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FREDERICK DOUGLASS

Prepared by:

Paul C. Swartz
Park Historian
National Capital Parks

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In the month of February, just eight years after Abraham Lincoln was born in a humble cabin, a Negro child was born on Maryland's Eastern Shore in even more lowly circumstances. He lifted himself up from bondage, taught himself to read and write, and became a noted figure in American life as the foremost spokesman for an oppressed people and as a champion of the rights of man.

I Early Life¹

Once when Frederick Douglass was asked when and where he was born, he replied: "I cannot answer... Slaves have no family records." All that the biographer can say of his origin is that he was born as Frederick Augustus Washington Baily, sometime in February 1817, somewhere in Tuckahoe, Talbot County, Maryland, the son of an unknown white father and Harriet Baily, a slave.²

He never knew his father and his knowledge of his mother was "very scanty." He lived with his grandmother, and along with cousins, brothers and sisters, led a simple existence on the fringes of slavery and the world. At the age of seven, Douglass was taken several miles from his birthplace to the home of his master, Captain Aaron Anthony, a slaveholder and general overseer for Colonel Edward Lloyd, a prosperous Maryland wheatgrower.

Douglass' life on the Lloyd plantation consisted primarily of running errands and performing simple chores. However, he was witnessing for the first time the harsher aspects of slavery, which rounded out full depth and meaning to the term "slave." He witnessed the early dawn flogging of a young woman whose screams

and warm flowing blood were to remain a life-long memory. He learned the meaning of cold from the meager allowance of clothing received for service in all seasons and realized the constant pangs of hunger when the master's table was overlaid. In suffering the everyday humiliations of slavery, perplexing questions began to exercise the powers of his child's mind. "Why am I a slave? Why are some people slaves, and others masters? Was there ever a time when this was not so?"

Living near his master's house presented the opportunity for a more rewarding experience--that of re-union with his mother for the first time since his birth. Their meetings were infrequent and usually late, circumstances dictated by her condition as a field hand on a plantation twelve miles distant. The association was brief, ending with her death only a few months later. Only shadowy memories remained but it was enough for him to have learned that he was not merely a child but a child of someone.

A significant turn in Douglass' life occurred in the summer of 1825, when he was sent to the Auld household in Baltimore. He found in Baltimore that treatment of a city slave differed greatly from the hard life led by the plantation Negro. On one occasion, hearing his new mistress reading aloud, he persuaded her to teach him to read. She complied with his wishes expecting her husband to be pleased. The lessons were abruptly ended however, with the master's angry shout that "learning would spoil the best n__r in the world." Nonetheless his appetite had been whetted and through astute questioning of his white playmates he continued to educate

himself. All that he learned impressed him with the terrible reality, "I am a Slave for life." After purchasing the Columbian Orator, his reading of the dialogues and speeches it contained enlightened him further as to the nature and character of slavery and awakened in him a hope that liberty might be the right of every man.

In this state of mind he was returned to plantation life and hired out to a professional slave-breaker who deemed that a weekly flogging was the proper method of conditioning the seventeen-year-old lad. After six months Douglass, in desperation, reversed the procedure and overcame bodily the master who was powerless to carry out his violent intentions. Thus bested, the master attempted no more floggings and was content to remain quiet on this incident which would have ruined his reputation as a slave-breaker.

Douglass was next hired out to a master of a much kinder temperament and he came to realize that the slave when overworked, starved and brutalized, valued only life, but when he received better treatment he yearned for freedom. Within a month he, in concert with several other slaves, laid plans for escape. The attempt failed due to the betrayal of their plans and for a week they suffered ignominious treatment at the hands of slave traders while awaiting desposition from prison.

To his great surprise he was returned to Hugh Auld in Baltimore instead of being shipped to the Deep South. He became a journeyman calker and in time with the aid of money, friends

and his developed sagacity, bade an illegal farewell to Baltimore and slavery. Having made good his escape to New York, he was aided by David Ruggles, the Secretary of the New York Vigilance Committee. He and Anna Murray, a free Negro who had helped him escape, were married and set on their way to the Nathan Johnson House of New Bedford, Massachusetts.

Here the newlyweds started a new life with the new name Douglass, as suggested by Johnson. Douglass sought work as a calker but could not be employed because white laborers refused to work with him. Laying aside the tools of his trade he borrowed a wood-horse and saw from Johnson and for the next three years worked at any task he could find. He averaged only a dollar a day but the money was shared with no master. His wife, working as a domestic, contributed to the task of eking out an existence. Their financial hardships were lightly born in freedom.

II The Garrisonian

He soon made himself a part of the Negro community when he discovered that prejudices were not confined to the South. Four months after his arrival, a copy of William Lloyd Garrison's Liberator came into his hands. He became a regular subscriber, and as he later stated, the paper became his meat and his drink. He studied its principles and philosophy and increasingly became involved in the abolitionist activities of the New Bedford Negroes.

As a delegate from New Bedford to the annual meeting of the Bristol Anti-Slavery Society, Douglass came to the attention of

the great abolitionist leaders of the day. When he was called upon to speak, though trembling and ill at ease, he spoke with such deep sincerity and power of his own life as a slave that the assembly was deeply moved. Next, Garrison himself, using Douglass' remarks as his text, delivered a rousing indictment of the institution of slavery. Before the convention adjourned Douglass was persuaded to become an active lecturer for the organization. Doubting his own ability, he agreed to work for the society for only three months, but events were to show how greatly he had underrated himself. It proved in fact to be the launching of a great career.

For the next ten years, Douglass was to participate in the Garrisonian school of abolitionist activities. He joined this movement at a time when his services were needed as an answer to the increasingly successful barrage of propaganda formulated by slaveholders in defense of their "peculiar institution." They emphasized the divine origin and sanction of slavery, and argued that the system was actually beneficial to the Negro, whose condition was far better than the factory worker of the North.

As an agent Frederick Douglass was the American Anti-Slavery Society's answer to these assertions and to the charge that the abolitionists were ignorant of slavery as it really existed. In his numerous speeches he told his story with unquestionable authority as "a late graduate for the peculiar institution with his diploma written on his back." His effectiveness was evidenced by an immediate response to his lectures. But he was unable to

parrot the same story over and over. He was driven by fertile mind to explore the deeper significance of the issues even in the face of the leaders' admonitions to "leave the philosophy to us." Nor did he confine his invective to slavery but carried the battle to Northern prejudices, reminding his audience of his personal experiences with discrimination in railroad cars, in seeking jobs and even in the church. "You degrade us," he cried, "and then ask why we are degraded-- you shut our mouths, and then ask why we don't speak-- you close your colleges and seminaries against us, and then ask why we don't know more."³ He could no longer echo the familiar abolitionist lectures. From personal experience he shared the degradation of his people and in burning indignation spoke out as their voice.

After lecturing in Eastern Massachusetts in the interest of the two leading abolition journals he, with a small band of anti-slavery orators, turned his attention to Rhode Island to prevent the passage of the Dorr constitution. The instrument proposed to limit suffrage to white male citizens, thus disenfranchising Negroes who had theretofore voted in the state. His labor was rewarded with the defeat of the Constitution and the retention of Negro suffrage.

In 1843, the New England Anti-Slavery Society laid plans to advance their work by conducting a series of one hundred conventions in six states. Douglass was assigned as an agent in this campaign and plunged into the difficult work under conditions of extreme hardship. He conducted meetings in hostile surroundings,

suffering the derision and insults of the audiences and physical brutality at the hands of the mobs.

But as the work moved forward, Frederick Douglass grew. He studied constantly in his free time and benefited from the association with such men as Garrison, Phillips, Gay and others who at the time were the giant intellects of the movement.

His development as a great orator and thinker was so rapid that notices began to appear expressing doubts that he had even been in bondage. A Philadelphia correspondent wrote in the Liberator in 1844:

"Many persons in the audience seemed unable to credit the statements which he gave of himself, and could not believe that he was actually a slave. How a man, only six years out of bondage, and who had never gone to school a day in his life, could speak with such eloquence--with such precision of language and power of thought--they were utterly at a loss to devise."⁴

Douglass realized that these increasing notices would strictly limit his effectiveness in the anti-slavery cause. He had purposefully refrained from divulging details on his origins in slavery, his master's name and the method of his escape, since enforcement of the fugitive slave law could be prevented only here and there by local sentiment. Nevertheless at this time he resolved to write his experiences and despite the admonition of Wendell Phillips to throw the manuscript in the fire, his Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass was published in May 1845.⁵

The work was more than the conventional slave autobiography, for in graphic simplicity, the dramatic incidents were fused with logical arguments that made it a powerful exposé. It was an

immediate best-seller and having been translated into French and German received high praise in notices both in America and abroad.⁶

The resulting immediate and widespread identification of himself and his former master made his stay in America perilous. To avoid recapture and to carry the anti-slavery cause to the world he set sail for England. His two years work on the lecture platform in England and Ireland in association with reform movements and their leaders added both to his personal development and international reputation. He returned from his tour, not only as a renowned voice for freedom but as a free man in fact, made possible by his English friends who had purchased his manumission.

III Champion of Liberty

When, in 1847, Douglass arrived in America more than his legal status was changed. Nurtured in the tenets of moral suasion, the former bondsman had been a faithful servant to the Garrisonian cause. His trip abroad had brought him in contact with new ideas, views, and men. His horizons were no longer circumscribed by the narrow confines of Puritan fanaticism.

The breach with his erstwhile mentor widened when Douglass established his own newspaper. It became increasingly obvious to Douglass that he could no longer accept Garrison's doctrinaire rejection of political abolitionism nor his intemperate attacks on organized religion. Finally, he could not accept the program of disunion advocated by the more rabid elements in Garrison's camp.

Douglass, by 1851, completed his break with the American Anti-Slavery Society, arguing that political weapons had their place in the arsenal of abolitionism and that to rely solely on moral suasion was to court disaster. He urged the battle to be fought on all fronts with all weapons. In this approach he had the support of the larger part of abolition sentiment, particularly that of the Gerrit Smith school of thought.

By breaking with Garrison and in adopting the views of the New York philanthropist, Douglass showed he preferred flexibility to intransigence, practicality to principles, and success to martyrdom. "The Civil War proved that in renouncing Garrison's radical doctrine ... he showed himself a more practical, farsighted, and useful fighter."⁷ The pragmatic approach was well within the American tradition, and, by taking that path, Douglass showed himself to be the son of his nation, as well as of his race.

In 1847, Douglass founded his newspaper, The North Star, to fulfill the need for a purely Negro press which would speak with authority. By 1851, the National Negro Convention resolved that his Rochester organ, renamed Frederick Douglass' Paper, had met this need.⁸

Douglass brought to his journalistic career those high standards of performance which had characterized his oratory. The articles which appeared in his publications, according to a contemporary evaluation, "rank with anything ever written for the American press,"⁹ and the paper itself "stood comparison with the best-edited weeklies of the ante-bellum period."¹⁰ Though founded

with the money supplied by English friends and subsidized in part through the generosity of Gerrit Smith, the paper consistently bore the imprint of its editor. In that era of personal journalism, the Douglass publications stood forth as a credit to the man and his race.

Douglass did not confine his literary talents to his newspaper. My Bondage and My Freedom, a sequel to his 1845 Narrative, appeared in 1855. As with its predecessor, it is "immeasurable better than any previous narrative" which can be credited to Negro authorship.¹¹ The reader is captured by the "uniformly virile and sonorous"¹² style in which the author successfully subordinates his anti-slavery arguments to the plot without diminishing their remarkable poignancy.¹³ The books were among the most effective weapons in the anti-slavery crusade.¹⁴

In 1841, "in Frederick Douglass the abolition crusade had found the ideal orator."¹⁵ Perfecting his technique in the 50's, Douglass became "the unrivalled orator of his race" and thereby achieved a level of accomplishment which few have challenged and none have met.¹⁶ He was one of three men who "did most for American Negro literature between 1840 and 1865"¹⁷ and in his oratory that literature, aside from its folk songs, reached its highest plane.¹⁸

Douglass' concern for the slave did not overshadow his work in behalf of the Northern freedman. His anti-slavery agitation spilled over into participation in the Underground Railroad, into campaigns to end segregation in schools, and into the fight for

the franchise. In advising his people on the role of education, he said, "The education of the hands must precede that of the head."¹⁹ This conviction led him to join Harriet Beecher Stowe in her efforts to establish a college designed to train Negroes in the manual trades and thereby encourage racial self-sufficiency. It was an educational philosophy that was to reach its zenith a half-century later under the stewardship of Booker T. Washington.

In that pre-Civil War era of social ferment Douglass was drawn to those humanitarian movements which thrived along side of, and sometimes in conjunction with, the anti-slavery crusade. The agitation over capital punishment, world peace, homestead legislation, and even the Chartist movement received his active encouragement. His reform impulse inevitably led him to support the temperance movement and the struggle for woman suffrage. With the former he carried on but a mild flirtation; but he was among the most ardent advocates of women's rights and he played a significant role in the pioneering Seneca Falls convention of 1848. Douglass recognized neither color nor sex where human rights were concerned.

After leaving the Garrisonian wing of the abolitionist movement, Douglass maintained his flexibility in method of operation. Once he committed himself to the doctrines of political abolitionism, he supported a variety of political parties. He supported candidates be they Free Soilers, Liberty Party man, Republicans, or Radical Abolitionists. His loyalty to his race was not sacrificed to partisanship. This lack of the doctrinaire

in his political make-up allowed him to support those who were anti-slavery men but who rejected abolitionism. He was disappointed when the Republicans in 1860, failed to pledge themselves to the eradication of slavery. However, with the election of Abraham Lincoln, he saw the political power of the slave states measurably reduced and he took comfort in the knowledge that he had helped to ensure the victory.

Though zealous in freedom's cause, Douglass possessed the saving grace of realistic recognition of circumstances. This facet of his mentality was nowhere better illustrated than in his role in the 1859 raid on Harpers Ferry. Douglass first met John Brown in 1848. He admired Brown for his strong religious convictions and through the years entertained the crusader in his home and succored him financially. However, when Brown urged Douglass to join him on the raid into Virginia, Douglass not only refused to participate in the madness, but also earnestly strove to dissuade Brown. Douglass failed in diverting the zealot from his martyrdom. When the raid was crushed, Douglass was seriously implicated. At his friends' urgings, he fled the country as a fugitive from justice.

Douglass had seen Brown's act as "basically moral,"²⁰ but recognized it as also being most unwise. The colored orator chose to fight another day and when the Union hosts marched to war singing of John Brown's body, Douglass lived to lead the crusade in blood inaugurated by the martyr of Harpers Ferry.

IV Civil War -- The Ending and Beginning

When the news came that Fort Sumter had been fired upon, Douglass greeted it with the words, "God be praised!"²¹ He was certain that now there would be no turning back, that the institution of slavery was certain to fall in the ensuing fratricidal conflict. Douglass re-dedicated himself to ensuring the destruction of human bondage in America.

For Douglass, the war, "a struggle for humanity,"²² called for a two-fold attack; the war must result in a triumph over slavery and it must be won through the use of Negro troops. Understandably, the Negro leader had little patience with the initial policies of Abraham Lincoln. Douglass could not sympathize with those who desired merely to preserve the Union, and who cared not whether the slaves were freed in the process. Lincoln's policies drove the orator to speak of the "moral blindness, infatuation and helpless imbecility"²³ of an administration which refused to accept abolitionism as a primary war aim. Those who spoke in terms of moral imperatives scorned the administration for seeking the expedient, and not the just, solutions.

Douglass railed against a government which returned fugitive slaves to their Southern masters, which refused to make use of Negro soldiers, and which consistently blocked subordinate generals in their attempts to issue proclamations of emancipation as war measures. With other anti-slavery leaders, Douglass cajoled, pressured, and threatened; but Lincoln was unmoved. Only when abolition would be compatible with the demands of a war to preserve the Union, would Lincoln act.

With the coming of the Emancipation Proclamation, Douglass' relations with the President reached a signal turning point. Unlike many of the abolitionists, Douglass accepted the Proclamation as a step toward making the conflict a war against slavery. He felt a new spirit would pervade the war effort. As Union soldiers had previously fought to preserve the Union, they would now also fight to make men free.

Douglass now turned to the second aim in his drive for Negro rights. The use of Negro troops in the Union Army was, to Douglass' mind, imperative. It was an essential step toward the realization of the full equality of his people.

Within a year of the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln called for the creation of Negro regiments. In compliance, the Governor of Massachusetts commenced a campaign to recruit Negro battalions, and called upon Douglass to elicit Negro support in this effort. After sixteen years of continuous publication, Douglass interrupted his journalistic career and took to the lecture trail. By use of his gifts of oratory, persuasion, and leadership, he persuaded scores of freedmen to enlist in the cause of their nation and of their race. Two of Douglass' sons joined with other Negroes and black Boys in Blue marched to join their white comrades at the front.

The battle for making abolition a war aim and for making use of Negro troops was won but the war for equal treatment and justice turned to new fronts and the battle was to be joined again and again on new battlefields.

Douglass protested the unjust treatment of Negro troops. He deplored inequalities in pay, the lack of Negro officers, the slowness of promotion of Negro soldiers, and the refusal to retaliate against southern treatment of Negro prisoners-of-war. As he demanded immediate reforms with regard to treatment of Negroes, he did not lose sight of the long-range demands of his people. Free schools, the right to vote, and equality before the law, were more than demands for Negro rights, they were demands for human rights.

Relentlessly, Douglass pressed these demands on the President, on Congress, and on the people. As the election of 1864 approached, other abolitionists who thought as did Douglass, sought a candidate more militant than Lincoln and more firmly dedicated to the principles of Negro equality. Although the war had led Douglass to make an uneasy peace with the Garrisonians, with whom he had differed in the past, Douglass hesitated to move against Lincoln.

Although Lincoln refused to act precipitously, Douglass felt the President moved steadily in the right direction. Further, if Lincoln was not supported, the election could result in a Democratic, if not a "Copperhead," triumph. These considerations, plus his unwillingness to challenge his people's growing affection for "Father Abraham," as well as his appreciation of Lincoln's personal attentions to himself, led Douglass to support the Republican ticket in 1864. Lincoln's victory was Douglass' vindication. When Lincoln broke precedent and personally received the former

slave at the Inaugural reception, Douglass' hopes for his race were magnified as was his faith in Lincoln's leadership in the years to come.

With Lincoln's assassination, these hopes were shattered. With Booth's act the Nation lost its President, the race lost its benefactor, and Douglass lost his friend. The cry for vengeance went abroad in the land, and Douglass' voice was heard in the appeals, not for reconciliation, but for thorough reconstruction.

Shortly after the assassination, Douglass received from Mrs. Lincoln the President's walding cane. It had been Lincoln's desire to present to the Negro leader some personal symbol of the respect with which he regarded Douglass. Although the gesture touched his heart, probably more comforting to Douglass were the reports that Lincoln had spoken of him as "...one of the most meritorious men, if not the most meritorious man in the United States."²⁴

With Lincoln's legacy and with Lincoln's words to accompany him, Douglass again took up his burden and drove on in his search for a world in which, no matter how humble his origin--whether he had been born in bondage or born in backwoods poverty, a man could find his rightful place in the sun.

V Elder Statesman

After Appomattox Douglass maintained his position as the outstanding spokesman for his race. He scorned the ameliorative

efforts of Andrew Johnson and vigorously supported the Radical Republicans in their program of Reconstruction. Negro suffrage became his primary concern and with the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment he saw the last significant triumph of the campaign upon which he had embarked in 1841. He also labored for Negro homestead legislation, was active in the Negro labor union movement, and served his race as the President of the Freedman's Bank. However, in these years the Negro found victories turning to ashes in his mouth as the triumphs became fewer and successes less stable.

During the tragic era of Reconstruction, Douglass became convinced the future of the Negro lay with the Republican Party. Closing his eyes to the scandals in the Grant Administration, he time and again rallied Negro voters to the party of Lincoln. Having served as a party wheelhorse, Douglass in 1872, moved to the Nation's Capital in the hope of garnering the plums of patronage. Five years later when Hayes succeeded to the presidency, Douglass' patience was rewarded. Although the Republicans had abandoned the southern Negro in the Compromise of 1877, they appointed Douglass to the Office of United States Marshal of the District of Columbia.

The prestige of the appointment as the District of Columbia's first Negro Marshal pleased Douglass immensely and the light duties of office allowed him a leisure he had never before experienced. Although he continued his activity on the lecture platform he was no longer required to devote six months to the

grueling traveling schedule. His improved economic situation, resulting in part from fat lecture fees, enabled him to purchase Cedar Hill, a 20-room house and 15-acre estate situated in Anacostia. He now was able to maintain a huge correspondence, and spend time with his family.

He continued to receive great honors, as in 1879 when his bust was placed in Sibley Hall at the University of Rochester. Often, he was invited to speak at prominent gatherings, and would accept with the warning that he would bring the "colored man" with him. Yet in improved circumstances he was less aware of the terrible hardships of his people.

Douglass had been criticized for his silence in the closing years of Reconstruction when all that had been achieved for the Negro was being wiped out while the Republican Party did nothing to prevent it. He was silent still when President Hayes ordered the removal of troops which resulted in the abandonment of the Negro in Southern States. While his personal fortunes rose the Negroes' conditions degenerated to the depths of a new form of slavery with which Douglass was not in touch.²⁵ The Negro in the South was disenfranchised by force, intimidation and a system of discriminatory election qualifications. He was economically subjugated by the new masters of a share cropping system who defrauded him of meager earnings. Any stand for rights or redress was met by arrest, mob law and murder.

How little Douglass knew of the new problems facing his people were revealed by his arguments opposing a Negro migration

from the South to Kansas, Missouri and Indiana. Negro leaders were divided on the issue and Douglass was openly charged with denying the freedom of others and allying himself with the Southern planter.²⁶

When the Supreme Court decision of 1883, struck down the Civil Rights Act of 1875, and established the doctrine of dual citizenship, Douglass modified his arguments against Negro migration. He did not waiver on his belief however that the battle for Negro freedom could not be won by running away from the South. He indignantly denounced the decision in terms so strong that even his former anti-slavery associates advised caution. But Douglass was back in form and scorned such timid advice. After visiting South Carolina and Georgia he was further enlightened to the true plight of the Negro and upon his return wrathfully declared that he saw the Negro only "nominally free" and his "so-called emancipation as a stupendous fraud--a fraud upon him, a fraud upon the world."²⁷ This was the fearless Douglass the Negroes revered and they forgave him his shortcomings.

When it was known in 1881 that President Garfield did not plan to reappoint Douglass as Marshal, Mark Twain was among those who spoke in Douglass' behalf:

"...I offer this petition with peculiar pleasure and strong desire, because I so honor this man's high and blemishless character and so admire his brave, long crusade for the liberties and elevation of his race.

"He is a personal friend of mine, but that is nothing to the point, his history would move me to say these things without that, and I feel them too."²⁸

Douglass was pleased with Garfield's explanation that he wished to appoint a personal friend as Marshal but that Douglass would be appointed Recorder of Deeds for the District of Columbia. He received the appointment and remained in office through President Arthur's administration.

Anna Douglass died in 1884, and in the twilight years of his life Douglass married Helen Pitts. The second Mrs. Douglass was a college trained white woman of forty-six who had been a secretary in the Office of Recorder of Deeds. Immediately a storm of criticism rained down from both Negroes and white people. Douglass answered this criticism by pointing out that to refrain from his marriage because of race would have been a denial of his entire philosophy of life. In a lighter vein he remarked that he was quite impartial, his first wife being the color of his mother and the second, the color of his father. He suffered little from the storm for he was beyond the reach of social ostracism.²⁹

Their marriage brought them happiness. Visitors remarked on their common interests and intellectual compatibility. Many distinguished visitors made their way to Anacostia to spend a social evening at Cedar Hill. Students of Howard University were always welcome and young Negro leaders from all parts of the country came to discuss their problems with the "Sage of Anacostia." Continuing to hold his office in the early Cleveland administration, both he and his wife attended the President's grand receptions. Following his resignation, he and Helen embarked for a long-awaited year of touring in Europe.

In 1888, Douglass eagerly stumped the country for the election of Harrison who pledged his support of the Republican platform that advocated Congressional action to guarantee the free exercise of Negro rights. Unexpectedly Douglass was honored with the appointment of Minister to Haiti. Aware of the many eyes upon him, he conscientiously strove to strengthen the relations of the two governments. He quickly gained the affection and trust of the Haitian people but felt slighted when his own government placed over him Admiral Gherardi as a special emissary to negotiate the lease of Mole St. Nicolas for use as a naval base.

The admiral's attempt to negotiate with a show of naval force in the harbor resulted in the rejection of the American proposal. Editorials criticized Douglass for the failure. He promptly resigned in order to tell his side of the story and emerged spotless from "one of the more unsavory episodes in the history of American diplomacy."³⁰

With Cleveland's victory in 1892, Douglass could no longer hope for political appointment. The ministership to Haiti proved to be his last public office but many other honors were bestowed upon him in his remaining years. Probably the greatest of these was his appointment as Haitian Commissioner at the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893--a reflection of the continued high esteem held for him by the Haitian people.

During the Nineties amidst the increase of bestial tortures, burning and lynchings when "Not a breeze comes to us from the

late rebellious states that is not tainted and freighted with negro blood,"³¹ Douglass' voice and pen were never more active. His position as the Negroes' leader remained as firm as ever for they continued to look to him, their elder statesman, for counsel and guidance. This hold on the Negro people is best explained in his own words delivered extemporaneously at a surprise party on the occasion of his seventy-first birthday:

"I think I can understand what you mean by this demonstration...and that is that during nearly fifty years of my life I have been an unflinching, unflagging and uncompromising advocate and defender of the oppressed. When the slave was a slave I demanded his emancipation, and when he was free, I demanded his perfect freedom--all the safeguards of freedom. In whatever else I may have failed, in this I have not failed..."³²

The end came at Cedar Hill on February 20, 1895. While describing the events of the day the great orator suddenly became dumb. He sank to the floor as the carriage rolled up to take him to his next speaking engagement.

VI Conclusion

Frederick Douglass once stated that the Negro should not be judged by his present condition but by how far he had progressed. Applying this rule of measure to Douglass, and considering his lowly origin, his own life and work are enhanced. Nevertheless, it is doubtful that his accomplishments were as far reaching as those of some of his contemporaries.

His early activities in anti-slavery agitation were overshadowed by his mentor, William Lloyd Garrison, who had

injected a new urgency into the aged and faltering abolition movement. Nevins states in Ordeal of the Union, that "It was upon the essential doctrine of immediacy established by Garrison that Wendell Phillips delivered his telling orations, that Whittier wrote his noble poems, that Charles Sumner carried the battle into the Senate and that Richard H. Dane, Jr. fought the fugitive slave law."³³ After severing his ties with the Garrisonian school of abolition, Douglass contributed to the movement in which Gerrit Smith and other legislators dominated. His efforts to advance the anti-slavery cause by oratory and newspaper articles before the war did not equal the tremendous influence on public opinion brought about by Harriet Beecher Stowe's book Uncle Tom's Cabin, nor John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry.

With the coming of the war, the climax to the work of the anti-slavery agitators was signed by President Lincoln under the Proclamation of Emancipation. Lincoln and his administration also took the responsibility and are given the credit for the employment of Negro troops advocated by Douglass and other leaders.

In the Reconstruction era, Douglass' goal for Negro equality placed him in the camp of the Radical Republicans, whatever their differences in motive. Here again legislators, i.e. Charles Sumner and Thaddeus Stevens, were the prime-movers in securing legal guarantees of the Negro's rights.

In the post-reconstruction period Douglass' efforts in the cause of a more perfect freedom met with no success, nor was he able to stem the tide of worsening Negro conditions. His

appointments to minor offices of government at that time attest to a recognition of his personal attributes and his prominence as a leader of his people but they did not enable him to influence significantly the current of American life.

In the last analysis then, Frederick Douglass does not emerge as the foremost figure in any of the various reform movements in which he took part. He was broad rather than deep. While his personal attributes and his long struggle in behalf of the people of his race may establish him as the most prominent Negro of the Nineteenth century, his influence in American history is secondary to that of contemporary leaders, in the various areas of his endeavors, whose contributions were of greater significance.

Some of the leaders above referred to have been memorialized with the designation of the Church of the Pilgrims in Brooklyn, as a National landmark. Various memorials to Lincoln are located in the Washington area. Douglass also has been honored with a memorial statue in Rochester's Highland Park and his bust in Sibley Hall. His home in Anacostia is maintained as a memorial by The Frederick Douglass Memorial Association.

APPENDIX A

CHRONOLOGY¹

- 1817 Frederick Douglass was born at Tuckahoe, near Easton, Talbot County, Maryland.
- 1825 Was sent to Baltimore to live with a relative of his master.
- 1833 March. Was taken to St. Michael's, Maryland, to live again with his master.
- 1834 January. Was sent to live with Edward Covey, slave-breaker, with whom he spent the year.
- 1835-36 Hired to William Freeland. Made an unsuccessful attempt to escape from slavery. Was sent to Baltimore to learn the ship-calker's trade.
- 1838 May. Hired his own time and worked at his trade.

September 3. Escaped from slavery and went to New York City. Married Miss Anna Murray. Went to New Bedford, Massachusetts. Assumed the name of "Douglass."
- 1841 Attended anti-slavery convention at New Bedford and addressed the meeting. Was employed as agent of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society.
- 1842 Took part in Rhode Island campaign against the Dorr constitution. Lectured on slavery. Moved to Lynn, Massachusetts.
- 1843 Took part in the famous "One Hundred Conventions" of the New England Anti-Slavery Society.
- 1844 Lectured with Pillsbury, Foster, and others.
- 1845 Published Frederick Douglass's Narrative.
- 1845-46 Visited Great Britain and Ireland. Remained in Europe two years, lecturing on slavery and other subjects. Was presented by English friends with money to purchase his freedom and to establish a newspaper.

¹Chestnutt, Charles W., Frederick Douglass (Boston, 1899), pp. xi-xix.

- 1847 Returned to the United States. Moved with his family to Rochester, New York. Established the North Star, subsequently renamed Frederick Douglass's Paper. Visited John Brown at Springfield, Massachusetts.
- 1848 Lectured on slavery and woman suffrage.
- 1849 Edited newspaper. Lectured against slavery. Assisted the escape of fugitive slaves.
- 1850 May 7. Attended meeting of Anti-Slavery Society at New York City. Running debate with Captain Rynders.
- 1852 Supported the Free Soil Party. Elected delegate from Rochester to Free Soil convention at Pittsburgh, Pa. Supported John P. Hale for the Presidency.
- 1853 Visited Harriet Beecher Stowe at Andover, Massachusetts, with reference to industrial school for colored youth.
- 1854 Opposed repeal of Missouri Compromise.
- June 12. Delivered commencement address at Western Reserve College, Hudson, Ohio.
- 1855 Published My Bondage and My Freedom.
- March. Addressed the New York legislature.
- 1856 Supported Fremont, candidate of the Republican Party.
- 1858 Established Douglass's Monthly. Entertained John Brown at Rochester.
- 1859 August 20. Visited John Brown at Chambersburg, Pa.
- October 12. Went to Canada to avoid arrest for alleged complicity in the John Brown raid.
- November 12. Sailed from Quebec for England. Lectured and spoke in England and Scotland for six months.
- 1860 Returned to the United States. Supported Lincoln for the Presidency.
- 1862 Lectured and spoke in favor of the war and against slavery.
- 1863 Assisted in recruiting Fifty-fourth and Fifty-fifth Massachusetts colored regiments. Invited to visit President Lincoln.

- 1864 Supported Lincoln for re-election.
- 1866 Was active in procuring the franchise for the freedmen.
September. Elected delegate from Rochester to National Loyalists' Convention at Philadelphia.
- 1869 Moved to Washington, District of Columbia. Established the New National Era.
- 1870 Appointed secretary of the Santo Domingo Commission by President Grant.
- 1872 Appointed councilor of the District of Columbia. Elected presidential elector of the State of New York, and chosen by the electoral college to take the vote to Washington.
- 1876 Delivered address at unveiling of Lincoln statue at Washington.
- 1877 Appointed Marshal of the District of Columbia by President Hayes.
- 1878 Visited his old home in Maryland and met his old master.
- 1879 Bust of Douglass placed in Sibley Hall, of Rochester University. Spoke against the proposed negro exodus from the South.
- 1881 Appointed Recorder of Deeds for the District of Columbia.
- 1882 January. Published Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, the third and last of his autobiographies.
August 4. Mrs. Frederick Douglass dies.
- 1884 February 6. Attended funeral of Wendell Phillips.
February 9. Attended memorial meeting and delivered eulogy on Phillips.
Married Miss Helen Pitts.
- 1886 May 20. Lectured on John Brown at Music Hall, Boston.
September 11. Attended a dinner given in his honor by the Wendell Phillips Club, Boston.
September. Sailed for Europe.

- 1886-87 Visited Great Britain, France, Italy, Greece, and Egypt.
- 1888 Made a tour of the Southern States.
- 1889 Appointed United States Minister Resident and Consul-General to the Republic of Haiti and "charge d'affaires" to Santo Domingo.
- 1890 September 22. Addressed abolition reunion at Boston.
- 1891 Resigned the Office of Minister to Haiti.
- 1893 Acted as Commissioner for Haiti at World's Columbian Exposition.
- 1895 February 20. Frederick Douglass died at his home on Anacostia Heights, near Washington, District of Columbia.

APPENDIX B

"Cedar Hill" Memorial to Frederick Douglass

Early History

Early in the 19th Century the land on which most of the town of Anacostia now stands was acquired by John Van Hook who subdivided and developed it as the Uniontown. About 1854 on a portion of this land he erected his own dwelling known as Cedar Hill. Douglass acquired Cedar Hill in 1874 and it remained his home until his death in 1895.

Two years after the death of his first wife in 1882, Douglass married Miss Helen Pitts. In his will Cedar Hill was left to Mrs. Douglass but, because the will had not been properly witnessed, it was declared invalid by the courts. In order to establish the home as a memorial to the memory of Frederick Douglass, Mrs. Douglass sought to have the other heirs (four children of his first wife) relinquish their rights to Cedar Hill. Upon their refusal, Mrs. Douglass was obliged to purchase their interest for \$15,000. She was then compelled to mortgage the home for \$5,500 in order to support herself and maintain the estate.

Under the terms of her will, Mrs. Douglass left the estate to the Frederick Douglass Memorial Association, which she had founded, and had incorporated by Congress, exempt from taxation. In 1917, the Association became affiliated with the National

Association of Colored Women. Soon afterward the debt was retired, and the house has been continuously opened for the visiting public.

Description of the House^{*}

The Douglass home, on an estate of 14 acres, stands on a high elevation in the Southeast section of the District of Columbia. A winding road leads up from 14th and W Streets, N.E., to the rear of the house, and the top of the hill affords a magnificent view of the city. Pedestrians reach the home via steps leading from 14th Street.

A large 14-room brick structure, the Douglass home contains many of his prized possessions. The inside of the house presents much the same appearance as it did when Douglass resided there. His simple tastes are reflected in the furniture and other furnishings of his home. The story of his varied experiences can be partially traced in the objects seen in the various rooms.

On the first floor, are two parlors on each side of the central hallway at the front of the house. In the room on the east the Douglass family assembled for music. The room contains a music box and in one corner is an upright piano with an ebony case. On the walls of these rooms are several bronze plaques which list the name of contributors to the mortgage, repair and maintenance fund of the Association.

In the hallway of this floor is a copy of the historical address made by the abolitionist, John Brown, to the Virginia

^{*}an excerpt from a report by Stanley W. McClure, 1949.

Court, when he was about to receive the sentence of death at Harpers Ferry. A portrait which shows that Douglass was the only Negro member of the Centennial Inaugural Executive Commission at the time of President Benjamin Harrison's inauguration in 1889, hangs in the hallway.

His library located at the rear of the music room remains largely intact. On one side, glass covered bookcases reach to the ceiling, the shelves filled with books on history, economics, political economy, sociology and law. His desk and chair stand in their old places. A Remington typewriter of ancient vintage occupies a place nearby.

The dining room contains the original oak furniture which is of a simple type. At the rear is the kitchen and also a summer kitchen.

Scattered through the house are paintings, engravings, and photographs of Douglass and other distinguished persons of his era, including Abraham Lincoln, William L. Garrison, John Brown, Harriett Beecher Stowe, Susan B. Anthony, Wendell B. Phillips and many others. There are several busts of Douglass and also one of Lucretia Mott.

In the second floor hallway are two cases of documentary souvenirs of Douglass' career. These include volumes of his own periodicals; pamphlets concerning his work; addresses by or presented to him; an order signed by Abraham Lincoln; the bill of sale by which Douglass obtained his freedom from slavery; a set of silver given to him by Queen Victoria, Douglass' violin, and other relics.

There are six bedrooms on the second floor and two rooms in the attic. In the second floor rooms is the well-known Douglass death mask; hats and clothing once owned by John Brown; portraits of Douglass' first wife and his eldest son, John Henry, the latter drawn by Joseph H. Douglass, a grandson; copies of his paper The North Star of the issue of February 16, 1849; his original appointment by President Benjamin Harrison as Minister Resident and Consul-General to Haiti, dated December 16, 1889, and the diploma awarded him by Wilberforce University of Ohio in June 1893 when he was given the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws.

Present Condition

The house and grounds are maintained by a caretaker who lives with her family in an attached cottage behind the house. The caretaker opens the house for an average of four visitors a week. No admission fee is charged.

The grass immediately around the house is cut, but the remainder of the estate is in an unkempt condition--overgrown with high grass and weeds. The dirt road leading to the house is badly eroded.

Although the integrity of the house has largely been preserved, both the interior and exterior are badly in need of extensive repair and restoration.

FOOTNOTES

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