

History



Frederick Douglass: Freedom's Champion

FREDERICK Douglass spent the first 20 years of his life trapped like a fly in a spider web. Once he broke free, he devoted his life to helping others do the same.

SLAVERY

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THE NORTH STAR



Like many black Americans in the early 1800's, Frederick was born a slave. His white owner beat him and made him work long hours without pay. Sometimes, just to eat, Frederick had to fight dogs for scraps of food.

The hope of freedom kept Frederick Douglass alive. When he finally escaped his master, he began a new life. He became a respected newspaper publisher, popular speaker, and adviser to Presidents.

Life as a Slave

Frederick Bailey was born on a

Maryland plantation in 1817. When he was a young boy, he was separated from his mother after she was hired out to another farm.

At age 7 or 8, Frederick went to Baltimore to live as a companion for a white boy. He lived among educated people and soon realized that knowledge could help him become free. In exchange for favors, his white playmates secretly taught him to read and write.

As a teen-ager, Frederick was sent to work in the fields. Life was hard. He was whipped and poorly fed. But he had learned enough to improve his reading and writing skills on his own. And he prayed for freedom.

Life on the Run

Frederick's chance to escape came in 1838 when his master sent him to town alone. He wore a sailor's suit as a disguise. As a train left town, he leaped on it.

fighting for freedom. He spoke against slavery and wrote a shocking book about his life as a slave. Then he fled to England in case his master sought to capture him.

For two years in England, Douglass lectured on the evils of slavery. A group of Englishmen were so impressed that they raised \$1,250 to buy his freedom from his master. Now, he was free forever.

After Douglass returned to the United States in 1847, he published *The North Star* and other anti-slavery newspapers in Rochester, N.Y. He also put his words into action, helping runaway slaves flee to Canada.

A Friend to All Americans

The debate over slavery divided Northern and Southern states and touched off the Civil War in 1861.

Douglass urged black men to join the Northern army and fight for the freedom of all black people. He

Fugitive slaves could be hunted and returned to their masters. Frederick nervously rode trains, ferries and steamships to the Northern states where slavery was outlawed. He found safety in Massachusetts, a state with a law forbidding the return of runaway slaves.

Still, he feared being kidnapped and returned to his master. Frederick changed his last name to Douglass to hide his identity.

Telling a Slave's Story

Frederick Douglass did not stop

helped recruit thousands of black soldiers. Slavery finally ended with the South's defeat in 1865.

Douglass's greatest honor came in 1889. President Benjamin Harrison appointed him America's representative to the island nation of Haiti. He later retired to his home in Washington, D.C., now a historic site visited by thousands of people each year.

Douglass died in 1895. He had used his freedom to seek fair treatment for all Americans, no matter what the color of their skin. ★

—Patrick S. Washburn

