

Frederick Douglass

The premier black abolitionist of the nineteenth century, Douglass was born a slave on Maryland's eastern shore. After his escape in 1838, he adopted his new surname to evade pursuit and began to forge his career as an orator, writer, and campaigner against slavery. By the time President Lincoln welcomed him personally to the White House on inauguration day in 1865, Douglass was arguably the most influential black man in America. While most famous for his "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, A Slave" published in 1845, the excerpts below demonstrate his tremendous gift for spoken word and come from two speeches.

"If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to freedom and yet depreciate agitation are men who want crops without plowing. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its might waters.

This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what people will submit to, and you have found out the exact amount of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them; and these will continue till they have resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they suppress."

- **Frederick Douglass, 1857, *An address on West Indian Emancipation (3 August 1857) delivered at Canandaigua, New York***

"For a white man to defend his friend unto blood is praiseworthy but for a black man to do precisely the same thing is a crime. It was glorious for Americans to drench the soil and crimson the sea with blood to escape a threepenny tax upon tea; but it is a crime to shoot down a monster in defense of liberty of a black man and to save him from bondage one minute of which (in the language of Jefferson) is worse than ages of that which our fathers rose in rebellion to oppose."

- **Frederick Douglass, 1854, *Frederick Douglass' Paper, June 2, 1854. In response to the slaying in Boston of James Batchelder, a truckman serving as a U.S. Marshall who was killed during an attack by a crowd seeking to release Anthony Burns, a fugitive slave held in the Court House.***

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

(1818 – 1895)

- ORATOR
- AUTHOR
- STATESMAN

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- ✓ Born to a slave mother (who died when he was seven) and white father (he never knew)
 - ✓ Apprenticed with a shipbuilder in Baltimore (age eight to fifteen)
 - ✓ Sold back into slavery
 - ✓ Primarily self-educated
 - ✓ Escaped slavery at the age of twenty and lived in Massachusetts
 - ✓ Was a member of several abolitionist organizations, including the Anti-Slavery Society
 - ✓ Published *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* in 1845
 - ✓ Published a weekly abolitionist paper called *The North Star*
 - ✓ Worked with Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War
 - ✓ Ran the Freedmen's Bureau during the Reconstruction Era

