

Themes of Slavery, Christianity & Descriptions of Paradox in the Practice of Christianity in Two Slave Narratives:

Harriet Jacobs Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl & Harriet Wilson OUR NIG Sketches from the Life of a Free Black.

Miriam Adwoa Ganaah

MASTER THESIS - AUTUMN 2016

A Thesis submitted to the Department of Language and Literature, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim, In Partial fulfillment for the Award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil)

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	i
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Slave Narratives.....	11
Chapter 3. Religious life and Christianity in the slave community	28
Chapter 4. Religious themes, imageries and symbols as presented in the two slave narratives	40
Chapter 5. Paradoxes in the Practices of Christianity as found in <i>Incidents</i> and <i>Our Nig</i>.	53
Chapter 6: Conclusion	72
Primary Sources.....	76
Works Cited	77
Bibliography	82
BIOGRAPHY.....	83

Chapter 1: Introduction

Some 19th century slave narratives have presented Christianity from the perspectives of both slaveholders and the enslaved and how these two categories of people have conducted their lives from a shared context of Christian teachings and Biblical knowledge. Two such works are *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs published in 1861, and *Our Nig: Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* by Harriet Wilson published in 1859. These books examine the contradictions that are apparent in the actions of both the slave masters and the slaves in relation to the teachings of the Bible. The dichotomy of meanings to specific texts of scripture as exemplified by both the slaves and the slave masters in the two narratives mentioned above is a reflection of moral and philosophical convictions relating to the perceived truth of the teachings of the Bible. This reflection of convictions enforces the thought that the interpretation of the scriptures was characterized by relativism, a sheer absence of an objective standard of measuring the truth by which the actions of one can be condemned and the actions of the other upheld.

Biblical hermeneutics and exegesis have been characterized by tensions in the history of Christianity, usually by scholars. Nineteenth-century Christianity faced equal tensions except that in the world of the slave narratives, the players were ordinary people stratified into two distinct classes: slaves and slave masters. Literal interpretation of various passages of the Bible prompted some contradictions between Biblical teachings and how both the slave masters and the slaves transposed them for their own purposes. The ways in which both the slaveholders and slaves acted and reacted to the Bible demonstrate obvious elements of contradiction, a paradox of a kind, in what they seemingly believed and how they eventually acted.

Slavery has existed throughout history. Slavery suggests a state where a person is owned and controlled by another, in terms of what they work with and where they live. A slave is one who is in this condition. Slavery can take various forms including child trafficking, domestic slaves, and chattel slaves. According to Kenneth Stamp, slavery is also referred to as the “peculiar institution” (Brundage 118) with its history in

1

America beginning with the earliest European settlements and ending with the Civil War. A slave in places such as 17th century North America could be ranked as property and was usually forced to work for nothing and without pay. Slavery was practiced throughout the American colonies in the 17th and 18th centuries, and African-American slaves helped to build the economic foundations of the new nation. Steven Mintz states that about 500,000 Africans, approximately 6 percent of all Africans, were forcibly sent to the Americas. About 70 percent arrived directly from Africa, and as of 1860, 89 percent of the nation's African-Americans were slaves. The majority of African slaves were brought to the British colony of North America between 1720 and 1780 (Mintz np).

In the early period of settlement before the 17th century, the first arrivals on the Northern part of America were Europeans who lived in Jamestown, a place commonly referred to as the first English settlement. These European settlers did not just come to explore the land but also to stay and build a life for themselves. They had plantations, which produced crops such as cotton, rice, sugar and tobacco and they had poor Europeans and Native Americans working for them. These poor Europeans had travelled over the Atlantic to this New World of America to serve as indentured slaves for a certain period of time with the intention of making a fortune or at least acquiring a decent living. Some of the work they found themselves doing in addition to being indentured slaves was to work on the early plantations of the European settlers. Initially the settlers used the Native Americans and these poor European travelers as workers on the early plantations, but the Native Americans showed little resistance to diseases that followed the settlers, as compared to the European workers. With the passage of time, there was a greater demand for workers on the plantation. The poor Europeans seeking a good life in the New World when the plantation crops demanded many workers, could not meet this. This demand was what led to the import of slaves, especially blacks from Africa.

One of the reasons the European settlers turned to black slaves was because they were considered cheaper and a more plentiful labor source compared to the indentured slaves. The black slaves therefore became popular as a work force since they were

considered stronger than the Native Americans. For instance, they were less affected by diseases and were also used to the adverse weather conditions. The black slaves were also preferred because they were easily caught whenever they tried to escape and once they were paid for by their owners, they became the permanent property of the slave owner: this was not the case with the white workers as they were freed after a certain period of serving. These slaves were brought over to the colony to assist in the production of tobacco and other crops on the plantation. Tobacco, especially, was a very profitable crop in building the economy of the nation at the time. Thus the spread of slavery reached the American colonies.

North America was divided into the North and the South and slavery existed in both regions. Both regions were economically stable until a shift in the economic balance between them led to an unequal distribution of wealth. This inequality could be attributed to the abolition of slavery and the devastation of the South's economy as caused by the civil war. The economy of the South was totally dependent on the labor of the slaves, as they constituted about one-third of the southern population with most of the slaves living on the plantations. Slavery became both a regional and sectional issue for the states that maintained it, as the industrialization of the north and also the expansion of the demand for cotton in the south contributed to the shift in the balance between the economies of both regions.

Prior to the enactment of laws that made slavery legal and defined the status of slaves, there was no mutual agreement between the different states of North America regarding the institution of slavery itself and the status of slaves. This lack of mutual agreement led to different states having different laws for regulating slavery activities. The result was inconsistency and confusion in dealing with the issue of slavery from a common perspective. Thus, most power to regulate the states, which also included the power to control slavery, was given to individual states to decide whether or not to prohibit or forbid slavery. This autonomy to the states is what led the North to forbid slavery, unlike the South. In the South, slavery still existed and fueled the economy, as the state was reliable on cheap labor.

Due to the increased number of slaves in the various regions in North America, there was a need for laws to regulate the situation. That is, it became necessary for laws to be enacted to enforce legal control over slaves, prevent a revolt from them, and restrict their freedom as well as prevent them from escaping from their masters. In Virginia, for instance, there was an increase in the black population from 23 in 1625 up to 210,000 in 1775, and between 1640 and 1705, several laws concerning slaves were introduced ('Slavery and the Law in Virginia : The Colonial Williamsburg Official History & Citizenship Site' np).

Some of these laws restricted the freedom of blacks and legalized discrimination. Other laws punished slaves for attempted escape. For instance, it was legal to wound or kill a slave who resisted arrest. Rewards were given, especially, to Indians who captured slaves and returned them to face the high authorities. Another example from the Virginian law stated that baptism did not bring freedom to blacks. Before the slave laws and codes were made, some of the slaves were known to use their status as Christians to demand freedom either for themselves or members of their families. Although baptism was a spiritual act, which implied spiritual freedom and transition from being enslaved from the bondage of sin to a life of freedom, the freed slaves, especially those who had become Christians, considered it as a justifiable reason to be made free or 'buy' their relatives out of slavery.

The slave masters were aware that it was not religiously right for a Christian to be considered a slave. Therefore, encouraging the act of baptism will contradict the significance of freedom it represented. As slave masters, they were required to teach Christianity to their slaves; meanwhile, baptism as a religious act could not be excluded from the Christian teaching. The only possible way the masters could teach baptism without having to contradict its logical physical implications was to put in place a law about baptism that prevented slaves from using that (baptism) as a reason to seek freedom ('Slavery and the Law in Virginia : The Colonial Williamsburg Official History & Citizenship Site'). This was a paradox that interfered with the genuine practice of Christianity in the slave era.

There were anti literacy laws according to Howard Dodson in “African American Women Writers of Nineteenth Century,” (Dodson Howard, np), which emphasized the view that the literacy of slaves was illegal. In states like North Carolina, Louisiana and Georgia, anti-slavery laws were enacted to regulate the status of slaves. These laws, mainly enacted by White people, restricted black people’s access to literacy because they feared that it could be dangerous if Black people could read and write.

Nevertheless, some black men and women in the nineteenth century tried to find ways to learn to read and write by themselves. They realized that the acquisition of literacy was a way to revolt against their enslavement, and literacy became the first step in their quest for freedom.

Some of the slave owners aimed at making their slaves absolutely dependent on them by not exposing them to education and promoting anti literacy laws. The consequences for breaking these laws varied from state to state. In North Carolina, for instance, any free person who attempted to teach a slave to read or write would be liable to prosecution which included whipping or the payment of fines. Also, slaves who were caught teaching their fellow slaves to read and write were to be sentenced to receive thirty-nine lashes on their back (North Carolina Law 1830-31).

Harriet Jacobs makes mention of some these laws. For instance, her character Linda compares her native place in America to England and writes how there are no laws forbidding slaves in England to read and write or help others do so. She further observes the freedom the slaves have to read the Bible. Linda, based on her experience in England, sees how easy life is for the slaves in England, especially regarding literacy, compared to where she is coming from. Although slaves were not completely free in England, Linda concludes based on the freedom she observes that even the “Most ignorant and destitute of these peasants were a thousand fold better off than the most pampered American slave” (Jacobs 330).

Again, Linda talks of how Uncle Fred who, like many other slaves, desires to learn and read particularly the Bible but is afraid to do so because of the punishment that comes with it. Uncle Fred expresses this desire and Linda, after telling him the laws concerning

literacy, decides to teach him to read in spite of the punishment she is likely to face if caught (Jacobs 202,203). Linda also points out the contradiction and hypocrisy evident in the church, as missionaries travel across the globe preaching and doling out Bibles to people abroad, yet had not dealt likewise with their people (American slaves) back home. This hypocrisy is clear because Uncle Fred is an American slave who desires to be literate but has no right to attain that because of the punishment that comes with it if caught. The Americans, especially the missionaries who can help slaves such as Uncle Fred to be literate and eventually provide them with Bibles, have neglected their own people and rather invest in travelling to other nations to preach and give out Bibles.

One of the main reasons for anti-literacy laws and regulations was that the slave masters believed that there was a tendency for education to stimulate dissatisfaction in the minds of the slaves concerning how they were being treated. This discontent could eventually lead to rebellion to these laws; there were also attempts by some slaves to cause insurrections. These insurrections were acts of rebellion against the slave owners and the institution of slavery itself. Although some insurrections occurred, only a few were successful. The notable one that most terrified slave owners was the Nat Turner's insurrection in Southampton County, Virginia, in August 1831 which is also mentioned in Jacob's narrative (chapter 12). Turner was believed to have been hearing divine voices and was eventually convinced that it was time to revolt. Together with the help of some slaves in his neighborhood, he executed an insurrection, which resulted in the murder of about 51 white people.

As Jacobs further mentions in her narrative, some slave owners pointed to Turner's rebellion as evidence that blacks were to be limited in their literacy since their knowledge was what had enlightened them to fight for their rights. Other slave owners claimed that Turner's rebellion provided proof that blacks were naturally inferior beings who needed an institution as slavery to keep them in check, especially when they were considered barbarians. Nat Turner's insurrection caused fear of similar insurrections, thus leading many southern states to strengthen their slave code in order to limit the education, assembly and movement of slaves.

Although literacy was neither encouraged nor promoted among the slaves, Jacobs again points out that the insurrection caused by Turner made some of the religious masters conclude that it will be useful to give the slaves enough religious instruction to keep them from murdering their masters (197). Consequently, the slaves were given the opportunity to partake in religious services and sermons on how slaves were to be obedient to their masters were mainly preached. Religious masters also put in place measures like organizing separate religious meeting for the blacks; clergymen of the various churches led such meetings. These platforms were strategically and tacitly used to instruct the slaves from a religious point of view, particularly regarding the theme of obedience, in the hope that the slaves will be influenced to accept the lordship of their slave owners. The anti-literacy laws and religious teaching intended to indoctrinate the slaves notwithstanding, some slaves managed to secretly educate themselves through personal reading and writing. Though risky, some of the slaves had owners who were kind to teach them how to read and write, while other slaves were taught by their fellow slaves. This made it possible for them to write or recount their stories when they got their freedom.

Generally, all the liberties, rights and privileges of slaves were curtailed. Indeed, some of the slave owners sexually abused their slaves in an attempt to satisfy their sexual cravings. Female slaves who were bold enough to resist these sexual attempts from their slave owners were either punished or maltreated directly or indirectly such that they either had to eventually give in or stand their ground while risking their lives or those of their families. For instance, Linda is presented throughout Jacobs' narrative as one who was unwilling to submit to her master's (Dr. Flint) advances and abuses, but rather risked her life and that of her children by hiding in her grandmother's attic for seven years with the hope that Dr. Flint would sell her children rather than maltreat them. Eventually, Linda managed to escape to the North and events led to her reuniting with her children.

Slaves had very little or no free time. Considering the hard work and labor the slaves were engaged in by their owners, they hardly had any time to spend together with their families, even if they were lucky to have them around and living together. They worked

at all times and, perhaps, the only free time they had were the times they had to eat or take a short holiday – that is, a day or two when they were exempted from work. These days were special days for the slaves as they had the opportunity to rest. Given the daily struggles and challenges of slaves, there was a movement aimed towards fighting for their freedom and to end racial segregation, in general. This was the Abolitionist Movement.

One cannot speak of slave narratives without mentioning the role of the abolitionists who supported and worked for the legal prohibition and ending of slavery in North America. They advocated freedom for slaves and gained strength and support, particularly from the North. This movement emerged on the scene from the 1830s up to around the 1860s with the principal aim of speedy liberation of all slaves and the end of racial seclusion and discrimination. The abolitionists provided support for freed slaves who had the ability to write or tell their life stories as slaves, and worked together with some free black writers, including Harriet Jacobs, Frederick Douglas and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Stowe was known for her successful anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* which was published in 1852. By the mid-19th century, America's expansion, along with a rising abolition movement in the North, provoked a great debate about the legitimacy of slavery, which eventually became one of the several reasons that caused the American Civil War (1861-65). In 1865, the 13th amendment to the US constitution banned slavery in the nation and although slavery was outlawed, North America still had reasons for its maintenance.

The good thing about the abolitionist movement was that it included white supporters such as William Lloyd Garrison who was a prominent American abolitionist, journalist, suffragist, and social reformer. These supporters backed the change, and that made an impact in the lives of the slaves because the inclusion of influential persons did not only emphasize the immediate need of emancipation but also helped in validating the writings of freed slaves who had the opportunity to retell their stories. Even among the abolitionists, there were different motives for the abolition of slavery. For instance, the Second Great Awakening, which was a movement by the Protestant religious revival in the United States during the early 19th century, sparked a radical abolitionism that

prompted a group of people to advocate for freedom on religious grounds. Another group of abolitionists was more inclined to a non-religious free labor argument where they believed that slaveholding was unproductive and had little or no economic positive effect. These ideas of the abolitionists became prominent in Northern churches and politics and added to the regional hostility between North and South, eventually becoming one of the several factors that contributed to the American Civil War. Regardless of these differences amongst the abolitionists, they had one common goal: the desire to emancipate slaves and end racial segregation and discrimination.

The controversy of slavery in the United States at the beginning of the 19th century eventually led to literary writings on slavery issues with some former slaves sharing and publishing their experiences in slavery. According to David Blight, these autobiographies of ex-slaves in America are the foundation of an African American literary tradition, as well as unique glimpses into the souls of slaves themselves (Blight).

These stories, created a medium for freed black slaves to share their stories with their readers, especially those from the North. These free slaves, especially the blacks who were able to read and write, recounted their story of the physical journey from slavery to freedom. Some of them wrote their stories while others told them to some of the abolitionists who authored them with permission. These stories helped the abolitionists, especially, to defend their position against slavery, as these stories were a reflection of what it meant for one to be a slave. In addition to defending their position against slavery, the stories helped in generating funds to support the abolitionist movement. Although slave literacy was not very popular at this time, the knowledge on the importance and benefits of education motivated the few free blacks in certain parts of the South to establish schools and colleges to educate others. These writings referred to as slave narratives, emerged therefore as a distinctive recognizable genre in the anti-slavery period, black literature and print culture.

Chapter 2: Slave Narratives

Slave narratives are accounts of the lives of former or fugitive slaves, either written as autobiographies or rendered orally by the slave personally and recorded by a second party, mostly abolitionists. It is a definite genre with clear conventions and deals with a story of escape from slavery. Some of the conventions for the narratives included the use of first persons and the inclusion of the journey from bondage to liberation. The use of the first persons is usually presented as 'I' and runs through the entire text. Slave narratives by their very existence served as testaments of protest against the double standards that existed during the slavery period. These narratives are tales of bondage and freedom written or told by former slaves.

As mentioned earlier, anti-literal laws still existed, especially in some parts of the South, but the situation was better in the North since there was an acceptance of slave literacy, unlike the South. Despite the restriction against slave literacy at the time, many slaves managed to learn to read and write, making it possible for them to write slave narratives which today have become a literary genre in American literature. The slaves who were unable to write their stories owing to illiteracy found amanuensis who narrated their stories on their behalf.

The autobiographies of former slaves in America are the foundation of the African-American literary tradition. It is one that gives us a special glimpse into the very lives of the slaves themselves and also a way of getting us to understand the nature of slavery. There have been several debates around the authorship of slave and the motives of slave narratives. In the case of authorship former slaves were constantly doubted and questioned about the authenticity and veracity of their stories and writings. As mentioned earlier, the role of abolitionists was very important in authenticating the authorship of the slave narratives. White abolitionists therefore found it necessary to layout well-defined conventions and formulae for literate authors to follow and in many cases where potential narrators did not possess literary skills; the abolitionists took up the task of recording the oral narratives of the fugitives. The establishment of a framework and the verification of the narratives, it can be argued, were measures put

in place to counter the prejudices of the white reading public than of the literary abilities of former slaves.

In all cases, though, the abolitionists also “insisted on adding their own authenticating endorsements to the slaves’ narrations through prefaces and introductions” (MacKethan np). These endorsements were significant as they reinforced the value of the narratives and coming from people such as the abolitionists who were influential and respected by many, the narratives were most likely to be accepted by the public. Writers such as Sojourner Truth had her story narrated through scribes because she was an illiterate. Other slave narratives were published with letters of endorsements from the abolitionists attesting to the credibility of the author’s work. For example, Lydia Maria Child for Harriet Jacobs, and William Garrison and Wendell Philips for Frederick Douglass. The slaves who told their stories accepted this requirement from the abolitionists because of the power and authority inherent in being white and influential. Some of the narratives also included the phrase ‘Written by Himself or Herself’ and this is found, for instance, in both Jacobs’s and Fredrick Douglas’s narratives respectively. These phrases in the narratives authenticate the authorship of the writer and emphasize the personal relationship the author has with the work in question.

Slave narratives are generally first-person narratives because this point of view authenticates the authorship of the writer. That is, it is an affirmation of the writer’s spiritual, literary and psychological freedom. It is important to note, however, that not all slave narratives use the first person narrator; for example, Harriet Wilson’s *Our Nig*. That said, Wilson’s text shares many conventions with Jacobs’s more traditional text. Despite their obvious differences - one set in the South, the other in the North; one a slave narrative, the other fiction; one written to further the abolitionist movement, the other to make money - these books have some similarities in that both are structured chronologically, are written by women, and feature female protagonists. They have strong echoes with sentimental literature, and both narrate a struggle of race and gender, which sums up the total struggle for freedom.

As is the case with all autobiographical slave narratives, there is no doubt that Jacobs and Wilson were the authors of *Incidents* and *Our Nig* respectively, while admitting that they spoke through narrators. However, unlike Wilson, Jacobs authenticates her authorship of her true experiences by using the first person witness account. This difference does not in any way make Wilson's work less authentic. It is only easy to identify and relate to Jacobs' character more closely than one does with Wilson's character. Other important works within this genre that use the first person witness account include Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* written in 1852 and Fredrick Douglas's *The Narrative and Life of Frederick Douglas*, written by Himself in 1845.

In slave narratives, most slave narrators disclose their sorrows, struggles, hopes and, more importantly, their conquests. Slave narrators usually describe their struggles of survival and how they escaped from enslavement in search of liberty. Slave narratives are significant to African American literature and history as they reveal to readers the discourse between whites and blacks of that period, and also give the readers an opportunity to learn about slavery from a first-hand experience.

Slave narratives are usually written in different stages such as the beginning from a state of innocence, leading towards an escape-which involves the planning and eventually ends with freedom. Some of them have several religious themes such as innocence, fall, redemption, salvation, prayer and the Bible among others. Slave or Fugitive Slave Narratives (as they are sometimes called) appeared in the 1760s and from the middle of the 19th up to the 20th centuries. They emerged as one of the most influential literary traditions in North American literature. About 150 autobiographies of fugitive and former slaves were published between 1760 and 1865. About fifty more appeared immediately after the end of the Civil War and the abolition of slavery in 1865 (Campbell).

One of the several motives for slave narratives was that the authors used their stories as a platform to appeal to the society to help in the fight against slavery. Another reason was that the slaves felt the pressure and need to demonstrate their humanity in a society that was greatly influenced by racial prejudice. Another motivation was that it was a

way of proving that they could be reliable truth narrators of their own experience and their freedom, especially as there was no law that offered them liberation from this dehumanizing act of slavery. The motivations of the slave authors coincided with those of the political and ethical agendas of abolitionists who saw the recorded evidence of the suffering of the slaves as a powerful medium both to underscore the cruelty and immorality of slavery as well as a powerful propaganda tool in their anti-slavery work. Thus, writers such as Douglas, Jacobs and Wilson, through their individualized accounts of their slavery experiences, had a bigger purpose of speaking for the freedom of the yet to be freed slaves, and used the opportunity to demonstrate their own humanity as well as desire to claim an identity within a country that legally denied their right to exist as human beings.

The abolitionists in the North were not entirely supportive of narratives that focused attention on slavery in the North and therefore did not patronize them. This was because the narratives criticized them against the backdrop that the North was known to be a place of freedom and liberty when it is not. The argument was that there were instances and evidence that slavery was not completely over and people were still under bondage indirectly. An example is Harriet Wilson's work where Frado, the main character in *Our Nig* is a slave in the North. The North was considered the place where slaves sought refuge; therefore, a work that exposed traces of slavery was one that least attracted sympathy from its target.

By far, the biggest project to gather the personal experiences of former slaves orally is the WPS Federal Writers' Project, which managed to collect 2500 testimonies in the 1930s. However, the genre reached its high point between 1830 and the abolition in 1865, during which period masterpieces such as Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* (1845) and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) were published. Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig; Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* (1859) did not achieve similar fame until Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr. rediscovered it in 1982.

Harriet Jacobs and Harriet Wilson's works will be the central texts for this work. Both works can be considered slave narratives as they have traces of the conventions that define the genre.

Jacobs was born into slavery in North Carolina in 1813 and from her narrative, she did not know that she was a slave for the first six years of her life until after her mother's death when she heard from neighbors that she was a slave. As mentioned earlier, Linda is used as a pseudonym to retell Jacobs's life story. Linda stayed and worked for a slave owner and his wife for a period of time and the wife of the slave owner, who was Linda's mistress, passed away. At the death of her mistress, Linda found herself with a new family of slaveholders. She now had to deal with sexual harassment from her new master throughout her teenage years when she stayed with him. Unable to cope with her ordeal any longer, she ran away from home and hid in a small attic for seven years. Linda left her two children in the care of her grandmother and successfully escaped to New York by boat, where she gained her freedom and settled. After her successful escape to the North, Jacobs began to write publicly about her experience and life story as a slave. She took her first steps towards authorship by writing a series of articles, which were published in the New York Tribune in 1853. Encouraged by female abolitionist Amy Post, Jacobs succeeded in writing her autobiography entitled *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, which was a revelation of her personal experiences as a slave.

Incidents have elements of both the facts of historical events and the emotions of the sentimental novel. It was one of the first books in the 19th century to campaign for freedom by female slaves. The work explores topics and themes such as the struggles of women with respect to sexual harassment and physical abuse, and their efforts to protect their roles as women and mothers. The work also has some religious themes running through it, especially those related to Christianity and the Bible. In her preface, Jacobs admits that in a bid to be cautious, she fabricates names of her characters and hides the names of certain places in an attempt to remain focused to pursue her goal of creating an awareness of the cruelty of slavery, and to fulfill her desire to champion women's emancipation and empowerment (Preface).

Apart from their different settings on the plantation and in a household respectively, Jacobs and Wilson's accounts exhibit similarities that can only come from their adherence to the prescribed formats that governed the publication of slave narratives. These two narratives conform to the genre format set by whites and display individualized features. For instance, Lucinda MacKethan outlines the genre expectations of slave narratives and notes that these narratives were to give accurate details of slaves' experiences of enslavement, stressing "their sufferings under cruel masters and the strength of their will to free themselves"(MacKethan). These expectations were to see to it that slave narratives were authentic and credible since they had to do with personal life stories of other people.

First, it was important for the narratives to sound authentic while at the same time exciting the imagination of the readers through descriptions in dramatic detail of how the slave managed to escape from bondage. Related to the need for authenticity was the need for plausibility. The narratives were to be accepted as genuine autobiographies or personal writings of slaves and must, therefore, include a "literacy scene" (MacKethan) in which the narrator explained how he or she acquired the ability to read and write. This element of literacy was crucial because pro-slavery writers did not encourage slaves to be literate especially as they did not want slaves to have knowledge about how to defend themselves from the cruel nature of slavery. Thus, it was crucial for slave writers to explain that aspect of their narrative as well as establish the authenticity of their narrative.

Providing an explanation to the acquisition of literacy was of great significance to the writers because not only did it provide authenticity for the stories the slaves wrote or told, but it also elicited empathy amongst readers. The stories told and written by or for the slaves were to be as real and believable as possible; therefore, the inclusion of how the slaves acquired literacy was important as it backed the authenticity and credibility of the work and better helped the slaves explain their story. The result of literacy contributed to helping the slaves present true-life stories of men and women fighting for their lives against a system that saw them as nothing more than property. It forced

readers to experience their suffering, leaving them no choice than to move with compassion to help in the fight against slavery.

Another feature pointed out by MacKethan is that slave narratives had to have elements of the concept of Christianity. This requirement was essential because since slave owners were by default Christians, Christianity became the default religion of the slaves. This feature implies that narrators were required to present their credentials as upright Christians, while testifying to the hypocrisy of their supposedly pious owners. This provided evidence that the slaves in question indeed had Christian backgrounds and so they had a strong foundation on which to condemn the contradictory Christian behavior exhibited by their so-called pious owners.

Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* was published as a book in 1861 under the pseudonym Linda Brent. Jacobs tells her story through Linda who is the lead character in the narrative. Jacobs' narrative is ranked with Frederick Douglass' narratives as a masterpiece of the slave narrative genre as both are widely read and in generic terms, canons of the American Literature and in particular handy references to both historians and scholars of the slave narrative tradition. While Douglass' work serves as a prototype, not only for the slave narrative genre, but also for a male dominant view of slave narratives, Jacobs' typifies a premier feminist response to slavery, thus placing both works on an equal gender scale.

Our Nig by Harriet E Wilson, on the other hand, can be argued to be an autobiographical fiction as she uses the different characters to present her life as a slave. It is a combination of both the sentimental and a narrative work. The narrative is a story of a mixed-race girl named Frado who was abandoned by her white mother after the death of the child's black father. Left at the door of the Belmont's at the age of six by her mother who never returned, Frado served as a slave for the Belmont's, a white middle-class family, until she turned eighteen. At the outset, the narrative presents background events leading to Frado becoming an orphan and how she eventually became a domestic slave as she served in the home of the Belmont's. Through her character Frado, Wilson gives an account of her slave experience, recounting her suffering at the hands of her

two cruel mistresses, and the sad occurrences that characterized her harsh years of servitude. Frado later finds herself in a marriage that results in abandonment, single parenthood and extreme poverty.

Frado's stay with the Bellmont family was not one that was officially agreed upon between the parents of Frado and the Bellmont family. However, although not clearly stated, it is obvious that Mrs. Bellmont treated Frado as a slave from the very moment Frado was brought into her home. Without an official arrangement, as would have been expected regarding indentured slaves and for what period of time, it is evident in the text that Mrs. Bellmont did not intend to release Frado. She warns Frado, upon gaining her freedom, that she (Frado) will soon wish to be back again (117). Under the abusive authority of her mistress Mrs. Bellmont, and despite the sympathetic efforts and concerns expressed by Mr. Bellmont, his sons, and invalid daughter, Frado's daily reality becomes one of harsh physical labor, endless tedious and menial tasks, and violent exchanges between herself and Mrs. Bellmont. The relationship between Frado and Mrs. Bellmont reveals the realities of slavery in the North, exposing how slavery still exists in that part of the land supposedly known to be a place of personal independence and liberation.

Frado's dependence on the Bellmont family as well as the implied permanence of her situation, which involved the fact that Frado labors without wages under cruel supervision and neither becomes self-sufficient nor develops a loving attachment to the Bellmont family, makes her service closer or equal to slavery. This is what Wilson intends to communicate to her readers: that considering the life of Frado as a domestic slave living in the North, Frado suffered as much as slaves in the South, especially because of the impression that slavery did not exist any longer or at least not as harshly as it was in the South.

Wilson's work, despite her endeavors and plans to better her condition, was not patronized and sadly, her endeavors and the text's self-conscious plea for its own marketplace success among Wilson's colored brethren were not enough to better her condition. Although Wilson is not directly presented in her work, it is obvious that the work is inspired by her life. The work contains both autobiographical and sentimental

elements. This is because it reflects some of the conventions of 18th and 19th century slave narratives. Although Wilson's novel lacks the use of the popular feature in most slave narratives, namely the first person pronoun, there is the incorporation of some other features usually seen in autobiographies.

Both Jacobs' and Wilson's works share a common theme of sentimentalism. This form of literature, lays emphasis on sensibility, preservation of family and the glorification of virtue.

Wilson's work also portrays its sentimentalism by incorporating the styles of popular American fiction writers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe. In her first chapter, Wilson writes:

LONELY MAG SMITH! See her as she walks with downcast eyes and heavy heart. It was not always thus. She had a loving, trusting heart. Early deprived of parental guardianship, far removed from relatives, she was left to guide her tiny boat over life's surges alone and inexperienced. As she merged into womanhood, unprotected, uncherished, uncared for, there fell on her ear the music of love, awakening an intensity of emotion long dormant (5)

Wilson's introduction already introduces some sentimental features as she presents to her readers, a young woman who is lonely, abandoned, sad, heartbroken and frustrated due to her past experience. Wilson is acknowledged as the first female African-American novelist to ever publish a novel on the North American continent. In the preface, Wilson cites her real life maternal responsibilities as the fundamental inspiration behind her writing and that her reason for writing the book is to use the earned money to care for her young son:

Deserted by kindred, disabled by failing health, I am forced to some experiment which shall aid me in maintaining myself and child without extinguishing this feeble life (Wilson preface).

Although published in 1859, Wilson's novel did not become widely known until in 1980 when Henry Louis Gates, an American historian and literary critic, rediscovered it. Gates also found other documents belonging to Wilson and these documents included the death certificate of Wilson's son and other scholarly works by her. These documents helped confirm Harriet Wilson's race as an African-American and as the author of the novel. The audience that Wilson addresses in the preface of her narrative is the abolitionist audience similar to that addressed in Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Wilson addresses a dual audience, made up of both the white abolitionists and freed black slaves whom she addresses as her colored brethren who lived in the south and assumed there was freedom in the North. One of Wilson's intentions in writing her story was to provide economic support for her, and to let people understand her textual exposure of slavery's cruel existence in the form of indentured servitude in the supposedly free pre-Civil War North. Her address to the abolitionists was, perhaps, intended to emphasize the need for emancipation for the slaves, to solicit empathy from her readers and to warn slaves from the south not to delude themselves into thinking that life in the North was a better place to escape to. Wilson remained an invalid even after her own service ended and her poor health limited her means by which she could support herself and her child. As implied in the preface, Wilson thought writing would be the best means to support herself and her child, assuming that was probably a minimally taxing and potentially profitable activity to engage in.

From the contents of *Incidents* and *Our Nig*, one can notice that both are representatives of slave narratives in terms of their targeted readership and didactic content. The principal goal of the authors was to appeal to the conscience of an antebellum white audience by revealing the immorality of slavery and the hypocritical behavior of slave owners. The two narratives are therefore replete with descriptions of episodes that stressed the immorality of slavery, in general, and courted sympathy among white readership.

Self-awareness and liberation from captivity was still the goal for the slaves. For instance, Harriet Jacobs expresses her motive for publicizing her personal story of

enslavement, degradation, and sexual exploitation as follows: “I have not written my experiences in order to attract attention to myself; on the contrary, it would have been more pleasant if I had been silent about my own history...I want to add my testimony to those of abler pens to convince the people, the white audience’ about the plight of those who are still in bondage” (Jacobs preface).

As far as black female writers are concerned, the treatment of the slave narrative genre has been one of the most twisted in African-American literary criticism, especially because it has more often focused almost exclusively on the treatment of heroic male slaves with little or no emphasis on the females. Morgan Winifred discusses two of the most widely read American slave narratives, *The Narrative and Life of Frederick Douglass*, written by Himself and Jacobs's *Incidents In The Life Of A Slave Girl* and how they provide useful representative texts with which to examine the differences in gender in both the narratives and the lives of slaves. Both narratives suggest that, while they were responding to their place and the themes that were important at that period which included the fight for freedom, their strategies of coping and resistance was defined by gender. One common feature with most male narrators, which Douglass also emphasizes, is the ability to speak in public as well as to read and write. Through their use of language, literate male narrators were able to display their place as men and their right to self-dependency in a political democracy based on a voter's ability to understand and debate the issues. On the other hand, like other women narrators, Jacobs emphasizes her womanliness, thus Morgan admits, women narrators related to feminine culture of their time, and that involved telling their stories in terms of relationships (Morgan 76).

Furthermore, slave narratives written by male authors portrayed the kind of expectation that was on them as authors. For instance, the male as the head of his family desires to protect and support his family the best way possible, especially from tragic situations like slavery. However, this was not the main preoccupation of the male head of the family and Douglass’ narrative, is an example of how the male treated marriage and family as fundamentally peripheral to his quest for freedom from slavery (Douglass).

In the African-American literature, the male slave is viewed as a hero who

accomplishes tasks or overcomes situations using force, wits and his inherent courage. So in the case of slavery, the male slave is expected to show evidence of how he overcomes the institution of slavery in his narrative. The struggle to preserve the male slave's manliness from the brutality and cruelty of their owners and against the institution of slavery itself is considered an essential factor in obtaining freedom. Usually, the ability of the male slave to escape slavery is defined by danger, violence and the slave's physical strength and internal resolve. An example can be seen in Douglass's narrative where in standing up to Covey (Chapter 10), Douglass boldly defends himself by putting up a physical fight. This moment of exchange between Douglass and Covey reveals the use of Douglass's masculine power, which interestingly grants him boldness throughout his journey of escape to the North.

In a world largely dominated by white men during the nineteenth century, race was not the only thing that made it difficult for black women to gain recognition; gender was equally a contributing factor. Although male and female narratives both had a primary goal to expose the reality of slavery and emphasize the need for freedom, one major difference was clear. Male narrators emphasized the importance of reading and writing while female authors focused on the importance of relationships while at the same time maintaining their conventional gender roles at the time.

For the black female author in the slave period, narratives had traces of conventions of gender roles and motherhood from the Victorian era. These elements were to be maintained in the narratives and they included virtues such as righteousness, purity, domesticity and attention to the protection of the family. Wilson and Jacobs both emphasize these features in their narratives as they each also bring out the female perspective of being a slave, including the role of motherhood and its challenges. For the female narrator, the target audience was women; specifically free Christian women as the narrative emphasizes female issues such as womanhood, motherhood and sexual abuse. Motherhood was one of the female writers' primary goals and it played a significant role in the feminine sense of worth. Under the role of motherhood, mothers usually took the responsibility of ensuring the moral stability of their family and by extension the society as a whole. According to Walters, mothers came to serve as the

moral locus that other institutions or individuals could not be (Schroeder 93).

Women were expected to be pious, pure, submissive etc. For instance, a wife and mother performed the moral work of the nation by making sacrifices of her deed and desires so that the success of her family is ensured. The inclusion and presentation of the role of mothers and family separation in slave narratives won the empathy of female audience as they could easily relate to it. Jacobs, for instance, in writing as Linda in her narrative recalls that she was born a slave; but “ never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away” (125). Jacobs’ comments on the consequence of slavery’s influence over her family is what begins her realization that she was a slave: “When I was six years old, my mother died: and then, for the first time, I learned, by the talk around me, that I was a slave” (127). The death of her mother adds to her pain as she realizes that she is without any immediate maternal influence.

Another reflection of motherhood is found in Jacobs’ *Incidents*. For instance, Linda’s decisions to hide in her grandmother’s attic in order to be able to see her children daily and how they were being treated is a portrayal of the role of motherhood. Presented the opportunity to escape, Linda could have taken that chance and find out from a distance how her children were fairing. Instead, she decides to hide seven years against all odds in the attic as a result of her determination to ensure the welfare of her children and to eventually see them free. How she is able to maintain her sanity and strength in this period is beyond the reader’s wildest imagination; nevertheless, she exhibits unique qualities of a strong black woman willing to protect her family at all cost. Another example is Linda’s desire to move to the North and arrange with Mr. Sands to buy her children from Dr. Flint. Linda dreams of freedom, especially for her children, and consistently reflects on the hindrances against her plans (213).

What made the male and female narratives different was that these female narratives further revealed the day-to-day threat of their children being sold, and an endless fear of being raped by their white oppressors or even other male slaves on the plantation. Female-authored narratives also introduce us to broken homes and the separation between families as a result of slavery. Family institutions are broken because parents

are separated from their children, or spouses from each other when they are being sold or taken away to another town or place. For instance, Linda is separated from one of her children when she decides, after considering Dr. Flint's proposition to offer her free papers, to work on the plantation of Flint's son in preparation for the arrival of his son's bride. In other instances, she has to hide or move from one place to the other to avoid being re-enslaved. During all these times, she is separated from her children.

Literary works by black Female authors, including Jacobs and Wilson, define womanhood as one that actively pursues the domestic life of motherhood and yet at the same time struggle to reach that aim considering their state of bondage in a system that did not favor them. These writers carefully exposed the moral difficulties they faced as they tried to pursue the female qualities that were expected of them in society. Jacobs' experience as a victim of Dr. Flint's unwavering pursuit of her sexuality and Wilson's abandonment by her mother are some of the examples that portray the countless ways in which these women were prevented from living out white notions of womanhood.

In *Incidents*, the absence of a masculine protector for Linda, stemming from black slave men's inability to protect black women, caused the women to adopt an active role and to make decisions about their own lives, thus showing their strong will and tenacity order to survive. It is important to note that the reason for the men's inability to protect their black females was not because they did not want to; the circumstance of slavery did not make room for them to exercise their manliness both as protectors and men with authority. In the first chapter of his narrative, Douglas presents Harriet Bailey as his mother. As is evident in the narrative, there is no expression of an emotional attachment between Douglass and his mother.

Douglass was separated from his mother soon after birth and he assumes this separation was a common practice among slave owners. The separation, Douglas writes, is perceived as breaking the natural ties of affection between mother and child. According to Douglas, he and his mother barely met except on the few nights where she visited him and usually tucked herself in his bed. Douglas is orphaned at the age of seven after the death of his mother and the news of this does not impact him in any significant manner(Douglass 18).

As evidence of the inability of men to save or protect females, there is an instance in Douglas's narrative where he watches his aunt being beaten and does nothing to save her (Douglass 20,21). As stated earlier, his inability to intervene is partly because of the fear of his master's reaction.

Generally, as a common feature between male and female narratives, the freedom of the family is highlighted. This is usually seen in the opening chapters of the narratives. The opening chapters of Jacobs' *Incidents* and Douglas' *The Narrative and Life of Fredrick Douglass, An American Slave Written by Himself*, like many others, usually provide a simple background to the situation of the narrator.

Comparing Douglass and Jacobs, it is relevant to note that although both works trace the path from bondage to freedom, Jacobs' cause is personal as she aims to save her children while Douglass' is, at least in part, political, wanting to make a political impact. We see that Jacobs addresses the issues of female bondage and sexual abuse from the female perspective so that, for instance, while the story of Douglass is centered around the quest of literacy and the freedom of speech, Jacobs' story is built around the fight for the rights and freedom of women and the protection of their children. Generally, Jacobs presents to her readers the feminist side of slavery.

In *Incidents*, Jacobs immerses the reader in her life and the brutal world of the antebellum South. She also asks her readers to excuse her deficiencies in consideration of circumstances. She further explains how she was born and reared in slavery and that she remained in slavery for twenty-seven years. Still in her preface, Jacobs mentions her present location as she writes "since I have been at the North, it has been necessary for me to work diligently for my own support, and the education of my children" (119). Furthermore, we are able to have a general idea of how she views her life and experience when she writes:

...this has not left me much leisure to make up for the loss of early opportunities to improve myself; and it has compelled me to write these pages at irregular intervals, whenever I could snatch an hour from household duties (119).

This part of her preface is significant in that readers are able to picture how Jacobs lived her life and how she hardly had time for her personal desires of improving her competences. The fact that she writes how she manages to write only when she can grab an hour away from her schedule portrays her busy life.

Joanne M. Braxton criticizes slave narratives for focusing mostly on male authors and their experience in dealing with slavery. This, she concludes, is the presentation of half of the entire picture of slave narratives. She further points out that Jacobs' *Incidents* has a style of both the autobiographical tradition of the heroic male slaves and a line of American women's writing that attacks racial oppression and sexual exploitation. It combines the narrative pattern of the slave narrative genre with the conventional literary forms and stylistic tools of the 19th century domestic novels. These narrative forms and stylistic tools emphasized marriage, family, the home, and the demure of women. This pattern is an attempt to motivate the women of the North to take a public stand against slavery, the most political issue of the day. Jacobs states this sentimentally and emphatically in the preface of her work:

But I do earnestly desire to arouse the women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions of women at the South, still in bondage, suffering what I suffered, and most of them far worse. I want to add my testimony to that of abler pens to convince the people of the Free States what Slavery really is. Only by experience can anyone realize how deep, and dark, and foul is that pit of abominations. May the blessing of God rest on this imperfect effort in behalf of my persecuted people! (120).
The above desire expressed by Jacobs is evident of the themes of abolition and feminism both interwoven and presented in the text.

One other dilemma black women had to face in writing their story was the conflict between articulating their collective experiences and simply remaining silent about certain private details that mostly had to do with their sexuality. It must have been a humiliating issue for a female writer, as Jacobs noted, to convey her most intimate thoughts, considering the fact that the experiences related mostly to sexual abuse. It can be argued that this part of the black female writer's experience only adds credence to

her work and serves as a means of awakening empathy in her readers.

In general, it can be pointed out that the study of slave narratives written by black females help transform definitions of narrative traditions and the African-American experience. One other feature of slave narratives is the presentation and role of religion, especially that of African-Americans and Christianity which is examined in the work.

Chapter 3. Religious life and Christianity in the slave community

The impact of religion on African-American culture is underscored by a variety of scholarly works. According to William H. Swatos, Jr. some scholarly studies on African-American religion in the United States can be traced to works such as W.E.B Du Bois' "The Negro Church" (Du Bois) which gives us an insight into the origins and richness of the African-American religion and its significance to the black culture in the time of oppression specifically in becoming a means to endure in hardship during the slave era (Swatos, Jr) . In addition to the portrayal of the richness of the African-American experience, Swatos further mentions how black religion gives us significant insights into the social condition of black people in U.S. society. Swatos presents Franklin Frazier's (1974) arguments based on his review of Du Bois' work that African-American religion historically has functioned as a "refuge in a hostile white world" (Swatos, Jr np) and has served as a form of cultural identity and resistance and at another level, to a white-dominated society.

This implies that African-American religion played dual roles in the lives of black people in America: a place of hiding and security from white dominance, and secondly as the people's identity. This duality put in light a new religious reality that largely influenced the religious practice in the slave community and significantly accounts for traces of paradox in the expression of Christianity in the era. While white slave owners sought to use religion, Christianity in particular, as a tool to establish hegemony and control over black African slaves eventually leading to the widespread and popularity of chattel slavery among whites, the majority of enslaved black Africans embraced Christianity mainly as an enclave in an uncongenial environment that deprived them freedom and imposed, as it were, a new identity on them.

African religious beliefs and practices were numerous and varied during the beginning of the transatlantic trade. In addition to these varieties, there was a significant portion of the continent that had fallen under Islamic influence. Despite this diversity, there were common threads across cultural groups. For instance, in West African societies,

where America's largest source for slaves came from, the people shared a common belief in a Supreme Creator, a chief deity among lesser gods to whom they prayed and offered sacrifices. Music and dance were made vital in their form of worship even as they made conscious efforts to seek a harmonious balance between the spiritual and the natural worlds. This has led some scholars to conclude that religion is inseparably interwoven with the being of the African. John Samuel Mbiti (1969) states that, "religion is the strongest element in traditional background and exerts probably the greatest influence upon the thinking and living of the (African) people" (p.1). Theism is seen as a notion grounded in the African culture that basically forms the individual's ontological understanding and meaning of life. The way children are raised through the various stages of life, accompanied by rites and rituals, the kinds of food eaten or forbidden, the way marriage and funeral are performed, highlight the religious affinity of the African. Again, a similar observation is made by Mbiti "for Africans, the whole of existence is a religious phenomenon; man is a deeply religious being living in a religious universe" (Mbiti 1)

This pervasive and systemic religious atmosphere, on the contrary, experienced significant inhibitions in terms of religious expressions outside mainland Africa. Circumstances such as separation of families, high death rates and so on under which most of the slaves lived made the preservation of religious traditions difficult and often unsuccessful. As well, there was a concerted effort by some white slave owners to eradicate non-Christian customs and replace them with Christian customs. In most cases, resistance to this radical Christianization by slaves was met with brute force from white slave owners to force compliance. Beside this religious change being forced on African slaves, there was a cultural change too. Slaves were acclimatized to the language and customs of North America and with time they became Americanized. This Americanization gave some slaves a sense of belonging and a new identity to the point that they willingly accepted to be owned, making chattel slavery a reality. American culture was thus subsumed in Christianity and conversion to Christianity was unavoidably conversion to a new culture. Apparently, religion and culture, though independent categories, paradoxically fused into one principal category that was

leveraged over imported African slaves in America in general and antebellum south in particular.

However, unique practices and traditions characterize African indigenous religion. Belief in the curative powers of plant roots was a common cultural practice inspired by the religious worldview of the African. Plant roots were largely used as medicine to cure diseases. In some quarters, communities of people perceived certain plants as totems with supernatural healing abilities. The deification of such plants was expressed when their roots were used to cure diseases especially those considered to be unnatural such as leprosy or some other epidemiological diseases.

Another common practice is the belief in a world of spirits and ancestors. Most Africans believed that spirits such as ghosts, for instance, communicated to them through dreams and visions. Sometimes the people sought advice and counsel from these ghosts who could reveal a secret to them or give them directions or solutions to meet a particular need at a given time. The belief in rhythms and isolated songs was also popular amongst the Africans. Aside the role of songs and rhythms as a cultural identity to the Africans, songs played a significant role in the lives of the traditional Africans as sometimes the songs were used as mediums to call forth the spirits and marked a sense of unity with the ancestral spirits and gods. Clapping and dancing to form various rhythms was as well considered means by some traditions to cast out demons and evil powers from those who were considered possessed by these evil spirits. African religious influences were also essential among Northern blacks; nevertheless exposure to Old World religions was more intense in the South, where the black population was greater.

By the eve of the Civil War, Christianity had pervaded the slave community so much so that there were no more barriers to the evangelization of slaves especially those who were born Africans. Elements of African Traditional Religion merged with Christianity to create uniquely African-American forms of the Christian faith that gave rise to the emergence and growth of Afro-Christianity. Thus, Raboteau presents West African religion as containing many similar beliefs compared to that of evangelical Christianity that dominated the antebellum southern United States. He portrayed the slaves' genius

in surviving slavery by inventing an 'invisible institution' (212) that quietly combined African beliefs with Christian ideals meaningful to the slaves. An example of such similarities is the fact that in both the beliefs of West African religion and the evangelical Christianity, there is the acknowledgement of the existence of one single creator who is God. Other examples include the religious prayer and songs, the symbolic death and rebirth, and blood sacrifice. Baptists for instance to an extent were able to make incursion among the slaves because baptism by immersion was similar to some of the initiation rites associated with West African cults. These similarities are what facilitated the conversions of slaves in to Christianity by allowing them to incorporate their familiar beliefs and traditions into that of the new world they were exposed to.

While explaining the power of religion to sustain the slaves in their captivity, the author adds that from "the very beginning of the Atlantic slave trade, conversion of the slaves to Christianity was viewed by the emerging nations of Western Christendom as a justification for enslavement of Africans" (Raboteau 234). This justification of slavery was initiated by the Christian missionaries who succeeded in convincing slave masters that converting their slaves would be for a good cause in owning slaves.

The missionaries used an evangelical appeal to point out that slaveholders could profit from their slaves as they taught them how to serve in Christian love and obedience. This line of teaching was going to be productive for the slave owners, as they will have slaves who will work diligently and out of obedience to the advantage of their masters. This illustrates, at the onset, that the emergence of Christianity in the slave community was characterized by obvious traces of contradictions that have stained the true image of Christianity. As a result, some slaves rejected Christianity and preserved their traditional African beliefs or their belief in Islam. This rejection of Christianity was basically because of a paradox rooted in the hypocrisy of the nation as a Christian one supporting slavery compared to the teachings the slaves were receiving from the bible.

Now in the Christian world of North America, a larger number of black men and women were converted during the rebirth and intensification of revivalism during the Second

Great Awakening of the late 18th and early 19th centuries (Sambol-Tosco). The second great awakening was a religious revival movement in the United States during the early 19th century led mostly by the preachers from Methodist and Baptist congregations. Baptist and Methodist ministers appealed to the slaves and free black populations, preaching simple messages regarding hope and redemption. The Methodist and Baptist congregations were not, however, the only beneficiaries of the growing Christian conversion of the slaves during the early eighteenth century. The Anglican missionaries were involved too. In their attempt to bring Christianity to slaves in the Southern colonies, these missionaries often found themselves in conflicts with uncooperative masters and resistant slaves. Many clergy within these groups actively promoted the idea that all Christians were equal in the sight of God, a message that provided hope and sustenance to the slaves. It however turned out to be false the assertion that Christians were equal in the sight of God because of the overt discrimination that characterized a highly racially chauvinistic slave community.

Thus, relationship between slave masters and their slaves with regards to the practice of Christian religion varied. Some masters accepted to allow their slaves to participate in various religious activities either partly or fully, which meant that the slaves were either allowed to attend only Sunday services or that in addition to other weekly activities. Slave masters often took house slaves to religious services at white churches, where the slaves were required to sit in separate galleries, which were appropriated for their use. These slaves were not allowed to participate in church ordinances such as the Holy Communion with the white slave owners. An instance is in Jacobs *Incidents* where Linda describes how the white ministers served the communion first to their fellow white congregation and after everyone had partaken and benediction had been said, the minister called “my colored friends” (p.196) to come down from the gallery in order to partake. Although white ministers presided over these services for slaves, the slaves desired to have a place of their own. Baptism which is a symbol of unity with the body of Christ, the church congregation, did not have any significant impact in creating equal treatment and participation of the black Christian population in the formal institution of the church because they had a different seating place. There is ample evidence in the

way these slaves are addressed 'my colored friends' to suggest that ironically or rather paradoxically enmity was intended rather than friendship.

As a result, the slaves believed they had no higher happiness than to meet together, and pour out their hearts in spontaneous prayers in addition to the fellowship they shared with each other during these services. Many white owners after accepting to involve the slaves in religious activities insisted on slave attendance at white-controlled church meetings since they were fearful that if slaves were allowed to worship independently, they would ultimately plot rebellion against their owners. Thus, as a standard, the slave owners largely exercised control over the movements and public associations of slaves. There were significant exceptions however minimal. Slave masters usually organized their religious meetings and taught the slaves on diverse biblical topics, particularly on obedience. When resistant slaves protested to the way they were treated, they were subjected to flogging or more work on the plantations. The use of brute force on resistant slaves by these equality-propagating Christian missionaries and slave owners bring to light paradoxes in Christianity in the slavery era.

In light of the differences in the way the slave owners and slaves perceived Christianity, the slave religious community witnessed the development of two church institutions: the visible institution of church dominated by white slave owners and the 'invisible institution' of church organized by a good segment of Christian slaves. Albert Raboteau first used the term invisible institution, in explaining the religion of the slaves, which was one that was unnoticed by white slave owners and was not publicly visible. This religious practice was largely clandestine and seen in the informal prayer meetings, bible studies, church services and weeknight services organized by the slaves. With reference to Raboteau's work, the invisible institution is also regarded as these various religious experiences of the slaves such as mentioned above, that were by no means fully contained in the visible structures of the institutional church.

Although the slave religion was not regarded as a formal and religious institution, it matured in the latter part of the antebellum period although independent black churches with slave members did exist in the South before emancipation. From his work,

Raboteau provides evidence that the slave community had an extensive religious life of its own that was kept secret from their masters. While describing the religious life of the enslaved, mention must be made of the subtle contradiction that comes with the sheer clandestineness in the activities of the invisible institution in relation to the formal, visible church. In these secret meetings, enslaved ministers, rented by the white slave owners, freely contradicted the messages they preach, usually arousing the obedience of the slaves, when their white masters were present by preaching a gospel that emphasizes hope and freedom. Although the slaves obeyed their masters as enjoined by the Bible, in their secret meetings, they encouraged each other of the hope they can have in Christ, and the glorious future ahead of them as they serve their masters faithfully as the Bible admonishes them to do. In emphasizing their sufferings and redemption during their meetings, their hopes were also renewed each time they met and encouraged one another. The slaves also found courage and strength to endure the hardships they faced from their masters. These meetings brought about some of the spiritual songs, which the slaves sang to first acknowledge their sufferings, and then secondly accepting the provision of hope and power these songs provided them in their need to survive slavery. In *incidents*, Linda mentions how she is not surprised that the slaves sing: "Only Satan's church is here below; Up to God's free church I hope to go". (205) A song which presents the church on earth as Satan's and God's church as one that is free and above the earth. By this, the slaves showed a contradiction between the visible churches controlled by white slave owners and a heavenly church controlled by God. The inference can be drawn that, as far as Christianity in the slave community is concerned, three different church institutions can be identified: the formal or visible church institution established by missionaries and dominated by whites, Raboteau's description of an informal or invisible (church) institution organized by a majority of black slaves and finally, a celestial or heavenly church identified by the slaves as god's perfect church. The differing relevance of each of these church institutions can best be described as paradoxical.

The slaves, in addition to their teachings on redemption and suffering, had songs that were forms of resistance to their condition. These songs were spiritual songs with contents of salvation and freedom. Some of these songs had references to biblical

figures such as Moses, who according to the Bible was instructed by God to lead his people to freedom. On occasions, these songs functioned more explicitly as expressions of resistance, encoding messages and sometimes even passing messages across for directions of escape. Some of the songs encoded for escape included religious songs such as *Steal Away and Sweet Chariot*. These songs gave both directions and signals to the slaves as to where and how to get to their destination. Sometimes these songs could also be in a call and response format where the one leading, calls out information or question in the form and song and the others respond through a song as well.

Former slave Harriet Tubman was known to be of help to slaves who were planning to escape from their slave masters. She became a famous conductor on the Underground Railroad and is known to have led several slaves to freedom. She is also known to have carried a gun that was never fired as it was only used to threaten slaves who dared to return to their plantation for fear of being caught during the escape. Tubman is referred to as the 'Moses' for the African-American slaves according to Sarah Hopkins Bradford. As a source of help to the slaves, Harriet Tubman had skills in avoiding arrest and a great sense of duty to help her fellow slaves escape. She mostly used songs to communicate to her passengers. These songs were fundamentally religious. However, there is a contradiction in the way the slaves used them as they became superficially religious songs but fundamentally existential. Due to her selfless actions and willingness to risk her life in helping slaves, Tubman remains an important personality in the history of American slavery(Bradford H.).

A reflection of their sufferings produce an awareness of what it means to be a slave and thus formulates a resolve to be free. The slaves were always present at these meetings to listen to these teachings by their masters or at times black slave preachers who were appointed by the masters to teach the slaves. A justification for the slaves meeting alone without their masters is that the slaves were aware that their masters were convinced about a selective interpretation of the Bible especially regarding obedience because it would promote submissiveness from the slaves as well as to justify their actions towards their slaves. African-Americans developed independent arenas in which to interpret, experience, and express their religious commitments. In their worship, they

listened to black preachers affirm their humanity, dwelling on a biblical narrative like that of the book of Exodus where the Lord promises the people of Israel “I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment” (Exodus 6:6). This and other similar scriptures, offered them the promise of God’s deliverance of his suffering people.

Irrespective of their different motives, slaveholders remained mindful of the potential subservience of religion among slaves. Some slaveholders were convinced that Christianity could be used as a type of social control.

The subject of slavery raised various opinions and positions among evangelical preachers. An earlier generation of evangelical preachers opposed slavery in the South during the early 19th century. These preachers pontificated a radical egalitarianism that saw all human beings as equals in the sight of God and repudiated, among others, such evils as slavery and discrimination. The evangelical Churches, which were made up of the Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterian, then became the accepted Christianity during the late 18th century. Nevertheless slaves were not treated as part of the church, which was basically dominated by the whites. Egalitarianism as a religious rhetoric thrived alongside overt discrimination in the slave community creating an atmosphere of marked polarity. For example, slaves were not permitted to sit together with the whites, they were given places in the gallery or had to wait until the service for the whites was over before they could use the church facility. Laurie Maffly-Kipp, writes that the black slaves observed that ministers promoted obedience to one’s master as the highest religious ideal and thus considered it a mockery of what the slaves measured as the true Christian message of equality and liberation as they knew it (Maffly-Kipp 1). While white slave owners held the view that the highest religious ideal is obedience to the slave master, black slaves upheld equality and freedom, thus revealing a contradiction in Christianity was conceptualized in the slave community.

Paradoxically, the Bible was both justificatory and liberating: for the masters, the Bible was a tool for the endorsement of slavery as an institution and its teaching and interpretation were used to justify the actions of slave owners. The enslaved black Christians, on the other hand, used the Bible and its interpretation as a refuge from the

oppressive situation they found themselves in; it served as a coping mechanism for them to endure the cruelty of slavery and they relied on the interpretation of the Bible as a provision of hope and freedom. The slaves discovered how their masters were using the Bible to their advantage by selecting and teaching passages that favored the masters. For this reason, the slaves for instance, usually after the meetings with their masters, organized their own private meetings in secret in order to emphasize subjects such as hope, the love of God for them as slaves and their equality before God. The slaves observed that their masters only focused on the demand of obedience from them and left out the part where masters were to treat them humanely.

Hodge argues that whereas the Old Testament contained texts and scriptures that apparently sanction slaveholding as an act of divine command, the New Testament does not forbid or denounce the act. Rather, slavery appears to be acknowledged in the bible as consistent with the Christian character and in accordance with justice, mercy, holiness, and love to God. In the bible, there is no clear condemnation of slavery yet there is no endorsement either although scriptures such Colossians 3:22-24 appear to justify slavery as an institution. Hodge concludes therefore that to declare it a terrible crime would constitute a direct accusation of the word of God. This lack of condemnation of slavery provided justification for slaveholders to claim slave-holding as a divinely sanctioned right (Williams). According to Judith Weisenfeld, European missionaries have long interpreted the biblical story of Noah's curse on Ham as one of blackness and servitude. Thus, they promoted a view that bondage was God's will for people of African descent and that the Christian scriptures charged them to be obedient to their masters above all else.

Larry Morrison deals with the moral and ethical foundation of both enslavement and abolition. His study discusses the religious defense of American slavery before 1830. He argues that the foundation upon which the slaveholding ethic and the proslavery argument were built was the scriptural defense of slavery. The use of the Bible in the South to defend slavery and the master-slave relationship was thus an attempt to put forward a moral defense of slavery although religion was not the only moral basis for the justification of slavery. The emphasis from defenders of slavery was always based

upon a literal reading of the Bible, which they interpreted as representing the mind and will of God himself. Morrison's work shows that slaveholding was not only justified but also made moral because it was recognized in the Bible. Slavery's defenders relied on this literal reading as a response to the emphasis upon the principles of Christianity used by those opposed to slavery. Morrison notes further that much of the attack and arguments brought against slaveholding had always been upon moral grounds.

In her article on slavery and religion, Iulia Basu-Zharku (2011) shows ways in which the enslaved adapted Christianity to suit their situations. She writes that many slaves turned to religion for inspiration and comfort, especially because it helped them cope with their hardships, as it gave the slaves a sense of personhood and dignity. Religion also served as a form of resistance for the horrible experience of slavery. As a form of resistance, some of the slaves rejected the white Christianity of their masters because of what they considered to be its embedded contradictions: its use to justify slavery and oppression.

Slaves who wanted to attend church service in the white churches needed to secure the approval of their masters. And, when they were allowed to attend, the slaves were confined to separate pews or galleries. In short, slaves experienced that they were not extended the right hand of fellowship or even considered as part of the church family. Therefore, the slaves built their own Christian community and fellowships by worshipping in their quarters at night and praying for freedom, although these practices were not entirely approved by the white masters. Perhaps more depressing were the teachings of apparently sympathetic (to slaves) white preachers, during their sermons, admonished the slaves to submit unconditionally to the authority of the slave owners, as this act was considered biblical.

Particularly, the slaves hated the oft-repeated sermon of the preachers that servants should be obedient to the masters, even when their masters were maltreating them. Hence, some of the slaves expressed their dissatisfaction with the white community and preachers through rebellious acts such as converting to other denominations. For instance, some who were instructed to practice Catholicism sang Methodist hymns.

Religious hypocrisy was not only manifested in the interpretation of the Bible but also in prayer and the treatment some slaveholders meted out to their slaves. Some examples are presented in both Jacob's and Wilson's works and are either mentioned earlier, or yet to be discussed in the next chapter. Reverend William H. Robinson noted the contradiction between slaveholders' religious beliefs and cruelty to slaves through prayers offered by slaveholders to the Lord to grant them a large increase of slaves, while consoling the slaves that the wisdom of God is displayed in the system of slavery (Grendler, Leiter, and Sexton 1).

Overall, the impact is that in the southern states, increasing numbers of slaves converted to evangelical denominations. The slaves accepted Christianity but the challenge was that they had the desire to continue to adhere as much as possible to the religious beliefs of their African ancestors. In fact, even the black people who accepted and embraced Christianity in America did not totally abandon their Old World religion; instead, they blended the Christian influences with their traditional African beliefs. That the religious environment of the enslaved was largely characterized by syncretism is evidenced by the mixed beliefs and practices embraced by the converted slaves. This syncretic tendency accounts for some paradoxes in the behavior of the slaves. However, by 1810, when the slave trade to the United States came to an end the slave population began to increase naturally thus making it possible for the preservation and transmission of religious practices that were, by this time, truly African-American. These contradictions in the response of both the slaves and slave owners to Christianity is indicative of how these two groups of people, slave owners and slaves, used Christianity during the slavery era and revealed some inherent paradoxes in their actions.

Chapter 4. Religious themes, imageries and symbols as presented in the two slave narratives

The elements of religion, particularly Christianity, that were outlined in chapter three are identifiable in both Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig; or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black*. This chapter presents insights that both works give about the different attitudes of slaves and the masters to Christianity, which is apparent in the unique ways in which the protagonists adhere to Christian principles under different settings and circumstances. In doing so, the chapter also emphasizes elements of contradiction between the faith and actions of slave owners. Crosscutting themes in both works are the importance of Christianity, the Bible, prayer, and religious meetings; the quest for literacy; the racialization of God and religion; and the use of the Christian religion as a tool of control and of liberation by slave masters and slaves respectively.

Christianity, the Bible, prayer, and religious meetings were important in the lives of slaves in America. The theme of conversion of slaves to Christianity is apparent in both works. Generally, slaves were introduced to the Christian faith by their masters and, sometimes, white family members of the household. In *Incidents*, Linda tells us about how the teachings of her mistress informed her (Linda) lifestyle. She says:

My mistress taught me the precepts of God's Word: 'thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them' (128).

In chapter 4 of Wilson's *Our Nig*, we are informed that Frado became aware of Christianity and the Bible in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Belmont (her master and mistress), her spiritual development as a Christian took off when she encountered James, the oldest son of the Bellmonts and Aunt Abby, Mr. Belmont's sister. In the unfolding narrative, we are told that James and Aunt Abby, with initial approval of Mrs. Belmont, encourages Frado to lead a religious life, read the Bible constantly and attend religious meetings. Aunt Abby was a devout Christian whose way of life and relations

40

with others and especially Frado reflected her Christian principles. She is very kind to Frado and loved her own a daughter, and reminds her about the importance of doing good even to those that hate them (chapter 8). Abby saw beyond Frado's race and social status and she became Frado's spiritual guide and, like James, demonstrated a pleasant and kind demeanor towards Frado. The subject of Christian life was something dear to James in particular who saw religion and his faith as giving him spiritual strength and peace when he was sick. For him, religion was a stage in his quest for eternal glory in heaven, his new home after his death (78, 80, 95). In James and aunt Abby then we see faith in practice, an attitude that was rare among slave owning Christian whites. It could also be that they could afford such a demeanor because they were not yet slave owners.

In any case, the love and kindness that James and Aunt Abby showed for Frado strengthened her and gave her hope and a sense of belonging. The support and encouragement of the two characters helped Frado to be peaceful and patient in spite of Mrs. Bellmont's abuse and cruelty towards her. Having accepted the teachings of James and aunt Abby, Frado commits herself to Christian religion and particularly to daily reading of the Bible, which made her consider that all her pain and suffering as fleeting.

While finding comfort in her religious activities, Frado, nevertheless, reflected endlessly on the inconsistency between her slave condition and the Biblical lessons about love, equality, peace and salvation. In chapter 4 (*Our Nig*), she reflects on her skin color and life in servitude and inquiries from James why God created her with a different complexion in comparison with the complexion of her oppressive mistress: "He made her white, and me black. Why didn't he make us both white?" (51). James did not have an answer to this query about the mysteries of God. Awareness of the race-based privileges increased Frado's doubts about the fairness of God to all creation

However, her doubts never drove her to the extreme of denouncing religion as Mag, one of the characters in *Our Nig*, did when she encountered challenges in her life. Mag is Frado's white mother who married a black man to the disapproval fellow whites. When Mag's husband, Jim died, Mag became a widow, an outcast shunned by her white

neighbors. Instead of falling on religion as succor, she rather felt dejected and became desperate, and eventually gave up on Christianity and God. Her situation of careless abandon is illustrated through her use of curse phrases like “black devils” (16, 17) to describe the mixed race children. Eventually, she absconded, leaving behind her six-year-old daughter to the Belmont family.

Church attendance and other Christian rituals is not limited to slaves only. Consistently in Wilson’s work, we find that both slaves and their white masters often talk about the importance of church service. Indeed, many of the characters play key roles in these services and others attend Bible study class. For instance, besides James and Aunt Betty, Mrs. Belmont, is presented as one who performs all the outward duties required of Christians. She is a regular church and Bible study meeting goer, and she prays regularly. This is why Frado is baffled by her character traits and wicked behaviors that are not consistent with the teachings from the Bible. In fact, Frado thinks that it would be unfair if Mrs. Belmont qualifies to go to heaven (89).

Once introduced to Christianity and the Bible Frado adopts a habit of reading the Bible daily as long as she has some time to rest from her chores. This desire to read the Bible began gradually after the Belmonts’ eldest son, James, and Mr. Belmonts’ sister, aunt Abby, introduced her to Christianity and the Bible (Chapter 4). For Frado, the Bible represents comfort and she strived to live a transformed life based on its teachings, a development that James and aunt Abby found to be encouraging and positive. Although Frado never said it herself, James and aunt Abby assumed that the noticeable change in Frado’s life emanated from her relationship with the spirit of God through her growing knowledge of Biblical scriptures. Aunt Abby held that Frado’s religious lifestyle was the result of “a heavenly messenger ... striving with her” (page 86). James also shares his view on how much he thinks Frado was influenced by the messages she heard in the evening meetings and how Frado “seem to love read her Bible” and her curiosity about its contents (74). In the process of conversion, before Frado acquires literacy Aunt Abby encourages her by reading the Bible to her and urging her to accept Christ. She also urges Frado not to hesitate to come to her with her difficulties and not to “delay a duty so important as attention to the truths of religion,

and her souls interest” (99-100). She recognized her fallibility and always uttered the prayer of the publican, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (90). This is a prayer by a tax collector (Luke 18:13) recorded in the Bible and Frado by uttering this prayer shows her faith in the Bible and the prayer as well. This part of Frado’s life is what helps her to endure the hardships she faces with her mistress Mrs. Bellmont.

The idea of the Bible as a symbol of virtue and integrity in the life of slaves that had converted to Christianity is also apparent in Jacobs’ *Incidents*. For Linda, believing in and swearing to the Bible was a measure of declaring fealty to truth and honesty. This conviction comes out in a scene where her mistress asks her to swear on the Bible as a sign of her honesty. She notes,

She handed me a Bible, and said, Lay your hand on your heart, kiss this holy book, and swear before God that you tell me the truth. I took the oath she required, and I did it with a clear conscience (157).

Both Linda’s grandmother and Linda’s mistress were influential figures in her conversion and quest to live a Christian life Linda acknowledges particularly how the teachings of her mistress informed her (Linda) lifestyle. “My mistress taught me the precepts of God's Word: ““thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them”” (128).

These teachings were a source of hope and inspiration for Linda as well as a model for how she lived her life. These Bible based teachings became a guide for her moral and virtuous life as is apparent in a confrontation with Dr. Flint, who was tries to coerce her to submit to his will by reference to the Bible. The following is Linda’s recollection of the confrontation:

[Flint]... You can do what I require; and if you are faithful to me, you will be as virtuous as my wife.

[Linda] I answered that the Bible didn't say so. His voice became hoarse with rage. "How dare you preach to me about your infernal Bible” (205).

The Bible and Christian beliefs also served as a guide to virtuous life for some whites in *Our Nig*. For instance, Aunt Abby and James are equally influenced by their faith in their Christian religion. This belief is what motivates them to love Frado and help her conversion. As Wilson narrates, there is never a moment that James and Aunt Abby have a talk without mentioning Frado's name and welfare (73-74). Their follow-ups, and care and love for Frado receives inspires Frado to appreciate the virtue of living life as a true Christian. James is reports as living a very religious life and encourages others to do same including his brother. He has hope in his beliefs and that inspires how he lives even to the point of death. On his dying bed, James admits he has been sick in a while and is about dying. He tells Frado, "My Heavenly Father is calling me home" (95) and encourages her to continue leading a virtuous life because "it will be but a short time before we are in *heavenly* home together", a place where there is no sickness and pain (95). James also entreats his wife Susan to teach Charlie the way to heaven, which James believes is essential in Charlie's growth. The description of James' death scene reinforces the ultimate prize that Christians strive for in life: to be ushered to heaven by "the shining ones!" (97). For James, the "Angel of Death who severed the golden thread, and he was in heaven. At midnight the messenger came (97)"

In addition to being introduced to Christianity through conversion, some slaves were also privileged to have slave owners who granted them permission to attend church services and religious meetings as well as indulge in Prayer. Prayer and prayer meetings were very common in the black slave community environment as it served and played important roles in the lives of the slaves. Like *Our Nig* and *Incidents*, most slave narratives broach the theme of prayer and meetings as crucial rituals in the lives of the characters. For slaves particularly, Christian prayer meetings and personal prayers serve as a form of direct communication and communion with God as well as a source of strength. These meetings and gatherings also imbued in them a sense of fellowship and a community. In Wilson's text, aunt Abby, with the approval of Mrs. Bellmont, encouraged Frado to attend church services and other religious meetings. In fact, on some plantations slaves were permitted to celebrate occasions like marriage, baptism, and funerals, with some slave masters and whites observing and sometimes partaking

in them occasionally. The slave masters seemed to love the singing, praying and preaching of their slaves. Nevertheless, the slaves considered these religious and cultural events as private because they were more than convinced that regardless of the interest shown by the whites their master's religious motivation did not include prayers for the freedom of their slaves.

Some slaveholders were averse to the idea of allowing slaves to be a part of a church congregation or religious meetings for two reasons. The first reason is that some masters had the impression that blacks were not as equal to the whites thus did not see the reason why they had to be a part of religious meetings and church services. The theme of Christianity as preserve of the whites is raised in both *Our Nig.* and *Incidents*. In a scene in *Our Nig.*, Mr. Belmont informs Mrs. Belmont that in recognition of Frado's dedicated services to the family they should allow her to "enjoy the privilege of being good" (Wilson, 88) through education and church attendance. However, Mrs. Belmont objected, saying that, just like any other black slave, Frado's role should be limited to driving her white masters to church. She should not be encouraged to aspire to become educated (86-89) and pious through participating in church activities, prayer saying and bible reading. When she discovered Frado reading the Bible, Mrs. Belmont ironically grew furious and told Frado that she should cease saying prayers because "Religion was not meant for niggers" (68), adding that praying serves no purpose for blacks, as the only obligation they (the blacks) have is to obey their masters and caretakers. This racialization of religion had broad support among slaveholder, though Aunt Abby and James appeared to be exceptions.

Sometimes slaves used similar race arguments when reflecting on the inequalities between whites and blacks, and particularly the suffering that slaves go through. In *Our Nig.*, Frado in reflecting on the persistent mistreatment visited on her by her mistress began to question the existence of God because she attributed her slave existence and suffering to the fact of her skin color. She wondered why a just God would create her tormentor, Mrs. Belmont, white and give her all privileges of good life, while she Frado was given a black skin that condemned her to servitude and suffering (51).

Another reason why some slave owners forbade their slaves from attending church meetings was that they feared that the religious meetings could become potential breeding grounds of Biblically grounded ideas of equality, freedom and liberation in slaves. An ex slave explained this fear: “White folks ’fraid the niggers git to thinkin’ they was free, if they had churches ’n things (Raboteau 220)”. Mrs. Belmont’s opposition to Frado being educated and attendance of church meetings (86-89) is precisely due to the thinking that education and religion would give slaves the knowledge of freedom, which will eventually lead them to the fight of their freedom.

White fears about the potential influence of the Bible and religious meetings on the thinking of the slaves about freedom leads to the theme of the use of religion as a weapon of subordination by slave masters on the one hands and as a liberation force for slaves on the other hand. Slave masters considered the Bible to be a controllable and effective instructional tool used to achieve the goal of making their slaves submissive to their commands. In *Incidents*, Linda points out that rather than allowing their slaves to acquire literacy in order to be able to read the Bible, the slave owners preferred to teach them selected sections that talked about humility and subservience to the will of rulers, in this case the slave masters. The slave masters preferred that the slaves gained biblical knowledge through rote learning of the verses and chapters that they used to strengthen their own position of domination. For the masters, a controlled access to the Bible was the safest way of keeping the slaves from learning directly about the ideas of freedom and equality among God’s creations on earth through possession of Bibles and learning to read and discuss it at meetings. The resolve of the slave masters to use the approach indirect access to Bible knowledge by slaves was taken a step further after Nat Turner’s insurrection described in *Incidents*. Jacobs notes that after Nat Turner’s insurrection, the slaveholders hired a reverend minister to deliver sermons to their slaves on the importance of obedience and submission to their masters at all times or suffer the damnation of hell (13). In *Incidents*, Jacobs presents an example a preachers, reverend Pike, upon visiting and holding a church meeting with slaves, he

... seated himself, and requested all present, who could read, to open their books, while he gave out the portions he wished them to repeat or respond

to. His text was, "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ" (198).

The biblical verse referred to is Ephesians 6:5-8, a scripture wherein Paul admonishes slaves to obey their masters. Reverend Pike recounts in his sermons how the slaves had been naughty and how his sermons reminded them that it was their Christian duty to obey their masters. This approach was apparently to use the authority of the pulpit to plant fear in slaves. This is a clear case of slave owners using the Biblical scripture and preacher's authority manipulatively, as a tool to cow slaves into accepting their servile condition.

Another measure that the slave-owning establishment adopted to keep the slaves ignorant and obedient to their masters was the enactment of anti-literacy laws that strictly forbids slaves in the South acquiring reading and writing skills. Overall, the white slave masters feared that black literacy would make the slaves become aware of their rights; give them ideas about freedoms that would become a threat to the slavery system through rebellious action. Above all, the whites knew that keeping the slaves illiterate would prevent them from acquiring knowledge that would make them to challenge their owners' justification of slavery with Bible verses. Clearly, the anti-literacy law was in line with the general efforts to use all possible means to keep the slaves under the control of and dependent on the slave owners for their spiritual and daily need. Teaching slaves to read and write is considered a felony, and the law prescribed severe punishment for people who chose to teach the slaves these skills.

Indeed, the slaves on the hand usually connected the pursuit of literacy to the search for freedom. They believed that acquiring knowledge through reading and writing will give them a sense of identity and empower them to fight for their liberty. Particularly, they knew that literacy would help them be able to discover other truths besides the selective information and interpretations of scriptures that their masters gave them. Acquiring scriptural knowledge for themselves without the help of their masters will boost their confidence in their identity and know how to relate to the teachings from their masters.

They considered literacy to be so fundamental to their spiritual and social development that they were ready to go against the anti-literacy law and risk being punished. In *Incidents*, uncle Fred expresses the desire to learn to read and write generally, but most especially he desires to be able to read the Bible. As Linda who taught Fred to read and write noted,

At fifty-three years old he joined the Baptist church. He had a most earnest desire to learn to read. He thought he should know how to serve God better if he could only read the Bible. He came to me, and begged me to teach him (202).

Uncle Fred believed that the ability to read the Bible would bring him closer to God and give him the opportunity to live a good life, without fear of death. Moreover, he believed that only those who could read the Bible who had the opportunity to control its knowledge. In his own word:

Honey, it 'pears when I can read dis good book I shall be nearer to God. White man got all de sense. He can learn easy. It ain't easy for ole black man like me. I only wants to read dis book, dat I may know how to live, den I hab no fear 'bout dying (202).

The selective approach of slave owners to the Bible for their own purposes brings out issues about how they translate their treatments and views about slaves contradicted the key principles of their Christian faith. In the episodes described above, the hypocritical attitude of some Christian slave owners shows in how they encourage their slave to convert to the Christian faith and yet are apprehensive of the moral impact that conversion and the associated Bible literacy would have on the master-slave hierarchies. Several episodes in *Our Nig* and *Incidence* illustrate this apparent paradox between faith and deeds among Southern slave-owning white evangelicals. Linda's pointed sarcasm seems to sum up the contradictory behavior of slave owners. She says:

My mistress taught me the precepts of God's Word: 'thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you,

do ye even so unto them.' But I was her slave, and I suppose she did not recognize me as her neighbor (*Incidents*, 128)

In *Our Nig*, Wilson presents Mrs. Bellmont in a hypocritical light by highlighting episodes where she shows apparent hatred for and persistently scolds Frado, her domestic slave. These attitudes are manifest in several situations of tantrums, ire and reprimand that Mrs. Bellmont displayed towards Frado on the least opportunity. As noted earlier, the Bellmont family generally approved of the education and conversion of their slaves to Christianity. However, Mrs. Bellmont appeared to be apprehensive about the perceived effects that Frado's conversion to Christianity and acquisition of literacy would have on her services as a slave. This apprehension is illustrated in episodes where Mrs. Bellmont falls into tantrums whenever she saw Frado practicing her Christian faith by reading the Bible. Thus, one day when Mrs. Bellmont discovered Frado reading the Bible she got furious and complained to her husband, John Bellmont, about the risk that Frado's literacy and Christian practices might pose to the family in terms of Frado's availability when needed. In conversation with her husband, who seemed to defend Frado's literacy Mrs. Bellmont quipped:

...Don't you know that every night she will want to go toting off for meeting? And Sundays, too? And you know we have a great deal of company Sundays, and she can't be spared? (89).

Mrs. Bellmont's contention was that having allowed Frado to acquire literacy, the family could not hope to restrain her from attending church meetings and Bible discussions after her conversion to Christianity. In addition, she complained to her husband that Frado has expectations of becoming a "pious nigger" (88), with ambitions of preaching to white people, a condition which is not yet embraced by the adherents of the idea of hierarchy in Christian evangelism. Significantly, in response to his wife's Mr. Bellmont replied rather sarcastically, "I thought you Christians held to going to church" (89). The apparent contradictions between Mrs. Belmont's Christian beliefs and her unwillingness to practice the tenets of the faith as revealed in her disapproval of Frado's Bible reading skills illustrates the hypocrisies of Christian slave owners in

the South. Yet, Mr. Belmont's sarcastic reply to his wife's fretting about Frado is not necessarily an unequivocal and sympathetic approval of Frado. Both husband and wife agreed on one thing: the economic worth or "profit" (90) of Frado to the family. In fact, Mrs. Belmont confesses how important Frado has been to them economically in the summer as she did the work of two girls and saved the family money they would have used to hire more labor.

In *Incidents*, Jacobs exposes some of the harsh realities of the Christian faith and practice in both the South and the North. She describes how Christian slave owners invoke and manipulate biblical texts on submission to authority to reinforce and perpetuate attitudes of subservience among slaves. In this way, Christianity becomes a tool of oppression in the context of the institution of slavery. She distinguishes the Christianity practiced by the slaves and the hypocritical one practiced by the slave masters. Slave masters, are presented as hypocrites whose practices were contrary to Christianity's fundamental principles brotherly love, humility, compassion and respect towards other Christians. Although slave owners taught their Christian slaves to heed to and practice the teachings of Christ as delineated in the Bible, their treatments of slaves were the not consistent with the main biblical teachings about neighborly love and equality.

Linda (Jacobs, chapter 8), observes how the white pastors from North hypocritically accepted the Southern Christianity's use of the Bible to justify the institution as well as the high-handed attitudes of slave masters. One episode that illustrates Linda's reproach is how a clergyman from the North who was invited by the slave owners of the South to preach to their slaves presented slaver positively after being taken around by slave owners to observe the living conditions of a few privileged slaves who are living in relative comfort. Surprised the clergy-man's sudden change of attitude, Linda describes him as a "northern man with southern principles" (169). She finds this attitude, which most Yankees seemed to adopt on coming to the South, as hypocritical:

They seem to satisfy their conscience with the doctrine that God created the Africans to be slaves. What libel upon the heavenly Father, who “made of one blood all nations of men!” (170)”

Several episodes in Jacobs’ narrative touch on this inconsistency in the attitudes and practices of slave owners, white public officials and even pastors. We cite a few as illustration. The first concerns Linda’s observations about what she saw as relaxed attitude of the Methodist church in appointing people to leadership positions in the church and the economic motives of some of these appointees. A case in point is the appointment of the town constable as the leader of a Methodist class meeting that she attended and the ‘unchristian’ that he exhibited towards the class members. For Linda, the constable appears to have accepted to perform Christian duties not out of commitment to the faith but for any amount of “fifty cents” (199). Linda comes to this conclusion because she observed that the constable does not even show any sign of empathy, love or care to the congregation. She portrays him as an unsympathetic and insensitive person who took pleasure in the suffering of others as shown in the way he responded to a grieving woman slave whose children had been taken away from her. Linda narrates that after the woman told her heartbreaking story and expresses her desire for God to take her life, the constable “become crimson in the face with suppressed laughter, while he held up his handkerchief, that those who were weeping for the poor woman’s calamity might not see his merriment” (200). Thus, Linda describes him as a “white-faced, black-hearted brother” (199).

Another case is Linda’s expression of shock when she found out that Mr. Flint’s, her high-handed and wicked master, had joined the congregation of the Episcopal Church. The fact that a man such as Dr. Flint joins the church makes Linda question whether Christianity had an impact on the character of people at all. At least, she saw no positive change in the attitudes of Dr. Flint after he joined the church. Thus, when Dr. Flint asked her to join the church, Linda answered sarcastically that she already found enough sinners in the church and hopes she “could be allowed to live like a Christian” (204) outside it. In other words, Linda does not believe that the Church makes a person

live like a true Christian and therefore she sees no reason to join the Episcopal Church congregation.

It is abundantly clear from the discussion of selected episodes in *Our Nig* and *Indents* that Christianity and Bible reading had a formative influence in the lives of both slaves and slave masters. Yet it is also clear that different characters, slaves and slave owners, had different uses for the religion and its rituals, which sometimes exposed elements of contradiction between faith and action in the case of the slave masters. The next chapter addresses some of the paradoxes that the tension between slavery and Christianity exposed in the chapter.

Chapter 5. Paradoxes in the Practices of Christianity as found in *Incidents* and *Our Nig*.

The Oxford dictionary defines a paradox as “a seemingly absurd or contradictory statement or proposition which when investigated may prove to be well founded or true; it is also a statement or proposition which, despite sound (or apparently sound) reasoning from acceptable premises, leads to a conclusion that seems logically unacceptable or self-contradictory”. Following the definition, there are apparent contradictions in the actions and responses to Christian teachings and scriptures shown by both slaveholders and slaves in the two works under consideration.

As mentioned earlier, Jacobs and Wilson have elements of religion running through their work and they use some examples to present their position and views on it. Harriet Wilson and Harriet Jacobs in their work repeatedly present the irony of religion mainly Christianity in the institution of American slavery. In both works, even more evident in Jacobs, the authors use paradox to explore how Christianity, a religion that speaks of mercy and love, was abused in the antebellum South to exploit slaves and to endorse the cruelty of slaveholders. These two writers both present religion from different views: one from the perspective of the slaves and the other from the slaveholders.

Firstly, Harriet Jacobs writes about the difference between Christianity and religion in the South. She presents several of the contradictions and hypocrisy she encounters. Right from the beginning, Jacobs identifies a paradox in the teachings of her mistress. Jacobs praises her mistress for the things she taught her as a slave including blessing her memory for the happy times she spent with her; she further expresses her surprise and how she lost hope by the decision that was made by her late mistress to send her to serve someone else instead of liberating her.

Linda’s mistress taught her the precepts of God’s word in the words of the Bible "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself...Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them" to which Linda retorts “But I was her slave” (128). The text above is found in Matthew 7:12 and has come to be known as the ‘Golden Rule’ prescribing the way people, especially Christians ought to relate with one another in

reciprocity, fairness and equality. To make someone a slave will mean that one can also in like manner be made a slave but this was not the way Linda's mistress related to the Biblical principle. By Linda's response, Jacob's sees the apparent contradiction in the meaning her mistress sought to convey to her and what she thought was the objective meaning of the scripture.

Also, one gets the impression that the word "neighbor" either had more than one meaning or one exclusive meaning ascribed by the slaveholders. The latter seems more plausible in this case as Jacobs notes; "I suppose she did not recognize me as her neighbor" (128). Jacobs is compelled by the actions of her mistress to conclude sarcastically that perhaps slaves are not considered neighbors and the reference in the bible regarding loving and doing good to one's neighbors refers to an exclusive group of people including her mistress' kind and does not apply to slaves. The sheer relativism that characterized the use of scriptures especially by the slaveholders presented the Bible as a manual for legitimizing the institution of slavery, justifying their unjust actions towards the slaves and molding the slaves into conformity with their wishes. This is so because, of the two, the slaveholders were literate and custodians of education. Any formal means of learning was the exclusive preserve of the slaveholders. Slaves considered it a rare privilege to be taught by their kind owners to read and write because it was unlawful for a slave to have education. Therefore the disproportionate use of the precepts of God by slaveholders may not only have aided them to get away with the unjust treatments they meted out to the slaves but also exerted an influence on the way the slaves viewed the Bible and Christianity in general because they were their Bible teachers.

A paradox is found in the passage where Jacobs points out how slaves are taught to believe concerning the North. First of all, some of these slaves have been made to believe and accept that they are inferior and will be punished at any attempt for "running away from a kind master" (168). This statement is a comment made by a slaveholder when they returned from the North and told the slaves in the South about life for the free slaves in the North. Jacobs, after the slaveholder's comment on life in the North, states that "slaveholders pride themselves upon being honorable men; but if you were

to hear the enormous lies they tell their slaves, you would have small respect for their veracity” (168). This is another example of how and why the lives of the slaveholders cannot be trusted especially when the writer presents the lack of truth in their words and actions in general. Slaveholders create the impression that being a slave in the South is a better life and option compared to being free in the North and some of the slaves believed this impression and lived by it.

Jacobs goes ahead to describe how freedom can make a man free but yet because many of the slaves have been made to believe that there is no worth in exchanging slavery for freedom, there is difficulty in persuading the slaves to believe otherwise especially in order to protect their families. In short, slaveholders have made it clear in their actions towards the slaves that slavery is better and more valuable than life itself. Here lies the paradox: by implication, every slaveholder is free; that freedom is what entitles them to have chattel slaves because a slave could not own another slave.

Therefore, to suppose as slaveholders in the south did, that slavery was better in the south than life and freedom in the north is not only an exploitative deception but also a contradiction of their own status as free men. One wonders why the slaveholders did not swap places with their slaves if it was good an option to be a slave. This can be said to be a calculated attempt by the slaveholders to use such philosophical statements to administer hegemony over the slaves. It also follows from the above mentioned contradiction that the slaveholders sought to create a social context within which to mediate a reconstruction of the status of slaves that negotiates a new identity; one that sees a free man in a slave in the South as opposed to one devalues the freedom of a slave in the North. Thus the quest for self-identity sought by the slaves through their struggle for freedom and emancipation was diminished and an imposed identity was placed, at least, on most of the slaves who believed and settled with the status quo.

In the event of the death of Linda’s father (130), her grandmother tries to console and comfort her, as it is a difficult period for her. Her faith as a little girl is being tested by death, which has taken away her father, mother, mistress and friend. Her faith crumbles and she eventually rebels against God. Her grandmother, in an attempt to console her, makes this remarkable statement: “who knows the ways of God? Perhaps they have

been taken from evil days to come” (130). One can deduce the following beliefs from the statement above:

1. she believes that man cannot know the ways of God; and
2. she believes that death is a way of God, and remains a mystery to man.

Given the above premises, it is necessarily logical for her grandmother to conclude that God may have used death as his will to take the deceased out of inevitable troubles that lie ahead of them. In a later statement made by Linda’s grandmother in relation to the status of her grandchildren as slaves, Linda admits that her grandmother literally fought to make them accept their status as slaves as the will of God and that God “had seen it fit to place them under such circumstances; and though it seemed hard, [they] ought to pray for contentment” (p138). When placed side by side, the two statements reveal some contradictions. In the first statement, it is clear from her grandmother’s rhetorical question “who knows the ways of God?” (138), that no finite human mind can know God’s ways, including herself. In the second statement, however, grandmother seems to know the ways of God as it relates to the slave status of her grandchildren enough to vigorously entreat them to settle with it.

It is also significant to note that it is paradoxical to claim that a situation such as slavery, with its consequent denial of comforts and human dignity in the antebellum south, is the will of God while admonishing the slaves to pray to the same God who supposedly willed it for them to grant them appeasement. This inconsistency indicts the quest of her grandmother for her own freedom and affirms rather than condemns the practice of slavery from the biblical point of view. The tendency to relativize Christian teachings both by slaves and slave masters severely undermined the authority of the Bible as an objective moral framework for life. The reasoning of Jacobs and her siblings in reaction to what their grandmother said leans forward to what can be termed an objective proposition of the Bible “it is much more the will of God for us to be situated as she was [in freedom]” (138).

In chapter 4 of Jacobs's work, an excerpt of a conversation between Benjamin and his grandmother when they went to visit him in jail illustrates a notable degree of contradiction on the issue of forgiveness. After his attempted escape proved abortive, Benjamin is recaptured and imprisoned by his master and the entire experience is distasteful to the poor slave. When asked about the role of God in rescinding a decision to commit suicide when he was captured, Benjamin's admission that he forgot about God when hunted like an animal triggered his grandmother's response "Don't talk so, Benjamin," said she. "Put your trust in God. Be humble, my child, and your master will forgive you"(144). Benjamin disagreed with his grandmother's persuasion that he should ask for forgiveness from his master. He said,

"Forgive me for what, mother? For not letting him treat me like a dog? No! I will never humble myself to him. I have worked for him for nothing all my life, and I am repaid with stripes and imprisonment. Here I will stay till I die, or till he sells me" (144).

As the dialogue shows, Benjamin and his grandmother agree that there is an offence for which forgiveness must be sought. However, they disagreed on who ought to be apologizing and asking for forgiveness. Benjamin, like other like-minded slaves, believes that slave owners should be the ones apologizing and asking for forgiveness from their mistreated slaves. He therefore does not see the logic in asking for forgiveness from a man whose delight is to treat him as an animal. His resolution to not humble himself and ask for forgiveness from his master can be considered as a reflection of the paradox embedded in his grandmother's gentle persuasion.

Again when Benjamin was asked if he ever thought of God, he answered, "No, I did not think of him. When a man is hunted like a wild beast he forgets there is a God, a heaven" (144). He points out that his only focus was how to get out of his struggle and get beyond the reach of his attackers whom he referred to as "bloodhounds" (144). In this situation, we see how the slave Benjamin expresses his views of God in times such as what he described to his grandmother. One would expect that as they believed and trusted God, they would constantly depend on him more especially in times of trouble but this slave makes us aware that even a slave in his desperation to be free sometimes

does not look up to God. On one hand there a profession of faith in God but on the other hand, especially when it was inevitable as in Benjamin's case, to seek divine intervention, the expressed action or reaction betrays the confessed faith in God, revealing a paradox of a kind.

Jacobs draws attention to yet another paradox in chapter 5 where she notes:

If a pastor has offspring by a woman not his wife, the church dismisses him, if she is a white woman; but if she is colored, it does not hinder his continuing to be their good shepherd (204).

Within the context of Christianity at the time, this pronouncement was most likely a creed by which the affairs of the formal church community were conducted. The substance of this self-made religious ideal hangs on the belief that a pastor's culpability for the offence of having a child from an adulterous relationship is based on the skin color and status of the woman with whom the act was committed. In essence, the act is not an offence deserving dismissal if the woman involved is a black slave. This shows that the interpretation of certain parts of the bible was manipulated to satisfy selfish interests. The language in the creed above also accentuates the discursive practices that reveal the power relations in the slave era society. This discursive practice shows the assertion of power and designates the social status of slaves and slave owners, thus bringing the marked social stratification of the era into focus.

When compared to the bible, this invented creed fails to account for proper moral conduct and accuracy of biblical thought on the subject of adultery. The Bible records in Exodus 20:14 that, "You shall not commit adultery" ('BibleGateway.com'). From the biblical point of view, adultery is conjugal infidelity where a man or woman has illicit sexual intercourse with another other than their spouse. It is clear from the scripture that God prohibited it and a severe punitive measure in the form of death was meted out to those who were caught in the act. Again, the Bible says "If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them shall die — the man that lay

with the woman, and the woman; so you shall put away the evil from Israel ”. (Deuteronomy 22:22).

In the teachings of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, the meaning of adultery was even more expanded to include lustful thoughts as recorded: “But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart”(Matthew 5:28). The obvious consequence of adultery in the New Testament, as Jesus taught, was divorce as it is written that “...whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery”(Matthew 19:9).

None of the scriptures above suggests that adultery and adulterous offspring are lawful or socially approved in the Christian context. The gravity of the offence seems trivialized in the religious thought of the slave masters in the South. Their self-invented creed self-destructs when closely investigated and is absurd in comparison to the Bible’s position on the matter. The logic lacks internal consistency and fails to account for a sound basis for an objectively justifiable conclusion. The constant, a pastor’s adulterous lifestyle, now becomes a variable because it remains no hindrance to his pastoral duties as far as his partner in infidelity is a colored slave. From the foregoing, it can be concluded that the offender is therefore a colored female slave. It is even more paradoxical when one considers the fact that the slaves, especially black women, had no free will and were at the disposal of the caprice of their masters.

The slave women had no right to say no to the wishes of their masters and this accounts for the numerous sexual abuses they suffered in this era. A legitimate question to ask is how the infraction of a law desacralizes one woman’s dignity enough to prohibit a pastor from continuing with his pastoral duties but allows him to continue his work when it applies to another woman? The difference in the application of the law can be derived from the color, background and status of the woman: one is white and free and the other colored and a slave. Behind the paradox mentioned above, is a sense of obtuse commodification of colored female slaves whose worth was, among others, reduced to the satisfaction of the libido of their masters.

Also presented in Jacobs's narrative is an illustration of the characteristic contradictions in many of the discourses that took place between slave owners and slaves. Linda points out the hypocrisy in the dignity conferred upon a colored person after death. She notices how a friend of her uncle Philip implies how useless it is that colored slaves are not regarded when alive but rather praised when they are dead.

Now that death has laid him low, they call him a good man and a useful citizen; but what are eulogies to the black man, when the world has faded from his vision? It does not require man's praise to obtain rest in God's kingdom (350).

Philip, a slave, is dead. In his absence, he is eulogized as a good man and classified as a useful citizen; a term that was not commonly used as a slave was never at any time in this period considered by his masters as a good man or a useful citizen.

In chapter 13, an extract of a church fellowship meeting presents a case study of the central statement of this thesis that there are paradoxes in the actions of both the slave owners and the slaves. The Rev. Mr. Pike is the speaker for the day and chooses his scripture for the day's sermon. He reads: "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ" (Ephesians 6:5). He began his sermon, and in a rather pious posture, remarks:

Hearken, ye servants! Give strict heed unto my words. You are rebellious sinners. Your hearts are filled with all manner of evil. 'Tis the devil who tempts you. God is angry with you, and will surely punish you, if you don't forsake your wicked ways. You that live in town are eye-servants behind your master's back. Instead of serving your masters faithfully, which is pleasing in the sight of your heavenly Master, you are idle, and shirk your work. God sees you. You tell lies. God hears you. Instead of being engaged in worshipping him, you are hidden away somewhere, feasting on your master's substance; tossing coffee-grounds with some wicked fortuneteller, or cutting cards with another old hag. Your masters may not find you out, but God sees you, and will punish you. O, the depravity of your hearts!

When your master's work is done, are you quietly together, thinking of the goodness of God to such sinful creatures? No; you are quarrelling, and tying up little bags of roots to bury under the doorsteps to poison each other with. God sees you. You men steal away to every grog shop to sell your master's corn that you may buy rum to drink. God sees you. You sneak into the back streets, or among the bushes, to pitch coppers. Although your masters may not find you out, God sees you; and he will punish you... (Jacobs, 198).

The meaning of the Biblical text above lies in the relevance of the historical and cultural context on which the writing of the text was predicated. Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians during the reign of the Roman Empire. There was a cultural tolerance for slave ownership and a social and moral order that defined the master-slave relationship. Slavery was an accepted institution in the Roman Empire. According to the New Testament Bible Exposition (BE) Commentary, there were probably six million slaves in the Roman Empire at the time of the letter. Part of this epistle was therefore intended by the writer to address the master-slave relationship from another perspective. The NTBE Commentary identifies a two-fold reason for Paul's gentle chide to the slaves who had become Christians. Firstly, by serving their earthly masters, they were indeed rendering service to God. This will curtail the complaints of the masters that the slaves were lazy and idle especially when no one was watching and ultimately give them a sense that their labor and service was a submission to Jesus Christ as head of the household. The second reason is expressed by the phrase "in singleness of heart" which means the right work attitude.

This means Paul was encouraging the slaves to be excellent at their work because it amounts to doing the will of God. The BE commentary further notes that slaves were assigned with tasks that they hated but they were to do them regardless, so long as they were not against the will of God. In this context, disobedience to one's earthly master implied disobedience to God and the author points out that such a behavior was not a reflection of true Christianity.

The practice of slavery did not undergo any radical transformation from the Roman Empire to the 17th and 18th centuries in the antebellum south. Of particular significance is the role of Christianity in these two eras. In Paul's writing, he saw the need to go further, in the same context and chapter, to state the responsibilities of the slave masters: "and masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him". (Ephesians 6:9).

Two remarkable thoughts are evident in the verse above. First, reciprocity and second, equality. By reciprocity, it is meant that the masters treat the slaves just as they would the slaves respond to their wishes in their duty. By equality, Paul suggests that both the master and the slave owe allegiance to one God before whom they are equal. From the foregoing, one can consider Ephesians 6:5 and Ephesians 6:9 as parallel passages that complete each other.

In the sermonette of Mr. Pike to the slaves, mention is not made of verse 9 at all. Consequently, the message only highlighted the obligation of slaves to their masters and described with intensity the punishments awaiting any who flouted the divine injunction. His constant use of the phrase 'God sees you' dismisses the concept of equality before God implied in the Bible text. Is it only the case that God sees the slaves in their rebellious disobedience to their masters or he also sees the masters in their dehumanizing treatment of their human chattels? It is very clear that the slaves understood the Bible in this context much more than their teaching masters. They expected their masters to reciprocate their service with a touch of human dignity and mercy, which was illusive. This is why Benjamin in chapter six refuses to apologize to his master after his recapture because he feels his master has only treated him bad in return for all his good efforts. The apparent contradiction in the use of biblical texts by the masters or their hired agents like Mr. Pike is a deliberate effort to use religion and Christianity in particular to consolidate the legitimacy of the institution of slavery and make any attempt to revolt against it a religious offence deserving punishment from God.

Undoubtedly, the image of Christianity suffered a dent in the slavery era so severely that it affected the ethical reflections of both the slave masters and the slaves. One effect of this was the biased propensity to interpret the bible in a way that obscured the truth but highlighted parochial self interests. That this led to a number of notable paradoxes is evident in both individual and parallel statements made by slave masters and slaves in the books under review.

With reference to Wilson's *Our Nig*, an instance of exchange between Aunt Abby and Frado illustrates not only a seeming contradiction but also an assumed motivation for the interpretation of a bible text that can be deduced from the given context. The bible text is found in Matthew 5:44 "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you (KJV)". This, according to Aunt Abby was the point of departure for the good minister's sermon both she and Frado had previously listened to in the service.

Frado and Mary were not the best of friends. As far as Frado was concerned, Mary was more or less another tormentor and an enemy probably for many reasons, including the fact that Mary's presence did not make things better for her already sorry state in relation to her mistress Mrs. Belmont. The news that Mary was returning after her time of visit gave Frado much joy, which she shares with Aunt Abby. Frado puts it sentimentally "Well she's gone, gone, Aunt Abby. I hope she'll never come back again" (80). Aunt Abby's response "No! no! Frado, that's wrong! you would be wishing her dead; that won't do" (80), indicates an inference that Frado meant some kind of a permanent no return analogous to death.

Arguably, it seems to Aunt Abby as much a paradox as being happy for someone's death which refers to a portion of the minister's message stating "But you forget what our good minister told us last week about doing good to those that hate us"(80). Frado's reaction is "Didn't I do good, Aunt Abby, when I washed and ironed and packed her old duds to get rid of her, and helped her pack her trunks, and run here and there for her?" (81). One understands from Frado's reactions that any act performed to get rid of

an enemy is an act of good which she thinks synchronizes with the text in Matthew 5:44 sermonized by the preacher and referred to by Aunt Abby.

Exegetically, Frado's application of the bible text is to a significant extent opposed to what it actually means. Doing good deeds to those who hate you does not include wishing them dead or a similar fate. Frado's interpretation of the bible text cannot be removed from the existential reality of her suffering at the hands of her mistress and her kin. To her, anything that erases her suffering and afflictions is good, the circumstances notwithstanding. She therefore considered it acts of good to get rid of Mary.

Again after becoming ill, Frado wished to pray for pardon. Frado's health was impaired after constant lifting of the sick man and by drudgery in the kitchen. Her mistress had told her how useless it would be praying for her wish to materialize. In the words of Mrs. Belmont "prayer was for whites, not for blacks" (94) therefore for a black slave it will "do no good for her to attempt prayer" (94). Instead Mrs. Belmont proposes that the only way Frado could be excused from duty was to adhere to her command.

Frado recognized the bias in Mrs. Belmont's tone. The disharmony between her mistress's admission and what the preacher or Aunt Abby had instructed her on prayer was undeniably obvious and her ability to note the difference is due to the education she had received and how she exercised her mind deeply on the things of God. The premise that "prayer was for whites, not for blacks" (94) as admitted by Mrs. Belmont is noteworthy. Frado's recognition that there was no harmony between her mistress's conclusion on prayer and what the preacher or Aunt Abby had instructed or taught her points to an underlying contradiction in the minds of two people of the same religious persuasion and social class.

In analyzing the statement in comparison to the Bible, there is also an element of contradiction. Biblical prayer is simply talking with God. W. L Leifield's article notes that prayer is "communion with God, usually comprising petition, adoration, praise, confession, and thanksgiving. The ultimate object of prayer in both OT and NT is not merely the good of the petitioner but the honor of God's name" (Liefeld, W L 931).

From the commentary above, there is no reference to racial or status distinctions in engaging communion with God unlike Mrs. Bellmont's portrayal of it.

Further on prayer, McClintock notes that "the first definite account of its public observance occurs in the remarkable expression recorded in the lifetime of Enos, the son of Seth: 'Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord' (Genesis 4:26). From that time a life of prayer evidently marked the distinction between the pious and the wicked" ('McClintock and Strong Biblical Encyclopedia). Again, there is no reference to any categorized distinctions racial or status that determine prayer as opposed to the opinion of Mrs. Bellmont. On the contrary, it is sufficiently clear and implied from the Bible that anyone or everyone is free to call upon the name of the Lord. Several references from the bible including the book of Acts state that: "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). This must have been the basis on which the preacher of Aunt Abby's congregational fellowship taught on the subject and Frado's participation in the meetings eventually enlightened her belief in prayer to God whose mercy and grace can be entreated by all including black slaves.

The fact that Mrs. Bellmont feared the scriptural or more generally the religious enlightenment of her chattel is undoubtedly clear in her dislike to Frado attending church service and getting pious to which she complains to her husband Mr. Bellmont and seeks his opinion but to no avail since Mr. Bellmont seems to have no problem with Frado's religious interest.

One major paradox found in slave narratives is the role of Christianity. Christianity had two different practices: the kind which black slaves believed in and the other, which the white American masters believed in and which mostly was used as an excuse to treat the slaves badly and as objects. Without a doubt, it can be said that Christianity was the dominant religion during the period when slavery reached its peak and slaves practiced it as well as it helped them achieve grace although the kind of Christianity the masters appeared to be practicing made no room for hope. Again it is important to note that almost the slaves were Christians and as stated in the earlier chapters, some of these slaves merged their beliefs to the Christianity they were introduced to by their masters and practiced it their own way.

From the narratives under consideration and other narratives for that matter, the writers presented their impression on how it seemed that the more a slaveholder considered himself religious, the harsher he is to his slaves so that being a slave to such a master is likely to be considered the worst calamity a slave could ever face. This in itself was a paradox and one would expect that a Christian master would be one that gave a sense of love and comfort to his slaves. Slaves should be longing to serve masters who were Christians not only in words but also in deeds but unfortunately this was not so as presented by the narratives. The first paradox discussed is that of the kind of Christianity presented to us by both Wilson and Jacobs. There were instances where both Wilson and Jacobs address and explain situations where Christianity was significant and how the white slaveholders averted to their slaves knowledge and interest in Christianity. The paradox identified in the kind of Christianity the slaveholders practiced and how they justified it is noteworthy.

To start with Wilson, there is the use of some Christian imageries and symbols by slaveholders. For instance, Wilson presents Frado's mistress, Mrs. Bellmont as a regular church member and also one dedicated to attending bible studies. She is one who also prays and exhibits some religious traits that easily identify her as a Christian. In sum she seems to possess all the qualities that rightly place her under the category of a Christian. Yet, in spite of the external traits she possesses, her life is totally opposite from what is being portrayed; she is cruel to Frado and has no kind heart towards her.

In *incidents*, Jacobs equally presents a character whose lifestyle is different from what she appears to be. Mention is made of Mrs. Flint who is a member of the church, part of its several services, and also partaker of the Lord's Supper (132). According to Linda, she is not one who appears to be living in her Christian frame of mind and the reason is simply because she acts inhumanely and seems to passively watch the cruel treatment of her slaves (132, 133). She also has an attitude that can be described as insensitive especially her attitude towards her servants when dinner was not served at an exact time. This is an opposite reflection of the life that is expected of Christians.

Jacobs describes slaveholders in a way that presents them as very horrible and insensitive people. She explains how women are considered nothing unless they were able to produce for their masters and how these slave owners who show how mean they are, profess to be Christians (175). This is considered hypocrisy and one of the masters mentioned in this page (175) boasted in the name and standing of a Christian yet could be heartless enough to shoot a woman right through the head. His authority demands that no one questions him, as the belief is that no slave is ever valued and that a master has the right to do what he pleases with his slave who is also considered his own property.

The other reason a master would care less for his slave or place no value on him is simply because the master has hundreds of them and has nothing to lose. Jacobs uses this master's self-proclaimed Christianity as a point to clearly reveal what she believes is the true perception and reality of Christianity: "the young lady was very pious and there was some reality of Christianity...her religion was not a garb put on for Sunday and laid aside till Sunday returned again" (175). This, in Jacobs's opinion, was an example of the hypocrisy that was evident in the lives of the whites in the community as they were concerned more with the external show of their Christianity instead of the inner character.

There are several instances where both Jacobs and Wilson write on the hypocrisy of the lives of the whites especially the slaveholders when it came to the role of church service. As Raboteau adds, the church is what they called it but the preachers themselves led double lives or lives contrary to what they preached. Most of the things they focused on were how servants ought to submit and obey their masters. This was often repeated at each service so much so that the slaves themselves were aware of the topic for the next sermon even before the day of the service itself.

In chapter 13 of Jacob's work, she points out that religion was used as a tool to prevent murder as the masters came to a conclusion that the slaves needed enough of religious instructions to prevent them from murdering their masters. There is the mention of three churches - Methodist, Baptist and Episcopal- in place which, in their own way, made

arrangements to hold services for the black slaves although there was a bit of difficulty to decide a suitable place for them to worship.

Jacobs gives an example of the Rev. Mr. Pike and how he always gave out the portions of scripture to which he wished the black slaves read and respond. For example, “Servants be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ” (198). A good look at his entire sermon and one could see how he only addressed slaves as though all they did was to steal and to disobey their masters. There was not a line that was addressed to masters and the way they related to their slaves or mistreated them. Scriptures and sermons of this kind created the impression to slaves, especially those who could not read nor write, that their masters were justified in the way they treated their slaves and how right the notion that slaves were just properties and made to work and serve was. This way of preaching and the use of the bible by slaveholders led some slaves to distinguish between their master’s bible Christianity and the slaves own experiential Christianity.

In Raboteau’s work on slave religion, a former slave, Charlie Van Dyke, bitterly complained about how sometimes even in the preaching of a sermon nothing about Jesus was ever said in the preaching and most of the time the overseers are around to ensure that these preachers talked the way they were ordered to and this included black preachers. These preachers and especially the black ones were also careful to repeat whatever they had been instructed by their white masters as they were afraid to do otherwise (213, 214).

Looking at how superiority of white people is presented in these slave narratives, it is right to assume that the idea of superiority influenced black writers so that they equally questioned whether people with dark complexion were able to fully live Christian lives just as much as the whites do or claim for themselves. This notion of racial superiority is mentioned in an article by Andrea S. (Schaumlöffel 7–9).

An example is Harriet Wilson’s presentation of Frado as a character. Frado concludes that she doesn’t like God based on the fact that she questions why God made her black and made Mrs. Belmont white: Frado wonders why God did not make both of them

white. As a writer, Wilson could have presented Frado as one who questioned why Mrs. Belmont was not created black but rather Wilson creates a character who desires to be white and thus hates God for making her black. This can be Wilson's silent admission on the superiority of whites over blacks.

Wilson also presents uncle James as a character who, though a Christian and white, does not explain to Frado about the truth that there was nothing wrong in being black and that it had nothing to do or say about her being human. Instead his silence causes Frado to believe that there is a difference in being white or black. She also concludes that if God created these two different colors, then heaven was for only people who are good and white.

Mrs. Belmont portrayed the assumed effect of Christianity on slaves who were committed to this religion. Slave masters were not in support of the idea that their slaves could be literate especially with regards to the reading of the bible. There was the fear that the slaves would gain knowledge and also have power to withstand the abuse they were facing from their masters. Perhaps the slave owners were aware that the kind of teachings they taught their slaves and their corresponding actions were in conflict, thus did not want the slaves to acquire knowledge in order to expose their hypocrisy. Whatever the reason was for the slave masters, it was evident that the slave owners simply reacted to the acquisition of knowledge and identity.

Other elements of contradiction are visible in Jacobs' observation and description of the clergyman as blind as hypocrites (203,204). She notes that the clergyman who visits the South has a somewhat nebulous persuasion that slavery is wrong. The contradiction is beyond the clergyman to the slaveholders and the slaves. When the slaveholders receive a first time clergyman from the South, their suspicion that the clergyman has a feeling however unclear that slavery is wrong makes them act in certain deliberate ways. Slaveholders involved the clergyman in discussions on theology and talks that suggested close connections thus corroborating the clergyman's convictions.

The naivety of the clergyman is further exploited as these favored household slaves claim that they do not want to be free when quizzed by their masters in the presence of the clergyman. Blindly, the clergyman returns, with the notion that slavery in the South is a beautiful “patriarchal institution”(204) and the slaves prefer slavery to freedom as a result of certain religious privileges they have as well as the privilege to have “hallelujah meetings”(204). Thus his post-visit impressions are counter-intuitive to his pre-visit mental and emotional representation of slavery.

Although the slave holders contributed significantly to the skewed knowledge discovery of the clergyman, Jacobs does not exonerate the clergyman completely because she sees him as a “doctor of divinity” (203), one whose awareness and genuineness ought to make him sensitive to the plight of the poor and outcast in society. Besides, that the slaveholders, when the clergyman was their more dignified guest, would entertain him in the social space of the few favored slaves who were privileged to live in comfortable huts and engage theological discussion and issues suggested a somewhat homogeneous existence between them and their slaves, is a sharp contradiction to the actual treatment meted out to the majority of slaves. As Jacobs notes, the reality of the slave condition is that there are “half starved wretches toiling from dawn till dark on the plantations, of mothers shrieking for their children, torn from their arms by slave traders...”(204), this counter perception reveals the contradiction.

Not only do we see the hypocrisy and contradictions in the slaveholder and clergy as noted above, the slaves show the same. Through the discourses of the slave masters, power relations were mediated and hegemony and dominance enacted over the slaves, resistance became a default reaction by the slaves. The resistance to slavery and struggle for freedom became the identity of the slaves no matter the temporary comforts extended to them by their sometimes-kind owners. To this extent, the answer of the ‘favored household’ slaves “O no massa” (204) when their master asked if they wanted to be free in the presence of the clergy man is a contradiction of the identity of the slave at the time. One factor that accounted for such a contradiction in the slaves believing and standing for one thing but confessing otherwise is an imposed identity negotiated by the rhetoric of fear and death used by the slaveowners.

Another paradox is found in *Our Nig*, where Mrs. Belmont threatens to whip Frado to death if she ever tried to be religious. Prior to this threat by Mrs. Belmont, Frado had been to church and the minister had inquired of her troubles and encouraged Frado to come over to his house so she could express herself. This caused some of the neighbors to report to Mrs. Belmont that Frado had related her experience to the minister. Mrs. Belmont assuming Frado had spoken of how she has been whipped, threatened Frado. In this scene, even Frado is appalled by how Mrs. Belmont treats her considering she is a “professor of religion” (104). One would expect that for a woman who is part of the church, she will be tolerable enough to at least allow Frado to be religious. Mrs. Belmont’s attitude causes Frado to change her desire to want to go to heaven. Why would Frado think this way? Obviously Mrs. Belmont presents a wrong picture of heaven. Mrs. Belmont’s action and attitude in general towards Frado, causes Frado to doubt if such personalities were allowed to be in heaven. What Frado sees in Mrs. Belmont is a religious personality totally different and contrary to what people like James and aunt Abby have presented to her. Mrs. Belmont’s life therefore is a paradox and Frado sees that after her own personal interest in being religious.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Several examples regarding the paradoxes evident in slave narratives, and especially from the works of Jacobs and Wilson have been discussed. Some of the themes can be discussed further in this concluding chapter.

On the theme of love for one's neighbor, there was a contradiction in the application of the term neighbor as seen in the Bible text "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself...Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them" (Luke 10:27b, Luke 6:31 KJV). That Jacobs had difficulty in understanding the meaning of the text above is evident in her response "But I was her slave" (128). By this response, Jacobs saw the apparent contradiction in the meaning her mistress sought to convey to her and what she thought was the objective meaning of the scripture, which included her in the category "neighbor".

Similarly, in *Our Nig*, the theme of love takes on another twist as it relates to those who hate you or enemies. The bible text says: "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you (Matthew 5:44 KJV)". To Frado, fulfilling this text, to a significant extent had to do with getting rid of Mary her mistress's kin, and that included death. Aunt Abby's admission that it was wrong to wish someone dead underscored the contradiction in the way that Frado viewed the statement.

The theme of obedience as emphasized by Mr. Pike through his sermon to the black slaves presented a paradox. Presenting his message from Ephesians: "servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ" (Ephesians 6:5), Mr. Pike emphasized obligated service as the only requirement for pleasing the slave masters. The text of scripture cannot be isolated from its broad context and narrowed down to an interpretation that put the slave masters in a better light to receive loyalty and deference. Rather, Ephesians 6:5 cited above ought to be compared to Ephesians 6:9 -"And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that

he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him”- to make it complete. The slave masters did not take reciprocity and equality, which are the essence of the texts, into consideration. On this basis, it was absurd to assume, for example, that God was more interested in seeing the slaves obey their masters than having the masters treat their slaves with in the same way as they expected obedience.

Furthermore was the illusion that, being a slave in the South was better than being free in the North in the antebellum South. This theory was not based on any expressly stated bible text but rather a perspective. It can be observed that in the 19th century in particular it contradicts logical reasoning to suggest that there is freedom in slavery in one place (south) but plausibly, not necessarily, slavery in another (north). The only group of people, who were free, was the whites who were also slave owners.

There was a contradiction in making a claim that one could not know the will of God at one time and counter-claim at another time that they were certain of God’s will in a situation. This was exemplified by the conversation between Benjamin and his grandmother on the theme of forgiveness. Benjamin had just been recaptured after an attempted escape and he faces severe punishments. His grandmother entreats him to ask for pardon but Benjamin boldly shows his disagreement with his grandmother. His reason was that, like many slaves in this era, he believed that it is both ridiculous and self-contradictory for a hardworking slave seeking to flee from the wickedness and inhuman treatments of his master to be commanded to ask for forgiveness from his cruel master.

The discussion did not progress without the observation of a paradox in the moral defect in one of the most pervasive areas of slave abuse, sex and its consequences. The main issue was adultery and an instant from Jacob’s work is the situation where a pastor has offspring by a woman not his wife, and is dismissed by the church on the grounds that the woman is white. However, if the woman is colored, it does not hinder the pastor from maintaining his position as the pastor (204).

What is interesting from the above assessment in the light of scripture is that the bible states: “You shall not commit adultery”(Exodus 20:14 NKJV) and "If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them shall die — the man that lay with the woman, and the woman; so you shall put away the evil from Israel”. (Deuteronomy 22:22 NKJV) This assessment therefore reveals a striking paradox.

Black slave women in this era had no right to decline the sexual pursuits of their white male owners. In the absence of consensus, force was applied and they were abused sexually. It was not possible for a black man, whether bond or free to marry a white woman in this era due to race and color discriminations. It therefore follows that the above statement most preferably referred to a white pastor and a black slave woman affair. It is a paradox that a pastor forfeits his job on the basis of his adulterous relations with one (white) woman but maintains it all the same when involved with another (black) woman. It is also contradictory that although the bible condemns adultery outright, the slave masters were selective in demoralizing the act although they claimed they were guided by the Bible.

It was also noted how in the death of Philip, Linda’s uncle, he was eulogized as a good man and his memory supposedly honored by the slave masters. Here was an observation of falsehood and a sharp contradiction that betrayed the genuineness in their claim of calling Philip a good man and a useful citizen (350).

Lastly, one important aspect of Christianity mentioned in this work is prayer. Both slave masters and slaves modeled it differently, though. Wilson portrays Mrs. Belmont’s philosophy on prayer as one that gives us grounds to conclude her reply to Frado’s quest for pardon from work due to ill-health that “prayer was for whites, not for blacks”(94). This is not just a false belief but also an attempt to give prayer a racial color and portray God as a racist. It is also a paradox especially when the biblical foundation of prayer teaches all men to “...call upon the name of the Lord” (Genesis 4:26).

The circumstances and instances explored in the two works *Incidents* and *Our Nig* have highlighted some of the deep-rooted moral and religious issues in 19th century slavery in America. More specifically, they have shed light on the claim that most of the actions and reactions of both the slave masters and slaves were characterized by some elements of contradictions or paradoxes in relation to what they believed and how they eventually acted.

From the various examples gathered from the two works, one can conclude that, in addition to the specific accounts of slave experiences in the slave narratives, it is observed that there are noticeable elements of paradoxes in actions and speeches of slave masters and slaves. Along with the contradictions or paradoxes pointed out were some understandings of possible reasons behind these paradoxes. Some of the reasons included religious piety on the part of the slave masters, ignorance or illiteracy on the part of the slaves, race and culture.

This work does not have the full scope of the topic of this thesis. Nevertheless, it raises the awareness about paradoxical reflections in slave narratives in general and in *Incidents* and *Our Nig* in particular.

Primary Sources

Jacobs, Harriet A. 'Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl. Written by Herself'.

Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass, An American Slave & Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl. An Introduction by Kwame Anthony Appiah. United State of America: Modern library, 2000. 125–353. Print.

Wilson, Harriet E. *Our Nig: Or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black.* 2005th ed.

Dover, 2014. Print.

Works Cited

Basu-Zharku, Iulia O. 'Slavery and Religion in the Antebellum South'. *Student Pulse* 3.01 (2011): 1,2. Print.

'BibleGateway.com: A Searchable Online Bible in over 150 Versions and 50 Languages.' N.p., n.d. Web. 15 Nov. 2016.
<<https://www.biblegateway.com/>>.

Blight, David W. 'The Slave Narratives: A Genre and a Source | The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History'. N.p., 6 Aug. 2012. Web. 29 Apr. 2015. <<http://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/literature-and-language-arts/essays/slave-narratives-genre-and-source>>.

Bradford H., Sarah. 'Sarah H. Bradford. Harriet, the Moses of Her People.' *HARRIET The Moses of Her People*. N.p., 2004. Web. 18 Oct. 2016.
<<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/harriet/harriet.html>>.

Brundage, Fitzhugh. 'American Slavery: A Look Back at The Peculiar Institution'. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 15 (1997): 118–120. Web.

Campbell, Donna M. 'The Slave, Freedom, or Liberation Narrative'. N.p., 2015. Web. 10 Nov. 2016.
<<http://public.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/slave.htm>>.

Dodson Howard, Chief. 'African American Women Writers of the 19th Century'. N.p., 1999. Web. 24 Aug. 2016.
<http://digital.nypl.org/schomburg/writers_aa19/intro.html>.

Douglass, Frederick. 'Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass'. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave & Incidents in the Life of a*

Slave Girl. 2000th ed. United State of America: Modern library, 2000. 1–113. Print.

Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Negro Church. Report of a Social Study Made under the Direction of Atlanta University; Together with the Proceedings of the Eighth Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, Held at Atlanta University, May 26th, 1903*. Atlanta, Ga: N.p. Web. 3 Sept. 2016.
<<http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/negrochurch/dubois.html>>.

Fredrickson, M. George. 'The Historical Origins and Development of Racism'. *RACE - The Power of an Illusion . Background Readings / PBS*. N.p., 2003. Web. 14 Oct. 2016. <http://www.pbs.org/race/000_About/002_04-background-02-01.htm>.

Grendler, Marcella, Andrew Leiter, and Jill Sexton. 'Guide to Religious Content in Slave Narratives'. N.p., 2004. Web. 4 May 2015.
<<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/religiouscontent.html>>.

Jacobs, Harriet A. 'Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl. Written by Herself'. *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass, An American Slave & Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl. An Introduction by Kwame Anthony Appiah*. United State of America: Modern library, 2000. 125–353. Print.

Liefeld, W L. 'Prayer, In International Standard Bible Encyclopedia'. *Prayer, In International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Vol. 3. T & T CLARK LTD ATTN SUBSCRIPTION DEPT 59 GEORGE ST, EDINBURGH EH2 2LQ, MIDLOTHIAN, SCOTLAND, 1982. Print.

MacKethan, Lucinda. 'American Slave Narrators, Freedom's Story, TeacherServe®, National Humanities Center'. N.p., Apr. 2010. Web. 27

Sept. 2015.

<about:reader?url=http%3A%2F%2Fnationalhumanitiescenter.org%2Fts
erve%2Ffreedom%2F1609-1865%2Fessays%2Fdouglassjacobs.htm>.

Maffly-Kipp, Laurie. 'African American Christianity, Pt. I: To the Civil War, The
Nineteenth Century, Divining America: Religion in American History,
TeacherServe, National Humanities Center'. N.p., 2005. Web. 14 Sept.
2015.

<[http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nineteen/nkeyinfo/aareligi
on.htm](http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nineteen/nkeyinfo/aareligion.htm)>.

Mbiti, J.S. *African Religions & Philosophy*. Praeger, 1969. Web.

<<https://books.google.no/books?id=XgpPAAAAMAAJ>>. Heinemann
Educational Books Paperbacks.

'McClintock and Strong Biblical Cyclopedia Introduction and Main Index.'

McClintock and Strong Biblical Cyclopedia Online. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 Nov.
2016. <<http://www.biblicalcyclopedia.com/>>.

Mintz, Steven. 'Facts about the Slave Trade and Slavery | The Gilder Lehrman
Institute of American History'. N.p., 30 July 2014. Web. 5 Sept. 2015.

<[http://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/slavery-and-anti-
slavery/resources/facts-about-slave-trade-and-slavery](http://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/slavery-and-anti-slavery/resources/facts-about-slave-trade-and-slavery)>.

Morgan, Winifred. 'Gender-Related Difference in the Slave Narratives of Harriet
Jacobs and Frederick Douglass'. *American Studies* (1994): 73–94. Print.

Raboteau, Albert J. 'Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum
South'. *New York* 48 (1978): 213–321. Print.

- Sambol-Tosco, Koberly. 'Slavery and the Making of America.Religion'. 2004. Web.
<<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/experience/religion/history2.html>>.
- Schaumlöffel, Andrea. 'To What Extent Do Nineteenth-Century Texts Affirm
Notions of Racial Superiority? Shown on the Basis of Douglass' Narrative
of the Life of Frederick Douglass and Wilson's Our Nig'. 7–9. Print.
- Schroeder, Elizabeth R. 'Anger, Sentimentality, and the Female Slave Experience:
Harriet Jacobs, Harriet E. Wilson, Hannah Crafts, and Mary Prince'.
(2003): n. pag. Print.
- 'Slavery and the Law in Virginia : The Colonial Williamsburg Official History &
Citizenship Site'. N.p., 2016. Web. 28 Apr. 2016.
<<http://www.history.org/history/teaching/slavelaw.cfm>>.
- 'Slaves Are Prohibited to Read and Write by Law | North Carolina Law (1830-
31)'. N.p., n.d. Web. 8 July 2016.
<<http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/slaveprohibit.html>>.
- Swatos, Jr, William H, ed. 'African American Religious Experience'. *Encyclopedia
of Religion and Social Science* 1998. Web. 6 Sept. 2016.
<<http://hirr.hartsem.edu/ency/african.htm>>.
- Williams, Jay. 'Christianity and Slavery'. *The Bible and Interpretation*. N.p., Nov.
2009. Web. 2 June 2015.
<<http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/slave357904.shtml>>.
- Wilson, Harriet E. *Our Nig: Or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black*. 2005th ed.
Dover, 2014. Print.

Bibliography

American History and Peculiar Institution

14.Aug.2016 <http://www.ushistory.org/us/27.asp>

Fisch, Audrey, ed. *The Cambridge companion to the African American slave narrative*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Veney, Cassandra. "[Abolitionism](#)." New Dictionary of the History of Ideas. 2005. *Encyclopedia.com*. 5 Apr. 2016 <<http://www.encyclopedia.com>>.

BIOGRAPHY

Miriam Adwoa Ganaah is a Ghanaian-born Norwegian citizen. After high school studies and a certificate from Gerhard Schønings, Miriam pursued a bachelor's degree in European Studies with a foreign language from NTNU, Norway and completed in 2012. She has volunteered as a SIT Daycare Parent student representative as well as part of a student representative council of Gerhard Schønning High School. She was also a member of the Reference Group at the English Department. She has worked as a leader for university students housing community. Miriam is part of the Betel church community and serves as a member and of the church's music ministry. Miriam is married to Pastor John Ganaah, a teacher at the Bible School in Trondheim, with whom she has two children.