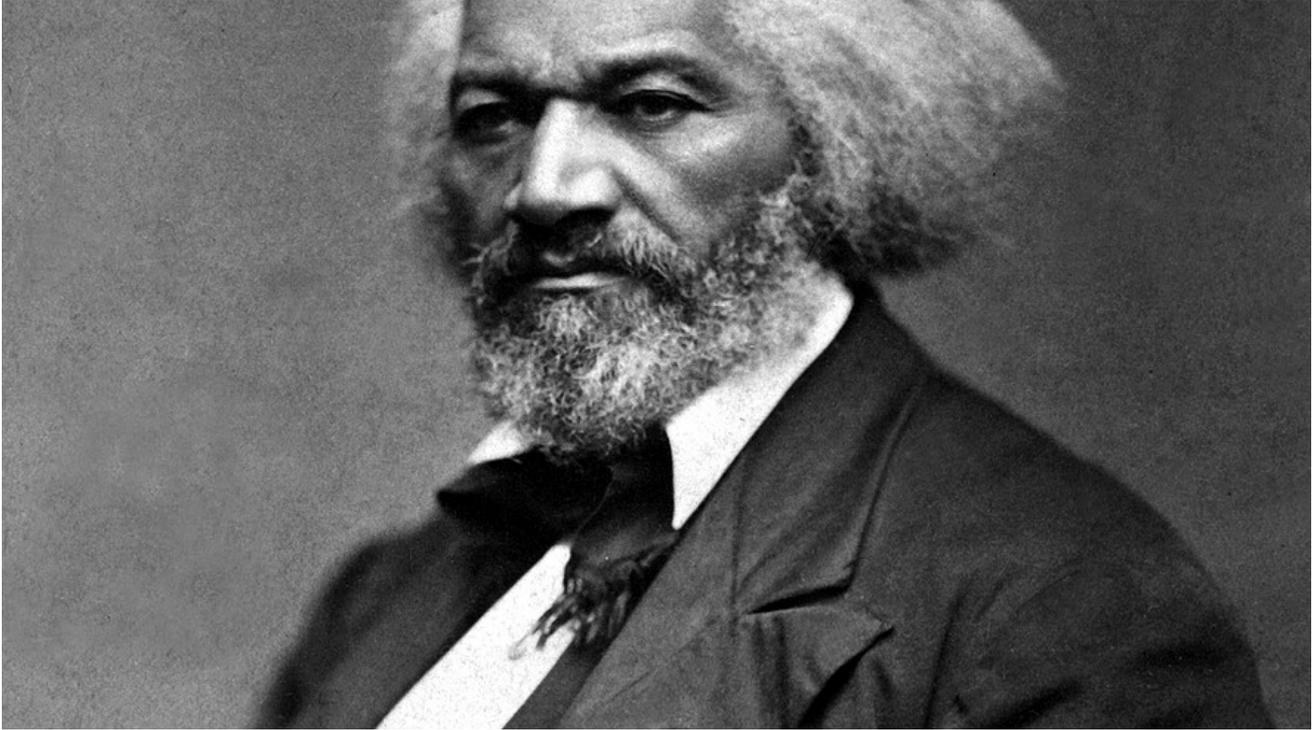


The Abolitionists: Frederick Douglass

By Biography.com Editors and A+E Networks, adapted by Newsela staff on 07.20.16

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Frederick Douglass Frederick Douglass Portrait, National Archives and Records Administration

Synopsis: Frederick Douglass was born into slavery around 1818 in Maryland. He became a free man who spoke out against slavery and became one of the most famous thinkers of his time. He gave advice to presidents and spoke before thousands about slavery and women's rights. Douglass wrote several books describing his experiences in slavery and his life after the Civil War. He died on February 20, 1895.

Life In Slavery

Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey was born a slave in Maryland around 1818. He lived with his grandmother, but at a young age, he was sent to live in the home of the plantation owner who many thought was his father. His mother died when he was about 10 years old.

Growing up, Douglass worked on different plantations. When he was 12, he was sent to the Baltimore home of Hugh Auld, where Auld's wife taught him the alphabet. It was against the law to teach slaves to read and write. When Auld found out about the lessons, he stopped them, but Douglass continued to learn from other whites.

By reading newspapers and books, he learned that slavery was wrong. He read "The Columbian Orator." It was a schoolbook that taught reading and speaking. It had speeches about freedom. Douglass shared what he learned about freedom with other slaves.

Next, he was moved to yet another plantation. There, he taught slaves to read the Bible at weekly church services. Sometimes 40 slaves would show up for lessons. This made other slave owners angry and they made the lessons stop.

Douglass was then sent to work for Edward Covey, who was a very cruel man. Covey would beat Douglass, but the 16-year-old fought back. After losing a fight to Douglass, Covey never beat him again.

Freedom And Abolitionism

Douglass tried to escape from slavery three times. A woman named Anna Murray helped him. She was a free black woman. On September 3, 1838, Murray gave him money, a sailor's uniform and papers from a free black seaman. Douglass got on a train in Maryland and made his way to a safe house in New York.

Murray followed him to New York and they were married. They moved to Massachusetts. It was there that they chose the name Douglass as their married name. Douglass joined a black church. He went to meetings to end slavery. He also read William Lloyd Garrison's weekly newspaper, *The Liberator*. Garrison began writing about ending slavery in 1831.

Douglass was asked to tell his story at these meetings. Garrison printed the story in *The Liberator* in 1841. A few days later Douglass gave his first speech at a Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society convention. He was a good speaker and many people wanted to hear him. He gave speeches across the country. Some crowds were not friendly and in 1843, Douglass was chased by an angry mob. A Quaker family saved him. Quakers were religious people who believed in working things out peacefully.

Garrison wanted Douglass to write his life story about growing up as a slave. "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave," was published in 1845. Many copies of the book were sold in the United States and Europe. Douglass wrote three more books.

In 1845, Douglass had to leave the country. Some people wanted to capture him and send him back to Maryland. He stayed in Ireland and England for two years. He spoke to large crowds about slavery. During this time, money was raised to pay his owner for his freedom. He returned to the United States in 1847 as a free man.

Back home, he printed five different newspapers. They were against slavery and for women's rights. In 1848, he was the only African-American to attend the first women's rights convention in New York. Douglass told the group that if black men were allowed to vote, then women should be allowed to vote too.

Civil War And Reconstruction

During the Civil War between the North and South, Douglass worked with President Abraham Lincoln to help the black soldiers who were fighting. Later, he worked with President Andrew Johnson on black voting rights.

In 1865, slavery was ended everywhere in the United States.

After the war, Douglass was the president of a bank and he worked for the U.S. government in other countries.

In 1872, Douglass became the first African-American chosen to be vice president of the United States when people put him on the Equal Rights Party ticket with a woman who was running for president.

Douglass visited one of his old owners Thomas Auld in 1877. He forgave Auld, though many said he should not have forgiven this man who once owned him.

Family Life And Death

Frederick and Anna Douglass had five children: Rosetta, Annie, Lewis Henry, Frederick Jr., and Charles Redmond.

After his wife's death, Douglass married Helen Pitts, the daughter of an abolitionist who had worked with Douglass. She worked hard for women's rights, but their marriage upset many, including their children, because Pitts was white and nearly 20 years younger than Douglass.

On February 20, 1895, Douglass returned home after a meeting with a women's group in Washington, D.C., and suddenly fell down and died. Doctors said he might have had a heart attack. Douglass was buried in Rochester, New York.