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Frederick Douglass: The man, his words and his legacy as a master rhetorician

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Frederick Douglass: The Man, His Words and His Legacy as a Master Rhetorician

TITLE

BY

Tameka Lashean Johnson

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

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IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

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2010

YEAR

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Abstract

This thesis offers a synthesis of existing research regarding not only Frederick Douglass’ literacy in the slave narrative genre, but also an Aristotelian analysis of his Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself (1845). Douglass’ challenge is to reach an audience not only of abolitionists, but also of free blacks who are more grounded in the vernacular tradition than equal to his own considerable skills in rhetorical literary construction.

My research addresses the problem that existing research inadequately considers the degree to which Douglass uses his awareness of the audience and employs rhetoric in his Narrative. My thesis analyzes Douglass’ Narrative using principles and precepts from classical rhetoric while examining Douglass’ work through the lens of genre theory.

I also recognize that, before Douglass can assess the rhetorical strategies to reach his audience, he must overcome limits within himself that Du Bois would later call “double consciousness.” Douglass does not equivocate: I argue in my thesis that his Narrative, in echoes of Aristotle, uses the best ideas expressed with the best words in the best arrangement for the best purpose: the liberation of millions of enslaved Africans, the very embodiment of rhetoric as agency in voicing his humanity on his own terms for his own purposes.
Dedication:

To God—who is the head of my life—for allowing me the strength to make this incredible journey. To my children, James and Tamia, who have consistently shown love, support and patience during my educational experiences. To my grandfather for always believing in me and for showing me love's true essence. To everyone who encouraged me, listened to me discuss Frederick Douglass, and to those who helped me continue to strive towards success.
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Understanding rhetoric lends an understanding to the power behind Frederick Douglass’ *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave Written by Himself* (1845). In order to grasp the power behind Douglass as a rhetorician, I will look closely at the *Narrative* to help readers understand how Douglass’ rhetorical power and how Douglass’ narrative was an example for others who published their own slave narratives. Douglass illustrates a clear understanding of his culture and society and of the power of rhetoric. While focusing on the duality of his audience—both free blacks and northern whites—he convinces them to change their ignorance concerning the conditions in which slaves are held as chattel.

According to Amy Devitt, the power of agency begins with understanding genres. She states, “Genres have the power to help or [to] hurt human interaction, to ease communication or to deceive, to enable someone to speak or to discourage someone from saying something different” (1). Devitt’s three-part definition, however equivocating, lends comprehension to the power behind Frederick Douglass’ 1845 *Narrative*. Douglass begins his narrative, simply, to inform his audience of the trials and tribulations involved in slavery and to call for a change in the American people’s all-too-often complacent indifference to it. Douglass, however, is a free man at the time of the *Narrative*’s publication but still a man with no real credibility, due to his fugitive slave status. To gain a measure of such credibility, Douglass accepts a rhetorical decision that involved another rhetorician speaking on his behalf, William Lloyd Garrison—a well-known abolitionist.
While Frederick Douglass’ *Narrative* begins originally as a way to support eloquent oratorical skills and leads to literary construction in order to prove that he was a slave who had indeed achieved such a degree of literacy, given that such eloquent oratory would likely raise doubts, the *Narrative* becomes much more than a biography, an account of historical events and a revelation of slavery’s horrors; it also becomes a prominent example of how to write an effective slave narrative. Where biographies begin with the life of the person, birthplace, date of birth and parentage, Douglass’ *Narrative* begins with the mystery of a slave’s life:

I have no accurate knowledge of my age, never having seen any authentic record containing it. By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs, and it is the wish of masters to keep their slaves thus ignorant. I do not remember to have ever met a slave who could tell of his birthday. (47)

In many ways, this example of Douglass’ life helps the slave to recognize how his anonymity and the powers over him coincide while it undermines the slaveholder’s assertion that a slave cannot learn while withholding even knowledge of his birth.

Nevertheless, Douglass also articulates clearly the harsh, physical realities linked with slavery. He takes the isolation and the “hidden” atrocities and brings them to the forefront of the American people’s attention; then he juxtaposes the theft and loss of identity with animals incapable of knowing their birth. In order to establish a common ground with his audience, Douglass relies not only on the *pathos* of his audience (a rhetorical move), but also a strategy common among 19th Century sentimental writers.
Moreover, Douglass uses specific examples of his life, and his visual effects call on a skill of sentimentalism prominent in 19th Century literature. The *Narrative* not only appeals to the sentiment of the audience, but it also serves a dual audience: first, the prominent white abolitionist audience who could decide the fate of "runaway" slaves pursued by their masters’ agents, and, second, future fugitive slaves and current slaves struggling to attain freedom from those masters and their agents all too eager to be informed of their escape methods. Douglass, however, does not allow the dual audience to hinder his work. The *Narrative* is published in the 19th Century prior to the Civil War, as were most slave narratives. While the slave narratives are particular to a specific audience and a specific time frame, they remain powerful in their own right, further exemplifying Devitt’s argument that “the rhetorical genres have the power to help or hurt human interaction” (1). When speaking of the Underground Railroad, Douglass illustrates this duality, to help or hurt: open communication helps potentially the slave master and hurts the slaves. Douglass’ disapproval of the openness with which fugitive slaves discuss their escape is visible when he calls the Underground Railroad the “upperground railroad” (138). Although he appreciates the sacrifices made by these men and women who risk harsh punishment and death from assisting in escape and the pursuit of freedom, he criticizes them simply because he cannot understand how any revelation of successful methods to escape helps future fugitives. He only sees this divulgence of crucial information as helping the slave masters (138). Imploring ceremonial oratory, Douglass is able to show his appreciation for Underground Railroad workers, but he also reprimands them for their ill-conceived notions about the helpfulness which in reality proves dangerous to the future fugitive slaves.
Even though the slave narratives proved influential for the growth of the abolitionist movement, Douglass cites a specific occasion where this rhetorical genre becomes a danger to the remaining slaves who desire freedom. He also incorporates these dual concerns of sentimental appeal and documentation without revelation within his own diction: while honoring the noble people who extend empathy, he also recites a picture of betrayal and bloody persecution. Douglass uses the word *enlightening* in acknowledging the slave master's generosity—albeit constrained by the inhumanity of the institution itself—and in indicting the slaves who commit this disgrace of betrayal of and complicity in the persecution of their fellow slaves. Former slaves who are now free write in this genre to educate whites about the many cruelties towards people of African descent, to tell their stories in hopes of changing the society in which they live, to gain sympathy for the cause of freedom, and to inspire whites and blacks to end chattel slavery. The previous example encompasses many ways that the narrative inspires the audiences; however, some information of necessity remains an untold story to protect the fugitives who are telling their stories as well as preserving a path to freedom for future fugitives.

The conflict of appealing to and withholding information from simultaneous audiences not only considers the audiences that the narratives intend to serve, but also gives voice to the people who are writing the narratives. Douglass began his career as an orator speaking at various events to protest slavery, and that exposure led to him writing his narrative. He becomes a writer and orator, simultaneously, serving both audiences. Gregory S. Jay, in his article "American Literature and the New Historicism: The
Example of Frederick Douglass,” explains the connection between Douglass the orator and 19th Century culture. He eloquently states:

As a speaking subject, Douglass becomes the agency through which the literary and social ideologies of his time speak... Douglass's mastery of the master's tongue transforms him from the dictated subject of ideology into the agent of history (and literary) change. (228)

Douglass not only learns his rhetorical skill by participating in the oratorical culture, but he also masters literary expression—the art of his masters—while he gains popularity and a means to reach a larger audience than oratory alone would permit. The culture of 19th Century America leads to a first-person account of history, encompassing literary and rhetorical genres, through Frederick Douglass' *Narrative*.

Douglass, additionally, attracts his audience as he relates to them through his life experiences and calls on the teachings of Aristotle, evoking *pathos*, *logos*, and *ethos*. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg summarize the definitions as follows. “the arguments that one discovers or ‘invents’ should appeal to reason (*logos*), emotion about the subject under discussion (*pathos*), and trust in the speaker’s character (*ethos*)” (31). These rhetorical appeals derive strictly from the teachings of Aristotle and other classical rhetoricians; therefore, such a theoretical dominance as Aristotle enjoys midway through 19th Century America helps readers understand the importance of Frederick Douglass’ *Narrative* within the context of his culture.

In addition to Douglass speaking to inform his audience, he supplies the need for the American people to hear directly the stories of enslaved Africans. John A. Collins, in a conversation with William Lloyd Garrison, explains, “The public have itching ears to
hear a colored man speak, and particularly a slave. Multitudes will flock to hear one of this class” (qtd. in James Matlack “The Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass” 16). The recurrence of slaves speaking in public adds to the thirst of the public to crave ever more intriguing stories than they have already heard; however disturbing, they represent slavery’s atmosphere and nurture the pathos of an abolitionist public ever more vocal, albeit self-righteously so, in their expression of moral outrage.

According to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, “rhetoric falls into three divisions, determined by the three classes of listeners to speeches [...] it is [...] the hearer that determines the speeches’ end and object” (185). Aristotle categorizes the three oratorical divisions, the “proofs.” based on the hearer as, “political, forensic, and the ceremonial oratory of display” (185). Each division serves a specific purpose and focuses on a different time: “political speaking urges us either to do or not to do something, [...] forensic speaking either attacks or defends somebody, [...] and the ceremonial oratory of display either praises or censures somebody” (185). Douglass, indeed, exemplifies all three forms of rhetorical genres: deliberative, judicial and epideictic, in that, respectively, he persuades, judges and entertains his audiences. Frederick Douglass melds each of these styles together, and he praises or censures, urges a call-to-action, and attacks or defends his audience simultaneously, which can be observed in the 1845 *Narrative*. His jeremiadic *Narrative* both condemns the era as failing in its ideals and thus rightly punishable, but also, like the prophet Jeremiah, he holds out hope for reforms.

Instead of focusing solely on the lack of intervention, Frederick Douglass engages in a rhetorical style currently considered the jeremiadic genre. Willie J. Harrell, Jr., in his article, “A Call to Consciousness and Action: Mapping the African-American Jeremiad.”
discusses the rhetorical style of the African-American jeremiad, explains the use of the jeremiad and asserts its influence on the community when used for protest. The jeremiadic genre, Harrell argues, is a rhetorical device for “Black protest” because it “called for social prophecy and criticism” (151). Harrell investigates David Howard-Pitney, who argues “Blacks used this prototypical form of rhetoric in ‘its purest form’” (151). Harrell argues African-American writers invoked this prophetic style of rhetoric to employ social change. While there are several definitions of the jeremiad, the one that fits Douglass’ rhetoric, Harrell explains, originates with Winthrop D. Jordan. He defines the rhetoric as a:

complex fusion of religious and political modes of thought strongly tinged with less lofty quality of opportunism […] it focused not on the miseries of the victims of slavery but on the wickedness of the victimizer. (153)

Since the jeremiadic criticizes the perpetrators as well as urges them to act, react or they may choose to not act—as required the political division—the jeremiadic is also a ceremonial style of rhetoric, which entails a process of praising or illustrating disdain for a specific situation. The major difference involves Douglass’ use of the Bible as a means to critique those guilty of betraying their own ideals. As Christianity is the dominant religion in 19th Century America, Douglass understands the power inherent in embracing the religion as a means to attack slaveholders on the ground that they betray their own belief system.

In conjunction with understanding the jeremiadic rhetorical style, its purpose also links Douglass’ style to what Carolyn R. Miller refers to as “social action.” She also validates rhetorical genre as “a classification of discourse upon recurrent situation or.
more specifically, upon exigence [sic] understood as social motive, ... the typical joint rhetorical actions available at a given point in history” (31). Because rhetorical genre derives from specific times in history and specific situations, the slave narrative of Frederick Douglass fits perfectly into the genre. Drawing on the teachings of rhetoric and the culture in which he lives, Douglass uses recurrence as a means to prompt social change—not unlike the allusion that echoes the bondage of the Jews in Egypt and also sanctifies their exodus toward liberation.

Miller relies on a definition from Raymond Williams, based on his anthropological work, stating, “culture as a ‘particular way of life’ of a time and place, in all its complexity, [is] experienced by a group that understands itself as an identifiable group” (qtd. in Carolyn Miller 68). Miller further explains, “It surely is the case that in different times and places different sets of genres appear” (68). The need to discuss the horrors of slavery promotes the slave narrative. The culture of buying and selling humans not even perceived as such as a cultural experience, however, also leads to the popularity of the slave story—with the irony noted: without slaves, their stories need no telling. The specific time and place for this rhetorical genre of the slave narrative could only occur during enslavement as the need for protest heightened with each passing year that African descendants remained in fetters.

In order for rhetorical genre to represent culture, the texts produced must also be representative of the culture. Mikhail Bakhtin’s essay “The Problem of Speech Genres” focuses on speaking through a series of language styles as opposed to the vernacular moment in which people actually speak. He focuses on speaking as a means to communicate that which has been transformed over time. Bakhtin states, “[l]anguage
arises from man’s need to express himself, to objectify himself” (1232). This affirmation of one’s own being through language implies that the human being only wants to communicate with others in sustaining community and, in doing so, finds the rhetorical style in language to accomplish this goal of becoming a free being in a just state.

Frederick Douglass’ Narrative exemplifies a balance of the Aristotelian proofs (ethos, logos and pathos) and melds the genres of rhetoric (deliberative, judicial and epideictic) with jeremiad. He both helps the slave population achieve a sense of self and an inherent human right to citizenship and harms the slave economy by undermining its notion that no “human beings” were at risk. Not only does he ease communication among abolitionists and ground it within the voice of those who could now express themselves as agents of their own freedom—the fellow and future writers of these slave narratives, but he also challenges the white population coming to hear him speak to reconsider its own latent white supremacy in perceiving him as the agent of his own world. His speeches exude such eloquence that many did not believe that he had ever been a slave.

Frederick Douglass not only encompasses the cultural behaviors of his environment, but he also masters them in a way that exudes his rhetorical brilliance. Learning to articulate his being through the rhetorical genre of the slave narrative, Douglass’ Narrative and his life become an inspiration to many of the writers following him. Using his culture and his understanding of that culture, Douglass is able to prompt successfully social change, the emancipation of those in bondage, during 19th C. America. Not only does Douglass initiate social change, he does so through the power of rhetoric, which is exactly what those supporting enslavement did for three centuries.
Quoting the Bible and citing other moral reasons, Douglass battles rhetoric with rhetoric. a much more effective form of fighting than the looming bloodshed ahead of the Civil War that not even Douglass and Lincoln could avert with their moral imperative of rhetoric. Nonetheless, Douglass still instructs us in the moral capacity and imperative of rhetorical power—for agency and for understanding.
A Classical Solution to an Unconventional Problem

While the rhetorical genre proves effective in speech, it is also important to understand where this genre's foundation begins. One cannot truly gain an understanding without looking first to the classical rhetoricians. Frederick Douglass' *Narrative* echoes classical and other rhetorical genres, enhancing his ability not only to connect with his audience, but also learning to choose his words wisely. Douglass' rhetorical introduction begins with the *Columbian Orator* and as he reads various well-known and effective orators. As Douglass continues to study this book, it becomes a part of him, and he teaches himself to speak in the same manner that he taught himself to read. Douglass' *Narrative*, while a subgenre of biographical writings, goes further. Biographies and memoirs are documents that the author writes in an attempt to inform future generations about life's struggles and accomplishments so that the stories leave a legacy for others to remember the author. Whereas slave narratives serve their contemporaneous generation and require the reader to make changes to the current state of conditions, the narratives' focus on current events makes it a genre requiring action and not just a means to remember someone. Houston A. Baker, Jr. offers the introduction to Douglass' *Narrative* recollecting about a nineteenth-century editor who notices the significance of slaves telling their stories, claiming that:

The fugitive slave literature is destined to be a powerful lever. We have the most profound conviction of its potency. We see in it the easy and infallible means of abolitionizing [sic] the free states. Argument provokes argument, reason is met
by sophistry; but the narratives of slaves go right to the heart of men. (qtd. in Baker 9)

While this editor may be overly zealous in his description, he does make several pertinent observations. This editor claims that argument provokes argument: something Douglass knows and understands all too well. Slavery’s discussion causes dissent within the union from southern as well as northern citizens because morality is not an issue one can truly measure. Ethics, on the other hand, involves agreement within society, and, while there is still disagreement, it focuses on the whole of the community and leaves less contention for debate. Slavery time and time again becomes an issue of morality. While some Americans find the idea of chattel appalling, others view African descendants as animals and, therefore, see nothing wrong with treating them like common household pets or farm animals. So Douglass with his rhetorical finesse takes this issue and illustrates its immoral qualities. Douglass juxtaposes Africans first with animals then as people to show how this line of argument is blurred not by reason but by opinion.

As Douglass illustrates the slave owners’ ability to constantly and consistently devalue Africans, he remembers the events following Captain Anthony’s death. The demeaning continues throughout every aspect of the slave’s life; Douglass recalls “There were horses and men, cattle and women, pigs and children, all holding the same rank in the scale of being, and were all subjected to the same narrow examination” (113). Noticing how Douglass purposely groups people with animals, instead of simply listing property, and its valuation is essential to understanding how he explores his audience’s pathos. Douglass’ description involves depicting the picture that slaves are treating as animals and in the eyes of their owners. Then Douglass claims that each held “the same
rank in the scale of being” (113). Leaving the reader to ponder how a person or entire group of humans can hold the same rank as animals not only forces a derogatory image to one’s mind, but this image also reminds the audience that people should not be treated with the same respect as a mere animal. Douglass’ previous claim that he knows as much about his life as a horse knows of his prompts the question would a horse really want to know his age; whereas, a human instantly wants to know his origin and history. Lacking this information haunts people as it does Douglass most of his life. The arguments that slaveholders use to justify slavery are the same arguments that Douglass use to illustrate the moral dangers that one incurs as a slaveholder; moreover, as Douglass presents his audience with reasons for abolition, at times, it is met with its own recognition of the convoluted, misleading reasons as justification for enslavement. But the fact that slavery proves injurious becomes an effective tool in developing his skill to illustrate the irrationality of human bondage. The ways in which Douglass implores rhetoric enables him to find success as an orator.

One of the ways that Douglass does achieve this stature is by mimicking Cicero’s teachings. Cicero suggests:

We show the student whom to copy, and to copy in such a way as to strive with all possible care to attain the most excellent qualities of his model. Next let practice be added, whereby in copying he may reproduce the pattern of his choice and not portray him as time and again I have known many copyist do. (320)

The pattern that Douglass reproduces is, in fact, the autobiography; however, he does not simply copy this pattern; he uses it to illustrate the vast differences of being a man in American society as opposed to being a black man in nineteenth-century slaveholding
America. Douglass continually incorporates events from his life to give his audience an understanding of what is lacking in his life story. Whereas autobiographical writings generally begin with background information, Douglass begins with a lack of knowledge and a craving to fill the gaps. Douglass says: "A want of information concerning my own [birth] was a source of unhappiness to me even during childhood. The white children could tell of their ages. I could not tell why I ought to be deprived of the same privilege" (47). This desire for information continues throughout his life and, in some ways, justifies Douglass' need to learn to read and to become a better man than he had been conditioned to believe that he could be. As Douglass reflects, he mentions the "want of information" and the "unhappiness" that he experiences from not gaining that information. This experience first shows his audience that, unlike white children, black children are deprived of the simplest information and purposely kept ignorant to serve the purpose of slavery: Douglass feels that he is entitled to the information as he recalls the deficit in his life, noticing that it is indeed a privilege to know one's origin. These words drive the remainder of his rhetorical career.

In conjunction with transforming the autobiographical genre into literary construction of a voice different, more sentimental, and focused on changes for a better America than had yet been achieved, Douglass exercises various elements of speech. Bakhtin's *The Problem of Speech Genre* asserts:

When there is style there is genre. The transfer of style from one genre to another not only alters the way a style sounds, under conditions of a genre unnatural to it, but also violates or renews the given genre. (Bakhtin 123)
Instead of giving dates and events that occur in his life, Douglass eloquently elaborates each incident, leaving little room for doubt concerning the accuracy of his story or his ability to touch the hearts and minds of his audience. As Douglass writes his *Narrative*, he indeed changes the biographical genre altering the style, and, in many ways, he violates the standards required for telling a life story creating a new genre. Biographical authors focus on joyous occasions, family ties and overcoming struggles, but Douglass focuses on how a joyous occasion becomes a hardship, and how the lack of familial ties causes difficulty when attempting to overcome struggles. Douglass reminds his reader of Christmas and how slaves enjoy this holiday as drunken idiots. The slaves enjoy a transitory but illusory idea of freedom, and they abuse alcohol to the point of utter sickness. While the slave owner uses trickery to induce these feelings, the slave’s misery causes a craving for the security and health that enslavement brings with it. Thus, the slave owners continually keep the slaves ignorant about their health and freedom.

Frederick Douglass understands that this struggle is not his alone, and, in order to help himself and the millions of enslaved Africans, he must adapt the strategies of the master to his own purpose; therefore, his speech and mannerisms become a combination of his African culture and the Euro-American teachings. Once he becomes literate, his readings lead to his uncompromising and successful skills as a rhetorician. During the 19th Century, Frederick Douglass was referred to as an “African champion.” according to William L. Garrison’s *Liberator*, as the author reflects on a speech that Douglass presented at the “Syracuse Convention,” stating: “this estimable colored man created quite a sensation” (111). Calling Douglass a champion illustrates that he is a fighter and, moreover, wins his fights quite frequently. Garrison also claims that Douglass creates a
"sensation"; this description implies that the audience does indeed feel moved when Douglass speaks. Whether the audience feels the need to change its perspective or it is appalled by his descriptions, the fact remains that he is capable of making his audience feel the very revulsion that has been his life. From Douglass’ studies, he learns to speak naturally. Douglass’ ability to speak enhances his drive to better himself because he does not simply copy other rhetorician’s styles; he uses his life experiences to enhance his speech and effectiveness towards the audience.

Quintillian, along with Cicero, also speaks of imitation; while Quintillian acknowledges the importance of imitation, he takes it a step further. Advocating for imitation as a means to obtain a higher level of excellence than the original speaker, teacher or whomever is being imitated. Quintillian believes:

Undoubtedly, then, imitation is not sufficient of itself, if for no other reason than it is the mark of an indolent nature to rest satisfied with what has been invented by others...It is dishonorable even to rest satisfied with simply equaling what we imitate. (401)

Aristotle’s, Cicero’s, Isocrates’ and Quintillian’s teachings enhance and illuminate Douglass’ rhetorical complexity and thus make him one of the great orators in American history not only because he studied and was able to make a difference in his country, but also because he made a difference by improving the conditions for freedom for himself by helping others. His goal remains the freedom of the body, but he did not neglect the development of the mind as a means to freedom; that emphasis makes him uniquely qualified to move towards progress. No progress occurs if the person’s mind remains in the manacles of captivity.
In conjunction with captivating the audience, Isocrates advocates for education in rhetoric assenting to the previous ideas of the Sophists. He asserts, “[...] education could improve the natural talents of all comers—and that it should be useful to the state” (25). Natural talent alone does not make a successful orator, but learning the skills of argumentation and persuasion helps develop the oratory, so it can be “useful to the state.” Isocrates’ “Antidosis” advises “it is well that in all activities, and most of all speaking, credit is won, not by gifts of fortune, but by efforts of study” (79). The importance of learning about and studying one’s prospective audience, in an attempt to win credit specifically in speech, helps the orator persuade his audience. Knowing one’s audience proves far more beneficial than having oratorical skill alone.

Douglass not only learns his rhetorical skill by participating in the oratorical culture, but he also masters the art of his masters while he gains popularity and gains a means to reach a larger audience. America’s 19th century culture leads to a first-person account of history encompassing literacy and rhetorical genre visible through Douglass’ Narrative. As Douglass gains insight into his own culture as well as that of his masters through the legacies of rhetoric, he also gains insight about how to sway most effectively his audience. Douglass relies on William Lloyd Garrison’s credibility to affirm his own authenticity, since, as a fugitive slave, he does not possess very much stature. Garrison introduces Douglass as a man “capable of high attainments as an intellectual and moral being—needing nothing but a comparatively small amount of cultivation to make him an ornament to society and a blessing to his race” (34). While Garrison’s description of Douglass does encourage people to listen to what he has to say, it also brings questions of his education and ability to remain a respectable member of society. He also calls him “a
blessing to his race,” and, by using the word *blessing*, he brings religion into accountability as Douglass always does.

In contrast, Garrison’s description also plays into many of the stereotypes of the Antebellum America. As Garrison claims that Douglass requires “a comparatively small amount of cultivation to make him an ornament to society and a blessing to his race” he paints a picture of him that is both positive and negative. Cultivation is something generally attached to land, and to claim that a man needs this type of treatment distorts the picture more. The word *cultivation* becomes much like a *pharmakon*, as it becomes both a blessing and a curse to Douglass’ character. Though Douglass only needs a little cultivation—he does indeed need someone to help him—Garrison infers that the help comes from the same people oppressing him. Instead of treating this race as animals, Garrison wants the slave owners to teach them to be better citizens. Ironically, most of Douglass’ cultivation is by his own hand. He speaks often about how he taught himself in an attempt to show that African Americans are capable of learning, but, more importantly, he illustrates that African descendants are thinking people and not mindless beasts. When Garrison describes Douglass as a man who has “properly chosen to write his own *Narrative*, in his own style, and according to his own ability, rather than employ someone else” (3-4), he focuses on Douglass’ need to tell his story in his own way and on his own terms. Illustrating both the necessity behind Douglass’ narrative’s publication and the ability of African descendants to learn, Garrison gives all the credit to Douglass improving his mind. The introduction addresses two “fears,” or white supremacist projections that were popular during slavery: a slave’s inability to learn and his inability to function in society without the instruction of the supposed, self-proclaimed white
ruling class. However, because the narrative is in the first person, Douglass speaks directly to his audience which enhances both his connection to his audience and his awareness of them. Douglass takes the time to explain, in detail, the events that he witnesses, vividly helping his audience embody the horrors for themselves. While recording an event about a slave woman’s whipping, Douglass elaborates:

Mr. Severe was rightly named: he was a cruel man. I have seen him whip a woman, causing the blood to run half an hour at a time; and this, too, in the midst of her crying children, pleading for their mother’s release. He seemed to take pleasure in manifesting his fiendish barbarity. (55)

Douglass paints a picture for his audience that not only illustrates the horrors, but he also condemns simultaneously Mr. Severe. He discusses the unusual cruelty necessary for slave owners, calling attention to barbaric acts that cause “blood to run” for an extensive period of time. He also relays the inability to show concern for crying children “pleading” for their mother. More importantly, however, as Douglass describes the “fiendish barbarity,” he brings to mind acts that his audience has either witnessed while standing by idly or, perhaps, some members of it have committed some of the same crimes. Douglass does not want to his audience’s actions to go unnoticed. So, with each description and detail that he relates, he makes certain of their effectiveness.

While genre theory classifies types, Douglass’ focus on the rhetorical genre within his slave narrative helps him accomplish the means to freedom which an autobiography without self-conscious use of rhetorical significance could not. Douglass’ awareness of the need to invoke change helps him call for action, which is very a different purpose from biographical stories. By focusing on the need to change
America’s culture through logic, while illustrating his emotion and his passion for the country, its people and the well being of all inhabitants, Douglass successfully condemns the American people for their treatment towards African descendants. On one hand, biographies and memoirs serve as a legacy for future generations to remember the authors and help the audience gain insight into their lives—an unnecessary and unfounded luxury for Africans. Slave narratives, on the other hand, focus on the present attempting to enhance the current generation’s lives. Slave narratives tell a story specific to the enslaved person, even though they share some levels of familiarity with a vast majority of slaves and slave owners. Each one entails common knowledge about life on plantations along with portrayals of typically cruel treatment, but Douglass focuses on the betterment of life through learning to become a man of integrity who accepts himself as a man. He also understands that, in order to accomplish this task, he must help the audience see what is wrong with the system and that Africans deserve to be treated equally as the Declaration of Independence guarantees to all men.

Genres, according to Amy Devitt, “have to power to help or hurt human interaction, to ease communication or to deceive, to enable someone to speak or to discourage someone from saying something different” (1). Devitt sets up genres as a duality, a dichotomy that serves as an either/or proposition, with no middle to be attained, thereby inscribing the logical fallacy that evokes a false dilemma. However, Douglass notices that the middle is where success lies in the persuasive mode. Often situations are presented as either-or choices, but, once his audience is able to see that compromise begets success for both parties, he is able to make a better connection with them and to gain more sympathy—if not empathy—and understanding. Douglass uses this pride in
liberty not only to relate to common principles, but he also makes his point to the white, male-dominated American audience before him. When he focuses on the pride of the country, he remembers the founding fathers of the country. Douglass argues:

Pride and patriotism, not less than gratitude, prompt you to celebrate and to hold it [Independence Day] in perpetual remembrance. I have said that the Declaration of Independence is the RING-BOLT to the chain of your nation’s destiny; so indeed, I regard it. The principles contained in that instrument are saving principles. Stand by those principles, be true to them on all occasions, in all places, against all foes, and at whatever cost. (363-364)

By speaking of celebration and the Declaration of Independence, Frederick Douglass calls to attention the emotions attached to the day as well as feelings of freedom. Aristotle’s teachings develop a style encompassing pathos, logos, and ethos. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg summarize the definitions as follows, “the arguments that one discovers or ‘invents’ should appeal to reason (logos), emotion about the subject under discussion (pathos), and trust in the speaker’s character (ethos)” (31). Invoking both logos, “stand by those principles,” and pathos, “be true to them on all occasions,” Douglass articulates the history of the country without attacking the principles or beliefs of the audience. With the last line, he reflects on a time of war in the country when the citizens fought for individual rights. He also advocates for the rights of the slave community, and he wants his audience to advocate for freedom as the founding fathers did in 1776.

In order for Douglass to win this battle, he must begin with the foundations of rhetorical study. The Sophists “sought to call attention to the function of language in
inducing belief, rather than encouraging audiences to give themselves up uncritically to its power to move and persuade” (23). Since Biblical scriptures remain the dominant support for slavery, Douglass uses his rhetoric to debilitate those justifications. Therefore, Douglass becomes adamant about changing so-called Southern Christianity. He notes the differences in believing, preaching and actually practicing the religion. Douglass notices that, in order for the slave to receive religion, he must do so not passively but claim it actively as his own because his master was not concerned with saving his soul like the Bible instructs.

In Dwight Hopkins’ Cut Loose Your Stammering Tongue introduction, he discusses the idea of the “invisible institution” (Hopkins x). Hopkins claims that the institution not only involves ideas that incorporate the slave’s religion, lifestyle, and overall need to survive, but it also overlaps into every aspect of the slaves’ life. The invisible institution, Hopkins explains, existed as “the illegal and concealed slave gatherings where full singing, dancing, preaching, praying and shouting were offered as testimonies to what the Lord had done for black people in bondage” (Hopkins x). While Hopkins irresponsibly generalizes the African’s conception of God claiming their idea “speaks to the omnipresence and non-derivative status of the divinity” (5), he makes a valid observation. Slave owners typically argued that Africans were, indeed, pagans and had no religion. Hopkins observes that many of the Africans believed in a God who sees all, knows all and understands one’s trials and tribulations. He also asserts that “African indigenous religions believe in a God who cares; some call God ‘the Compassionate One,’ others see ‘the God of pity’ who rescues victims in need. …God is the main hope of the poor in society” (5). Considering the previous ideas that Africans attached to God.
it is not surprising why they both accept and reject white Christianity. Taking into account the African’s understanding of Christianity, one must consider Douglass’ struggle with southern religion. Douglass recalls his need to free himself and other slaves of the misguidance of their mental and spiritual oppressors. He recalls his and other slaves’ participation in the Sabbath as well as this “invisible institution.” Douglass’ recollection proves both the need for secrecy and the slaves’ ability to gain their own relationship with their Creator. Claiming that “Instead of spending the Sabbath in wrestling, boxing and drinking whisky, we were trying to learn how to read the will of God: for they had much rather see us engaged in those degrading sports, than to see us behaving like intellectual, moral and accountable beings” (120). Douglass not only criticizes the practice of Christianity, but also he professes openly his disdain against slave owners for attempting to convert the religion into a heinous ideology for their own selfish desires in order to keep slaves ignorant and in bondage.

Even though Douglass admits his belief in Christ, he condemns “the slaveholding, the woman-whipping, the mind darkening, [and] the soul destroying religion that exists in the southern states of America” (20). Douglass does not hesitate to articulate his disdain for the hypocrisy of such “Christian” ideology.” Douglass’ ability to illustrate his rhetorical power through his ability to captivate his audience helps him become a speaker in high demand among the abolitionists. His views on southern Christianity, his theatrical rhetoric and his ability to articulate his thoughts and emotions enhance his necessity for abolitionists to request his services. Not only does it become necessary for blacks to change the idea of a white God, but they must also learn to teach themselves. The idea of incorporating one’s own experiences into that of the new life bleeds into
every aspect of the slave’s life in bondage. He not only learns to survive through the “invisible institution,” but also his whole life becomes a part of this institution. He learns to assimilate necessary parts of the culture in order to become a legitimate member of society—both in the eyes of blacks and in an attempt to prove his rights to “be” a part of the dominant culture. Douglass continually questions Christianity and uses a political forum to do so. Douglass’ style cannot be limited to one class of speech and a mixture of styles tends to work best for Douglass, depending on his audience. Douglass understands that one method will not work in all situations and that sometimes change is better than the proscribed practices. Douglass analyzes his audience and relates to them by using terminology that is familiar to them from the Declaration of Independence as well as biblical quotes. This new style derives from the teachings of Isocrates.

Another skill pertinent to Frederick Douglass’ success relates to the way that he teaches himself to read and write, as well as to how he masters the skills necessary to become an excellent rhetorician. Through imitation exercises, from The Columbian Orator, which he describes in his autobiography, Douglass reads and memorizes several rhetorical strategies. One story Douglass reads about a discussion between a slave and his master intrigues him. He comments in the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave on the dialogue between slave and master, recollecting, “the slave was said to say some very smart as well as impressive things in reply to his master—things which had the desired though unexpected effect” (83). As Douglass reads the dialogue, he becomes more interested in learning to read well because he now has an example of an intelligent slave. The “desired though unexpected effect” that Douglass speaks of reveals the teachings of rhetoric as a form of persuasion. The slave’s
evident intelligence led to “the emancipation of the slave on the part of the master” (83). Douglass, at the age of twelve, and after he learns of the slave’s emancipation, recoils at the thought of “being a slave for life” (83). These events, coupled with his master Thomas Auld scolding his wife, as she was teaching Douglass the alphabet, that “[l]earning would spoil the best nigger in the world...if you teach that nigger... how to read, there would be no keeping him” (78), adds to Douglass’ determination to obtain education after receiving this brief taste of literacy as power and freedom.

All fully realized talents, including rhetoric, are learned and trained skills. While I do not believe anyone is born with the ability to persuade or speak eloquently without proper training, some natural talent is necessary in order to use the learned talents efficiently. With ample dedication and training, all people have the ability to become rhetoricians. However, like any skill if untrained, it is does not flourish. Rhetoricians are artists with a talent, but, if they never train that talent, then the ability to persuade is not as powerful as when the individual works to develop that talent. Douglass’ ability to speak out about the heinous acts against his community in bondage and inflicted upon himself helps him to acknowledge and to incorporate the need for social changes. Rhetoric is a form or art that shapes the world and adapts as the people do. Using his many examples and teachings, Douglass uses various classes of the rhetorical genre, but each class helps him to elaborate, to communicate and to move his audience towards the changes that he desires: those that culminate in freedom. As Douglass evolves and incorporates his many life lessons into his story, his world changes. Rhetoric is not what or even how you say something but how effectively you communicate your point to another person: that skill—melding talent, work, development and experience with
compassionate commitment as Douglass does—proves a powerful means of changing a society founded on bondage and encouraging a people's journey from enslavement to liberation.
Frederick Douglass Breaks His Slave Chains and Becomes His Own Master

Most scholars discuss Frederick Douglass' rhetoric as one dimensional; however, Douglass' study of the *Columbian Orator* fused the styles that he studied into his own unique style. Douglass has been viewed as an epideictic orator due to his speeches being presented on special occasions and by the abolitionists requesting his presence. The same misconception that leads audiences to view his speeches as ceremonial also leads his *Narrative of the Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1845) to be viewed as a ceremonial text because he was asked to write it after finding success through his abolitionist speaking engagements. While his *Narrative* does follow the same pattern as his speeches, it is worthy to note that he taught himself to master several of the most prominent orators' styles and that he adapted those styles to meet the African Americans' needs during Antebellum America. An epideictic orator commends or criticizes an audience for specific deeds. Frederick Douglass did both commend and criticize his audience; however, his language reaches far greater depths than the epideictic orator definition allows. He also informs, calls for a change, and persuades. Because Douglass performs many skills simultaneously, it remains difficult to categorize this great orator. Frederick Douglass' skills varied on many different levels; therefore, he should not be contained in the single category of an epideictic orator.

Because Douglass' life incorporates much pain and suffering endured by other slaves and by him, he frequently reminds his audience that his life is not nearly as harsh as other slaves' experiences. One might also consider what happens to the slaves to be a
tragedy in the sense that many slaves tell stories about the horrific events they all endure. While his life, when compared to white privileged citizens, does not illustrate America’s promises—a life in the New World full of prosperous opportunities—his life gives him an opportunity to grow as a man and to appreciate life. According to Aristotle’s Poetics, a tragedy has six parts necessary to be considered a tragedy, including: “plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle and song” (25); moreover, he explains that the most important element is the “arrangement of the incidents” (25). While Aristotle’s definition pertains to playwrights creating tragedies, this definition also applies to rhetoricians as they formulate and present ideas to an audience. Taking into account that a life story is also a performance lends an understanding to Aristotle’s discussion of rhetoricians, as he states:

A further argument is that if a man writes a series of speeches full of character and excellent in point and diction and thought, he will not achieve the proper function of tragedy nearly so well as a tragedy which, while inferior in these qualities, has a plot or arrangement of incidents. (27)

A rhetorician must take into account the audience’s ability to follow the story line and to incorporate the events within it in an orderly fashion in an effort to keep the attention of the listener or, in Douglass’ case, the reader. Douglass speaks continually of events familiar to his audience, and, when he refers to familiar events, he calls attention to the events that many of the slaves tell while illustrating Douglass’ ability to captivate an audience. This technique can either bring forth the passion of the audience or reveal Douglass’ insight as his story progresses. Continually illustrating tragedies proves effective repeatedly for Douglass as he reveals not only the horrors, but also the inhumane treatment that the slave suffers. Tragedies generally force people to act, and
that is precisely what the political division of rhetoric determines. A call to action, on the part of the speaker as well as the audience, requires *logos* (reason) for an action that leads to freeing the enslaved and to ending human suffering: the abolition of slavery as a defining American institution.

Frederick Douglass, known to many as a rhetorician, author, editor, proprietor, and abolitionist, was first known as a slave. He was born into slavery circa February 1818. As a slave it was illegal for anyone to teach him, or for him to learn, to read and write. However, he mastered reading, writing, and oratorical skills with very little assistance and no formal training. Unsurprisingly, Frederick Douglass became a great orator by assimilating all the styles of classical Greek and other rhetoricians into his own personal style.

By using rhetoricians like Aristotle, Isocrates, Cicero, and Quintillian in order to understand Douglass’ rhetoric, it becomes clear that he is more than a ceremonial rhetorician. Not only do I argue that Douglass’ rhetoric is an assimilation of many other rhetoricians, but I also wish to give readers more understanding towards the varying styles of rhetoric throughout history in order to untangle the misconception of Douglass as merely an epideictic orator than those who have so framed him have acknowledged. While broadening the understanding of his rhetoric in its literary and rhetorical dimension to that which moves beyond ceremonial inscription to oratorical performance, Douglass illustrates his ability to captivate his audience using various rhetorical skills to widen the scope in which scholars view him and his rhetoric. Frederick Douglass, while demonstrating the ability to focus on a variety of rhetoricians, heavily displays Aristotle’s influence. Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* explains the three categories of rhetoric as forensic,
ceremonial, and political. The definitions for each type of speech make it difficult to
categorize Douglass. “[F]orensic speaking either attacks or defends somebody […]
ceremonial oratory of display either praises or censures somebody […] and the political
orator is concerned with the future; it is about things to be done hereafter that he advises
for, or against” (185). Looking closely at each definition and illustrating how Douglass
employs all three simultaneously, I will discuss the importance of the rhetoric within his
*Narrative* and how he inspires a country to move towards change.

Andrea Deacon, in “Navigating ‘The Storm, the Whirlwind, and the Earthquake’: Re-Assessing Frederick Douglass, the Orator,” reports: “one possible reason for this lack
of serious attention may stem from Douglass’ rhetoric being perceived merely as
epideictic or ceremonial in nature” (65). Deacon looks closely at Aristotle’s definition of
an epideictic orator and compares it with Douglass’ 1852 address, “What to the Slave is
the Fourth of July.” Though I view the *Narrative* and she investigates the speech,
Deacon makes a noteworthy observation as she rejects the original categorization and
asserts a different classification, stating, “Douglass’ public address more accurately
reflects a dramatic form of political or deliberative rhetoric that deserves to be taken
seriously, especially in its formation of a collective identity for African Americans within
antebellum America and in its potential for current, interdisciplinary scholarship and
pedagogical application” (66). Deacon’s analysis pertaining to Douglass’ speech is also
helpful in understanding his *Narrative*. Douglass understands the necessity for
performance in his oration and mimics that throughout the *Narrative*.

Before Douglass embarks on connecting with his audience, he employs the
rhetorical skill of *kairos*. That skill of captivating the audience adds to the impact of
Douglass’ rhetoric because he invokes several skills simultaneously. In conjunction with Aristotle, Douglass also implements the ideas of Isocrates, a rhetorician and educator. Isocrates advocates for education in rhetoric assenting to the previous ideas of the Sophists. He asserts, “[...] education could improve the natural talents of all comers – and that it should be useful to the state” (25). Natural talent alone does not make a successful orator, but learning the skills of argumentation and persuasion helps develop the skill so it can be “useful to the state.” Isocrates, in the “Antidosis,” advises “it is well that in all activities, and most of all speaking, credit is won, not by gifts of fortune, but by efforts of study” (79). The importance of learning the values of one’s prospective audience helps the orator persuade his audience. This skill proves far more beneficial than having oratorical skill alone.

Douglass demonstrates his diverse rhetorical skill throughout his Narrative. He relays his many disappointments with the state of the country, exercises his ability to relay pertinent information, and makes connections while using various rhetorical skills to achieve his goal. Studying the state of American society and its history becomes a key aspect of Frederick Douglass’ Narrative. In order to truly know the audience, he must study its values and relate to it in a way that continues to grasp and to hold the audience’s attention.

When the founding fathers demanded freedom from Great Britain, they used rhetoric to do so, explaining that:

In every stage of these Oppressions we have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated petitions have been answered only by repeated injury.
A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of free people. (Declaration of Independence)

In the same fashion that American people described their tyrant and complained for not receiving just treatment, Douglass does the same when recalling an incident with a slave who, upon being asked if his master treats him well, responded negatively. Douglass claims that:

He was immediately chained and handcuffed; and thus without a moment’s warning, he was snatched away, and forever sundered, from his family and friends, by a hand more unrelenting than death. This is the penalty of telling the truth, of telling the simple truth, in answer to a series of plain questions. (62)

Douglass later reminds his audience of the saying adopted by slaves that “a still tongue makes a wise head” (62). Slavery did to the African what Britain attempted to do to the American. They receive harsh treatment and are not allowed to voice the truth without receiving harsh penalties, yet the slave owners commit crimes more harsh and seem ignorant to the injuries that the slaves incur.

In this manner, the oppressed becomes the oppressor, and Douglass wants to make the connection a more vivid one so that a logical solution can be reached and so that this dialectic of “master and slave,” in the analogy of “taxation without representation,” will never happen in the country again. Douglass says the man was “chained and handcuffed...by a hand more unrelenting than death” (62). As he explains this story, he calls attention to the fact that the man is being punished for telling the truth, a moral quality that most people respect, but, since he offended his master, he is forced to leave family, a severe enough punishment, but Douglass refers to it as something worse
than death. Douglass illuminates how telling the truth and how the slaves voicing their desire for freedom and better treatment frees some men—those white men who fought for their freedom from Britain—while others incur punishment for requesting that same freedom and respect. Douglass, not ignorant of his audience’s motives and history, delivered “The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro: Speech at Rochester, New York, July 5, 1852,” one of his more memorable speeches illustrating his rhetorical ease as he critiques, condemns and praises his audience. He relays his many disappointments with the state of the country, exercises his ability to relay pertinent information, and makes connections with his audience while using various types of rhetorical skill to achieve his goal. Studying the state of the American society and its history becomes a key aspect of Frederick Douglass’ speech. As he puts it, “[t]he task before me is one which requires much previous thought and study for its proper performance” (359). In order to truly know the audience, one must study their values, and relate to them in a way that continues to grasp and hold the audience’s attention.

Seventy-six years before Frederick Douglass delivered this speech, the country celebrated its independence from Great Britain, and the pride from that day resonated with his audience. Douglass used this pride to not only relate, but he also makes his point to the white, male dominated, American audience before him. When he focuses on the pride of the country, he remembers the founding fathers of the country. Douglass argues:

Pride and patriotism, not less than gratitude, prompt you to celebrate and to hold it [Independence Day] in perpetual remembrance. I have said that the Declaration of Independence is the RING-BOLT to the chain of your nation’s destiny; so indeed, I regard it. The principles contained in that instrument are saving
By speaking of celebration and the Declaration of Independence, Frederick Douglass calls to attention the emotions attached to the day as well as feelings of freedom. As he attempts to remind his audience of their own acts of tyranny, he also reminds them of why they are no longer under Britain’s rule. Douglass relies heavily on his previous rhetorical success, and it should not be ignored. His previous speaking engagements do not become void because he chooses to write his *Narrative*; those engagements allow him the opportunity to nurture the ideas that he discusses within the *Narrative*.

Consequently, Douglass’ style incorporates Aristotle’s seminal teachings by developing a style encompassing *pathos*, *logos*, and *ethos*. *Pathos* relates to an emotional connection with the audience, *logos* appeals to the audience’s ability to follow logically the argument or to use its own logic to support the argument, and *ethos* appeals to both the character of the speaker as well as to that presumed of the audience.

Douglass rhetoric incorporates not only the words and styles of previous rhetoricians, but also the feelings of pride and hardship facing the founding fathers. Douglass assimilates this patriotic tone in order to obtain some understanding on behalf of the African Americans in bondage. This sense of remembrance allows him to make recommendations for the future of the African American slave--soon to be considered citizen--as well as that of the country. Douglass encompasses several ideas in this small space, including the “harsh and unjust” behavior towards the African American and how this treatment leads to a desire for freedom from that same government which, ironically, he has just professed a common affirmation for self-determination with his audience.
Douglass’s statements serve a continual dual purpose as he helps his audience remember the past “greatness” of the nation; he also reminds them of the necessity to act instead of remaining complacent, if that “greatness” of “one” nation is to be fulfilled.

The Declaration of Independence, a private document with public acclaim, now a governmental document, inspires Douglass on several occasions. However, Douglass understood the nature of the document and merely imitating the document would not suffice. He depended on the passion that the document evoked in the nation to inspire his own passion and to transmit it to his audience. Even though Douglass has to discuss the founding fathers’ great accomplishments and victories, he also acknowledges the current state of bleakness him and his brethren face. Douglass understands the delicate nature in which he must discuss these events because his words will impact the future of millions. His eloquence and his combination of rhetorical teachings allow him the opportunity to inspire hope for the future without losing respect for the past—or, at least, for the principles of that past.

While there has been some criticism attempting to decide where Douglass’ style of rhetoric fits, none comes close to explaining his variations in style and the enormous rhetorical skill that he possessed. Douglass not only embodies all three characteristics of Aristotle’s foundational attributes of argument, but, in his rhetorical style, he merges them with the teachings of other classical rhetoricians. True to Aristotelian rhetoric, this synthesis not only appeals to the pathos of the audience, but it also appeals to the logos. Douglass knows the best way to appeal to his audience is to find some familiarity between his audience and him. As Douglass attacks the open discussions surrounding the Underground Railroad, he also manages to praise the efforts of the escaped slaves.
According to Aristotle’s definition, forensic oratory must be an “either/or” approach.

Using Aristotle’s approach, Douglass explains:

I have never approved of the very public manner in which some of our western friends have conducted what they call the underground railroad, but which, I think, by their open declarations, has been made most emphatically the upperground railroad...I honor those men and women for their noble daring, and applaud them or willingly subjecting themselves to bloody persecution, by openly avowing their participation in the escape of slaves...They do nothing towards enlightening the slave, whilst they do much towards enlightening the master...Let us render the tyrant no aid; let us not hold the light by which he can trace the footprints of our flying brother. (138)

Douglass accomplishes multiple goals when he forces his audience to reconsider its actions, knowing some if not most of them are abolitionists and participants in freeing slaves. While he does not hesitate to acknowledge his appreciation for helping slaves escape bondage, he does want to call to mind that the more the secret society discusses its efforts, the more it puts future runaway slaves at risk. Also by renaming it the “upperground” railroad, he brings to light the very nature that it is not as secretive as his audience thinks, or as it needs to be. What actually occurs allows the slave masters—the tyrants—more access to capturing runaway slaves, thereby making his audience of abolitionists complicit with masters committing more horrible crimes towards the slave and possibly allowing all future and current runaway slaves a punishment that only death can end.
Even though Douglass shows respect and admiration for the country, he also shows his disdain in the way that the promises brought forth by the founding fathers have gone astray. As Douglass focuses on convincing his audience to hear him and make changes, he must also accept the fact that many of the men listening to him admire the founding fathers for their ability to construct the very system that he speaks against. However, like the audience that he addresses, many of the founding fathers owned slaves while others disagreed with the system. Therefore, he is able to make connections with his audience regardless of its personal stance relating to the founding fathers. This duality enhances the multiple aspects of his rhetoric, and it allows him to praise the founding fathers while condemning the audience. Douglass does not take an either/or approach; instead he takes a both/and approach. He evaluates both sides equally with the same amount of preparation and evidence.

Knowledgeable of the historical events that bring him to this moment, Douglass is aware that even with this pride comes a sense of disgrace. Though the founding fathers were able to gain victory from Great Britain, they became the oppressors themselves. Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* illustrates this strange sense of Africans as less than human while describing whites as beings full of purity. Jefferson describes Africans as “that immovable veil which covers all the emotions of the other race” (50). However, when discussing describing whites, he claims they have an “elegant symmetry of form” (50). Noticing that the great men capable of writing the Declaration of Independence are the same men capable of announcing that Africans wear an “immovable veil” which hides their true selves from the world, Douglass must find a way to respect the positive effects of these mean while acknowledging that the country they
envisioned was also not a utopia. These strategic moves help him persuade and invoke the *logos* and *pathos* of his audience. As the audience is made aware of the culture’s history, when the facts are clearly stated, it becomes difficult to argue with the respect and admiration of men whom they consider time honored. This ability to show respect adds to the Douglass’ *ethos* as an orator. This esteem he demonstrates towards his audience and America not only leaves the audience with thoughts to ponder, but it also helps them to remember the great tradition of principles on which the country was built.

The scholar Wolfgang Mieder discusses Frederick Douglass as a testimonial orator, but this assessment also narrows unnecessarily the way in which we view Douglass’ rhetorical skill. In his article “‘Do Unto Others as You Would Have Them Do Unto You’: Frederick Douglass’s Proverbial Struggle for Civil Rights,” Meider notes “he [Douglass] assumed their [enslaved African-Americans] narrative identity, and when he spoke or wrote, his words were based on the authority of the Bible and the democratic ideals of the United States” (331). By using proverbs, both biblical and folk in origin, Frederick Douglass connects to his audience on a level of humanity and common sense. Meider acknowledges one of the many skills of Douglass in an eloquent manner; however, Douglass does more than merely testify to the audience. Douglass’ use of the Bible displays more than an understanding of his audience; it also illustrates his understanding of classical rhetoricians. Douglass invokes the use of Aristotelian maxims, “[…] a statement; not about a particular fact. […] but of a general kind; nor is it about any and every subject” (222). Aristotle explains “some proverbs are also maxims” (224). Douglas’ historical knowledge invokes his audience’s *pathos* through his strategically explicated narration of his life and its implied significance for America’s history. This
connection coincides with his research and preparation for his speeches. Douglass is well acquainted with the ideals of Americans during the 19th century and must make connections with them in order to persuade them; he must also convince them that what is important to him is also important to them. Even though Douglass uses many proverbs to connect to his audience, he does so in an attempt to invoke its ethos: to create identification, and to inspire it with a fiery desire for change, not so that it could respond with the proverbial “Amen.” Unarguably, Douglass understands the Christian beliefs of his audience, thus he uses a familiar language to persuade it to listen to his story. By using proverbs, he is able to connect with it on many different levels of understanding. Once an audience becomes receptive to the speaker’s words, it is easier to convince it to listen, thus for it to make the recommended changes in the presence of a common moral discourse. This strategy not only invokes pathos, but also ethos.

As Douglass closes his Narrative, he feels the need to correct some misunderstanding that may have arisen from his seeming attacks Christianity. As Douglass eloquently puts it:

What I have said respecting and against religion, I mean strictly to apply to the slaveholding religion of this land, and with no possible reference to Christianity proper: for, between the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference—so wide, that to receive the one as good, pure, and holy, is of necessity to reject the other as bad, corrupt, and wicked...I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ: I therefore hate the corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land. (153)
As Douglass makes an apology for his harsh criticism of religion, he does not digress. What seems to be an apology is a further condemnation of the ways in which the people of this land profess one theology and practice an ideology completely different than what is instructed through Christ. He continually juxtaposes the concepts of good and evil, of purity and corruption, so his audience can decide if it is practicing Christianity or a religion that it has taken pieces of to create what it believes to be correct, taking only what it can use for its own advantage and disregarding the parts which condemns it for its sins.

Douglass as a rhetorician transcends the many forms of rhetoric. and he refuses to be held to the conventions of epideictic rhetoric. His self-taught skill and knowledge makes it difficult to categorize him as an epideictic orator: he is a true rhetorician. While assimilating all the styles of the classical rhetoricians, Douglass transcends one form to join the many. I am not saying that his style should not be categorized; however, give it the justice and education necessary to study the nature in which Douglass excels. Douglass learns to praise and to condemn effectively, but, more importantly, he lets his rhetoric become a starting point for showing his audience that it cannot ignore what is indeed happening to the African race. Frederick Douglass learns the technique of persuasion and imitation, infuses his speeches with pathos, logos, and ethos as well as encompasses the three motives for speaking that are described by Aristotle; moreover, he is able to move a nation to change its ways and to better his life—and the lives of the millions of enslaved Africans.
The Revival of Frederick Douglass—His Rhetoric and His Education

Opens the Door to His Rebirth

“See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant” (King James Bible, Jeremiah 1.10). Frederick Douglass, familiar with Biblical scriptures and the book of Jeremiah, notices two distinct characteristics about the prophet: God calls him to do his work, and God’s requirement for Jeremiah to deconstruct in order to rebuild. These two precepts also dictate the jeremiadic rhetorical genre evident throughout Douglass’ 1845 Narrative. While many definitions and perspectives exist about the African American jeremiadic, the one consistency is that it is a rhetorical style that stems from Antebellum American culture. The existence of slavery, the need for blacks to find a place to belong and the slaves’ ability to relate to the Biblical Jews presents an opportunity for the jeremiad as a successful means of rhetoric. However, by focusing on the African, Douglass creates a cultural connection and an opportunity that may have otherwise been unnoticed.

In order for rhetoric to meet the criteria as an African American jeremiadic speech genre, it needs to meet three categories, according to William J. Harrell: “citing the promise, criticism of present declension or retrogression from the promise, resolving prophecy that society will shortly complete its mission and redeem the promise” (Harrell 154). In conjunction with Harrell’s definition David Howard-Pitney adds that, while it does limit the jeremiadic to pre-civil war, it also lends an understanding to the power behind the slave stories popular during the abolitionist movement. Douglass’ Narrative
fits both Harrell’s and Howard-Pitney’s definitions, but also it moves further, embracing Wilson Jeremiah Moses’ definition that the “Black Jeremiad is the constant warning issued by blacks to whites, concerning the judgment that was to come for the sin of slavery” (qtd. in Harrell 150). Considering both definitions, Harrell defines explicitly the “African American jeremiadic, then as a deliberate fusion of rhetoric—the use of language—and social protest that represents a transformation from a religious to a sociopolitical critique of public advocacy while inspiring moral uplift and elevation in its Black audience” (151). Taking Harrell’s definition into consideration, attempting to understand Douglass’ motivation and his use of specifically chosen words throughout his Narrative can help today’s audience understand how strategies that informed his own liberation also influenced the strategies that he used when describing for his listeners the power of self-liberation.

In order to understand the African American jeremiadic, a brief discussion, however, is necessary about the American jeremiadic from which it stems. Sacvan Bercovitch notices that the American jeremiadic “was considerably affected by a variety of social and intellectual changes” (Harrell 152). The American jeremiadic focuses on the religious, social, and political changes that occur in early American history. It primarily began with the Puritan ministers speaking about their experiences in the new world and evolves into rhetorical outcry—a fusion of religious and political speech (Vander Lei and Miller 98).

Frederick Douglass’ Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself encompasses all these various definitions; however, what is missing is how he not only reminds his audience of America’s forgotten promises, but he
also looks closely at those promises to help citizens visualize America’s true promise to its citizens. Instead of calling for a complete change, he reminds his audience by recalling the origin of the nation, and he helps the audience to see the danger of ignoring those promises. In this respect, Douglass’ need for the audience to make social and intellectual change remains at the forefront of his mission.

Douglass’ *Narrative* must be analyzed from different perspectives as he analyzed his own life. Douglass’ ability to move an audience lies in his understanding of American culture as well as his understanding that various cultures exist simultaneously within the country. This binary awareness is expressed in his speech and his life as he begins to understand what Du Bois later calls “double consciousness” which helps Douglass evolve as a man. Several events occur in his life which leads to his evolution, but, before he fully overcomes obstacles within his own identity, he must first acknowledge that what is occurring in the country is hindering his ability to completely become a man. His battle with Covey, moving from one plantation to another, the loss of his mother, then his grandmother being left to die alone are several examples of struggles that he must overcome and ways in which he notices that something is severely wrong with the American society.

One of the things Douglass notes is the fear of punishment for sin—a requirement needed for jeremiadic rhetoric. Douglass notices early in life how slavery affects not only the slave, but also the slave owner. He describes this process in metaphorical terms relating to disease. His implicit language is more accessible to his Bible-reading audience, who are familiar with the plethora of disease-filled stories which God sends as punishment. Every prophet brings forth warnings, and God repeatedly sends plagues.
disease, and infestations to guide people back to the path of righteousness. Novalis states:

Illnesses are certainly a most-interesting object of humanity, since they are so innumerable, and each person has to fight with them so much. We still know very imperfectly the art of using them. They are likely the most interesting stimulus and material of our contemplation and of our action. (828)

Diseases tend to be unfamiliar upon their introductions, but the more people learn about the disease, the better equipped they are to prevent the spread of infection. Disease prevention requires action as well as knowledge. Knowledge is one of the foremost preventative tools. Thinking of slavery as a disease infesting the nation and destroying the nation’s ability to properly function also lends an understanding to the way in which Douglass describes life events. Novalis’ explanation concerning disease as a mystery we have not yet learned to use advantageously does not entirely agree with Douglass’ use of disease. Whereas Douglass uses the conceit of disease to imply danger as a warning sign and to try to force his audience to react as well as to act, he does not have the power to infect American citizens with an actual disease but nonetheless is able to illustrate the harm one incurs from owning another human being.

In conjunction with Novalis’ explanation about the use of disease, Martin Pernick discusses the etymology of disease, stating that “in ancient and medieval medicine, a contagious disease spreads from person to person by touch” (859). Pernick also declares, “contagion also increasingly denoted diseases that grew in numbers or severity with each transmission” (859). The more slavery grew across the nation, the more people infected
with this desire treat other human beings cruelly and with little respect for basic human rights—those given by the Creator and the Declaration of Independence.

The first instance where Douglass notices slavery’s analogy with disease comes upon his arrival at the Auld residence. Upon his arrival and prior to her introduction to slave holding, he describes Mrs. Auld as such:

She had never had a slave under her control previously to myself, and prior to her marriage she had been dependent upon her own industry for a living. She was by trade a weaver; and by constant application to her business, she had been in a good degree preserved from the blighting and dehumanizing effects of slavery. I was utterly astonished at her goodness. (Douglass 77 my emphasis)

Prior to slave holding, this good woman treated people with a sense of respect and kindness. Her lack of owning a slave and her ability to stay away from the slave industry protects her from the dangers incurred through the strange system of owning another human. Douglass notes the difference in her demeanor, after Mrs. Auld owns a slave. He recalls:

This kind heart has but a short time to remain such. The fatal poison of irresponsible power was already in her hands, and soon commenced its infernal work. That cheerful eye, under the influence of slavery, soon became red with rage; that voice, made all of sweet accord, changed to one of harsh and horrid discord; and that angelic face gave place to that of a demon. (Douglass 77)

Douglass not only notices the change in her acts towards him, but also he makes it clear, as he paints a picture for his audience in an attempt to illustrate the transformation consequent of enslavement, that he is not the only one being punished and suffering. The
belief that slavery was cruel cannot be disputed; however, not many observers in Douglass' own era comment on the effects that it has on the slave owner as well. Douglass first calls attention to the “irresponsible power” given to her and the “infernal” effects of this power.

Discussing slavery’s affects on Mrs. Auld in this manner makes one think that one either needs training to be a slave owner, or one has to be naturally cruel so that the harshness does not cause turmoil to good-natured people. He also describes how the infestation destroys her not only mentally, but also physically, for she loses the beauty that once made him amazed by her goodness. Douglass’ claim that her eyes went from “cheerful” to “red with rage” and her “sweet” filled voice changed into something “harsh and horrid” illustrated slavery’s negative influence over her. Douglass could simply say that she changed from good to evil or from sweet to acerbic; instead, he sets up a binary—a sense of cause and effect—to make the audience associate slavery and its harmful affects on the slave owner. Carefully choosing his words to illustrate that slave owning begets a sense of death. Douglass is making his rhetoric more effective than vague platitudes because the country cares more about the owners than the slaves. Douglass understands that he must make self-interest of the slaveholders evident to his audience, so he focuses first on purity and changes the concept into one of diminishing returns that begin to deteriorate and to lose their beauty and, indeed, to threaten the very spiritual basis for that conception: he deconstructs purity in the simultaneous act of owning another human being. Douglass also illustrates that race is an issue and one of the deciding factors for his audience. As he describes the ways in which this disease defeats Mrs. Auld, he realizes that the effects on his audience would not be the same had
she been an African woman. By using words that describe the corrosive effects in
metaphors of disease, Douglass is able to call on the audience’s fears and to show that, if
change does not occur by way of freeing the enslaved Africans, the same malady could
occur in any of the “angelic” women whom they profess to hold dear.

Since its introduction, the Bible has served as a powerfully didactic text. The
Bible teaches various lessons and discusses the joy that one receives or the ramifications
that incur when people disregard God’s instructions. By understanding how the Bible
teaches lessons, Douglass is able to illustrate the association between disease and sin.
Consider the story of Moses when attempting to free the Israelites from slavery. God
sent plagues and death consumed the Egyptians for consistently disobeying His
instructions, and these examples served to illustrate the importance of being kind to your
fellow man as well as the need to exterminate slavery. The Bible says, “For the wages of
sin is death;” (King James Bible Romans 6.23). Through Douglass’ illustration with Mrs.
Auld’s story, he uses his and his audience’s knowledge of biblical stories to demonstrate
that sin and disease are synonymous.

After noting the dangers of slaveholding, Douglass focuses on the promises
broken as he calls attention to the promises God makes to man and the promises the
founding fathers guarantee to all citizens. Since slaveholders cite the Bible in defense of
slavery, the first example presents Douglass with a difficult task. So Douglass points out
the many ways in which the Bible rejects slavery and the idea of holding anyone as
chattel. He battles misconceptions and misinterpretations of the Bible as he deconstructs
the ideals of the slaveholder in an attempt to help the audience realize that it must change
and rebuild anew. Douglass describes religion as fearsome, as one that destroys hope instead of bringing people closer to each other or their creator. He asserts:

Most unhesitatingly, that the religion of the south is a mere covering for the most horrid crimes—a justifier of the most appalling barbarity—a sanctifier of the most hateful frauds—and a dark shelter under which the darkest, foulest grossest, and most infernal deeds of slaveholders find the strongest protection. (117)

Douglass does not say “Christianity,” he says, “the religion of the south,” specifying it as a corrupt theology very different from the Christianity that he knows and supports. Calling this religion “Christianity” would be to ignore Matthew 7:12: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” Douglass’ study of the Bible leads him to understand that the religion that slavery-supporting southerners profess does not resemble that of Christianity due to slaveholders being able to commit various horrible crimes against the slaves.

Suggesting that Americans are defiling their own pure faith and that they are turning it into a crime against man and God helps to see that they are not protected; but these victimizers are, indeed, destined to receive divine punishment, if they continue on the destructive slave-holding path that they have created. In this manner, Douglass both calls attention to the crimes and makes a plea for change. His self-proclaimed Christian audience is not only familiar with Biblical scriptures, but also is fully in tune with the nation’s history. Notice, in Douglass’ description, that his diction is dark and bleak, for he witnesses “appalling barbarity, hateful frauds, dark shelter, the darkest, foulest grossest [and] infernal deeds.” so he paints a picture that, while bleak, is accusatory as well, focusing on the fact that slave owners are frauds, simply because they have yet to
practice what they consistently advocate throughout history. They are also barbaric which illustrates their lack of intelligence, an attribute of humanity that they claim the African has yet to achieve—if even acknowledging the capacity to do so—and ironic in that Douglass’ own rhetorical power gives lie to the proposition itself.

Once Douglass points out the sins of his audience, he can then move to the next stage of the jeremiadic which requires:

a detailed criticism of America’s failure to fulfill this promise... Often the orator appeals to the audience’s emotions through graphic descriptions of American racism and matches that emotional appeal with a logical contrast of the promise and the reality of contemporary social injustice. (Howard-Pitney 288)

The ability to remind the audience of broken promises requires historical knowledge. and Douglass accomplishes this task by looking at the Declaration of Independence. This document for Americans embodies all that they are entitled to as members of the society. Douglass comprehends the ability to affect change, realizing that not only does speaking out affect change, but so does well thought out speeches, carefully choosing words and the ability to inspiring an audience to consider making change. The intellectual integrity of the speaker and the audience becomes a major aspect of what brings about the change. As Douglass begins to formulate his arguments against the white ruling class, he must consider the promises broken. Even though the slave masters focus on the Declaration of Independence for their own prosperous purposes, Douglass uses that knowledge to advance his goal of freeing himself and his brethren. The Declaration of Independence illustrates the many ways that America fails the African, and it is therefore necessary to
remind the audience of the early promise to the citizens as they declare their freedom from Britain’s rule. The Declaration of Independence states:

We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,--that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute a new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing it powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. (capitalization from original document)

Douglass, fully aware of America’s history and determination to gain freedom from their previous tyrants, focuses much of his argument on the previous section. His focus is rights given by the Creator, man’s right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” and the fact that, if the government does not keep its promise to the members of the country, those people neglected by the law have a right to begin a new government, one that will live up to the promises and protect its citizens. Not only that, but the Declaration also implies that, since the previous colonial government failed the people, it is their right to sever that connection and build one that will benefit all inhabitants of the country. Similar to the ways in which the rhetorical jeremiadic deconstructs and builds anew, the Declaration of Independence inspires countrymen to declare what is rightfully owed to men of this nation, and so do the pre-war speeches and slave narratives inspire and reinforce Americans’ belief in their naturally given rights.
Though Douglass is aware of his audiences’ diversity since both abolitionist and pro-slavery members attend speaking engagements, he does not allow that diversity to distract him from lending his voice to the cause to end slavery. He does more than speak to white audiences; he speaks on behalf of those slaves not yet free who are unable to speak for themselves. According to Bakhtin’s *The Problem of Speech Genre*, “Quite understandably, the nature and forms... are just as diverse as are the areas of human activity. Language is realized in the form of individual concrete utterances (oral and written) by participants in the various areas of human activity” (Bakhtin 1227). The way in which Douglass speaks acknowledges both audiences simultaneously because he understands the power of language. Douglass’ language—as language signals race, class and status—as a fugitive working within the abolitionist movement, continues to affect his efforts to free those who he leaves behind to suffer temporarily until the fulfillment of the lost promise.

Finally Douglass must “resolve the prophecy that society will shortly complete its mission and redeem the promise” (qtd. in Harrell 154). As Douglass makes a call to consciousness for his audience, unbeknownst to him, the call takes place in him as well. He describes his awakening, breaking physical and mental shackles and the means to gain true freedom—literacy. Douglass notices how slavery impacts him physically and mentally, but, like most diseases, once he learns more, he desires more from life. Thomas Auld tells his wife Mrs. Auld, “if you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell” (78). He later explains that “learning will spoil the best nigger in the world.” and Douglass reflects that “from that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom” (78). Douglass’ desire to learn, indeed, “spoils” him for slavery, but not
because he reads but because he learns to become a thinking man through doing so.

Slavery does not just exist physically, for it is a means of mental control; and, once the slave gives over his ability to think, he truly loses his ability to ever be a free man.

Douglass comes to the realization that, like for many diseases, there exists a *pharmakon*, both the cure and the cause of suffering. Douglass reflects on his ability to read and recalls:

> The readings [from the *Columbian Orator*]...enabled me to utter my thoughts, and to meet the arguments brought forward to sustain slavery; but while they relieved me of one difficulty, they brought on another even more painful than the one of which I was relieved...It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. (84)

Douglass realizes the power of being literate, but he is also able to explain to his audience why slaveholders found it important to neglect a slave’s ability to read or to learn. He explains:

> I have found that, to make a contented slave, it is necessary to make a thoughtless one. It is necessary to darken his moral and mental vision, and as far as possible, to annihilate the power of reason. He must be able to detect no inconsistencies in slavery; he must be made to feel that slavery is right; and he can be brought to that only when he ceases to be a man. (135)

Thus, in order to truly break the chains, the slave must re-learn to think because the struggle is not simply physical. To control someone’s thoughts is to truly control the person, and “at the heart of this kind of thinking is the realization by blacks that the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed” (Biko 92).
Douglass understands that the country is suffering, experiencing senseless bloodshed and could not survive in this manner.

In order to free the country of this disease, drastic measures becomes necessary, and Douglass wants his audience to realize that this “call to arms” is not a battle between the blacks and the whites, for they must work together to create a nation that will make both the founding fathers and God proud. Douglass understands that he cannot combat directly the white supremacist ideas that stem from the cultural changes in both this and the founding fathers’ society; however, he is a rhetorician. Therefore, focusing on the literal meaning of the documents to incite change becomes a powerful tool. Douglass argues for what the documents claim for their citizens and focuses on “men are created equal” because arguing the intended or implied meanings are not relevant when arguing what the documents actually say. Creating the new envisioned nation calls for a new tradition: one which does not involve holding any man in bondage but celebrates mutual liberation from white supremacy—both in its chattel slavery of blacks and in its spiritual bondage of whites.

Frederick Douglass values his rhetorical skill and views it as “the pathway from slavery to freedom” (78). For him, literacy not only led to his freedom, but it also is his freedom. The opportunities given him allow for his growth mentally and, eventually, his escape from slavery. Like the prophet Jeremiah, Douglass believes that he is chosen to better himself and to show Americans the sins of their evil ways. Upon arriving at the Auld residence, Douglass explains: “I may be deemed superstitious, and even egotistical, in regarding this event as a special interposition of divine Providence in my favor” (75). Because life in the Auld residence begins his introduction to literacy and he reflects years
later on the experience, the use of “divine Providence” illustrates his belief in being chosen to begin that journey that leads to him becoming a free man. Then again, when forced to return to the plantation for property division, he recalls: “I saw more clearly than ever the brutalizing effects of slavery upon both the slave and the slaveholder...I suffered more anxiety than most of my fellow slaves...Thanks to a kind Providence, I fell to the portion of Mrs. Lucretia” (91). Even though Douglass never calls himself a prophet, the ways in which he describes his life events illustrate his belief that there is more to life than being a slave. And, as Mr. Auld predicted, Douglass determined to gain his freedom. declares, “You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man” (107). Be it through his self-education, providence or life experiences, Frederick Douglass offers an illustration to anyone who wants to escape his bondage and find freedom. He uses the words made each time to illustrate the change that occurs in him. Fully aware that his Narrative will reach a large audience, he acknowledges how circumstances made him a slave but how his choices make him a free man.

Douglass consistently illustrates the harsh reality of American culture for the slave as well as the slave owner. Douglass describes Americans who continually live fraudulent lives, kidnap people, sell mothers and children, destroy families, and preach hypocritical respect for the family unit all while they punish the common thief. What Douglass does with his rhetoric is call attention to the fact that blacks and whites have to work together to end this system of destruction and disease infesting this great nation. He does not fault the nation or its foundation, but he does find fault with the current and previous generations for neglecting to fulfill the promise that “all men are created equal.”
As Douglass struggles for his freedom, he gains the knowledge and power to change his life. He begins his narrative with mystery but ends it with hope. He writes:

Sincerely and earnestly hoping that this little book may do something toward throwing light on the American slave system, and hastening the glad day of deliverance to the million of my brethren in bonds—faithfully relying upon the power of truth, love, and justice for success in my humble efforts—and solemnly pledging myself anew to the sacred cause. (159)

He does not lose sight of the battle but continually relies on his audience’s ability to remember the promise as he hopes that it will help him to fulfill it. He begins “sincerely and earnestly” in an attempt to once again put his audience at ease as he continues to condemn it for the crimes they commit. He also relies on their familiarity with the Bible as he awaits “the glad day of deliverance” by recalling the way the enslaved Jews received their deliverance from slavery. Douglass also claims to rely on faith, letting his audience know that he does believe in the Creator and in the hope that He brings deliverance and justice. Douglass, throughout his life, fights for the less fortunate and ill-treated. He commits to this “sacred cause” because he firmly believes that not only can America do right by its inhabitants, but also man can do right by his fellow man. In using his stories, illustrations and well articulated rhetoric, he is able to prompt change in some of his audience members.
Conclusion: Remembering the Man, Embracing His Legacy and Honoring His Journey

The ability to change one’s circumstances is one that requires much time, patience and practice. Proper attention to education and cultivation are also necessary. As Douglass cultivates his mind, his education enhances his freedom to define both his world and himself. By learning to accept his right to live as a free thinking man, Douglass takes the first steps necessary to free himself and his enslaved brethren. As Douglass prepares himself for the idea of a better life, he studies rhetoric and his culture. Rhetoric, with its many implications, proves helpful to Douglass, but it can also prove harmful to his audience’s psyche and its emotional well-being. Instead of simply addressing the audience, Douglass uses various rhetorical skills to enhance his Narrative. James J. Murphy’s “What Is Rhetoric and What Can It Do for Writers and Readers?” recollects on the many uses of rhetoric as he relates:

Rather than try to predict the unpredictable, though, the rhetorician prepares the writer/speaker to have a keen sense of adaptability coupled with a broad spectrum of knowledge and skills, as preparation for meeting the unpredictable. It is not the rhetoric that writes or speaks, but the user of the rhetoric who does. (76) Douglass, unaware of how his audience will perceive his Narrative, writes as he speaks. The passion, cultural understanding and ability to adapt to each audience inevitably helps him to prepare his rhetoric but only with the best hope that it will be received in a manner that forces his listeners to feel the need to make changes in the country’s current system where they dehumanize and devalue Africans. In many ways, Douglass’ hope is to
illustrate the negative manner in which slavery destroys the nation as he desires to change American culture for the betterment of the African.

Douglass’ focus on the lost promises stemming from the country’s foundation, his ability to imitate the lessons that he learns from previous orators, and his focus on social change all make his Narrative a rhetorical genre worthy of elaborate study. Douglass’ life becomes the means for social and political change in America as he utilizes each opportunity to address his audience. In order for Douglass to encompass all the necessary tools of a rhetorician, he considers his audience, the culture, and America’s history. He effectively employs logos, ethos and pathos along with kairos to ensure his Narrative’s success. Invoking both logos and pathos of the Declaration of Independence, Douglass articulates the history of the country without attacking the principles or beliefs of the audience. He reflects on a time of war in the country when the citizens fought for individual rights. He also advocates for the rights of the slave community, and he wants his audience to advocate for freedom as the founding fathers did in 1776. As Douglass uses his own life lessons to make his argument more powerful than would mere abstract argument, not once does he use words simply for the sake of using them. Though Douglass defies the rules of the country, since he is a fugitive slave, he earns much credibility due to the very detailed stories that he tells about his life as a slave. His life as a slave included experiences involving unexpected kindness and extreme cruelties; therefore, he received enough exposure to slavery’s vast differences that he was adequately equipped to speak on behalf of the mass of slaves in bondage.

Douglass’ ability to closely investigate each incident in his life enhances his ability to evoke kairos. When Douglass first notices Ms. Auld’s kindness and she teaches
him to read, he capitalizes on this opportunity. Even after he could no longer receive instruction from her, he knows literacy’s importance; and he says “Mistress, in teaching me the alphabet, had given me the inch, and no precaution could prevent me from taking the ell” (83). Douglass’ statement illustrates education’s ongoing importance in his life and his belief and the necessity in him making the best of each opportunity. Not only does he incorporate kairos in this example, but he also explores Aristotle’s maxims reminding the reader of Mr. Auld’s words, “if you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell” (78). Douglass incorporates maxims throughout the narrative not only to connect with his audience, but also maxims are familiar to the audience and they (maxims) allow the audience to remember his words long after it finishes reading his Narrative. Similar to the ways that the Declaration of Independence claims “all men are created equal.” Douglass uses phrases reminiscent of America’s struggles with Great Britain, and he is able to strengthen his argument. Furthermore, Douglass knows that the maxim “a still tongue makes a wise head” (62) is false. The fact that Douglass learns to speak out about the crimes against him and his people is the very act that allows for change to begin in the country. The more Douglass spoke, the more he read and studied; the more he learned the wiser he became. A still tongue keeps secrets, which handicap the nation and forces stagnant conditions to remain prevalent.

A true rhetorician knows his character can deter his audience or guide them to make the most pertinent logical choice available. So as Douglass understands this about his audience, he carefully gives specific examples and he names specific people throughout each chapter. As Douglass lists specific events, these detailed accounts both enable his credibility while they allow those who doubt the validity of his accounts the
ability to research and determine its truth on their own. Ultimately, the choice belongs to
the audience, but the rhetorician presents an argument that helps it understand its choices.
Douglass also understands that only a man who accepts his past can truly embrace his
future. This insight helps him also persuade his audience as it must also accept its past
victories, defeats, and decisions leading to independence—and act so that that
independence is realized fully and fulfilled completely for all the citizens of the nation.

Douglass’ Narrative continues to serve as a means to understand various 19\textsuperscript{th}
Century cultural aspects; however, looking at his story and the rhetoric that he uses to tell
that story allows for a broader look at his life. Investigating his life story as a rhetorical
device in which Douglass explores classical rhetoric, Aristotelian teachings and the
jeremiad all enhance his legacy and our—students and future scholars—ability to learn
from him. Douglass supplies a means to understand not only 19\textsuperscript{th} Century America, but
also how incorporating life lessons enhance one’s ability to grow mentally, physically
and spiritually. Douglass claims that his life events help him become a man once he
learns to take the control back from his oppressors, and he uses the most effective words
in his possession to ensure that his growth helps all the enslaved Africans. He also uses
powerful words to force the oppressors to visualize their cruel violent acts. Douglass’
Narrative is not only a cultural and historical document, but the Narrative is also a
powerful rhetorical document which should be studied as such.
Works Cited


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