

# Autobiography of frederick douglass

[Literature](#), [Autobiography](#)



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Frederick Douglass's *Autobiography, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, is situated in a context that was not open to, or fond of the straightforwardness of his writing style. His open identity in an anonymous world of anti-slavery literature thrust him into international fame. His writings are often compared with that of Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin. Unlike Jefferson and Franklin, however, Douglass's *Narrative* was inspired by much more than a harsh, but removed king-figure. Instead, violence and the difficulty of obtaining a worthwhile education spawned Douglass's quest for freedom.

After compelling and continual praise from Garrison and Wendell Phillips in the Preface to the *Narrative*, Douglass begins his story immediately addressing the ignorance expected from slaves. They were not allowed to know their ages, they were often taken from their mothers at a very early age. Even Douglass admits that upon his mother's death, it meant nothing more to him than the death of a stranger.

From a very early age, Douglass felt the need to learn. He recognized that a major distinction between slaves and their white masters was education. He recalls his master saying that education could do him (Douglass) no good, but instead "a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy" (1776). At that moment, Douglass realized what he had to do to escape the bonds of slavery to achieve freedom. "These words sank deep into my heart, stirred up sentiments within that lay slumbering, and called into existence an entirely new train of thought" (1776).

Diligently, Douglass learned to read and became an eloquent speaker. Upon his escape to freedom, the opportunity to share his experiences with multitudes of others that were unaware of the abilities of a Negro to think deeply and speak powerfully opened up.

He led a revolution of thought and made available to the public a new perspective on universal and all-inclusive humanity.

In addition to education, violence also played an important role in Douglass's efforts to prove himself an equal. He offers disturbing accounts of starvation and depravation of the most essential things in life. Numerous descriptions of violent beatings that were indicative of any given day on a plantation drew sympathy from those who read the Narrative. Douglass's stories offer a view of the brutality of slavery that was rarely seen or heard in that time, especially from a black man. His descriptive and graphic words grabbed hold of the hearts of readers and listeners. Douglass used his personal experiences, as painful as they were, to inspire a revolutionary new idea: the idea that Negroes were as capable (if not more capable to be able to endure those methods of punishment) as the whites.

To Douglass, education would bring him out of oppression, and the violence he witnessed and endured left him no choice but to escape from that oppression. In his Narrative, the visual imagery of emaciated slave girls fighting for offal thrown into the street and women being beaten until too exhausted to even stand provided a foundation for events as critical as the Emancipation Proclamation. He showed courage beyond that which was called for by standing, as a former slave, against those who would oppress a

person because of the color of their skin. His narrative is powerful and moving and it a cornerstone of the civil rights we have today.