

The prolific production of slave narratives in antebellum America has been propelled by cultural and sociopolitical forces, including the antislavery movement, abolitionism, and romanticism. The industrial inventions revolutionizing the printing press also led immediately to the cheaper production and subscription of journals and penny newspapers. It was in this new era that the ability to read and to write passed from the hands of well-educated into the masses that began to take a more active part in intellectual matters. It was also in this new era that journalism brought the slavery question into the consciousness of plain people. The vogue of fugitive slave narratives did not arise until the second half of the 1830s when the northern abolitionists became concerned with the wrong doings of the slaveholders. The immense popularity of the narratives appealed to a sense of justice.

Part of the antislavery movement and abolitionism, slave narratives of the antebellum period served as abolitionist propaganda and were used as conversion narratives. William L. Andrews indicates that in the 1840s the mode was used by the black autobiographers who “secularized the Christian soul into the spirit of American individualism and reoriented the concepts of testing and salvation to the contemporary sociopolitical scene” (99). However, the need for conversion was shifted from the black slaves to the white audiences, who would identify with the slaveholders as criminal and realize slavery was inhuman. The social and political forces that supported the black autobiographers and the publication of slave narratives did arouse the public sympathy for the slaves. As long as the slave narratives by ex-slaves narrators did not contradict the abolitionist propaganda, the form of slave narrative seemed to offer the ex-slaves an opportunity to tell their life stories and to write freely. Yet, the ex-slave narrators had to make a compromise between what kind of self their white reformers wanted them to be and how much they had to tell themselves rhetorically in order to satisfy their patrons and to achieve the aim of the antislavery movement. As Andrews indicates, Antebellum America “had never been receptive to black autobiography

as an expressive mode unless it could be packaged and recommended by the white as something else” (100). The restriction set up in the expressive mode of slave narrative implied a complex power relation between the slave narrators and the white reformers.

The cultural experiences in slavery that ex-slaves drew in slave narrative accounts were quite different in narratives by men and by women. These differences in gender-specific texts were revealed in not only the incidents selected by the slave narrators but also the sexual ideologies operated by the abolitionists. In both male and female narrative accounts, sexual ideologies existed and served to distinguish and to reflect diverse arenas that male and female slave narrators wanted to explore in their slavery experiences. While male slave narratives usually focused on the story of public life and constructed a journey to restore manhood, female slave narratives emphasized the sufferings in their private lives and examined the problems existing in the cult of true womanhood. Female slave narrative apparently deviated from male slave narrative tradition. However, their narrative accounts were not highly admired and appreciated as male slave narratives were. As Valerie Smith points out, “By mythologizing rugged individuality, physical strength, and geographical mobility, the narrative enshrines cultural definitions of masculinity” (34). This privilege of maleness and manliness in cultural terms influenced the reception of gender-specific slave narratives. Female slave narratives were placed in the second place or were omitted, lost, and forgotten.

Feminist critics have manifested the impartial circumstances that slave narratives and speeches made by male ex-slaves were usually more welcomed than those by the female ex-slaves. Two crucial questions are raised by Mary Helen Washington: “Why is the fugitive slave, the fiery orator, the political activist, the abolitionist always represented as a black man? How does the heroic voice and heroic image of the black woman get suppressed in a culture that depended on her heroism for its survival?” (xvii). Washington also points out black women wrote

approximately twelve percent of the total number of extant slave narratives. In other words, female ex-slaves were not granted the same power of articulation as male ex-slaves were and their slavery experiences were not appreciated and seen as representative. The production, circulation, and reception of gender-specific slave narratives were, in fact, operated by the white abolitionists who operated sexual politics to determine how the slave narratives should be packaged and published in order to achieve their own personal interests in the antislavery movement. On the surface, the form of autobiography seemed to achieve a literary emancipation for the ex-slaves who were willing to tell and to record their slavery experiences. However, the ex-slave narrators did not tell and write their slavery experiences in equally free manner.

Slave narrative was a product of history and a construction of a specific time, developing in responses to a variety of social contingencies and serving to satisfy abolitionist individual desires. In addition, the slave narrative published by the abolitionists was a market commodity, deliberately written to produce desired effects to serve the needs of white liberals. To examine the abolitionist priori structure and press from 1830s to 1860s will lead us to notice the erasure and exclusion of female slave narratives. My attempt in this paper is to show that male-identifying culture, as feminist critics indicated, was not the only cause for the popularity of male slave narratives and constant elision of female slave narratives. There also existed the dominance of slave narrative formulas, in which sexual ideologies and politics were partially and prejudicially constructed and operated by the abolitionists. The female slave narratives were obliterated within the abolitionist press because female ex-slave narrator needed to comply with the dominant formulas established by white women abolitionists, to emphasize mostly the private side of life. Therefore, female slave narratives would hardly and not possibly be categorized under the abolitionist propaganda literature that usually endowed male ex-slave narrator with a public personality for moral and ideological aims and manufactured a prototype fitted into the myth of

American individualism. Two canonical slave narratives will be used to trace the political phenomenon of displacing female slave narrative in the dominance of slave narrative formulas, one is Frederick Douglass's well-known autobiography *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave Written by Himself* published in 1845 and the other is Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* published in 1861.

Production of Slave Narratives

The abolitionists were the most important publishers that the slave narrator ever had, but they were not the only publishers. About one-half of the more than six thousand narratives were published or kept in a state of preservation by five other sources of publication: the court record, the sensational journal, the church record, the independent printer printed by the author, and the Federal Writers' Project Administration during the 1930s (Starling 222). In all total six thousand records have been found, one half of the number belonging to the period when the slave was still a slave, the other half resulting from recent attempts to capture the story from the aged survivors of slavery. With the existence of non-abolitionist sources and record, it is possible to compare the data of slave narratives published under abolitionist auspices with those unconnected with such auspices.

From 1703 to 1863, fifty-six life histories of slaves were discovered in the court record. The editor of these slave narrative accounts was the court stenographer, who had been paid for his work and had no interest in the words that he was trying to take down from the lips of the slave. Among these fifty-six records, three of the slave narrators, Peter Randolph, Anthony Burns, and John Anderson had abolitionist publishers. Without the external marks of identification, it is hard to distinguish the court record from the abolitionist press. As Starling notes, "The combined testimony in the fifty-six court records—both the minutiae and the general nature of the slave experience—produces a variety of evidence that comes in very handy as corroboration of one or another apparently flagrant

exaggeration of fact in statements from narratives published by the abolitionists” (223).

A curious series of slave narratives were published in the form of broadsides between 1760s to the 1790s. They were about the confession of slaves who were identified as rakes and were going to be executed for some crime. The slave narrative account of this group was the most popular due to an interest in the rake’s progress and the effect on the condemned slave of his wild adventure which has made as an entertaining project at the beginning of the 17th century. The reporter’s chief job was to get all the narratives onto the sheet as fast as he could so he could peddle down the streets next morning. With its similarity, the other surprising adventures of kidnappings, lucky escapes, and enforced slavery in foreign parts were published in the sensational journal in the 18th century.

From church records, thirty-three short slave narratives and the long narratives of William Boen have been found among the Quakers. The religious slave narratives revealed individuals less troubled by the enslaved institution that shackled their bodies and minds than the problem of their immortal souls. Slaves’ testimonials of the power of faith in God to lift them above the despair can also be found in the slave narratives published by the abolitionists. Some revealed fuller details of their dependence upon prayer for spiritual release from the degradation of slave experiences.

Publishing of slave narratives by authors themselves can be traced back to the first printing of Jupiter Hammon’s story in 1787. During the 1840s to 1860s, these narratives were absorbed into the stream of antislavery publication and this was the way that popular narratives reached the public market. The format for these publications ranged from inexpensive paper covers to very handsomely bound editions, usually with gold trimming and glossy pages. The cost of publication was met by local church groups or organizations. After 1863 there were many who brought out the narratives of their lives as private projects as the previous years brought a desire to record the story of slave experiences.

The non-abolitionist source of the slave narratives can also be found under the Federal Writers' Project Administration between 1934 and 1938. A total of twenty-three hundred slave testimonials had been collected from the interview of aged ex-slaves between seventy-two and one hundred and twelve years old. These records had been collected in an edited anthology as a "folk history of slavery" by the director of the project. These narratives also provided sources for corroboration of the data in the slave narratives published as abolitionist propaganda.

The slave narratives comprise a group of autobiographical or semi-autobiographical records of American Negro slaves. Before 1836, individuals slaves concerned with the individual's escape from bondage but after 1836 to the end of Civil War, the slave narrators infused with race and class consciousness in their slave narrative accounts. From the literary view point, the popular testimony of the slave narrative during the significant period of 1830 to 1860 had been justified as literature of propaganda, and a conservative estimate of published narratives was more than a hundred. The abolitionists were the most important publishers that the slave narrator ever had.

Gendered-Specific Slave Narratives

Douglass's *Narrative* and Jacobs's *Incidents* were not published by the same agent. Douglass's *Narrative* was published by "The Anti-Slavery Office in Boston" that undoubtedly was the abolitionist press in the antislavery movement. However, Jacobs's *Incidents* was published by the author herself that was categorized under the non-abolitionist records. Both titles were framed differently. The title of Douglass's slave narrative is called *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, which clearly indicates this narrative is emphasized upon a distinct individual and shows Douglass was the author. On the contrary, Harriet Jacob published her slave narrative in a pseudonym name, Linda Brent. The title is called *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, which alludes to a specific

group or a class instead of a distinct individual. While both narratives were claimed “Written by Him/Herself,” it seemed that the author was to claim the ownership of its content and his/her responsibility for authentic selection and arrangement of the texts. The editor’s name, however, was shown in the Jacobs’s narrative but not on the Douglass’s. This arrangement implies that female-slave narrator was unable to claim authorship of her narrative without an editor’s validation of authenticity.

Following the title page is the “Preface” or “Introduction” by their white abolitionist patrons, editors or friends. This part usually functions to distinguish the roles and to establish the relationship between the abolitionist and the slave narrator. In contrast to Douglass who did not write a preface to inform his readers the authenticity of his text by including two letters written by well-known abolitionists, Jacobs in the preface continued to reassure that her narrative is not fiction for those who might doubt the authenticity of her story. She included L. Maria Child’s introduction and Amy Post’s statement to confirm, to support, and to reinforce her literary decision and her claim to selfhood and sisterhood with other women. These differences in gender-specific slave narratives lead us to ponder two relevant questions: What kind of a priori structure and system of desire preexisted and was determined by the abolitionists for the ex-slave narrators to make such selection of their writing materials? To what extent and for whose gain were sexual politics and ideologies operated and constructed in gender-specific slave narratives?

The fundamental relation between abolitionists can be seen as intimate political partners who benefited from each other in the antislavery movement. To propel the antislavery movement, the abolitionists needed slave narratives as propaganda to draw the reading public’s attention towards the racial and sexual issues within the slavery. The slave narrators needed the abolitionists to authorize the credibility of their slave narrative accounts. However, this kind of power relation was usually in conflict. As Antonio Gramsci argues in his theory of

hegemony, “the cultural and ideological relations between ruling and subordinate classes in capitalist societies consist less in the domination of the latter by the former than in the struggle for hegemony—that is, for moral, cultural, intellectual and, thereby, political leadership over the whole society—between the ruling class and, as the principal subordinate class, the working class” (qtd. in Bennett xiv). By using Gramsci’s mode of hegemony to evaluate the complexity of power relation between the abolitionists and slave narrators, the form of slave narrative is ambiguous. On the one hand, the slave narrators gained the opportunity to express themselves and to tell their life stories, but usually they had to convert their life stories in order to gain more audiences and to receive the support of their abolitionist patrons. On the other hand, the abolitionists still had great influence upon slave narrative accounts. They created ideology in the antislavery movement and controlled the way of slave narrators’ ways of delivering their speeches and slave narrative publications. Negotiation, therefore, is inevitable.

The form of slave narrative seemed ideal without any intrusion of white voice, but the letters or preface put at the beginning of slave autobiographies were usually written by the white abolitionists. The introductory quality of the letters or prefaces usually provided us with some kind of reading map, which was usually manipulative and authoritative. In fact, the form of slave narrative can be seen as the product of negotiation. As Tonny Bennett points out, “If the Gramscian concept of hegemony refers to the processes through which the ruling class seeks to negotiate opposing class cultures onto a cultural and ideological terrain which wins for it a position of leadership, it is also true that what is thereby consented to is a *negotiated version* of ruling class culture and ideology” (xv). While slave narrators supplied the facts of their life stories, the abolitionists were the ones who controlled and manipulated ideology and philosophy in the antislavery movement. However, the white abolitionists still achieved the domination not by effacing or intruding in the slave narrative accounts but by deliberately giving the ex-slaves some space to express and articulate themselves against slavery. To fit into the

ideology of antislavery movement, the slave narrators inevitably had to convert their narrative accounts, to negotiate with the abolitionists, and to follow the ideology of the ruling class.

Douglass's early development as a public speaker and a writer served of a good example of negotiation. Douglass had been assisted by white abolitionists and friends, whose ideas of what roles black Americans should play in their literary life and in their own emancipation that he found were restrictive. He also found that slave narrator had been confined to the slave narrative tradition that was once a means to freedom and the opportunity to make statement against slavery. During the antislavery lecture circuit, Douglass revealed that he had been coached by his co-workers in the proper image that he should present to the public. He resented the restrictions and the way in which he was expected to make theatrical display and to imitate the plantation dialect when speaking in public. He realized the conflict and the difference between black's and white's idea of discourse and broke through this restricted mode. He developed his own mode of rhetorical discourse into a new level.

Douglass had been self-taught as a rhetorician and boldly expressed himself in public, but the way he approached the public had been condemned by Ephraim Peabody as self-indulgent in his passionate utterance and being viewed as naïve about the commercial side of American life. Nevertheless, Douglass's bold gesture and achievement took the slave narratives away from traditional mode of production: slave narrators supply the facts while the abolitionists promote them with a fixed value and meaning. As Andrew suggests, "Douglass was practicing a kind of literary and rhetorical self-reliance;" he "was turning the slave narrative into a metaphor of self" and to demonstrate "the performing self" through the narrative acts of "self-discovering, self-watching, and self-pleasuring" (110). Defying the narrative mode of discourse set up by the white abolitionists, he became a great orator, and his rhetorical discourse was no longer a commodity only said what it meant. Resisting being an object and merchandize of antislavery

movement, he became the focal point on the stage of rhetorical performance.

The slave narratives were in essence commodified by the abolitionists who determined how the slave narratives should be delivered in public. The labor of production had been divided into two parts: “Negro supplies the raw materials, the ‘brute fact’ of a life, and the white man manufactures and packages them for public consumption” (Andrew 107). In the process of producing slave narratives, the slave narrators who could not speak their mind freely had to make compromises between what kind of self their white reformers wanted them to be and how much they had to sell themselves rhetorically in order to achieve the aim of the antislavery movement. For the slave narrators, they could not freely comment on the fact of their lives, and for the white reformers, they were concerned very much about the image of slave narrators and the ideals of texts appearing in public as well as in the publishing marketplace. Not allowing the slave narrators to express themselves freely when writing or delivering their speeches, the abolitionists preferred them to only report the facts without giving any extra comments. Ephraim Peabody, a Boston Unitarian minister and moderate abolitionist, stated that “success in the socioliterary marketplace, as in the business world, depended on ‘a few sober words from a calm, wise, discriminating mind’” (Andrew 109). As long as the white reformers continued to entail a fixed value and meaning upon slave narratives, slave narrative remained as a restricted form.

Sexual Ideologies and Politics Embodied

Slave narratives of antebellum period were once viewed as products of antislavery movement because their true value had been masked by the white reformer’s belief in the slave narrator’s credibility and decision of how truth should be interpreted and presented. On the surface, the production of slave narratives was to achieve the social aim of emancipation. The sexual ideologies generated in both male and female slave narratives were to be noted in their emphasis and

interests, which inscribed their slavery experiences based on sexual differences and creative process. In *Narrative*, Douglass was depicted as a representative of the oppressed people and a self-made man. In *Incidents*, Jacobs broke the boundary of generalization and assumption dominant in the literature of slave narrative. She brought up the question of true womanhood in terms of social and economical consequences. The women abolitionists who stood against the slavery gradually realized that slavery took different forms, and they fought for the emancipation of slaves and also of women. Although different sexual ideologies were operated on purpose in both gender-specific texts by the abolitionists in the antislavery movement, both Douglass's and Jacobs's texts, while dealing primarily with the slavery problem, significantly brought the white audiences with different perspectives of slavery in terms of gender differences.

In the fourth and final version of his autobiography, Douglass made an apology about the autobiographical nature of his writing, "I write freely of myself, not from choice, but because I have, by my cause, been morally forced into thus writing" (*Life and Time* 511). Although Douglass in his whole life struggled against the conflict with his patrons who confined him to the dominance of slave narrative formulas, he never abandoned this slavery genre. Originally, his first and most popular autobiography *Narrative* had been viewed as a typical work of abolitionist propaganda in pamphlet length. Douglass himself in the text was constructed as a cultural stereotype in accordance with the conventional myth of what a successful man in America was expected to be. The dominance of slave narrative formulas formed the qualities of the effective propaganda that often led to financial and popular success. As Wilson J. Moses suggests, "[Douglass's] life symbolized the myth of American individualism, altruism, and self-sacrifice" (69). The slave narrators usually were concerned with "depicting himself in ways that would appeal to liberal Christian readers and valorize bourgeois social conventions . . . the message must be simply and passionately stated in order to catch the attention of a broad audience" (Moses 69). By reducing the ex-slave

narrator's individuality into a mere representation of racial injustice and oppression, the narrator's personality is less important than the moral message that the narrative accounts wanted to deliver.

The sexual ideology celebrated in Douglass's *Narrative* was the recuperation of manliness. As Douglass stated in his autobiography, "You have seen how a man was made a slave; you should see how a slave was made a man" (294). From a slave to a free man, Douglass abandoned his mother's name and renamed himself. This gesture of remaking his beginnings, as Deborah E. McDowell points out, was against "the paternalism and property relations at the heart of the slave system" (46). The act of discarding family ties enabled Douglass to affirm his manhood. At the same time, it also allied with the abolitionist's condemnation of the slavery's legal denial and destruction of family to slaves to expose the inhuman cruel side of slavery that the slaves had been deprived of the right to wives and children.

Male slave experience was usually depicted as a quest to gain not only manhood but also freedom and literacy in order to establish their published and public voices. As McDowell suggested, "In choosing autobiography as a form, Douglass committed himself to what many feminists consider an androcentric genre. In its focus on the public story of a public life, which signifies the achievement of adult male status in Western culture, autobiography reflects and constructs that culture's definition of masculinity" (44). In his observation of the differences between the experiences of female and male slaves, especially in black women's sexual oppression, Douglass depicted female slaves as vulnerable victims who suffered sexual oppression by their white masters. As feminist critics point out, Douglass's text did not mention any women problems at all; women readers were excluded to participate in his journey from slavehood to manhood. Nevertheless, Douglass's narrative account had widely touched white readers and had tremendous effect and powerful appeal to their sympathetic understanding.

In contrast to Douglass's device of eliminating the family ties, Jacobs craved a

family for her children and indicated how hard it was for a free black woman to have a home of her own. The family meant much to black female slaves. However under the cult of true womanhood, black female slaves were deprived the right to be virtuous women and good mothers. Since the true womanhood of white women had been defined as pure, virtuous and submissive, the black female slaves were not only deprived the rights of their children, and they were also exploited and abused sexually. This concept of true womanhood, therefore, was impossible for the black women to achieve. The unique quality in Harriet Jacobs's narrative accounts, as Carby notes, "carefully negotiated the tension between satisfying moral expectations and challenging an ideology that would condemn her as immoral" (73). The true womanhood of black women that Jacobs portrayed and longed for was reflected in the image of her grandmother, who was represented not only as being pure and pious but also an unconventional womanhood to the extent that she sustained physically and spiritually the whole family. Carby also indicates that "[w]ithin the series of 'incidents' that Jacobs represented, this decision was pivotal to the structure of the text and to the development of an alternative discourse womanhood . . . following incidents established the unconventional definitions of womanhood and motherhood that Jacobs, herself, tried to decide" (74). What Brent learned from her grandmother was the importance of the home that she built for her grandchildren. Being a free black woman in the north, she found it difficult to build a home of her own. Still bound to be a servant of the white at the end, Jacobs felt her free status in essence was still confined in a different form of slavery.

Besides exposing the serious effect of slavery in black women's lives, women's problem was specifically questioned. Jacobs explores the concept of true womanhood and distinguished the meaning of true womanhood and motherhood between the white and the black women. In her narrative, Jacobs depicts how desperate and isolated Linda Brent became when she encountered sexual oppression. Threatened by her white master, she was at the same time

mistrusted by her mistress. Remaining an unmarried woman and a mother of two children, Brent suffered the torture of being a woman and a mother. As Jean Fagon Yelling indicates, Jacobs's slave narrative account centered "on the figure of a woman struggling to break her chains" and emphasized "the evils of slavery are dramatized as the sexual abuse of women and the torture of mothers" (89). Brent was not the only woman who underwent the sufferings caused by laws of slavery that were unable to protect her from sexual abuse and also by patriarchal sexual ideology that condemned her inability to remain chaste. For women readers who were educated under the cult of true womanhood, Jacobs's slave narrative account seemed contradictory and inappropriate.

Nevertheless, Jacobs's slave narrative accounts were significantly written by a woman, for other women, and about the conditions and images of black and white women in slavery and in the patriarchal society. As critics point out, Jacobs employed techniques drawn from sentimental fictions and a "feminine" rhetoric. The effect is tremendously powerful. As Karlyn Kohrs Campbell points out,

In most instances, personal experience is tested against the pronouncements of male authorities (who can be used for making accusations and indictments that would be impermissible from a woman) . . . The tone tends to be personal and somewhat tentative, rather than objective or authoritative . . . [It] tends to plead, to appeal to the sentiments of the audience, to "court" the audience by being "seductive" . . . [to invite] female audiences to act, to draw their own conclusions and make their own decisions, in contrast to a traditionally "Masculine" style that approaches the audience as inferiors to be told what is right or to be led. (qtd. in Foster 109-110)

By creating the tension and addressing the distrust between black and white women, Jacobs achieved two purposes. First, she was capable of reaching white female readers who were willing to act and to oppose slavery. Secondly, as Yelling

suggests, “informed not by ‘the cult of domesticity’ or ‘domestic feminism’ but by ‘political feminism,’” Jacob’s narrative account “is an attempt to move women to political action,” that is, women are urged to “move beyond the private sphere and to emulate their example by engaging in the public debate on slavery and racism” (92).

Conclusion

The autobiographical form of slave narrative is usually questioned for its authenticity and validity. Doubts as to the trustworthiness of the slave narrative, as Starling points out, “may be expected for three reasons: it was used as abolitionist propaganda in the only period during which it possessed literary importance; it depicts a social institution completely foreign to the modern mind; and it involves the element of unreliability natural to the autobiographic form, particularly when the autobiographer is in need of editorial assistance” (221). The evaluation of authenticity and validity as well as the acceptance in gender-specific slave narratives had been constructed differently. Before Douglass published his *Narrative* and struggled hard to earn a living as a figurative slave in New Bedford in 1841, he had emerged as the “grandest slave of them all” and had captured the attention of the abolitionists and the public. He gradually became an active speaker and a celebrity. His publication of *Narrative* had been acclaimed uniformly by the antislavery journals as the chief literary text of the day.

In contrast to Douglass who had being highly accepted as an ex-slave speaker in public and a writer of slave narratives in the market of publication, Jacobs’s *Incidents* was not so fortunate to be accepted as an authentic and valid partly because her narrative was not fitted in the dominance of slave narrative formulas, a narrative of simple and true facts. Jacobs wrote in the mode of confession of her personal slavery experience, and the unusual content seemed too unconventional to be accepted by the reading public. She also had to write under a pseudonym Linda Brent to protect herself from discovery. If she was known as the author of

this book, the life she depicted would cause embarrassment to her friends. Although in the introduction L. Maria Child claimed the authenticity of Harriet Jacobs's work, a greater part of her book had been assigned as the work of Mrs. Child's composition.

The reception of male and female slave narrative has apparently operated in the prejudicial frame of sexual politics, in which male slave narratives that mostly dealt with the racial problem were valued and viewed as representative and authentic slave narrative account. The whole antislavery movement only concerned the racial problem and not so much women's problems. As McDowell points out, "It is also, however, a specific pattern in abolitionist discourse in which women occupied secondary places" (47). Ironically, Douglass who was a woman's right supporter viewed the slavery abolition as primary and felt feminist abolitionists should postpone their own protest. It is not surprising to find that in male slave narratives the racial problem would be the main and crucial issue, where in female slave narrative it remained not as a primary concern.

In the letter to Amy Post in 1857, Jacobs revealed her ambivalence toward the selection of writing material:

I have My dear friend— Striven faithfully to give a true and just account of my own life in Slavery—God knows that I have tried to do it in a Christian spirit—there are some things that I might have made plainer I know— Woman can whisper— her cruel wrongs into the ear of a very dear friend— much easier than she can record them for the world to read—I have left nothing out but what I thought—the world might believe that a Slavery Woman was too willing to put pout . . . I have placed myself before you to be judged as a woman whether I deserve your pity or contempt—I have another object in view—it is to come to you just as I am a poor Slave Mother. (111)

Black female slaves suffered sexual oppression that they were too ashamed to tell.

Whether Jacobs was encouraged or compelled to discuss the issue of female sexuality, her slave narrative account boldly deviated from male slave narrative tradition that mostly emphasized on the racial problem. Her narrative unflinchingly exposed the black and white women's problems and particularly questioned the view of true womanhood embraced by the Victorian middle class.

Sexual politics strongly controlled, influenced, and manipulated the reception of gender-specific slave narratives. Female slave narratives were less welcomed only because they were about female slavery experiences. In addition, male critics were not convinced that female ex-slave narrators were capable of writing their own slavery experiences. However, female slave narratives contributed significantly to the antislavery movement. The significance of female slave narrative was its breakthrough of traditional slave literary form as well as its unique content. The cultural experience of female slaves redefined and broadened the idea and perspective of abolition. Female slave narrative accounts written by women and specifically dedicated for women were to reach and accomplish the goal of racial as well as sexual emancipation.

Gender-specific slave narratives direct us to look inside how the publication, circulation and reception were involved in the dominant white and male culture. Although the political and cultural realities of slave narratives provide unique experiences of individual lives and memories in slavery, how authentic these stories are has been put in question because the free telling was controlled by the dominant culture and social forces that manipulated and exploited the interpretation of the truth. Within this restricted biographical form, both male and female ex-slave narrators resisted traditional mode of slave narrative and strived to break through the convention. They became analysts of racial and sexual issues. The hard-won literacy and freedom brought ex-slaves to tell their life stories and this telling also affirmed their human right. And yet, the negotiation with dominant culture will never end.

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