

The Psychological Strains of Slavery through a Slave's Eyes. Case Study: Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

## **Chapter one: Psychoanalysis, Race, and Slavery; Theoretical and Historical Background**

### **Introduction:**

Slavery was and is still a big topic of discussion in history. Many historians talked about it, and about its legacy. It was considered as a racial discrimination that led to many psychological issues in the lives of the enslaved people. Slavery also was and is still a topic and a major theme in literature. Many writers analyzed this concept from different perspectives. Psychoanalysis, Critical Race Theory, and Biographical Criticism were among those theories that were applied on the literary texts which dealt with slavery.

This chapter was intended to give a historical and theoretical background to slavery as well as the previous mentioned theories. It also provided information about one of the most important, if not the most important and dominant literary genre in the nineteenth century and exactly in the antebellum period, the slave narrative. Harriet Jacobs was one of the writers who wrote a slave narrative to depict the cruelty of slavery, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. At the end, it was necessary to give an overview about Jacobs' styles and modes of writing.

## **1-Historical Background of Slavery**

### **1-1-Definition of Slavery:**

Before starting to talk about slavery, it is necessary to define it. From one society to another, slavery differed in practice. In America, slaves were treated differently according to the slave owner attitudes, the kind of works they did, and the place of living. Despite those differences, the institution of slavery had a common definition and objective (Ball 18)

Slavery was one form of exploitation. Its special characteristic included the idea that slaves were property; that they were outsiders alien by origin or who had been denied their heritage through judicial or other sanctions; that coercion could be used at will; that their labor power was at the complete disposal of a master; that they did not have the right to their own reproductive capacities; and that the slave status was inherited unless provision was made to ameliorate that status.(Lovejoy 1)

### **1-2-Origin and Development of Slavery in America**

In the beginning of the seventeenth century, under horrific conditions that frequently resulted in starvation and death, millions of African people were kidnapped, enslaved, and shipped across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas. During that organizing journey nearly two million people died at sea.

In order to legitimize slavery, enduring mythology about the inferiority of black people was used as an excuse. Historian Peter Kolchin in *American Slavery* related the small heads of the slaves to their limited intellectual capacity. He commented that they were not intelligent to be considered as equal as the whites, "*hard working, loyal and productive under loving but firm conditions (ie slavery), they lacked the temperament and*

*intellectual capacity for independent, existence, and in freedom would quickly, degenerate, falling into ignorance, superstition, and perhaps even extinction”.*(193)

Although in the South the enslavement of black people was widely embraced, resistance remained for another century after the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865 to ending slavery. One hundred fifty years after the Emancipation Proclamation and little has been done to address the legacy of slavery in contemporary life.

On the one hand, slavery granted the slave owners complete power over the black men, women, and children. On the other hand, it deprived the slaves of any legal right or autonomy.

The beginning of slavery in America started when the first Africans were brought to the British colonies in 1619, on ship to Jamestown and Virginia. At that time the economy of that region became totally based on force labor, and racial prejudice became more ingrained on the social culture as well. Because of that, American slavery developed as a permanent and hereditary status tied to race. The slaves were transported to America under horrific conditions through sea.

Taken on a board ship, the naked Africans were shackled together on bare wooden boards in the hold, and packed so tightly that they could not sit upright. During the dreaded Mid-passage (a trip from three weeks to more than three months)...the foul and poisonous air of the hold, extreme heat, men lying for hours in their own defecation, with blood and mucus covering the floor, caused a great deal of sickness. Morality from undernourishment and disease was about 16 percent. The first few weeks of the trip was the most traumatic experience for the Africans. A number of them went insane and many became so despondent that they gave up the will to live.... Often they committed suicide, by drowning or refusing food or medicine, rather than accept their enslavement. John W. Blassin Game, *The Slave Community* 7 (1979)

Extreme physical as well as psychological violence were considered as punishment for those enslaved people who tried to run away, failed to complete assigned tasks, learnt to read, or arguing with whites.

The United States congress banned the importation of slaves from Africa in 1808. Following that, the development of the cotton gin caused a high demand for slave labor to skyrocket in the Lower South. The solution for that was the Domestic Slave Trade. Slave

traders forcibly transported hundreds of thousands of slaves from the Upper South to Alabama and the Lower South, over the next fifty years. As a result, the population of Alabama grew.(*slavery in America 2013*)

In the early 1800, in order to meet the high demand for slaves in Alabama, slave traders chained the enslaved people together in coffles and forced them to walk hundreds of miles from the Upper South to the Lower South. This way of transporting the African Americans was slow and expensive. In order to solve this problem and move the slaves in a faster way, slave traders developed two new ways: the steamboat and the railroad.

In the beginning of 1820, vast plantations with large number of slaves emerged in Alabama and other regions. Slavery devastated millions of people in America. It also fostered racial discrimination and violence, this costed the enslaved people too much destruction and sufferance.

## **2. Psychoanalysis Theory**

One of the many approaches that reflected literature is Psychoanalysis. It began from medical profession into psychology. Many different points of view were made by specialists as Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung, Alfred Adler Erick Enichson, Karen Maslon, John Lacon, helped to develop this field of study.

While psychoanalytic theories give importance to the differences between individuals, psychoanalysis circulated around the idea that people's actions are determined by their previous experiences of the recurrent events stored in their minds (Fromm 1992). A corner of the dark side of the mind is devoted to pack some unremembered memories and experiences. This latter would come to the surface in the forms of dreams, actions, experiences, and gestures. Christopher. F. Monte (1977) claimed that "*psychoanalytic theories assume the existence of unconscious internal states that motivate an individual's overt actions*" (*Beneath the mask* 8).

The issue of the influence of the human mind on the behavior has made a big subject of discussion among the scientists, the philosophers, the academics. Psychology as a field which studies the human mind has a great role in explaining many behaviors ignored by previous fields of the study ( Ogene, 95). Sigmund Freud and psychiatry as his original

area of specialization have championed the psychoanalysis movements (1959-1939). The focus of psychiatry is more on the mental deviation of the individual, especially when psychiatrists think that there is nothing important to be studied like madness. The idea that a man's life is influenced by evil forces which push him to do unconscious evils, paves the way to new discoveries and studies. ( Ogene, 96)

After his separation from his colleague Josef Breuer, Freud recognized that there was an "official anathema" and damnation against psychoanalysis. *The interpretation of dreams* was largely ignored, and no followers are to follow him for over 10 years. He was disliked. As a result to this dilemma, members of the psychoanalytic movement were to be brought in a united body. After that, in Vienna, Freud was joined by a small group of disciples, and an active interest started to be given to psychoanalysis by psychiatrists in Switzerland like: E Bleuler and Carl Jung.

America began to give Freud different reception by giving him the chance to give his five lectures on psychoanalysis (1910) through an invitation sent by the psychologist G. Stanley Hall. This event helped psychoanalysis to gain many followers among the public in America.

One movement broke out from psychoanalysis led by Alfred Adler in 1911, another one led by Carl Jung in 1913. The former; rejected the overestimated significance of sexuality, tracing neurosis and character development to men's desire for power, while the latter attempted to avoid the concept of infantile sexuality and the Oedipus complex. It also attempted to give an impersonal and non-historical interpretation to the results of psychoanalysis. Freud considers the previous figures (Adler and Jung) as "heretic" because they oppose his ideas. On the other hand," loyalty" is used by him to describe other individuals such as: Otto Ranky, Ernest John, and Hanns Sachs, who continued to collaborate with him. (Freud 33)

## **2.1 Freud's Main Psychological Tenets and Concepts**

The most important tenets of psychoanalysis are first, personality as an inherited system, and the influence of the childhood period on the whole life of the person. Second, the illogical drives influence human's attitudes, experiences, thought, and mannerism. The third tenet is irrational drives are unconscious, and attempt to bring those drives into awareness meet psychological resistance in the form of defense mechanisms. Conflict

between conscious and unconscious, or repressed material can materialize in the form of mental or emotional disturbances such as: anxiety, neurosis, depression, neurotic traits, and others. Skilled guidance, and therapeutic intervention bring the unconscious materials to the conscious mind, this led to the liberation from the effects of the unconscious material (Fromm, 13-14).

In addition to all those new beliefs and ideas, Freud has brought to existence typically new concepts that would explain the various psychological states of men, which has a great influence on the development of psychology. Those concepts turn to be the most suitable to really express the psychological inner states. Concepts like:

**2.1.1 Death drive:** an impulse for destruction, also called; Thanatos. *Freud* defined this concept as the desire to “re-establish a state of things that was disturbed by the emergence of life”. (“Ego and the Id” 709).

**2.1.2 Drive:** or” urge”; the word in psychoanalysis is a psychic tendency, which is quit related to sexual needs.

**2.1.3 Ego:** in psychology is the most central part of the mind which mediates with one’s surroundings, one’s reality, and the person and the id demands. For *Freud*, the ego is “*the representative of the outer world to the Id*” (“Ego and the Id” 708)

**2.1.4 Id:** is the unconscious impulsive component of the keyword personality in the Freudian psychoanalytic model. According to *Freud*, the Id is “*the dark, inaccessible part of our personality*”

**2.1.5 Libido:** drives or mental energies related to or based on sexual instincts, but not necessary sexual in and of themselves.

**2.1.6 Life drive:** it is the opposite of death drive, collective instincts for self-preservation.

**2.1.7 Oedipus Complex:** the complex of emotions aroused in a child by an unconscious sexual desire for the parents of the opposite sex. About this complex, Freud commented: “the reaction to the threats against the child aimed at putting a stop to his early sexual activities and attributed to his father” (Introductory Lectures 15.208).

**2.1.8 Repression:** the involuntary rejection from consciousness of painful or disagreeable ideas, memories, feelings, or impulses. Often involves sexual or aggressive urges or

painful childhood memories. Those undesirable mental contents are put on the unconscious.

**2.1.9 Unconscious:** it is the opposite of awareness. It can appear as slip of the tongue, dreams, or neurotic symptoms.

**2.1.10 Superego:** the part of the mind that acts as a self-critical conscience, reflecting social standards that have been learnt.

## 2.2 Psychoanalysis and Literature

Psychoanalysis is a field that has a relationship with many fields among them, and the most important one is literature. Psychoanalysis interaction with literature provides a better understanding to the world and life. It started immediately after the beginning of psychoanalysis because the founders of this approach are already interested to literature, which itself provide them with language to express their insight. This latter emphasized that psychoanalysis has had a great impact on the study of literature. (Trilling, 1951) as Freud himself admitted, the *“poet and philosophers before me uncovered the unconscious”* and he stated: *“Literature was the scientific method by which the unconscious can be studied”* (34).

To treat and cure the illnesses of the soul, it was necessary to create such a field as psychoanalysis which studies the psychic life of the individuals. It has also different aims. That is why it was developed through time. Sigmund <sup>1</sup>Freud has found it, and has categorized it among the different sciences of the brain and the mind. Psychoanalysis went beyond its definition as a branch of psychology and medicine to the understanding of philosophy, culture, religion...etc. Freud has a strong relationship with literature; he was a good reader, he has a sharp sense of language and style, and thus he is familiar with the great works of universal literature.

Freud believes that the psychologists and the writers of literature share the same role which is observing, and analyzing the mind and the behaviors of the characters. Freud starts by attempting to interpret his own dreams, and this is considered as a means to comprehend men's psyche. He was also a man of art and culture. Freud was fluent in several languages

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<sup>1</sup> Sigmund Freud is a psychologist and a great thinker during the early 20<sup>th</sup>C. He was born in 1856 in Moravia. He referred as the father of psychoanalysis; he formulated several theories throughout his lifetime including the concepts of infantile, sexuality, repression, and the unconscious.

such as English, Italian, German, French, Yiddish, Latin, and ancient Greek. Literature had an important role in helping Freud when he was criticized across time. It was considered as a testimony for Freud to ensure his claims in many aspects of human behaviors. Freud noticed that his clinical cases are read like novels; his job helped him to understand more literature and helped literature to benefit from his founding.

### 3. Critical Race Theory

**3.1 Definition:** *” it is a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power”.* (Delgado, Stefancic, 2001). Critical Race Theory centers on race and how racism is intensely entrenched within the structure of American society. (Parcker and Lynn 2002). This theory examines racism as both a group and individual phenomenon that functions on many levels, and it offers a means by which to identify the function of racism as an institutional and systematic phenomena (Stovall 2005).

Many of the same issues that, conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses are considered by the Critical Race Theory. The latter treats them from a wider perspective that includes economics, context, history, group, self interest, and even feelings and the unconscious. While traditional civil rights calls for the progress, the Critical Race Theory focuses on questioning the basis of the liberal order such as: Enlightenment rationalism, equality theory, legal reasoning, and neutral beliefs of constitutional law. Angela Harris stated: *”unlike traditional civil rights, which embraces incrementalism and step-by-step progress, Critical Race Theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law”* (from *Critical Race Theory an Introduction 1*).

Critical Race Theory has become a very well known and spread discipline, though it started just like a movement in the law. Nowadays, many people who work in the field of education use the ideas of that theory and consider themselves as a specialist in it. They use those ideas as for a better and standing of the problems of school disciplines and classes, tracking, strives over curriculum and history, and results of assessment. Critical Race Theory is considered as a unit of ethnic studies courses and material on critical white studies, developed by Critical Race Theory writers. Unlike some academic disciplines,

Critical Race Theory contains an activist objective, it aims to understand and then to change the social situation, it also aims to know how society organizes itself along racial lines and social structures, and to change it for the best.

### **3.2. Early Origins**

Critical Race Theory emerged in the mid 1970s, when a group of activists, lawyers, and legal scholars across the country recognized that the advances of the civil rights movement of 1960's had postponed, assuming that they needed new theories and strategies to rebel against racism. Among the early writers who held this responsibility were: Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado, many others soon joined them. The first conference took place at a convent outside Madison, Wisconsin, in the summer of 1989. Further conferences and meetings were held later on.

### **3.3 Relationship to Other Movements**

Critical legal studies and radical feminism are two movements preceded the Critical Race Theory to both of which it owes a large debt. It also draws from certain European philosophers and theorists such as; Antonio Gramsci and Jacques Derrida. Among its figures; Frederick Douglass, Cesar Chavez, Martin Luther King, in addition to the <sup>2</sup>Black Power and <sup>3</sup>Chicano Movements of the 60's and early 70's. The idea of legal indeterminacy was borrowed from critical studies; it stated that not every legal situation has a unique true result. But rather it can be interpreted differently. The group also built on feminism's insights into the relationship between power and the construction of social roles. Harris added: "*as well as the unseen, largely invisible collection of patterns and habits that make up patriarchy and other types of domination*" (from *Critical Race Theory, An Introduction 2*).

### **3.4. Principal Figures**

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<sup>2</sup> The Black Power: a political slogan and a name for various associated ideologies aimed at achieving self-determination for people of African descent. It is used by African Americans in the United States. It was prominent in the 1960s and early 1970s, emphasizing racial pride and the creation of black political and cultural institutions to nurture black collective interest.

<sup>3</sup> Chicano Movements: movements seeking political, social, and cultural recognition for Chicanos. The movement rose to prominence in the late 1960s and 1970s associated with the broader civil rights movement in the United States at that time.

Among the founding fathers of the movement is the professor of law at New York University, Derrick Bell. He teaches rights occasional law review articles and memory-type books, delivers speeches, and keeps a number case-book current. The late Alan Freeman, who taught at the state university of New York at Buffalo law school, wrote a number of foundational articles including a path breaking piece that documented how the United States supreme court's race jurisprudence, even when seemingly liberal in thrust, nevertheless legitimized racism. Kimberlé Crenshaw, Angela Harris, Charles Lawrence, Mary Matsuda, and Patricia Williams are major figures, as well. Leading Asian scholars include Neil Gotanda, Eric Yamamoto, and Matsuda. The top Indian critical scholar is Robert Williams, the best known Latinos as, Richard Delgado, Kevin Johnson, Margret Montoya, Juan Perea, and Francisco Valdes.

### **3.5. Basic Tenets of Critical Race Theory**

#### **3.5.1 Everyday Racism:**

*"Racism does not exist"* this is what white Americans still think. They believe that the word racism applies only to the forms which are quite visible such as: physical or verbal attacks against people of color; the activities of white supremacists groups; the intended and overt exclusion of racial minorities from particular housing, restaurants and social organization open to the public; and the like. Perhaps one of the most distressing forms of everyday racism is the fact that the whites deny the existence of racism and that the blacks are oversensitive about discrimination, ethnic jokes...etc.

#### **3.5.2 Interest Convergence:**

This term, in America, is used by Derrick Bell to say that the concept of racism is common because it often converges, or overlaps with the interest; the Americans used the blacks for a special interest either of a white individual or group, one example is the exploitation of the black labors by the upper class whites by paying them less than their white counterparts. This latter offers a sense of reconciliation for the underpaid white workers and make them feel superior to someone else. Bell (1980) suggests that civil right gain within communities of color, and, specifically, those for African Americans should be interpreted with measured enthusiasm. First, early civil rights legislation

provided only basic rights to African Americans, rights that had been enjoyed by Whites for centuries. These civil rights gains were in effect superficial “opportunities” because they were basic tenets of U.S. democracy; however, Bell (1980) argues that these very basic rights came only inasmuch as they converged with the self-interests of Whites. “*We would add that these concessions were offered to the extent that they were not seen (or exacted) as a major disruption to a “normal” way of life for the majority of Whites*”.(Delgado and Stefancic 28).

### **3.5.3 The Social Construction of Race**

This belief has to do with the differences, in terms of physical features, between for example; light-skinned blacks and dark- skinned whites, when there is a slight difference among members of each group. So how can racism be defined as a matter of physical features?

United States Census Bureau is taken every ten years; between 1790 and 1920 shows the racial categories. Those categories have not to do with biological reality, but rather the dominant beliefs towards race prevailed in different periods of time. The following example clarifies the previous idea. From 1790 to 1810, the division according to the social and economic pressure was: free whites, all the other free persons except Indians and slaves were not taxed. From 1820 to 1840 many racial divisions took place. In this context Prince Brown Jr. stated:

If humans could be grouped into absolute “racial” categories...we would have groups of people unable to have children with any other groups... and there would be any differences between people in the same group. Instead what we find is that 75 percent of genes are identical...in all individuals regardless of the population to which they are socially assigned. The remaining 25 percent are genes which appear in more than one form... for example... in the four (A, B, O, AB) different types of blood. That is, there is no gene for “race”. (Brown 145-146)

### **3.5.4 Differential Racialization**

This concept is about the different bad deeds (racism) of the dominant society against different minority groups, using multiple means through time, according to its need. The white supremacists justified those actions, such as working in the large plantations in

South America before the civil war, by the fact that those minorities were simple minded and savage and they could not support themselves, so they needed the supervision of the whites. Those mythical stereotypes, according to the whites, are arguments for the black's dependence on the white supremacists. Tyson commented:

Native Americans have been considered friendly and noble, lazy drunkards, thieving heathens, or bloodthirsty savages. Similarly, Chicanos/ as have been stereotyped as devoutly religious and extremely family oriented, superstitious and gullible, or lazy, good for-nothing freeloaders, depending on white society's need to see them one way or the other. Chinese American men have been stereotyped as wise, fatherly guides for youngsters of all races; Chinese American women have been stereotyped as submissive to men; and Chinese American men and women have both been stereotyped as sneaky and treacherous. And although Japanese Americans are generally considered hardworking and trustworthy, during World War II they were seen as dangerous potential traitors and put in internment camps for duration of the war. (Tyson375)

### **3.5.5 Intersectionality**

Race intersects with " *class, sex, sexual orientation, political orientation, and personal history*" (Tyson 376), in forming each person's complex identity, as an example; person who is black, under employed, working class male or Mexican American. This person will face many difficulties, segregation, and oppression from different sources for different reasons without being aware of them.

### **3.5.6 Voice of Color**

According to many critical theorists, minority writers and thinkers have more chance than the white writers to write successfully about racism because they experienced and suffered from racism directly, so white American writers had no to do with identity. That is why "*black, Indian, Asian, and Latino/a writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that the whites are unlikely to know*"(Delgado and Stefancic 9). Voice of Color is not something genetic, but rather it is learned through the exposure to racism. Tyson stated:

The voice of color is an essential-that is, an inborn, or genetic quality. Rather, it is learned through the experience of racial oppression. In other words, the voice of color-the enhance ability to

speaking and writing about race and racism due to the experience of racial oppression-is socially, not biologically, acquired.(Tyson 377)

### **3.5.7 Critical Race and Literature**

Generally speaking, critics agree that African American literature has focused on a number of recurring historical and sociological themes, all of which reflect the politics, the realities of political, social, and economic power of the black American experience. Among those themes are the following: reclaiming the African past ; surviving the horrors of the Middle passage; surviving the ordeal of slavery; the quest for freedom from slavery and from other forms of oppression; the quest for literacy; the experience of African Americans during the civil war and reconstruction; surviving life in the South under segregation; the problems and conflicts of mulattoes in a racist society; the difficulties of economic survival; the migration North and the related themes of urbanization, alienation, and the quest to reconcile double consciousness; the role of religion in personal and collective survival; the importance of cultural heritage; and the importance of family and community, of course, surviving the combined oppression of racism, classism, and sexism is also a recurring theme, but until the mid-twentieth century, black writers had to treat this and other racial charged subjects carefully or encode them in their writing (indicate their intended meaning through subtle references that black readers and sympathetic white readers would catch but that unsympathetic white readers would not readily notice) in order to be published by white editors and read by white audience. (Delgado and Stefancic 2001)

## **4. Biographical Criticism**

### **Introduction**

One of the most important roles of Literary Criticism is to illuminate a reader's understanding of a text, and in turn, attempt to improve a reader's understanding of the world. What characterized great writers is their ability to see the world from different angles, in a way that many readers at first cannot fully understand. While what distinguished great critics is their capacity to serve readers by giving them a language by which they can explicate meaning in a text. This "language" can be in the form of certain

literary concept or theory. This way allows the reader to view the text from new perspective. (Biographical Criticism and its Application to Tolstoy 1)

#### **4.1 Definition**

One method of interpretation which has long been under debate is the Biographical Criticism as it was defined by Frank .H. Ellis, “*the relation between a written work and the biographical experiences of the writer*” (Ellis 971). This theory suggests that a work can be, more specifically, the product of an author’s life experiences and through a better understanding of significant details pertaining to these experiences, a reader may understand the work of the author in a great way.

Talking about the importance of the circumstances and the context for a literary criticism, A .I. Farkas best articulates the premise of New Historicism and cultural criticism stating “*the literary text, rather than being a fully autotelic entity that can, and indeed, should be interpreted and/or enjoyed in its solitary self, is something that can fulfill its multiple functions in a rich contextual field defined by such externalities as the reader, the world, and last but not least, the writer*” (Farkas 17).

#### **4.2 Points Related to Biographical Criticism**

Many points should be taken before applying Biographical Criticism, such as: researching the author’s life, using the biographical information to understand the inferential and evaluative levels of the work, researching the author’s beliefs, relating those systems of beliefs to the work, explaining how the connection reflect in the work’s themes and topics, explaining what can be determined about the author’s statements within the text based on biographical information.(Wishart, literary analysis Biographical perspective)

#### **4.3 Questions to Ask Oneself When Doing Biographical Criticism**

While doing a biographical criticism, some questions are to be taken in consideration, questions like: are the facts about the writer’s life relevant to your understanding of the work? Are characters and incidents in the work versions, of the writer’s own experiences? How do you think the writer’s values are reflected in the work? How do the connections explain the author’s purpose and the overall meaning of the work?

When applying Biographical criticism one might consider the social structure of the time period during which the author lived, events that took place during the author's life; and also during the time period, the author's attitude towards society or events taking place.

The previous approaches; Psychoanalysis, Critical Race Theory, and Biographical Criticism are to be applied, in the second chapter of this paper, on one of the famous literary works of the Antebellum period. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Written by Herself, a slave narrative written by Harriet Ann Jacobs.

## **5. Slave Narrative**

### **Introduction**

Throughout the nineteenth century, slaves in South America suffered too much from the dehumanization of slavery. Once they recognized that literature had a great effect in changing social and political attitudes, some ex-slaves started to write about their experiences. Many literary genres appeared at that time as a result to that. Among them were the slave narratives.

#### **5.1 Definition of the Slave Narratives**

Slave narrative is a type of autobiography that was most popular during the last half of nineteenth century before the Civil War in America. Slave narratives were written by escaped or freed slaves to tell their experiences of slavery, and most of them were assisted by abolitionists. Slave narrative first appeared in the United States around 1703, but most of them were published as a part of the abolitionist movement in America in the period between 1830 and 1860 until the end of the Civil War (Franklin 473).

#### **5.2 The Main Goals of the Slave Narratives**

The main goal of slave narratives was to gain the sympathy of white readers as well as to support for the abolitionist movement. Slave narrative provided the readers with a view of slavery in the United States of America and allowed readers to explore some of the most compelling themes of the nineteenth century slavery, including labor, resistance and fight, relations with masters, family life, and religious belief (Fort 1).

Since the slave narratives were written by former slaves and they are the first hand experiences of slaves; therefore, several scholars are interested in the writing of slave narratives as a source for historical references. Slave narratives are one way to learn not only about black slave history but also more about American history. Narratives by slaves before the Civil War are essential to the study of American history and literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries during the time of the <sup>4</sup>Atlantic slave trade. As historical sources, slave narratives recorded slaves' lives in the United States from firsthand experience of slaves. They revealed the struggle of black people. The reality of racism, and some histories of African American people, which were hidden to the world in the past, white people as the majority in society ignored, and some historical incidents that they refused to record in the historical documents. Any attempt of subjectivity or any additional acts to make the events of the slave narrative significant would jeopardize the works even more.

The writer of a slave narrative finds himself in an irresolvable tight bind as a result of the very intention and premise of his narrative, which is to give a picture of slavery "as it is." Thus it is the writer's claim, it must be his claim, that he is not emplotting, he is fictionalizing, and he is not performing any act poiesis (=shaping, making).(Olney 48)

White people viewed that black people as marginal groups in their society reflected on the oppression and suffering from being slaves. Thus, some incidents were too horrifying to be mentioned and recorded in historical documents, especially the issues of sexual oppression, segregation and other unethical and horrible incidents. Consequently, some factual details of the incidents were covered, ignored, and abandoned in the American history at the time. As a result, slave narratives document the history of blacks in America that had been ignored in the history books of white majority. Olney talking about the slave narrative stated:" *a non-memorial description fitted to a performed mold that bound the majority if not the phrase 'slave narrative.'*" (Olney 49)

Black slaves used narrative writings as a tool to reveal the reality of slave lives and to make contact with others. However, slave narrators could not straightforwardly tell their stories and record factual details into historical documents because they were at risks of being threatened by white supremacy. In addition, by the nineteenth century, it was

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<sup>4</sup> The Atlantic Slave Trade or the trans- Atlantic Slave trade was the process of procuring, transporting, and selling slaves, especially black African to the New world prior to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

generally illegal to teach a slave to read and write and black slaves had no chances to gain education. Slaves viewed that the acquisition of literacy was to revolt against their enslavement, and literacy became the first step in their quest for their freedom. Consequently, this form the literary works was applied as a tool to convey and contribute their traumatic experiences. Therefore, it can be said that slave narratives are valuable sources for readers to understand the experiences of slaves in the United States.

The narratives are all trained on one and the same objective reality, they have a coherent and defined audience, they have behind them guiding them an organized group of “sponsors”, and they are possessed of very specific motives, intentions, and uses understood by narrators, sponsors, and audience alike: to reveal the truth of slavery and so to bring about its abolition. (Olney 52)

## 6. Writing style and modes

Harriet Jacobs follows the characteristics of Slave Narratives proposed by Charles Twitchell Davis and Henry Louis Gates. First she begins the first sentence with “I was born”. David W. Blight states in the slave narratives: “*A Genre and Source*” that American slaves also write their personal experience to prove that they could be reliable narrators to tell the truth about their own experience. Jacobs uses the first pronoun “I” in order to show that her narrative is real. Jacobs suffers from her separation from her mother or family. When she was six years old as she begins to realize her status as a slave. Also she always, through her work, reveals the difficulties of her life as a slave. (Rattana, 2011)

She gives descriptions of the inhumanity and cruelty of slavery. In her narrative, she usually portrays her struggles to survive in her daily life, for example, she is always uncertain about where and how she will get her meal. She details the clear description of the difficulties of slave’s lives on a plantation under the control of white masters. In addition to the record of barriers being raised against literacy. The literacy scenes are illustrated in which the narrator explains how she is not allowed to read and write in the white society. Nevertheless, during her late childhood years, she has an experience that is she has a mistress who teaches her to read and write. Jacobs’ narrative also shows that literacy eventually played a very important role in their decision to escape.

Finally, details of failed and successful attempts and strategies to escape from enslavement to seek freedom are widely exposed in the narrative, in “*An Introduction to the Slave Narrative*”, William L Andrew states that an important scene of slave Narrative, is the successful escape from enslavement to the North.

Other points concerning the style is that Jacobs in, “*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*”, writes in discontinuous form and fragmentary. This can be seen in the beginning chapters in her autobiography, for example Jacobs starts telling the story of her life and describes her feeling when she was a child, but then in chapter three, the New Year’s Day, she changes to present and tells of painful experiences in the life of every slave in general and describes the laws against the black slaves or the racism among white society.

Jacobs also breaks from the standard tone and style of the slave narrative, and uses emotional language to convey events. For example in the previous mentioned chapter, “New Year’s Day”, the narrator explains that the slave families were broken because they were taken to the auction block at the start of the year. The narrator then uses exclamation points and interjections to express the anguish that the slave mother felt when they were suspended from their children.

Jacobs’s *Incidents* cleverly combines the conventions of very different literary styles; confessional literature, the sentimental novel, African folktales and the trickster figure, the picaresque novel, and obviously, the (male) slave narrative. There is an element that links these literary genres together: sex. If we considered *Incidents* a sort of confessional autobiography, sex would be the starting point in the sin to rebirth progress: her illicit sexual intercourse with a man who was not her husband would be her sin, which she would have purge to achieve spiritual and physical freedom. She purges her sin by spending seven years in a hiding-place in which she could hardly move and in which she felt very lonely, as she could not risk seeing many people.

Jacobs’s confession that she had a sexual relationship with a man outside marriage would be outrageous in the context of the sentimental novel, especially if we take into account the fact that the readers of the sentimental novel were mostly women who had a very strong and strict sense of morality. However, Jacobs knows this and justifies herself stating that, for the female slave, white standards of morality are almost unattainable since

the slave is in a submissive position and has to do what she is ordered to or bear the consequences.

## **Conclusion**

South America was a battlefield to an issue which was very prominent in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. It was slavery which turned the life of the slaves to a real dilemma. The white slave owners practiced all kinds of racial segregation that affected their psychological side.

The men of letters used this topic in many of their writings through time. Many scholars did different researches and applied theories to analyze literary works about slavery. Psychoanalysis, Critical Race Theory, and Biographical criticism were among them. The basic tenets of those theories had strong relationships with slavery. Every point in those tenets treated one side from this phenomenon.

Many slaves wrote about their daily life with slavery and described how much it was painful to live as such. Their writings were in the form of autobiographies. This literary genre was called slave narrative. Among those writers who wrote about their experiences was Harriet Ann Jacobs. She wrote " *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*" on which the previous mentioned theories will be applied in the second chapter of this paper.