



FACULDADE DE FILOLOXÍA

GRAO EN INGLÉS: ESTUDOS LINGÜÍSTICOS E LITERARIOS

The Birth of African American Identity in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*

Vo. e Pe. da directora:

NUÑEZ
PUENTE
CAROLINA



Student: Cristina Pardellas Fernández

Advisor: Carolina Núñez Puente

Year 2022

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Introduction.....	1
1. Part One: African American Identity and Slave Narratives.....	4
2. Part Two: Identity, Literacy, and Writing in Douglass' Work.....	8
2.1. Narrative Structure and Racial Issues: Preface, Letter, and Appendix.....	8
2.2. Thematic and Formal Features in Douglass' <i>Narrative</i>	17
Conclusion.....	28
Works Cited.....	30

Abstract

The object of study of this end-of-degree project is the autobiography of Frederick Douglass, titled *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*, and written in 1845. The aims that I want to demonstrate are two: that the conceptualization of African American identity is inextricably related to the slave narrative genre and that Douglass' *Narrative* is a literary masterpiece, both formally and thematically. Throughout this paper I will also study the concepts of "identity," "race," and the general characteristics of slave narratives. Moreover, I will analyze the content of Douglass' book by focusing first on its themes and finally on its form.

Regarding the methodology I followed for the elaboration of this study, the first step was to search for information on the various topics I wanted to address. To do so, I collected some articles from academic sources such as *JSTOR* or *Dialnet* and also consulted dictionaries and books in search of definitions of some key concepts—e.g. *Oxford English Dictionary* and *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. Furthermore, I also used as secondary sources of information some publications from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and the original text of the "Declaration of Independence." All of these sources deal with topics such as African American identity and the genre of slave narratives; moreover, several of them are focused on analyzing exclusively the works of Douglass.

Before beginning to write this paper, I did a close reading of the book in which I took notes of the most important issues addressed, trying to focus on race, identity, and literacy. Additionally, for the thorough analysis of the form, I also selected several rhetorical figures and two complete passages that I will quote in the corresponding section. Most of the key concepts addressed in this B.A. thesis belong to the field of African American Studies. Some of these include the experience of people of African descent in the United States, race-based oppression, and the formation of an African American community and culture. Therefore, the study of

Douglass' *Narrative* from an African American Studies perspective helps the reader to understand the abuses that black people have suffered for centuries.

The structure of this dissertation consists of two main parts; furthermore, the second part is subdivided into two sections. The reason for this distribution is to demonstrate the two aims of this project separately. On the one hand, the first part will study African American identity and the genre of slave narratives. On the other hand, the second part will be focused on analyzing Douglass' *Narrative* through a close reading. One of the conclusions I have reached is how questionable the concept of "race" is today in the scientific realm compared to the past. In addition, it has also been demonstrated the key role that slave narratives played in the recognition of the identity of black slaves and how exceptional both the themes and form of Douglass' *Narrative* are.

Introduction

This end-of-degree project analyzes in depth *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*, focusing on the themes discussed in it as well as the form in which it is written. Frederick Douglass was a man who was born in 1818 into slavery and, after managing to escape and become a free man as an adult, dedicated his life to the abolitionist movement. Although numerous slave narratives have been written throughout history, the reasons why I chose this book for my project are its rich writing style and the narration of the personal development Douglass experiences. Next, in this introduction I will explain the motivations that made me choose this narrative as the object of my analysis, as well as the aims of this study and the methodology I followed in order to write it. Finally, I will end this section by describing the structure of this project.

Regarding the motivations that made me want to study the life and work of Frederick Douglass in depth, foremost among them is my interest in African American literature. In my end-of-degree project, I wanted to go back to the beginnings and analyze the birth of African American identity and, therefore, I had to focus on slave narratives. Furthermore, another reason was how unfair I found it that this literary masterpiece was almost forgotten. Although films about slaves are still being made today, there has never been a biopic about Frederick Douglass even though the concept of African American identity can be said to have begun with him and his narrative was a turning point in the slave narrative genre. As for the aims, this project seeks to demonstrate that the conceptualization of African American identity is inextricably related to the slave narrative genre. In addition, I will also prove, by means of close-reading, that Douglass' *Narrative* is a literary masterpiece, both formally and thematically.

The first step before I began writing this paper was to gather articles from reliable sources on the concepts of "race" and "ethnicity," African American identity, slave narratives,

and the works of Frederick Douglass. To search for this information, I resorted to academic websites such as *JSTOR*, *Dialnet* or the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Some of the secondary texts I read for my research are publications from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*; in addition, I also quote a fragment of the text of the “Declaration of Independence.” Other articles cited are written by Kwame Anthony Appiah, Kelly Norman, James Olney, Ira Berlin, James Matlack and John L. Thomas; furthermore, I used a class lecture of “North-American Literature 1” by Carolina Núñez Puente. All of these sources discuss the origins of African American identity, the characteristics of the genre of slave narratives, and analyze Douglass’ *Narrative* highlighting the features that make it different from others. Needless to say, the text I examined the most was my main object of study: Douglass’ printed volume.

Continuing with the explanation of the methodology I followed during the elaboration of this study, the next step after the first search for information was to read the entire *Narrative* of Douglass. Once I had done a first reading to remember the general development of the story, I proceeded to do a close reading of the text to determine which themes I would deal with in this project. During this reading process, I took notes of some topics or ideas that could be useful to me in the future, and I also highlighted in the book the fragments that I could quote in order to analyze them. Once I started the writing process, I found myself confronted with terms that I did not know how to define and with concepts that I did not have enough information about. Therefore, I was obliged to find more sources with which to complete this paper at the same time I was writing, among them a chapter taken from *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. With all the necessary information gathered, I was then able to focus solely on writing this study.

In terms of the structure of this paper, its content will be divided into two main parts; moreover, the second part will also be subdivided into two sections. The reason for this division is to demonstrate the two aims of this project that were mentioned above. Thus, Part One will

be more focused on proving the first aim while Part Two will concentrate on demonstrating the second. The title of Part One is “African American Identity and Slave Narratives” and is four pages long. This section begins by providing the definition of the concept of *identity* and explaining what slave narratives consist of; in addition, some of the most famous authors of this genre as well as the titles of their works are also named. This is followed by a description of the characteristics that most slave narratives tend to have in common. Lastly, this section concludes by analyzing the crucial role that slave narratives have played in helping people, especially whites in the US, recognize that African slaves possessed an identity of their own.

The title of Part Two of this end of degree project is “Identity, Literacy, and Writing in Douglass’ Work”. Section 2.1. is titled “Narrative Structure and Racial Issues: Preface, Letter, and Appendix.” At the beginning, I will give a definition of the concept of “race” and then comment on the opinions of some scholars on the uses of the term “race” both in the past and in the present. Next, I will explain how the *Narrative* of Douglass is structured. To conclude this section, I will conduct a close reading of the title, the preface, the letter, and the appendix providing a critical analysis of why Douglass decided to include these parts in his text. Section 2.2. is titled “Thematic and Formal Features in Douglass’ Narrative” and is divided into two areas: topics and style. I will first discuss the main themes that are dealt with throughout the *Narrative*, quoting the fragments that are most relevant. Finally, to conclude this subsection, I will do a close reading of the form, where I will analyze several passages while considering the rhetorical figures.

1. Part One: African American Identity and Slave Narratives

The body of this end of degree project is divided into two parts. The beginning of part one will focus on defining and commenting upon the concept of “identity.” Next, I will provide an explanation of the slave narrative genre and give some examples of the best-known slave narratives. Furthermore, I will also enumerate some of the characteristics that all narratives tend to have in common. To conclude this first section, I will discuss the crucial role that slave narratives played in terms of African American identity; through them, people began to recognize that black slaves had an identity of their own.

This end-of-degree project studies how Douglass’ *Narrative* and the reputation achieved by its writer mark the beginning of African American identity. However, before we begin to analyze the birth of the identity of an entire ethnicity, the first step is to know the meaning of the term “identity.” Among the numerous definitions provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, we find that “identity” refers to “the sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition of being a single individual; the fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality” (“Identity, n. 2”). The statement that “identity” is “the condition of being a single individual” leads one to reflect on how, at the time of slavery in the United States, blacks were considered to be a homogeneous mass of labor. Although nowadays it would be unthinkable to judge all people belonging to the same ethnicity as a whole—as if they were a uniform group and shared the same characteristics—, this was not the case in the America of the 1800s. The plantation owners in the South refused to recognize that each enslaved person was an individual in his or her own right with their unique personality and thoughts, and not a being with a mentality as simple as that of an animal.

To begin to recognize the identity of the enslaved Africans, slave narratives proved to be exceptionally useful. In order to delve more deeply into this distinctive genre of American literature, it is first necessary to provide a general definition. The term “slave narrative” refers

to an account of the life of a slave (either a fugitive or a former slave) written by the slave himself or transmitted orally to another person. Slave narratives usually recount the slave's oppressive life on the plantation, their escape to the "free states"—often not described in detail—and finally their life as a free citizen engaged in anti-slavery activism (Andrews). The atrocities that were committed within the slave plantations of the South were largely unknown to many citizens in other parts of the United States. Even if some people were aware of the details, the general thinking at the time was not to consider blacks within the category of human beings. Nevertheless, Andrews says that in the early nineteenth century, at the height of the movement for the abolition of slavery, people began to want to read "hard-hitting eyewitness accounts of the harsh realities of slavery in the United States."

During the period of slavery in the United States, numerous slave narratives emerged as a result of people's demand to read first-person accounts of the reality of slavery. Among these can be found the bestseller *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano; or, Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (1789). Also noteworthy are the *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave. Written by Himself* (1847) and the *Narrative of Sojourner Truth, a Northern Slave, Emancipated from Bodily Servitude by the State of New York, in 1828* (1850). Other famous titles are *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom: Or, The Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery* (1860) and *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853* (1853)¹. Moreover, Harriet Jacobs' *Incident in the Life of A Slave Girl, Written by Herself* (1861) is considered "the most important slave narrative written by an African-American woman" ("Harriet"). However, among all of them, the narrative that Andrews consider as "the epitome of the slave narrative" is the autobiography of Frederick Douglass (1845). In Douglass'

¹ Solomon Northup's story is more widely known because of the film *12 Years a Slave*.

Narrative the narrator gradually discovers his identity thanks to literacy, which is one main theme.

Slave narratives do not only have an incalculable value as a first-person testimony of the horrors experienced by slaves, but their importance also lies in their usefulness for readers to recognize African American slaves as having an identity. These narratives allowed readers to know the thoughts and sentiments of the slaves, and helped people realize that they were not so different from them. Therefore, narratives about the lives of black slaves did not serve the same purpose as autobiographies written by white American citizens. Whereas the latter were an account of the author's individual adventures, the former acted as a collective discourse that represented their entire ethnicity and had the mission of denouncing the miseries of slavery. According to Kelly Norman, the narrative voice of a slave autobiography is not an "I" that represents only its author, but a collective "I" that symbolizes the silenced voices of all enslaved blacks in America (26). Since slaves were not recognized as having an identity—either collective or not—for their situation to be condemned, their narratives represent both themselves as individuals and as a collective. Thus, those who had managed to escape from slavery told their story to achieve individual freedom and recognition as human beings and also to emancipate their entire ethnic group that was undergoing a common experience.

According to Olney, slave narratives are easy to recognize since they all tend to share certain characteristics as well as following the same structure (50). First of all, the title page usually features a photograph of the protagonist of the autobiography. Secondly, on the title page is usually included the phrase "Written by Himself" or something similar, e.g. "Written from a statement of Facts Made by Himself" or "Written by a Friend" (Olney 50). This is because some narratives were transmitted orally by the slaves—who were illiterate—to be written by white people. The title page is followed by an introduction to the narrative, or a preface written by a respectable white person attesting that the testimony of the black slave is

true. The people who wrote the prefaces were either activists in the abolitionist movement who knew the protagonist, or the white person who acted as scribe. Furthermore, a slave narrative usually begins with a first sentence that says, “I was born...” and specifies the place of birth (Olney 50). Nevertheless, sometimes the protagonist does not know the date of his birth because the master has concealed it from him or her. This is followed by a mention of the slave’s family, which either includes a white father—the owner or the son of the owner—or tells how the protagonist was separated from his/her mother as a child. As Olney states, there is also usually a cruel master (emphasizing that Christian masters are the cruelest of all) and descriptions of the first time the protagonist saw how another slave was punished by whipping (50).

Slave narratives tend to include poems, either whole poems within the appendix or a few verses in the middle of the narrative (Olney 49). Something that is noteworthy and that distinguishes this literary genre from all others is the exaggerated amount of documentation that accompanies the book. These documents may appear in the narrative at the beginning, interspersed in the middle, or as appendices. Among them can be found letters addressed to the protagonist, news of slave auctions and fugitive slaves, official certificates (e.g., of birth and death), and anti-slavery speeches that demonstrate that the narrator is engaged in activism. There is a reason why the slave narratives include all the mentioned features: a picture of the protagonist, correspondence between the narrator and other people, the claim that it was “Written by Himself” within the title itself, and the first sentence “I was born.” As argued by James Olney, while these details could be found in other autobiographies of that period, they certainly would not share the same meaning (52). This documentation is for the sole purpose of proving that the narrator exists, and that his/her account is reliable.

2. Part Two: Identity, Literacy, and Writing in Douglass' Work

2.1. Narrative Structure and Racial Issues: Preface, Letter, and Appendix

The second part of my dissertation is again divided into two sections. I will begin this section with a definition of the term “race,” followed by the opinions of some scholars on the subject. Afterwards, I will describe how Frederick Douglass' *Narrative* is structured and will conduct an in-depth analysis especially of the title, the preface, the letter, and the appendix. To conclude this section, I will discuss racial issues and will focus on the meaning and motives that lead Douglass to add these parts to his narrative.

The concepts of race, identity, and literacy are closely related in the *Narrative*. Due to the race (or ethnicity, as I prefer to say²) to which Frederick Douglass belongs, for the majority of the citizens of the United States he lacks an identity of his own and is little more than an animal, fit only to perform manual labor. Nonetheless, thanks to his autobiography Douglass will be able to prove to his white readers that he has an identity. In order to discuss the many racial issues that exist in the *Narrative*, we must first understand what exactly is meant by the term “race.” Among the different definitions that appear in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, we find that, “according to various more or less formal attempted systems of classification,” the concept of “race” refers to “any of the (putative) major groupings of mankind, usually defined in terms of distinct physical features or shared ethnicity, and sometimes (more controversially) considered to encompass common biological or genetic characteristics.” Of this definition, what I find most interesting is the phrase that alludes to the controversy that sometimes all members of the same ethnic group are “considered to encompass common biological or genetic

² “Race” is usually associated with biology and linked with physical characteristics such as skin color or hair texture. “Ethnicity” is linked with cultural expression and identification. (Blakemore)

characteristics” (“Race”). This statement seems to me a racist excuse to be able to claim that, for example, all blacks are ignorant.

Kwame Anthony Appiah contends that, since humans began to write, there have been references to the differences between people considered “our own kind” (this normally refers to white people) and other ethnicities and/or cultures. These allusions emphasize people’s physical appearance as the central axis for defining the concept of “other.” Moreover, people who believe that they take common ancestry as a reference to explain “why groups of people display differences in their attitudes and aptitudes” (274). As I stated before, this theory seems racist to me and an excuse for discrimination. To elaborate further on this way of thinking, Appiah gives as an example of what he calls a racialist: the English poet Martin Tupper. Tupper believed in dividing human beings into a limited number of groups which he called “races” because, according to his thinking, people of the same group shared common biological characteristics which they did not have in common with members of other races. Racialists believed that race was not only about physical appearance, such as skin color; for them to say that someone was “Negro” also meant that they had inherited characteristics such as intelligence or honesty from their race. Racialism was considered a valid theory in the late 19th century and Western scientists wanted to explain how these biological characteristics were inherited in a person’s racial essence (Appiah 276).

Appiah continues that several centuries later, the scientists of our current society hold the opposite hypothesis to the one proposed by racialists in the 19th century. Today, the term “race” is no longer recognized as relevant within the realm of scientific discussion. In addition, scientists not only reject the idea that the supposed racial essence of a person makes him or her inherit intellectual or moral aptitudes, as was mentioned above. Scientists even argue that categories such as “*Negro*, *Caucasian* and *Mongoloid* are of no importance for biological purposes” (Appiah 277). In fact, many scholars have stopped using the word “race” and claim

that the belief in differences between races has had serious consequences for human beings throughout history. One of the consequences of the belief that some races are inferior has been slavery. From the period of slavery in the United States emerged the literary genre of slave narratives to which Douglass' *Narrative* belongs.

The structure of Frederick Douglass' *Narrative*, shares most of the common characteristics of slave narratives that were explained in the previous section. The book begins with a preface written by William Lloyd Garrison, followed by a letter by Wendell Phillips—both white anti-slavery activists. After the preface and the letter is when the narrative voice begins to tell the story of his life; the narration consists of eleven chapters that tell the story from his childhood in slavery to achieving freedom in adulthood. At the end, the *Narrative* has an appendix written by Douglass himself in which he clarifies some aspects of his story.

Whenever a book comes into our hands, the first feature that catches our attention is its cover. In this case, the cover of the *Narrative* displays a black and white photograph of Frederick Douglass; this was one of the ways of demonstrating that this man really existed (Olney 52). The other element that shapes the cover of the book-is the title: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*. After examples of slave narratives mentioned above, this title is not much different from what is common in this genre. Nevertheless, if we analyze the title carefully, we will see that behind these words lie more meanings than the obvious ones. First of all, the words *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* state clearly to the readers what they can expect from this novel, which is an autobiography. Secondly, the title reads *an American Slave*; this, which might seem an unremarkable statement for both the public of that period and of today, is in fact not, as I will explain. Douglass' *Narrative* was published in 1845, sixty-nine years after the United States Declaration of Independence, which had been signed on July 4, 1776.

The most famous part of the Declaration of Independence is the following: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” (“Declaration”). If “all men are created equal,” then black people should not be considered inferior to whites (Núñez Puente). Furthermore, if all “men³” have the right to life and liberty, then slaveholders would be violating those rights by depriving their slaves of both. Thus, the phrase *an American Slave*, which seemed to be a simple statement, turns out to be an oxymoron. As for the last part of the title, *Written by Himself*, this not only emphasizes that the story is written by the protagonist himself but also implies that he, a slave, is able to write. During the period of slavery in the United States, the access to education was forbidden to black slaves. Most of them were illiterate⁴ and, for this reason, many slave narratives were written by white people to whom the slave in question had told the story. Nonetheless, the case of Douglass is different in that he could read and write, which helped the white audience to see him more as a human being and less as an animal.

As already mentioned, the *Narrative* begins with a preface written by William Lloyd Garrison, an American journalist who owned the newspaper *The Liberator*, which had a wide circulation in both England and the United States (Thomas). In 1832, Garrison founded the New England Anti-Slavery Society and, the following year, helped organize the American Anti-Slavery Society. According to Thomas, due to Garrison’s fierce activism and the strength of his convictions, he was recognized in North America as the most radical of American antislavery campaigners. In the beginning of his preface—which extends over seven pages—he narrates how he met Frederick Douglass at an anti-slavery convention and describes the meeting as a fortunate event. However, Garrison not only refers to how lucky it was for the two

³ Men means humans.

⁴ Although they were considered illiterate, slaves had their own culture and forms of literacy.

to meet but says that the event was fortunate “for the cause of negro emancipation, and of universal liberty” (Douglass 3). In the words of the owner of *The Liberator*, two of the previously discussed topics come to the surface once again. Firstly, how the speech of a single ex-slave immediately becomes a collective speech of his entire ethnicity. Secondly, how the struggle for his individual freedom becomes a universal one.

Furthermore, Garrison adds in his preface that the fact that Douglass decided to participate in that anti-slavery convention “gave the world assurance of a MAN” (Douglass 4, emphasis in the original). It is striking that the word man is written in capital letters, to make it clear to anyone who reads it that this is the narrative of a human being and not of an animal, which was how slaves were generally considered. In addition, Garrison borrowed that line from *Hamlet*, Shakespeare’s play (Douglass 4n3); throughout the preface more references are made both to the Bible and to famous people and expressions of their own. When the well-known white activist addressed the convention after Douglass’ speech, he says that he “reminded the audience of the peril which surrounded this self-emancipated young man at the North” (Douglass 4). The truth is that although Douglass was living as a free man, having escaped, he was still legally a slave belonging to his last master, who could search for him and try to bring him back at any time.

Garrison recounts that he was among the first people who tried to convince Douglass to join the anti-slavery movement and dedicate himself to telling his story in public. Nevertheless, Douglass “expressed his conviction that he was not adequate to the performance of so great a task” (Douglass 5). After a lifetime in slavery and near total ignorance (until he was able to learn how to read and became more aware of his situation), Douglass felt inferior to the rest of the activists fighting for freedom. As narrated in this preface, the former slave began what was his first speech with a hesitant attitude and apologizing to the audience for his ignorance. Nothing foreshadowed the global reach and influence his story would have and the important

place he would occupy in the history of the United States and African Americans. Much to Garrison's delight, he was able to convince Douglass to join the New England Anti-Slavery Society and to travel throughout the North of the United States and Great Britain telling his story (Douglass 3n1).

Garrison describes Douglass as someone with "gentleness and meekness, yet with true manliness of character. As a public speaker, he excels in pathos, wit, comparison, imitation, strength of reasoning, and fluency of language" (Douglass 5). The advocate continues to try to convince the public that they are faced with a true man who has an intelligence equal to that of any white man with an education. To further emphasize this idea of equality between blacks and whites, Garrison tells the story of a white American sailor who was shipwrecked in Africa and enslaved for three years. After being freed, the man had lost the ability to reason and even to speak in his own language. For the campaigner, this fact "proves at least that the white slave can sink as low in the scale of humanity as the black one" (Douglass 6). Therefore, for Garrison the white man is not in a position of superiority to the black man when they face the same conditions.

Garrison explains that Douglass has "chosen to write his own Narrative, in his own style, and according to the best of his ability, rather than to employ some one else. It is, therefore, entirely his own production" (Douglass 6). As mentioned earlier, it was common among slaves to lack the skills of reading and writing; thus, many of them had to be content with narrating their story to someone else to write it down for them. As for the *Narrative* under discussion here, it is clear that this was not the case and that every word it contains was written by Douglass. Garrison knows that his mission in this preface is to give credence to Douglass' story and to convince people that it is all absolutely true. For this purpose, he writes that the *Narrative* "comes short of the reality, rather than overstates a single fact in regard to SLAVERY AS IT IS" (Douglass 7, emphasis in the original). The use of capital letters again helps to emphasize

that everything narrated by Douglass is nothing more than a faithful testimony of the harsh reality of slavery.

The journalist from *The Liberator* highlights the important role that literacy played in helping Douglass find his identity: “how his misery augmented, in proportion as he grew reflective and intelligent,—thus demonstrating that a happy slave is an extinct man!” (Douglass 7). This last statement that a happy slave is a man who is empty inside demonstrates why slave owners went to such great lengths to keep their slaves in utter ignorance, denying them even to know their date of birth. Garrison also argues that “so profoundly ignorant of the nature of slavery are many persons, that they are stubbornly incredulous whenever they read or listen to any recital of the cruelties which are daily inflicted on its victims” (Douglass 8). I must insist that a large percentage of the citizens of the United States were unaware of the atrocities that were being committed on the southern plantations. This state of ignorance of the population made it even more necessary for narratives such as Douglass’ to exist in order to describe how inhumane the slave system was.

In nineteenth-century America, black people were ascribed an aura of falsity and this is why those who wrote slave narratives were obliged to focus on facts that could be corroborated. Garrison states that it would be easy to verify whether all the claims made in the *Narrative* are true. Douglass “has frankly disclosed the place of his birth, the names of those who claimed ownership in his body and soul, and the names also of those who committed the crimes which he has alleged against them” (Douglass 8). Finally, Garrison reminds the readers that “no slaveholder or overseer can be convicted of any outrage perpetrated on the person of a slave [...] on the testimony of colored witnesses, whether bond or free” (Douglass 9). Garrison states that black people had no rights and no credibility as witnesses to a crime (Douglass 9), even if they were free citizens; hence the need to include writings by white men in slave narratives verifying their stories. After William Lloyd Garrison signs his preface, we encounter a letter

written by Wendell Phillips to Frederick Douglass; this letter is reasonably shorter than the preface as it only lasts three pages. Wendell Phillips was a lawyer who graduated from Harvard and owned a law office in Boston; nonetheless, he did not mind sacrificing his social status to join the anti-slavery movement (“Wendell”). He became friends with fellow abolitionist Garrison and devoted himself to lecturing and writing articles against slavery in *The Liberator*—the newspaper owned by Garrison.

At the beginning of his letter, Phillips celebrates Douglass’s decision to put his life story on paper. The abolitionist writes: “You remember the old fable of ‘The Man and the Lion,’ where the lion complained that he should not be so misrepresented ‘when the lions wrote history.’ I am glad the time has come when the ‘lions write history’” (Douglass 10). Phillips is aware of how important it is for the abolitionist cause to have a first-person account of what a slave’s life is like, both within the southern plantations and as a domestic slave further north in the United States. The fact that, in his narrative, the public can read the thoughts Douglass had as a slave is a great help for them to discover that people of African descent also have an identity of their own and are beings endowed with intelligence. Phillips attests that both he and those closest to him “have known [Douglass] long, and can put the most entire confidence in [his] truth, candor, and sincerity” (Douglass 10-1). Just as Garrison did in his preface, Phillips assures the white public that Douglass is a person to be trusted. In fact, the abolitionist recounts that when he first met the former slave he refused to let Douglass tell him his real name and place of birth because he preferred not to know such personal, important, and dangerous details.

Phillips tells Douglass in his letter that he read his narrative trembling for the former slave, as the latter reveals too much personal information and, by ceasing to remain anonymous, is at great risk. Phillips reminisces when the American Declaration of Independence was signed and writes to Douglass: “you, too, publish your declaration of freedom with danger compassing you around” (Douglass 11). In this way the activist reminds the public again that by publishing

his story Douglass is in great danger, as he becomes someone easy to locate and his former master could claim him back. The fact that his friend warns Douglass of the danger he is facing is another sign that all the facts told in his narrative are true. To conclude his letter, Phillips encourages Douglass in his fight for the liberation of all people of African descent: “Go on, my dear friend, till you, and those who, like you, have been saved [...] from the dark prisonhouse, shall stereotype these free, illegal pulses into statutes” (Douglass 12).

Once Douglass’ core narrative is finished, there is a six-page appendix interspersed by two poems, as is customary in the slave narrative genre. Douglass begins by saying that it is possible that in reading his story those who do not know him will presuppose that he is “an opponent of all religion” (Douglass 75). Consequently, he devotes his appendix exclusively to clarify that when he speaks of religion he is in no way referring to Christianity, but to the religion of slavery. According to Douglass, the Christianity of the United States is not the true Christianity and is also full of hypocrisy: “the man who wields the bloodclotted cowskin during the week fills the pulpit on Sunday, and claims to be a minister of the meek and lowly Jesus” (Douglass 75). The purpose of Douglass’ appendix is to send a black message in a white envelope. What I mean by this expression is that the author writes his story in defense of his ethnicity and all those who are enslaved by the white man. Nevertheless, at the same time, the white envelope refers to the tone and the means by which he sends that message to the American population. The tone is calm, appealing to the readers’ empathy, while the means are the respectful language used by the writer so as not to offend religious people.

The 1845 audience to whom this narrative was addressed was largely white, puritan, and very religious. The author did not intend to offend the religious feelings of his readers, who, if moved by his narrative, might become future allies for the abolitionist cause. In fact, one of his purposes in publishing his *Narrative* was to persuade the white majority to oppose slavery laws, since they were the only ones with sufficient power to effect real change. It is for this very

reason that Douglass puts so much effort into explaining the separation between what he considers to be pure Christianity and the religion practiced by slaveholders. At the end of his appendix, the author expresses his hope that the publication of his narrative will help bring an end to the cruelty of slavery. Douglass writes: “sincerely and earnestly hoping that this little book may do something toward throwing light on the American slave system, and hastening the glad day of deliverance to the millions of my brethren in bonds” (Douglass 80). Douglass employs a humble tone—“this little book”—and refers to all slaves in America as “his brethren.”

2.2. Thematic and Formal Features in Douglass’ *Narrative*

The second section of part two will be devoted to a thorough close reading of the *Narrative* by Frederick Douglass in order to discuss its form as well as its content. The previous section already explained the preface, the letter, and the appendix; thus, 2.2. will focus exclusively on studying in depth the narrative itself. This chapter will be divided into two parts. The first part will analyze the main themes addressed in the *Narrative*—literacy, identity, and freedom—and the second will study the form of Douglass’ book.

I will begin by analyzing the themes of the *Narrative*. The story itself has eleven chapters that can be further divided into four stages. These four stages correspond to the phases of development that Frederick Douglass experiences from the time he was a slave in his childhood until he becomes a free man in his adulthood (Núñez Puente). The first stage comprises chapters 1-7 and corresponds to the moment when Douglass becomes aware of his position as a slave. The second stage goes from chapter 5 to chapter 8 and describes the details of the daily life of a slave. The third stage consists of chapters 9 and 10 in which Douglass begins to seriously meditate on the idea of running away from his masters and becoming a free

man. Finally, the fourth and last stage constitutes chapter 11 where the narrator explains the steps he took to finally achieve the long-awaited freedom.

The first stage begins in chapter one where Douglass gives detailed information about the place where he was born (Tuckahoe, Maryland), although he says that he has never known his date of birth. As a child he was not aware of being a slave and therefore did not understand why he did not enjoy the same rights as other children: “the white children could tell their ages. I could not tell why I ought to be deprived of the same privilege” (Douglass 12). The narrator also provides the names and surnames of the members of his family and speculates on the possibility that his parents were his white master and a black slave, which made him a slave. Douglass denounces the unfairness of the slavery laws: “the fact remains, in all its glaring odiousness, that slaveholders have ordained, and by law established, that the children of slave women shall in all cases follow the condition of their mothers” (Douglass 13). The narrator argues that in this way slave owners earn double profit: first, they satisfy their lust with their slave and, when she becomes pregnant, they enslave the child and use it as a labor force, which is very profitable.

The fact that Douglass has no information about his birth or his father as well as the separation from his mother at a very young age are some of the methods slave owners used to strip slaves of their identity. One of the first steps that masters took when new slaves arrived in America was to provide them with a new English name, thus separating them from their African heritage (Berlin 251-52). The most common names among slaves tended to be diminutives or infant names—e.g., Tom, Moll, or Nan—even though sometimes they also used numbers or names similar to those given to animals to emphasize their non-human status. Moreover, many of the slaves were not assigned a surname at birth. This identity theft, together with the fact that members of the same family were usually sent to distant plantations, had the consequence of ending a lineage and breaking the ties between related slaves.

In what follows Douglass recounts the first time that, as a young boy, he witnessed an aunt of his being punished with the whip; it is common for slave narratives to emphasize that first glimpse of the reality of slavery. For the author, who until then had lived on the outskirts of the plantation, it proved to be the awakening to the idea that he was a slave: “It was the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which I was about to pass” (Douglass 15). Douglass uses a very visual language such as the “blood-stained gate” or the metaphor “the hell of slavery” to make the passage more dramatic and to emphasize the sufferings of living as a slave.

Douglass tells how, on the plantations, slaves often sing and how this gesture is often misinterpreted by people with a feeling of happiness. According to Matlack, African American culture has always been characterized by a spirit of double entendre (19). As Douglas observes, the slaves “would sometimes sing the most pathetic sentiment in the most rapturous tone, and the most rapturous sentiment in the most pathetic tone” (Douglass 18). To Matlack, slave songs were considered safe because to white ears they sounded like cheerful melodies composed of seemingly meaningless jargon. On the contrary, to the slaves, these songs were a way of expressing their pain and despair. Slave songs are related to the complicated relationship slaves had with the truth; Douglass recounts that masters had spies among the slaves to discover what the slaves really thought. That is why slaves always used to speak well of their masters and say that they were very content with them. According to Douglass, slaves “suppress the truth rather than take the consequences of telling it,” which for him is a sign that they are human beings.

The second stage into which the *Narrative* can be divided corresponds to chapters 5-8 and in it Douglass recounts the details of his life as a slave. One of the key moments in Douglass’ life occurs in the fifth chapter: his departure from Colonel Lloyd’s plantation to move to Baltimore with his new master, Mr. Auld. As he himself says, this step opened the door to his later prosperity as his new master, Mrs. Auld, begins to teach him the alphabet. However,

her husband forbids her to do so by saying that “a nigger should know nothing but to obey his master—to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world” (Douglass 29). These words are a turning point and a revelation for Douglass and help him to understand “the white man’s power to enslave the black man” (Douglass 29). From this moment on, Douglass realizes what the path from slavery to freedom is: his transformation from illiteracy to literacy. According to Kelly Norman, understanding the importance of literacy made Douglass discover “what it was to truly possess a Self or Being” (22), as it is a characteristic of human beings.

Over the next few years Douglass manages to learn to read in a self-taught way, befriending white children to teach him and carrying books with him. At the age of twelve he obtains a book called *The Columbian Orator* which contains a dialogue between a slave and his master, in which they discuss the pros and cons of slavery. This conversation results in the liberation of the slave because his wit is superior to that of his master. In the same book there is also a speech on the emancipation of Catholics; both readings help Douglass to reaffirm the injustice of slavery and to learn about human rights. The more he read, the more he abhorred his masters and the more tormented he felt. This intellectual awakening also proves to be a curse for Douglass, since “it had given [him] a view of [his] wretched condition, without the remedy” (Douglass 33). During this period, he also learns the meaning of the word “abolitionist” and has his first thought about escaping from his masters, although first he wants to learn to write, which he achieves after a few years.

The third stage into which the *Narrative* is divided consists of chapters 9 and 10 in which Douglass begins to think seriously about how to escape from slavery. After the death of his owners on the plantation, the inheritance is divided and Douglass ends up living in St. Michael with his new owner, Thomas Auld, a mean man who does not feed his slaves. Douglass says that his master went to a convention where he converted to Christianity and that this, far from

making him more human, made him crueler. This is one of the several criticisms of Christianity that make Douglass have to explain himself in the appendix⁵. As Douglass' master could not manage to tame him, he sent him to live for a year with Mr. Covey, who was dedicated to training slaves. Mr. Covey mistreats him so badly that after six months there, Douglass says: "Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed" (Douglass 45). Exhausted by work and beatings, Douglass loses his desire to read and write and has no strength to dream of escaping. Most importantly, Douglass was psychologically devastated, since that is the most effective way to break a human being.

Near the house in which he lives is the Chesapeake Bay, where Frederick Douglass has a soliloquy that is one of the most famous passages in his *Narrative*, both for its form—which I will discuss later—and for its content. As he sits on a bank and watches the ships with their white sails, Douglass laments his status as a slave and is envious of the freedom of the sailing ships. He exclaims: "O God, save me! God, deliver me! Let me be free! Is there any God? Why am I a slave?" (Douglass 46). Douglass questions the existence of a god that allows some humans to live in conditions as unjust as slavery. It is in this monologue that he makes the decision to flee from his owners at the first available opportunity. Although in the meantime he must remain with Mr. Covey, after this soliloquy Douglass is changed inside. If with his transfer to Mr. Covey's house they turned a man into a slave, after his awakening in the Chesapeake Bay the slave becomes a man again.

At this point the narrative reaches a turning point: with Douglass' renewed strength and his decision to escape, he refuses to continue to be dominated by the cruel Mr. Covey. One afternoon when the slave tamer beats Douglass again, he decides to walk to St. Michael's to

⁵ "The Bible was used to justify the enslavement of black people, e.g. a dark-skinned figure called Ham was punished by God." (Núñez Puente)

complain to his master about Mr. Covey's violence; nevertheless, Mr. Auld tells him that he must return. Once back on Mr. Covey's plantation, Covey tries to tie Douglass up to whip him once more, but the slave decides to fight back and grabs Covey by the throat, telling him that he refuses to be mistreated by him again. For Douglass, "this battle with Mr. Covey was the turningpoint in [his] career as a slave" (Douglass 50), as it awakened in him the desire to be free. After serving his year with Mr. Covey, Douglass is assigned to Mr. Freeland's plantation for a time, where he convinces a few slaves to escape by canoe up the Chesapeake Bay. Unfortunately, someone betrays them, and they all end up in Easton jail.

The fourth and last stage corresponds to chapter 11 where Douglass plans his escape and succeeds in becoming a free man. Nonetheless, in the *Narrative* he does not explain all the details of his escape so as not to compromise the people who helped him and so as not to complicate the future runaways of fellow slaves who might follow the same route. Douglass finds himself living with his former master Auld in Baltimore, who tries to convince him that in order to be happy he must live in ignorance and be obedient. Auld "seemed to see fully the pressing necessity of setting aside [Douglass'] intellectual nature, in order to contentment in slavery" (Douglass 67), since he fears that after becoming literate, Douglass will seek freedom. The truth is that Mr. Auld was right, for a few weeks later Douglass flees Baltimore for New York; he says he encountered no problems along the way and so begins his life as a free man.

Douglass says that his first days of freedom in New York were difficult as he felt very lonely, did not trust anyone and was afraid of being captured. A short time later he was taken in by Mr. David Ruggles, who arranged a wedding for him with his fiancée Anna Murray. They both went to New Bedford where some abolitionist friends were waiting for them, and it was they who suggested to Frederick that he take the name Douglass, since his birth name was Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey. Thereafter, he will sign his works with his new last name. Douglass becomes a subscriber to the newspaper *The Liberator*—owned by W. L.

Garrison, writer of the preface of the *Narrative*—where he learns about antislavery reform. This is when Douglass becomes active in the abolitionist movement and thus ends the narrative of his life. According to Olney, what distinguishes Douglass' *Narrative* from other slave narratives is that while the latter only recount the details of slavery, the former delves deeper into “the intellectual, emotional, moral growth of the narrator” (51). Douglass' personal development as well as his descriptions of the horrors slavery does to a human being make this slave narrative one of the richest ever written.

As explained in the introductory paragraph of this section, 2.2. will not only focus on analyzing the main themes of the *Narrative* but also on the form of Douglass' text. This slave narrative is written in an exceptional way; its pages are full of stylistic devices and Douglass knows perfectly when to use an informal or a more dramatic tone to approach his readers. According to Matlack, “Douglass' *Narrative* is consistently cited as one of the best-written autobiographies among scores of such accounts produced by or in the name of ex-slaves during the 1840s and 1850s” (15). Matlack continues that one of the main reasons why this work is considered a masterpiece of American literature is the extremely elaborate technique Douglass employs to tell his story (15). Throughout the narrative, he demonstrates a high degree of artistic skill in addition to a vast knowledge of stylistic resources. The fact that Douglass possesses such a level of literary knowledge is impressive considering that, being a slave, he was prohibited from any education throughout his life. Therefore, one can only conclude that he had a special gift for literature.

For the most part, the style Douglass employs in his *Narrative* can be categorized as plain and honest when it comes to bearing witness to what life in slavery is like. For Matlack, this plain style is “the basis of Douglass' effectiveness and credibility as narrator” (19). Furthermore, the fact that Douglass avoids stylistic and emotional excesses to tell the everyday life of a slave makes the story more overwhelming, since the reader knows that what is being

told is not an exaggeration or something invented but real facts (19). Nonetheless, even though the general tone of the narrative is calm and plain, there are several fragments in the story that completely deviate from this general style. Some of the most famous are the description of Douglass' grandmother being abandoned in the woods to die and the soliloquy of Douglass watching the ships in the Chesapeake Bay. Both passages have dramatic elements and numerous rhetorical devices that not only render them poignant but also make them literary masterworks.

First of all, I will make an in-depth analysis of the form of the passage about the death of Douglass' grandmother. That part of the narrative begins with a description of how the owners of his grandmother abandoned her in a hut in the woods to die once she became too old to work. At this point the writing style ceases to be informal. The entire introduction explaining the situation of his grandmother is done in a single sentence in that lasts six lines. This sentence is composed of subordinate clauses, non-finite clauses, and numerous coordinates. After this presentation begins the more dramatic part of the narration, where Douglass abandons his plain style in favor of sentimentalism and more rhetorical devices:

The hearth is desolate. The children, the unconscious children, who once sang and danced in her presence, are gone. She gropes her way, in the darkness of age, for a drink of water. Instead of the voices of her children, she hears by day the moans of the dove, and by night the screams of the hideous owl. All is gloom. The grave is at the door. And now, when weighed down by the pains and aches of old age, when the head inclines to the feet, when the beginning and ending of human existence meet, and helpless infancy and painful old age combine together—at this time, this most needful time, the time for the exercise of that tenderness and affection which children only can exercise towards a declining parent—my poor old grandmother, the devoted mother of twelve children, is left all alone, in yonder little hut, before a few dim embers. She stands—she sits—she staggers—she falls—she groans—she dies.” (Douglass 37-8)

In the first sentence there is a personification: “The hearth is desolate.” Moreover, in the following sentences we can read how Douglass seeks the reader’s empathy by emphasizing how pitiful his grandmother’s situation is: “She gropes her way, in the darkness of age, for a drink of water.” In that phrase we can also find a metaphor, “the darkness of age,” which not only refers to how dark it is to grow old but also to his grandmother living in darkness in a hut in the woods. The narrator adds that “the grave is at the door,” another metaphor for saying that his grandmother has little time left. This is followed by a sentence lasting six lines, in which he strings together subordinate clauses with coordinated ones and uses uncommon punctuation marks such as dashes. The fragment ends with a parallelism in which there is also alliteration of the letter “s”: “she stands—she sits—she staggers—she falls—she groans—she dies.” As if foreseeing Emily Dickinson, the dashes separating such short statements make the situation more dramatic.

The second passage of which I will analyze its form in depth is Frederick Douglass’ soliloquy as he watches the vessels from the bank in the Chesapeake Bay. William Lloyd Garrison, in the preface of the *Narrative*, refers to this passage as the most thrilling of all and asks, “who can read that passage, and be insensible to its pathos and sublimity?” (Douglass 7). Garrison praises Douglass’ eloquence and power in describing his deepest thoughts and sentiments. It is clear to Matlack, however, that “this is of course strictly a literary performance” whose form reminds the reader that the *Narrative* was written by Douglass years after these events took place (19). The truth is that, while his writing style is impeccable, it seems evident that Douglass did not have that conversation with himself out loud on the Chesapeake Bay and that it is in fact a dramatization. As happened in the previous passage recounting the death of his grandmother, here Douglass again abandons his plain style to write a soliloquy full of rhetorical figures. The excerpt is as follows:

My thoughts would compel utterance; and there, with no audience but the Almighty, I would pour out my soul's complaint, in my rude way, with an apostrophe to the moving multitude of ships:—"You are loosed from your moorings, and are free; I am fast in my chains, and am a slave! You move merrily before the gentle gale, and I sadly before the bloody whip! You are freedom's swift-winged angels, that fly round the world; I am confined in bands of iron! O that I were free! O, that I were on one of your gallant decks, and under your protecting wing! Alas! betwixt me and you, the turbid waters roll. Go on, go on. O that I could also go! Could I but swim! If I could fly! O, why was I born a man, of whom to make a brute! The glad ship is gone; she hides in the dim distance. I am left in the hottest hell of unending slavery. O God, save me! God, deliver me! Let me be free! Is there any God? Why am I a slave? I will run away. I will not stand it. (Douglass 46)

The excerpt begins with a paradox—which could respond to his frustration—since Douglass says that he was expressing himself in his rude way, which is not consistent with the elaborate language of the passage. What is most striking during the first few lines of this soliloquy are the parallelistic constructions and anaphora in every sentence. From “you are loosed from your moorings” to “I am confined in bands of irons” the narrator maintains the same sentence structure: they begin with “you” and after a comma or semicolon comes “I.” Between these first lines we also find a play-on-words in “bloody whip” between the interjection “bloody” and the adjective which means to be full of blood (Núñez Puente). The following sentences also contain anaphora, since two of them begin in the same way: “O that I were free! O, that I were on one of your gallant decks.” In addition, we find the interjections “Alas!” and “O” which, together with the numerous exclamations and questions thrown into the air, resemble a soliloquy performed in a theater in front of an audience. The passage ends with two short sentences that convey to the reader the sense that Douglass has quickly made his decision to escape.

In addition to these two passages, throughout the *Narrative* Douglass makes numerous biblical references—mostly to criticize his Christian masters. One example is when he recounts

his master Auld's use of Christianity to justify his cruelty towards his slaves. Douglass describes how Mr. Auld whips a girl while quoting a passage of Scripture: "He that knoweth his master's will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes" (Douglass 41). Besides biblical language, many examples of rhetorical devices can be found in the narration. Regarding metaphors, there is one that the narrator uses twice: "to shutting me up in mental darkness" (31) and "they had been shut up in mental darkness" (55). With this "mental darkness" he refers to ignorance as living in darkness and how literacy was like seeing the light for him. Another of the many metaphors we encounter is the following: "It was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom" (50). Douglass refers to slavery as death and freedom as a dream state, like heaven.

In the *Narrative* we can also find other stylistic devices such as similes: "He trembled like a leaf" (Douglass 50) and "His comings were like a thief in the night" (44). Moreover, in the appendix there is a passage where Douglass employs a rich writing style with which he appeals to his readers' understanding of his criticisms of religion. In terms of structure we can find parallelisms in the beginnings of these three sentences, as well as an anaphora: "He who sells my sister," "He who proclaims it a religious duty" and "He who is the religious advocate" (75). These sentences refer to the hypocrisy of Christian masters, who commit atrocities while considering themselves religious men. In the same excerpt there is again parallelism and anaphora in these two sentences: "The man who wields" and "The man who robs" (75); furthermore, there is also a polysyndeton: "sundering husbands and wives, parents and children, sisters and brothers" (Douglass 76). Douglass uses this figure of speech to list the members of a family, connecting them with the conjunction "and." Furthermore, the polysyndeton also serves to emphasize the family relationships that the slaveholders are severing; the separation with commas slows down the reading so that the reader has to focus on the elements and internalize the injustice that is being committed.

Conclusion

After conducting a thorough study of Douglass' *Narrative* and reading the secondary sources that were used throughout this project, I have come to several conclusions regarding African American identity and the book on which this paper focuses. First, contrary to what happens with the autobiographies of white men, the voices of the narrators of slave narratives do not only represent themselves; their stories become collective discourses in which they give voice to their entire ethnicity. Moreover, slaves who recounted their life stories were obliged to include photographs of themselves, actual correspondence they had with other people, and prefaces written by white men who were considered respectable, as seen in this *Narrative*. The reason for this was that former slaves not only had to prove that the people and places they mentioned were real, but they also had to demonstrate that their account was reliable since most people did not trust their words.

Furthermore, my analysis of secondary sources has revealed that the term "race" is subject to controversy since, in the past, it was used to state that all members of a given race had biological or genetic characteristics in common. In fact, there was a group of people who shared this view—categorized as racialists—such as the English poet Martin Tupper. Racialists used the theory of common genetic features among individuals of the same assigned "race" as an excuse for claiming that all black people were not biologically intelligent or honest. Nonetheless, after researching the opinion of some scholars regarding this theory, I found statements that completely refuted it. Having read the scientific hypotheses in which the term race is not even recognized as real, one can come to the conclusion that so-called races are of no importance as far as biological purposes are concerned.

Slave narratives are primarily known for recounting the horrors of slavery with first-person testimonies. Nevertheless, the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, despite fulfilling all the common characteristics of slave narratives, transcends this literary genre and

excels any other. In his *Narrative*, Douglass not only recounts the sufferings of life as a slave but also the intellectual and emotional growth undergone by him. This is one of the main features that make his book one of the richest slave narratives ever written. Therefore, Douglass' autobiography proved to be a crucial evidence to the public that African American slaves possessed an identity of their own as well as intellectual capacities equal to those of white people. This demonstrates the first of the two aims of this paper, which is that the birth of African American identity is intrinsically related to the slave narrative genre.

To conclude this project, I will explain how I accomplished the second of my aims, which was to prove that Douglass' *Narrative* is a literary masterpiece, both in formal and thematic terms. Throughout the narration of his life, Douglass deals with many topics that were unfamiliar to most of his white audience. In order to study the entire text in depth, I divided the content of the book into four stages corresponding to the author's phases of personal development. By means of a thorough close reading I analyzed some of the most important themes, such as the state of complete ignorance in which the masters kept their slaves, denying them even to know their date of birth. Another of the most relevant issues is how literacy comes as an awakening for Douglass and helps him to understand his situation as a slave. As for the form of the *Narrative*, it is striking how, for a person who was denied an education throughout his life, Douglass had a gift with language. He knew when to use plainer, more informal language to make the story of the cruelty of slavery believable. Nonetheless, Douglass also knew how to embellish the more dramatic moments of his account with clever rhetorical figures. In all, the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* is a masterpiece of American literature as well as a fundamental element in the birth of African American identity.

Works Cited

- Andrews, William L. "Slave Narrative." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 6 Jul. 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/art/slave-narrative>. Accessed 4 May 2022.
- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. "Race." *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, edited by Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, The U of Chicago P, 1995, pp. 274-87.
- Berlin, Ira. "From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African-American Society in Mainland North America." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 53, no. 2, 1996, pp. 251–88. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2947401>. Accessed 12 Apr. 2022.
- Blakemore, Erin. "Race and Ethnicity: How Are They Different?." *National Geographic*, 22 Feb. 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/race-ethnicity#:~:text=%E2%80%9CRace%E2%80%9D%20is%20usually%20associated%20with,and%20characterize%20seemingly%20distinct%20populations>. Accessed 20 May 2022.
- "Declaration of Independence: A Transcription." *The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration*, 2021, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>. Accessed 7 May 2022.
- Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1997.
- "Harriet Jacobs Writer." *New Bedford Historical Society*, <https://nbhistoricalsociety.org/portfolio-item/harriet-jacobs-writer/>. Accessed 22 May 2022.
- "Identity, n. 2." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, March 2022, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/91004>. Accessed 4 May 2022.

Matlack, James. "The Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass." *Phylon* (1960-), vol. 40, no. 1, 1979, pp. 15–28. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/274419>. Accessed 14 Apr. 2022.

Norman, Kelly. "The Language of Being and Metaphor of Autobiography in Frederick Douglass's Narrative". *REDEN: Revista Española de Estudios Norteamericanos*, no. 6, 1993, pp. 21-8. *Biblioteca Digital Universidad de Alcalá*, <https://ebuah.uah.es/dspace/handle/10017/4842>. Accessed 11 Apr. 2022.

Núñez Puente, Carolina. "Slave Narratives: Frederick Douglass." *Literatura norteamericana* 1, 24 March 2021, Faculty of Philology, University of A Coruña. Class lecture.

Olney, James. "'I Was Born': Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature." *Callaloo*, no. 20, 1984, pp. 46–73. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2930678>. Accessed 11 Apr. 2022.

"Race, n. 6." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, March 2022, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/157031>. Accessed 4 May 2022.

Thomas, John L. "William Lloyd Garrison." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 6 Dec. 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Lloyd-Garrison>. Accessed 15 May 2022.

"Wendell Phillips." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 29 Jan. 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Wendell-Phillips>. Accessed 17 May 2022.