

## **Frederick Douglass: Rhetorical Analysis**

Student Name

University

Course

Professor Name

Date

## **Outline**

- I. Introduction
- II. Autobiography Genre with Political Implications
  - A. The Role of Freedom in Douglass' Works
  - B. Main Ideas of Douglass' Writings
  - C. The Influence of Douglass' Ideas
- III. Conclusion

## **The Role of Frederick Douglass' Works in American History**

In the United States in the 19th century, the issue of slavery and discrimination against the black population was acute. The American Anti-Slavery Society, an abolitionist movement, emerged to fight it. The famous American writer Frederick Douglass was one of the most famous representatives of this movement. Douglass was a slave who became a free man and devoted a great number of works to this subject, one of which is *My Bondage and My Freedom*. The main genre of the writer's works was biography and autobiography, where Douglass described his life, showed the cruelty and inhumanity of such a social system and criticized the phenomenon of slavery itself. The work of the writer possessed the spirit of the struggle for the rights of the black population quickly became popular in society, and the oratorical abilities attracted majority of people to his side. Creativity contributed to the liberalization of the worldview of Americans, changing the attitude towards the black population of the USA. Due to all these factors, Frederick Douglass became a significant figure of combat with social inequality, and his works are not only autobiographical, but also philosophical in nature.

### **Autobiography Genre with Political Implications**

As noted above, Douglass was a slave at a certain period of his life, and therefore, all of his works were written in the autobiographical genre. He managed to escape and become a free man, which shows that the author condemned and criticized the slave system. The writer tried to show as clearly as possible the problems and misunderstandings both in his surroundings and in the communication between black and white people in general. For example, in the novel *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*, the author tried to show all the nuances of what he could remember from his own life (Widyahening & Koesdyantho, 2018). Frederick Douglass was convinced that his works could change the lives of black people, on the one hand, by opening the

eyes of white people and, on the other, by encouraging slaves. Frederick Douglass himself was very hostile to slavery and always openly opposed and criticized it, both in public and in his books.

### **The Role of Freedom in Douglass' Works**

A separate place in Douglass' work belongs to freedom, and he was convinced that slavery was incompatible with such social spheres as education, happiness, and travel. From a young age Frederick Douglass looked for any moment, any opportunity to become free. It illustrates how attentive the book hero to the little things and the slightest chance to carry out a plan to escape (Blight, 2020). Details in Douglass works make people to draw a conclusion that the freedom was the most important goal in his life.

If one observes the Douglass's life as an adult, the main activity of the writer in addition to creativity was to promote the idea of social equality, to fight against the oppression of different races. Frederick Douglass traveled throughout Europe and visited many countries, recording all the differences in mentality in a diary known as *The Frederick Douglass Diary*. Due to these writings, it became clear how destructive and unprogressive slave society was in contrast to Europe.

### **Main Ideas of Douglass' Writings**

Douglass set several goals for himself while he wrote his autobiographies. It was not so much important for him to show the poverty of the slaves in such a society as to emphasize precisely the hypocrisy and contradiction of such a system. The writer was outraged that in the society of the day, people allowed themselves to abuse, humiliate, and mock each other, as well as to elevate some people over others. "A close look at how Douglass' writing evolved over the years gives interesting insight into not only Douglass himself but to the world in which he lived".(Hurt, 2019, p.61) It is important to understand that slavery is not just an economic problem in the form of poverty for some people. Also it is destructive to society as a whole, because it generates a lack of moral and ethical

attitudes, and contradicts the foundations of democracy, one of which is the value of human life. Nevertheless, attention is focused on the other side of the problem as well, namely on the ordinary black person who endures horrific treatment for no objective reason. It is correct to say that Douglass was outraged by any inequality, not just racial disparity. Through his journey to Europe and his life in the American North, his conviction that social equality leads to the prosperity of humanity as a whole was only strengthened.

### **The Influence of Douglass' Ideas**

In addition to being a writer, Douglass was an orator and spoke regularly to the public to promote his ideas and values. In conjunction with his writing, he began to quickly gain credibility, becoming a popular reformer. His ideas were both political and philosophical, and because of his acceptance by society, his books were also gaining popularity. In this way, Douglass became one of the brightest representatives of 19th-century black America. Later, his speeches and writings began to appear in various newspapers, indicating his widespread and successful influence on the masses (Rossing & McKivigan, 2018). The ideas Douglass promoted were considered modern and correct and were supported by the European people. Douglass also spoke at schools and universities to promote equality of education for all.

It is important to stress that Frederick Douglass was not only fighting against racism and slavery. Douglass also “spoke and wrote prolifically on almost every significant social issue connected to a struggle for freedom, equality, and justice-slavery, woman’s suffrage, immigration, the post-emancipation rights of black citizens, education and more”. (Rossing & McKivigan, 2018, p.1). Thus, the writer sought equality for absolutely everyone and held liberal views, this was reflected in his works and in his speeches.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Frederick Douglass was not only a prominent American writer on slavery and racial discrimination, but also a fighter of justice. His rhetoric influenced 19th-century American society to think of a cruel and outdated system as a vestige that must be destroyed. The writer is an important part of American history, considered a very recognizable and famous representative of the black population, a great reformer and orator. This author's autobiographies and other writings allow anyone to look at the pressing social issues of the time from both sides, to learn about Douglass' own life and the social flaws relevant to his day. Frederick Douglass' bold and principled ideas became the basis both for a new social order and for a rethinking of American values and moral standards.

## References

- Blight, D. W. (2020). *Frederick Douglass. Prophet of freedom*. Simon & Schuster.
- Hurt, A. E. (2019). *Frederick Douglass. Abolitionist and writer*. Cavendish Square Publishing LLC.
- Rossing, J. P., & McKivigan, J.R. (2018). Frederick Douglass's rhetorical legacy. *Rhetoric Review*, 37(1), 1-76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07350198.2018.1395263>
- Widyahening, C.E.T., & Koesdyantho, Drs Ar. (2018). The struggle of Frederick Douglass to get his freedom as seen in the narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: An American slave (a psychological approach). *Researchers World*, 9(2), 169-175.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.18843/rwjasc/v9i2/22>