

Compare and Contrast Three Slavery Experiences Student Exemplar Response

Emancipation narratives tell the story of how a person went from slavery to freedom. The stories of Elizabeth Keckley, Frederick Douglass, and William and Ellen Craft are examples of this type of narrative. Because everyone's experiences are different even when they experience similar life events, these types of narratives will have both similarities and differences. Their experiences as slaves seemed to affect how they experienced freedom from slavery. The narratives of Keckley, Douglass, and the Crafts were similar in the fact that all wanted their freedom, but different in their experiences as slaves, their reasons for wanting emancipation, and their lives after emancipation.

Elizabeth Keckley's slavery experience was different from that of Douglass and the Crafts because she lived with her master and considered herself one of his family in many ways. Keckley wanted freedom for herself and her son, but did not tend to view her situation quite as negatively as the others. Keckley is a vital part of her master's family, and she respects the relationship. Keckley is married to her husband in her master's home, with his family in attendance. She says that "the wedding was a great event in the family." Keckley even mentions that she respects the authority of her master when she says, "As much as I respected the authority of my master, I could not remain silent on a subject that so nearly concerned me." She even refuses to leave when he says she can go if she wants because she wants to be legally free. She is not willing to run away like Douglass and the Crafts.

Throughout his description of life as a slave, Douglass emphasizes how important it is for him to work for himself instead of his master. Unlike the others, who have other family members to think about, Douglass's primary goal is to be free to work for himself. He wants to run away, but he is afraid of being caught and returned to his master, who he knows would punish him severely. Douglass desperately wants his freedom, but is also very afraid of what can happen to him if he is caught while fleeing. About this fear he says, "I was again seized with a feeling of great insecurity and loneliness. I was yet liable to be taken back, and subjected to all the tortures of slavery." When he finally does reach relative safety in the North, it takes him a long time to adjust to his new surroundings because he is still fearful of being returned to his master.

The Crafts' main reason for fleeing to the North is to be together, because they have been cruelly separated by their masters. The way their story involves disguise and deception was very different from Douglass's and Keckley's. The author of the article says, "It was William who came up with the scheme to hide in plain sight, but it was Ellen who convincingly masked her race, her gender and her social status during their four-day trip." The Crafts travelled together from South to North under disguise, Ellen passing as William's disabled, male master. Unlike Keckley and Douglass, who could both read and write, the Crafts were disadvantaged due to their illiteracy.

These three emancipation stories highlight the fact that there were as many different slavery and emancipation experiences as there were slaves. We learn more about Keckley's and Douglass's slavery experiences through their first person accounts of their lives than we do about the Crafts' experiences through the 3rd person narration of their flight to freedom. Despite their very different lives and different experiences of emancipation, the stories are united in the fact that they give readers a more complete view of the complex topic of slavery in America.