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## **Free will between Slavery and Freedom: A Study of Linda Brent in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl***

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### **Abstract**

Harriet Jacobs was a writer and a reformer. As a female writer in the nineteenth century, Jacobs was a slave with an agency. She wrote her narrative as a means of resisting the system of slavery at that time. Her book *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (1842) reflects upon the exploitation of the black people and the need to change the hierarchal attitude that governs the white-black paradigm. She was engaged in many abolitionist events and her anti-slavery approach appeared clearly in her writings. She shares Du Bois ideas about freedom and emancipation and the need for political and cultural change. Thus, Du Bois's theory provides a framework for her autobiographical novel where she portrays Linda Brent, the main character, a strong-willed lady whose path to freedom came after an

agonizing journey. Despite differences in cultural status and upbringing, both Jacobs and Du Bois go from a subjective representation of a personal experience to an objective statement about the general conditions of black people in slavery, and the discrimination black people face during their lives. To Jacobs, freedom is a choice a person has to fight for, and a mental process that is accomplished through resistance and protest. Her strategies of resistance came through three points in the novel; the family, who helped her through her journey; pregnancy and the choice of the father of her kids; and finally motherhood and the promise of a better future for her children. This paper concludes that Jacobs's novel is a narrative antecedent for slaves' voices and a reclamation of identity after slavery.

**Keywords:** black female writer, Du Bois, Harriet Jacobs, resistance, slavery.

### **Introduction**

In writing her book, Jacobs defies the dominance of the white figure. She was a slave who refused the sexual offers of her master, chose the father of her children, and escaped to the North on a long, horrible journey to seek her freedom. She documented her life in the story of Linda Brent to make her journey an example and a lesson to all the free spirits. Her book is a cultural production that demonstrates the ravages of sexualized violence and self-realization of the need to make changes in the white-black relation in the society. She believes that freedom is the freedom of the mind as well as of the body. In this, she shares W. E. B. Du Bois ideas about the freedom of body and mind. Their aptitude for emancipation is ardent, enthusiastic, and radical. Du Bois then becomes the model that can best analyze Linda's idea about slavery because her writing protests against the power of the master through the power of the body for she "translates her body into a political instrument, of sorts, to engage in a form of civil resistance to slavery" (Daniels–Rauterkus, 2019, p.498). Her body becomes her mechanism to resist and reject the sexual harassment of her master and to make a political statement by defying the nineteenth-century conventions and by choosing the father of her children. Therefore, she picked a man that has no control over her mind or body.

The book projects her personal experience and the psychological understanding of Jacobs, it portrays how slavery surroundings cause abject

humiliation that runs so rampant, however, Jacobs succeeds in turning the violence inflicted on the mental self into a statement of abolishment. In her writings, she reflects on how the female slave's psychological and emotional recognition and interpretation is a reflection of the system of slavery; she expresses "I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others" (Jacobs, 2005, p. 92). This means that black women suffer slavery as an ideologically structured system of oppression played by their masters and mistresses.

Jacobs was born in Edenton, North Carolina, but soon became an orphan. At the age of twelve, she was mentioned in the will of her dead mistress as a gift to the three-year old nephew of the deceased (Yellin, 2004). In her teenage years, Jacobs was harassed sexually by the father of her owner, yet she refused all his advances because she did not want to be another possession of the man. At the age of sixteen, she made a choice to be pregnant and have children with a neighboring white person instead of her owner. When her master discovered that she was pregnant, he moved her to another plantation and threatened to sell her kids. This leads Jacob to hide from everyone, except her family, for seven years in the attic of her grandmother, a small place where she could barely move. In 1842, Jacob ran away to the North and managed to reunite with her children with the help of her brother and the father of her children. After settling down, Jacobs and her brother became an advocate of abolition of slavery (Yellin, 2000).

Jacobs struggled to prove her identity as a female slave seeking the freedom of her body and spirit. Her narrative became what Du Bois called "a realm of true freedom" (1965, p. 165) defying the system of slavery and the inequality between races. She challenges the white-dominant culture of masters, and documented her experience in order to be a living example of the strength of resistance ever done by a black woman at the nineteenth century. Her ideas about emancipation are similar to that of Du Bois who assumed that "blacks should pursue a more demanding tone of protest and ask for equal civil rights as lawful citizens of the country. He insisted on equality in everything" (qtd. In Ithawi, 2021, p. 50) and also:

I dream of a world of infinitive and valuable variety... all possible manner of difference, topped with freedom of soul to do and be, and freedom of thought to give to a world and build into it, all wealth of

inborn individuality. (1965, p. 165)

Both Du Bois and Jacobs value the freedom of the soul as well as the body. Jacob's writings go align with Du Bois theory to fight slavery as both share the idea of equality challenging the hierarchical dominance of the white. DuBois suggests in his (1897) article, "The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, — this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost". This idea of double-consciousness in which the slave looks at himself through the eyes of his white master, or through the nation that has trained him to value himself through the contempt of racist white culture lies at the core of Du Bois's theory. It is the idea of how slave people position themselves among the aggression of the white nations. Jacobs refused such treatment and thus challenged all the norms of her generation. She succeeded in accomplishing her goal through three points on which this paper sheds light, these points are family, pregnancy, and motherhood. Through these points, Jacobs succeeds in reflecting upon her journey toward freedom that replicates De Bois idea of a "new America." Jacobs's situation as a black writer in the nineteenth century defies the whole system of slavery as she stood, in Deborah Gray White's (1985) words, "at the crossroads of two of the most well-developed ideologies in America, that regarding women and that regarding the Negro" (p. 27). This may lead us to assume that her ideologies of physical and mental freedom of Jacobs have emanated from her realization of the importance of educating people about her story where the inner struggle against slavery is turned outward through a story that follows her journey towards freedom. Jacobs's self-defense appears in politicizing her experiences as a female slave as well as a black woman writer, she states:

Reader, it is not to awaken sympathy for myself that I am telling you truthfully what I suffered in slavery. I do it to kindle a flame of compassion in your hearts for my sisters who are still in bondage, suffering as I once suffered. (Jacobs, 2005, p. 62)

The uniqueness of Jacobs's work is that it was written by herself, an image of a black female in slavery and/or an image of a slave woman defying social standards. The story is told from a witness's perspective. This is basically

what places her text among the canon of slavery, it is the sufferings of female slaves, the social resistance, and the mechanics of empowerment to overcome the strategies of the white-dominant society. Thus, it is noticeable that few studies have been done about women writers who were slaves themselves. However, this specific text has been studied widely to designate racist issues in American history, slavery, plantation, and freedom. There have been some studies that draw comparisons between this text and texts written by contemporary writers such as Toni Morrison, with her long list of fictional writings concentrating on slavery; Frederick Douglass, who wrote his own experience when he was a slave; and Anita Hill, who reflected on her account of sexual abuse within the environment of a certain institution (Berlant, 1978 and Braxton, 1988). Nevertheless, all these experiences differ from that of Jacobs in form and content.

### **Slavery and Enslaved Families:**

The ability to make choices is what distinguishes a free person from a slave, or this is what we like to think. Linda Brent, the heroine in this novel proves the opposite. She is a black slave who was imprisoned in a frameset previously by society, yet she refused her life and chose to act according to her own will and belief away from any societal pressure. This novel is an autobiographical account of an anti-slavery female journey to freedom. In the novel, Jacobs projects the sexual exploitations of an African- American female-slave. Through the character of Linda Brent, Jacobs exposes the relationship between the white master and the black slave when a slave has a determination and a plan to lead her/his own life. The aim of this paper is to argue that slavery is a strategy that a black woman can defeat, physically and mentally. I acknowledge there are lots of events and circumstances that alienate the experience of black people and the history of slavery by simplifying the horror of the experience. This project does not attempt to do that. The real concern of this paper is to shed light on the importance of the strategies that help achieve her freedom, whether external circumstances or inner concerns; such issues separate the binary of freedom/ slavery in the mind of a female slave-like Jacobs. Linda never feels that she was a slave and thus refused the sexual advances and the cruelty of her master only because he insisted on treating her like “a piece of merchandise” (Jacobs, 2005,

p.16). To understand such a mentality, the character will be analyzed according to her three strategies of resistance: the family, pregnancy, and motherhood. These three points expose how an individual can stand against the collective, especially if the legacy of the collective is based on malicious behavior.

Linda's family and relatives provide a supportive and loving environment. Despite being born slaves, they encourage her physical and spiritual growth. Her mother died when she was six, followed by the mysterious death of her father after a couple of years, but she was treated nicely by her mistress who was taught her to read and write. However, when her mistress died, Linda was given as part of the will of the deceased. She understands she is a slave at the age of twelve when Dr. Flint, the father of her three-year-old owner, became basically her master, a master that wanted to abuse her sexually and physically. Linda was not alone in this situation since all her family was owned by the same master and thus understand the agonies of slavery. Therefore, they always supported her decisions. Her Grandmother, Aunt Martha, supported Linda and strengthened her will against her master. The grandmother created a shield of protection against the harms of slavery. Witnessing the selling of her children and grandchildren, the grandmother believed that buying freedom was probably the best option for slave people. Therefore, the grandmother always tried "to cheer us with hopeful words, and they found an echo in the credulous hearts of youth" (Jacobs, 2005, p. 40). Indeed, when Linda was hiding in the garret, the grandmother got really sick because of anxiety and fear for her destiny that she could not sleep or eat well, however, she took charge of the responsibility for Linda's children despite refusing Linda's path and decisions; Linda expresses her feelings during the time she was hiding in the garret:

In the midst of my illness, grandmother broke down under the weight of anxiety and toil. The idea of losing her, who had always been my best friend and a mother to my children, was the sorest trial I had yet had. O, how earnestly I prayed that she might recover! How hard it seemed, that I could not tend upon her, who had so long and so tenderly watched over me! (Jacobs, 2005, p. 169)

Linda also notes that everyone "who knew her [grandmother] respected her intelligence and good character" (42) and that her grandmother's "presence in

the neighborhood was some protection to... [her]. Though she had been a slave, Dr. Flint was afraid of her” (Jacobs, 2005, p. 62). Despite being the master, Dr. Flint felt nervous around the grandmother because she was a respected person. The influential grandmother was allowed to open a bakery shop beside her work in the master’s house. The grandmother’s plan was to collect enough money to buy her loved ones one after the other. In this, the grandmother’s ways of fighting slavery differ from that of Linda. The grandmother disagrees with Linda’s method to fight for her freedom since she assumes that family is more important than anything. She believes in the power of family and the need to sacrifice in order to keep the family intact. She even expresses these feelings to Linda: “Stand by your [Linda] own children and suffer with them till death. Nobody respects a mother who forsakes her children; and if you leave them you will never have a happy moment. If you go, you will make me miserable the short time I have left to live” (Jacobs, 2005, p. 132). The grandmother acted selfishly here because she was making Linda feel guilty, not only for leaving her grandmother but also for leaving her children. Linda’s approach toward freedom differs because she has a different personal experience. Being a victim of sexual harassment from her early years provoke Linda to refuse such exploitation and fight for her dream of freedom. This point clarifies the disparity in perspectives between Linda and her grandmother. While the grandmother thinks submissively of appropriating the idea of slavery, Linda has a more rebellious spirit resisting the violence of the master internally and externally. Despite this, the grandmother always supported Linda even when the latter decided to run to the North and leave her children behind. The grandmother understands that her mission is to advise not to impose her ideas and thus supported Linda with all her decisions. Together with Linda’s brother and uncle, they make an ally to offer the necessary aid to make Linda determine her fate, regardless of her position as a slave.

Just like the grandmother’s attitude, Linda’s brother, William, and her two uncles, Benjamin and Phillip, help her overcome obstacles and grow mentally. Each one of them helps in constructing her inner persistence against oppression as well as developing her mechanics of resistance. Benjamin becomes the role model for Linda because he is the first one to run from captivity to the north. Benjamin escapes after striking his master who kept on

hitting him: “his master was angry, and began to whip him. He resisted. Master and slave fought, and finally the master was thrown” (52). His journey to freedom becomes a legend because he was caught, and imprisoned but managed to escape again to the North after a long-suffering journey from torture to freedom. Linda described Benjamin as having “a spirit too bold and daring for a slave” (Jacobs, 2005, p.49). Despite getting his freedom, Aunt Martha always expressed sympathy towards his sufferings and also her disapproval for leaving the family, even if he was seeking freedom, Linda remarks:

Her memory always flew back at once to the sufferings of her bright and handsome son, Benjamin, the youngest and dearest of her flock. So, whenever I alluded to the subject, she would groan out, “O, don’t think of it, child. You’ll break my heart.” ...but my brother William and my children were continually beckoning me to the north. (Jacobs, 2005, p. 200)

Linda sees his journey worth all the troubles because he finally succeeds in getting his own freedom. Here, the image of the handsome uncle is interrelated with the image of the brother and the children of Linda who are urging her to escape. Except for the grandmother, it seems that all the other figures of the family long to escape and free themselves. Sympathy urges the grandmother to feel sorry for Linda as she felt for Benjamin because both are thinking in escaping despite the hardships of the journey. However, the grandmother realizes that such spirits as Linda and her uncle can never live in captivity. Thus, she never held back any of them. When Linda escaped to the North, Benjamin visited her. He was pale and sick, so Linda took care of him and placed him with William, her brother. Thus, finally, the whole family gathered in the North except for grandmother and Uncle Philip.

William, on the other hand, experienced an identity crisis when he was a child. Being a slave, he was torn between obeying his master or his father. He is lost between his duty towards his family and the urge to fulfil the orders of his master. When he was a child, he was summoned by both his father and his mistress at the same time, and because he was a child with no sense of duty towards the family, he answered the mistress leaving his father waiting but then he is “to learn his first lesson of obedience to a master” (Jacobs, 2005, p. 40) when his family make it clear to him that he has a free spirit and that



family comes first. This ‘double consciousness’ that William experienced is what Du Bois criticized in his theory:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One feel his two-ness, — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (1897)

This means that the identity of William as a slave prevails on the expenses of his individuality and personal identity. William here positioned himself at an intersection between slavery and family duty. Most of the black people at that time suffer such a social-identity-crisis because of the effect of slavery and degradation: “The African Americans or the Negroes or the colored or the blacks had no identity of their own” (Shaan, 2020, p. 70). The idea represented by Jacobs here through William moves from the micro to the macro, and from subjectivity to objectivity which means the double-consciousness of William was a normal reaction by most slaves at that time. In mentioning this in her book, Jacobs is actually setting an example of how slavery disturbs the spirit, mind, and social identify of the black people. She contends the conditions that give the right for white people to control the black culture of men and women:

Women are considered of no value, unless they continually increase their owner’s stock. They are put on a par with animals. This same master shot a woman through the head, who had run away and been brought back to him. No one called him to account for it. If a slave resisted being whipped, the bloodhounds were unpacked, and set upon him, to tear his flesh from his bones. (85)

To Linda, such a crisis destroys the spirit of freedom and thus needs to be protested against. Because William’s father had a free spirit, he understood that William’s identity is derived from the degraded status of slavery, and thus attempted to modify such a situation. He reproached William and made him realize the importance of family and freedom. This free nature and high soul of the father seemed to appeal to William who grew up to be a young man with strong will and defiant spirit. Therefore, when Dr. Flint imprisoned him to make him confess Linda’s secret place, William was courageous

enough to handle the prison and face the tyranny of the master without revealing the secret. He was imprisoned in the same place with Linda's children so he started taking care of them until they were purchased by Mr. Sands, Linda's lover and the father of the children. However, William refused slavery as a concept rejecting the whole dehumanizing system even if it was by a kind master, and thus he eventually escaped to the North.

These three characters played an important role in developing the personality of Linda. They tended her when she was hiding in the garret, a place "never occupied by anything but rats and mice" (Jacobs, 2005, p. 159) and she stayed there for seven years: "family members do what they can to comfort this young woman who seems in the midst of sacrificing her own life" (Kreiger, 2008, p. 616). Her body was all aching and numb:

My limbs were benumbed by inaction, and the cold filled them with cramp. I had a very painful sensation of coldness in my head; even my face and tongue stiffened, and I lost the power of speech. Of course it was impossible, under the circumstances, to summon any physician. My brother William came and did all he could for me. (Jacobs, 2005, p. 168)

To Linda, such a condition was better than living in slavery. She was even ready to sacrifice her life for her freedom. One day, when she was in the attic, she felt sick but refused to go out and visit the doctor so William felt sorry for her and wanted to find a way to help her. He then went to the physician and describe Linda's symptoms as his own only to fetch her all the needed ointments and medicine to treat her condition and help her restore her wellbeing. William, his uncle, and the grandmother manifested family love and support throughout Linda's journey to freedom even though, sometimes, they did not agree with her decisions. When the grandmother knew Linda was pregnant, she dismissed her away because she brought shame on the family. However, after a while, family love prevails, Linda explains:

I knelt before her, and told her the things that had poisoned my life; how long I had been persecuted; that I saw no way of escape; and in an hour of extremity I had become desperate. She listened in silence. I told her I would bear anything and do anything, if in time I had hopes of obtaining her forgiveness. I begged of her to pity me, for my dead mother's sake. And she did pity me. She did not say, "I forgive you;" but she looked at me lovingly, with her eyes full of tears. She laid her old hand gently on my head, and

murmured, "Poor child! Poor child". (Jacobs, 2005, p. 94) The grandmother understood the agonizing circumstances that led Linda to her decision. Accordingly, forgiving Linda for her adultery implies an inner recognition of the uncanny position of black women at that time. A position that, later on, the grandmother accepted willingly when she loved and raised up Linda's children. The image of the grandmother represents love and support and the insistence on building strong ties between family members. She accepted Linda's flows though the latter disgraced the family's honor with her choice. The grandmother believes that family's bond should be a strong commitment than anything in the world. Such a bond enhances the mechanisms of resistance and moves them forward, towards the North and towards freedom. Linda's steps towards freedom were carefully calculated including her decision to be pregnant and also the choice of the father of her children.

### **Slavery and the Ability to Make Choices:**

Linda chose Mr. Sands to be the father of her children. She understood that she needed to make a radical choice because Dr. Flint was tightening the circle around her with his cruelty and sexual harassment. Linda rejected any arrangements made by him but could not ostensibly declare her refusal. Her sexual involvement with Mr. Sands was her political resistance against the system of slavery. By her choice, she declares that she is not owned by any master and that she has the right to choose the father of her children. Linda described Mr. Sands: "He was a man of more generosity and feeling than my master, and I thought my freedom could be easily obtained from him" (Jacobs, 2005, p.91). She figured out that this kind lawyer might even take care of her children in the future, and she was right since Mr. Sands deceives Dr. Flint into buying his children to send them to Linda in the North:

I was desperate. I shuddered to think of being the mother of children that should be owned by my old tyrant. I knew that as soon as a new fancy took him, his victims were sold far off to get rid of them; especially if they had children". (Jacobs, 2005, p.91)

For a sixteen-year-old teenage such a decision is hard but Linda reluctantly decided to throw herself into the arms of Mr. Sands assuming that there were no other choices "Jacobs uses civil resistance to challenge the racism and sexism of slavery, while securing greater personal freedoms and rights"

(Daniels–Rauterkus, 2019, p. 502). The fact which drove her to such a decision was that she became

An object of interest to a man who is not married, and who is not her master, [a fact that] is agreeable to the pride and feelings of a slave...There is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you, except that which he gains by kindness and attachment (Jacobs, 2005, p.91).

Linda was ashamed for being pregnant without marriage but she “illustrates the necessity of such strategies, even as they stand outside of the normative conventions of sexual propriety during the nineteenth century” (Daniels–Rauterkus, 2019, p. 498). Such a resistance was based on a “deliberate calculation” (Jacobs, 2005, p.90) as declared by Linda, and Kreiger (2008) believes that Linda “admits to offering sex in exchange for possible advantage” (p.3). Through the choice of being pregnant, Linda is destabilizing patriarchal supremacy and the ultimate model of the power of the master over his enslaved woman. Nonetheless, Linda was so ashamed that she asked for the reader’s sympathy and pretext when she talked directly to him/her: “Pity me, and pardon me, O virtuous reader! You never knew what it is to be a slave; to be entirely unprotected by law or custom” (Jacobs, 2005, p.92). In this sense, Linda’s confession to the reader of her sin and the shame she brings on her body and her family, which is illustrated in five-long-detailed pages, acts as a means for a better understanding of the self and a step towards freedom. However, Linda’s body became her method of negotiation. She prefers Mr. Sands over Dr. Flint and was ready to compromise on her morals and principles because of an inner feeling that Dr. Flint might accept to sell her if he knew she was pregnant with a child from another man. In fact, this choice granted Linda some relief and freedom over her master, “I knew nothing would enrage Dr. Flint so much as to know that I favored another; and it was something to triumph over my tyrant even in that small way” (Jacobs, 2005, p.90). Linda defied Dr. Flint with her decision to have children from another man, after she tolerated his sexual remarks and emotional abuses for years. Such a decision is overwhelmingly powerful coming from a female slave at that time. This form of resistance enhanced Linda’s power by giving her the freedom to have the power over her body. Her premises to have Mr. Sands’ children is to “fend off the sexual threat of her master Dr. Flint”

(Foreman, 1990, p.77) and to defeat him. Beside this, Leigh Gilmore (1994) believes that confessing sin could liberate a figure out of the burden of self-punishment because it is a way to find a voice and define a new identity. Therefore, the decision to go out of the garret and escape to the North comes after she realizes that it is an experience of “a death and rebirth” (Kreiger, 2008, p.3). In the North, she has new identity, an identity that releases her from the guilt and shame she had felt since she became pregnant.

It is also Linda’s attempt to spare the pain of humiliation for her future children by choosing, what she believed the right father. She is a slave woman who refused to yield to the sexual advances of the master and kept on resisting his demands and her method to do that is by engaging with another man. When she got her children, Benny and Ellen, motherhood became her new identity. Li (2006) believes that motherhood to Linda became an encouraging motive to resist slavery and get her liberation: “Converting her body and reproductive abilities from sites of exploitation to vehicles of resistance, Linda undermines the authority of the slave master and works to liberate her children” (p.15). Being a mother is the excuse Linda gave to Flint when he wanted to move her to another house, and it is also her excuse to hide for seven years because she did not want her children to be her breaking point, especially when she recognized Dr. Flint intention to bring the children to the plantation as a means to ‘fetter’ her and make her submissive. (Jacobs, 2005) Linda’s motive to be free increased when she had kids because she did not want her children to go through a similar experience as her, of being humiliated, offered in auctions, beaten or sexually abused by their masters, “The mother of slaves is very watchful. She knows there is no security for her children” (Jacobs, 2005, p. 93). Therefore, Linda had to free herself from the ties of slavery, she states:

God alone knows how I have suffered; and He, I trust, will forgive me. If I am permitted to have my children, I intend to be a good mother, and to live in such a manner that people cannot treat me with contempt. (Jacobs, 2005, p. 214)

It is important to note that securing freedom for the children of a slave woman challenges the domestic representation of motherhood back then. This might explain her indirect apology for the virtuous reader which is implied in the idea that she never projects her sexual and emotional physical interaction with

Mr. Sands. Linda limits the description of her relation with Mr. Sands to the idea of motherhood. For her, the relationship with Mr. Sands is not about affection and tenderness rather, it is more about securing a better choices for her future children and to escape the harassments of the master. When Dr. Flint asked her to live with him in his new house, Linda did not announce that she was in love with someone else, on the contrary, she told him that she was pregnant. Therefore, pregnancy and accepting a motherhood status became the loophole through which she could escape the terrors of slavery. She is the mother who not only challenges the domestic life but also defies the perceived image of motherhood of a slave mother. Davis (1981) asserted that women at that time played the role of mommy<sup>1</sup>to carry the burden of their pregnancy and raise up children while doing their usual chores of hard labor in their houses and in the houses of their masters. At the same time, these women were constrained by sexual advances of the master and hatred of the mistress, all this should happen while maintaining the image of motherhood drawn by society and community.

Linda challenges all these traditional images and complicated relations of master- slave paradigm. She never suffered the double-consciousness in which her brother suffered, on the contrary, she drew a path towards freedom and pursued it, she said: “My master had power and law on his side; I had a determined will. There is might in each” (p.125). Linda made the readers question the quest for morality under slavery and even the patriarchal power of the white men, she assumed “The degradation, the wrongs, the vices that grow out of slavery, are more than I can describe. They are greater than you would willingly believe” (Jacobs, 2005, p. 61). Acknowledging this fact, Linda took the hard road towards freedom resisting all the obstacles in front of her. She never surrendered to the image of a slave woman. On the contrary, she understood very well that “slavery is a curse to the whites as well as to the blacks. It makes the white fathers cruel and sensual; the sons violent and licentious; it contaminates the daughters, and makes the wives wretched. And as for the colored race, it needs an abler pen than mine to describe the extremity of their sufferings, the depth of their degradation” (Jacobs, 2005, p. 88)

Both Jacobs and Du Bois allocate slavery as their biggest enemy and hence attempted to criticize it in their writings, she said: “I asked why the curse of

slavery was permitted to exist, and why I had been so persecuted and wronged from youth upward. These things took the shape of mystery, which is to this day not so clear to my soul as I trust it will be hereafter” (Jacobs, 2005, p. 170). Her free will transcends slavery through an inner determination for a better life for her and her children. By the end of the novel, Linda, and Jacobs behind her, gets her freedom with an aptitude for a better future: “Jacobs not only convinces the reader to show sympathy towards her, but she also creates the physical and mental space in which resistance to slavery can be staged. (Daniels–Rauterkus, 2019, p.502) and this is basically the method of resistance Jacobs offered to her fellow slaves. Linda’s quest did not stop to securing the safety of her children but extended to a new mission. She wanted to buy a house for her children in the Free State. She stated: “The dream of my life is not yet realized. I do not sit with my children in a home of my own. I still long for a hearthstone of my own, however humble. I wish it for my children’s sake far more than for my own” (Jacobs, 2005, p. 260). In that respect, such a message from a black woman in the nineteenth century, who used to be a slave, inspired a civil, and a political resistance against all the harm inflicted by the slavery institution and white-powerful master.

### **Conclusion**

In telling her story to the public, Jacobs moves from a subjective image to an objective representation of the problems of black people under slavery. Her autobiographical story is a construction of a slave narrative that was written as a corrective account and a social model of a bleak situation that continued for years. Jacobs resists the denial of freedom to African American and just like Du Bois, she fights slavery through certain strategies of resistance. These strategies spring from the three factors that helped her achieve her goal of freedom: her family which is represented by her grandmother, her brother and her uncle; her decision to be pregnant without marriage at that time; and the idea of motherhood which basically motivated her to resist all kinds of slavery for fear for the future of her kids. Each factor of these, works collaboratively to ensure the ultimate emancipation of the body and the mind. As a slave woman, Linda managed to perceive life differently. Linda’s un-submissive spirit help her built a new life with new identity in another place. She protested her conditions through her body and through refusing the power of

master and slavery. In this, Linda shares Du Bois mechanisms of resistance in pursuing equality through refusing slavery and fighting to free the body and the soul. Her motherhood identity pushes her forward to establish a basis for resisting slavery and voicing the repressed slaves and the struggles of the black people. The final outcome of the novel indicates that Linda challenges master-slave dehumanizing image in favor of a more cohesive humanitarian relation between the white culture and the black. This rebelliousness happens as a resistance to the violence of an oppressive experience that becomes a literary example of the silenced voices of black slaves, especially women. The story of Linda Brent, although characterized by agony and hardship, has the refinement of freedom of the body and the mind that offer hope for slaved people at that time, that freedom can be pursued with hard work and persistence.

### Note

- 1- Deborah Gray White explains that records of that period reflect the wide use of this term to describe slave women.

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### الارادة الحرة بين العبودية والحرية: دراسة لشخصية ليندا برنت في "حوادث في حياة الفتاة الرقيق كما كتبتها بنفسها"

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#### المستخلص

ككاتبة في فترة القرن التاسع عشر، كانت جايكوبس تكتب بأهليه وسلطه رغم كونها من العبيد ولهذا اعتبرت مذكراتها وسيلة لمقاومة نظام العبودية انذاك. استعرض كتابها الذي يحمل عنوان "حوادث في حياة الفتاة الرقيق كما كتبتها بنفسها" (1842) استغلال السود كعبيد ، والحاجة إلى تغيير وترتيب العلاقات الهرميه التي تحكم البيض والسود. كانت جاكوبس ايضا منخرطة في العديد من الأحداث المتعلقة بإلغاء الرق كما وظهر نهجها المناهض للعبودية بوضوح في كتاباتها. بالاضافه لذلك، ان جايكوبس تتشارك مع دو ببيوس نفس الافكار حول الحرية والتحرر والحاجة إلى تغيير سياسي وثقافي متعلق بالمجتمع الاسود خصوصا. ولذلك فان نظرية دو ببيوس توفر إطاراً لسيرتها الذاتية المكتوبه على شكل روايه. تصور روايتها شخصيه ليندا برنت ، وهي الشخصية الرئيسية ، كسيدة قوية الإرادة وصلت إلى الحرية بعد رحلة عناء طويله ومؤلمة ، كما وتستعرض الروايه ايضا علاقه بين المجتمع الابيض والاسود ، وعلى الرغم من الاختلافات في الوضع الثقافي والتنشئة بين جايكوبس ودو ببيوس ،ينقل كل منهما من التمثيل الذاتي لتجربة شخصية إلى تصريح موضوعي حول ظروف العبودية للسود والتميز الذي يواجهه السود خلال فتره حياتهم. بالنسبة لجاكوبس ، الحرية هي خيار يجب على الشخص أن يناضل من أجله ، وعملية عقلية يتم إنجازها من خلال المقاومة والاحتجاج. ولقد جاءت استراتيجياتها في المقاومة من خلال ثلاث نقاط في الرواية؛ العائلة التي

ساعدتها خلال رحلتها ؛ الحمل واختيارها لوالد أطفالها ؛ وأخيراً الأمومة والوعد بمستقبل أفضل لأطفالها. يتوصل هذا البحث إلى أن رواية جاكوبس هي سابقة سردية لاعلاء اصوات العبيد السود المكتومه انذاك والتركيز على اهميه استعادة الهوية الشخصيه والحضاريه والثقافيه لمجتمع السود بعد العبودية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** كاتبة سوداء، دو بيوس، هاربيت جاكوبس، مقاومة، عبودية.