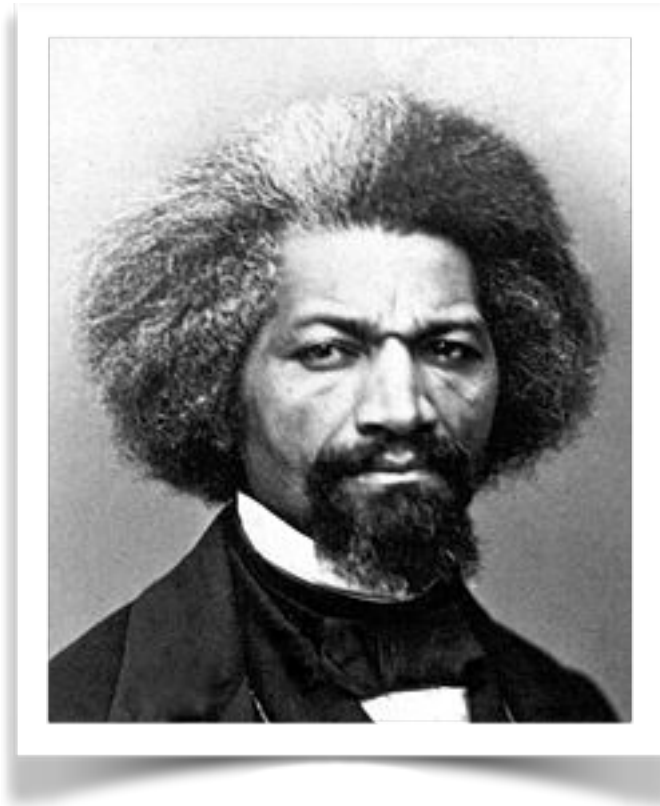


LET'S BE MORE LIKE FREDERICK DOUGLASS



JOURNALIST, ORATOR, SLAVE

A STORY OF SELF-CREATION IN AMERICA

**WRITTEN FOR
YOUNG ADULTS**

BY

YVONNE F. BROWN

**Founder & President
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Individual intellect, self-reliance and ability make great people. Circumstances, race and social credentials are not the main determinants of achievement. Examples of such people exist throughout history: Thomas Jefferson, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and the like. Supporting the foregoing hypothesis and introductory statement, I submit the life of Frederick Douglass.

EARLY LIFE

Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey was born into slavery in the United States of America in February 1818. He never knew the exact date. His self discovery started early in life as he states in his own biography concerning his birthday, Chapter 1, Page 1:

A want of information concerning my own was a source of unhappiness to me even during childhood. The white children could tell their ages. I could not tell why I ought to be deprived of the same privilege. I was not allowed to make any inquiries of my master concerning it. He deemed all such inquiries on the part of a slave improper and impertinent, an evidence of a restless spirit.

Frederick hardly knew his own mother. She was sent to work in another location, and too few times before her early death, ventured on foot the twelve miles to see him. At around seven or eight he was sent to Baltimore to the employ of Mr. and Mrs. Auld. It is from Mrs. Auld that he learned his ABCs and thus his intellectual awareness began. On the day Mrs. Auld was ordered by her husband to cease and desist this activity, young Frederick experienced an epiphany through her husband's words.

If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master - to do as he is told to do. Learning would *spoil* the best nigger in the world. Now, if you teach that nigger how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become

¹ Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass An American Slave

unmanageable, and of no value to his master. As to himself, it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy.

At that moment, and through these words, Frederick understood “the pathway from slavery to freedom.... [and] set out with high hope and fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read.” Using all of his faculties, Frederick motivated many of the white children he encountered in the streets to teach him what they had learned in school. While on the job he copied the markings of the other workers to fences or brick walls and pavements in order to teach himself how to write. His pen and ink was a lump of chalk. He also, when left alone to take care of the house,

... used to spend the time in writing in the spaces left in Master Thomas' copybook, copying what he had written. I continued to do this until I could write a hand very similar to that of Master Thomas. Thus after a long, tedious effort for years, I finally succeeded in learning how to write.

Thus began his road to freedom. Frederick, after many years of aborted attempts to escape, finally succeeded on September 3, 1838. He was twenty years old. After his escape, he married, dispensed with Augustus Washington Bailey, and settled on the name Douglass.

LATER LIFE

On the 11th of August 1841, Frederick, "felt strongly moved to speak," at an anti-slavery convention in Nantucket, finding a degree of freedom that compelled him to oratory success.

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

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

Twenty-two years later, in late July 1863, Frederick obtained his first interview with President Lincoln. Although not satisfied with his success, Douglas was impressed with Lincoln. On August 25, 1864, Frederick had a second interview with President Lincoln. However, by 1865 when the Civil War was ended, the “freedman” and the abolitionist

was free from this individual master but a slave to society. He had neither money, property nor friends. He was free from the old plantation, but he had nothing but the dusty road under his feet. He was free from the old quarter that once gave him shelter, but slave to the rains of summer and the frosts of winter. He was turned loose, naked, hungry and destitute to the open sky.

Still this did not deter him.

After the Civil War, Douglass, a leader and spokesman for former slaves, fought for enactment of the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. He was also in Santo Domingo in 1871 as Assistant Secretary of the Commission of Inquiry to Santo Domingo, and in Haiti between 1889 and 1891 as Charge' d'Affaires for Santo Domingo and Minister to Haiti. Frederick Douglass also became U.S. Marshall for the District of Columbia (1877-1881), Recorder of Deeds for the District of Columbia (1881-1846). He soon realized that the U.S. government felt it's duty complete, and that it was up to the freedmen to succeed or fail on their own.

Freedom without self-reliance, is impossible, and Frederick was prompted to state,

No man can be truly free, whose liberty is dependent upon the thought, feeling, and action of others, and who has himself no means in his own hands for guarding... and maintain that liberty. A new condition has brought duties. A

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James Kirby Martin, Randy Roberts, Steven Mintz, Linda O. McMurry, James H. Jones, America and its People

character which might pass without censure as a slave cannot so pass as a freeman. We must not beg men to do for us what we might do for ourselves.

Now that the slaves were freedmen, Frederick found his notion of self-reliance tended to assume cold deterministic qualities.

Speaking of the self-reliant Black and America, he remarked: 'If he lives, well. If he dies, equally well. If he cannot stand up, let him fall down.' To vivify this point, he resorted to metaphor. 'The apple must have strength and vitality enough in itself to hold on, or it will fall to the ground where it belongs. The strongest influence prevails and should prevail. If the vital relation of the fruit is severed, it is folly to tie the stem to the branch or the branch to the tree or to shelter the fruit of the wind. So, too, there is no wisdom in lifting from the earth a head which must only fall the more heavily when the help is withdrawn. Do right, though the heavens fall; but they will not fall.

Frederick Douglas became friendly with fellow abolitionists. He also wrote for and owned several newspapers. In March of 1874, the Freedman's Bank's board of trustees elected him president, possibly in order to bolster sagging confidence in the institution. Enconced in his new and exhilarating role, Frederick pondered its personal significance to wit:

I could not help reflecting on the contrast between Frederick the slave boy, running about Colonel Lloyd's with only tow linen shirt to cover him, and Frederick - President of a bank counting its assets by millions. I had heard of golden dreams, but such dreams had no comparison with reality.

The bank was plagued by bad loans, speculation, and the panic of 1873. Within six weeks of becoming bank president, Douglass realized that the bank was not a safe place for people's hard earned money. On July 2, 1874, the bank failed. Several months after

⁵ Waldo E. Martin, Jr. [The mind of Frederick Douglass](#)

⁶ Waldo E. Martin, Jr. [The mind of Frederick Douglass](#).

⁷ Frederick Douglass [Life and times of Frederick Douglass](#)

the Freedman's Bank failure, Douglass' last newspaper, the New National Era, also ceased to exist.

Frederick Douglass was fortunate enough to travel to both Western European and other New World societies. These trips afforded him the opportunity to witness firsthand the treatment of blacks outside of the United States. He was the privileged to observe the European situation several times. Once during an abolitionist lecture tour between 1845 and 1847, and again during a brief trip to England in late 1859 through 1860. His first wife having passed away, Douglass remarried and honeymooned with his second wife, Helen Pitts, Douglass, visiting Europe once more between 1886 and 1887. These visits to Europe gave Frederick the opportunity to see lifestyles, societies and cultures outside other than those in America and gave him a basis for comparison of quality of life and country cultures.

So impressive was Frederick Douglass' oratorical and intellectual abilities in these countries, however, that opponents refused to believe that he was once a slave and alleged him to be an impostor, foisted upon the public by the abolitionists.

Notably, it was after writing his autobiography in 1845, "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave," that Douglass, married a white woman named Helen Pitts. She served for awhile as his secretary while he was recorder of deeds (1881-1886) in Washington D.C. At the time of their marriage, Miss Pitts was forty six, twenty years younger than Douglass. She came from a solid western New York family and had graduated from Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in 1859. She was committed to woman's suffrage, a cause that Douglass was also involved in, and they often played

music together. He played the violin, she the piano. They faced considerable disapproval from all sides.

This union appalled his fellow blacks. Some argued that Douglass had slapped his race in the face and abandoned it by marrying a white woman. He insisted that his choice of a marriage partner was a private matter.

I would never have been at peace with my own soul or held up my head among men had I allowed the fear of popular clamor to deter me from following my convictions as to this marriage. I should have gone to my grave a self-accused and self-convicted moral coward.

EPILOGUE

Frederick Douglass died in Washington D.C., on February 20, 1895 a little more than 100 years ago. His legacy remains as a powerful force in a country still confronted with a certain duality where race is concerned.

President John F. Kennedy saw Douglass as a prime symbol of the universal desire for freedom and human rights, on one hand, and America's dedication to realizing them, on the other. Mr. Kennedy wrote: 'the life of Frederick Douglass is part of the legend of America. As a successful fighter for freedom a century ago he can give inspiration to people all around the world who are still struggling to secure their full human rights. That struggle must go on until those rights are everywhere secured. By advancing that cause through law, democratic methods, and peaceful action, we in America can give an example of the freedom which Frederick Douglass symbolizes.'

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Francis J. Grimke, Second Marriage of Frederick Douglass

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Waldo E. Martin Jr. as quoted from Smith, Introduction, Douglass, *My Bondage and Freedom*, xxv; John Fitzgerald Kennedy to Rosa L. Gragg, March 2, 1961, on exhibit in Frederick Douglass Institute- Museum of African Art, Washington, D.C., The Mind of Frederick Douglass

In today's political arena, individuals are criticized and vilified for preaching self-reliance. The media exhorts the general public to abhor the party that suggests that reliance upon one's self is preferable to reliance upon the government. The media supports altruism and pushes their misguided belief in collectivism safely ensconced in their relief that the general public is unaware of, or does not have a clear understanding of what collectivism really means to their freedom and potential success. They wish upon the public a dependency which if followed, will ultimately destroy them and the American way of life.

If great Americans such as Frederick Douglass were made the subject of historical study in our schools, and held up as an example of what is possible with motivation, a little work, tenacity and some self-reliance, our country would be the greater for it in the long term. Admittedly, we cannot all be great orators, and we may not all become historical figures, but at least we can all gain knowledge of, and use our ability to reach deep within ourselves, and work towards our greatest potential.

We are constantly bombarded with commercials on television and by billboards exhorting us to follow the cult of celebrity and to "Be more like Mike," today's African American role model. Would that we exhorted to our children to "**Be more like Frederick Douglass.**" Here is a truly self made man, who not only preached self-reliance and education as the road and the means to true freedom, but supported his principle by living it. Anyone who studies the life of Frederick Douglass will find in it the motivation necessary to press on, to strive for greatness and to achieve excellence. For if a man such as this, born into slavery during the most savage of times in the South, can teach himself to read and write, escape from slavery, and find within himself such

greatness as to change the course of history, what then can stop any one of us today from reaching our American dream?

Douglass himself wrote in his autobiography:

I prefer to be true to myself, even at the hazard of incurring the ridicule of others, rather than to be false, and incur my own abhorrence. From my earliest recollection, I date the entertainment of a deep conviction that slavery would not always be able to hold me within its foul embrace; and in the darkest hours of my career in slavery, this living word of faith and spirit of hope departed, not from me, but remained like ministering angels to cheer me through the gloom.

Of the religion in the South he wrote:

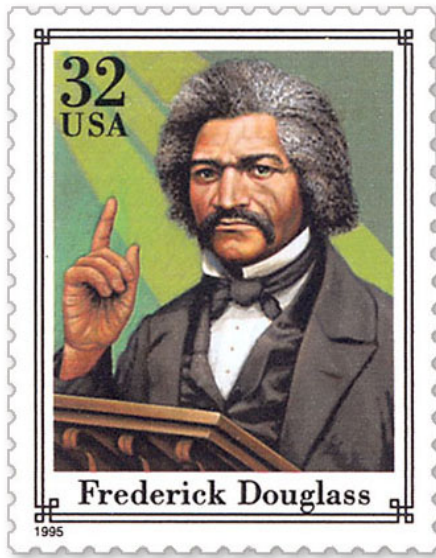
They attend with Pharisaical strictness to the outward forms of religion, and at the same time neglect the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. They are always ready to sacrifice, but seldom to show mercy. They are they who are represented as professing to love God whom they have not seen, whilst they hate their brother whom they have seen. They love the heathen on the other side of the globe. They can pray for him, pay money to have the Bible put into his hand, and missionaries to instruct him; while they despise and totally neglect the heathen at their own doors.

It is easy to understand how Douglass would feel this way about religion. While still a child-slave, he witnessed how his master would attend church in the morning, only to return to dispense whippings upon his slaves. These beatings were sometimes accompanied by the quoting of passages from the Bible. "He that knoweth his master's will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes."¹²

¹⁰ Frederick Douglass, Narrative Of The Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave

¹¹ Frederick Douglass, Narrative Of The Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave

¹² The Holy Bible



A recent visit to the U.S. Post office left me in possession of Civil War stamps. To my amazement, one features Frederick Douglass, and I have included it to this paper.

The back of this stamp states, "Journalist-Orator, Frederick Douglass, 1818-1895. Wielding... pen...voice, ex-slave campaigned for rights of blacks, women. Assisted runaways to Canada. Helped recruit Blacks for 54th Massachusetts Regiment. U.S. Minister Haiti."

Which of those "slave breakers" and slave owners in the South at the time of Frederick's youth might have believed this possible? Which of them could have known that on the day following his death on February, 21, 1895, citizens in Rochester, New York, would plan for the erection of a statue in his honor, and complete and execute the statue of his likeness in June of 1899? Which of them would have believed that there would one day exist in Washington, D.C., a Frederick Douglass Institute? I dare say they would have subjected the speaker of such utterances to ridicule and shunned them.

As is written in the introduction of the book "My Bondage and My Freedom"

When a man raises himself from the lowest condition in society to the highest, mankind pays him the tribute of their admiration; when he accomplishes this elevation by native energy, guided by prudence and wisdom, their admiration is increased; but when his course, onward and upward, excellent in itself, furthermore proves a possible, what had hitherto been regarded as an impossible, reform, then he becomes a burning and a shining light, on which the aged may look with gladness,

the young with hope, and the down-trodden, as a representative of what they may themselves become.

Frederick himself said:

I have seen dark hours in my life, and I have seen the darkness gradually disappearing, and the light gradually increasing. One by one, I have seen obstacles removed, errors corrected, prejudices softened, proscriptions relinquished and my people advancing in all the elements that make up the sum of general welfare. I remember that God reigns in eternity, and that, whatever delays, disappointments and discouragements may come, truth, justice, liberty and humanity will prevail.

CONCLUSION / SUMMARY

Numerous books have been written about Frederick Douglass. Some endeavor to rationalize the personal thought process responsible for his contribution to history, and for his greatness. The simple fact is that individual intellect, self-reliance and ability, account for the achievements of Frederick Douglass. For who today can say that they are not equipped with the tools to learn to read and write? Here is a man who taught himself to write with a *piece of chalk* on the *sidewalk and on fences* even after they removed the means of achieving self-education from him.

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. During this time, my copybook was the board fence,

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James McCune Smith, Introduction to Douglass *My bondage and my freedom*

¹⁴

Frederick Douglass, December 7, 1890

brick wall, and pavement; my pen and ink was a lump of chalk. With these, I learned mainly how to write.

One can only imagine the sheer determination, high motivation to achieve self actualization, and tenacity in the young man/slave called Frederick Douglass and I for one, am inspired by it. I say to you, when things seem the worst to you, rest if you must, but think of this great man and let your inner voice yell the words to you: “press on... press on!” For life is not much more than this to press on when it seems that impossible odds are against you.

I myself have had to deal with my share of the clouds of self-doubt, and had to use the self-determined means to reach achievement of my goals. When I arrived in the United States at 17 believing that “in America the streets are paved with gold” I was ready to achieve the American Dream. I had never heard of Frederick Douglass and only had my personal hopes and dreams to help me press on. I found that while difficult, it was possible to reach self-actualization but that without a doubt it requires tenacity and the ability to press on. Yes, I know that some days it may seem like we are working against impossible odds and some may even encourage us to give up and acknowledge defeat. But there was always that inner voice that called out to me that success comes to those who not only try, but keep on trying when the going gets tough.

When I decided to take American History classes at a local college I discovered Frederick Douglass in the pages of my history textbook. He was not then, nor is he now, a part of the agenda for the American history class. But I found him and his story so incredibly fascinating, that I located and purchased his book “Narrative of the life of

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Frederick Douglass, Narrative Of The Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave

Frederick Douglass, An American Slave; written by Himself.” After reading that book, I realized that my life was changed forever.

Soon I began to investigate the required reading for high school students in American schools and realized that none of the schools were teaching about men such as Frederick Douglass.

Intrigued, I investigated the syllabus for African American studies at various schools and realized that none of them were teaching about this great American. I contacted my son who was still in the U. S. Air Force at the time and learned that he had never heard of Frederick Douglass. He had taken American History and Black History in high school, but no, they had never really mentioned Frederick Douglass.

Subsequently, I endeavored to bear in mind that regardless of how difficult the times are that I might face today, the times for Frederick were much worse, and *still* he managed to rack up a significant list of accomplishments (included here under separate heading) and we can too.

Always remember that **self-creation starts with self-reliance** and use that thought as a self-motivator. Use it as a motive motor to jump-start your personal energy motor, and avail yourself of the energy produced to propel yourself towards the finest destiny you can imagine.

The destiny you imagine will come from your own self-creation. ***It is possible, it is achievable, and it is yours for the taking.*** Believe in yourself and don't just talk about it; Do it Now! Be more like Frederick Douglass, and begin building your own unique list of

accomplishments, so that you can look back at your life and reflect one day, and be proud of how far you've come.

Addendum

On a recent visit to Washington, DC I had the privilege of visiting Cedar Hill, the home of Frederic Douglass. As I visited the museum next door and watched a movie about his life it struck me how far reaching and long lasting his legacy has become.

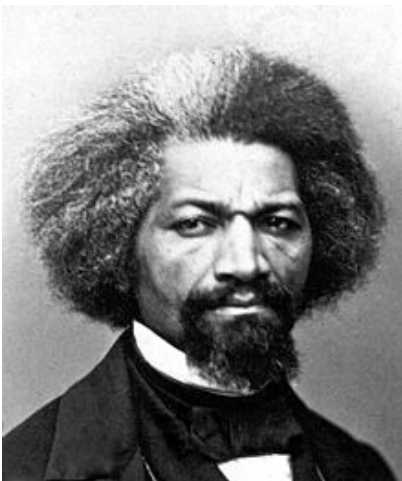
I can't express enough what an impact it had on me to learn even more about this man I so admire. I bought a mug with the inscription "Right is of no sex – Truth is of no color" [Motto of Douglass' newspaper *North Star*]. How true the statement is, I thought, even today his words ring true.

The Parks and history guide offered to give me a tour of Cedar Hill and as I eagerly accepted his offer, I couldn't believe my good luck. Soon I would be walking the same halls that Frederick had walked. When we arrived at the front steps, I paused and had the picture below taken.



We toured the estate and I learned even more about Frederick Douglass. The house is perched at the top of a hill overlooking the city and the grounds are very well kept. The Estate is taken care of by the National Park Service and our guide was incredibly knowledgeable. I felt privileged to have the opportunity to be so close to Frederick's things and felt as though I really had an understanding of this man and how far he had come.

From slave, to orator, to statesman, Frederick continues to inspire us and remains one of my heroes. If you are ever in Washington, DC, be sure to visit Cedar Hill. I promise you, you won't regret it.



A Frederick Douglass Chronology

The Life of Frederick Douglass

1818

(Exact date unknown) Frederick Douglass is born as Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey, a slave at Holme Hill Farm, Talbot County, Maryland.

1826

Sent to live with Hugh Auld family in Baltimore.

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- 1827
Asks Sophia Auld to teach him his letters. Hugh Auld stops the lessons because he feels that learning makes slaves discontented and rebellious.
- 1834
Hired Out to Edward Covey, a "slave breaker", to break his spirit and make him accept slavery.
- 1836
Tries to escape from slavery, but his plot is discovered.
- 1836-38
Works in Baltimore shipyards as a caulker. Falls in love with Anna Murray, a free woman (daughter of slaves).
- 1838
Escapes from slavery and goes to New York City. Marries Anna Murray.
- 1839
Subscribes to William Garrison's *The Liberator*.
- 1841
Speaks at a meeting of the Bristol Anti-Slavery Society and becomes an agent for the Society traveling widely in the East and Midwest lecturing against slavery and campaigning for rights of free Blacks.
- 1842
Makes first visit to Rochester attending a convention of Blacks.
- 1845
Publishes the first of three autobiographies - *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*. To escape recapture following publication, goes to England lecturing on the American anti-slavery movement throughout the British Isles.
- 1846
Becomes legally free when British supporters purchase his freedom from Hugh Auld, his former master.
- 1847
Returns to the United States as a free man. Against the advice of Garrison, moves to Rochester, NY to publish a weekly newspaper, *North Star*.
- 1848
Attends the first women's rights convention at Seneca Falls, NY and advocates the right to vote for women.
- 1850
Publishes an attack on the Compromise of 1850 and the new fugitive-slave law.

-
- 1851
Changes the name of *North Star* to *Frederick Douglass's Paper*. Helps three fugitive Maryland slaves escape to Canada as "Station Master" of the Rochester terminus of the Underground Railroad.
- 1852
Splits with Garrison over the means to achieve the abolition of slavery. Chosen vice-presidential candidate at the Liberal Party convention.
- 1855
Writes a second autobiography: *My Bondage and My Freedom*.
- 1858
John Brown stays at the Douglass home in Rochester while developing plans for encouraging a slave revolt.
- 1859
Escapes to Canada to avoid being arrested as an accomplice in John Brown's plan to seize Harper's Ferry and sails to England.
- 1860
Returns to the United States upon hearing of the death of his eleven-year old daughter, Annie.
- 1861
Calls for the use of Black troops to fight the Confederacy through the establishment of Negro regiments in the Union Army.
- 1863
Serves as a recruiter for the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Regiment. Visits President Lincoln to protest discrimination against Black troops.
- 1866
Attends convention of Equal Rights Association and clashes with women's rights leaders over their insistence that the vote not be extended to Black men unless it is given to all women at the same time.
- 1867
Turns down President Andrew Johnson's offer to name him commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau inasmuch as the National Black Leadership supported General Oliver O. Howard's continuation in the post.
- 1870
Becomes owner and editor of *The New National Era*, a weekly newspaper in Washington, DC.
- 1871
Appointed Assistant Secretary to the Commission of Inquiry into the possible annexation of Santo Domingo.

-
- 1872
Rochester home destroyed by fire with the loss of the newspaper archives. Moves his family to Washington, DC. Nominated for vice-president by Equal Rights Party on a ticket headed by Victoria Woodhull.
- 1874
Named president of Freedman's Savings and Trust Company.
- 1877
Appointed US Marshall of the District of Columbia.
- 1878
Purchases "Cedar Hill" a 9-acre estate in the Anacostia section of Washington, DC.
- 1881
Appointed Recorder of Deeds for the District of Columbia. Publishes a third autobiography: *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*.
- 1882
Anna Mirrray Douglass dies.
- 1884
Marries Helen Pitts. Resigns as Recorder of Deeds for the District of Columbia.
- 1889
Appointed Charge d'Affaires for Santo Domingo and Minister Resident and Consul-General to Haiti.
- 1891
Resigns as Minister to Haiti.
1895. Dies at Cedar Hill, Anacostia¹⁶
-

VOCABULARY

Determinants	Something that determines or conditions
Hypothesis	An assumption made especially in order to test its logical or empirical consequences
Impertinent	Rude

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Yvonne Brown is President & CEO of JAD Communications, LLC, a consulting, training and knowledge management firm. With 20 years of business and technology experience in Fortune 500 Companies, she has extensive experience managing major systems initiatives.

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Prior to founding JAD Communications, LLC, Ms. Brown exhibited a proven track record as a skilled and versatile businesswoman. Her substantial background in financial services, public sector, manufacturing, retail, wholesale, commercial real estate, and leisure services, provides her clients with a wealth of best practices experience in varied

industries. She has managed large-scale complex systems initiatives to successful completion on time, within budget and with a high degree of end-user satisfaction.

In addition, she was directly responsible for packaged software implementation, project planning, project-cost estimates, risk management, project staffing, management and creation and execution of statement-of-work. She also ensures that her client's business requirements are always met and exceeded. To accomplish this she utilizes project management methodologies certified by the Project Management Institute, strong management, cross cultural communication, and interpersonal skills.

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