

FREDERICK DOUGLASS: ADVOCATE FOR EQUALITY

Venue Support Notebook

Developed by

THE GILDER LEHRMAN
INSTITUTE *of* AMERICAN HISTORY

With generous support from

CHARLES H.
REVSON
FOUNDATION

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GENERAL INFORMATION

This exhibition was developed by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History and made possible by the Charles H. Revson Foundation.

- David Blight (Yale University) was the scholarly advisor for this exhibition.
- Curator, Sandra Trenholm, Director of the Gilder Lehrman Collection, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History
- Curatorial Intern, Zoya Siddiqui, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History)

Format

The exhibition is composed of six retractable vinyl banners. Each panel measures 81 inches in height and 33 inches wide. It requires a total of 14 running feet and can be displayed separately or together. Detailed setup instructions are provided to the venue's coordinator upon shipment. Setup instructions can also be found on the [FAQ page of the GLI Traveling Exhibitions website](#).

Rental Security

Exhibitions may be displayed in any open areas, but preferably not in a hallway. No exhibition is to be displayed outdoors or in a tent or other temporary structure. It is preferable that a staff member is in the room with the exhibition when it is open to students or guests.

If a borrower is determined to be at fault in damage or loss of any part of the exhibition, then the institution will be responsible for paying the replacement or restoration costs. The value of the *Douglass* exhibit is \$2,250. Some institutions chose to add a rider to their insurance policy.

Shipping

The exhibit is shipped in a wheeled, plastic case measuring 38 inches x 18 inches x 14 inches and weighing approximately 75 pounds. GLI will be responsible for arranging shipping via FedEx. A week prior to the end of your loan period, we will reach out with a return label and instructions.

Reporting

Each site is required to complete a condition report upon receipt of the exhibition and again after the exhibition has been packed for return. Condition reports will be sent to the venue coordinator via email.

Questions

If you have questions about please contact

Traveling Exhibitions Program
exhibitions@gilderlehrman.org
Phone (646) 366-9666 ext. 164

PROGRAMMING IDEAS

The Institute encourages host sites to plan programs related to the exhibition. Past programs have included discussions, debates, lectures, and film series. We encourage sites to get creative with programming and incorporate community history and resources as well!

For more ideas including lesson plans, virtual exhibitions, essays, and more digital resources, you can visit our resource page dedicated to [*Frederick Douglass: Advocate for Equality*](#).

Public Program Ideas

- Host a Community Book Program before and/or during the exhibit using any of Douglass's own autobiographies or biographies. You may consider choosing an additional title for young adults and children. Please see the bibliography included in this Site Support Notebook for biography and other book ideas.
- Create displays or complimentary programming based upon the following:
 - Black soldiers in the Civil War
 - Jim Crow era laws and their impacts
 - Ida B. Wells and her continued fight for civil rights following Douglass's death
- Host this exhibition as part of Black History Month programming in February, also highlighting the influential figures Douglass worked with during his life. Other figures to feature might include: Ida B. Wells, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman.
- One of Douglass's core beliefs was that voting should be a right and is one of the most powerful ways to influence the world around us. Host a voting registration drive alongside the exhibition in honor of Douglass's belief in the power of voting.

Program Ideas for Classrooms

- Plan a program showing middle grades how to use primary sources in historical research, both in print and online.
- Have a group of students read each of Douglass's autobiographies. Hold a discussion in which students can compare and contrast his own narrative of his life as he aged and the fight for equality continued. Create a scavenger hunt using key quotes, images, and facts from Douglass's life. Challenge students to find the answers on the panels while they view the exhibition.
- During his own life, Douglass's views on whether or not the constitution itself enumerated universal voting rights. Use this change in viewpoints from Douglass to teach students about interpreting the constitution and the complexity of using one document to determine the fate of a rapidly expanding and changing nation.

FURTHER READING

By purchasing any of the books mentioned through the links to bookshop.org provided, you are supporting the programming of the Gilder Lehrman Institute. We receive an affiliate commission from every sale and put that toward developing high-caliber American history programming.

In Douglass's Own Words

- Douglass, Frederick. [*The Complete Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass \(An African American Heritage Book\)*](#). Wilder Publications, 2008.
- Douglass, Frederick. [*The Portable Frederick Douglass*](#). Edited by Gates, Henry Louis, and John Stauffer. Penguin Group, 2016.
- Douglass, Frederick. [*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*](#). Edited by Ira Dworkin. Penguin Group, 2014.
- Douglass, Frederick. [*My Bondage and My Freedom*](#). Edited by Bernier, Celeste-Marie. Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Douglass, Frederick. [*Life and Times of Frederick Douglass: Written by Himself*](#). Edited by Bernier, Celeste-Marie and Andrew Taylor. Oxford University Press, 2022.

Related Works

- Blight, David W. [*Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*](#). Simon & Schuster, 2020.
- Foner, Eric. [*Reconstruction Updated Edition: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877 \(Revised\)*](#). Harper Perennial, 2014.
- Preston, Dickson J. [*Young Frederick Douglass*](#). Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019.
- Bernier, Celeste-Marie, et al. [*Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American*](#). Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2018.

For Younger Readers

- Bolden, Tonya. [*Facing Frederick: The Life of Frederick Douglass, a Monumental American Man*](#). Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2020.
- Keller, Shana, and Kayla Stark. [*Bread for Words: A Frederick Douglass Story*](#). Sleeping Bear Press, 2020.
- Prince, April Jones. [*Who Was Frederick Douglass?*](#) Illustrated by Robert Squier. Penguin Workshop, 2014.
- Walker, David F. [*The Life of Frederick Douglass: A Graphic Narrative of a Slave's Journey from Bondage to Freedom*](#). Illustrated by Marissa Louise and Damon Smyth. Ten Speed Graphic, 2019.

BACKGROUND

By David W. Blight

Born into slavery in Talbot County on the eastern shore of Maryland in February 1818, Frederick Douglass was the son of Harriet Bailey, an enslaved woman. Named Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey, he took the surname Douglass from Walter Scott’s poem “The Lady of the Lake.” Douglass hardly knew his mother, and never knew the true identity of his father, who in all likelihood was his mother’s White enslaver. Hence, for life, he was an orphan in the fullest sense.

Douglass lived twenty years enslaved and nearly nine years as a fugitive subject to capture. From the 1840s to his death in 1895, he attained international fame as an abolitionist, reformer, editor, orator of almost unparalleled stature, and author of three classic autobiographies. As a public man, he began his abolitionist career two decades before America divided in a civil war over slavery. He lived to see Black emancipation achieved in enormous bloodshed, to work actively for women’s equality, to experience the civil and political rights triumphs and tragedies of Reconstruction, and to witness America’s economic and international expansion in the Gilded Age. Douglass lived until the beginning of the age of Jim Crow, when America collapsed into retreat from the very victories and revolutions in race relations he had helped to win.

This epic life, a career of many transformations and personal reinventions, emerges from a single-page summary Douglass provided of his story in 1893, displayed in this exhibition. Above all, Douglass’s was a life forged in his mastery of words—the only real weapon he ever possessed. His genius with oratorical and written language is beautifully represented here. So many times he found the way to capture in words his nation’s predicament with race, as well as his own. In the last sentence of his second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), his long-form masterpiece, Douglass wrote that he would carry on his fight for human freedom and equality “while Heaven lends me ability to use my voice, my pen, or my vote.” In the nineteenth century no other American left a greater mark with voice and pen on our common equal rights. It remains for us to preserve them.

EXHIBITION CONTENT

Panel One: Frederick Douglass: Advocate for Equality

Introductory Text

Throughout his life, Frederick Douglass worked for equal rights. From the abolition of slavery to the fight against Jim Crow, he challenged Americans to live up to the founding ideals of the United States.

Major Events in the Life of Frederick Douglass

- February 1818: Born at Holmes Hill Farm, Talbot County, Maryland
- March 1826: Sent to live in Baltimore with Hugh and Sophia Auld
- September 1838: Escaped slavery by impersonating a sailor
- August 1841: Hired as a lecturer by the American Anti-Slavery Society
- May 28, 1845: Published first autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*
- 1845–1847: Toured Ireland, Scotland, and Britain with his first autobiography
- July 19–20, 1848: Attended Women’s Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York
- July 5, 1852: Delivered “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July” speech in Rochester, NY
- August 1855: Published second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*
- October 17, 1859: Fled to Canada following John Brown’s raid, then to Great Britain
- February 24, 1863: Began recruiting Black soldiers for the Union Army
- August 1864: Met with Lincoln at the White House for a second time
- May 1871: Appointed Secretary to the Santo Domingo Commission under President Ulysses S. Grant
- January 1881: Published third autobiography, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*
- July 1889–August 1891: Served two years as US resident minister and consul general to Haiti
- February 20, 1895: Died at Cedar Hill home in Washington DC

Panel Two: Becoming Frederick Douglass

Introductory Text

Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey was born enslaved in Talbot County, Maryland. He rarely saw his mother, Harriet Bailey, who died when he was a child. And he never knew the identity of his father, who was probably his mother’s White enslaver. When he was eight years old, he was sent to Baltimore to work for the family of Hugh and Sophia Auld. There, he learned a valuable and life changing lesson: education was the key to freedom.

2.1 Frederick Douglass to Benjamin Franklin Auld, March 24, 1894. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC07484.01)

The principal thing I desired in making the inquiries of you was to get some idea of my exact age. I have always been troubled by the thought of having no birth day,” - Frederick Douglass

2.2 *The Columbian Orator* by Caleb Bingham, 1797. (Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, FRDO 650)

2.3 *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* by Frederick Douglass. 1845

“The 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.” – Frederick Douglass

2.4 Photo of Anna Douglass, 1859. (Library of Congress)

“Blessings of Liberty and Education,” by Frederick Douglass. 1894.

“Education, on the other hand, means emancipation. It means light and liberty. It means the uplifting of the soul of man into the glorious light of truth, the light by which men can only be made free.”

Panel Three: Fighting against Slavery

Introductory Text

After escaping slavery, Douglass married Anna Murray and settled in New Bedford, Massachusetts. In 1841, he began speaking at anti-slavery meetings where his words electrified audiences. Douglass rose to national prominence as the debates over slavery intensified in the 1850s with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act (1850), the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854), and the Supreme Court’s *Dred Scott* decision (1857). From 1850 to 1856, Douglass gave more than seventy lectures and traveled over five thousand miles.

Daguerreotype of Frederick Douglass, ca. 1847–1852. (Art Institute of Chicago)

3.1 *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 1845. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC06117)

3.2 Hugh Auld to Anna Richardson agreeing to free Frederick Douglass, October 6, 1846. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC07484.04); Image of Anna Richardson. (University of Newcastle)

3.3 *North Star*, edited by Frederick Douglass, April 14, 1848. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC07233)

3.4 William J. Stone’s facsimile of the Declaration of Independence, 1823. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC00154.02)

3.5 Dred Scott and his wife, Harriet, *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, June 27, 1857. (Library of Congress)

Panel Four: Frederick Douglass's Civil War

Introductory Text

The election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860 led to the secession of eleven slave-holding states. Douglass hoped the Civil War would end slavery. He campaigned for emancipation and the right for Black men to serve in the military. At the beginning of the war, Douglass attacked some of Lincoln's policies. By 1865, the Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment demonstrated Lincoln's commitment to ending slavery.

Photograph of Frederick Douglass, ca. 1856. Artist unknown, (National Portrait Gallery)

4.1 Emancipation Proclamation [California Printing, Cheesman copy], San Francisco, 1863. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC00742)

4.2 *Men of Color: To Arms! Now or Never*, Recruitment broadside, 1863. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC10021)

4.3 Currier & Ives, "The Gallant Charge of the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts (Colored) Regiment," New York, 1863. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC02881.23); Portrait of Abraham Lincoln, ca. 1865. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC00241.01)]

4.4 Photograph of Lincoln's hearse in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Wilson & Hood, no date. (The Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC05136.27)

Panel Five: Frederick Douglass, Reconstruction, and Voting Rights

Introductory Text

With the end of slavery and the passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the US Constitution after the Civil War, Douglass possessed new hope for the future for Black Americans and the United States. Throughout this period of Reconstruction (1865–1877), Douglass continued to use his voice to demand equality and the right to vote for all Americans.

Engraving of Frederick Douglass from *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 1882. (New York Public Library)

5.1 James Carter Beard, *The Fifteenth Amendment Celebrated May 19 1870*, 1870. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC10030)

5.2 A.R. Waud, “The First Vote,” *Harper’s Weekly*, New York, November 16, 1867. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC01733.09, pg. 721)

5.3 Elizabeth Cady Stanton with her sons, 1848. (Library of Congress)

5.4 Thomas Nast, “Uncle Sam’s Thanksgiving Dinner,” *Harper’s Weekly*, November 20, 1869. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC01733.11)

Panel Six: Frederick Douglass and the Fight against Jim Crow

Introductory Text

The late nineteenth century did not bring the equality Douglass hoped for. With the end of Reconstruction in 1877, Jim Crow laws, intimidation, and violence were used to rob Black Americans of their civil rights, particularly in former Confederate states. Despite this, Douglass never faltered. He believed all people were born with the same rights and dedicated his life to achieving liberty and equality. His eloquence and faith in the ideals of the Declaration and Constitution continue to inspire Americans today.

Photograph of Frederick Douglass, ca. 1880. (New York Public Library); Frederick Douglass (seated, left) with the Commissioners to Santo Domingo, Brooklyn Navy Yard, January 1871. Digital image courtesy of Getty’s Open Content Program.

6.1 “Frederick Douglass, The New Marshal of the District of Columbia,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, April 7, 1877 (Library of Congress)

6.2 Portrait from *African-American Monument*, B. F. Hammond, 1897. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC08941)

6.3 Ida B. Wells Barnett, 1893. (National Portrait Gallery); Frederick Douglass delivering the Tuskegee Institute’s commencement address, March 26, 1892. (Library of Congress)

6.4 Haitian Building at the World’s Columbian Exposition, 1893. (Chicago Historical Society, ICHI-40687).

6.5 Address by the Hon. Frederick Douglass, “Lessons of the Hour”, 1894. (Library of Congress)

6.6 Photograph of W. E. B. Du Bois, James E. Purdy, 1907. (National Portrait Gallery); Funeral of Frederick Douglass 1895. (Rochester Images Digital Collection)