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**Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*;  
a Literary Weapon Against Slavery**

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## **Dedications**

*To those who believed in me*

*To those who helped me through hard times*

*To my Mother,  
my family and my friends I dedicate this work*

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*Immense loads of gratitude and thanks are addressed to my teacher and supervisor Ms. Meriem **MENGOUCHI**; this work could have never come to existence without your vivacious guidance, constant encouragement, and priceless advice and patience.*

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## Abstract

Harriet Ann Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* seemed not to be the only literary work which tackled the issue of woman in slavery. However, this autobiography is the first published slave narrative written in the nineteenth century. In fact, the primary purpose of this research is to dive into *Incidents* in order to examine the author's portrayal of a black female slave fighting for her freedom and her rights. On the other hand, Jacobs shows that despite the oppression and the persecution of an enslaved woman, she did not remain silent, but she strived to assert herself. Two chapters are included within this research; the first one is theoretical vision on slavery in America, the attempts of slaves to assert themselves politically through literature, the role of women in the antebellum era, and the strength of slave narratives in abolishing slavery. As for the second chapter, it contains an examination of the major aspects of slavery within the main incidents written in the narrative of Harriet Jacobs, to better grasp the meaning of a female life under oppression, racism, sexual abuse that were experienced at the hands of white masters. In this research, Harriet A. Jacobs is considered as the spokesperson of black and white women in the Antebellum America who fought against slavery and sought to assert herself and all slaves as well.

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# **General Introduction**

Literature has always been a way through which the silent hearts pour their thoughts, concerns, and lives in the form of a liquid substance that drops on those white papers to turn them from a mere blank sheets to memorable and strong messages. For this reason, writing has been taken as a mirror that reflects the adventures of its writer. Talking about all of this, Harriet Jacobs should be deeply taken as an example of an “enslaved life” that is reflected through literature, mainly through her book under the title of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861).

Harriet Ann Jacobs is one of the prominent figures in American black literature who, after her successful escape, recounted her life in a stunning feminist slave narrative in which she put into words the many facets of slavery, chiefly concerned the female slave experience. Furthermore, her strive for authorship made *Incidents* praised as the first autobiography by a female slave.

Overall, though educating slaves was prohibited in the nineteenth century United States, Harriet’s first mistress taught her to read and write unaware that she was providing Jacobs with a weapon she might use to fight against slavery. Oddly enough, Harriet Jacobs lived with her family which made her contact with her relatives. She did not notice she was a slave until her kind mistress died. Accordingly, Harriet experienced the anxiety and the suffering of a female slave from both man and woman when she witnessed a radical change in her master’s house. A master who chiefly wanted Harriet for himself by subjecting her for his sexual harassment. Unlike many of her counterparts, Harriet Jacobs repeatedly rejected her master and resisted his oppression, brutality, and sexual abuse.

The aim of this research work is to introduce the literary genre known as ‘slave narratives’ through the following question: to what extent did Jacobs’s *Incidents* succeed in portraying the horrors of slavery for black Americans, and specifically for black female slaves?

Consequently, this research question can be answered if the following questions are raised:

- ❖ What are the various conditions that effected slaves' lives in the nineteenth century America?
- ❖ How did black men and women assert themselves in the Antebellum era?
- ❖ How did women act in the antislavery movement?

These questions can be solved from a Feminist Marxist approach because it exposes the bad conditions of the American women's lives in general and black female's life in particular since they were both oppressed in their society which neglected their rights as human beings and see them as poor, helpless and ignorant. Nonetheless, it reveals their struggle to reach their principal targets in achieving equal rights among all Americans regardless of their gender or their colour. Whereas, the Marxist approach is used to shed light on the racist treatment of black as inferiors and worthless.

Accordingly, this work relies on the accounts of different theorists and historians like Johnnie M. Stover who argued that black women endeavoured, through their autobiographies, to better their circumstances by making a change for themselves and for black brothers and sisters. Jean Fagan Yellin, also, emphasized the struggle of Harriet Jacobs to assert herself and her narrative *Incidents* as well.

This thesis is divided into two chapters; the first one is intended to offer a vision on the slave life and how blacks sought to assert themselves through various ways, and the major events that happened in the Antebellum America. As for the second, it reflects a study of the different aspects through which Harriet Ann Jacobs presents the evil of slavery in her narrative as well as the portrayal of the suffrage of young female slave.

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### 1.1. Introduction

The present chapter mainly aims to shed light on slavery over the Antebellum era and its impact in the nineteenth century America when the society witnessed a substantial change among all, including people of both gender and race. As well as, it focuses on all-out efforts of black and white abolitionists to end slavery. Consequently, a myriad of literary works were produced, ranging from slave narratives, pamphlets, novels, newspapers, articles to journals, to contribute in the immediate abolition of slavery through the detailed presentations of the evil of bondage to the people of America and the western Europe.

### 1.2. Africans' Lives Under American Bondage

Slavery existed historically throughout the world, it has often been treated as a significant aspect of history. In fact, the modern world and the United States' development are due to the crucial role that slavery played in effecting the social, economic, political, and cultural institutions of Europeans when spreading the slave trade (Walker 121). Therefore, with the purpose of understanding the circumstances of African slaves' lives under bondage of the American society, there must be a reference to the reasons of the American slavery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In the early seventeenth-century America, African slavery, for the first time, began in Jamestown, Virginia in 1619 (Green 8). Then, it reached the other states and continued to be practiced for more than two centuries. The number of African slaves was quickly increasing as the Atlantic slave trade grew more profitable. "Africans were transported from Africa to America seated in this position with a once a day break for exercise. [Hence] many died or went insane." (Asante and Mazama 10)

Along with economic development, the wealth of the Northern Colonials was made of the shipping of Africans; the business of the Southern colonies was

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dependent on the labour of African slaves who build their houses, cleared their plantations, plowed their fields, and worked in the production of different crops such as tobacco, sugar cane and later cotton. As well, lifestyle of the southern colonial gentry was depended on “slaves who cooked their meals, served at their tables, and helped to care for their children”. (Harris 43)

As the Southern economic prospered, planters found slavery “the ideal form of labour” (Ransom 52). Consequently, they wanted to have a plenty of land and of labours. Controlling slaves, however, was done by punishing them. It was often brutal to intimidate them not to defy master’s authority. Mostly in the south, “the system made slaves chattel (property) of a master who held the total dominance.” (Ferrell 4). For African men and women, slavery was an equally painful and destructive experience. Both were captured and torn from their homelands, letting unwillingly their families, and transported across the Atlantic. As they reached Americas, slaveholders sold them to their new masters who would have the total dominance of their lives. Describing the bad circumstances of slaves laboured in plantation, Elizabeth Abbott explained that:

Working conditions [for both black men and women] were almost as punishing as punishment itself, as slaves toiled from dawn to sunset, naked under the boiling sun of midday or barely covered by rags. They were rewarded by miserable food in tiny quantities, and often forced to prepare it themselves after their fieldwork was done. It was usually very late at night before they free to return to their huts, where they fell onto mud floors for brief hours of respite. (11)

Despite of the common factors, however, the circumstances of gender servitude differentiated between slave men and women. Early on, strongest and healthiest young African men were the most favoured as slaves since they were the most likely to reach Americas alive (Searing 52). Moreover, they were assigned to perform

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carpentry and blacksmithing. Whereas, women and the remaining male slaves were oriented to work in plantations. In spite of the fact that the planters preferred to purchase African men for fieldwork, they turned to buy “female field hands” because slave women were cheaper and more readily available, resulting an outnumbered female slaves in farms and plantations. (Hallam)

For many enslaved women, physical burden as well as psychological one, which came of pregnancy, were enormous. After giving birth to her baby, the slave mother left it to be raised by others and returned to work in fields soon (Forret 211). Ultimately, the most important factor that differentiated the life under bondage among males and females was the master’s exploitation of the female slaves’ sexuality. Since slaves were considered as objects, their owners made young single female slaves ready for his sexual pursuits. Within their controls and dominance over their slaves, “masters often felt it their right to engage in sexual activity with black women” (Hallam)

Either by frightening their masters or by escaping, whenever possible, both male and female slaves resisted to their enslavement. As a result, to obtain their freedom, “some were killed; more were captured; most returned voluntarily when they got too hungry or cold, or missed their families, or heard from a master that they would be taken back with little or no punishment.”(Harris 46). However, many enslaved people did not stop their attempts to free themselves. Yet, by the late of eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, many American whites and blacks participated in social reform’s movements like abolitionism to end the human bondage and spread equal rights.

### **1.3. Abolitionism, an Overview**

Abolitionism, a fundamental reform movement during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was a long lasting movement that sought to end the practice of slavery in Western Europe and Americas. As well, it endeavoured to run out the

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Atlantic Slave Trade carried out in Americas (Kazin 1). Abolitionism in the United States, also called the antislavery movement, was a part of an international effort against slavery. This campaign collected a huge number of reformers in about half a century long fight to eliminate the embedded institution of slavery, end all forms of bondage, and spread the racial equality in the whole country (ibid). Historically, abolition of slavery derived its roots from the black resistance to their enslavement. Such opposition to slavery started in the fifteenth century as the captive Africans often tried to kill the European captors or suicide. Likewise, the changing interpretation of the Christian morality, eighteenth-century ideas concerning universal human rights which sprang from the American and European revolution, and the economic change also contributed to end human bondage (Drescher 40). Within this movement, some of the early opponents of slavery adopted the concept of gradualism; they advocated the gradual abolition of slavery so that the southern economic system would not be damaged. Whereas, the others advocated the immediate abolitionism. (Kazin 1)

### 1.3.1. Early Development

Americans slavery arrangement took different forms to control the enslaved African men and women depending on the location and the economic system of states. However, slaves in the South as well as in the northern states lost their accustomed rights as human beings. From the beginning, those subjected to slavery refused the bad conditions of life under bondage. Hence, they attempted to free themselves either by self-purchase, or through court action, or, more seldom, by acts of slave rebellion. At the same time, a group of Quakers founded the Religions Society of Friends in the late 1600s. They were the first white abolitionists in America who-like their coreligionists in Britain-opposed slavery and deemed it as “sinful and physically dangerous to slave and master alike” (Kazin 1). Soon, with the American Revolution (1775-1783), abolitionist movement began to spread beyond

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the Quakers and African Americans. Yet, in 1816, slaveholders, who objected slavery, organized the American Colonization Society (ACS) which believed that slavery should be carried out gradually by sending free slaves to Liberia, a black colony established in West Africa (Harrold 2). Although, the American Antislavery society became the leading antislavery organization by the 1820s, many free African Americans found that colonization was unveiled since they believed that “the ACS’s real goal was to strengthen slavery by removing its most dedicated opponents-themselves.” (ibid)

### 1.3.2. Immediatism

By 1830s, the focus of the American Abolitionist movement switched to Immediatism, or the immediate abolition of slavery. Eric Rose, a history professor at University of South Carolina in Columbia, SC United States defines Immediatism as “the demand for direct emancipation of individual slaves, without any preconditions or intermediate stages of obligatory servitude” (447). This action of social reform is often known as the contrary to the principle of gradualism. Thus, the growing opposition of the immediatism to the gradualistic doctrine led to the failure of the gradualist methods in abolishing slavery (Alexander & Rucker 447). The most important three factors that guided abolitionists toward immediatism, motivated them to realize immediate emancipation and equal rights for African Americans in the United States. First, some white Northern abolitionists were convinced by their black mates that the ACS was a proslavery deception. Second, several revolts which were organized in different states by free African Americans like the rebellion led by the ex-slave and preacher Nat Turner and 70 other slaves in Virginia, August 1831, caused a state of anxiousness among white abolitionist who aimed to avert a race war in the Southern States. Third, the concourse of the Second Great Awakening, a Christian revivalist movement in which preachers provided the American public with facts that supported the social reforms, in addition to the northern economic

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modernization contributed in boosting the number of white Americans who denied the sinful practice of slavery and believed it had to be abolished. (Kazin 2)

These most significant factors influenced William Llyord Garrison (1805-1879), a white American editor, publisher and founder of *The Liberator* in Boston, in 1831, to strive for the immediate release of slaves and their equal rights (ibid). In Philadelphia, Garrison brought together a varied group of gender and race to form the American Anti-slavery Society (AASS) in December 1833 which was considered as the most known diverse abolitionist group in the decades before the Civil War (1861-1868) (Eisenstrak 13). Relying on “moral suasion”, by identifying slavery as incompatible with ideas set forth in the declaration of Independence, the members of the AASS undertook to achieve “immediate, uncompensated emancipation and equal rights for African Americans throughout the United States (Kazin 2). Following the lead of William Llyord Garrison, a number of antislavery organizations and societies were arisen throughout the northern and western states. Between 1830s and 1860s, a vast network for escape slaves became known as the Underground Railroad. It was a system organized by “Conductors”, white antislavery activists and free blacks, who helped fugitive slaves reach freedom in the Northern United states and Canada. The Underground Railroad was a network of hiding places and safe Rouses set along the freedom rout where conductors could help slaves to runaway and also provide them with food and clothes. In a long run, approximately 100.000 slaves escaped through the Underground Railroad during the antebellum period. (Alexander and Rucker 536)

Within the abolitionist movement many American men and women, blacks and whites engaged in antislavery societies which allowed them to express their ideas and spread their message against all forms of slavery by mailing pamphlets and newspapers and by sending antislavery petitions to the U.S. Congress. Furthermore, many lecturers were sent to deliver antislavery speeches and some slave narratives (Eisenstark 5). Nonetheless, “white men dominated the organization’s leadership”, claimed Harrold “but thousands of black men and thousands of woman of both races

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lent active support”. Yet, a few number of former African American slaves like Frederick Douglass, Henry Highland, and Sejourner Truth became the most prominent abolitionist in this biracial antislavery movement. Likewise, antislavery white activist women, such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton stepped the women’s rights movement since they grew conscious of their own unfairness and inequality. (Kazin 2)

A few years after the rise of the immediate abolitionist the 1830s, the antislavery movement became divided over various issues. In 1829, the society led by William Garrison split onto too groups because of differences in opinion. Garrison had a more radical view since he was not only an opponent of slavery, but also demander for full equality for all women, rejected the U.S. Constitution as a proslavery document, and called for the breakup of the Union and form a separate country if the nation did not set up a new government which, “prohibited” slavery in all United States (Kazin 2) Whereas, other abolitionist leaders, including Frederick Douglass, Sejourner Truth and David Walker turned to politics as the immediatist way to abolish slavery. By the late 1850s, abolitionism reached its peak as the American and Foreign Anti-slavery Society (1840-1855) and the two new short-lived political parties were formed in the United States, the Liberty Party (1840-1848) and the Free-Soil Party (1848-1856). Ultimately, the Republican Party was founded in 1856. Its members, known as radical political abolitionist, aimed only at abolishing slavery within the national domain (Eisenstark 14).

### **1.4. Female Activity in the Antebellum America**

In the 1830s, an important bond between abolitionism and feminism had been forged concerning women’s use of their oratorical skills on behalf of the antislavery efforts. Hence, abolitionism as a movement which opposed the existence of slavery and sought for its immediate eradication, started as a moral issue in the North, yet shifted to the South as a political issue, and finally led to the civil war (Eisenstark

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and Weber 2). Whereas, feminism that “started as the women’s suffrage movement” aimed initially at abolishing slavery and realizing the social equality for all, “irrespective of race, class, or gender” (Mazama 58). Accordingly, female activity during the antebellum era became the bridge between abolitionism and feminism. At the outset of the antislavery movement, a debate had been raised over women’s role which became “the important catalyst in moving a few independent-minded abolitionist women” to demand for women’s rights and considering feminism as “a necessary adjunct to abolitionism.” (Persy and Fellman 282).

Although the beginning of the nineteenth century was characterized by the emergence of different dichotomies: “free labourers and slaves, white and black, men and women, North and South”. However, these dichotomies outlined two aspects of life in the United States; “dependence and unfreedom” represented by slaves, African Americans, women, and the South. Whilst, white, labouring, men and the North symbolized “independence and freedom” (Barney, 255). Moreover, women’s works concerned race, class and gender operating on behalf of different women’s status: “poor women, widows, and the wives of drunkards” and the antislavery attempt, they became more conscious about the reality of female oppression (Worell 458). Since their commitment to abolish slavery and to decry the oppression of women of both race enforced Angelina and Sara Grimké, Maria Stewart, Frances Wright and other women to dare to speak out, they suffered for overtly making speeches to both American men and women. Years later, it became more popular for the society and particularly for women, including Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone, Lucretia Mott, and Sojourner Truth, to use their pens and rhetorical skills on behalf of the antislavery movement.(O’Dea 3)

Politically, the participation of women in the moral reform of abolitionism resulted the first wave of feminism in the United States in the 1830s (Worell 458). During the antislavery movement, the engagement of female abolitionists in social reform by writing, speaking and organizing brought democracy to a “higher level”

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(O’Dea 3). Women actions were diverse depending on some criteria such as race and religion. Mary Darcy explains:

[Many] abolitionist women worked on the Underground Railroad. Their work underscored the evils of slavery and the conditions of women. Many associated the abolitionist with white Quakers. While many were Quakers, abolitionist women were not of one mind or race. Free and emancipated black women took part in the movement, as well. White women of differing values and religions also participated. Some white abolitionists believed that blacks were inferior, but they did not support slavery (1).

Alongside the involvement of women in the abolitionist movements, they became more accomplished in organizing assemblies, writing and participating in public speeches in front of mixed audiences and petitioned Congress. Other courageous activist women worked on the Underground Railroad like Harriet Tubman (1820 – 1913), a notable example of boldness as well as adherence, who served as conductor in the network (O’Dea 3). However, the honour of these background factors, which made feminists more likely to speak out in public for temperance and equality between genders, and liberty of black people, and women in particular, then jeopardized their lives (Buechler 17). Furthermore, when the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) was established in Philadelphia in 1833, the meeting organizers allowed Lucretia Mott and other abolitionist women to attend the meeting, but they did not permit them to speak or to sign in. Hence, these women, after the meeting, became more aware about their subordinate status. As a result, they gathered a group of black and white women, and few days later, they founded the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (PFASS) on December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1833. (Worell 458)

As female abolitionists, they continued to struggle against slavery in addition to their fight for women’s rights which became increasingly disappointing because of

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the limits on their efficiency as activists and their rights as citizens. One of the most historic examples was the exclusion of the U. S. delegates Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady from participation in the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention in London. Only male could be seated in this convention. Therefore, Lucretia and her mate Elizabeth decided to have a convention on women's rights. Consequently, eight years later, they organized the Seneca Falls Woman's Rights Convention in upstate New York, in 1848. As a result, meetings and conventions on women's rights launched the nineteenth-century women's rights movement. (O'Dea 4)

### **1.5. Black Literature in the Antebellum America**

Throughout the history of American slavery, there were numerous African American literary works that brought out the resonance of Black voices to carry their identical message across which was freedom. Of the more than hundreds extant works generally labelled as Abolitionist literary pieces from 1800 to the beginning of the Civil War (1861-1865), African American writings – slave narratives, songs, poetry, novels, newspapers, essays and epistles - became an instrument to better black person's social and ethical conditions. (Gates 30)

Despite all the difficulties that slaves faced to obtain their own freedom, emancipation or manumission of Africans became well-nigh impossible mostly after the revolts of the free black men Denmark Vessey in 1822 and Nat Turner in 1831. Southern States deprived the meetings of slaves for any ground, even religious and put limits on black preachers. Moreover, they intensified laws against literacy (Juang and Morrissette 999). Virginia in 1831, for example, passed legislation making it illegal to teach slaves, free blacks, or mullattoes to read or write (Rountree 192). Similar laws were passed in North Carolina which banned teaching slaves literacy and imposed punishments represented in fines or imprisonment for any person who dared to break the law (Perkson and Perkson 245).

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Nonetheless, African American literature was published in the high tide of the antislavery movement and slave narrative; as the literary genre, was proved to be one of “the most powerful weapons” used by abolitionist writers “to fight against slavery” (Castillo 149). The American professor Audrey A. Fisch stated that the purpose behind writing the slave narrative is to put an end of slavery, then he suggested that “the narratives, according to Bruce, are able to argue effectively for the abolition of slavery” (2)

A number of important African narrators of the Antebellum America including Fredrick Douglass, Harriet Ann Jacobs, William Wells Brown, Harriet Tubman, David Walker, Sojourner Truth, Henry Walton Bibb and others, created a distance between them and American readers via “the mode of realistic narration” (Sinanan 73). In addition, black abolitionists used different literary styles to cover various themes – social, political, religious, sentimental and historical – in order to win the White Allies in their fight against slavery. To explain more, Johnnie M. Stover (2003) exemplified the resistance of a Black female abolitionist saying:

Because the nature of enslavement and because of the scars left by particularly vicious acts of oppression, nineteenth-century African American women autobiographies, in an effort to make changes for themselves and for their black brothers and sisters, chose to make public their stories of personal hardship, By applying the special communicative techniques that characterize the African American mother tongue, and by subverting and re-molding existing American literary genres, these black women established positions from which they could express resistance to the oppressions they suffered. They carve out enough room for their social, political, and literary voices to resonate... This is especially obvious in Wilson’s *Our Nig*, Jacobs’s *Incidents*, and Keckles’s *Behind the Scenes*, with their heavy reliance on the sentimental style (203-204).

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Eventually, one may shed light on the role played by several abolitionist newspapers in abolishing slavery in the United States. In the nineteenth century, newspapers like the *Liberator*, *Philanthropist*, *National Era*, *North Star*, and *National Anti-Slavery Standard* granted chances to different abolitionists to deliver their literary works across America from South to North, allowing them to spread their messages, spark the attention of new audiences and increase the number of proponents. (Asante and Mazama 80)

### 1.6. African American Narrative

Slave narrative, also called narrative of the enslaved, are “autobiographical stories about life in slavery”. Mostly written between 1760 s and the postbellum America, the accounts were either recounted in writings or passed on orally (Proctor 349). As claimed by the historian Daniel P. Kotzin, slave narratives are classified according to the period in which they were published. There were two major periods. The initial period (1760 – 1807) was identified by the description of the author’s lives as slaves, and the later period (1831 – 1865) was characterized by the author’s brutal descriptions of enslavement, “overly agitating for the abolition of slavery.” (Thinks and Mckivigan 617). African American narratives represented one of the nation’s first indigenous literary genres in which many common themes were tackled like slave’s oppression in bondage, physical and psychological mistreatment, the panic of auction the terrors of capture the importance of family, the yearning for freedom, the importance of family. (Asante and Mazama 387)

In the early period, slave narratives were effected by “[the] early white Protestant religious testimonials and the Judeo-Christian redemption methodology tales” (Beaulieu 795). Hence, they included “biblical analogies” and “an unconscious acceptance of white dominance” in which slavery was portrayed as the absence of physical freedom (ibid). Some of the most noteworthy narratives include Briton

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Hammon, *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, a Negro Man (1760)*, Venture Smith, *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa (1798)*; Boston King, *Memoirs of the Life of Boston King, a Black Preacher (1798)*; and Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African (1789)*. (Hinks and Mckivigan 618).

While a handful of slave narratives occurred by the first decades of the nineteenth century, “the rise of the antislavery movement came a demand for stories that would emphasize the harsh realities of slavery” (Asante and Mazama 349). White abolitionists became interested in slave narratives, considering them as “a powerful propaganda tool” for their targets. They believed that testimonies of the enslaved would have an impact on people in the North who were unaware about slaves’ conditions in the South (Hinks and Mckivigan 618). Among the antebellum autobiographies, there were Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845); Harriet A. Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861); Henry W. Bibb’s *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave* (1849); Sojourner Truth’s *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1850); William W. Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown, A Fugitive Slave* (1947); Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852); Leonard Black’s *The Life and Sufferings of Leonard Black; A Fugitive from Slavery* (1847), Henry Watson’s *Narrative of Henry Watson, Fugitive Slave* (1848).

White abolitionists often added “a preface or appendix” to a slave narrative through which they introduced the writer as a good person and summarizes the narrative and what it would deliver as facts about the evil of slavery (Asante and Mazama 349). As a result, many of the African American narratives had a great impact on the assertion of their writers and the abolition of slavery.

### 1.7. Conclusion

This chapter tackled the main incidents in Antebellum America, focusing on the change that African and American abolitionists result from their numerous attempts to assert slaves' lives. As a matter of fact, many women stand on the behalf of their abolitionist mates, not only for the target of ending slavery, but also to change their status as property and spread equal rights in all America. Moreover, literature remained a tool through which American and African American writers spread messages provide their readers with facts about the evil of slavery.

**Chapter two:  
Harriet Jacobs, a  
Female Voice Against  
Slavery**

## Chapter Two: Harriet Jacobs, a Female Voice Against Slavery

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### 2.1. Introduction

This chapter is designed to examine Harriet A. Jacobs's *Incidents in the life of a slave girl (1861)*. Deep strides are made to delineate the different aspects that affected Harriet's life as a slave girl and as a writer. Moreover, it features the main conditions through which *Incidents* had been written. Accordingly, this part concentrates on the thematic and psychological sides of women's suffrage under the control of white men during the nineteenth century.

### 2.2. A Synopsis of Harriet A. Jacobs's Life

Harriet Ann Jacobs is one of the most important and shining names in the world of literature that reflects the lives and adventures of people of the dark colour who lives as slaves. Her written productions have been a source for both American and none American readers. In these following lines a brief review about the journey of this important phenomenal person is to be presented as a way to explain the reason behind the importance and bright of this famous black female in the history of humanity.

Harriet Jacobs first came into life in Edenton, Chowan County, North Carolina; the daughter of Delilah, a slave of Margaret Horniblow, and Daniel Jacobs, the slave of Andrew Knox, in 1813, twenty four years after the adoption of the constitution had firmly established slavery in the newly born and established United States (Yellin 3). Though born as a slave, Harriet Jacobs did not know that fact. Rather, being her father's and mother's apple of eye, and her grandmother's source of joy, little Harriet enjoyed the best moments of childhood until she turned her sixth spring. In her autobiography, Jacobs describes this situation saying that she lived with her parents for six years and she never thought that she might be a no more than a slave because she says that " though we were all slaves, I was so fondly shielded that I never dreamed I was a piece of merchandise, trusted to them for safe keeping, and liable to be demanded of them at any moment" (Jacobs 8).

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Harriet Jacobs was born in Edenton as a result of her grandmother's existence there as a slave who was bought and brought to Edenton by a local tavern (Yellin 4). Then, Jacobs' life was meant to take place in Edenton. After her mother's life as a slave, the latter passed away leaving her six years old daughter to her mistress Margaret Horniblow who promised the mother to take care of Harriet. Indeed, the mistress fulfilled her, she took care of Harriet and taught her how to write and read (Yellin 11), giving her the first weapon that helped her later to be a writer and an abolitionist calling for the rights of people who shared a life like hers. However, Jacobs' life started to witness a radical change after the death of the kind Miss Horniblow and her movement to be a slave in the home of Dr. Norcom. In that house, Jacobs was introduced to repeated and harsh sexual harassment by Dr. Norcom. As a result, Jacobs became involved in a sexual affair with a white neighbour of Dr. Norcom, the lawyer Samuel Tredwell Sawyer at an end to the harassing and believing that her new decision and relationship with the lawyer would help her and put an end to the doctor's harassments (Knight 218). However, Harriet Jacobs gave birth to two children whose father was the lawyer Sawyer, whereas the doctor's harassments never stopped or even became less severe, rather, Norcom was even more enraged and took a vow to remain her master, and monster as well.

Out of her fear that Norcom could take her children away from her and sell them, Jacobs took another huge decision to change her life forever. In 1835, Harriet Ann Jacobs ran away from Norcom's household with a huge hope that her two children would be sold to their father, which was exactly what happened later (Knight 2019). Jacobs, then, remained seven years watching her children from far in her hiding place at her grandmother's house. Later on, in 1849, Jacobs decided to go north to New York where she worked as a nanny in the New York home of the editor Nathaniel Parker Willis, found her daughter Louisa whose father has taken her north, and she called for her son Joseph.

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Jacobs remained in contact with her children then she travelled with Mr. Willis to England to return to New York after one year and work with her brother in the abolitionist movement. Meanwhile Jacobs lived in the house of the writer and abolitionist Amy Post whose encouragements were the first sparks that encouraged her to write and make her own story of slavery public, however, Mr. Post suggested that Jacobs should approach Harriet Beecher Stowe who would help her write her story of slavery, but Stowe found her story hard to believe, then Jacobs hopes started to fade again (Knight 2019). After that, the grown and married Mary Norcom appeared again looking for Jacobs to take her back; yet, in 1859 Mister Willis came to rescue Jacobs and bought her and her children from Mary Norcom to set them all free. Though aching for being still treated as a product to be sold and bought, Jacobs gathered all what she had of strength and became more determined to put her story to print.

This time, Jacobs found heavy and serious help from the abolitionist Lydia Maria Child, the editor of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and who wrote its preface as well ( Garfield and Zafar 8, Knight 2019). Then, after facing certain problems with publishers, Jacobs saw her *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by herself* coming into existence, though the title page takes Child only as the writer, the story has been widely acknowledged as a production of Jacobs words and pen (Knight 2019), after that Jacob started to write even widely and published different letters and accounts in her work of publications and her story of moving from a slave girl into a free American citizen.

All in all *Incidents in the life of slave girl* marked a great change in the history of American literature as a masterpiece. In this context, Garfield and Zafar argue that:

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There is no better illustration of the rapidly changing critical landscape in American literary studies than the study, and seemingly instant canonization, of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*; the essays of our contributors underscore the complexity and breadth of Jacobs scholarship and the large society it reflects. Harriet Jacobs may have sought and welcomed the editorial aid of Lydia Maria Child, but she also struggled to ensure that she would tell her own story. So do the contributors, from each of their complementary perspectives, seek to honour and situate this nineteenth-century black woman's pioneering autobiography within a critical, historical, and cultural continuum. "Reeder, be assured this narrative is not fiction" (8).

### 2.3. Slavery and Racism in *Incidents*

Jealousy was an additional burden to the ones already laying upon Jacob's back. Noticing her husband's approaches towards Jacob, the doctor's wife started to address the slave in a tongue full of blame and accusations and a threatening eye. Out of her doubts, the mistress forces Jacob to swear and take a vow for telling the truth about her relation with her master and to assure her mistress that she is not interested in him. For these reasons, and though virtuous of a clean soul, her black colour was the one that determined white people's reactions towards her, rage and jealousy were the main elements that lead the mistress's actions, "The mistress, who ought to protect the helpless victim, has no other feelings towards her but those of jealousy and rage. . . Even the little child, who is accustomed to wait on her mistress and her children, will learn, before she is twelve years old, why it is that her mistress hates such and such a one among the slaves" (Jacobs 30-31). Thus, beauty that is taken as a gift for normal women was nothing but a curse in the narrator's life as it brought the harassment of the master as well as the furious and jealous reactions of his wife.

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Moreover, and though the beauty of Jacobs made her a desirable goal for her immoral master and a fought threat to his wife, Jacobs in her narrative explains and shows the reader a point deeper than sexual harassment that female slaves suffered from. In her book, the narrator focuses and describes different aspects and terrifying images of slavery, images that make the reader closer to Jacobs's heart and that explore the darkness and unmerciful world of slavery in the southern part of America. The scene when Jacobs talks about the expected life for an innocent black little girl is one of the most influential descriptions that leave an unforgettable touch on the reader's mind. In one example Jacob tells the reader about two little sisters, one white and the other black, but for the black one her future was predestined as the common flow of life in southern America, she was meant to suffer as a future slave. At that scene Jacobs tells about the two sisters:

One was a fair white child; the other was her slave, and also her sister. When I saw them embracing each other, and heard their joyous laughter, I turned sadly away from the lovely sight. I foresaw the inevitable blight that would fall on the little slave's heart. I knew how soon her laughter would be changed to sighs. . . How had those years dealt with her slave sister, the little playmate of her childhood? She, also was very beautiful; but the flowers and sunshine of love were not for her. She drank the cup of sin, and shame, and misery, whereof her persecuted race are compelled to drink. (32-33).

In these lines, the narrator leaves an undeniable stamp in the hearts of her readers, mainly those in the northern part of America for the reason that they compose the part whose hearts are already accepting the idea of freedom for black slaves who are under the mercy of American masters in the south.

Going further in the novel one might easily come in touch with other passages that draw closer images about the theme of sufferance and pain as a part of the daily life experienced by slaves. Mainly, slaves in America at the time when Jacobs had that label suffered from bad treatment, they were rather perceived as merchandise

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instead of normal humans of blood and flesh. In her book, the narrator presents very deep words to convince the reader of the bad and miserable conditions under which slaves were living. White men of the south, and ignorance ones in the north all practiced in making the black man a humiliated creature who himself had lost faith in himself and had lost the belief of being a normal man who has the right of an acceptable life. In this context, Jacobs admits that the black man is ignorant but only as a result of white man's actions:

I admit that the black man is inferior. But what is it that makes him so? It is the ignorance in which white men compel him to live; it is the torturing whip that lashes manhood out of him; it is the fierce bloodhounds of the South, and the scarcely less cruel human bloodhounds of the north, who enforce the Fugitive Slave Law. They do the work. (49)

From her words, Jacobs is a vivid example for the black soul who attempts all the time to flourish like a spring bud but is constantly being crashed under the foot of the cruel and heartless white man. Thus, slavery was an issue that caused the spirit and independence as well as happiness of the black man to diminish.

For Jacobs, all the problems of weakness, enslavement, being under the mercy of the white man, were explained as being the result of blackness and of not sharing the common colour that is seen in the faces and bodies of other American women and men. Racism was surely the first cause from which all other blew off. Slaves, especially female ones, suffered a lot from bad treatment. Yet, Jacobs tells her readers that dignity and pride were not something totally taken away from slaves who knew that they are humans just like the white men and that they deserve a good life as it is the case with the author's mother who was mostly known for her strong character especially that the mother "had been a slave merely in name, but in nature was noble and womanly" (9).

For eons upon eons, slaves were subjects for the bad and unmerciful treatment of the white men. Being whipped for trying to escape the miseries of slavery and the

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cruelty of the masters, slaves suffered even more. One of the most important quotes that show such a cruel treatment is seen when the narrator describes the situation of slaves who were caught when trying to escape from Southern plantation. If a slave resisted being whipped, “the bloodhounds were unpacked, and set upon him, to tear his flesh from his bones. The master who did this was highly educated, and styled a perfect gentleman.” (55). Thus, the actions of masters of the south were perceived as rights to be practiced over the black race for the mere reason of colour that gave them then the title of inferiority. Slaves were seen as nothing more than animals in the service of the white “superior” man.

Diving deeper within the book, one might easily notice the attempts of Jacobs to reflect all the ill-treatments that came out of racism and caused slavery to take place within the southern part where plantation covered the largest field of labour. Masters throw slaves under immense pressure not taking into account that they are humans who should be treated mercifully. In one occasion, Jacobs questions the white master in a criticizing tongue when she says: “What does he know about the half-starved wretches toiling from dawn till dark on the plantation? Of mothers shrieking for their children, torn from their arms by slave traders? Of young girls dragged down into moral filth? Of pools of blood around the whipping post?” (83).

From all what has been mentioned, Jacobs’s narrative of the events of her life as well as the lives of other slaves who fell under the hands of white masters presents the reader to a world of questions, of doubts and of explorations that should be paid attention to. Sexual harassment, racism, and slavery were all scenes that could reveal endless truths about slavery in the south when put into papers by Jacobs, a woman who strived for her brothers and sisters in slavery and whose voice rose more and more to reach all the parts of the world. More than that, in the context of slavery Jacobs’s work could mark a very interesting and vivid historical source to study the history and conditions experienced by white masters upon black slaves in the South.

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### 2.4. Sexual Harassment of Female Slaves in *Incidents*

Stories about slavery, slaves, and their suffering have covered a wide range of literary productions, both fictitious and factual ones. Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* is one of the most important and brilliant texts that came out of real events and adventures lived by the author herself. Having been a black slave under the control of American white masters, Jacob had poured endless drops of ink as an attempt to tell the world about the hard times, sufferings and hard life that she witnessed during her slavery. Though living under acceptable conditions with her first owner Margaret Horniblow who taught her to read and sew, Jacobs was then introduced to a more cruel world of slavery as she became the first target for doctor Flint's immoral treatments. At this point, Jacob started to suffer from harassments and she struggled to save herself from her master's actions that caused her immense pain, especially that such type of treatment had always been a one that black female slaves suffered from, for the reason that slaves had no rights for protection in the South. Then, female slaves became an easy target for white male masters.

For many slaves and as a result of being put under immense pressure, even male slaves step away and give total access to their wives and daughters for the white masters who are eager to enjoy the beauty of black female slaves whenever they wanted to. The narrator sheds light on this issue by telling the reader about such practices and humiliation of the human nature when she writes that "Some poor creatures have been brutalized by the lash that they will sneak out of the way to give their masters free access to their wives and daughters" (49). Thus, sexual harassment and mental suffering is the result of such immoral practices over black slaves for the reason that even a male slave could see his wife or daughter used to please the master while he is prevented the right to defend or react against those practices, another instant through which Jacobs attempts to show the deeper and darker problems of slaves in south America.

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As Wilma King mentions, sexual harassment was a common problem and a widely practiced action that black female slaves suffered from in addition to family split and other maltreatments from the part of white masters, especially male ones (158). In Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, the protagonist describes such similar treatment as being a victim of her master's attempts to enjoy the young slave's body for pleasing his desires. Being the property of Dr. Flint, Jacobs lived in pain and fear while fighting to protect her virtuous soul against her malicious master. While in the master's house, she tells the reader that her master "began to whisper foul words in my ear. Young as I was, I could not remain ignorant of their import. I tried to treat them with indifference . . . I saw a man of forty years my senior daily violating the most sacred commandments of nature" (30). Though suffering and receiving that treatment, Jacobs could not even tell her grandmother or defend herself for the reason of having no law that would stand by her side because slaves were never protected; they were perceived as mere objects and possessions.

Despite choosing to have a lover for the purpose of forcing the doctor to give up his approaches, the latter sticks on his will and never accepts to sell his slave who is at the same time the target of his desires. As Jacobs says, "There was no hope that the doctor would consent to sell me on any terms. He had an iron will, and was determined to keep me, and to conquer me." (46). Jacobs already knows that her master insists on keeping her under his mercy despite her refusal to be his mistress or to obey his dirty desires. For long nights, Jacobs could not sleep; horror had taken up her heart for the obscene advances of the doctor, this could be seen when she writes: "O, what days and nights of fear and sorrow that man caused me" (32).

### 2.5. The Cult of Womanhood

Throughout time, the issue of women and their voice to gain proper rights as men as an important part of society had covered a wide range of literary

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productions, freedom against tyranny, right against wrong, and freedom against slavery as well as equality between men and women are all topics that lay in the bottom and base of womanhood and feminist calls and screams, this fact had mainly been a part of literary productions as it is the case with Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

In her book, Jacobs sheds light on a set of examples and situations through which she basically attempts to raise the voice of womanhood in general and not only that of black slaves. When describing the acts of jealousy that she had received from her mistress, Jacobs does not pay attention only to the suffering of herself by the mistress's actions, rather she calls the reader to think about the rights and situations of the white woman as well, that woman who had been suffering from the approaches of her husband towards the black female slaves. For a careful reader, this could simply denote that even white woman suffered from men and their tyranny, they were only taken as objects in many instances and they had to accept it. As it is the case with the mistress who was put under stress for the possibility of losing her husband whose interest laid in finding the proper way to lead his wife as well as her slave under his control.

In the other way, Jacobs raised in her book many other images that scream out the voice of feminism and femininity for black female slaves. This could be mainly seen in the example of her grandmother who was very strong and feared by the white men of tyranny despite the fact of being a mere slave. When talking about this important character in the narrative of her life, the narrator describes her grandmother as a saviour whose strong heart had protected Jacobs for a very long time. The grandmother lived her life and worked hard to support Harriet and provide her with all what she wants. Moreover, she was even one of the reasons that drove away the dirty approaches of Dr. Flint whose interest fell upon the narrator. The job of a protector who was strong and courageous was always one feature that gave the grandmother a loud feminine strength that proved to the reader that women are able to sacrifice, to work, to raise families and protect them. One example could

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be seen when Jacobs says about her grandmother who keeps trying to protect her grandchild from prison to show the strength of womanhood “Day and night she laboured. The trader's price would treble that he gave; but she was not discouraged” (26). In addition, the strength of womanhood is even more present in the scene where the narrator tells the reader about the fear that the grandmother threw in the hearts of the strongest white masters in the village where she lives: “she was a woman of a high spirit. She was usually very quiet in her demeanour; but if her indignation was once roused, it was not very easily quelled. I had been told that she once chased a white gentleman with a loaded pistol, because he insulted one of her daughters” (32). These words are but a simple instances about the strength and abilities of womanhood in slavery, being slaves did not prevent them from defending their rights and regaining their important estate among society, even the white man who was the master was chased by them when insulting a woman.

In addition to the example of the grandmother, Jacobs also writes some notes about her mother who is another woman reflecting the power and loud voice of women in slavery. Amongst her fellow slaves and even the masters and mistresses, the woman had a great positive reputations, slavery never made her lower her voice or forget her right as a normal woman. Yet, doing so did not made her look as a rebellious but rather as a courageous and honourable woman. Even for the slaveowners, Jacob’s mother was agreed to be a most noble woman, and proved that nobility and ethics are not a property of white females only rather a black woman could be as noble and high in rank and education as her whiter mistress. Mainly, the owners of Jacobs’s mother mostly spoke of her kindly as a woman who “had been a slave merely in name, but in nature was noble and womanly” (9). Thus, images of womanhood and their nobility as well as high voice that calls for their rights are not excluded from the text and narrative of Harriet Jacobs who keeps trying to show the high level of purity, nobility, and strength that a black woman, even as a slave could attain.

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### 2.6. Resisting Jacobs's *Incidents*

Authority and authenticity mark an inevitable challenge in communicative contexts particularly “when a writer or narrator is different in a race, gender, or class from the implied or actual reader” (Garfield and Zafar 57). Though the social identity of a writer or a narrator is never totally relevant, standing becomes worthy of attention when the subject or the plot coincides thematically with the readers’ assumptions about whom he/she reads (58). The resistance of the authority of blacks or of slaves, for African American women writers, was compounded by “gender prejudices”, Frances F. Foster claimed “even if the authorships were acknowledged and their accounts were verified, their writings still perceived through a veil of sexism” (59-60). As manifested in the nineteenth century, black women’s literary works were doubted since the audiences would not believe that these writers could be intelligent and eloquent. Hence, this desperate struggle led the African Americans to develop their literary skills and strategies because they recognized with a view to prove their authorities and authenticities through “the power of the pen” which they had to wield it with courage, cleverness. (60)

Upon Harriet Jacobs’s biographies and researches on her narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, a good representation of reader and writer resistance was noted since it is considered as a distinctive case, concerning both author and her text with its unique aspects (ibid). Harriet Jacobs’s life was full of struggle, from the day she resisted her master and his wife until the day she became free, she lived several difficult incidents which made her story seem fictional as most earlier readers thought (Gallay 324). After her successful escape to Philadelphia, then she moved to New York city and established herself in Rochester where she met her brother’s activities circle and joined it immediately in a house situated in the centre of Sophia Street. This house belonged to the white Quakers Amy and Isaac Post who were antislavery activists, and a number of antislavery friends associated with them. These abolitionists had set an Antislavery office and the Reading Room in the

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year before Harriet Jacobs' coming to the city purposely to make Rochester a regional hub of the movement. Their aim behind their establishment was to provide their friends by information concerning their progress and supply them by books and pamphlets. Also, "they raised money for the cause by selling a rich variety of Fancy and useful articles made by the Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society". (Yellin 101-102)

Subsequently, Jacobs was required to share her story in the antislavery effort but she did not agree until the Fugitive Slave Law was set in 1850 (Garfield and Zafar 61). Yet, her conscience told her that she must write to help free other slaves after Molly's death (her grandmother) since, in some level, she was not able to tell her story and mention her troubled sexual history before her grandmother was gone. Ultimately, she decided to set down her account and moved to the house of Nathaniel Willis who was a famous writer and editor where she worked as a nurse (Yellin 126).

When Jacobs was working in her brother's Rochester antislavery reading room, she realized that she had to do many efforts to acquire a good literacy which would allow her to write a well-crafted autobiography because during that year, she was in contact with a group of intellectuals, artists, and social activists. In addition, Frederick Douglass's offices were located under her brother's antislavery reading room what kept her in touch with the latest news of Douglass's struggles, his enthusiastic abolitionist companions, and his writings such as his autobiography. Therefore, writing *Incidents* in an appropriate style was "one requirement for authorship" which caused a resistance to hers. (Garfield and Zafar 62)

Yet, she moved to the Willises' home up the Hudson in Canada where the nature inspires the writer. However, she could not write because of the nursery, she was too busy (Yellin 127). Moreover, she felt isolated because she was far from her friends who were encouraging her face-to-face and frequently. Even more than support, "Jacobs needed time", Jean stated "Aware that she could not possibly

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finish her book without some relief from her twenty-four-hours, seven-day-a-week job”. (128)

These circumstances and others, like Jacobs’s suffering during her illness when she had a tumour in her womb, the dependence of Mrs. Wills on Jacobs when her husband’s health worsened, and taking care of babies occupied her time, but still she worked on and assumed her evenings with her pen (Yellin 131). All these conditions were time consuming obstacles i.e. another resistance to *Incidents*.

Furthermore, recognizing that her story will be read largely by a white audience, yet, they may resist her voice. “She knows her book differs from other slave narratives in its focus on the sexual oppression of women in slavery, [since] what she has written is not fiction, but her life story” (Yellin 135). Also, Harriet was aware about professional jealousy and competition, and working in a literary household made her conscious of the absence on an international copyright. Consequently, she thought of establishing her copyright to sell her book both at home and abroad (Garfield and Zafar 62, Yellin 136).

Indeed, Jacobs firstly published her book in London. It was after she sailed for England on May 26<sup>th</sup>, 1859 under the protection of Mrs. Willis’s Uncle, Mr. Mosses Grinnell. Then, “she was armed with letters of introduction from Chapman to Garrisonian activists in England, Scotland ad Island, and with a letter from Mrs. Willis verifying that her freedom had been purchased” (Yellin 137). Thence, one may notice that Harriet Jacobs’s freedom was necessary to publish her narrative; otherwise, she would not come back home “a publisher author”. (137)

After publishing her book in Britain, Harriet Jacobs spent months looking for a publisher in several places in America but, each time she tried, she returned embarrassed by her failures (Yellin140). Because publishers, particularly those of antislavery leanings who were sedulous to print slave narratives, could not dare to publish Jacobs’s *Incidents* since it was “so original and striking” that they required more than the usual endorsements by others. (Garfield and Zafar 63).

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In her last attempt, the African American activist and writer William C. Nell helped Jacobs to contact Lydia Maria Child who was an activist, an author of many antislavery pamphlets and the former editor of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. Child accepted to serve as the editor of Jacobs's narrative and supply a preface because she found that "[Harriet Jacobs] tells her story in a very intelligent, spirited manner, and the details seem to [Child] well calculated to advance the cause she had so deeply at heart." (Yellin 140, 141). As an expert editor, Child proposed to make some modifications on Jacobs's manuscript by transporting sentences and pages so as the events of the story became more sequent and consistent. Later, after finishing their work on the narrative, Child tried to persuade Thayer and Eldridge to print two thousand copies. (Garfield and Zafar 63)

At the end, about a decade of trying, struggling, and extreme tiredness, Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* was finally published in 1861. Hers, however, caused contradictions among the readers that waned and waxed continuously to the present day because on the cover page, they identified Lydia M. Child as the editor of the narrative while they mentioned "A Slave Girl: Written by herself". Nonetheless, some scholars proved that this narrative belongs to Harriet Ann Jacobs, Foster stated that "a good many readers continue to resist identifying the book as an autobiography by a former slave woman named Harriet Jacobs". (64)

### 2.7. Conclusion

Many African American men and women writers contributed to the production of numerous literary pieces through which their messages were echoed. Great names had put all their efforts together for the purpose of providing the American society with facts that help abolishing slavery and better their circumstances.

One of the bright names in the shining field of slave narrative is Harriet Ann Jacobs whose work is still considered as a weapon against slavery. Noteworthy, Harriet introduced a set of themes that tackled the women's lives of both race,

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mainly the slaves' lives, and her constant fight and resistance against the horrors of slavery.

# **General Conclusion**

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

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For many reasons, Americans and African Americans turned to literature in the antebellum era. As a result, many ex-slave writers, through their narratives, started to make tenacious efforts to assert themselves and all slaves in America by being a part of the antislavery societies. In this period, white women were treated as second-class citizens, whereas black women were considered as chattels of their owners. Yet both of them resisted to their status by participating in the abolitionist movement, first, to abolish slavery and second to overcome the marginalization and stereotypes that had overtaken the Americans minds for long.

As one of the prominent figures in American black literature, Harriet A. Jacobs is one of those writers who chose slave narrative to fight against slavery. Mostly, presenting the struggle of female slaves was a priority in all of her narrative. Her work is a testimony of human suffering under the bondage of slavery; sexual harassment of the master; physical and psychological abuse of the owner and his wife; the longing for freedom; the struggle to acquire literacy; the importance of family and the difficulty of maintaining family bonds when enslaved, escape from enslavement; and a new self-definition after freedom.

This research paper focused on Jacobs's *Incidents in the life of a Slave Girl* (1861), drawing attention to the real circumstances which African American female slaves lived and suffered from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the Civil War, and revealing the human side of the slave experience. Harriet's narrative provides much more graphic descriptions about how sexual control by white masters made slavery especially oppressive for black women, than any of her counterparts.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

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All in all, slave narratives, as literary genre, had a considerable impact on the struggle to end slavery in America through exposing the horrors of the slave trade and the inhumanity of slavery, and calling for the abolition of this institution.

Eventually, through the slave narrative *Incidents in the life of a Slave Girl* (1861), and Harriet Ann Jacobs herself, one may notice women's strength that could prove their ability to be educated, then to enter the writing world. Harriet Jacobs was a good example of an abolitionist black woman who wrote her narrative for antislavery targets. A narrative which was considered later as a weapon against slavery.

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