

A look at the drive  
and will power of  
frederick douglass  
and chris mccandless



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

It is sometimes said that nothing in life that is worth having comes easily. I have noticed that what often separates those who attain their hopes and dreams from those who do not is that they possess a certain drive and determination to stop at nothing to achieve those dreams. Although the two individuals Chris McCandless and Frederick Douglass lived in different time periods, and grew up in totally different environments, they possessed the will to overcome whatever obstacles life presented them and achieved the goals that they set for themselves. Chris McCandless was determined to live an unconventional, nomadic lifestyle like those of his idols Henry David Thoreau, Boris Pasternak, and the Jules Verne character Captain Nemo. Growing up, he waited until the time was right to begin his journey across the country and into the wilderness. John Krakauer wrote: Five weeks earlier he'd loaded his belongings into his car and headed west without an itinerary. The trip was to be an odyssey in the fullest sense of the word, an epic journey that would change everything. He had spent the previous four years, as he saw it, preparing to fulfill an absurd and onerous duty: to graduate from college. At long last he was unencumbered, emancipated from the stifling world of his parents and peers, a world of abstraction and security and material excess, a world in which he felt grievously cut off from the raw throb of existence. (22) Later in the book we were again given a glimpse of Chris's gritty determination to achieve a goal that he had set for himself.

During his travels Chris stopped in the small dusty town of Tapock, Arizona. It was there that he noticed an old secondhand canoe which he purchased in an attempt to float from Lake Havasu to the Gulf of California. During this adventure down the Colorado River Chris traveled through the Colorado

River Indian Reservation, the Cibola National Wildlife Refuge, and the Imperial National Wildlife Refuge, and across the border into Mexico. He was unaware of the fact that once in Mexico the Colorado River turns into a maze of irrigation canals, marshland, and dead end channels. At one point he follows a map drawn by a group of Mexican canal officials he had met to no avail. He found himself at a dead end in the middle of the desert. He did not give up though. Instead he carried his canoe and gear for three days to a new canal to continue his quest for the sea.

After traveling for several more days Chris once again found himself lost and stuck in swampy marshland. By chance he met a group of duckhunters who after hearing his tale of wrong turns and dead ends agreed to take him to the small fishing village of El Golfo de Santa Clara, located on the Gulf of California (34-35). At several points along the way Chris could have easily given up his quest and turned back, but he would not allow himself to fail. This is the same type of determination that can be seen in Frederick Douglass. Frederick Douglass was born a slave in Tuckahoe, Maryland during the early 1800's. He was eventually sent to Baltimore to live with his new master and mistress.

It was there that Douglass found the key by which he could unlock the bonds of slavery and revel in the freedom that few of his peers would ever come to know. Douglass wrote, " Mistress, in teaching me the alphabet, had given me the inch, and no precaution could prevent me from taking the ell" (31). He remained true to his words over the next couple of years and used an ingenious plan to take every opportunity possible to learn to read and write.

Douglass was often called upon by his mistress to run various errands  
<https://assignbuster.com/a-look-at-the-drive-and-will-power-of-frederick-douglass-and-chris-mccandless/>

throughout the day. He found that if he hurried up and got his errands done quickly he had a few minutes that he could use to get a lesson. He carried with him bread and a book. He would make friends with the white kids in the streets by bribing them with the food and in return in they would teach him what they could. Douglass described the scenario, “ This bread I used to bestow upon the hungry little urchins, who, in return, would give me that more valuable bread of knowledge” (32). What a great plan to use the most basic of human needs, hunger, and the kids’ naivety to gain the most valuable of assets that a slave could hope for, but he wasn’t done. Frederick not only wanted to read, but he was also driven to learn how to write. Once again he used a cunning plan to reach this goal. Douglass described the how he learned to write as follows: The idea as to how I might learn to write was suggested to me by being in Durgin and Bailey’s ship-yard, and frequently seeing the ship carpenters, after hewing, and getting a piece of timber ready for use, write on the timber the name of that part of the ship for which it was intended. When a piece of timber was intended for the larboard side, it would be marked thus-“ L.” When a piece was for the starboard side, it would be marked thus-“ S.” A piece for the larboard side forward, would be marked thus-“ L. F.”

When a piece was for starboard side forward, it would be marked thus-“ S. F.” For larboard aft, it would be marked thus-“ L. A.” For starboard aft it would be marked thus-“ S. A.” I soon learned the names of these letters, and for what they were intended when placed upon a piece of timber in the ship-yard. I immediately commenced copying them, and in a short time was able to make the four letters named. After that, when I met with any boy who I

knew could write, I would tell him I could write as well as he. The next word would be, “ I don’t believe you. Let me see you try it.” I would then make the letters which I had been so fortunate as to learn, and ask him to beat that. In this way I got a good many lessons in writing, which it is quite possible I should never have gotten in any other way... Thus after a long, tedious effort for years, I finally succeeded in learning to write. (34-35) I think what amazes me the most about both of these individuals was the time period over which they continued to strive for their goals. They both forged ahead over the course of months and years gaining whatever advantages and overcoming any obstacles they were presented with, staying focused on the final outcome. This type of determination and will power is inspiring to me, as in this day and age more people seem to have trouble setting goals, or staying focused on achieving them for any extended time period.