

# Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave

written by Himself  
Boston, 1845

edited and rewritten by  
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Castro Valley, 2007

## Preface

### 1. ATTENTION

This section of the story introduces Frederick Douglass. Read to find out his background.

In the month of August 1841, I attended an antislavery convention in Nantucket where I was happy to meet Frederick Douglass, the writer of this book. He was a stranger to nearly every member of the convention as he had just escaped from slavery and now wanted to learn about the abolitionist movement he had heard about while being a slave in the South. A friend encouraged Douglass to attend the convention.

It is fortunate for the millions of slaves waiting for freedom; fortunate for the cause of emancipation and liberty; fortunate for the land of his birth; fortunate for a large number of people who now support him because of the hardships he has endured, his good character, and his experience as a slave; fortunate for the citizens of our republic who he has told of the hardships of slavery and brought to tears; fortunate that he has become an important spokesman to end the practice of slavery and set his people free!

I shall never forget his first speech at the convention—how it excited the crowds and created much applause. I think I never hated slavery so much as at that moment. The brutality slavery inflicted on its victims was made more clear than ever before.

He stood upon the stage, a commanding presence, a great intelligence, a natural ability—yet a fugitive slave, fearing for his own safety, unable to believe that on American soil there was a single white person who could be found that would help him.

Douglass was a man capable of high ability, intelligence, and moral being needing very little help to become a model to society and his race, yet by the law of the land he was considered only a piece of property!

A friend convinced Mr. Douglass to speak at the convention. Douglass came forward to the platform with some hesitancy and embarrassment. He apologized for his ignorance and reminded the audience that slavery was a poor school for the human mind and heart. He spoke about his life as a slave. After he had finished and taken his seat, I got up and said that Patrick Henry of the American Revolution had never given a better speech in support of liberty. And this speech came from a man who was a hunted fugitive!

## REVIEW THE DETAILS

1. As a slave, Frederick Douglass was considered: (circle one)
  - a. to be free
  - f. to be property
  - g. to be a criminal
  - h. to be a business person

## 2. ATTENTION

This section seeks to inform the reader about slavery. Read to find out what Douglass says about slavery.

I reminded the audience that Douglass' freedom was in danger, even on the free-soil of Massachusetts, the place of the Pilgrims, and home of the revolutionary patriots. I asked them if they would ever allow Douglass to be carried back into slavery.

The crowd shouted, "No!"

"Would you protect him?"

With a thunderous response that might have been heard all the way to the Southern border they joined together and shouted, "Yes!"

It occurred to me to convince Mr. Douglass to use his talent to support the anti-slavery movement. It would greatly change the minds of Northerners of their prejudice towards Africans. At first, he believed he lacked the ability to support the anti-slavery cause and feared he would do more harm than good. After some thought, however, he decided to try it. Since then, he has spoken for the American Anti-Slavery Society and the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. He has worked hard and has had great success—more success than anyone had imagined possible—in fighting prejudice and gaining followers.

As a public speaker, Douglass excels in wit, reason, and understanding of language. He possesses great intelligence and emotion to win others over. Hopefully he will continue to grow and spread his message in America and around the world.

It is an interesting fact that the greatest speaker for the slave population is a fugitive slave. He is Frederick Douglass.

Mr. Douglass has chosen to write his own book in his own way to the best of his ability rather than have someone else do it for him. Considering how long he spent as a slave, how few opportunities he had to improve his mind after he escaped, is a credit to his intelligence.

The experience of Frederick Douglass as a slave was not an unusual one; his situation was not a very hard life. His story may be seen as a typical life of a slave in Maryland, a state that feeds slaves better and treats them less cruelly than in Georgia, Alabama, or Louisiana. Many slaves have suffered more, yet his situation was still terrible.

So many people are ignorant of the nature of slavery that they often show surprise when they are told of its cruelties. These people do not deny that slaves are held as property, but they seem to pretend that there is no injustice or savage mistreatment. Tell these people of cruel whippings, mutilations and brandings, and the absence of education and they show outrage at such outrageous lies about Southern planters. As if these facts were not the natural results of slavery!

Reader, are you with the man-stealers or on the side of their victims? If you support the slave owners, then you are an enemy of God and civilized man. If you are with the victims, are you prepared to do what is necessary to end slavery? Be faithful, be vigilant, be untiring in your efforts to break every chain and let the slaves go free. Come what may—cost what it might—there shall be "No compromise with slavery! No Union with slaveholders!"

William Lloyd Garrison  
Boston, May 1, 1845

## REVIEW THE DETAILS

2. Read the boxed text and underline or highlight the qualities that make Douglass a good speaker.

3. In the last paragraph, what is William Lloyd Garrison's opinion about slavery?

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## Chapter I

### 3. ATTENTION

Douglass explains his early childhood on the farm.

I was born in Tuckahoe, near Hillsborough, and about twelve miles from Easton, in Talbot County, Maryland. I have no accurate knowledge of my age because I have never seen any record with my birth date. Most slaves know as much about their age as a horse, and it is the wish of most masters to keep it that way. I have never met another slave who knew their birthday. The closest they can guess is that it might be around planting time, harvest time, spring time, or fall time. Not knowing my birthday made me unhappy as a child. The white children knew their ages. I could not understand why I should not know my age. I was told not to ask my master about it. He thought any questions coming from a slave showed a lack of respect and a restless spirit. I can guess that I am between twenty-seven and twenty-eight years of age. I guess that I am this old because I once heard my master say, in 1835, that I was about seventeen years old.

My mother was named Harriet Bailey. She was the daughter of Isaac and Betsey Bailey, both black, and quite dark. My mother was of a darker complexion than either my grandmother or grandfather. My father was a white man. Everyone I ever talked to said he was white. Some even whispered that my master was really my father, but it was never proven.

My mother and I were separated just after I was born. It is common in the part of Maryland that I grew up in to separate children from their mothers at an early age. Frequently, the child is removed from the mother before its first birthday and the mother is hired out to another farm far away. The child is placed under the care of an older slave who is too old to work out in the fields. I do not know why this is done. Perhaps, it is to destroy the natural attachment of a mother toward her child. In any event, this is the result. I never saw my mother more than four or five times in my life; each of these times was at night for a very short time.

My mother was hired out to a Mr. Stewart who lived about twelve miles from my home. She made journeys to see me at night, traveling the whole distance on foot, after working all day in the fields. A slave would receive a whipping if they were not in the fields at sunrise unless they had permission from their master. I do not remember ever seeing my mother by the light of day, only at night. Very little communication ever took place between us.

Death soon ended what little we could have while she lived, and with it her hardships and suffering. My mother died when I was seven years old. I was not allowed to be present during her illness, at her death, or her burial. She was long gone before I ever knew anything about it. Never having enjoyed a real relationship with her, I took the news of her death with much the same emotion as I probably would have felt at the death of a stranger.

### REVIEW THE DETAILS

4. A slave that asked questions was considered: (circle two)
  - a. a restless spirit
  - f. smart
  - g. disrespectful
  - h. curious
5. How did Douglass react to the death of his mother and why?  

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**4. ATTENTION**

Douglass introduces the reader to the cruelty against slaves.

I have had two masters. My first master’s name was Anthony. I do not remember his first name. He was not considered a rich slaveholder. He owned two or three farms and about thirty slaves. His farms and slaves were under the care of an overseer<sup>1</sup>.

The overseer’s name was Plummer. Mr. Plummer was a miserable drunkard, a man who constantly used foul language, and he was a savage monster. He always went armed with a cowskin whip and a heavy club. I have known him to cut and slash women’s heads so horribly that even the master would be enraged at his cruelty. Master, however, was not a kind slaveholder. It required extraordinary barbarity on the part of an overseer before it affected Master.

Master was a cruel man, hardened by a long life of slaveholding. He would at times seem to take great pleasure in whipping a slave. I have often been awakened at the dawn of the day by the heart-rending shrieks of an aunt of mine, who he used to tie up and whip until she was literally covered in blood. No words, no tears, no prayers from his victim seemed to move his iron heart from its bloody purpose. The louder she screamed, the harder he whipped; and where the blood ran fastest, there he whipped the longest. Only when she passed out did he cease to swing the blood-clotted cowskin whip.

**REVIEW THE DETAILS**

6. Write three adjectives that describe Master.

Note: An adjective describes a noun.

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_

*tall* man

*happy* event

*hot* desert

**CHAPTER II**

**5. ATTENTION**

Douglass discusses the poor living conditions in which slaves lived.

My master’s family lived in one house on the plantation owned by Colonel Edward Lloyd. My master was Colonel Lloyd’s clerk and superintendent—something of an overseer for all the overseers. I spent two years of my childhood on this plantation. The principal products raised here were tobacco, corn, and wheat. These products combined with the products from his other farms, kept his

cargo ship, *Sally Lloyd*, in constant use as it took goods to market in Baltimore. The vessel was manned by slaves who were looked upon by the other slaves of the plantation as privileged for it was no small affair, in the eyes of the slaves, to be allowed to see the city of Baltimore.

Colonel Lloyd kept from three to four hundred slaves on his home plantation and owned a large number more on the neighboring farms belonging to him. It was the seat of government for all the rest of the farms, numbering twenty. All disputes among the overseers were settled here. If a slave was convicted of any high misdemeanor, became unmanageable, or showed a desire to run away, he was brought immediately here, severely whipped, put on board the cargo ship, carried to Baltimore, and sold to Austin Woolfolk or some other slave trader, as a warning to the slaves remaining.

It was here, too, the slaves of all the other farms received their monthly allowance of food and yearly clothing. The men and women slaves received eight pounds of pork or fish and one bushel of corn meal. Their yearly clothing consisted of two coarse linen shirts, one pair of linen trousers, one jacket, one pair of trousers for winter made of coarse cloth, one pair of stockings, and one pair of shoes—not costing more than seven dollars. Children unable to work in the fields only had two linen shirts given to them each year. Frequently, children from seven to ten years old went naked at all seasons of the year.

<sup>1</sup> overseer: a man in charge of slaves often using threats and physical punishment to keep them working.

No beds were given to the slaves. They had one coarse blanket for each man and woman and nothing else. However, this did not bother slaves as much as the lack of time to actually sleep. After coming in from the fields, most of the slaves had to wash, mend, and cook taking up much of their sleeping hours. After doing their chores, old and young, male and female, married and single, dropped down side by side on the floor to sleep covering themselves with their miserable blankets until they are wakened by the overseer's horn.

### REVIEW THE DETAILS

7. How long did a slave's clothes have to last? (circle one)
  - a. one month
  - f. six months
  - g. one year
  - h. two years
8. Underline or highlight the information that tells what kind of clothing slaves received.

**6. ATTENTION**  
Douglass writes about the working life on the plantation.

Mr. Severe, the overseer, used to stand by the door of the quarters, armed with a large hickory stick and heavy cowskin whip, ready to whip anyone who was not ready to head to the field.

Mr. Severe was rightly named for he was a cruel man. I have seen him whip a woman causing the blood to run half an hour while her crying children pleaded for their mother's release. To add to his cruelty, he used a lot of profanity.

It was enough to chill the blood and stiffen the hair of an ordinary man to hear him talk. The field was the place to witness his cruelty and profanity. From sunup to sundown, he was cursing, raving, cutting, and slashing among the slaves of the field in the most frightful manner. His career was short-lived as he soon died after I arrived at Colonel Lloyd's.

Mr. Hopkins took over the position. He was a very different man. He was less cruel, less profane, and made less noise than Mr. Severe. He whipped people but seemed to take no pleasure in it. He was called a good overseer by the slaves.

The home plantation of Colonel Lloyd looked like a country village. All the operations for all of the farms were done here. The shoemaking and mending, the blacksmithing, cartwrighting, coopering, weaving, and grain-grinding were all performed by the slaves on the home plantation. The whole place wore a business-like atmosphere, unlike the other farms. It was called the Great House Farm by the slaves. It was considered by the slaves to be a privilege to do errands here. They thought it was evidence of the great confidence in them by their overseers to be chosen frequently to go to the Great House Farm. Also, it temporarily freed them from the whip in the fields. The competitors for this privilege sought to please their overseers like office-seekers in the political parties sought to please and deceive the people.

Slaves would often sing songs on the way to the Great House Farm. The songs told tales of woe and bitter anguish. Every tone was a statement against slavery and a prayer to God for an end to it. Those songs have always depressed my spirit and filled me with sadness. Those songs still follow me and deepen my hatred of slavery. I have often been astonished since coming to the North of the people who think the songs of slaves are a sign of their happiness. It is impossible to think of a greater mistake. Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy. The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart.

### REVIEW FOR UNDERSTANDING

9. Underline or highlight the words that describe the overseers.

10. What was the overseers' job? (circle one)

- a. to keep the slaves working
- f. to dig water wells
- g. to care for the horses
- h. to run the plantation

11. Why did slaves sing songs? (circle one)

- a. they were happy
- f. it made the time pass quickly
- g. the master forced them to sing
- h. they hated slavery and wanted it to end

### CHAPTER III

#### ATTENTION

In this chapter, slaves are careful about what they do or say. Severe punishments often forced slaves to lie about their condition.

Colonel Lloyd kept a large and well cultivated garden containing lots of fruits of almost every description from the hardy apple of the North to the delicate orange of the South. As a result, the garden created a great deal of trouble. Scarcely a day passed where a hungry slave was not whipped for stealing fruit. Finally, the colonel had to tar the fence that ran around the garden. Thenceforth, any slave found with tar upon his person was considered guilty of stealing or trying to steal the fruit

and was severely whipped by the chief gardener. Slaves became afraid of tar as much as the whip.

The colonel also kept a fine stable under the care of two slaves, father and son, by the names of old Barney and young Barney. Their only job was to take care of the stable and the horses. However, it was not an easy job as Colonel Lloyd demanded absolute perfection when it came to his horses. The slightest inattention to these animals resulted in punishment—no excuse could shield them. They never knew when they were safe from punishment. They were frequently whipped when least deserving of punishment and escaped whipping when most deserving it. If a horse did not move fast enough, or hold his head high enough, it was owing to some fault of old Barney and young Barney.

Colonel Lloyd complained, "This horse has not had proper attention. He has not been sufficiently rubbed and curried, or he has not been properly fed; his food was too wet or too dry; he got it too soon or too late; he was too hot or too cold; he had too much hay, and not enough grain; or he had too much grain, and not enough hay."

To all of these complaints, a slave must not defend himself. When Colonel Lloyd spoke, a slave must stand, listen, and tremble. I have seen Colonel Lloyd make old Barney, a man between fifty and sixty years of age, uncover his bald head, kneel down upon the cold, damp ground, and receive upon his naked shoulders more than thirty lashes. All of Colonel Lloyd's family lived at the Great House Farm and enjoyed the luxury of whipping the servants when they pleased.

Colonel Lloyd was rich. He kept from ten to fifteen house servants. He was said to have owned a thousand slaves. In fact, he owned so many, he did not know them when he saw them. One story had him riding down the road where he met a black man and called out to him in the usual manner.

"Well, boy, whom do you belong?" asked the Colonel.

"To Colonel Lloyd," replied the slave, not knowing who he was talking to.

"Well, does the Colonel treat you well?"

"No, sir," was the reply.

"What, does he work you too hard?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, don't he give you enough to eat?"

"Yes, sir, he gives me enough, such as it is."

After, the Colonel figured out where the slave belonged. Two or three weeks later, the slave was told by his overseer that for having found fault with his master, Colonel Lloyd, he was to be sold to a Georgia trader. He was immediately chained and handcuffed, separated from his family and friends, and sent off. This is the penalty for telling the simple truth in answer to a series of plain questions.

As a result of these punishments, when slaves are asked their opinions about their masters, they almost always say they are happy and that their masters are kind. Slaveholders have been known to send in spies among their slaves to discover the views and feelings of their slaves about their condition. This has had the effect of slaves keeping the truth quiet to avoid the punishments for being honest.

### REVIEW FOR UNDERSTANDING

12. Why did slaves come to fear tar on the plantation?

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13. To avoid punishment for telling the truth, slaves learned to:

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(write the word in the blank above)

### CHAPTER IV

#### 8. ATTENTION

In this chapter, Douglass shows the ease with which whites could commit crimes without punishment against slaves.

Mr. Hopkins remained only a short time as overseer. Why, I do not know, but it is possible that he lacked the necessary cruelty to make Colonel Lloyd happy. Next, came Mr. Austin Gore, a man possessing all of those traits of character to make him a first-rate overseer. Mr. Gore was proud, ambitious, and persevering. He was also cruel. He was one of those who could torture at the slightest look, word, or gesture on the part of a slave. Mr. Gore acted on the old saying: "It is better that a dozen slaves be whipped than admit an overseer made

a mistake." Mr. Gore was a serious man; he told no jokes, said no funny words, and seldom smiled. He spoke only to command and committed the grossest and most savage deeds upon the slaves under his watch.

Mr. Gore once started to whip a slave named Demby. He had only given a few lashes when Demby ran and jumped into the creek refusing to get out. Mr. Gore told him that he would give him three calls, and that, if he did not come out at the third call, he would shoot him. The first call was given. Demby made no move. The second and third calls were given and Demby stood still. Mr. Gore then, without hesitation, raised his musket, took deadly aim at Demby, and in an instant Demby was no more. His mangled body sank out of sight and blood and brains marked the water where he had stood.

Mr. Gore was asked by Colonel Lloyd why he resorted to this extraordinary action. His reply was that Demby had become unmanageable. He argued that if one slave refused to be corrected, and escaped with his life, the other slaves would soon do the same. In the end, it would be the freedom of the slaves and the enslavement of the whites. Colonel Lloyd seemed satisfied with the answer. Mr. Gore's horrible crime was not even investigated by the authorities since it was only witnessed by the slaves and they could not sue or testify against him.

I say that killing a slave or any black person in Talbot County, Maryland, is not treated as a crime, either by the courts or the community. Mr. Thomas Lanman, of St. Michael's, killed two slaves, one of whom he killed with a hatchet by knocking his brains out. He used to brag about the awful and bloody deed.

Colonel Lloyd's slaves were in the habit of spending a part of their nights and Sundays fishing for oysters, and in this way made up for the lack of food they received. An old man belonging to Colonel Lloyd, while fishing, happened to get beyond the limits of Colonel Lloyd's property and entered the property of Mr. Beal Bondly. For this, Mr. Bondly took offence, and with his musket came down to the shore, and shot the poor old man.

Mr. Bondly came over to see Colonel Lloyd the next day, whether to pay him for his property, or to justify himself in what he had done, I do not know. At any rate, this whole incident was kept quiet. Very little was ever said about it and nothing ever done.

### REVIEW FOR UNDERSTANDING

14. In the boxed text, underline or highlight the sentence that explains why whites fear the slaves.
15. What rights did slaves or African Americans have? (circle one, infer)
  - a. the same as white Southerners
  - f. almost as many rights as white Southerners
  - g. few or no rights
  - h. equal rights in the courts only

### CHAPTER V

#### 9. ATTENTION

In this chapter, Douglass leaves the plantation where he spent most of his childhood. Read to find out what caused this change.

My own treatment on Colonel Lloyd's plantation was similar to the other slave children. I was not old enough to work in the field so I had a great deal of play time. The most I had to do was drive up the cows in the evening, keep the birds out of the garden, keep the front yard clean, and run errands for my old master's daughter, Mrs. Lucretia Auld. Most of my free time, I spent in helping Master Daniel Lloyd in finding his birds after he shot them. My connection with Master Daniel was an advantage for me. He became very attached to me and

became a sort of protector of me. He would not allow the older boys to pick on me.

I was seldom whipped by my old master and suffered little from any thing else than hunger and cold. I suffered a lot from hunger but much more from cold. In the hottest summer and coldest winter, I was kept almost naked—no shoes, no stockings, no jacket, no trousers—nothing on but a coarse linen shirt reaching only down to my knees. I had no bed. To avoid dying from the cold, I stole a bag used to carry corn to the mill and crawled into the bag with my head in and feet out. My feet became cracked with the frost.

Children were not given regular food amounts. Our food was coarse corn meal boiled. This was called mush. It was put in a large wooden tray and set upon the ground. Then the children were called, like so many pigs, and like pigs they would come and eat the mush. Some used oyster shells, others pieces of a shingle, some with naked hands, and none with spoons. He that ate the fastest, got the most; he that was the strongest got the best place; and few left the tray satisfied.

I was probably between seven and eight years old when I left Colonel Lloyd's plantation. I left it with joy. My old master, Anthony, decided to let me go to Baltimore to live with Mr. Hugh Auld, brother to my old master's son-in-law, Captain Thomas Auld.

The ties that ordinarily bind children to their homes did not exist for me. My home was charmless. On leaving, I could not feel that I was leaving anything which I could have enjoyed by staying. My mother was dead, my grandmother lived far off, so I seldom saw her. I had two sisters and one brother that lived in the same house with me, but the separation of my mother early on in my life also ruined the relationship with them. I looked for home elsewhere.

We sailed out of Miles River for Baltimore on a Saturday morning. I remember only the day of the week, for at that time I had no knowledge of the days of the month or the months of the year.

We arrived at Baltimore early on Sunday morning. I was taken by Rich, one of the sailors on the ship, to my new home on Alliciana Street near Mr. Gardner's shipyard. Mr. and Mrs. Auld were both at home and met me at the door with their little son Thomas. I was told it was my job to take care of little Thomas. I considered this job far better than anything that I did at the plantation.

### REVIEW FOR UNDERSTANDING

16. Where did Frederick Douglass end up moving to? (circle one)
- a. New York
  - f. Richmond
  - g. Baltimore
  - h. St. Michael's

### CHAPTER VI

#### 10. ATTENTION

In this chapter, Douglass' life changes dramatically. Read to find out how.

My new mistress proved to be a woman of the kindest heart and finest feelings. She never had a slave before and knew little about the institution. She was so good, I hardly knew how to behave around her.

Soon after I moved in with the Aulds, she began to teach me the ABCs. Then she began instructing me in learning to spell words of three or four letters. It was at this point Mr. Auld found out what was going on and immediately told Mrs. Auld to stop teaching me. He told her, among other things, that it was illegal and unsafe to teach a slave to read.

"A slave should know nothing but to obey his master," he said, "to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best slave in the world. If you teach that slave how to read, there would be no keeping him. He would at once become unmanageable and of no value to his master. It could do him no good but a great deal of harm. It would make him unhappy."

It was at that instant I realized what allowed the white man to enslave the black man. I now understood the pathway from slavery to freedom. Even though I no longer had a teacher, I had learned enough. I now had a purpose, and at whatever cost, I was going to teach myself to read. For Mr. Auld knew what he was saying. If he saw something was a great evil, to be carefully shunned<sup>2</sup>, then to me it was a great good. In learning to read, I owe almost as much to the bitter opposition of my master, as to the kindly aid of my mistress.

I quickly noticed the difference in the treatment of slaves in cities like Baltimore than on the plantations of the country. A city slave is almost a freeman compared to the slave on the plantation. He is much better fed and clothed. However, there are some painful exceptions to this rule. Mr. Thomas Hamilton, who lived on Philpot Street, owned two slaves. Their names were Henrietta, aged 22, and

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<sup>2</sup> shunned: to exclude or avoid someone or something.

Mary, aged 14. Of all the mangled and withered creatures I ever looked upon, these two were the worst. The head, neck, and shoulders of Mary were literally cut to pieces by the lashes of her cruel mistress, Mrs. Hamilton. I have witnessed her whipping both girls daily, often drawing blood.

“Take that,” she said, hitting the girls with a cowskin whip. “If you don’t move faster, I’ll move you!”

Added to the cruel lashings, both girls were kept nearly half-starved. They seldom knew what it was like to eat a full meal.

### REVIEW FOR UNDERSTANDING

17. Why might it be unsafe to teach slaves to read? (infer)
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
18. What did Frederick Douglass see as the path to freedom? (circle one)
- a. running fast
  - f. lying to his master
  - g. earning money
  - h. learning to read

### CHAPTER VII

#### 11. ATTENTION

Douglass learns to read and his thoughts turn to changing his current situation. Read to find out how reading changes his life.

I lived in Mr. Auld’s family about seven years. My mistress was at first, a kind woman who knew little of slavery. She treated me as any human being would treat another human being, but once her husband had instructed her that treating a slave as an equal was wrong and dangerous, her behavior began to change. Her heart turned to stone and her soft qualities gave way to a tiger-like fierceness. Slavery had caused as much damage to her as it did to the slave. The first step in her downward course was in her ceasing to instruct me.

Nothing seemed to make her more angry than seeing me with a newspaper. Many times she rushed at me with a face made all up of fury and snatched a newspaper from me. She had learned that education and slavery were incompatible with each other.

To continue my education, I began making friends of all the little white boys whom I met in the street. As many of these as I could, I converted into teachers. With their kindly aid, obtained at different times and in different places, I finally succeeded in learning to read. When I was sent on errands, I always took my book with me. By completing the errand quickly, I found time to get a lesson before my return. I used to take bread with me and give to the poor white children in the neighborhood in exchange for the bread of knowledge. I will not mention their names as it is an unpardonable crime to teach slaves to read in this Christian country.

I was now about twelve years old, and the thought of being a slave for life began to bother me a lot. Just about this time, I got hold of a book titled “The Columbian Orator.” Every opportunity I got, I used to read this book. In one part of the book, a conversation occurred between a master and his slave. The slave had run away three times. Yet the slave said many smart things to defend himself. His master finally freed his slave. The moral I learned from this was the power that truth had over others—even a slaveholder. I learned to argue against slavery and for human rights. Yet, the more I read, the more I hated my masters. I could see them only as a band of successful robbers who had left their homes, gone to Africa, and stolen us from *our* homes, and in a strange land brought us into slavery.

Just as Mr. Auld said, I felt tormented. I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. Reading gave me a view of my terrible condition. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but offered no ladder to get out. At times I regretted my own existence and wished myself dead. Except for the hope of being free, I believe I would have killed myself or done something for which I should have been killed.

## REVIEW FOR UNDERSTANDING

19. How did Frederick Douglass learn to read?

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### 12. ATTENTION

Douglass continues to improve himself while thoughts of running away continue. Read to see how Douglass continues his education.

I have heard the word “abolition” but did not know its meaning. Until I got one of our city papers containing a story of a number of petitions from the North praying for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia and of the slave trade between the States. From this time, I understood the words abolition and abolitionist. Whenever the word was spoken, I drew near to hear more.

One day I went down on the wharf and saw two Irishmen unloading a scow<sup>3</sup> of stone. Without being asked, I helped the men finish their work.

“Are you a slave?” asked one.

“I am,” I said.

“Are you a slave for life?”

“I am.”

Both men said it was a shame that someone as good as myself should be a slave. They both told me to runaway to the North. I pretended not to be interested in what they said for fear they might be trying to trap me. White men have been known to encourage slaves to escape, catch them, and return them to their masters for the reward. Nonetheless, I remembered what they told me. I was too young at the time to runaway, and I still wanted to learn how to write.

I learned to write by challenging the local boys. When I met with any boy who I knew could write, I would tell him I could write as well as he.

“I don’t believe you,” the boys always challenged. “Let me see you try it.”

I would then make the letters which I had been so fortunate to learn and ask him to beat that. In this way, I got a good many lessons in writing. During this time, my workbook was the board fence, brick wall, and pavement. My pen was a lump of chalk.

When Thomas went to school, he began bringing workbooks home. When everyone was gone and I was put in charge of the house, I used to write over Thomas’ workbook, copying what he had written. After many years and great effort, I finally succeeded in learning how to write.

## REVIEW FOR UNDERSTANDING

20. Using the context from the text, what does the word *abolition* mean? (circle one)
- a. to start over
  - f. to end slavery
  - g. to rise up
  - h. to rebel

## CHAPTER VIII

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<sup>3</sup> scow: a boat for transporting goods.

### 13. ATTENTION

Once again, events beyond Douglass' control create changes in his life. Read to see what those events are.

In a very short time after I went to live at Baltimore, my old master's youngest son Richard died, and about three and a half years later, my old master Captain Anthony died leaving only his son Andrew and daughter Lucretia to inherit his estate. Since there was no will, it was necessary to value all of Captain Anthony's possessions so that it could be equally divided between the two surviving children. I was immediately sent for to be valued with the other

property. I hated slavery.

I left Baltimore and arrived at the place near my birth in about twenty-four hours. I had been gone for five years and was now about ten or eleven years old.

We were all ranked together at the valuation. Men and women, old and young, married and single, were ranked with horses, sheep, and pigs. There were horses and men, cattle and women, pigs and children, all being treated as equals in the examination. At this moment, I saw more clearly than ever the brutalizing effects of slavery upon both the slave and slaveholder.

After the valuation, then came the division. I have no words to express the excitement and nervousness that all of us slaves felt. Our fate for life was now going to be decided, and we had no more voice in that decision than the animals among whom we were ranked. A single word from the white men was enough—against all our wishes, prayers, and begging—to be torn from our dearest friends.

In addition to the pain of separation, there was the dread of falling into the hands of Master Andrew. He was known to all of us as being a most cruel man, a common drunkard, who had already wasted most of his father's property.

I suffered greater nervousness than most of my fellow slaves, for I knew what it was like to be kindly treated—they knew nothing of the kind. The thought of passing into the hands of Master Andrew—a man who but a few days before, to give me a sample of his bloody disposition, took my little brother by the throat, threw him on the ground, and with the heel of his boot stamped upon his head till the blood gushed from his nose and ears. After he had committed this savage outrage upon my brother, he turned to me and said that was the way he meant to serve me one of these days—meaning, I suppose, when I came into his possession.

Fortunately, I fell into the hands of Mrs. Lucretia and was sent immediately back to Baltimore to live again in the family of Master Hugh. I had escaped a fate worse than a lion's jaws.

Soon after, Mrs. Lucretia died and soon after, Master Andrew died. Yet, none of their slaves were freed. Now all the property of my old master was in the hands of strangers.

Two years later, another great change occurred. Master Hugh took to drinking brandy and slavery greatly hardened his once kind wife. Then, an argument occurred between Master Hugh and his brother, Master Thomas, Mrs. Lucretia's surviving husband and my current owner. As punishment, Master Thomas took me from Master Hugh to live with him at St. Michael's. Master Thomas said that I would never return to Baltimore. I hated myself for not running away as it was easier to escape from the city than from the country.

I traveled in a ship for St. Michael's, but instead of traveling south, we went north-east. Hopes for an escape rose and I determined that when the opportunity came, I would be off.

### REVIEW FOR UNDERSTANDING

21. After Lucretia died, where did Frederick Douglass end up going to live? (circle one)
  - a. Baltimore
  - g. St. Michael's
  - h. Richmond
  - m. New York

**14. ATTENTION**

Douglass begins to resist his master. Read to see what this leads to.

I have reached a period of my life when I can give dates. I left Baltimore to live with Master Thomas Auld at St. Michael's in March 1832. It was now more than seven years since I lived with him on Colonel Lloyd's plantation. We were now almost complete strangers. I was ignorant of his temper and he was ignorant of mine. In a very short time, we knew each other. I met his wife who

was much like him—equally mean and cruel.

For the first time in seven years, I knew hunger. There were four of us: my sister Eliza, my aunt Priscilla, Henny, and myself. We were given only small amounts of cornmeal each week and very little else. It was not enough to live on. We had to beg our neighbors for food and steal food when necessary while our masters had plenty of food in their house that they gave thanks to God for each morning.

I know of not a single noble act ever performed by my master. He was mean and like most mean men, he was unable to hide it. He got his slaves through marriage; he was not born a slaveholder. These men are the worst. He was cruel but cowardly; he commanded without firmness; in the enforcement of his rules, he was at times strict and at times lax. At times, he spoke to his slaves with the firmness of Napoleon and the fury of a demon; at other times, he sounded like he was lost and uncertain. He was a slave holder without the ability to hold slaves. He found himself incapable of managing his slaves either by force, fear, or pretending.

In August 1832, Master Thomas attended a Methodist camp and experienced religion. I hoped that it would lead him to emancipate his slaves or, at least, make him kinder. I was disappointed. In fact, he became more cruel and hateful in all his ways as he found religion supported his slaveholding cruelty. As an example, I have seen him tie up a lame young woman and whip her with a heavy cowskin upon her shoulders, causing the warm red blood to drip while he quoted this passage of Scripture: "He that knoweth his master's will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes."

His cruelty toward Henny was due to her injuries. When a little child, she fell into a fire losing the use of her hands. So, she was a bill of expense to Master Thomas. Finally, he freed her to take care of herself. Here was a religious man keeping the mother but sending out the daughter to starve and die.

Master Thomas and I had a number of differences. He said city life had ruined me. One of my greatest faults was letting his horse run away to his father-in-law's farm about five miles away. Then I had to go after it and bring it back. Of course I did this because I could always get something to eat when I was there. I never left his father-in-law's farm hungry. Master Thomas said he would stand it no longer.

I had lived with him nine months, during which time he had given me a number of severe whippings. He was determined to break me. For this purpose, he gave me to a man, Edward Covey, for one year. Mr. Covey was a poor man, a tenant farmer. He rented the place he lived on and worked the farm himself. He had developed a reputation for breaking young slaves, and it was a very valuable reputation to him, for he got slaves from slaveholders for a year to work on his farm. He was also a high-ranking member of the Methodist Church which added to his reputation.

I knew of his reputation, but I believed that at least I would get enough to eat and that meant a lot to a hungry man.

(see next page for Review Questions)

**REVIEW FOR UNDERSTANDING**

22. Read the boxed text and underline or

highlight the words that describe Thomas Auld.

23. What does Frederick Douglass say that religion does to Master Thomas? (circle one)
- a. Thomas frees some of his slaves
  - f. Thomas becomes a better person
  - g. Thomas becomes more cruel
  - h. Thomas gives his farm to charity
24. What does the underlined word *breaking* mean? (circle one)
- a. to rebel against someone
  - f. to teach farm skills to someone
  - g. to destroy a person's will to resist
  - h. to kill someone

## CHAPTER X

### 15. ATTENTION

Douglass suffers under a man determined to break him. Read to find out what happens.

I went to live with Mr. Covey on January 1, 1833. I was now, for the first time in my life, a field worker. I was at my new home for only a week before Mr. Covey gave me a very severe whipping, cutting my back and causing the blood to run and raising ridges on my back as large as my little finger.

It happened this way: Mr. Covey sent me to get a load of wood. He gave me a team of untrained oxen to pull the wagon. He said if there was a problem, hold onto the rope attached to the horns of the oxen. Well, I got to the woods without a problem but while I was loading the wood, the oxen became frightened and started to run. I grabbed hold of the rope and the oxen dragged me a considerable distance. The cart turned over and crashed into a tree. How I escaped death, I do not know.

After a long spell of effort, I succeeded in getting the cart righted, my oxen disentangled, and hooked back up to the cart. I went back to the place where I had chopped the wood and filled up the cart. I then proceeded home. Half a day had gone by. I stopped my oxen to open the woods gate, but just as I did so, before I could grab hold of the ox-rope, the oxen rushed through the gate, catching the cart between the wheel and the body of the cart, tearing it to pieces, and nearly crushing me. Thus, in one day, I narrowly escaped death twice.

On my return, I told Mr. Covey what had happened. He ordered me to return to the woods. He followed after me. Just as I got to the woods, he told me to stop the cart, and that he would teach me how to waste my time and break gates. He went to a large gum-tree and cut three large switches<sup>4</sup> with his pocket knife. He ordered me to take off my clothes.

I made no answer but stood with my clothes on. He repeated his order. I still made him no answer.

Upon this he rushed at me with the fierceness of a tiger, tore off my clothes, and lashed me till he had worn out his switches, cutting me so savagely as to leave the marks visible for a long time after. This whipping was the first of a number just like it.

I lived with Mr. Covey one year. During the first six months, hardly a week passed without his whipping me. I was seldom free from a sore back.

We were worked in all kinds of weather. It was never too hot or too cold. It could never rain, blow, hail, or snow too hard for us to work in the field. I was somewhat unmanageable when I first came to Mr. Covey, but after a few months of discipline, Mr. Covey tamed me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. The dark night of slavery closed upon me and turned me into an animal.

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<sup>4</sup> switches: a thin stick used to hit people for punishment.

Sunday was my only time off. I spent it in a sort of beast-like stupor<sup>5</sup>. At times a flash of energetic freedom would run through my soul—a beam of hope that flickered for a moment and then vanished. I sank down again, depressed over my pathetic condition. Sometimes I thought of taking my life and that of Mr. Covey’s.

That was my condition the first six months. You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man.

### REVIEW FOR UNDERSTANDING

25. How did Mr. Covey break Frederick Douglass? (circle one)
- a. Covey let Douglass do whatever he wanted
  - f. Covey whipped Douglass continuously
  - g. Covey starved Douglass
  - h. Covey shot Douglass and nearly killed him

#### 16. ATTENTION

Douglass suffers heat stroke and is severely beaten. Read to find out how he tries to get help.

On one of the hottest days of the month of August 1833, Bill Smith, William Hughes, a slave named Eli, and myself were fanning<sup>6</sup> wheat. Hughes was clearing the fanned wheat from before the fan, Eli was turning, Smith was feeding, and I was carrying wheat to the fan. The work was simple, requiring strength rather than intelligence. About three o’clock of that day, I broke down. My strength failed me. I was seized with a violent aching of the head along with extreme dizziness. I trembled in every limb. I tried to continue work, staggering to the hopper with grain, but when I could no longer stand, I fell down. All the labor came to a halt.

Upon hearing the fanning stop, Mr. Covey came to the spot where we were. He asked what was wrong. Bill answered that I was sick and there was no one to bring wheat to the fan. By this time, I had crawled to the rail fence nearby, hoping to get out of the sun. Mr. Covey asked where I was and came to the spot and, after looking at me a while, asked what was the matter. I told him as well as I could, for I barely had the strength to speak. Mr. Covey then gave me a savage kick in the side and told me to get up. I tried to do so, but fell back in the attempt. He gave me another kick and again told me to rise. I pulled myself up, staggered toward the fan, then fell back down again.

Mr. Covey took up the hickory stick that Hughes had been using, and he gave me a heavy blow upon the head, making a large wound. The blood flowed freely. Again, Mr. Covey told me to get up.

I made no effort, having now made up my mind to let him do his worst. In a short time after receiving this blow, my head got better. Mr. Covey had now left me to my fate. At this moment I decided to go to Master Thomas and complain about my condition. In order to do this, I must that afternoon walk seven miles, and under the circumstances, it was a truly severe undertaking. I was terribly weak.

However, I watched for my chance, while Covey was looking in an opposite direction, I started for St. Michael’s. I succeeded in getting a considerable distance on my way to the woods, when Covey discovered me and called for me to come back, threatening what he would do if I did not return. I ignored his calls and his threats and continued to the woods as fast as I could in my weakened condition. I had not gone far before my strength failed me. I could go no farther. I fell down and lay still for some time.

The blood was yet oozing from the wound on my head. For a time I thought I should bleed to death, but the blood so matted my hair as to stop the wound. After nearly an hour, I forced myself up

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<sup>5</sup> stupor: a lack of mental alertness like suffering from a lack of sleep.

<sup>6</sup> fanning: removing the wheat from the shaft of the stalk.

again, and started on my way, barefooted and bareheaded, tearing my feet sometimes at nearly every step. Seven miles and five hours later, I arrived at my master's store.

I was covered with blood from my head to my feet. My hair was all clotted with dust and blood; my shirt was stiff with blood. My legs and feet were torn with briars<sup>7</sup> and thorns. I told Master Thomas of my story, and it seemed, at times, to affect him. He would then pace the floor and try to justify Covey's actions by saying that I probably deserved what happened. Master Thomas said Mr. Covey would not kill me and that Covey was a good man. Finally, Master Thomas said I need to go back, come what may.

I stayed the night and went back in the morning. I reached Covey's about nine o'clock. Just as I was getting over the fence, out ran Covey with his cowskin to give me another whipping. Before he could reach me, I rushed to the cornfield where I could hide. After a while, Mr. Covey gave up and returned home, figuring that I must come home at some time to eat.

That night, I met with Sandy Jenkins, a slave who I knew somewhat. Sandy had a free wife who lived about four miles from Mr. Covey's. It being Saturday, he was on his way to see her and he very kindly invited me to go home with him. We talked the whole matter over and Sandy said that I must go back to Mr. Covey.

### REVIEW FOR UNDERSTANDING

26. What do you think Frederick Douglass wanted from Master Thomas?

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#### 17. ATTENTION

Douglass reaches his limits of tolerance. Read to see how he chooses to deal with authority.

Sunday morning I returned and out came Mr. Covey on his way to church. He spoke very kindly to me and asked that I drive the pigs from a lot nearby before he continued on to church. The day went well until Monday.

On this morning, I was told to go take care of the horses. I obeyed. But while I was rubbing down the horses, Mr. Covey entered the stable with a long rope. He surprised me and tried to bound my legs but I managed to break free, falling onto the stable floor. At this instance, Mr. Covey seemed to think he had me and could do what he pleased. But at this moment, from where I do not know, I decided to fight. I grabbed Covey hard by the throat, and as I did so, I rose. He held onto me and I on to him. My resistance was so entirely unexpected that Covey seemed surprised. He trembled like a leaf.

Mr. Covey soon called out to Hughes for help. Hughes came, and while Covey held me, Hughes attempted to tie my right hand. I gave him a heavy kick close under the ribs. This kick sickened Hughes and he left me in the hands of Covey, who was now losing his courage.

Covey asked me if I intended to continue my resistance and I answered, yes, come what might. He had used me like a brute for six months and I was determined to be used no longer. With that, Covey tried to drag me to a stick that was lying just outside the stable door. He wanted to knock me down, but just as he was leaning over to get the stick, I grabbed him with both hands by his collar, and sent him down to the ground.

By this time, Bill came and Covey called upon him for help. Bill wanted to know what he could do.

Covey said, "Take hold of him! Take hold of him!"

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<sup>7</sup> briars: a plant containing thorns

Bill said his master hired him out to work and not to help to whip me. So he left Covey and myself to fight our own battle out. We were at it for nearly two hours. Covey finally let me go, puffing and blowing at a great rate, saying that if I had not fought back, he would not have whipped me so much. The truth was that Covey had not whipped me at all. I thought Covey got the worse beating, for he had drawn no blood from me, but I drew blood from him.

The whole six months afterwards that I spent with Mr. Covey, he never laid the weight of his finger upon me in anger. He would occasionally say he did not want to get hold of me again.

“No,” I thought, “you should not for you will come off worse than you did before.”

This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning point in my career as a slave. It lit the fire of freedom and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. My self-confidence returned, and it inspired me again with the determination to be free. I felt as I never felt before. It was a glorious resurrection from the tomb of slavery to the heaven of freedom. My long-crushed spirit rose, cowardice departed, bold defiance took its place, and I now determined, however long I remained a slave in name, the day had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact. I did not hesitate to let it be known of me that the white man who expected to succeed in whipping me, must also succeed in killing me.

From this time, I was never again what might be called fairly whipped, though I remained a slave four years afterwards. I had several fights but was never whipped.

For a long time, I wondered why Mr. Covey didn't have the constable<sup>8</sup> take me to the whipping post for the crime of raising my hand to a white man in defense of myself. I am not sure of the reason but I think that Mr. Covey had a reputation of being a first-rate slave-breaker. It was very important to him. That reputation was at stake. Had he sent me, a boy of about sixteen to the public whipping post, his reputation would have been lost. So, to save his reputation, he let me go unpunished.

My term of service to Mr. Edward Covey ended on Christmas day, 1833. The days between Christmas and New Year's day are allowed as holidays and we were not required to work except to feed the livestock.

### REVIEW FOR UNDERSTANDING

27. In the boxed text, underline or highlight the words that describe Frederick Douglass' feelings after resisting Covey.

28. Why do you think Mr. Covey never touched Frederick Douglass again? (infer)

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#### 18. ATTENTION

Douglass decides to become a teacher. Read to discover why Douglass thinks education is important.

On the first of January 1834, I left Mr. Covey and went to live with Mr. William Freeland, who lived about three miles from St. Michael's. Mr. Freeland was very different from Mr. Covey. Although not rich, he was what you would call an educated southern gentleman. He seemed to possess some regard for honor, some respect for justice and some respect for humanity. Mr. Freeland had many faults common to slaveholders such as being very emotional, but I must do him justice to say that he was open and honest and we always knew where to find him. My new master also made no display of religion. This, in my opinion, was truly a great advantage.

I state, without hesitation, that the religion of the South is used to hide the most horrid crimes, the most dreadful cruelty, the most hateful lies, and all the dark deeds of the slaveholders. If I were sent back into slavery, I would consider being the slave of a religious master to be the greatest disaster that could happen to me. For all of the slaveholders with whom I have ever met, religious slaveholders are

<sup>8</sup> constable: office of the law.

the worst. It was my unhappy situation to belong to a religious slaveholder, but also to live in a community of such people.

Very near Mr. Freeland lived the Rev. Daniel Weeden and Rev. Rigby Hopkins, members of the Reformed Methodist Church. Mr. Weeden owned, among others, a woman slave whose name I have forgotten. This woman's back, for weeks, was kept literally raw due to the unending whippings of this merciless, religious wretch<sup>9</sup>. His saying was "Behave well or behave ill, it is the duty of a master occasionally to whip a slave, to remind him of his master's authority." Mr. Hopkins was even worse than Mr. Weeden, as he used to whip slaves in advance of deserving it. He managed to have one or more slaves to whip every Monday morning. He did this to create fear and strike terror into those who escaped. It would astonish a person unfamiliar with slaveholding life to see with what wonderful ease a slaveholder can find excuses to whip a slave.

A mere look, word, or motion; a mistake, accident, or want of power are all matters for which a slave may be whipped at any time. Does a slave look dissatisfied? It is said that he has the devil in him and it must be whipped out. Does he speak loudly when spoken to by his master? Then he is getting independent and should be brought down. Does he forget to pull off his hat at the approach of a white person? Then he needs to learn respect and should be whipped. Does he ever try to justify his behavior when getting into trouble? Then he is guilty of disrespect—one of the greatest crimes of which a slave can be guilty of. Does he ever suggest a different way of doing things that differs from his master? He is getting above himself and must get a flogging.

Unlike Mr. Covey, Mr. Freeland gave us enough to eat and enough time to eat our meals. He worked us hard but only between sunrise and sunset. He required a good deal of work but gave us good tools with which to work. His farm was large, but he employed enough people to work it. My treatment, while working for Mr. Freeland, was heavenly compared to that of Mr. Covey.

Mr. Freeland was himself an owner of only two slaves: Henry Harris and John Harris. The rest of his slaves he hired. There was myself, Sandy Jenkins, and Handy Caldwell. Henry and John were quite intelligent and in a short while after I went there, I succeeded in getting them to want to read. The desire to read soon sprang up in the others also. Very soon they found some old spelling books and each Sunday, I taught them how to read. Slaves from other farms found out about what was going on and they wanted to learn how to read. It was understood among all who came that the public must not know about this. The people at St. Michael's thought that everyone was spending Sunday wrestling, boxing, and drinking whisky, not learning to read.

The school was held at a free man's house and I had up to forty scholars all wanting to learn. They were of all ages though mostly men and women. The work of instructing my dear fellow-slaves was the sweetest time of my life. When I think that these great people are today shut up in the prison house of slavery, I become angry. These people came to school not because it was the popular thing to do and I did not teach because it made me popular. Each person at that school risked being whipped if they were caught. They came because they wished to learn.

Their minds had been starved by their cruel masters. They had been shut up in mental darkness. I taught them because it was the delight of my soul to be doing something that bettered the condition of my race. I kept the school going nearly the whole year I was with Mr. Freeland. Several who came to the school did learn to read.

At the close of 1834, Mr. Freeland again hired me from my master for another year. However, by this time, I wanted to live on free land without a master. I was approaching manhood and I was still a slave. I decided that I must make an attempt to get my liberty. However, I was not willing to go alone without my fellow slaves who were dear friends. I talked with them and they agreed to come along with me as soon as a plan for escape was made.

## REVIEW FOR UNDERSTANDING

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<sup>9</sup> wretch: a mean person

29. Why did slaves want to learn how to read? (circle one)
- a. slaves wished to learn
  - f. slaves were force to read
  - g. slaves wanted to improve their working skills
  - h. slaves hoped to make money

**19. ATTENTION**

Douglass' plans for escape fall apart. Read to see what happens.

The path to freedom has so many obstacles. If we gained our freedom, could we keep it? We could still be returned to slavery. We could see no spot this side of the ocean where we could be free. We knew nothing about Canada and our knowledge of the north did not go beyond New

York. And if we were caught and sent back, our treatment would be ten times worse than it is now.

As we sometimes saw it, it seemed like at every gate there was a watchman, at every river crossing a guard, on every bridge a soldier, and in every wood a patrol. We were surrounded. On the one hand, slavery was cruel and eating us alive. On the other hand, away back in the dim distance, flickering under the light of the north star, doubtful freedom was calling to us. In deciding to run away, we did more than Patrick Henry when he chose liberty or death. With us, it was doubtful liberty at most and almost certain death if we failed. For my part, I prefer death to hopeless slavery.

Sandy gave up but still encouraged us to continue. Our group was made up of Henry Harris, John Harris, Henry Bailey, Charles Roberts, and myself. Finally, our plan was to get a large canoe and, on Saturday night before the Easter holidays, paddle directly up the Chesapeake Bay. After about seventy or eighty miles from where we lived, we would set the canoe adrift and walk in the direction of the north star until we got out of Maryland.

We believed that taking the water route would make us less liable to be suspected as runaways. A week before our start, I wrote several letters, one for each of us. They said:

**This is to certify that I, the undersigned, have given the bearer, my servant, full liberty to go to Baltimore, and spend the Easter holidays. Written with mine own hand, &c., 1835.**

**William Hamilton, Near St. Michael's, in Talbot county, Maryland.**

Although we were not going to Baltimore, we were going toward Baltimore and these protections were only intended to protect us while on the bay. I was, by the agreement of the others, at the head of the whole affair. The responsibility of success or failure lay upon me.

The morning of our escape, we went into the fields as usual. We were spreading manure and all at once, I was overwhelmed with a terrible feeling.

I turned to Sandy who was standing nearby and said, "We are betrayed!"

"Well," he said, "that thought has this moment struck me."

We said no more. I was never more certain of anything.

The horn was blown as usual and we went up from the field to the house for breakfast. Just as I got to the house, out at the land gate, I saw four white men with two black men. The white men were on horseback and the black men walking behind them as if tied. I watched them a few moments till they got up to our lane gate. Here they halted and tied the black men to the gate-post. I was not yet certain as to what the matter was. In a few moments, in rode Mr. Hamilton with a speed that showed great excitement. He came looking for Mr. Freeland who was in the barn. Within a few moments, he and Mr. Freeland returned to the house.

By this time, three constables<sup>10</sup> rode up in great haste and dismounted from their horses and met Mr. Freeland and Mr. Hamilton. After a quick conversation, they walked to the kitchen where John and myself were. Mr. Freeland said there were some gentlemen at the door who wished to see me.

I stepped to the door and asked what they wanted. At once they grabbed me and tied my hands up. I insisted they tell me what was happening. They said I had been in a fight and that I was to be examined by my master. If it looked like I was innocent, I would not be harmed. In a few minutes, they tied up John. They then turned to Henry and commanded him to cross his hands so that they could lash them together with rope.

“I won’t!” said Henry, in a firm tone.

“Won’t you?” said Tom Graham, one of the constables.

“No, I won’t.”

With this, two of the constables pulled out their pistols and warned him that if he did not cross his hands, they would kill him. Each cocked his pistol and walked up to Henry.

“If you don’t cross your hands, we’ll blow your heart out,” they warned.

“Shoot me, shoot me!” said Henry. “You can only kill me once. Shoot. Shoot. I won’t be tied!”

As Henry said this, he knocked the pistols from each of the constable’s hands in a lightning move. The constables fell on him, beating Henry for some time before finally overpowering him.

While this was going on, I managed to get my pass out without being discovered and dropped it into the nearby fire. We were all tied now and ready to leave for the Easton jail. Then Betsy Freeland, mother of William Freeland, came to the door with biscuits and divided them between Henry and John. Then she looked at me and delivered a speech.

“You devil!” she said. “You yellow devil. It was you that put it into the head of Henry and John to run away. But for you, you long-legged devil, Henry nor John would never have thought of such a thing.”

I remained silent and was carried off to jail.

On the way, Henry asked me what he should do with his pass. I told him to eat it with his biscuit and say nothing of it. Without the pass, what could they prove? We were to be dragged fifteen miles behind horses to the Easton jail. When we reached St. Michael’s, we underwent an examination. We all denied that we ever intended to run away. We were prepared for anything but what we feared more than anything—even death—was being separated.

### REVIEW FOR UNDERSTANDING

30. Do you think Frederick Douglass is the only one who should take the blame for being caught? Yes / No because...

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31. What do you think will happen to Frederick Douglass and the others? (predict)

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#### 20. ATTENTION

Douglass has an uncertain future. Read to find out what happens to him.

Finally, we were sent off to the Easton jail. When we got there, we were given over to the sheriff, Mr. Joseph Graham. Henry, John, and myself were placed in one room together. Charles and Henry Bailey were put in another room to prevent us from all talking together.

We were not in jail for more than twenty minutes when a swarm of slave

<sup>10</sup> constable: an officer of the law.

traders and agents for slave traders flocked into the jail to look at us to see if we were for sale. Such a set of beings I never saw before. I felt myself surrounded by so many fiends from hell. They laughed at us and smiled, saying “Ah, my boys! We have got you, haven’t we?” They asked us questions trying to figure out our value, but we refused to speak to them.

Immediately after the holidays were over, Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Freeland came up to Easton and took Charles, the two Henrys, and John out of jail and carried them home. I was left alone. I saw this separation as a final one. It caused me more pain than anything else. I suppose they believed I was the whole cause of the affair and it was hard to make the innocent suffer with the guilty. They could sell me as a warning to the others that remained.

After about a week, and much to my surprise, Captain Auld, my master came up and took me out. He sent me back to Baltimore to live again with his brother Hugh to learn a trade. Thus, after an absence of three years and one month, I was once more permitted to return to my old home at Baltimore. He sent me away because many people in the community now disliked me and he was afraid I might be killed.

A few weeks after I went to Baltimore, Master Hugh hired me to Mr. William Gardner, a ship builder on Fell’s Point. However, it was a bad time to learn a trade as Mr. Gardner was building two large man-of-war<sup>11</sup> ships for the Mexican government. Things were moving fast as Mr. Gardner was facing a deadline and had a lot of money to lose. So, my orders were to do whatever the carpenters told me to do. This put me under the command of about seventy-five men. At times I needed a dozen pair of hands. I was called a dozen ways in the space of a single minute.

“Fred, come help me to cant this timber here.”

“Fred, come carry this timber yonder.”

“Fred, come help saw off the end of this timber.”

“Fred, go get a fresh can of water.”

“Fred, go to the blacksmith’s shop and get a new punch.”

“Hurry Fred! Run and bring me a cold chisel.”

“Come, come! Move, move! Come here, go there!”

This was my school for eight months. I might have remained there longer except for the horrific fight I had with four of the white apprentices<sup>12</sup> in which my left eye was nearly knocked out.

The facts are these: shortly after I went to work there, white and black ship carpenters worked side by side and no one seemed to have any problem with it. All of a sudden the white workers stopped working and said they would not work with free black men. Their argument was that if free black men continued to work there, they would take over the trade and put the poor white men out of work. I was not a free black man but the situation carried over to me as well. The white apprentices said it was degrading to be working with me. They bullied me around and sometimes hit me. Of course I fought back and licked each one, but when they grouped together and came at me with sticks, stones, and heavy handspikes I was overwhelmed.

One, coming up from behind, hit me on the head with a handspike. It stunned me and I fell down. They rushed on top of me, beating me with their fists. In an instant, I gave a sudden push and rose to my hands and knees. Just then, one of them kicked me in the left eye with his boot. My eyeball seemed to have burst. When they saw my eye closed and badly swollen, they left me. With this, I grabbed a handspike and started to chase them, but gave up. All the while, not one of fifty carpenters who witnessed this said a kind word to me, but many cried out, “Kill him! He hit a white person.” I found my only chance for life was in running, for to strike a white man is punishable by death according to the Lynch<sup>13</sup> Law. I got away without any further injury.

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<sup>11</sup> man-of-war: battleship.

<sup>12</sup> apprentice: a person learning a trade or skill such as printing, carpentry, masonry, etc.

<sup>13</sup> Lynch: a form of execution by hanging the victim with a rope tied around their neck.

## REVIEW FOR UNDERSTANDING

32. Why did the white apprentices not want to work with Frederick Douglass? (circle one)
- a. racism
  - f. Douglass was a better worker
  - g. Douglass made less money
  - h. Douglass had a bad temper
33. Why do the people of the community want to kill Frederick Douglass? (evaluate)
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### 21. ATTENTION

Douglass learns a new trade and does very well at it. Read to discover what causes Douglass to think about escaping again.

I went directly home, and told the story of what happened to Master Hugh. His wife took pity on me and washed the blood from my face and bandaged my head. Master Hugh was angry at the men who did this to me. As soon as I got better, he took me to Esquire Watson's, on Bond Street, to see what could be done about the matter. Mr. Watson said that nothing could be done unless a white man came forward as a witness and testify in court. He could issue no warrant on my word. If I had been killed in the presence of a thousand black people, their testimony combined would not have been enough to arrest a single white person.

It was impossible to get any white man to testify for me. Even those who felt sorry for me would not come forward. If a white person showed sympathy toward a black person, they would be called an abolitionist and that brought all sorts of problems. If I was killed, nothing would have been done. Such was the state of things in the Christian city of Baltimore.

Master Hugh brought me to his place of work at another ship yard where he was foreman under the employment of Mr. Walter Price. There I was put to work calking<sup>14</sup> and very soon learned the art of using my mallet and irons. In one year, I earned the highest wages given to the most experienced caulkers. I was now of some importance to my master. I was bringing in six to seven dollars per week. I sometimes brought him nine dollars a week. I earned one and a half dollars a day. Soon, I worked on my own, made my own contracts, and collected money that I earned. If I could get no work, I did nothing.

It was during these times that the old ideas of freedom came back. While I was busy, I did not have time to think about freedom. I have observed this in my experience of slavery—whenever my condition improved, it only increased my desire to be free. I have found that to make a slave happy, it is necessary to make him thoughtless. It is necessary to darken his moral and mental vision and, as far as possible, to destroy the power of reason. He must be made to feel that slavery is right and that can only happen when he ceases to be a man.

I was making a dollar and fifty cents a day. I got hired, I earned it, it was paid to me, it was mine. Yet, when I returned home each night, I had to give all my money to Master Hugh. And why? Not because he earned it. Not because he had any hand in earning it. Not because I owed it to him. Nor because he possessed the slightest shadow of a right to it, but because he had the power to force me to give it up.

## REVIEW FOR UNDERSTANDING

34. Why would white people be afraid to show sympathy for African Americans?

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<sup>14</sup> caulking: to fill in the gaps between the boards of a boat to make it waterproof.

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## CHAPTER XI

### 22. ATTENTION

Douglass begins to lay his plans for escape. Read to discover what Douglass does to fool his master while he plans his own escape.

I now come to the part of my life where I planned and finally succeeded in making my escape from slavery. I must say, before I continue, that I cannot state all of the facts of my escape as it would get other people into trouble and it might help slaveholders stop other escapes similar to mine.

I have never approved of the way some of the abolitionists have publicly discussed the underground railroad<sup>15</sup>. Their public bragging has made it more of an upperground railroad. I appreciate these people who risk their lives to free slaves from the South, however, I can see very little good it does themselves or the slaves escaping. Openly talking about the underground railroad does not enlighten or help the slave, but it does give information to the master so he can take action to capture his slave. While helping the slave escape to the north, we should be careful not to help the master in the south.

In the early part of 1838, I became very restless. I saw no reason to keep giving the money of my labor to my master. Each time I gave him the money, he looked at me with suspicion and asked, “Is this all?” He wanted nothing less than every cent I made. Sometimes, when I made six dollars, he would give me six cents to encourage me. It had the opposite effect. I thought if I deserved six cents, I deserved all of the money. I felt guilty for taking anything from him as I feared it might ease his conscience and make him feel like he was doing something nice for me by being an honorable robber.

In the spring of 1838, when Master Thomas came to Baltimore to purchase his spring goods, I asked him to let me hire myself out to others. Without hesitation he refused. He said it sounded like another attempt to escape. There was no where I could run where he could not catch me, he said. He told me, if I would be happy, he would take care of me. Do not think of the future and rely upon him for happiness. In spite of him, I continued to think of escape.

Two months later, I asked Master Hugh if I could hire myself out—he was unaware that I had asked Master Thomas earlier and been refused. At first, Master Hugh said no, but then after thinking it over, he agreed but upon the following terms: I had to pay him three dollars a week, pay for my own tools, clothing, rent, and food. These expenses came to about six dollars a week. If I could not pay, I lost my freedom to hire myself out. This worked in my master’s favor as he no longer needed to look after me. He got all of the benefits of slaveholding without its evils while I suffered all the evils of slavery and the problems of a freeman.

I worked at any time, day or night. I was determined to make money. I made enough to meet my expenses and save a little each week. I went on like this from May until August. Unfortunately, I was stuck working on a job an extra day and returned home a day late. Master Hugh was furious. He threatened to give me a whipping for leaving the city. I told him that I went to work where ever I could find it, I paid him his three dollars, I was unaware that I had to tell him everywhere I went. My reply troubled him and he said I could no longer hire out my time because at some point I was going to run away.

For the next week, out of spite, I did no labor at all. On Saturday night, he asked me for his three dollars and I said I did not have it. At this point, we were ready to come to blows. He yelled and cursed and threatened to get a hold of me. I said nothing in return, but if he laid a hand on me, I was

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<sup>15</sup> underground railroad: a loose organization of abolitionists who secretly helped slaves escape to the North.

determined to fight back. He did not hit me, but he told me that I needed to be in constant employment. I thought about it the next day and finally decided that on September 3, I would make my second attempt to escape.

I had three weeks to prepare. Before Master Hugh could get me work, I found employment at Mr. Butler's shipyard near the drawbridge upon what is called the City Block. The first week I brought Master Hugh between eight and nine dollars. He was very pleased. Little did he know about my plans to flee. My intent was to work steadily to remove any suspicion he might have of my intent to run away. The second week I gave him my full wages and he was so pleased, he gave me twenty-five cents and told me to make good use of it. I told him I would.

However, as the time to leave drew near, I felt depressed at having to leave my friends behind. It is my opinion that thousands would escape from slavery except they do not wish to be separated from their friends. In addition to the separation, the fear of getting caught bothered me. If I was caught again, it would seal my fate as a slave forever. I would suffer the greatest punishment and be put somewhere beyond the means of escape. For me, it was life and death.

### REVIEW FOR UNDERSTANDING

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|---|---|
| 35. Why did Frederick Douglass suddenly start working more jobs? (circle one) | 36. What bothered Frederick Douglass about escaping? (circle two) |
| a. he wanted to make a lot of money   | a. leaving his friends behind                                     |
| f. he was bored   | f. getting caught   |
| g. to fool his master   | g. losing his job   |
| h. his master told him to work more   | h. getting killed   |

#### 23. ATTENTION

Douglass makes his way to New York, but he must now survive in a strange city. Read to find out how Douglass survives.

On September 3, 1838, I left my chains and succeeded in reaching New York without any interruption. I cannot state how I made it to New York as it would alert the slaveholders and possibly prevent other slaves from doing the same.

I have often been asked how I felt when I found myself in a free State. I have never been able to answer that question with any satisfaction to myself. It was the moment of the highest excitement I ever experienced.

In writing a letter to a dear friend, immediately after my arrival at New York, I said I felt like one who had escaped a den of hungry lions. But the moment passed and I was filled with insecurity and loneliness. I could still be taken back and put to all the tortures of slavery. This was enough to squash my excitement. There I was, in the midst of thousands, and yet a perfect stranger without a home and without friends.

I was afraid to speak to anyone about my condition for fear of speaking to the wrong people and falling into the hands of money-loving kidnappers who would take me back to slavery. I knew I must trust no man. In every white man I saw an enemy, and in almost every black man I saw a reason to distrust him. It was a most painful situation and to understand it, one must experience it.

To be in a situation without home or friends, without money or credit, wanting shelter and no one to give it, wanting bread and no money to buy it, and at the same time feel that he is pursued by merciless men hunters. Let a person be placed in this most difficult situation—the situation I was placed in—then and not till then will a person fully appreciate the hardships of and know how to sympathize with the work-worn and whip-scarred fugitive slave.

Thank Heaven I remained in this situation for only a short time. I was saved by the hand of Mr. David Ruggles whose kindness I shall never forget. I wish to express, as far as words can, the love and gratitude I owe him. Mr. Ruggles is now suffering from blindness and is himself in the need of help he so often gave to others.

I was in New York for a few days when Mr. Ruggles sought me out and took me to his boarding house at the corner of Church and Lespenard Streets. Mr. Ruggles was then very busy with the Darg case, as well as working with a number of other fugitive slaves, creating ways for their successful escape. Although there were many working against him, he was more than a match for his enemies.

Soon after I went to Ruggles, he wanted to know where I wanted to go as he said it was unsafe for me to remain in New York. I thought of going to Canada, but he decided against it. He suggested I go to New Bedford instead, thinking I should be able to get work there. At this time, Anna, my intended wife, made her appearance. I wrote to her immediately after my arrival at New York and informed her of my successful escape and asked that she join me. In a few days after her arrival, Mr. Ruggles called in the Rev. J.W.C. Pennington who performed the wedding ceremony.

Mr. Ruggles gave me a letter to a Mr. Shaw in Newport and told me to see this man if I ran out of money. He would help. We arrived in Newport and were anxious to get a place of safety. We were directed to the house of Mr. Nathan Johnson who kindly received us. Both Mr. and Mrs. Johnson took a deep concern for our well-being. They proved they were worthy of the title of abolitionists. When we could not pay the fee for the stage ride, Mr. Johnson immediately paid the expense.

We began to feel safe to some degree and prepared for a life of freedom. On the morning after our arrival at New Bedford, while at the breakfast table, the question came up as to what name I should be called. The name given me by my mother was Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey. I had gotten rid of the two middle names long ago so that I was generally known as Frederick Bailey. I left Baltimore using the last name of Stanley and used the last name of Johnson when I reached New York. When I got to New Bedford, there were so many Johnsons, it got to be confusing. I told Mr. Johnson he should choose a last name for me. Mr. Johnson had just been reading the "Lady of the Lake" and at once suggested the name Douglass. From that time until now, I have been called Frederick Douglass.

### REVIEW FOR UNDERSTANDING

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|--|--|
| 37. Who helped Frederick Douglass survive in the North? (circle two) | 38. The people who helped Frederick Douglass could best be described as what? (circle one) |
| a. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson  | a. abolitionists   |
| f. J.W.C. Pennington   | f. slave owners  |
| g. Mr. David Ruggles   | g. Democrats   |
| h. Washington Bailey   | h. Southern supporters   |

#### 24. ATTENTION

Douglass is worried about being returned to slavery. Read to see how African Americans deal with the problem.

I was very disappointed at the appearance of things in New Bedford. The north was not what I expected it to be. While in slavery, I thought that northern people enjoyed few luxuries and comforts because they had no slaves. People in the south who owned no slaves were very poor. I somehow came to believe that without slaves, there could be no wealth. Coming north, I expected to meet a rough and unintelligent civilization. I was terribly mistaken.

In the afternoon of the day when I reached New Bedford, I visited the wharves to see the shipping. I found myself surrounded with the strongest proofs of wealth. Lying at the wharves and riding in the stream, I saw many ships of the finest model, in the best shape, and of the largest size. On the right and left, I was walled in by granite warehouses of the widest sizes that were filled to capacity with the comforts of life.

Added to this, almost everybody seemed to be at work but quietly so. There were no loud songs heard from those loading and unloading the ships. I heard no cursing. I saw no whipping of men. All seemed to go smoothly. Every man appeared to understand his work and carried out his duties with great interest as well as a sense of his own dignity as a man. To me this looked very strange. From the

wharves I saw the town—the splendid churches, beautiful homes, cultivated gardens—showing an amount of wealth, comfort, taste, and quality that I had never seen in the slaveholding part of Maryland.

Everything looked clean, new, and beautiful. I saw no broken down houses, no half-naked children and barefooted women as I used to see in Hillsborough, Easton, St. Michael’s, and Baltimore. The people looked stronger, healthier, and happier than those of Maryland. But the most astonishing as well as the most interesting thing to me was the condition of the black people. I found many who had not been out of slavery for more than seven years, living in finer houses and enjoying more of the comforts of life than the average slaveholder of Maryland. I found the black people much happier than I thought they would be. I saw among them a determination to protect each other from the blood-thirsty kidnapper.

Soon after my arrival, I was told of an incident that occurred that explained their determination. A black man and a fugitive slave did not get along with each other. One day the black man threatened the fugitive slave by saying he was going to tell the fugitive’s master where he was. Immediately a meeting was called under the notice “Business of Importance!” The black man was invited to attend. The people came at the proper time and organized the meeting by appointing a very religious old gentleman as president. He made a prayer and then looked down at the black man.

“Friends,” said the president, “we have got him here and I would recommend that you young men just take him outside the door and kill him!”

With this, a number of young men raced toward the black man who turned and ran. He has not been seen in New Bedford since. I believe there have been no more such threats and should there be hereafter, I believe death would be the punishment.

### REVIEW FOR UNDERSTANDING

39. Why do the people at the meeting want to kill the African American? (circle one)
- a. he stole money from the collection box
  - f. he might help capture a fugitive slave
  - g. he committed a crime against the city
  - h. he is a runaway slave

#### 25. ATTENTION

Douglass makes the North his new home. Read to see how Douglass becomes involved in the anti-slavery movement.

I found a job on the third day after my arrival. It was dirty and hard work for me, but I went at it with a glad heart and a willing hand. I was now my own master. It was a happy moment that could only be understood by those who had been slaves. It was the first job that I could keep what I earned.

There was no Master Hugh standing ready to rob me of the money I earned.

I tried to get a job at calking, but the white caulkers refused to work with me. So I was prepared to do any kind of work I could find. Mr. Johnson let me have his saw and wood-horse<sup>16</sup> and very soon I found plenty of work. There was no work too hard, none too dirty. I was ready to saw wood, shovel coal, carry the hod<sup>17</sup>, sweep the chimney, or roll oil casks—all of which I did for three years in New Bedford, before I became known in the anti-slavery world.

About four months after New Bedford, a young man asked me if I wanted to take the *Liberator*<sup>18</sup>. I told him I did, but I was unable to pay for it having just escaped from slavery. I did finally subscribe to it, however. The paper came and I read it from week to week. Its message stirred my soul. Its sympathy for my fellow man kept in chains—its attacks on slaveholders—its faithful exposures of

<sup>16</sup> wood-horse: a wood stand used by carpenters to cut wood

<sup>17</sup> hod: a portable trough to carry mortar or bricks

<sup>18</sup> the *Liberator*: an abolitionist newspaper published by William Lloyd Garrison

slavery—its powerful attacks upon those who supported slavery—sent a thrill of joy through my soul like I have never felt before.

I had not been a reader of the Liberator long before I got a pretty good idea of what the anti-slavery movement was about. I got involved and went to the anti-slavery meetings. I seldom had much to say at the meetings because what I wanted to say was said so much better by others. Yet, while attending an anti-slavery convention at Nantucket on August 11, 1841, I felt an urge to speak. Mr. William C. Coffin, a gentleman who had heard me speak before, urged me on.

The truth was, I felt myself a slave and the idea of speaking to white people bothered me. I spoke only a few moments when I felt a degree of freedom and then was able to say what I wanted very easily. From that time until now, I have been engaged in pleading the cause of my fellow brothers— with what success and with what devotion, I leave those acquainted with my labors to decide.

I sincerely hope that this little book may do something toward throwing light on the American slave system, and quicken the glad day that slavery will end for the millions of my brothers in chains. I faithfully rely upon the power of truth, love, and justice for the success in my humble efforts and pledge myself to abolitionism,

Frederick Douglass  
Lynn, Mass., April 28, 1845

## Appendix

I want to assure the reader that I do not oppose religion. The slaveholding religion of this land is not the same as Christianity. For between the Christianity of this land and the Christianity of Christ, there is the widest possible difference. To love one means to hate the other. I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ; therefore, I hate the corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle-taking Christianity of this land. When we have men-stealers for ministers, women-whippers for missionaries, and cradle-takers for church members, this is not Christianity.

