This is an annotated bibliography of several works pertaining to *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. In previous versions of the online anthology, there were no annotated bibliographies for this text. We feel it is important to include these literary criticisms because they help us see the many themes in *Incidents*. We hope future students, as well as instructors, can find this bibliography useful!


Garfield connects Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* to a much wider literary and oral tradition of slave narratives at the time. Jacobs wrote her ground-breaking text during a time when slaves started speaking out to white audiences about their time in slavery. Garfield delves briefly into the history of slaves trying to navigate this new sphere. They found that oratory narratives connected more strongly with the audience than written texts. Thus, many freed slaves started touring, giving lectures on what their life had been like as enslaved people. White folk resonated with these stories despite their horror. However there was one brand of slave narrative that people did not take to well: the female narrative. Female slaves often experienced horrific sexual assault. Their narratives were deemed corrupting for innocent white women. Therefore, enslaved peoples were censored in telling their authentic stories. They had to find alternate ways to get their messages across. Some took on oratory styles that were more traditionally “male.” Others, like Jacobs, resigned to trading out the more effective speech for a written text.

Garfield highlights may instances where Jacobs utilizes stylistic elements to soften the blow of her trauma for a white, female audience. Even though Linda experiences sexual assault in the story, Jacobs is very careful at how she portrays this reality. Dr. Flint, Linda’s main abuser, is oftentimes seen in the text verbally assaulting Linda even though the reader...
knows that much of her abuse is physical. Garfield notes that Jacobs purposefully did this to shelter her readers. These dynamics parallel physical rape; Linda must stand passively and take the aggression of Dr. Flint. Thus, the reader still experiences Linda’s reality, but in a way that is more palatable. Garfield highlights the gender politics in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and connects them to the events that were happening at the time. This context supports a deeper understanding of the characters and dynamics working in and on the text.


Gomaa goes into detail about how slave bodies were treated during their fight for freedom. Abolitionists required/pressured freed slaves to show people their physical scars so they could gain sympathy and further the rebellion. She talks about “sentimentalizing pain” in various slave narratives, including *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Sentimentalizing pain is the idea that one needs to make the reader live their pain through details of their lives or by comparing it to another kind of pain. The idea is that this preludes getting sympathy for said pain. She brings up how Jacobs refers to the body as “home,” creating a metaphor for readers to understand better and make a statement. Gomaa goes into detail about how Jacobs accomplishes these ideas throughout *Incidents*. It’s important to understand this idea because it helps us see the reasons behind Jacobs’ writing choices in *Incidents*.


In this literary criticism, Larson details what the “Cult of True Womanhood” is and how it connects with *Incidents*. She talks about how Jacobs attacks the ideals that are spread by them, particularly about purity and submissiveness. Purity and religious devotion were important in the 1800s, dictating how women needed to act. Larson details throughout this piece how Jacobs puts forth a call to action for womanhood. She suggests that Jacobs was showing women that community, or sisterhood, was more important than being domestic. This piece is important to *Incidents* in the Life of a Slave Girl because it shows how it is a feminist text. It is important for readers to see how *Incidents* can be a feminist text beyond having a persevering female lead. We feel that this piece might help readers see that.


Wesley takes an in-depth look into the underlying feminine narrative in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. She explains the narrative through the lens of the travel text and makes a multitude of comparisons to works of Frederick Douglass. While Douglass writes about masculine characters that fight for their freedom with physical strength and brutality, Linda is more constrained in her fight. Linda fought with her body, by getting pregnant with her white lover to upset Dr. Flint. While men in traditional slave and travel texts go off into the world and have an adventure, Linda shuts herself up in her grandmother’s tiny crawlspace. Here Wesley talks about gendered space. Males slaves often run off to the north and fight for their freedom there. Instead, Linda shut herself up. From her hole in the South, Linda starts her path towards freedom. She is able to gain power in that space as she has Dr. Flint chasing her fake letters around the North while she sits in her grandmother’s house. Westley notes how the later parts of the narrative shifts, as Linda begins her travels around the North. The residue of her trauma as a slave is seen as she maneuvers the free world. Thus, because she knows that the world can still overpower her, she is not truly free. Finally Linda’s employer buys her freedom. While this
should have come to relief for Linda, she still feels that she is controlled by the institution of slavery. While the protagonists of Douglass’s stories gain their own freedom, Linda eventually has it given to her. Wesley highlights how the feminine aspect of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* changes the narrative for the protagonist.


Whitsitt delves into the reliability and double voice of this slave narrative. Whitsitt suggests that Jacobs’ use of double voice allows her to tell the truth while appealing to a majority of her audience (Northern white women). This use of double voice affects the slave narrative in discrete ways, challenging the reader to “read between the lines” in order to find out the whole truth about slavery. This essay also discusses Jacobs’ use of feminine ideals and Christianity, explaining how they are used to gain trust from the reader base. This is an extremely important reading to bring to light due to the way *Incidents In The Life Of A Slave Girl* is received. Typically, the narrative is read as complete truth with few critics questioning the reliability. By bringing in the question of how reliable it is, Whitsitt shows us how even this slave narrative is affected by white power.