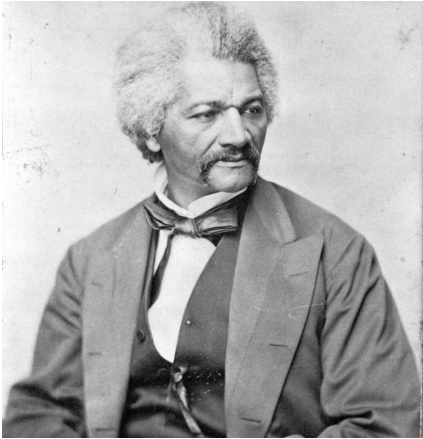


## Document 6: On the Life of Frederick Douglass



Frederick Douglass was born a slave in Talbot County, Maryland, in 1818. His exact birthdate is unknown. He was separated from his mother at a young age and raised by his grandmother on a plantation.

As a young boy, Douglass was taught to read and write by the plantation owner's wife, which was against the law in Maryland. He later learned more about the evils of slavery and the abolitionist movement through his own reading and by listening to other enslaved people.

At the age of 20, Douglass was sent to Baltimore to work as a slave in a shipyard. There, he taught himself to read and write more extensively and became involved in the city's vibrant African American community. He also began to plan his escape from slavery.

In 1838, Douglass successfully escaped slavery, "stole himself" as he said, by posing as a free black sailor and traveling by train and boat to New York City. He later settled in Massachusetts, where he became involved in the abolitionist movement and began speaking out against slavery.

In 1845, Douglass published the first edition of his autobiography, "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave," which chronicled his experiences in slavery and his escape to freedom. The book became a bestseller and helped to solidify Douglass's reputation as a powerful and influential voice in the fight against slavery, and brought the issue of slavery to an international audience.

Douglass spent two years in England, from 1845 to 1847, on a speaking tour to raise awareness about the horrors of slavery in the United States and to garner support for the abolitionist cause. At the time, Douglass had become a prominent and influential figure in the abolitionist movement in the United States. However, he faced increasing threats to his safety, including the possibility of being captured and returned to slavery. Douglass saw traveling to England as an opportunity to both spread the message of abolitionism and to protect himself from potential danger.

During his time in England, Douglass spoke at over 300 meetings and delivered powerful speeches that captivated audiences and helped to galvanize the anti-slavery movement. He was embraced by the British public, who were shocked by his firsthand accounts of the brutality of slavery and inspired by his message of freedom and equality. Douglass's time in England was a

pivotal moment in his career as an abolitionist and social justice advocate. His speeches and writings helped to change public opinion on slavery and laid the groundwork for the eventual abolition of slavery in the United States.

Douglass left England in 1847, after spending two years there. He didn't want to leave. Though on the one hand he was acutely aware of his status as a black man in a society that was still deeply divided along racial lines, his time in England was a transformative experience for him. He had become very popular and influential there and had developed strong relationships with many of the country's leading abolitionists. He was also able to speak freely about the horrors of slavery and advocate for the abolitionist cause without fear of retribution, and had gained a greater sense of his own potential as a leader and orator, his experiences his future his future as one of the most prominent and influential African American leaders of the 19th century.

However, he felt compelled to return to the United States in 1847, resuming his activism on behalf of abolition and became one of the most prominent and influential African American leaders by the time of the Civil War (1861-1865). In addition to his public activism, Douglass also helped individuals in need. He assisted fugitive slaves in their escape to freedom through the Underground Railroad, provided financial support and legal aid to African Americans seeking justice, and helped to establish schools and other institutions to provide education and support to marginalized communities.

Douglass played a significant role in influencing Abraham Lincoln's views on slavery and race during the Civil War era. Douglass met with Lincoln on several occasions, and their conversations helped Lincoln gain a better understanding of the plight of African Americans and push Lincoln towards emancipation.

After the Civil War and end of slavery, Douglass would continue as one of the most important civil rights leaders of the 19th Century, and remained committed to helping others and fighting for their rights.

Adapted From: <https://www.nps.gov/frdo/learn/historyculture/frederickdouglass.htm> and *Narrative on the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*

Image Credit: “[[Frederick Douglass, head-and-shoulders portrait, facing right](#)]” from the Library of Congress is under the Public Domain