

## American Slavery and the Consciousness of Play

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**Abstract :** "Narratives of Slavery and the Culture of Play" examines how play is discussed in early African American literature by both men and women to illustrate ways that they negotiated the hierarchy and oppression of enslavement. Reading narratives categorized as "slave narratives," including those written by Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Olaudah Equiano, through the lens of play theory offers an illuminated analysis of the significance of play culture in these texts. It then reads late nineteenth-century play culture (or absence thereof) portrayed in literature as a lens for more contemporary African American oral and literary culture. These discussions of social constructions through literature bridge analyses of African American-authored texts and create a larger conversation about print media as a tool of activism and resistance. This essay also contributes to a larger body of analysis of nineteenth-century African American culture through literature.

**Keywords :** childhood, slavery, consciousness of play, 19th century African American culture

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