

“Frederick Douglass and the Abolitionist Movement”

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Introduction

“Whenever I hear anyone arguing for slavery, I feel a strong impulse to see it tried on him personally.” - Abraham Lincoln¹

These immortal words signify Lincoln’s belief that the act of slavery was an unforgivable one. Throughout history, there have been numerous men who have stood up against slavery, but one of the most famous of all was a man named Frederick Douglass. Born a slave in the year of 1818, he experienced the pain and suffering of being owned by another person. Miraculously, he was able to escape enslavement and went on to play a very critical role in the Abolitionist Movement, whose primary goal was to end slavery and free all blacks. Douglass’ countless actions in his rise to fame was not an easy task because it had required a great deal of hard work and dedication. Several of his actions socially, politically, and religiously helped him immensely in gaining the recognition he needed in order to accomplish his goal. Due to the time and commitment he spent in his work, millions of black people found new opportunities after their life as a slave.

Historical Context and Cause of the Stand

Already struggling in his life as a slave, Douglass decided to make his first escape attempt. However, he was unsuccessful in doing so as his plans were revealed and he was arrested. Following his imprisonment, he was sent back to his master who

¹"A Quote by Abraham Lincoln." *Goodreads*. N.p., n.d. Web. 5 Dec. 2016.
<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/39563-when-ever-i-hear-anyone-arguing-for-slavery-i-feel-a>

hired him out to work at the shipyards near the city.² Unfazed by all these setbacks, he decided to try again on the night of September 3, 1838. He knew that if he were to fail again, "it would seal my fate as a slave forever,"³ as Douglass described in his first autobiography. Luckily, he was able to overcome this obstacle, leading him to his next major goal which he was determined to accomplish, the abolishment of slavery, so that his people would be free from all of their suffering.

Preceding any of these events, most southerners believed that if slaves were freed, it would cause widespread job loss and chaos. They were convinced that this would eventually lead to rebellions while also bringing about disorder in the world. Southern people also argued in their belief that slavery was a "natural state of mankind,"⁴ even thinking that enslavement was an honorable act. Adding onto this was the fact that they even supported it with statistics by saying that Romans, Greeks and only then until the 17th century that Americans had slaves. However, their strongest reason as to why they wanted to keep slavery was because they were afraid if the Abolitionist Movement were to achieve their goal, it would have an enormous negative economical impact in the South where they mainly relied on slave labor to make their money.

² Klein, Christopher. "Frederick Douglass Escapes Slavery." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 03 Sept. 2013. Web. 04 Dec. 2016.

<http://www.history.com/news/frederick-douglass-escapes-slavery-175-years-ago>.

³ "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass." *Frederick Douglass Narrative*. University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, n.d. Web. 04 Dec. 2016. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/douglass.html>.

⁴ "The Southern Argument for Slavery." *Ushistory.org*. Independence Hall Association, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016. <http://www.ushistory.org/us/27f.asp>

In 1841, three short years following Douglass' escape, he was invited to an American Anti-Slavery meeting in Nantucket Island.⁵ Here, he passionately talked about his hardships as a slave and his undying desire to promote freedom for all slaves. This occasion marked the first time he finally got the acknowledgement he deserved and needed in order to accomplish his second goal, abolishing slavery. Expanding onto this occurrence was his meeting with William Lloyd Garrison,⁶ who was a famed American abolitionist, suffragist and journalist who wrote about his ideals in his weekly journal known as "The Liberator." This event quickly prompted the two men to become great friends and later collaborated with each other. Subsequently, Garrison later hired Douglass as a speaker in an anti-slavery group. Prior to meeting each other, Douglass had subscribed to Garrison's weekly journal⁷. From what he had read, he realized that they had shared the same mentality on the matter of abolishing slavery and promoting freedom; which resulted in Douglass greatly admiring the man. These events would give the movement a greater increase in the amount of people who attended and supported their cause, due to the two men who were of distinctive ethnicities allying with each other to talk about something that they were both very passionate about.

Importance of the Opposition

⁵ "Abolitionist Movement." *Anti-Slavery*. Nantucket Atheneum, n.d. Web. 04 Dec. 2016. <https://www.nantucketatheneum.org/about/testhistory/nantucket-the-abolitionist-movement/>

⁶ "William Lloyd Garrison." *Historical Documents*. PBS, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p1539.html>.

⁷ "Frederick Douglass ." *Anti-Slavery*. PBS, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p1539.html>

The earliest known occurrence of an anti-slavery group was formed in the mid 17th century, calling themselves "The Society Of Friends,"⁸ but they are more commonly known as The Quakers. Their primary goal was to ban slaveholding and ended up making the Abolitionist Movement more well-known with the number of members increasing over time. This occasion would become significant as it motivated other African Americans to escape from their masters, undoubtedly knowing the consequences that would follow in doing so. Additionally, as other people would come to know, Frederick Douglass also popularized the movement as people learned of his past and the hard work he had accomplished. For instance, due to Douglass inspiring President Abraham Lincoln into writing the Emancipation Proclamation,⁹ the 13th Amendment came to be which states "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction,"¹⁰ therefore meaning that slavery shall cease to exist in this world. In other words, without him, the things we see now would have been very different. It has greatly impacted a numerous amount of African Americans because of the way that Douglass and the Abolitionist Movement had given them the freedom they had sought after for so long.

⁸ "Frederick Douglass and the Abolitionist Movement." *Anti-Slavery*. Frederick Douglass Heritage, n.d. Web. 04 Dec. 2016. <http://www.frederick-douglass-heritage.org/abolitionist-movement/>.

⁹ David W. Blight, Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee, William S. McFeely Frederick Douglass, and James Oakes, The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery. "Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass." *Lincoln's Classroom*. Lehrman Institute, n.d. Web. 04 Dec. 2016.

<http://www.abrahamlincolnsclassroom.org/abraham-lincolns-contemporaries/abraham-lincoln-and-frederick-douglass/>

¹⁰ "13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Abolition of Slavery (1865)." *Abolition of Slavery, 1865*. Our Documents, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

<https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=40>

Devotion and Hard Work

For him to achieve his goal, he had to overcome several obstacles so that he would be able to spread awareness of his cause. During his lifetime as a slave, he once worked under the home of Hugh and Sophia Auld.¹¹ It was here that he was able to learn how to read and write under the instruction of Mrs. Auld. In his earliest autobiography, he described her as “a woman of the kindest heart and finest feelings.”¹² However, her husband wouldn’t give the same treatment to Douglass as he forbid his wife from trying to teach him about education and even told her “if you teach that nigger how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave,”¹³ which also led to Mrs. Auld changing how she behaved towards Douglass.

Nonetheless, his master’s words would only serve as a way of teaching Douglass the significance of tutoring himself. Though he found it difficult to learn without a teacher, he believed to “set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read.”¹⁴ After spending seven years in their home, he was finally successful in conquering the hurdle in his way which eventually led to the finished product of his three renowned autobiographies: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*,

¹¹ "Biography – Early Life." *Frederick Douglass Heritage*. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

<http://www.frederick-douglass-heritage.org/biography-early-life/>.

¹² "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass." *Frederick Douglass Narrative*. University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, n.d. Web. 04 Dec. 2016. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/douglass.html>

¹³ "Douglass' Narrative." *Life of an American Slave*. Abolition of Slavery, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

<http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/abolitn/abaufda8t.html>

¹⁴"Great Philosophers." *Frederick Douglass*. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

<https://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl201/modules/Philosophers/Douglass/douglass.html>

which all describe his experiences as a slave.¹⁵ Not only this, but he also was responsible for the North Star anti-slavery newspaper. It was named this because of the fact that escaping slaves would use the North Star in the night sky to guide them to freedom. The motto of the paper read "Right is of no sex. Truth is of no color. God is the Father of us all, and we are brethren."¹⁶ This is major as it clearly demonstrates their feelings regarding slavery and reminds individuals that people should not only judge someone of their color or ethnicity but also by their personality.

Although Douglass was an excellent writer, it was his remarkable oratory skills that served to be his speeches. He would make several of them and used his lectures as his instrument to discuss his beliefs about slavery which would then lead the way to his success as most of which who heard his oratory skills found it to be very extraordinary. Such an instance of his orations were "What, To The Slave, Is The Fourth of July?"¹⁷, and "If There Is No Struggle, There Is No Progress,"¹⁸ both of which he presented to in front of countless onlookers. In the Civil War, Douglass' role was to be a consultant to President Abraham Lincoln. He would convince a multitude of people to serve under the Union forces and told them that the main goal would be the abolition of slavery¹⁹.

¹⁵ "Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies." *Library of America*. N.p., n.d. Web. 06 Dec. 2016. <https://www.loa.org/books/37-autobiographies>.

¹⁶ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. "The North Star." *Britannica*. Encyclopædia Inc., 11 Nov. 2016. Web. 05 Dec. 2016. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-North-Star-American-newspaper>

¹⁷ "Civil War Era." *Teaching American History*. N.p., n.d. Web. 04 Apr. 2016. <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/what-to-the-slave-is-the-fourth-of-july/>

¹⁸ "If There Is No Struggle, There Is No Progress" | The Black Past: Remembered and Reclaimed." *Frederick Douglass, 1857*. Humanities Washington, n.d. Web. 04 Dec. 2016. <http://www.blackpast.org/1857-frederick-douglass-if-there-no-struggle-there-no-progress>

¹⁹ "Douglass's Role." *The Civil War*. America's Library, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016. http://www.americaslibrary.gov/aa/douglass/aa_douglass_war_1.html

For a short time in his life, he became a licensed preacher in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. However, he believed that it had “consented to the same spirit which held my brethren in chains,”²⁰ which is why he left so soon. It wasn’t easy for Douglass to get recognized since he needed to work intensively in order to get to this huge point in his life.

Consequences

As a result of Douglass’ actions, vital outcomes ensued from it. His speeches played a crucial part in affecting how various people acted and treated each other while also resulting in the change of how children were educated in the way that young slaves were better taught with the addition of it helping in reducing the effect of the slave trade. However, the North and South would argue if this was the right decision and resulted in both areas opposing each other. The Abolitionists ended up putting great pressure on those with power to change this deplorable act. A political factor that eventually came was the 13th Amendment which was passed by Congress on January 31, 1865 and later ratified on December 6th of the same year. Nearly a century after, the Civil Rights Act of 1964²¹ was also created, ending segregation in widespread places and banning the discrimination on employing others based on their ethnicity, gender, religion or national origin.

²⁰ "This Far By Faith." *Frederick Douglass*. PBS, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

http://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/people/frederick_douglass.html

²¹ "The Civil Rights Act of 1964." *National Archives* . Records Administration, n.d. Web. 04 Dec. 2016. <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/civil-rights-act>

Although slavery was ultimately abolished, Douglass did not believe his job as an abolitionist was yet to be finished “until the black man has the ballot”²² as he once said. At the time of slavery, missionaries would teach slaves to read the bible and sought to save their souls. Despite this, some Christian masters would violently utilize their slaves. Religion would end up playing a massive role in the Abolitionist Movement as much of them believed “All souls were equal in the eyes of God.”²³ Due to this belief, other groups were inspired to undertake in numerous types of social reform. The aftermath of Douglass and the innumerable amount of abolitionists’ actions has changed many of the things we see today, such as the fact that there are no black slaves any longer.

Conclusion

Without the years of Douglass’ working exhaustively and the contribution of abolitionists’ preaching, slave labor could still very well be alive to this day. Being able to see all their suffering and not doing anything at all to help would have been an inexcusable sin. Although many of the other members in the movement including Douglass have been gone for so long, Americans will not be able to forget the energy that they had once emitted in the form of their bravery, intelligence, and their willingness to act upon what they deemed to be an unpardonable act, slave labor. As Douglass once said, “I didn’t know I was a slave until I found out I couldn’t do any of the things I

²² Zummo, Paul, and Donald R. McClarey. "Speech on the Thirteenth Amendment." *Frederick Douglass*. Almost Chosen People, 18 Jan. 2015. Web. 05 Dec. 2016. <https://almostchosenpeople.wordpress.com/2015/01/19/frederick-douglass-speech-on-the-thirteenth-amendment/>

²³ Muscato, Christopher. "Religious Roots." *Abolitionist Movement*. Study, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016. <http://study.com/academy/lesson/the-religious-roots-of-the-abolitionist-movement.html>

wanted.”²⁴ His undying words can be used to tell others of the pain other slaves felt and how difficult times were for them.

²⁴ "The Life of Frederick Douglass." *Bright Hub Education*. N.p., 08 Feb. 2013. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.
<http://www.brighthouseeducation.com/history-homework-help/127791-about-frederick-douglass/>

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources

"Abolitionist Movement." *Anti-Slavery*. Nantucket Atheneum, n.d. Web. 04 Dec. 2016.

This expands on the event of the first Atheneum speech that Douglass has given at an Anti-Slavery convention. It taught me a sense of how he felt when he was publicly speaking in front of a large audience.

"Civil War Photos." *Original Photographs*. Virtual Civil War, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

This is a photo gallery of people that contributed to the war and how the environment looked like before or after the Civil War. I was able to see the impact of the war to other people and what it was able to do them.

"Final Call." *Willie Lynch: The Making of a Slave*. FCN Publishing, 22 May 2009. Web. 04 Dec. 2016.

This includes the full lecture given by British slave owner, Willie Lynch titled "The Making of a Slave. It enhanced my understanding a lot more about how owners thought of their slaves.

"Fugitive Slave Act." *Compromise of 1850*. National Center, n.d. Web. 04 Dec. 2016.

This discusses the group of laws passed by Congress to provide for the return of slaves who fled from one state into another. I was able to enhance my knowledge on several of these laws that were part of the act and how it played a huge role in slavery.

"Great Speeches Collection." *The Hypocrisy of American Slavery*. History Place, n.d. Web. 04 Dec. 2016.

This provides the full speech given by Frederick Douglass on the Fourth of July in the year, 1852. It helped to give me other great examples of the many lectures he has given throughout his life.

"If There Is No Struggle, There Is No Progress" | The Black Past: Remembered and Reclaimed." *Frederick Douglass, 1857*. Humanities Washington, n.d. Web. 04 Dec. 2016.

This involves Douglass' speech in the year 1857, titled "If There Is No Struggle, There Is No Progress." Here, he mainly talks and reminds the audience that the West Indian slaves are playing a crucial role in a freedom struggle. However, it sounded as if he was already predicting an imminent Civil War. It gave me some knowledge on his renowned oratory skills and a few of the topics he talks about.

"Impact and Legacy of the Emancipation Proclamation." *National Museum of American History*. American History, 26 Aug. 2013. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

This includes a portrait of the Emancipation Proclamation document which was written by former 16th President, Abraham Lincoln. I enhanced my understanding on the importance of this document which contributed to the ratification of the 13th Amendment.

"Let The Monster Perish." *Henry Highland Garnet: Remembered and Reclaimed*. Black Past, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

This gives great details on the speech that was given by former slave Henry Highland Garnet on February 12, 1865 within days following the adoption of the 13th Amendment which banned slavery. I was able to learn of the thoughts of

another ex-slave about the abolition of slavery who also turned into a pastor of the Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C.

"Louisiana's Code Noir, 1724." *Remembered and Reclaimed*. Black Past, n.d. Web. 04 Dec. 2016.

This involves details about how relations were controlled between slaves and colonists which was named the slave code or code noir. I gained more knowledge on how slaves were treated from the 54 articles which were the laws that were supposed to keep them regulated.

"Mission Of The War." *Remembered and Reclaimed*. Black Past, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

This provides the speech that Frederick Douglass gave on January 13, 1864 where he discusses that the cause of the war was due to slavery and that the abolishment of it was not yet complete until slaves had full citizenship rights. I understood how he was able to use this lecture to contribute to the war.

"Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass." *Frederick Douglass Narrative*. University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, n.d. Web. 04 Dec. 2016.

This covers the topic of Douglass's very first autobiography and discusses the past life lessons he has learned so far while also telling the reader the struggles he went through as as a child to an adult. This was also where he had some details on his plan to escape and how had he felt when doing it. Through this electronic version of the book, I was able to enhance my understanding of some of the hard work he has accomplished during his young life.

"New York Slave Revolt of 1712." *Riot of Slaves*. Slave Rebellion, n.d. Web. 04 Dec. 2016.

This covers the topic of a letter written by Governor Robert Hunter nearly two months following the New York slave incident. Here, he mentions the tragic incident that occurred two months prior, where 23 blacks attacked and killed nine whites. I was able to understand the events that followed the attack clearly due to the letter that Hunter had written.

"Our Paper and Its Prospects." *The North Star, December 3, 1847*. University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

This involves the issue of an anti-slavery newspaper that Douglass created which was named "The North Star" after the fact that escaping slaves would use this in the night sky to guide them to freedom. I was able to understand how he felt about the creation of this newspaper and the importance of it.

"Photo Gallery (U.S. National Park Service)." *National Parks Service*. U.S. Department of the Interior, n.d. Web. 04 Dec. 2016.

This is a photo gallery of Frederick Douglass taken by the National Park Service from their collection. It has given me an idea of how the leader of the movement had looked like.

"Post Civil War." *Freedmen and Civil Rights*. National Archives and Records Administration, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

This covers the topic of how African American had tried to adapt to live the life of free people with the assistance of a federal organization known as the

Freedmen's Bureau, who helped blacks legalize marriages, children to attend school, and buy land. I learned of the lives of other African Americans following the events of the Civil War and other economic documents.

"13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Abolition of Slavery (1865)." *Abolition of Slavery, 1865*. Our Documents, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

This shows a document image of the 13th Amendment which eventually was ratified on December 6, 1865. I was able to get a picture in my head of what the record looked like and an example of which political factor was changed after the stand the movement took.

"This Far By Faith." *Frederick Douglass*. PBS, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

This discusses the several actions and risks that Douglass has took to rise to fame. One of these was his short time in an AME Zion Church and also becoming a licensed preacher there. I understood some religious actions he went through to get to the highest point in his life.

"William Lloyd Garrison." *Historical Documents*. PBS, n.d. Web. 04 Dec. 2016.

This provides an image of Garrison and also includes details about what some of his life goals were. It gave me a good insight on how one of the great men of the movement looked like and also what some of the causes he had supported were.

Zummo, Paul, and Donald R. McClarey. "Speech on the Thirteenth Amendment."

Frederick Douglass. Almost Chosen People, 18 Jan. 2015. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

Zummo and McClarey provide the entire oration given by Frederick Douglass about the ratification of 13th Amendment. I gained knowledge on his belief that slavery was still not abolished until blacks had the right to vote.

Secondary Sources

Alexander, Roberta Sue, Rodney D. Barfield, and Steven E. Nash. "African Americans." *Life Under Slavery*. NCPedia, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

Alexander, Barfield and Nash cover the topic of how slaves lived and how they were treated by their masters. It helped me understand the poor working conditions they had, nutrition and adequate clothing that they were given.

"Douglass's Role." *The Civil War*. America's Library, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

This engages deeply into the field of what Frederick Douglass did in the Civil War that would eventually lead to the demise of slavery. I understood how Douglass was able to contribute to the Union forces by telling other slaves that the goal of the war was for the abolition of slavery and that they should join in to help.

"Economic and Social Problems." *Freedmen Conflicts*. Social Studies Help Center, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

This includes details about the money problems that free slaves had after the Civil War. I gained knowledge on the fact that most of them still had no education due to the slave codes and jobs were very limited.

"First Africans." *Jamestown Rediscovery*. Historic Jamestowne, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

This discusses the event when the first 20 Africans were captured and sold out to slavery in late August of 1619. I was able to enhance my understanding on what main events had happened before which caused this issue of slavery.

"Frederick Douglass." *Abolitionist Leader*. America's Library, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

This showcases several actions that Douglass had taken to accomplish his most important goal, the abolition of slavery. It helped me gain more knowledge on the people who aided him along the way and also with other causes that he had supported such as women's rights.

"Frederick Douglass and the Abolitionist Movement." *Anti-Slavery*. Frederick Douglass Heritage, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

This provides in-depth details about one of the first occurrences of an Anti-Slavery group who were named the Quakers. They also talk about other people and things who had contributed to the abolition of slavery. I was able to understand the start of the movement while also learning of its importance in history.

"How The End of Slavery Led to Starvation and Death for Millions of Black Americans." *The Observer*. Guardian News and Media, 16 June 2012. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

This talks about the the events following the Civil War that left many African Americans to struggle for the short years to come. It helped me to understand that although they were free, it doesn't mean that they didn't suffer anymore.

"Major Impact." *Abolitionist Movement*. Enotes, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

This discusses the effect of the movement and how it has greatly impacted the United States. I was able to learn of the results that followed shortly after and the importance of their actions.

Muscato, Christopher. "Religious Roots." *Abolitionist Movement*. Study, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

Muscato talks about the religious roots of the members of the movement and how it has affected them. I was able to learn how religion was a very important part of life for most of the affiliates such as Frederick Douglass.

"People and Events." *William Lloyd Garrison*. PBS, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

This does an excellent job of including details about the past of William Lloyd Garrison who had a crucial role in the Abolitionist Movement along with Frederick Douglass. I was able to learn of his great mentality about the issue of slavery and how he planned to end it.

Scofield, Paige. "How Frederick Douglass's First Speech Got Him Noticed." *Constitution Daily*. Constitution Center, 14 Feb. 2013. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

Scofield revolves around the idea of how Douglass's first speech would later play out an important part in his life to where he finally got some acknowledgement. I was able to understand some of his other stronger passions and hardships.

"Southern Argument for Slavery." *US History*. Independence Hall Association, n.d. Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

This thoroughly explains what Southerners believed and thought about slaves by defending slavery through history, religion and social good. It was helpful to me

because I learned of the reasons from the South which was why they wanted to keep slavery.