 Frederick Douglass

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

I was born Frederick Bailey on February 7, 1817 in Tukahoe, Maryland. I was born a slave and my owner allowed another slave to treat me badly. My life was a very unhappy one.

When I was a teenager I was sent to Baltimore to work at the docks loading and unloading huge ships. I wanted to learn to read, and was able to do so while I was in Baltimore using a book on public speaking. In 1838, when I was twenty-one years old, I was able to run away and escape slavery. I changed my name from Frederick Bailey to Frederick Douglass. I went to New Bedford, Massachusetts where I got a job as a laborer at one dollar a day, and I continued my education.

I attended an anti-slavery convention in Nantucket, Massachusetts in 1841. I felt very strongly about slavery and made a speech against slavery at the convention. The others attending the convention liked my speech so much they encouraged me to speak throughout the northern states against slavery. My name became a symbol of freedom and achievement. I believed all men were equal. I continued to speak and write about the equality of all people.

In 1847, I became a conductor of the Underground Railroad in Rochester, N.Y. and helped many slaves from the South to escape to freedom. In 1860, I campaigned for Abraham Lincoln for president. I kept working for the freedom of slaves and for the poor white people of the South. I did not favor violence to gain freedom.

During the Civil War, I helped with two regiments of African-American soldiers, the Massachusetts 54th and 56th. After the Civil War, as a recognized leader and spokesman for former slaves, I fought for the enactment of the 13th, 14th, and 25th amendments to the U.S. Constitution. I became a United States Marshall and held numerous other government positions in Washington.

I lived in Washington, D.C. on an estate called Cedar Hill. Many people came seeking advice. I felt honored to be able to help others.