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What Lessons Can Contemporary African Americans Draw From Fredrick Douglass As Documented In "Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass?"

Frederick Douglass' "Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass" (1845) is a memoir that captures an enslaved person's life and the slaveholders' brutality. Douglass uses this book to provide his vivid history, including how he escaped and became one of the most celebrated African Americans in the country's history. Throughout the text, Douglass addresses the immorality of slavery and the need to abolish the oppressive institution. He also provides the readers with what it means to be a person of color in a highly discriminatory society. From reading the book, a person can gain numerous insights and lessons that would help them in their life. Douglass' story from an enslaved person to a respectable figure in America's politics can inspire generations of people of color today and in the future. Despite the numerous takeaways from his reading, Douglass' courage, self-determination, and grit are the most influential lessons that African Americans can draw from his life.

The story of Douglass' escape inspires self-determination and the continuous desire to break from the yolk of bondage. For a long time, Douglass had wanted to escape from his slaveholders. Although he failed in his first shot, he managed to run away successfully in his subsequent attempt. Escaping from slavery was one of the most unthinkable things during the slavery days. Besides whipping, escapees would also face severe punishments, including death. However, as he narrated in the book, "I looked forward to a time at which it would be safe for

me to escape" (Douglass 37). Running away from slavery was the dream of every enslaved person due to the brutality, and inhumane conditions blacks had to face. The determination illustrated by Douglass depicts the need for African Americans to continue challenging oppressive policies. Today, African Americans face numerous challenges, such as police brutality and the systemic racism that has permeated every aspect of their social life. Douglass' escape from enslavement should remind every black person that they must exercise courage, especially when protesting the violation of human rights. Platforms like Black Lives Matter (BLM) should actively resist modern-day slavery that manifests in various forms, including violence against blacks and inequality. Accordingly, Douglass embodies the need for every citizen to take personal responsibility in fighting oppression.

Douglass' self-determination enabled him to learn how to read and write despite the high illiteracy among the enslaved people. After learning about the alphabet, he slowly mastered the art of reading and writing. However, as he narrates in the text, his learning journey was not easy. He says, "My mistress, who had kindly commenced to instruct me, had, in compliance with the advice and direction of her husband, not only ceased to instruct" (Douglass 32). The white slaveholders knew that education would empower the enslaved person, bridging the gap between them. Besides self-determination, Douglass portrayed courage to learn reading and writing. He went ahead and taught his fellow enslaved people as this was the only legitimate way to acquire emancipation. Historically, African Americans have fought for equal opportunities in education. During the mid-20th century, the civil rights movement fought segregation in education, winning the landmark Brown v Board case of 1954. Regardless, discrimination in education remains a challenge. For instance, the graduation rates for African American students are lower than their white counterparts. In addition, learning facilities in predominantly black districts are below the

required standards. The current situation in the country reflects the longstanding education problem that began during the slavery era. Regardless, African Americans must emulate Douglass' grit and determination to educate himself despite scarce resources.

Despite almost giving up several times, Douglass maintained his quest to fight immoral slavery. He does not hide his negative attitude towards the institution in his book. However, fighting the establishment comes with numerous barriers that could compel an individual to concede. He states, "I often found myself regretting my existence, and wishing myself dead; but for the hope of being free, I have no doubt but that I should have killed myself" (Douglass 36). His failure to give up made him grow from enslaved to one of the most influential abolitionists. Contemporary African Americans must understand the need to stick to worthwhile causes. The black community continues to experience immoral things, from discrimination to disproportional exposure to the criminal justice system. Other challenges include inequality and the lack of health insurance. Like enslavement, some of these challenges are deeply rooted and would require significant effort to achieve change. However, Douglass reminds his audience that nothing is impossible, especially with the proper mental framework. His transition from a victim to a crusader depicts the need to maintain a fighting spirit, especially in cases where immorality prevails. Therefore, African Americans should gain inspiration from Douglass' attitude and beliefs when facing modern challenges.

Despite his commitment to emancipation, Douglass understood the responsibility that he and his fellow enslaved people had. The end of slavery was the beginning of a life of hard work and dedication to building a respectable black community. He narrates, "We now began to feel a degree of safety and to prepare ourselves for the duties and responsibilities of a life of freedom" (Douglass 95). Douglass continued to live a respectable life in his private and public capacities.

He knew that freedom was just an ingredient to a more purposeful life. Contemporary African Americans can draw significant lessons from this aspect of Douglass' life. Everyone has the resources and time to pursue the American Dream if they put in their mind and work. Unfortunately, many African Americans engage in worthless pursuits such as drug trafficking, violent robbery, and gang-related activities. Douglass encourages the African community to safeguard their place in the socioeconomic matrix of American society. They should actively advocate for good governance and prosperity for all. Therefore, if the black community does not engage in such beneficial endeavors, emancipation from slavery will not gain the significance it should have.

In conclusion, despite the numerous lessons from "Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass," Douglass' courage, self-determination, and grit are the most influential lessons that African Americans can draw from his life. His courage to escape enslavement inspires the contemporary black community to fight oppression and discrimination. In addition, Douglass' self-determination to educate himself reminds African Americans of the value of quality education. Knowledge acquisition is the ultimate source of freedom. Douglass also emphasizes the never-giving-up attitude, especially when confronting social injustice. African Americans continue to grapple with inequality, poverty, and discrimination. Achieving any success will require an unwavering commitment and the level of desire that Douglass showed his entire life. Lastly, Douglass emphasizes the need for responsibility after freedom. As the social space continues to improve, African Americans should take opportunities and climb the social and economic ladder.

Work Cited

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave*. Anti-Slavery Office, No. 25 Cornhill, 1845.