

# Frederick Douglass

Frederick Douglass was born around 1818 with a date unknown even to himself in Talbot County, Maryland. Douglass never really knew his mother and did not know who his father was, as they were separated onto different plantations after his birth. Originally, he lived with his maternal grandfather, Henry Bailey, staying with her until the age of six, when he was once again separated from his relatives and relocated to the Rye House plantation.

Even as a young boy, he endured all the horrors of slavery and grew up within that reality. At the age of 9, he was sent to work for his master's brother in Baltimore, and there Douglass learned the alphabet slowly by "memoria," thanks to the brother's wife. It was in this context that he first heard the words "abolition" and "abolitionist."

All of this filled him with curiosity, but he was forbidden by his master from learning about slavery or anything else. Nevertheless, he continued learning on his own from books, secretly, and he also taught other enslaved people to read and write using the Bible.

Naturally, the slaveholders considered this a serious problem. As a result, Douglass was transferred between several farms, being viewed as troublesome due to his knowledge and desire to teach others—until, he was eventually sent to a master known for being one of the most brutal.

Douglass experienced the worst period of his life there he was starved and whipped daily. After multiple attempts to escape, he finally succeeded at the age of 20. He fled to New York, where he stayed in the red house of abolitionist David Higgins. It was there that he also found the love of his life, Anna Murray, who he happened to already know from having lived on the same plantation as one of his former "owners". She helped him escape his current master's control, and soon after they married and had five children.

After living with her for a year, he began regularly telling his story at church, emphasizing the importance of the abolitionist cause. From the later, they moved to Rochester, where he delivered one of his most eloquent speeches to the white leaders of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. There, he was hired as an abolitionist leader, directly engaging in the movement.

In 1845, he published his first and most famous autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. The following years he played an influential role during the Civil War, speaking tirelessly throughout the conflict. He also directly influenced Abraham Lincoln, although Douglass grew disappointed with his for not prioritizing the right to vote for formerly enslaved people when Lincoln had declared the end of slavery.

They later reconciled, and Douglass even spoke at Lincoln's funeral. At the end of his life, after learning the death of his wife, he married a white activist and fought alongside her for the achievement of women's suffrage.

## Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave - 1845

WHAT  
OF THE  
FOURTH  
JULY?

What to the Slave Is  
The Fourth of July -  
1852

## My Bondage and My Freedom - 1855

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

My Bondage  
and My Freedom

## Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave - 1845

Douglass began sharing his story publicly, became involved in the abolitionist movement, and later moved to Massachusetts, where his powerful speeches earned him a position with the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. In 1845, he published his famous autobiography. During the Civil War, he became an influential voice, even advising Abraham Lincoln, with whom he later reconciled after initial disagreements.

Later in life, after Anna's death, Douglass married a white activist and continued fighting for social causes, including women's suffrage.

## What to the Slave Is The Fourth of July - 1852

What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July is a powerful speech delivered by Frederick Douglass in 1852, in which he exposes the profound hypocrisy of celebrating the independence of the United States while millions of people were still enslaved. Addressing a mostly white audience, Douglass praises the ideals of liberty and justice of the American Revolution, but soon reveals the stark contrast between those principles and the reality of slavery.

With forceful arguments, he denounces the cruelty, injustice, and dehumanization imposed on enslaved Black people, questioning how a nation that proclaims itself free can continue to uphold such a system. The speech resonates one of the most powerful criticisms of the United States' moral contradictions and a landmark in the struggle for civil rights and abolition.

## Curiosities

1. He published in his newspaper *The North Star*, which aimed to fight for the rights of Black society, women's rights, and the right to universal education.  
"Right is of no Sex — Truth is of no Color — God is the Father of us all, and we are all Brethren."

2. After Douglass's death, Congress built—at the request of his second wife—the "Frederick Douglass Memorial and Historical Association" at his home in Anacostia. It was opened on September 4, 1962, and in 1986 it was declared a national historic landmark.

3. He became one of the main representatives of nineteenth-century American literature with his autobiography, which, more than telling his life story, became a manifesto for racial equality.

"Right is of no Sex — Truth is of no Color — God is the Father of us all, and we are all Brethren" - Douglass, Frederick