



Bio4Kids: Frederick Douglass (1818-1895)

Brief Outline

The first African slave arrived in the North American colonies in the 1600s. Over time, slavery-the ownership of another person-became a common practice in the United States. Born in February of 1817 in Maryland, Frederick Douglass knew first-hand the hardships of slavery and spent his life trying to improve the rights of African-Americans.

Growing up as a slave, Douglass had little contact with his family. Like many slaves at the time, he was bought and sold several times. One slave owner beat him every day and barely gave him any food. The wife of another taught him how to read and write, not knowing that it would be his words that helped in the fight to end slavery.

Douglass made several attempts to escape. He succeeded in 1838, making his way to New York. His name at birth was Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey, but he changed last name to "Douglass" after he escaped. Around this time Douglass married a free African-American woman named Anna Murray, and they made New Bedford, Massachusetts their home. During the course of their marriage, they had four children together.

Active in the abolitionist, or antislavery, movement, Douglass traveled around, delivering powerful speeches for the Massachusetts Antislavery Society. Many people who attended his lectures were moved by his personal stories and his abilities as a public speaker. He found a mentor in William Lloyd Garrison, the publisher of *The Liberator*, an antislavery newspaper. The two later feuded over issues about the U.S. Constitution and whether the states should stay together as a union.

Soon the world would learn of Douglass's story. He bravely wrote about his life as a slave. The book put his life in danger because he was an escaped slave. In 1845, despite risks to his personal safety, he published his autobiography *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. To avoid capture, he left the United States and went to Europe. Traveling around England, Scotland, and Ireland, Douglass gave lectures and raised enough money to buy his own freedom when he returned home in 1847.

Back in the United States, Douglass lived in Rochester, New York. There he started the *North Star*, a publication that lobbied for the end of slavery and for rights for women as well as minorities. He remained active in the abolitionist movement and supported the Union side during the Civil War. He even helped President Abraham Lincoln by recruiting African-Americans to join the Union army.

After the war ended, he offered his suggestions for addressing the emancipation, or freeing, of the slaves and handling racial issues. He was later appointed to several government posts, including U.S. marshal for the District of Columbia. He died in Washington, D.C., on February 20, 1895. With his moving speeches and influential written works, Douglass showed that one person can help to change society and the world.

Related Works

1845 *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*

1881 *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*

Related Websites

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