

## **Frederick Douglass**

### **Abolitionist, Civil Rights Orator**

Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey was born in Tuckahoe, Maryland on February 14, 1817. Frederick Douglass was a brilliant orator and the preeminent human rights leader of the 19th century.

Frederick was the son of the slave Harriet Bailey and an unknown white father. Frederick was separated as an infant from his mother and raised by his grandmother on a plantation in Maryland. When Frederick was 8 years old, he was sent to Baltimore to serve as a house servant of the Hugh Auld family. Mrs. Auld began teaching Frederick to read, however when Mr. Auld found out he quickly put a stop to it. Frederick continued his education secretly with the aid of some white friends.

When Hugh Auld died, Frederick was sent back to the plantation as a field hand. Frederick and three other slaves attempted an escape in 1833 which failed, however in 1838 he successfully escaped to New York City. Frederick stayed on the move and eventually ended up in New Bedford, Massachusetts where he changed his name to Douglass to avoid the slave catchers.

In 1841 Frederick was asked to speak at an anti-slavery convention about his experiences as a slave. Frederick's passionate eloquence so impressed the convention that he was hired as an agent of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society and later as an agent of the [American Anti-Slavery Society](#).

White Americans, even abolitionists, could not believe that a former slave could possibly be so eloquent and articulate. Frederick wrote his autobiography, [Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave](#) in 1845 to counter that skepticism. Frederick had included the name of his former owner in his autobiography and to avoid being recaptured he left the country on a lecture tour of England and Ireland.

Frederick returned to the United States after British friends and supporters raised the money to purchase his freedom in 1847. On his return to the states, Frederick began publishing an anti-slavery newspaper called [The North Star](#), (1847-1860).

Frederick was also a strong supporter of the women's suffrage movement and in 1848 he was an active participant at the [Women's Rights Convention](#) held in Seneca Falls, New York. He was a friend and associate of [Susan B. Anthony](#) and a lifetime honorary member of the [National Women's Suffrage Association](#).

Frederick became an advisor to President Lincoln during the Civil War. He strongly supported and urged that free Blacks and former slaves be enlisted in the Northern Army to fight directly against slavery. ([The 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry was a direct result of his efforts.](#)) After the Civil War ended, Frederick continued to fight for full civil rights for African Americans.

Frederick was appointed as an assistant secretary to the Santo Domingo Commission in 1871. He was the editor and publisher of a weekly for former slaves, *The New National Era* from 1870 to 1874. In 1872 Frederick was the vice-presidential candidate of the [Equal Rights Party](#). He

served as the U.S. Marshal for the District of Columbia from 1877 to 1881 and as the U.S. Minister and Consul General to Haiti from 1889 to 1891.

Frederick married his first wife, [\*Anna Murray\*](#) in 1839 and after her death in 1884 he married his former white secretary, [\*Helen Pitts\*](#). Frederick's answer to the controversy stirred up by his marriage was, "*I honored my mother's race in my first marriage and my father's race in my second marriage.*"

Frederick Douglas died in Washington, D.C. on February 20, 1895.

**Sources:**

[\*Encyclopedia Britannica\*](#)

[\*Encyclopedia Africana\*](#)

[\*Gonzaga University\*](#)