

**PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA**

**Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research**



**Academic Master's**

**Domain: Letters and Foreign Languages**

**Field: English Language and Literature**

**Major: Literature and Civilization**

**Submitted by: Miss Bouchra Messaoudi**

**Title:**

# **Dehumanization and Identity in Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave***

**Dissertation submitted in Partial Fulfillment for the Requirement of the degree of  
Master's in English Literature and civilization.**

**Before the Jury**

<b>Examiner</b>	<b>Dr. Halima Benzoukh</b>	<b>UKM-Ouargla</b>
<b>Supervisor</b>	<b>Mr. Djelloul Bourahla</b>	<b>UKM-Ouargla</b>
<b>Examiner</b>	<b>Mrs. Dalila Mesloub</b>	<b>UKM-Ouargla</b>

**Academic year: 2019-2020**

## ***Dedication***

I dedicate this work to all whom I love.

My parents, my dearest siblings, and the apple of my eyes. My beloved family members and friends who motivated me to go forward.

I want to dedicate this hard work for myself for doing it faithfully

Pouring love over it, I dedicate to them and myself!

## **Acknowledgments**

First and foremost, thanks to the all mighty Allah for giving me insight, strength, patience and health to make this work accomplished. He only knows how faithful I tried to make this work be, and I shall be rewarded with success. Special thanks go to my research supervisor Mr. Djelloul Bourahla for his valuable guidance and support throughout this special academic journey in addition to the exceptional insights he delivered in literature. I extend my thanks to Dr. Khaoula Hakkoum and Miss Imane Hajaj who as well pushed me forward to make this research happen with shared knowledge. Your efforts are truly priceless and distinguished for me.

I would like to thank my academic family members at Kasdi Merbah University, specifically those who have always supported and encouraged my quests, you made this journey special despite all the hardships. Without your motivation, I would not have made an excellent position here. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my dearest translation teacher, Mrs. Mesloub for the continuous motivation and love to carry on this journey. Warm thanks go to Mr. Kantaoui for his distinguished influence on my writing and the lessons that I engraved on my mind.

I am thankful to my parents who are the primary reason of my success and my dearest uncle Pr. Salim Messaoudi. Special thanks are due to my friends Safaa and Sinda for their support and advice at an academic level.

Five years would have never been resisted without each and everyone's contribution at an academic or personal level. Space does not allow delivering all the emotions and mentioning all the names, but everyone knows his position and contribution.

## **Abstract**

African Americans responded and resisted the institution of slavery in the United States in different ways such as politics and literature. The African slaves in the US delivered their stories in the form of slave narratives that tell their truthful experience as an oppressed group. Among these writers Solomon Northup whose slave narrative *Twelve Years a Slave* represents his life and the life of slaves during the nineteenth century. This memoir is one of the many slave narratives that illustrated the real image of slavery. The aim of this study is to show the ways in which Solomon Northup is dehumanized in his daily life as a slave and shows the impact of that on Solomon's life particularly and its influence on his identity. This research was done through applying three intersecting theories: African American Literary Criticism, Critical Race Theory and Postcolonial Theory. We ultimately show in this study that the dehumanization and oppression and all the harsh events he lived, negatively impacted his identity throughout the twelve years he spent in bondage.

**Key words:** slavery, African Americans, slave narratives, dehumanization, oppression, identity.

## Table of contents

<b>Dedication</b> .....	II
<b>Acknowledgment</b> .....	III
<b>Abstract</b> .....	IV
<b>General Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Chapter I : Backgrounds</b> .....	7
<b>Introduction</b> .....	8
1. Historical Background.....	8
1.1 Aspects of Slavery in the United States: .....	8
1.2 Slaves' community and forms of resistance .....	10
2. Personal Background.....	12
2.1 Solomon Northup .....	13
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	14
<b>Chapter II: Slave Narratives</b> .....	16
<b>Introduction</b> .....	17
1. General Overview of Slave Narratives.....	17
1.1 A Brief History of Slave Narratives.....	17
1.2 Slave Narratives writers .....	18
1.2.1 William Grimes .....	19
1.2.2 Charles Ball .....	19
1.2.3 Harriet Jacobs.....	20
1.2.4 Fredrick Douglass.....	20
2. Characteristics and themes of Slave narratives .....	21
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	21
<b>Chapter III: Type of Dehumanization in Twelve Years a Slave</b> .....	25
<b>Introduction</b> .....	26
1. Family Separation.....	26
2. Kidnapping and dignity .....	28
3. Plantation Work.....	29
4. Violence.....	31
<b>Conclusion:</b> .....	33
<b>Chapter IV: Consequences of Slavery in Twelve Years a Slave</b> .....	35
<b>Introduction</b> .....	36
1. Trauma.....	36
2. Resistance .....	38
3. Identity and Freedom.....	40

<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>General Conclution .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>47</b>

## **General Introduction**

Slavery is considered one of the most important chapters of the history of the United States as it has influenced it at economic and political levels; and most importantly, it has influenced the construction of the American society. After the Civil War, the legacy of slavery could still be seen in the American society, especially on colored people. The latter is composed of African people who were brought to America to serve brutally in plantations under oppressive and totally inhumane conditions and then to be called “African Americans” after the abolition of slavery. They would also sometimes serve as a source of entertainment for their masters. That is to say that they have faced physical oppression and sexual abuse which have resulted in psychological disorders. On the other hand, the African American community experienced hellish existential conditions that developed within them a strong yearning for freedom and liberation. Thus, the African American community organized itself later into groups to fight for their right to live an equal life and to refute the inferiority stereotypes that came to be associated with them. Their resistance was not only at a political level but it also gave rise to a new genre of literature known as African American Literature. Within African American Literature, slave narratives marked a distinguished place in American literary history. Those narratives gave an insight and documented the enslavement institution and exposed individual experiences to the public.

Solomon Northup is one of the slave narratives writers whose memoir is popular until nowadays, similarly to Fredrick Douglass’ slave narrative. He introduced the history of his free family and his journey in obtaining his freedom after a twelve-year ridiculous forced enslavement. *Twelve Years a Slave* is shocking and illustrates a truthful image of slavery in the United States in the 19th century. His memoir has not only been a famous reading but it was also adapted into a movie in 2013 which gave it a position and gained more popularity for both the author and the story.

### **1. Research Problem:**

*Twelve years a Slave* introduces the readers into a world of dehumanization that affected, in many ways, the development of the hero’s personality Solomon Northup throughout the plot. Based



on the illustration of dehumanization and its effect, which will be mentioned throughout this dissertation, this research aims at answering this problematic:

To what extent does dehumanization affect Solomon Northup's identity?

## **2. Research questions:**

The problematic carried out in this dissertation aims to ask five questions raised throughout the research:

1. What are the aspects of slavery in the United States?
2. How did slaves resist slavery?
3. What literary genre helped the ex-slaves talk about their experience?
4. In which ways was Solomon Northup dehumanized during his twelve-year slavery?
5. What were the consequences of dehumanization on him as an originally free man?

## **3. Hypothesis:**

We hypothesize that dehumanization has negative impact on Solomon Northup's identity.

## **4. Research Objectives:**

To answer these questions, it is necessary to put forward the following statements around which are presented as the research objectives. Those objectives are made with reference to the research questions raised:

- To explore the different aspects that made up the slavery institution in the United States.
- Define the different ways in which the slaves' community resisted slavery and oppression.
- Give a deep insight about Slave Narrative as part of African American's life and a genre that helped them make their experience public.
- Explain the ways in which Solomon Northup was stripped away from his humanization.
- Identify the different ways in which dehumanization impacted the Solomon Northup's identity.

## **5. Methodology & Structure:**

Solomon Northup's autobiography deals with the life of both African Americans in the North and the enslaved ones in the South. It describes the fight of the African Americans and their

struggle within a society that oppresses them for their skin color considering them socially inferior. Consequently, they struggle to prove themselves in a society where they are oppressed to obtain their freedom. Slaves go through daily issues that the author narrates at different parts of the autobiography. He describes also many events in which slaves suffered from a harsh treatment that strips them from their humanization at a daily basis.

In this sense, a need for African American literary criticism is important to understand the daily oppression that slaves had gone through. This research is adapting the African American literary criticism because it refers to the literature written by slaves themselves such as Solomon Northup's narrative. This theory is applied to the novel to subtly read, analyze and introspecting the character's resistance during his slavery journey. It helps us to define the search for liberty that the character is experiencing. Also, it is applied in a way that helps us explore the African Americans' position within a dominant white group.

Another theory that is adapted to help us better explore the novel is the critical race theory. It helps us identify others' experience of racism. It emphasizes on examining how we and others perceive and respond to the systemic racism. That is to say it clarifies how the victims of this racism present themselves into the world to persist and obtain their equal rights. In our context, we are going to look at how white privilege prevents, subtly and obviously, African Americans from access to what a white man considers as his own; for instance, reading, writing and most importantly freedom. Therefore, the dominant group is actually making any opportunity as forbidden or hard to obtain for the racialized groups.

On the other hand, we are also working with the post-colonialism literary theory, for it intersects with both African American criticism and critical race theory. Post-colonial literary theory in fact explores oppression and dominance in texts written by people who were oppressed and helps us define the process of othering that leads to discrimination. It is applied in our research to look at how the oppressors are internalizing the slaves and little by little making them think about themselves the way they stereotyped them at first.

This present dissertation is divided into four main chapters. The first chapter contains two study backgrounds. The first one is a historical background that looks at the aspects of slavery in the United States, starting from the slave trade until the forms of resistance that distinguished the African American community. The second background is an entrance into Solomon Northup's life biography as an ex-slave and a writer.

The second chapter deals with Slave narratives taking a general overview of them and their history. It also briefly tackles the biographies of some slave narratives writers from both genders and those who made distinguished works. The discussion is also about techniques and themes that different slave narrators have used in their stories.

The third chapter goes more into detail to discuss the narrative of *Twelve Years a Slave*. Our focus of this chapter is on dehumanization ways in the novel such as violence and kidnapping. Additionally, it discusses how Northup became little by little a user of violence.

The fourth chapter is a representation of Solomon's main identity changes throughout the plot as a result of the dehumanization he received. The researcher basically discusses how Northup's art was used to trap him into slavery and the trauma he experienced because of that. Furthermore, we will tackle how the bad treatment he received was a motivation for him to yearn for freedom. Finally, Solomon Northup comes into self-realization not only by the end of the novel but also at moments when he could express himself through his art and that is when he feels that his identity is back. Actually, his art was a kind of resistance and boosting self-confidence against those who stripped him of his identity.

## **6. Motivation:**

The choice of Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* is not arbitrary. Northup's account gives an insight about the history of slavery in the United States and describes the life of slaves in the South which makes it one of the many important slavery documents. *Twelve Years a Slave* is unique in the way that Solomon describes his kidnapping experience and his journey from freedom to slavery then back to freedom after his resistance. In relation to his experience, Solomon states different themes related to slavery. Therefore, I became eager to understand and explore the aspects

of slavery in the United States at an academic level. In addition to that, the theories we have studied made it more interesting to research the topic of slavery and mostly the effects of dehumanization on slaves' identity. The task was challenging because it is a new experience to delve into the African American literature and research the history of a whole community. Thus, extensive readings for the novel to outline the most important point that help on making this research a success were made, noting that I read it five years prior to that. The reading process, as a result, helped me find myself within that part of history and it I was effectively involved. In fact, the stories that research on that particular novel and theme astonished me. I would highlight that this novel gave me a sense of critical mind and advanced my socio-cultural understanding with other aspects of life.

# **Chapter I**

## **Backgrounds**

## **Introduction**

In 1619, slavery started in the United States when slaves started to be brought to the colony of Jamestown, Virginia. The traded slaves worked mainly in fields of cotton, tobacco, and rice as by 1815 cotton has been hugely exported. Furthermore, slaves were not only a source of economic enrichment but they were also a box where a white slaveholder emptied all his racism, hate, and violence. Thus, slaves were subject to harsh physical oppression and sexual abuse. Despite all the hardships, the slaves' community could own some remarkable features that engraved it within history. All the misfortune that came with slavery gave birth to a resistance movement that was led by free African americans and white abolitionists.

This chapter aims at highlighting the most significant aspects of slavery in the United States starting by a brief presentation of how slaves were traded. Then, we are going to talk about how slave masters physically oppressed their slaves and how they sexually abused female slaves. A brief presentation about the slaves' community and the most known ways it used to resist slavery is also highlighted in this chapter. Afterward, we stated an insight about the life of Solomon Northup, the writer of *Twelve Years a Slave*. The latter has truthfully narrated the story of his life, family and shared his story with details about all the events he has gone through. This chapter is definitely important to analyze the events and conditions of kidnapping of Solomon Northup as well as defining his position and role within the large slaves' community.

### **1. Historical Background:**

This part is important to this dissertation as it gives us certain historical facts about slavery that will elicit the understanding of this long history and its relation to the analyzed story.

#### **1.1 Aspects of Slavery in the United States:**

Through looking at the history of the United States, we would notice that different aspects made the history of slavery in the United States.

##### **1.1.1 Slave trade**

Slavery as an institution had started in North and West Africa before that Europe got involved in that business (Horton; Horton). At first, only twenty Africans were first brought from their original

countries to the United States as slaves. “The first Africans had come to the colony in 1619, little more than a decade after its founding in 1607” (Horton; Horton). Afterward, the number of slaves brought from Africa started to augment. Olaudah Equiano, the first slave to share his biography that contains his experience in the Middle Passage. Equiano explained the horrible conditions during these six to eight-week journey (Horton; Horton). After the long journey that slaves would have taken, they would go into a new stage of enslavement known as the seasoning process in which slave masters chose the healthiest slaves and parade them around the town. This process was so traumatic to families because it separated them from each other since they were sold to different slave merchants (Martin R. Pierre).

The British colonies defined different laws to be applied to slaves to legalize their ownership. By the 1660s the Chesapeake colonies started establishing a legal foundation for the racial distinction that helped create the formal structure of racial slavery of the eighteenth century. The regulations they set worked to emerge the slavery system. In 1662 Virginia changed the law that suggests a child would take the father’s status to a law that child’s status would go through the maternal line to prevent the children who are the product of slaveholders’ and slave females to be free and to remain slaves forever. Another law issued in 1696 treated slaves as property of specific land. Consequently, the proportion of slaves in South Carolina accounted for 70 percent of the population in 1720 (Horton; Horton).

### **1.1.2 Physical oppression and Sexual abuse:**

African American slaves in the United States endured hard conditions both during their trade phase and enslavement years. Mostly, those conditions were the bad physical treatment they received from their masters and traders. There was a surgeon who had the experience of traveling on a slave ship from West Africa to the West Indies, he confirmed that around fifty or sixty slaves at once were chained one to another and fixed to the lower deck of a ship. When a doctor is about to consult one of them, he had to step on their chained bodies because they covered the whole floor (Horton; Horton). This is just one glimpse of deadly and unbearable suffering that slaves witnessed while they were shipped from their home countries, mainly from Africa, to the United States.

If slaves survive the hardships of the journey to get to their new destinations, they would impossibly survive the brutal treatment of their masters, be it a woman, a man, or a child. What slaves suffered from was not related to their tasks incompleteness or imperfection only but some others were harshly lashed to give access to their wives and daughters to the un-human slaves (Harriet). Additionally, Northup describes how slaves are lashed in the season of cotton picking for several reasons. If a new slave starts the business, he will be whipped to pick as fast as he can. Providing that he gets the same weights every day, he is considered as a survivor of the master's lash (Northup). The writer here illustrates how slaves are beaten to produce the maximum amount of cotton that the same or double of the punishment will be applied against them if they pick up the extreme of that quantity (Worley). Working for long hours, in summer, workers in the delta and low country labored under the sun and humidity that exposed them to the danger of dehydration, malaria, and yellow fever; whereas, in winter, they suffered from cold and frostbite. However, some slave masters realized that violence and abuse do not help them control the slaves like John Quitman from Mississippi but it did not make him merciful (Horton; Horton).

Sexual abuse was centered in the southern culture that considered all women as objects and properties. This culture prohibited the mixed sexual relations of white women and black men to keep a pure race. On the other hand, they protected the sexual relations of white men and black female slaves which resulted in mixed-race children (Smith). Therefore, sexual abuse is also one other form of oppression that slave masters used against their female slaves. The situation of attractive women especially was dangerous, for they have no choice but to submit to the masters' orders. Harriet Jacobs, a fugitive slave, narrates in her 1861 autobiography the harassment she received from her master. Female slaves were also a target of the masters' wives jealousy and frustrations. Yet, they could not confront their husbands' sexual relations (Horton; Horton).

### **1.2 Slaves' community and forms of resistance:**

Slaves' community in the United States faced many hardships that helped it form and emphasize its existence. Families developed a strong sense of community and unity with specific values, courage and resistance such as music that helped them feel liberated when in bondage.



### **1.2.1 Slaves community:**

Slave's community is mainly composed of two groups who had to do different tasks to be privileged one over another. Slaves serving at their masters' houses are called "house slaves". They had more advantages and better treatment than those of the field; thus, they were superior. Yet, being a house slave has also its disadvantages as being exposed to the family's negative emotions, anger, and abuse as Lewis Clarke describes his experience (Horton; Horton). Moreover, the slave driver position played an important role within the slave community, for he had to be trustworthy for his master and at the same time cooperate with his fellow slaves. For example, Solomon Northup worked as a driver on a plantation for eight years and he used his job to help his friends. Additionally, slaves committed themselves to the trust of each other and shared support so they would not accept to steal from each other (Horton; Horton).

Even though forming families was hard, slaves could find some sort of solutions to ensure the continuity of their generations and could set a distinguished community that supported its members. The continuity of the African American generation was affected by some laws put by the institutions, which wanted with all price to keep racial discrimination and at the same time to have the slaveholders' right to sexually exploit the female slaves. Some rules restricted slaves from forming families. However, perhaps due to those restrictions they were successful to form a community too. Slave narratives and autobiographies illustrate that families took a position of importance for slaves' life that is why some slaves exposed their life to danger to stay with their families and spouses to prevent separation (Brown). As well, the slave narratives demonstrate that many families were separated either due to sale or the migration of one of the couple's master. . That is why, slave narratives and autobiographies are outstanding resources to better understand the slaves' community (Brown).

### **1.2.2 Slaves and forms of resistance:**

Slaves had created their ways of resistance and revolting against slavery. One of those forms is music with which they had an attachment and was a part of the African American community. Slave musicians helped to keep the continuity of the folk of African American life through passing

their songs and music to the next generations. Those musicians were entertainers on the one hand and taught the black community a sense of community through preserving the African culture (Cimbala). The songs that slaves sang in the fields were group creations and had subtle messages to tell their sufferings; they added lines and harmonies one after another and had a leader who would be randomly selected because of the strength of his voice (Horton; Horton). The slaves who performed music were a sign of talented individuals who wanted to preserve the African American identity. They played a strong role in easing the slaves' souls regularly on different occasions (Cimbala).

Adding to that, escape was a common type of resistance amongst slaves and it was either a result of a long planned-process or resulted from traumatic events that the slave had witnessed. Running away was at some point hard an action due to family composing especially of young children. In that case, parents would sometimes be forced to leave their children or take half of them. In 1856, Margret Garner ran away with her husband and her children but she ended up killing one of them when she realized there were slave catchers. She said she would have killed all of them rather than imagining them growing in slavery. There was a Vigilance committee that dedicated itself to help the Underground Railroad. The Underground Railroad made an important chapter in American History because it contained organized groups who helped those who took the risk of escape. One of the most famous conductors in history is Harriet Tubman who worked along with William Still. Those conductors also engaged in interracial activities with white abolitionists who offered great aids to the movement of the Underground Road such as John Rankin. Another form of slavery resistance that slaves did was suicide. The new slaves sometimes threw themselves into the ocean during the process of their shipping. Therefore, the masters of newly coming slaves always checked on them to make sure they are not willing to commit suicide. Instead of suicide, some other slaves ran away temporarily to heal themselves psychologically from the torturing conditions they live in (Horton; Horton).

## **2. Personal Background of the Writer**

This part gives us an insight into the life of the writer of *Twelve Years a Slave* because learning about his life is really important to see link the broader events of his life to the events of the story.

## **2.1 Solomon Northup**

Solomon Northup, born on July 10th, 1807 or 1808, is an American abolitionist and the writer of the autobiography *Twelve Years a Slave*. He is educated and was born free as the son of a freed slave. On 1829 Christmas, he got married to Anne Hampton with whom he had three children, Elizabeth, Margret, and Alonzo. Afterward, he used the money he gained to construct the Champlain road to transfer timber from Lake Champlain to Troy, New York. He often visited Canada to widen his knowledge and got different job positions such as farming, cutting fiddle, carpentering. Not only had this but he also played the violin. Later in March 1834 Northup and his small family left to Saratoga Springs where his wife worked in the United States Hotel. The Northups remained there for seven years until 1841 when the family started to encounter some financial issues (Marsden).

While Solomon was looking for employment in 1841, he met two men who introduced themselves as Merrill Brown and Abram Hamilton pretending they were the members of Circus Company. They offered him a job of a fiddler in different performances in New York City (Cole). He went with the two gentlemen to New York taking with him his free-papers to fulfill the employment procedures (Marsden) then they convinced him to continue with them to Washington. He arrived on April 2nd and was put up at Gadsby's Hotel and soon after that, he started to feel unwell. The last thing he could recollect before finding himself chained in Williams' Slave Pen is that someone gave him medicine (New York Times ). In Williams' Slave Pen, Solomon was whipped by Burch a hundred times warning him to never mention his real identity. Ten days later, he was shipped to New Orleans with forty-eight other slaves.

Upon arrival to New Orleans, Northup was immediately taken by another slave trader called Freeman. The latter declined to sell him except to Mr. Ford where he lived and worked as a carpenter for a year. Later on, Ford sold him to Mr. Tibeat due to financial issues (New York Times ). Solomon witnessed hard slavery conditions under Tibeat but he fought back to survive and he

was fearless of what Tibeat would do (Northup, 2014). After that, Tibeat sold Northup to Edwin Epps where he was enslaved for ten years until 1853 in Avoyelles Parish. Epps was a sadistic master similarly to Tibeat. Solomon did not surrender to reality; instead, he tried to escape many times during his working decade under Epps until 1853 that he could catch a glimpse of liberty. Solomon heard the abolitionist views of a Canadian carpenter named Samuel Bass who came to do some work for Epps. At that time, he decided to confine him and tell him about the facts of his story. Bass wrote several letters on behalf of Solomon to his friends providing them with his location (Northup). One of the letters was forwarded to his wife, who sought for the help of Henry B. Northup, the grandnephew of the man who set Northup's father free (Fiske).

Later, when Henry B. Northup received the letter, he started to procure evidence that would secure the freedom of Solomon. He sought assistance from the local authorities of New York, Louisiana, New Orleans, and the Supreme Court of the United States. Then, he started his way to Louisiana looking for Solomon until he was found with a great difficulty (New York Times ). Solomon was finally able to get his liberty and was legally a free man on January 1853 (Fiske). Solomon Northup tried to bring charge against Burch but he could not testify it due to the laws that unable colored men to testify in courts (New York Times ). He wrote his memoir *Twelve Years a Slave* in 1853 with the assistance of David Wilson and it sold 30.000 copies within three years and became a bestseller. He got back to work as a carpenter and became one of the active figures of the abolitionist movement and made many lectures on slavery before the American Civil War. Around the year 1857, Solomon Northup disappeared once again and there was no sure information that speculates his real location or death circumstances (Fiske).

### **Conclusion:**

The institution of slavery in the United States started by trading African Americans to the colonies and ended by a resistance that made a great impact in history and the United States. The aspects of slavery in the United States will remain as a sign to show the strength of the slaves who did not give up on the fate created for them by other humans. Solomon Northup is an excellent

example of those distinguished African Americans out of hundreds because he conveys a strong message of courage and fight for life.

## **Chapter II**

### **Slave Narratives**

## **Introduction**

African-American literature is a literary genre produced in the United States by writers who originally descent from Africa. The African American Literature explores different themes such as the role of African Americans within the American society, African-American culture, racism, and mostly slavery. Also, African-American literature was at first a body full of autobiographical narratives as known as Slave narratives. Slave narratives are important documents that recorded ex-slaves experience. It is defined as a known genre of African-American Literature which developed in the 19th century. Those narratives were written by African Americans usually after that they escaped slavery. They wrote their stories to describe the hardships of their journey in slavery and the dehumanization a person under bondage might have received. Along with the development of this genre, different questions started to be raised concerning its characteristics, and how different writers have used them commonly to create different themes in that context to convey their message and view of slavery. This chapter is to give first a brief history about slave narratives and how they came into existence. Then, it gives hints about the life of the most known writers in the history of this genre. Finally, this chapter discusses the outline that slave narratives shared and the most recurrent themes on them. This chapter is important for this dissertation as it gives a detailed explanation of this genre that we are analyzing. It is important for our analysis as it maintains the truth transmitted in this narrative through the form and content outlined by James Olney in his article entitled "*I was born*": *Slave narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature*.

### **1. General Overview of Slave Narratives**

#### **1.1 A Brief History of Slave Narratives**

Slave narratives make a large body of literature that was produced by African Americans during the nineteenth century. Some narratives were presented as biographies to the readers such as the brief *Narrative of Dimmock Charlton*, *The Memoirs of Eleanor Eldridge*, and *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman* and many others (C. H. Nichols). James Olney describes an autobiography as a recollective/ narrative act in which the writer, from a certain point in life-the present-, looks back over the events of that life and recounts them in such a way as to show how the history has led to

this present state of being (Olney 47). Slave narrative is defined in Encyclopedia Britannica as an account of the life, or a major portion of the life, of a fugitive or former slave, either written or orally related by the slave personally. Most of the American slave narratives were written by African Americans and those African-born Muslims authored their narratives in Arabic. From 1760 to the end of the Civil War in the United States, around 100 autobiographies of fugitive or former slaves came into existence. Then, after the abolition in 1865 at least 50 former slaves wrote or dictated their lives accounts. The testimonies and the oral personal histories gathered from former slaves by the WPA Federal Writers' made up forty volumes during the period of the Great Depression in the United States (Andrews).

Moreover, slave narratives contain various topics and hold different themes and symbols that describe the depth of a slave experience which marked them as successful in the field of literature until the current time. Most of narrators tell the readers how they have worked on plantations and endured hard life conditions and rude environment. They were brought at first place to the plantations to work on cotton picking whereas others were trained to work as carpenters, coopers and black-smiths or house servants. What is also common between slave narrators is that they tell us how they were whipped during their enslavement regardless to their gender. Actually, the oppression which those narrators lived developed within them various feelings such as that of fear, hate aggression; and sometimes the feeling of guilt and personality disorders (C. H. Nichols). An example of a successful slave narrative is *Booker T. Washington's Up from Slavery* published in 1901. It was the best-selling slave narrative of the late 19th Century and early 20th century. *Up from Slavery* is a classic American story that depicts the progress of African Americans since the abolitionism in 1965. In addition to the old slave narratives, there are some other modern slave narratives and novels such as *Malcolm X* (1965) and *The Black Bat of Richard Wright* (1945). Not to forget mentioning Toni Morrison's realization of *Beloved* (1987) (Andrews).

## **1.2 Slave Narratives writers**

Slave narratives are also called in different names such as "The Freedom Narrative" or The Liberation Narratives". Those narratives were written by a group of African Americans who wrote



their personal stories after escaping slavery and recounted their experience to reveal the reality behind slavery. We are mentioning here many writers who greatly marked their names in African American Literature.

### **1.2.1 William Grimes**

William Grimes is the author of one of the earliest narratives *Life of William Grimes, The Runaway Slave*. After that he had escaped slavery in 1814, Grimes learned the basics of education and wrote his story. His autobiography was published in 1825 in a 68-page handbook. This novel earned him a position among the first ex-slaves to narrate their stories during the early nineteenth-century. The value of the story is that it illustrates how social classes, deprivation, and physical treatment affect someone's personality. His father died early in his life. When he grew older and started working in plantations, he endured many cruel whippings and punishment. Grimes once confined his friend and sought his help to run away but unfortunately, he informed against him and his trial was a failure. He was captured but succeeded to flee again to stay three days in the woods. Yet, again he was forced to get back due to hunger. William Grimes lived in different cities in New England and worked in different job positions after that he had escaped slavery. His autobiography illustrates how slavery affected him even after he has gained his liberty (Nichols).

### **1.2.2 Charles Ball**

Charles Ball is an ex-slave who was born into slavery around the year 1781 on a tobacco plantation in Maryland where he lived with his mother and sister. After the death of his owner, Ball was sold to Jack Cox who treated him well. Then, when the latter died, he was sold again to a strict and harsh owner who kept him cold and hungry. At the age of 20, his owner hired him to the Navy. Ball could escape after two years of service in the Navy with the help of an ex-slave; unfortunately, his former master returned him and sold him. He had spent seven years in slavery in South Carolina before he had escaped to Maryland. He secured his freedom after many attempts and finally settled in Baltimore; however, in 1830, he was captured and sold to a plantation-based in Georgia. Even though he could escape again, he could not get a reunite with his family forever (Charles Ball (U.S. National Park Service)). His narrative published in 1836 *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of*

*Charles Ball* was written with the assistance of Isaac Fischer. This narrative gained great popularity since Ball tells his enslavement experience as being treated in a bad way that made him, and his fellows, suffer (Henderson).

### **1.2.3 Harriet Jacobs**

Her full name is Harriet Ann Jacobs and differently called Harriet A. Jacobs. She was born in 1813 in North Carolina. Jacobs is an American abolitionist and an autobiographer who shared her experience of slavery through a slave narrative. She could learn how to read and write at an early age although she was born a slave. When she was a teen she had a relationship with a young white lawyer in the neighborhood and they had two children. She was sent to work in another plantation when she refused to be the mistress of her owner. She later escaped and spent seven years hidden. After Jacobs had escaped to the north in 1842, she moved to New York and worked with Fredrick Douglass's newspaper. She was later encouraged to write her story and experience of slavery when she went to an abolitionist lecture tour with her brother. She published *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* in 1861. Her narrative discusses different aspects of women suffering in slavery such as sexual abuse and the loss of children. It was finally recognized by scholars in 1981 (Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia)

### **1.2.4 Fredrick Douglass**

Fredrick Douglass was born into slavery in 1818 in Talbot County, Maryland; his exact day of birth is unknown but he chose to celebrate it on February 14th. His mother died when he was around 10 years old, so he lived with his grandmother he was then chosen to live in the plantation's owner house. Later in his life, he became one of the leaders of the abolitionist movement and a famous intellectual in different causes including women's rights. Douglass wrote many autobiographies in which he describes his experience in slavery and the post-civil war part of his life. Douglass could shape his ideology against slavery by reading newspapers and seeking political and literary writing that help him. Additionally, he helped other slaves on the plantation learn how to read the New Testament weekly when he was hired out to William Freeland. Later on, when he was 16 years old, he sent to serve Edward Covey; he almost had a psychological breakdown due to

the abuse he received for the former but he had enough power to fight and stand it strongly. When it comes to his escape trials, he had failed twice because he succeeded.

Douglass got married to a free African American woman “Anna Murray” on 1838 September 15th, Murray, helped him in his final try of escape in Baltimore. After they got married, Douglass changed his name to Johnson to hide his identity and they settled in Bedford, Massachusetts which has a large free African American community. He was being invited to tell his story at abolitionist meetings back then and eventually became an anti-slavery lecturer. In 1845, Douglass published his first autobiography *Narrative of Life of Fredrick Douglass, an American Slave*. It was a bestseller in the US and was also translated into several languages in Europe. Anna and Douglass had five children whom two of them assisted him in the production process of his newspaper *The North Star*. Although Douglass was disloyal, Anna remained a loyal partner for him. After the death of his wife, he married a feminist who is 20 years younger than him from Honeoye, New York “Helen Pitts”. They remained married until his death 11 years later even if his children were not satisfied with this marriage. Besides his writings, he had many achievements as an abolitionist and women’s rights activist. In 1848, Douglass was the only African American to be present at the Seneca Falls Convention on women’s rights. In addition to that, Douglass was assigned different political positions after the civil war as the president of the Freedman’s Savings Bank. Also, between 1889 and 1891, he was appointed minister-resident and consul-general to the Republic of Haiti. Fredrick Douglass died on February 20th, 1895 due to massive heart attack and was buried in Mount Hope Cemetery in Rochester, New York (Frederick Douglass - Quotes, Facts & Books - Biography)

## **2. Characteristics and themes of Slave narratives**

James Olney, in his article “*I was born*”: *Slave narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature* explains that people tend to think that every narrative they read is a unique production of someone’s unique life. Yet, as long as they start reading more and more narratives, they will feel a complete sameness of body of material of those narratives. A reader might find a slight difference or new things, but what would always come out is a mere repetitiveness on them (Olney 46-49). That is why; Olney shared a fixed outline which we always find in the slave narrative. James Olney

in his article gives us a group of characteristics in the content and form of slave narratives. He gives the following outline for the form and the content of the narrative:

**A. An engraved portrait, signed by the narrator: ( form, content, use from different writers)**

In the beginning of the novel we find a portrait signed by the narrator himself. This portrait is a picture of the narrator and below, we find his personal signature. An illustration of this is clearly shown in “*The Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass*” (Olney 50).

**B. A title page**

This title page in slave narratives usually includes a claim of this kind “Written by Himself, written from a statement of Facts Made by Himself... etc”. This claim is an essential part of the title page of slave narratives and we usually find it under the title of the narrative. The narrative written by William Grimes is an illustration of this as we find the statement “Written by himself” under the title *Life of William Grimes the Runaway Slave* (Olney 50).

**C. A handful of testimonials, preface(s) or introductions**

These can be written either by a white abolitionist who is a friend of the narrator like “William Lloyd Garrison” or by a white amanuensis, editor or author whose responsibility is the text like “John Greenleaf”. The preface is to inform the reader that the narrative is a candid and ordinary story and nothing is imaginary or fiction on it. We can find this on the *Life of Fredrick Douglass* in the form of a letter written by Wendell Phillips to Fredrick Douglass (Olney 50).

**D. A Poetic epigraph**

This is an inscription that we find by the beginning of the narrative. It is written by preference from the English poet William Cowper. We can find this poetic epigraph in Solomon Northup’s *Twelve Years a Slave* “Such dupes are men to custom...etc” (Olney 50)

**E. The actual narrative**

Within the narrative itself, there are different apparent themes which most of slave narratives share. First, there is a usual opening sentence starting by “I was born...” with specifying the place of birth of the narrator. This gives a record about the slave’s early years and childhood. The narrator would describe different things such the description of the masters or mistresses he worked for with

details of the first lashes he received; in addition to the stories of women slaves being victims and an image of a strong slave who refuses to be whipped for no reason. As viewed in *Twelve Years a Slave*, the narrator might include a description of a Christian but a severe slaveholder. The theme of literacy is also present at those narratives where the narrator talks about the hardships slaves faced for the expense of their willing to learn. Slave narratives as well are good representatives that show what were slaves' food and garments and the way they used to work. That is to say that they describe their living conditions under the institution of slavery. As mentioned earlier in chapter one, slave trade lead to family separation and sometimes it was hard a mission for slave to have stable families. So, the narratives usually include a realistic description of their families' separation and destruction. The narrator would insert part where he talks about his quest for freedom and his escaping trials that might end up successful or failure. The narrative is sometimes concluded with a successful escape from bondage and changes that the ex-slave makes to his last name, so that he can disguise (Olney 50-51).

#### **F. An appendix or appendices**

The appendix comes by the end of the narrative and can be a group of appendices. This can be composed of documents, bills of sale of the slave, in addition to the details of his purchase from slavery. It might also be newspaper items that include reflections on slavery, anti-slavery speeches, poems and call for the readers to support and abolish slavery. The narrative of *Twelve Years a Slave* includes an appendix that contain letters and other documents that helped in rescuing Solomon Northup from Slavery (Olney 51).

To conclude, slave narratives were written under a common pattern with various themes. However, they could create a full and truthful image of slavery in the United States and what were humans' sufferings under a dehumanizing institution and authority. With themes raised within them, slave narratives could both define and criticize slavery.

#### **Conclusion:**

The slave narratives in the United States created a bridge between the past and present to document what some human beings had to endure at a specific phase of their life. So, African

American literature is a pillar built by many ex-slaves and abolitionists who aimed at freeing themselves and their fellows through writing. *Twelve Years a Slave* is one of many writings that portrayed the life of a slave and showed us the development of personality which slaves had gone through; thus, this point will be discussed in the next two chapters.

## **Chapter III**

### **Types of Dehumanization in *Twelve Years a Slave***

## **Introduction**

The treatment that negates someone else's humanization is known as dehumanization (Keenahan). The term 'dehumanization' is defined in Oxford online dictionary as the act of making somebody lose their human qualities such as kindness, pity... etc. Solomon Northup describes his slavery experience during the twelve years he spent far from his family. In this narrative, Solomon tells the reality of slavery that many might not know and details the treatment slaves received from their masters and explains their feelings. Also, in his memoir, he presents different and important themes and topics of slavery. This chapter tends mainly to shed light on one of those topics which are Dehumanization. Dehumanization is an apparent theme in this memoir through various ways that Solomon witnessed since day one as a slave. Therefore, this chapter aims at illustrating the different ways in which Solomon was dehumanized and aims at giving a clear image of Solomon's life as a slave. We will first look at how separation from his family made him less human, and then we will be looking at his kidnapping event that stripped him away from his dignity as a free man. Afterward, we will look at his work in the plantation as a slave and how this work was hard to stand for a human being. Lastly, this chapter will be concluded by looking at violence as a main aspect of the dehumanization process in Northup's life.

### **1. Family Separation**

Slaves lived with the fact that there is a possible separation that might happen at any moment to their families. They usually get separated either due to sale or due to the death of their owners, so they get divided as an inheritance. However, it is not the same case for Solomon Northup. Family meant an essential part of his life and getting a wife and children gave him tranquility and peace. Consequently, he always felt safe. As a black person, he had legal papers that show he is a free black man whereas others are enslaved and dehumanized because of their color and separated from their beloved ones and family. For Solomon, the family is a quality that he enjoyed over other enslaved African Americans. That is to say that it was an advantage which Solomon had, many of his race fellows did not back then, so losing it held distressful consequences on Solomon's life



after kidnapping. Along the twelve years he spent in bondage, he never stopped thinking about his wife and children; thus, that brought him sadness.

In the beginning of the story Solomon describes his unconditional love for his family and how they are attached to each other. Solomon says:

From the time of my marriage to this day the love I have borne my wife has been sincere and unabated; and only those who have felt the glowing tenderness a father cherishes for his offspring, can appreciate my affection for the beloved children which have since been born to us. This much I deem appropriate and necessary to say, in order that those who read these pages, may comprehend the poignancy of those sufferings I have been doomed to bear. (Northup 8)

In addition to that, Solomon clarifies that he was leading a happy simple life with his wife. They were collaborating to keep the financial status of the family as good as it must be to feed and educate their kids. The following quote clearly shows how they both spend energy on their family: “We always returned home from the performance of these services with money in our pockets; so that, with fiddling, cooking, and farming, we soon found ourselves in the possession of abundance, and, in fact, leading a happy and prosperous life” (Northup 10).

Northup further in the first chapter gives more details about his kids’ names and expresses the attachment he has for them specifically and how they make their life a special one. It is very clear to the readers that Solomon, his wife, and kids make one of the good families. He also seems a caring father who gives some of his time to his kids whenever possible to give them the needed care. Solomon says:

They filled our house with gladness. Their young voices were music in our ears. Many an airy castle did their mother and myself build for the little innocents. When not in labor I was always walking with them, clad in their best attire, through the streets and groves of Saratoga. Their presence was my delight; and I clasped them to my bosom with as warm and tender love as if their clouded skins had been as white as snow. (Northup 11)

In other way, Solomon's family makes an important role in keeping hope for him to live and to rescue himself from slavery as he wished he was dead before having a family so he does not have to try to get back to them. Solomon questions: "Why had I not died in my young years—before God had given me children to love and live for?" (Northup 81). This way, the reader realizes how family is an important for the slaves' community and how separations that happen in any way are harmful for them.

Solomon's situation when he was separated from his family is different from families in the field because they were expecting it at some time. On the other hand, Solomon was having a peaceful life and has already lived his life as a free man by the name of the law. Suddenly, everything changed once he was trapped into slavery. Solomon confirms to the readers that the family's separation is an intentional act done out of racism and for-profits considering humans as commodities. As a result, slaves lived an unstable life and lost their human right of establishing families.

## **2. Kidnapping and dignity**

Kidnapping is defined in the Cambridge dictionary as to take a person away illegally by force. Solomon Northup was dehumanized when he was kidnapped in the first place and ignored his right of being a free man. After a hectic night, Solomon woke up in the morning chained and feeling dizzy then started recollecting what happened that night until he realized his free papers were robbed. With this act, Solomon's status was changed from a free human being with his full right of liberty into a property to be sold. His free papers are more than papers to show he is free but they also enable him to move as he wishes in the country. Normally, Solomon is a free man descending from a free father but to prove his freedom in a society where African Americans are perceived to be slaves, he has always to carry his papers with him. Solomon says of this "[...], to ascertain that I had not only been robbed of liberty, but that my money and free papers were also gone...!" (Northup 19). The chains are very symbolic in this narrative as they stand as a tool of control on someone else's life. Whoever is kidnapped and chained means he no longer belongs to his own but rather he lost his freedom and will be controlled.

Additionally, when Solomon was kidnapped, he was confined in a place called Williams' Slave Pen in Washington DC. Slaves used to be gathered there waiting for their traders to ship them to wherever they should serve later in their life. Solomon describes the cell he was put into: "It was about twelve feet square—the walls of solid masonry. The floor was of heavy plank. There was one small window, crossed with great iron bars, with an outside shutter, securely fastened" (Northup 21). When the reader concentrates on the description of this slave pen, no other idea than dehumanizing conditions would come up to his mind. The way they slept, ate, and showered was completely disgusting. As an act that robbed Solomon's dignity is the way he was sold after his kidnapping. Slaves like Solomon were kidnapped and traded according to their abilities and at what they are skilled best, they were sold. Before getting sold, they were prepared like objects. As much as they were clean, as much as the price of their purchase would get higher for the trader.

One more dehumanizing act that happened to Solomon upon his kidnapping is the loss of his dignity because he was given a new identity; eventually, they forced him to say that he is not a free man at all. When Burch entered Solomon's cell, he accused him of a runaway from Georgia and that he is now his slave while Solomon was denying all of these things: "He denied that I was free and with an emphatic oath, declared that I came from Georgia" (Northup 22). Not only this, but his movement was totally controlled by his masters and he could not move freely as he was before. Whenever Solomon is being transferred from a place to another, he needed passes that show he is not a runaway and to whom does he belong.

### **3. Plantation Work**

Plantation work is one more dehumanization way that appeared throughout the novel. Besides what Solomon endured and witnessed during his kidnapping, he also was dehumanized while serving his masters. When slaves start work in the plantations they had to consider themselves as tools to get work done for their masters; hence, they forgot they are humans. Solomon had kind of a peaceful experience with his first master but not with the others, he describes very hard moments that he lived. Master Tibeats was never satisfied with the efforts and services which Solomon does even though he works all day long. As a result of his dissatisfaction, he abuses Solomon. Solomon

narrates: “I was no compelled to labor very hard. From earliest dawn until late at night, I was not allowed to be a moment idle. Not- withstanding which, Tibeats was never satisfied. He was cursing and complaining. He never spoke to me a kind word. I was a faithful slave, and earned him large wages every day, and yet I went to my cabin nightly, loaded with abuse and stinging epithets” (Northup 68).

The idea of humans being turned into commodities is well portrayed in the narrative through Solomon’s experience in the field. Slaves were given no attention; instead, the masters were given huge importance to what the slave would produce every day regardless of his health condition. When a new slave is presented into the fieldwork, he would be lashed to work as fast as he can and get a satisfactory result for his master. Then, what he produces will be weighed every day. If one day, the slave produces less quantity, he would be lashed and would be proven incapable. Slaves work for long hours as Solomon describes: “The hands are required to be in the field as soon as it is light in the morning, and, with the exception of ten or fifteen minutes, which is given to them at noon to swallow their allowance of cold-bacon they are not permitted to be a moment idle until it is too dark to see, and when the on is full, they often times labor till the middle of the night (Northup 109). Solomon describes himself among other slaves not only as objects to get fortune for their masters but they were also as an entertainment for their masters. A master would also make his slaves awake all night long dancing and singing for him while he enjoys watching them with a drink: “all of us would be assembled in the large room of the great house, whenever Epps came home on one of his dancing moods. No matter how worn out and tired we were, there must be a general dance” (Northup 118). He might even enjoy lashing them so that they dance non-stop “usually his whip was in his hand, ready to fall about the ears of the presumptuous thrall, who dared to rest a moment, or even stop to catch his breath” (Northup 118). Still, slaves are obliged to wake up the next day early to work in the field even if they did not sleep until late at night: “Notwithstanding these deprivations in order to gratify the whim of an unreasonable master, we had to be in the field as soon as it was light, and during the day perform the ordinary and accustomed task” (Northup 118).

Moreover, Solomon mainly lived and worked in catastrophic situations with his fellow slaves. Their work did not end by the end of their plantation tasks; they beside did the household routines sometimes by candle light. In exchange for their work, they received a low quality and quantity of food: “Each one receives, as his weekly allowance, three and a half pounds of bacon, and corn enough to make a peck of meal. That is all – no tea, coffee, sugar, and with the exception of a very scanty sprinkling now and then, no salt” (Northup 110). After all the exhausting and harsh conditions that slave had worked in, they sleep in more disgraceful situation. Slaves usually share a cabin regardless to their gender. Solomon made his bed out of a stick of wood as a pillow and a coarse blanket as a bed. Solomon describes the cabin in which his fellows and he slept: “The cabin is constructed of logs, without floor or window. The latter is altogether unnecessary, the crevices between the logs admitting sufficient light. In stormy weather the rain drives through them, rendering it comfortless and extremely disagreeable. The rude door hangs on great wooden hinges. In one end is constructed an awkward fire-place” (Northup 111).

Solomon tells us more about sleeping that slave lay down in bed with fear of oversleeping in the morning which will expose them to hard punishments. Life in the field and plantation work was such a disgrace for human dignity and Solomon as being exposed to it; he was stripped out of every human quality.

#### **4. Violence**

Violence is defined in Cambridge dictionary as the action or words that are intended to hurt people or extremely forceful actions that are intended to hurt people or are likely to cause damage. *Twelve Years a Slave* as well describes how much violence was present in slave’s life at a daily basis. It gives an authentic description of violence that slaves face from the point of view of Solomon Northup. There were extreme and high levels of violence most of the time done by the slaves’ owners to bring horror into their slaves’ life and maintain their authority. We should mention here that violence was not only physical but it was also psychological. Slave owners mostly apply such a treatment on their slaves using different tools and materials such as whips,

paddles, shackles, and the stocks. As Solomon was newly presented to the life of enslavement, he describes the very first time he saw a paddle:

The paddle, as it is termed in slave-beating parlance, or at least the one with which I first became acquainted, and of which now I speak, was a piece of hard-wood-board, eighteen or twenty inches long, moulded to the shape of an old-fashioned pudding stick, or ordinary oar. The flattened portion which was about the size in circumference of two open hands, was bored with a small auger in numerous places. The cat was a large rope of many stands—the strands unraveled, and a knot tied at the extremity of each. (Northup 23)

This was the first time Solomon saw a punishment tool used by humans to whip other humans considering them not even animals but unfeeling objects.

Solomon was first presented to violence when he kept insisting that he is a free man and not a run away from Georgia as Burch claimed about him. He asked Radburn to bring him the paddle described earlier in this section. Then, they stripped him of his clothing and nailed him to the floor and he started receiving one blow after another to his naked body. When whipping him, Burch would stop only to give him the chance to admit his new status as a slave and not a free man. Solomon gives the reader a description of this scene:

As soon as these formidable whips appeared, I was seized by both of them, and roughly divested of my clothing. My feet, as has been stated, were fastened to the floor. Drawing me over to bench, face downwards, Radburn placed his heavy foot upon the fetters. With the paddle, Burch commenced beating me. Blow after blow was inflicted on my naked body. When his unrelenting arm grew tired, he stopped and asked if I still insisted I was a free man. I did insist upon it, and then the blows were renewed, faster and more energetically, if possible, than before. (Northup 23)

Solomon begged for mercy but the lashes were growing harder, he was whipped until he had no power to speak to either deny what they entitled him or to ask for mercy, he recalls: “I thought I must die beneath the lashes of the accursed brute. Even now the flesh crawls upon my bones, as I recall the scene. I was all on fire” (Northup 23).

After that Solomon had been sold to Tibeats, violence became an essential part of his life as a slave. Once he had a fight with master Tibeats because the latter provoked Solomon while he was working. Tibeats first filled Solomon with a flood of curses. In fact, the fight brought bad consequences to Solomon as he was almost killed by Tibeats and his companions. Tibeats brought his companions and they hang Solomon on a tree as a way to punish him: “Thereupon Tibeats tied my wrists, drawing the rope around them with his utmost strength. Then he bound my ankles in the same manner. In the meantime the other two had slipped a cord firmly. It was utterly impossible to move hand or foot. With a remaining piece of rope Tibeats made an awkward noose, and placed it about my neck” (Northup 73).

Masters and overseers did not only use violence to control their slaves but they also forced them to use violence on one another. Solomon Northup was forced to use violence himself by his cruel master Epps against other slaves like him. Solomon says: “The whip was given me with direction to use it upon any one who was caught standing idle. If I failed to obey them to the letter, there was another one for my own back” (Northup 127). In addition to that, he narrates the experience one of the slave women who was with him most of his slavery period under Epps’. Patsey is a young slave woman who experiences sexual abuse from Epps and severe treatment from her jealous mistress. She lived a life of horror and fear with all those conditions. Once she visited her friend to bring a bar of soap to clean herself, considering that slaves were not given even the full sanitation conditions as humans. When Patsey got back home, Epps did not believe that she was on her friend’s so he forced Solomon to whip her. Solomon recollects the moment he was given the whip: “Stepping to the piazza, he took down a heavy whip, and placing it in my hands, commanded me to lash her. Unpleasant as it was, I was compelled to obey him” (Northup 170). Unfortunately, with no mercy Solomon had to oppress another human who is as equal as him in the social class and situation due to an inhumane master.

### **Conclusion**

Solomon’s life was transformed when he was kidnapped and sold into slavery. He was eventually dehumanized by different factors. His experience helped people realize the reality of

slavery. Solomon among other slaves were expected to labor without stop like machines up to 18 hours a day and were faced with more and more cruelty and hard work conditions. His work gave details about life in plantations and the results of oppression that slaves face.



## **Chapter IV**

### **Consequences of Dehumanization in *Twelve Years***

*a Slave*

## **Introduction**

Solomon labored for different masters with whom he had experienced the hardest of years. Even though Solomon is a son of a free man, educated and had a family, which could not prevent him from getting trapped into slavery. He was kidnapped, beaten and his identity was changed and put away from his family. Serving as a slave after being a free man all his life, Solomon faced daily brutality and oppression, lived in a continuous fear of the future besides being nostalgic to his past days with his kids and wife. However, Solomon did not give up the idea of his freedom and getting his identity back for twelve years. Upon being kidnapped, Solomon did not realize what he was put in. Therefore, he did not know what he should exactly do except being angry and insisting on the fact that he is a free man. After experiencing different feelings, Solomon knew that essential parts of his identity were taken away from him, so he resisted and sought his freedom. As a result, dehumanization he faced daily paved his way to his identity again.

### **1. Trauma**

Solomon Northup was trapped into slavery because of his talent as a violin player, which is considered as part of his identity. He was kidnapped in Saratoga in 1841 in a smart way by two men who claimed they work in a circus. Eventually, he was illegally stripped of his legal papers that proof he is a free man and was sold in Washington DC. Solomon's slavery experience was traumatizing for him not only once, but many times. Trauma is defined in American Psychology association website as an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks... etc (Trauma and Shock). When it comes to Trauma in slavery, Nell Irvin Painter says: "By the end of the eighteenth century, branding, amputation, and other extremely brutal forms of punishment became rare as means of controlling slaves. But beating continued, causing slaves' most catastrophic physical and psychological trauma" (Painter).

When Solomon woke up chained in that dark room, it was hard for him to realize what is happening around him. Solomon being beaten almost until death for insisting on his freedom, he was afraid of any human being that approaches him and considered any white man is going to be

harsh and harmful to him: “A human face was fearful to me, especially a white one” (Northup 25). Then, after few days, he was driven far away with other slaves. He could not believe yet that he was apart from his family and that he is no longer considered as a free man. The events that happened to him since the very first moment of his kidnapping were hard to believe as well and seemed like a dream for him. Due to all the mentioned events that happened as kidnapping, beating and the pain, his mind was a state of denial to all of that. Solomon was questioning himself:

Could it be possible that I was thousands of miles from home—that I had been driven through the streets like a dumb beast—that I had been chained and beaten without mercy—that I was even then herded with a drove of slaves, a slave myself? Were the events of last few weeks realities indeed?—or I was passing only through the dismal phases of a long, protracted dream? It was no illusion. (Northup 46)

After moving to a new slave pen, Solomon witnessed a transformation from human into an object with his fellows. This was one more traumatic event that Solomon lived in the beginning of his enslavement. Slaves at first were ordered to clean themselves and get ready and trained so that they will get admitted by the customers who will purchase them. Solomon says:

In the first place we were required to wash thoroughly, and those with beards, to shave. We were then furnished with a new suit each, cheap, but clean. The men had hat, coat, shirt, pants and shoes; the women frocks of calico, and handkerchiefs to bind about their heads. We were now conducted into a large room in the front part of the building to which the yard was attached, in order to be properly trained, before the admission of customers. (Northup 47)

Solomon explained the way slaves were shown to customers which was disgracing human’s dignity similar to how animals are checked and sold: “He would make us hold up our heads, walk briskly back and forth, while customers would feel our hands and arms and bodies, turn us about, ask us what we could do, make us open our mouths and show our teeth, precisely as a jockey examines a horse which he is about to barter for a purchase” (Northup 48).

No one believed that Solomon was a free man once he was kidnapped and once he was sent to labor in Louisiana cotton plantations. This was a turning point because he was chosen between resisting to regain his identity by saying the truth or being exposed to death since his life is not important for the white men: “My life would not have weighed a feather, in any emergency requiring such a sacrifice”. (Northup 34)

The traumatic times Solomon spent in his slavery phase presented him to a hard lifestyle that people from his race live and which he has never heard about before. So, slavery as a dehumanization process exposed slave’s bodies and minds to physical and psychological traumatic experiences. Despite the hard experience a slave might have had, some could resist trauma thanks to their religious beliefs or their families (Painter). An example of this is Solomon Northup who resisted different kinds of oppression he received and kept seeking his liberty.

## **2. Resistance**

After that Solomon had faced all the difficulties of his kidnapping and trauma by the beginning of his slavery journey, his state of mind was in trauma and a total rejection of his new situation. That is why he tried by the beginning to find ways in order to run away: “awakening from the pleasant phantasms of sleep to the bitter realities around me, I could but groan and weep. Still my spirit was not broken. I indulged the anticipation of escape, and that speedily” (Northup 25). After many thoughts of the possibility of any mistake about his situation, Solomon realized that he has no way to change it unless he keeps silent and never utter a word about his origins and real identity: “I had by this time become satisfied, however, that my true policy was to say nothing further on the subject of my having been born a freeman. It would but expose me to maltreatment, and diminish the chances of liberation” (Northup 32). He finally submitted to the reality that he is now enslaved and is far away from his family and could not at present be who he was before, Solomon recollects: “Then I lifted up my hands to God, and in the still watches of the night, surrounded by the sleeping forms of my companions, begged for mercy on the poor, forsaken captive. To the almighty Father of us all—the freeman and the slave—I poured forth the supplications of a broken spirit” (Northup 46).

When Solomon realized he is now enslaved, he gave up the idea of revealing his real identity; rather, he started working hard in the plantation to prove his skills to his master and to gain his position. When he was placed at Mr Ford's plantation, he was assigned to do some work with lumber. He says: "at this business I think I was quite skillful, not having forgotten my experience years before on the Champlain canal. I labored hard, being extremely anxious to succeed, both from a desire to please my master [...]" (Northup 62). At this stage, Solomon was trying to impress his master Ford by the skills he has learnt in the past. In fact, this act is considered as a way of resistance against the daily racism and underestimation he gets as a black person. Black people were always reviewed as unskillful, ignorant and stupid individuals who cannot achieve nor do what a white person is able to.

Solomon resisted as well in another way when he started working for master Tibeats, a harsh master who disliked Solomon. Tibeats provoked Solomon one morning telling him that he did not do what he exactly had to and flooded him with curses and insults. On the other hand, when Tibeats seemed that he is about to whip Solomon, the latter became fearless of what the consequences would be if he violently reacted to Tibeats. When Tibeats ordered Solomon to obey him he says:

Before the blow descended, however, I had caught him by the collar of the coat, and drawn him closely to me. Reaching down, I seized him by the ankle, and pushing him back with the other hand, he fell over on the ground. Putting one arm around his leg, and holding it to my breast, so that his head and shoulders only touched the ground, I placed my foot upon his neck. He was completely in my power. (Northup 71)

Solomon's spirit was too rebellious and he was too angry that Tibeat's threats did not stop him from whipping him one after another until he felt his arm aching. Tibeats cried and called for God's mercy while Solomon was harshly blowing his body. That was not the first time Solomon and Tibeats were engaged in a serious fight. For the second time, Tibeats provoked Solomon while he was working. Yet, Solomon reacted even more violently than the last time and he was about to kill him. Fortunately, his mind was sane enough to realize that if he kills him he would bring more troubles to himself so, he ran away to save his life from a deadly punishment. Solomon says: "There

was "a lurking devil" in my heart that prompted me to kill the human blood-hound on the spot—to retain the gripe on his accursed throat till the breath of life was gone! I dared not murder him, and I dared not let him live" (Northup 87).

Solomon thanks God that he did not commit a murder during his enslavement: "I thank God, who has since permitted me to escape from the thralldom of slavery, that through his merciful interposition I was prevented from imbruing my hands in the blood of his creatures" (Northup 40). Those events illustrate how violent Solomon became and how courageous he was unlike many of the slaves who lived with him back then. Solomon as a free man did not accept that much assault even when he was enslaved and that explains to us that his free soul and identity were not stripped away from him.

### **3. Identity and Freedom**

Northup did not internally change due to the conditions he lived throughout the twelve years of slavery. The three essentials parts of Solomon's previous life are his freedom—including his name—his family and his violin. Once he lost them, they were still a motivation that triggers his to get back his freedom in a smart way rather than randomly mentioning about his real name and identity. Solomon could get back his real life thanks to his internal identity.

The violin is a part of Solomon's identity and is a symbol and a reflection of him. It both led him to slavery and helped him go through his hardest times in labor. When Mrs. Epps purchased him a violin it was a good shelter for him and a way to get back one of the aspects of his identity. He says: "It has also been the source of consolation since, affording pleasure to the simple beings with whom my lot was cast, and beguiling my own thoughts, for many hours, from the painful contemplation of my fate" (Northup 7). No matter what slavery has taken away from him, his art remained alive within him. During slavery his masters still were making profit of his artistic skills through making him be a fiddler in their parties. This way, Solomon could also gather little money and profit for himself too. Like in his past days, the violin was a source of profit for Solomon to make a living for his family, during his slavery period; he used the profits he got from the fiddling to get a clean and decent extra food unlike the contaminated dishes served for slaves.

During his most painful days, Solomon's violin represented the role of a real friend who brings him ease and serenity; the violin remained with him during happiness and sorrow to console his spirit. Solomon writes: "It was my companion—the friend of my bosom—triumphing loudly when I was joyful, and uttering its soft, melodious consolations when I was sad " (Northup 143). His violin would not only accompany him in parties and gatherings, it also helped him escape his distressing thoughts at night when he cannot sleep thinking about his fate; and gives him moments of peace on times of leisure.

In addition to all what has been mentioned, his violin brought him a partial liberty while in slavery because it introduced him to friends and gave him the chance to move and enjoy some privilege that other slaves did not. Thanks to his art, he became known and asked for around the country as a gifted fiddler. The violin gave him somehow a parallel position like the one he previously owned before being enslaved. Solomon says: "it heralded my name round the country—made me friends, who, otherwise would not have noticed me—gave me an honored seat at the yearly feasts, and secured the loudest and heartiest welcome of them all at the Christmas dance" (Northup 143).

As Solomon was an educated man, he could realize the gaps put between black and white people but never bowed his head and resisted humiliation in all ways possible. Even though in the beginning he decided not to utter a word about his real name, he was still have that idea of escape and freedom because deep inside he belongs to the identity of a free man. Solomon says concerning what his father taught him: "he endeavored to imbue our minds with sentiments of morality, and to teach us to place out and confidence in Him who regards the humblest as well as the highest of his creatures" (Northup 7). Eventually, he asserts that black people are not unconscious when it comes to liberty. Black men are perceived as ignorant and people who know little about liberty. Solomon says:

Let them know the heart of the poor slave—learn his secret thoughts—thoughts he dare not utter in the hearing of the white man; let them sit by him in the silent watches of the night—converse with him in trustful confidence, of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of

happiness," and they will find that ninety-nine out of every hundred are intelligent enough to understand their situation, and to cherish in their bosoms the love of freedom, as passionately as themselves. (Northup 135)

So, while working hard in the field and fiddling here and there, Solomon was looking for a source of hope to make his way into freedom. The spirit of the free man did not vanish once he got help from Bass and once he was rescued by Mr. Northup, instead, he stopped on his way home to sue his kidnappers. Unfortunately, even if he is a free man by law and considers his full rights to defend himself, law itself was not on his favour at that time to sue Burch since he is a black man. Solomon explains: "I was then offered as a witness, but, objection being made, the court decided my evidence inadmissible. It was rejected solely on the ground that I was a colored man—the fact of my being a free citizen of New-York not being disputed" (Northup 213). This shows us how limited are the rights of black people were in the United States and how due to the color of their skin, they were not able to claim their rights and stand against a white man in court.

### **Conclusion:**

In *12 years a slave*, Solomon Northup illustrates the key role his violin and understanding of freedom played to bring him survival throughout the distressing years of slavery. The music that he learned since he was young was used against him then taken from him all at once; afterward, it was used for his owners' favour and profit again. However, it was a comfort for him to find his stolen identity. As well, thanks to what his father taught him, he could understand that being free is his full right and did not give up seeking his way to free himself. He also was courageous enough to bring his cause into the court against whoever had a hand in his traumatic situation.



## **General Conclusion**

It was important for this research to examine the history of slavery in the United States and its highlight as well as looking into the writing style that made up an important phase of African Americans' resistance. The author of *Twelve Years a Slave*, via his experience, helped us learn more about the conditions he and his fellows lived. In addition to realizing the consequence, slavery drove to his life and personality.

In the first chapter, we have seen that slavery in the United States was an institution that had a deep impact on society, economy, culture, and politics. It was a prosperous economic resource for the colonies that traded Africans and considered them as inferior and therefore justifying their enslavement. We have analyzed how African men and women were laboring hard and they could barely get the satisfaction of their masters; on the other hand, women were particularly sexually abused which made them double oppressed in that history. Even though it was hard and sometimes impossible, the African Americans formed families, and little by little they could realize their community with specific values and characteristics. We have concluded that through their identity, African Americans could resist slavery in various ways such as music, the Underground road, and writing.

In the second chapter, we have taken a closer look into the slave narratives genre which is a literary genre that contributed to the birth of African American Literature. We have also analyzed how Solomon Northup's writing was enriching to slave narratives and helped to engrave the history of slaves in his way. Finally, we have concluded that slave narratives are narrations written by those who successfully made their way to freedom. We have noticed that those writers were from both genders and they could inspire the black community with their writings because they were rich with new themes and shared a common outline.

In the third chapter, we have further analyzed the ways in which Solomon Northup was dehumanized. Solomon Northup was a free man before that he got kidnapped. Like any other black enslaved person, he received a great deal of dehumanization and he was stripped of his identity. We have seen that once he was separated from his family, and once kidnapped, his name was immediately changed and he was denied the right of defending himself and proving his freedom.

We have concluded by the events of his slavery that all the life qualities he enjoyed were taken away from him such as his family and his violin.

In the last chapter, we have concluded the results of the conditions that Solomon lived during the twelve years of slavery. We have seen through analysis that he was trying to search for his identity within the values he learned in the past and the things he had such as his fiddling skill. We have also noticed that Solomon was a resistant who tried with all price to be himself despite the fact he could not even confess his real identity and name. Finally, the feeling of belonging to a free race did not get separated from him that is why he kept working hard to obtain his freedom.

Through this analysis, we have fulfilled our objectives in answering the research questions we have set. We have learnt the aspects of slavery in the United States and the struggles African Americans had to go through because of their race. African Americans witnessed the worst of living conditions such as trading them and later facing physical oppression and sexual abuse from their masters. We have found that the African American community; as a result, found different ways to combat slavery. Their resistance ways differed between music, escape, and building an underground road by slaves' activists. We have also found that slave narratives is the writing genre that helped ex-slaves write their stories for the next generations to be aware of how the United State was built. Solomon Northup is one of the ex-slave writers who witnessed all kinds of horrible treatments that made him conscious of the gap between the white man and the African Americans.

Furthermore, we have explored Solomon's experience with the dehumanization that started when he was separated from his family and lost them as a source of safety. Solomon was not only dehumanized when he lost his family but when the traders captivated him as well. When Solomon became officially a slave, he started working in plantations with other slaves. Work in plantations was hard and tiresome, for he worked from daylight until night. Solomon was given little time to rest and had not the chance to have proper food or bed. Unlike his previous life, Solomon could hardly get used to the new life in the plantation which was certainly inhumane. The treatment he went through was all about violence and whipping and was breaking to his dignity into parts and changed his attitudes. Through the events that Solomon witnessed we deduced the influence, they

drove to his identity throughout the twelve years of slavery. The event of kidnapping created a trauma that made him think a lot about his fate and his future. At other moments he would give up the idea of his freedom and at others, he would still not believe that he is holding another identity given to him by others. Northup narrated in many occasions, the moments in which he reacted to his master's violence with violence itself. He had at different places in his life as a slave the chance to end his enslaver's life; however, Solomon preferred not to so that he does not kill the seed of humanity inside him. His violence was an act of resistance and courage. The conditions and treatment he received made him stronger and helped him achieve his freedom. Solomon's will and yearning for freedom did not stop, he was always trying, by all means, to protect himself and at the same time to act wisely so that he gets his life back. He has kept the idea of freedom in his mind for so long and never lost the hope of being rescued. During times of sorrow, his violin would cheer him up and free him. So he had the feeling that his identity still exists within him and to get his freedom, he should work harder. We have seen that after being freed, Solomon took actions in front of the court to punish all those who had a part in his kidnapping. Even though people in charge were never sentenced, but this shows us how a free man keeps defending himself until the last moments. As for our analysis and Northup's narrative, we have deduced that the hypothesis that we suggested is correct. The reasons that made slavery a negative aspect in Northup's life are that all the harsh conditions he had to go through, brutality, racism, discrimination, and violence; they consequently harmed his life, behaviors, and emotions. Thus, he could not enjoy freedom for twelve years after that he had little idea about slavery life. However, all this did not break his will for freedom but made him even stronger, and thus our conclusion is drawn from a quote of Ralph Ellison "When I discover who I am, I will be free".

## Bibliography

### Primary Resource:

Northup, Solomon. *Twelve Years a Slave*. London: Penguin Books, 2014.

### Articles

Andrews, William L. *Slave narrative / American literature*. 26 April 2020

<<https://www.britannica.com/art/slave-narrative>>.

Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. *Harriet Jacobs / American abolitionist and author*. 03 March 2020 <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Harriet-Jacobs>>.

*Charles Ball (U.S. National Park Service)*. 14 April 2020 <<https://www.nps.gov/people/charles-ball.htm>>.

Cole, Rachel et al. *Solomon Northup American Farmer and Writer*. 01 October 2013. 14 April 2020 <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Solomon-Northup>>.

Editors, Biography.com. *Frederick Douglass - Quotes, Facts & Books - Biography*. 02 April 2014. 20 April 2020 <<https://www.biography.com/activist/frederick-douglass>>.

Henderson, Harris. *The Life of an American Slave*. 17 April 2020 <<https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/ball/summary.html>>.

Keenahan, Debra. «*Dehumanization - Research Online - UOW* .» 1990 . Research Online Universtiy of Wollongong Australia . <<https://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=2656&context=theses>>.

McCaskill, Barbara, and Sidonia Serafini. *William Grimes (1784-1865)*. 20 February 2017. <<https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/william-grimes-1784-1865>>.

New York Times . «*The Kidnapping Case: Narrative of The Seizure and Recovery of Solomon Northup*.» Teaching Tolerance. 9 May 2020 <<https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/texts/hard-history/the-kidnapping-case-solomon-northrup>>.

*Trauma and Shock*. 05 May 2020 <<https://www.apa.org/topics/trauma/>>.

Painter, Nell Irvin. *Slavery: A Dehumanizing Institution* / OUPblog. 14 February 2006 . 06 May 2020 <[https://blog.oup.com/2006/02/slavery\\_a\\_dehum/](https://blog.oup.com/2006/02/slavery_a_dehum/)>.

**Books:**

Brown, Steven E. «*Sexuality and the Slave Community*.» Brown, Steven E. Phylon. Vol. 42. Clark Atlanta University, 1960. 1 vols. 1-10.

Charles, H, and Nicholas Jr. «*Slave Narratives*.» Negro History Bulletin, Vol. 15, No. 6. Vol. 15. Association for the Study of African American Life and History, 1952. 6 vols. 107-114.

Cimbala, Paul A. «*Black Musicians from Slavery to Freedom: An Exploration of an African-American Folk Elite and Cultural Continuity in the Nineteenth-Century Rural South*.» The Journal of Negro History. The University of Chicago Press , 1995. 15-29.

Fiske, David et al. *Solomon Northup: The Complete Story of the Author of Twelve Years a Slave*. Praeger , 2013.

Harriet, Jacobs. *Incidents in the Life Of A Slave Girl*. 1861.

Horton, James Oliver. and Horton, Lois E. *Slavery and the making of America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Marsden, Elizabeth. «*Solomon Northup (1808-1863?)*.» S.Nelson, Emmanuel. African American Autobiographers . 2002. 290.

Martin R. Pierre, et al. «*The Effects of Racism, African Self-Consciousness and Psychological Functioning on Black Masculinity: A Historical and Social Adaptation Framework*.» Martin R. Pierre, et al. Journal of African American Men, Vol. 6, No. 2. 2001. 19-39.

Nichols, Charles Harold. «*The Case of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave*.» The William and Mary Quarterly, Vol. 8, No. 4. Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1951. 552-560.

Northup, Solomon. *Twelve Years a Slave* . Éd. Joseph Logsdon Sue Eakin. 1968. 125-212.

Olney, James. «*"I was Born": Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature*.» Olney, James. Callaloo, No. 20. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984. 46-73.

Smith, Merril D. *Encyclopedia of Rape*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2004.

Worley, Sam. «*Solomon Northup and the Sly Philosophy of the Slave Pen* .» *Callaloo*, Vol. 20,  
No. 1. 1997. 243-259.

## ملخص

قاوم الأمريكيون الأفارقة العبودية في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية وردوا عليها بطرق مختلفة كالسياسة والأدب وقد قاموا بكتابة سير ذاتية يقصون فيها تجاربهم الحقيقية كقصة مضطهدة. من بين هؤلاء الكتاب يوجد سالمون نورثوب صاحب السيرة الذاتية "عبد/لاثنى عشرة سنة" و تقدم هاته السيرة الذاتية حياة الكاتب و حياة العبيد خلال القرن التاسع عشر وتعتبر واحدة من بين الكثير من السير الذاتية التي أعطت الصورة الحقيقية عن العبودية. تهدف هاته الدراسة الى تبيان الطرق المختلفة التي تم فيها تجريد سالمون نورثوب من إنسانيته خلال حياته اليومية كعبد وتبين تأثيرها على حياته وعلى هويته بشكل خاص. قد تمت هاته الدراسة بتطبيق ثلاث نظريات متداخلة وهي النقد الأدبي الأفريقي الأمريكي، نظرية العرق النقدية ونظرية مابعد الاستعمارية. وفي النهاية قد بينا في هاته الدراسة بأن التجريد من الانسانية و الاضطهاد والاختطاف و كل ماتعرض له من أحداث قاسية قد أثر بشكل سلبي على هويته خلال الاثنى عشرة سنة التي قضاها في الرق.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** العبودية، الأمريكيون الأفارقة، قصص العبيد، التجريد من الانسانية، الاضطهاد، الهوية



## Abstrait

Les Afro-Américains ont répondu et résisté à l'institut d'esclavage aux Etats Unis avec différents méthodes telles que la politique et la littérature. Les esclaves africains aux Etats Unis ont livré leur histoire sous la forme du récit d'esclaves qui racontent leurs expériences véridiques en tant qu'un groupe opprimé. Parmi ces écrivains, Solomon Northup dont le récit d'esclave *Douze ans Esclave* représente sa vie et la vie des esclaves durant le dix-neuvième siècle. Ce mémoire est l'un des nombreux récits d'esclaves qui ont illustré l'image réel d'esclavage. Le but de cette étude est de montrer de quelle manière Solomon Northup a été déshumanisé dans sa vie quotidienne comme un esclave. Il expose aussi l'impact de ce dernier dans la vie de Solomon et particulièrement son influence dans son identité. Cette recherche a été faite en appliquant trois théories croisées : Critique Littéraire afro-américain, Théorie Critique de la Race et Théorie postcoloniale. Nous montrons finalement dans cette étude que la déshumanisation, l'oppression et toutes les épreuves qu'il a enduront négativement influé son identité durant les douze années qu'il a passé dans la servitude.

**Les mots clé:** esclavage, Afro-Américains, récits d'esclaves, déshumanisation, oppression, identité.