, the

fact that they showed their legs publicly made them look as ladies of easy virtues, so men did not hesitate to engage in sexual intercourse with them.

These women were often used as sex slaves by their masters, besides from performing the standard field or house work assigned. If they refused, harsh punishments would usually follow. The illegitimate children who were born from these mostly involuntary unions were in a very difficult position: because of being born to a slave woman they automatically became slaves, but the evidence of being the product of the master's lust was imprinted in the shade of the child's skin, so the mistresses often despised of them and punished them constantly for their husbands' adultery. The black girls who were forced or exploited by their masters in this way, were also perceived as rivals for the masters' jealous wives: sometimes they punished their husbands' black paramours by giving them unaccomplishable tasks, then whipping them for not completing them, or talking their men into selling off the girls or the children [12].

Slave women were often bought on the market and were most valuable if they were considered good "breeders", instructions for the recognition of the reproductive abilities of a black woman could be commonly read in the newspapers or discussed publicly among slave owners.

4.2.3 Slave families and sales

According to professor Bassingame's study of slavery, the black families, even though they were not officially recognized by law, were the most important survival mechanisms for slaves. These families were predominantly monogamous, but since the slave owners often regard slaves as individual objects instead of social and family beings, in many cases they were split. However, when the families were maintained, their functions remained the same as in standard nuclear families. They raised their children, prepared them for the plantation life and hard work and acted as supportive and encouraging groups [18].

When slaveholders believed that developing any kind of personal affection or social union in their slave community could distract the slaves from their duties or ease the way to rebellion, slaves were not allowed to live a social and family life. Under these conditions, kinship and family ties were practically erased [18]. The slaves were often sold away separately: one of the common traditions was the separation of mother and child shortly after birth, so that no strong bonds among them could be formed. In these cases, the children were kept mostly on a different plantation and raised by an older woman who was not suitable for field or house

work any more. Women returned to work almost immediately after childbirth [19]. Frederick Douglass himself confirms this kind of practices in his *Narrative*. He and his mother were separated before he reached one year of age, and he was unaware of any other family that would not be split [1]. As it was mentioned in the previous section, fathers of slave children were oftentimes not identified or acknowledged, because of the frequency of rapes and arranged impregnation of black women.

Habitually, some of the slave traders travelled between plantations and cities to offer their services regularly. This way the inconvenient slaves could be sold and others could be bought directly on plantations. As it has been described in many slave narratives, apart from the wandering salesmen and public or private auctions, slaves were traditionally traded or offered for hire annually, on January 1st. This particular day was dreaded by many slaves, because every year, any slaves' friends, husbands, wives or children might be offered for sale or hire and be never seen again [19].

5 Selected slave narratives

Through the writing of runaway slaves, it is easier to understand the crimes of slavery that suddenly become more credible, since we get to identify them with authentic victims. Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* [1] and Harriet Ann Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* [2], are both excellent examples of slave narratives written by fugitive slaves. Therefore they have been selected as representative literary works to support the aims of this thesis, and are going to be analysed further.

The selected authors have imprinted in their autobiographies a remarkable personal experience and point of view. At the time they were published, along with many other narratives, they fulfilled the role of a symbol for the slaves' humanity; they revealed how slaves suffered under the peculiar institution – physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. They managed to show to the public how much blacks struggled in the South, being completely aware of the iniquities that the white society committed and how much they craved for freedom [20]. Slave narratives became crucial instruments in the hands of abolitionists.

Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs were both witnesses of the cruelty of slavery, and were eager to undergo all the possible failures and punishments that came along with any attempt of escape. The risks that they were willing to take on their quest for freedom serve as an indicator of the level of terror that a life in bondage presented. They were both born in the American South as slaves, at the beginning of the 19th century, but their life stories differ. It is understandable that their experience was heavily influenced by the environment in which they were born, the kind of work that they were assigned to, by the nature of their owners and clearly, by their gender. Since slaves of different sex experienced slavery differently, they wrote about it in different ways. Therefore the gender of the authors marked significantly the final shape of their works. Douglass assumed the role of a strong male who fought for his getaway and had to defend his position of man among men, whereas Jacobs as a woman pointed up her womanliness and strong bonds with other female characters, in order to find compassion with female readers [20].

Jacobs narrates her story with much sensitivity and tenderness. She focuses more on the psychological impact that slavery had on her and the people around her, rather than on a factual description of the events of her life, which is frequent in Douglass' narrative. Jacobs is a woman of high moral values, which she uses to judge the deeds of people around her and blame the whole system of slavery. Since

she had such a strong moral awareness, she suffered much more the degradation and abuse by her masters. Therefore in the narrative she often expresses feelings of humiliation, pity and sorrow for her actions, which were inevitable in her condition, but diametrically opposed to her beliefs. Womanliness, the importance of family, friends, and trust are the central themes of her story. The degradation of women is presented quite often, so the narrative displays slavery perceived by a female slave and the impacts it had on her femininity and behaviour.

On the other hand, Douglass focuses much more on a factual description of the most important events in his life, rather than on the psychological impact of slavery on the enslaved. However, he gives the reader a good image of the life of a slave and different types of masters that he got to know. The fact that he lived and worked on plantations as well as in the city and was owned by a very wide spectrum of masters, sets him in the role of an insider who is capable to deliver a critical view of the system and people's characters. Unlike Jacobs, he does not hesitate to describe violent and cruel images that he witnessed, which is understandable, since he had a first-hand experience with the most devastating physical brutality of slavery.

5.1 Literacy and language in Douglass' and Jacobs' narratives

The quest for literacy and knowledge of the authors are very important common themes that appear in both analysed narratives. This inquiry affected their lives significantly and facilitated them the escape from slavery. Therefore they play an important part in their stories and are mentioned frequently; Frederick Douglass considers it the most important factor that liberated his mind and led him towards freedom [1].

Both analysed authors learnt to read and write secretly and so proved their immense yearn for literacy. They craved for knowledge and were determined to take serious risks in order to achieve this goal. Since reading and writing were abilities reserved exclusively for whites, it was outrageous for blacks to ask for the study of language. However, they both met masters at one moment of their lives, who were eager to teach them the basics. In both cases, the people who taught our narrators to read were white educated women, but their kindness represented an exception among slaveholders. As Frederick Douglass states in his *Narrative*, white masters generally believed that literacy was the key to the slaves' unmanageability

and their thoughts of freedom. One of his masters, Mr. Auld, specifically confirmed by saying to his wife that “by teaching that nigger (Frederick) how to read, there would be no way of keeping him.” Douglass realised that literacy was a pathway to freedom and he was devoted to take it [1]. This endless desire for education ignited Frederick Douglass’ thirst for freedom. This quest for literacy is an important theme in both Douglass’ and Jacobs’ narratives and the moments of learning are often vividly described in their texts.

From the facts stated above it is possible to assume that the American system of slavery somehow depended on the illiteracy of slaves. This way the stratification of the American slaveholding society was more pronounced: slaveholders had much more power over their slaves when they were illiterate. Illiteracy and a restrained access to education have been often used by more powerful groups as a means to control the weaker ones. Since Douglass understood it very well (partly because he overheard Mr. Auld once talking about the issue), he used the power that he gained against his masters and escaped out of their reach. He considered literacy to be his strongest weapon.

At the beginning of both narratives, the readers come across a humble confession and apology from the authors, for an alleged inferior literary quality of their works. This insecurity is probably rooted in the fact that they had to learn to write in solitary, in secret, and had never received any kind of formal education. In addition to that, when being enslaved in the South, they had never been allowed to write and express their real emotions and opinions of slavery publicly, so the fact that they were publishing such works for the first time might also be one of the sources of their insecurity. Harriet Jacobs even published the narrative under the pseudonym of Linda Brent, just because she was afraid of the consequences that the publishing of such texts would have for her and the people she left behind, who helped her to escape. All the other names she used for her relatives, friends and masters were changed in order not to expose them and cause them trouble. Douglass, on the other hand, decided to publish his work fearlessly under his new “free-man’s” name Frederick Douglass, since he already was a recognized speaker and abolitionist.

The language used in the analysed slave narratives is another valuable factor that should be regarded. Douglass’ narrative is composed in a very sophisticated and refined style. There is no wonder that he became such a remarkable public speaker, his texts are very dynamic and fiery, it is clearly visible that he was preoccupied with language. Jacobs’ writing style also corresponds with her personality; it is rather sensitive and gentle, with some interwoven passages that reflect abo-

litionist phrases and ideas. Clearly, she needed to express her disagreement with the practices of slavery in the South. Both authors employ polished structures and vocabulary, very similar to the ones employed by white writers of the 19th century. In direct speech, the words of fellow slaves are transcribed in some sort of slang, which copies the African-American English that was spoken among blacks. This form of transcribing the blacks' speech indicates that they were illiterate, therefore did not know the rules of standard English, nor did care for using it properly. Also it is known that African-Americans developed a modified form of English that was spoken among most slaves, probably because it was not the mother tongue of their ancestors and they adapted it to their needs. Douglass and Jacobs, however, had to employ the standard rules of English when entering the world of white scholars and intellectual abolitionists. They also intended their narratives to be distributed predominantly among the white public, so they had to adapt the form adequately.

5.2 Frederick Douglass' *Narrative*

Frederick Douglass was born in Maryland and was owned by several masters throughout his life. He learned the basics of spelling from the wife of one of his owners, Mrs. Auld. When Mr. Auld found out that his wife was teaching a slave boy how to read, he forbade her to do so. Douglass had to continue learning secretly. He escaped from his masters after two unsuccessful attempts and approximately twenty years in chains. He reached New York in 1838 and became a free man, and an influential speaker of the abolitionist movement. His thoughts of freedom and running away are strongly pronounced in his work, as well as an open critique of the system of slavery.

Douglass was separated from his mother soon after birth, and he never had the chance to connect with her properly. His father was a white man, probably his master, but he never got to confirm this suspicion. Therefore he was deprived of all familiar bonds and affections, and had to live as an individual, relying only on himself. He detested the white patriarchal concept of slaves living isolated lives, with no strong bonds among them, only happily united by the power of their master. Maybe that is the reason why he was so obsessed with the idea of taking charge of his own future. As it was mentioned before, thanks to the first hints of alphabet learning and the following prohibition of his master, Douglass very soon understood the importance of education and dedicated all his energy to its pursuit. He realized that power laid in knowledge and was determined to administer his own

life as a free man. Douglass even engaged in teaching some of his friends secretly, because he believed that literacy had the power to end slavery.

Another crucial factor that Douglass believed to bolster up the slaveholders' status, were the highly demanding work conditions that were set for slaves, predominantly in the fields. Once the slaves were tired enough, they were incapable of thinking about escape strategies and did not have enough physical force to effectuate them. He describes the work conditions of field hands very vividly, since he worked there for several months. He claims that during this most exhausting period he never had any thoughts of escaping, he was just not strong enough for it.

Douglass does not hesitate to describe violent scenes of terror on the plantations, mostly from the hands of the cruel overseers and masters he met. The descriptions of brutal whippings or other violent punishments and even killings are very credible and vivid; in comparison with Jacobs' more delicate writing, where she does not describe these atrocities so realistically and often. It has to be mentioned that Douglass sometimes acts very unusually for a slave. He stands out among the other described characters for his extraordinary courage. This braveness is remarkable especially when fighting with white men, mainly because blacks had absolutely no right to strike a white. When a black slave raised his hand against a white, even if they were fighting for the same cause or the black was in the right, the black fighter would be severely punished, whipped or even killed by his master or anybody else who was authorized to do so. By these fiery reactions Douglass demonstrates how determined he is to either live as a free man or die. Nothing in between is acceptable for him. After the fight with one of his overseers, which Frederick dominated completely, the overseer feared him that much that he never more objected him to any punishments or cruelties. Douglass understood that the power of whites over blacks was not endless and unbreakable. Furthermore, he was preoccupied with the question of laws and the iniquities of slavery, with the possible consequences of his actions. Several times he mentions the unjust treatment that slaves were subjected to: killing a slave was not considered a crime, and any white could do so, it was only considered a problem when the killed slave belonged to some other owner. Then his value had to be repaid to him. This dehumanization was another reason why Douglass was so determined to fight for the blacks' rights after escaping.

The master-slave relationship is one more crucial theme that Douglass decides to develop in his narrative. Since he worked for different masters and under di-

verse conditions, he is able to compare different behaviour of masters and overseers towards slaves. What is more, he even had the chance to observe how a decent white citizen could be transformed under the pressure of power that slave ownership gave him. This transformation is clearly noticeable in the case of Mrs. Auld. She had never before had control over a slave. After the arrival of Frederick to her household, she treated him with sympathy and affection. He was astonished by her kindness and the fact that she treated him as an equal. According to Douglas, under the influence of slavery she became even more violent than her husband. She abused the power she had over Douglass, nothing he did to fulfil her commands was ever completed well enough. In some time she learned to punish Douglass for every little detail of his work, detested seeing him with a newspaper, even when she was the one who taught him to read in the first place. She became a completely different person when she was given the power over a black slave child. Slavery destroyed her good character; as Douglass claims, slavery was destructive for the black people, as well as for the white.

As a religious man, he was very preoccupied by the question of religion and Christianity in the South, since the behaviour of the so-called Christian slaveholders certainly did not correspond with the Christian nature that Douglass would expect to see. The appendix of the *Narrative* is dedicated to this question of Southern Christianity. His experience had showed him, how slaveholders who called themselves religious, were capable of the most cruel deeds that he had ever witnessed. In his own words, “between the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, I recognise the widest possible difference – so wide, that to receive the one as good, pure, and holy, is of necessity to reject the other as bad, corrupt, and wicked. To be the friend of one, is of necessity to be the enemy of the other.” [1]

The importance of Frederick Douglass’ *Narrative* is unquestionable, but it gives the reader a rather one-sided picture of slavery. Even though he gives us a realistic portrait of the life of a Southern slave, it is very subjective and masculine. It is understandable that he wrote about the life in slavery as he perceived it, but for a thorough study of the whole institution it is very important to read confessions of more authors. For instance, Harriet Ann Jacobs’ work [2] gives another subjective view of slavery, but if the reader combines the knowledge of both narratives rather than focusing on just one of them, the general image he or she gets will be significantly wider.

5.3 Harriet Ann Jacobs' *Life of a Slave Girl*

Harriet Jacobs came from a town in North Carolina. Surrounded by family, friends and a good mistress, who taught her the alphabet, Harriet enjoyed a relatively happy childhood. Once her mother died, and soon her good mistress followed, she became property of Dr. Flint's young daughter and became the target of his sexual harassment. This constant abuse was so unpleasant for her, that she decided to run away from slavery. Before having a safe opportunity to escape, she had to hide for seven years in a tiny garret where she could barely move. This determination and patience made it possible for her to escape, save her children and finally publish her valuable autobiography [2] in 1861.

Jacobs organised her narrative slightly differently from Douglass. She decided to point out different chapters from her life, *incidents*, as she names them in the title of her narrative, instead of telling her whole story organised chronologically as Douglass does. There are many abolitionist ideas concealed behind the emotional confession that Harriet drafts. As it was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Jacobs' femininity is noticeable throughout the whole book. Since she was brought up in a family, and did not experience separation and solitude as Frederick Douglass did, the importance of family and relationships is crucial in her life. She is a social being that is strongly dependent on familiar bonds, her mother and grandmother the most. Therefore her narrative develops mostly around herself and the members of her family. The death of her mother and her good mistress were very deceiving moments for Jacobs, after that she develops an extremely strong bond with her grandmother. Since families play such an important role in her life, in her narrative she focuses primarily on the characterization of slave families and relationships in them.

An important turning point in the life of Jacobs is her entering Dr. Flint's family. When she turned fifteen years of age, his constant sexual pressure began. He chose Harriet to be the object of his appetite and was determined to do anything to get her. However, Jacobs despised of his desire and considered the deals he had for her outrageous. He wanted her to be his exclusive servant, he promised her anything she could think of, only if she would be there for him any time he needed her. She refused all of his offers and was determined to never be controlled by him, even after being threatened constantly. Since Jacobs was educated in a strongly Christian environment and was a person of high moral values, this kind of proposals from her much older and married master infuriated her unspeakably. He

threatened her by selling her away from town, to the plantation, because he knew that separating her from her family would be the worst punishment for her.

Here it is evident what kind of power Dr. Flint had over her. It is important to keep in mind that Harriet was not the only woman to suffer this kind of humiliation and molestation. On the contrary, such behaviour was almost a standard for white slaveholders. Therefore the power they had over their female servants was the constant extortion to which the women were submitted and their feeling of helplessness. The fact that women were often employed as servants in their owners' houses, made the constant surveillance and pressure on their female slaves even worse. Jacobs was very ashamed for her condition, for this reason she never wanted to confess it to her grandmother; she feared to be submitted to her judgement. In addition to that, Dr. Flint threatened to kill her if she told their secret anyone else. So Jacobs had to suffer alone.

Jacobs eventually developed her own method of resistance by secretly maintaining a relationship with a young white man, Mr. Sands, as she calls him in her narrative. When Dr. Flint found out, he was enraged, but Harriet profited from his anger because he avoided her for some time. In problematic situations, when being threatened, abused or raped by their masters, women often developed similar strategies or confessed their problems and experience with other women who were once in the same situation as them. This way, they developed a valuable tradition of female relationships, which were supported by the fact, that women worked often in an exclusively female environment (in the kitchen or masters' houses, when doing the laundry or caring for children), so they could share their experience and provide mutual support. The maintenance of these bonds was vital for the female resistance [20].

The feeling of love shaped Jacobs' life and subsequently her narrative. She loved her family, her grandmother above all, her fellow slaves, and her children. As strong as her love, on the other hand, is the hatred she feels towards Dr. Flint. This abhorrence had to grow stronger than the love that she felt for her grandmother and children specifically, because she decided at one point to leave her relatives behind and procure only for the escape from her master. Her dedication for this goal was so immense that she was capable to wait for seven years hidden in a garret behind her grandmother's house, waiting for a chance to flee. During the time she spent in her hiding place, she observed the people around her and tried to keep in touch with them at least by watching them passing by in the street. Again, it is evident of how much importance, at least a minimal amount of social interaction,

was to her. Her courage was of a different kind than Douglass', but not of less significance. The love for her children is even more supported by the fact that even during the years she spent hidden in her shelter, she still procured for her children to live a better life. She tried new strategies of how to procure for their freedom and never lost her hope. This endless hope for goodness and for a better future is incredibly encouraging.

Jacobs managed to imprint in her narrative an incredibly positive and strong message, her patience and endurance were surely outstanding and maybe motivating for other women. Because her writing is so feminine and sensible, so much interwoven with the importance of relationships and social interaction in the life of a woman, and the incredibly brave resistance to her master's desire, her narrative is remarkable in every aspect. She does not have to be violent and fierce in her written language to deliver an equally strong message and image of life in bondage as Frederick Douglass did.

6 Conclusion

In order to summarize the most important findings of this thesis it is essential to recall the aims that were set initially: to present an overview of the origins of slavery, its evolution in the United States and the consequences it had on the enslaved African-American people, focusing primarily on the differentiation of a male and female experience of slavery. To achieve this objective, the consulted literature had to be selected very carefully, since publications written by different authors offered very diverse descriptions of slavery. White scholars who witnessed the practices of slavery usually offered a rather positive but biased picture of the system. They mostly portrayed it as the best possible arrangement for both sides, the white owners and planters, as well as their “happy slaves”. However, they offered some valuable information about the everyday routine on plantations, and the view of slavery from the masters’ perspective. What is more, their justification of slavery was entangled in their writings, so they also provided relevant information on this matter. Post-Abolition texts provided more impartial information, but they mostly lacked the inner view of slavery, since they were written by intellectuals and historians who never experienced slavery as it was. For this reason, slave narratives from the WPA Collection have been chosen to provide a more balanced and credible evidence of the slaves’ experience. This subjectivity was notable in the last chapter of the thesis, which provided a detailed analysis of two autobiographies written by ex-slaves in the first half of the 19th century. The narratives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs were chosen for this purpose, since they are widely known texts that represent the prevalent masculine and feminine reality of a life in slavery. Contrary to the initial expectations, publications that would directly compare the male and female slave experience were rather scarce.

The presented findings were organized in five chapters, which are described right away. The institution of American slavery was definitely not an isolated episode in the history of humanity, because slavery has been present in many societies since the rise of ancient civilizations. However, the volume of slaves imported from Africa to America was unprecedented, as well as the fact that eventually, it became a question of race. For these reasons, it was considered important to present an abridged sketch of the evolution of slavery in the first slave societies – Egyptian, Grecian and Roman – and their specific traits that were adopted later by American slaveholders. The second chapter also provided a brief description of the process of colonization of North America, the enslavement of indigenous

peoples and the beginnings of the massive import of African slaves. Due to the impressive volume of enslaved and transported Africans, it was also important to reveal the motivation that Americans had to enslave the black people, and the justification they provided for it. The third chapter laid focus on the life of black slaves under the ownership of whites: on the poor treatment they received on the slave vessels or the dehumanizing techniques that were employed on the slave markets and auctions. For a better understanding of the detailed literary analyses that followed, it was also important to portray the basic characteristics of the life of a slave in the plantation South.

The second half of the thesis, beginning with chapter four, aimed more attention at the personal experiences of enslaved African-Americans and subsequently, at the gender-related differences of slavery. Therefore it focused mainly on the characteristics of the life and work of men and women and the aspects that differentiated their experience of enslavement. It is evident from these descriptions that work conditions were almost equally harsh for both genders, but the female experience was highly influenced by the fact that they were often perceived as sex objects by their masters, overseers or traders, and fundamentally everybody else. This objectification was a very common practice by most slaveholders, but this kind of sexual degradation and extortion was exclusively performed on black women. Moreover, this exploitation culminated when women were bought and used by their masters as breeders, whether it was for the multiplication of the owner's chattel or for his own pleasure. This female struggle is also visible in the analysis of Harriet Ann Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, which she published after escaping from the constant abuse of his master. The second slave narrative which was analysed in the fifth chapter is the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* who exposed there his subjective view and experience of slavery. Both analysed narratives provided an extremely valuable inner viewpoint of slavery, which facilitated the better comparison of the male and female experience necessary for the purpose of this thesis.

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Résumé

Tato bakalářská práce je zaměřena na specifika otroctví ve Spojených státech amerických, konkrétně na jeho původ, vývoj, a zejména rozdílné vnímání otroctví afroamerickými muži a ženami. Tyto genderové rozdíly se promítají ve dvou povídkách, které Frederick Douglass a Harriet Jacobsová napsali po útěku z otroctví a které jsou předmětem analýzy ve druhé části práce. Analýza rozlišuje jejich vnímání otroctví jako systému, jehož jsou součástí, jejich osobní zážitky a zkušenosti, ale také rozdílné metody vzdoru proti svým pánům a boje za svobodu. Práce se věnuje také literární stránce těchto povídek a dopadu, jaký měly na jejich autory a americkou otrokářskou společnost.

ANOTACE

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Název práce:	Americké otroctví z pohledu mužů a žen ve vybraných otrokářských povídkách
Název v angličtině:	American Slavery from a Male and Female Perspective in Selected Slave Narratives
Anotace práce:	Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá literárním žánrem otrokářských povídek, konkrétně pak analýzou dvojice publikací napsaných osvobozenými afroamerickými otroky v devatenáctém století. Hlavním cílem práce je zejména srovnání rozdílného vnímání otroctví muži a ženami, jejich různých rolí v systému otroctví a přístupu k celé problematice. Úvodní kapitoly práce se věnují obecné historii otroctví a charakteristice otázky otroctví ve Spojených státech amerických, navazující části pak postupně rozpracovávají obraz mužských a ženských otroků, jejich různé role ve společnosti, význam rodiny, jejich pracovní a celkové životní podmínky. Poslední část se pak věnuje detailní analýze autobiografií Fredericka Douglassa a Harriet Ann Jacobsové.
Klíčová slova:	Otroctví; otrok; otrokářská povídka; rasová diskriminace; gender; Frederick Douglass; Harriet Jacobs
Anotace v angličtině:	This thesis deals with the literary genre of slave narratives, specifically then with the analysis of two narratives written in the nineteenth century by fugitive African-American slaves, Frederick Douglass and Harriet Ann Jacobs. The main aim of this thesis is to describe the different perception of slavery between male and female slaves, their roles in the whole system of slavery and their approach to the problem. The first chapters of the thesis are dedicated to a general history of slavery and the characterization of slavery in the United States, its following parts define progressively the differences between the male and the female perception of slavery, their roles in the American slave society, the importance of families, their general work and life conditions. The last part deals with detailed analyses of the autobiographies written by Frederick Douglass and Harriet Ann Jacobs.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	Slavery; slave; slave narrative; race; racism; gender; Frederick Douglass; Harriet Jacobs
Přílohy vázané v práci:	1 CD ROM
Rozsah práce:	
Jazyk práce:	Anglický