

Autobiographies of ben franklin and frederick douglass



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Ben Franklin and Frederick Douglass are the most prominent figures in American history who fought for freedom and equal rights, democracy and racial equality. Frederick Douglass was one of the most important figures in anti-slavery and civil rights movement which took place in the 19th century. Ben Franklin was a scientist, politician, diplomat and author. His social and political activity coincided with consolidation and creation of the nation and for this reason his liberal ideas had a great impact on formation of the nation.

Thesis For both Franklin and Douglass, escape from oppressive circumstances became a turning point in their careers giving rise to political and social activity. The themes of survival and escape are closely connected with family background and early life of both men. Benjamin Franklin was of a family that for generations had lived by the sweat of its brow. Like his ancestors for generations back, he was bred to a trade through a long apprenticeship. That he became a journalist was not altogether accident.

His Uncle Benjamin and his maternal grandfather had been versifiers, and his elder brother had become printer of the fourth newspaper set up in New England. Franklin describes his experience: " I disliked the trade and had a strong inclination to go to sea, but my father declared against it. But residing near the water I was much in it and on it" 1. 1. Franklin, B. The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin (with Introduction and Notes). (Macmillan, 1914), 7 Moreover, he learned early that writing, if one has a mastery of it, is useful for creating and controlling the opinions of men. The story of his teaching himself to write is generally known.

Frederick Douglass was born a slave in 1818, and raised by his grandparents. Historians suppose that “ Douglass’ grandmother, Betsy Bailey, was the central figure in his early years¹. In contrast to Franklin oppression and slavery were the driven forces which forced Douglass to escape from. At their twenties, Franklin and Douglass ‘ escaped’ and run to big cities looking for job and career opportunities. At the age of 20, Douglass escaped from his master and went to New Bedford, Massachusetts. “ No longer in the clutches of slavery, he was ready to take the next steps in his career as an orator, a preacher, and an abolitionist” ².

It was a watershed in his life. “ This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning-point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood” ³. At the age of 18, Franklin broke indenture and run to Philadelphia. During a year, he worked for Samuel Keimer, a printer. On the October morning, 1723, when Franklin passed under the sign of the Bible, entered the shop of Bradford and asked for work, Samuel Keimer, a rival printer, had set up in the town. Bradford had nothing for the lad to do, but gave him a home and sent him to Keimer, by whom he was soon employed.

He describes “ I have been the more particular in this description of my journey, and shall be so of my first entry into that city, that you may in your mind compare such unlikely beginnings with the figure I have since made there” ³. 1. Lampe, G. P. Frederick Douglass: Freedom’s Voice, 1818-1845. (Michigan State University Press 1998), 27. 2. Ibid, 26 3. Douglass, F. Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave. 1997.

<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Literature/Douglass/Autobiography/> 4. Franklin, B. The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin (with Introduction and Notes).

(Macmillan, 1914), 24 During a few months all went well, and Franklin spent his time courting and printing. Franklin was sent to Boston with a letter to Josiah, a printer. Josiah refused to take him, and Benjamin came back to Keith, who now dispatched him on a fool's errand to London. He sailed with the belief that he was to have letters of introduction and letters of credit that he was to buy types, paper, and a press, and return to America a master printer. He reached London to find Keith a knave and himself a dupe. After the escape, both men started active political and social activity.

Douglass became a lecturer for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. He started publishing activity and published several newspapers including "New National Era", "Frederick Douglass Weekly", "The North Star", "Frederick Douglass' Paper", etc. He made friends with Wendell Phillips and William Lloyd Garrison. During the Civil War, he was an adviser to President Abraham Lincoln. Philadelphia during 1727 to 1757 was a town of remarkable intellectual activity. During 1727-1730, Franklin emerges as the chief political leader and scientist, the energizing, galvanizing source of two-thirds of the town's important enterprises 1.

In autobiography, Douglass creates a vivid image of slavery as "a burden" which deprives many people a chance to be free from oppression and humiliation. There is intensity of illusion because the author is present, constantly reminding readers of his unnatural wisdom. The moral quality of both works depends not on the validity of doctrines, but on the moral sense and arguments presented in the work. In both books, a certain amount of

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plot is based on emotional response. For Franklin, escape became a turning point in his career and world views. It was at this time that Benjamin founded the Junto, wrote his famous epitaph,

1. Lampe, G. P. Frederick Douglass: Freedom's Voice, 1818-1845. (Michigan State University Press, 1998), 28, 2. Franklin, B. The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin (with Introduction and Notes). (Macmillan, 1914),. 27 in grew religious, composed a liturgy for his own use 1. For instance, to get a circulation Philadelphia Franklin resorted to clever expedients. He strove to make the " Gazette" amuse its readers, and to persuade the readers to write for the " Gazette;" for he well knew that every contributor would buy a dozen copies of the paper containing his piece from sheer love of seeing himself in print.

Necessity to survive and hardship had a great impact on their moral values and views. Douglass supported equal rights movement and fight for emancipation in England where he earned the nickname " The Black O'Connell". After the Civil war, Douglass was selected the President of the Reconstruction-era Freedman's Saving's Bank; Minister-General to the Republic of Haiti and marshal of the district of Columbia. In 1862 Frederick Douglass described him as a " miserable tool of traitors and rebels" and " quite a genuine representative of American prejudice and negro hatred" 1.

For many Americans, religious norms represent the main code of values and norms determining specific mode of conduct personally and socially preferable. To some extent, this way of thinking gives strength and flexibility to both men who reflect their own identification with an entity - the nation.

Desire for independence and self-identity can be interpreted as distinctively
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“ American” feature and unique style of life. The first acknowledged master of American literary expression, Franklin is also in the heroic tradition of American humor.

Franklin’s humor and wit-the gentle touch that won men’s hearts and affections and the bite of satire that disconcerted the enemies of America and the opponents of freedom and progress-reveal him in his most creative aspect as a pioneer of the American personality. His spirit of fair play, tolerance and compromise for the better good of all have elicited, over the years, the

1. Franklin, B. *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (with Introduction and Notes). (Macmillan, 1914), 68.

2. Douglass, F. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*. 1997. <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Literature/Douglass/Autobiography/> respectful admiration of Americans and the love of the whole world. Though vivid images and ideas of survival expressed in his work, Douglass appealed to emotions of slaves talking about ideas of independence, freedom and equal rights. Douglass writes: “ It was enough to chill the blood and stiffen the hair of an ordinary man to hear him talk. Scarce a sentence escaped him but that was commenced or concluded by some horrid oath” 1.

Douglas did not believe in arguments against slavery, supposing that common sense and moral values were higher than any religion. Always loyal to this broad notion of what is real, Douglass tends to seek a mode of radicalizing viewing. In 1872, Frederick Douglass became the Vice President of the United States and was the first African-American who had occupied this high position. For both men, escape becomes a symbol of future and

hopes. Franklin and Douglass paved the way in accordance with life expectations and aims coined by hardship and necessity to survive.

Their style encompassed a respect for human dignity transcending the limitations of color, a defense of the rights of the press and of freedom of speech and conscience, a concern for the liberty of every man to worship God in his own way, a regard for education and learning and for arts and letters, a sincere belief in equality of opportunity and condition that expressed itself in a concern to prevent excessive wealth and extreme poverty, and a passionate belief in the future greatness of America. 1.

Douglass, F. Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave.

1997. <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Literature/Douglass/Autobiography/>

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2. Franklin, B. The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin (with Introduction and Notes). Macmillan, 1914. 3. Lampe, G. P. Frederick Douglass: Freedom's Voice, 1818-1845. Michigan State University Press, 1998. 4. Shenk, Joshua Wolf. The Myth of Lincoln, Reconstructed. The American Prospect. 12, February 26, 2001, p. 36.