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**Autobiography** 

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### Frederick Douglass Biography

Frederick Douglass (1818 -1895) was the most prominent African-American leader of the 19th century. A fiery orator, dedicated editor, bestselling author, and presidential advisor, Douglass crusaded for human rights as an abolitionist, a strong advocate for women's suffrage, and a voice for social justice.

Douglass was born into slavery as Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey to an African slave mother and white father in Tuckahoe, Maryland in the month of February, 1818. He was separated from his mother when he was only a few weeks old and was raised by his grandparents. When he was six years old, his grandmother took him, without warning, to his master's plantation to live. At age eight, he was sent to live with his master's relatives, Hugh and Sophia Auld. Sophia started to teach him to read and write as a child, in violation of state laws. He escaped slavery at age 20, married, and later moved to Massachusetts. He adopted the name "Douglass" and began to speak on behalf of abolitionism. Eventually, he embarked upon a three-year speaking tour of northern cities, building public support for the abolitionist cause, by educating audiences about the evils of slavery with his powerful rhetorical style of speech.

In 1845, Douglass wrote his first autobiography and called it *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. Written to address the righteousness of the abolitionists' movement, this moving book told of his struggle to gain his freedom. He identified his owner by name, and his book became a national bestseller. With his identity revealed, Douglass was forced into exile in England in order to avoid capture by slave traders. In 1846, British antislavery friends purchased his freedom.

Douglass returned to the United States in 1847, moved to Rochester, New York, and established his own abolitionist newspaper called *The North Star*. Douglass' children helped publish the four-page newspaper. As the abolitionist movement gained strength in the 1850s, Douglass became more directly involved with the Underground Railroad. Harriet Tubman and other "conductors" often stayed at Douglass' home en route to Canada. The notorious Dred Scott decision of 1857, in which the Supreme Court ruled that black people had no rights under the United States Constitution, infuriated Douglass and deepened the national debate over slavery.

Educational material provided by the Caring Institute and the National Park Service

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