



Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl

Harriet Jacobs

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Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl is a slave narrative that was published in 1861 by Harriet Ann Jacobs, using the pen name "Linda Brent." The book is an in-depth chronological account of Jacobs's life as a slave, and the decisions and choices she made to gain freedom for herself and her children. It addresses the struggles and sexual abuse that young women slaves faced on the plantations, and how these struggles were harsher than what men suffered as slaves. The book is considered sentimental and written to provoke an emotional response and sympathy from the reader toward slavery in general and slave women in particular[citation needed] for their struggles with rape, the pressure to have sex at an early age, the selling of their children, and the treatment of female slaves by their mistresses. Jacobs began composing Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl while living and working at Idlewild, the Hudson River home of writer and publisher Nathaniel Parker Willis, who was fictionalized in the book as Mr. Bruce. Portions of the book were published in serial form in the New-York Tribune, owned and edited by Horace Greeley. Jacobs's reports of sexual abuse were considered too shocking to the average newspaper reader of the day, and publication ceased before the completion of the narrative. Boston publishing house Phillips and Samson agreed to print the work in book form if Jacobs could convince Willis or Harriet Beecher Stowe to provide a preface. She refused to ask Willis for help and Stowe turned her down, though the Phillips and Samson company closed anyway. She eventually managed to sign an agreement with the Thayer & Eldridge publishing house and they requested a preface by Lydia Maria Child. Child also edited the book and the company introduced her to Jacobs. The two women remained in contact for much of their remaining lives. Thayer & Eldridge, however, declared bankruptcy before the narrative could be published.



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