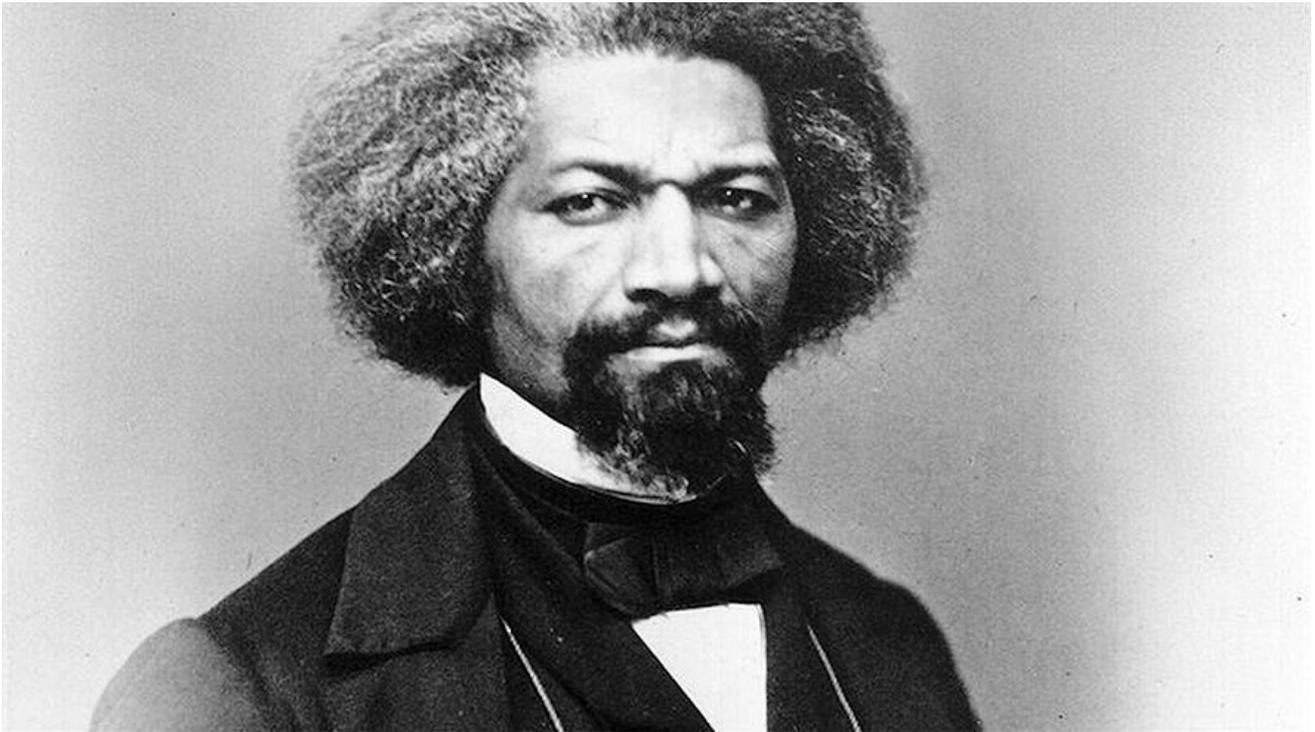


Time Machine (1895): The death of Frederick Douglass

By New York Times, adapted by Newsela staff on 06.15.16

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Frederick Douglass in the 1860s. Public Domain

This article appeared in the Feb. 20, 1895, edition of The New York Times on the day Frederick Douglass died. The article's language is typical of newspapers of the time.

Washington, Feb. 20. - Frederick Douglass dropped dead in the hallway of his residence in Anacostia Heights this evening at 7 o'clock. He had been in the highest spirits, and apparently in the best of health, despite his 78 years, when death overtook him.

This morning he was driven to Washington, accompanied by his wife. She left him at the Congressional Library, and he continued to Metzert Hall, where he attended the sessions of the Women's Council, returning to Cedar Hill, his residence, between 5 and 6 o'clock. After dining, he had a chat in the hallway with his wife about the doings of the council. He grew very enthusiastic in his explanation of one of the events of the day, when he fell upon his knees, with hands clasped.

Mrs. Douglass at first was not alarmed, but as she looked, he sank to the floor, breathing his last. Realizing that he was ill, she raised his head and then understood that he was dying. She called for help, and while Dr. J. Stewart Harrison was injecting a restorative into the patient's arm, Mr. Douglass passed away, seemingly without pain.

Mr. Douglass had lived for some time at Cedar Hill with his wife and one servant. No arrangements, according to Mrs. Douglass, would be made for his funeral until his children could be consulted.

The very last hours of Mr. Douglass' life were given to women's suffrage, one of the causes to which he has devoted his energies since his escape from slavery. Mr. Douglass was a regularly enrolled member of the National Woman's Suffrage Association, and had always attended its conventions. He was close friends with Miss Susan B. Anthony, a leader of the movement.

At tonight's meeting of the Women's Council, Mrs. May Wright Sewall announced the death of Mr. Douglass. There was a murmur expressing surprise and sympathy, and then the council settled down to the business of the evening.

Early Life, Reared In Slavery

Frederick Douglass has been often spoken of as the foremost African-American in the country. Though born and reared in slavery, he managed, through his own hard work and energy, to win for himself the respect and reverence of all fair-minded persons in this country and in Europe.

Mr. Douglass became well-known, early in his career, as an orator upon subjects relating to slavery throughout the the northern part of the United States and in England. So highly were his opinions valued that he was often consulted by President Abraham Lincoln, after the Civil War began, upon questions relating to his race. He held important government offices almost constantly from 1871 until 1891.

He was born into slavery in the year 1817 on the Eastern shore of Maryland, to an enslaved mother and a white father. When Mr. Douglass was 10, he was sent to work as a slave in a Baltimore shipyard.

Mr. Douglass suffered deeply while under the bonds of slavery, but educated himself nonetheless, learning his letters, it is said, from the carpenters' marks on planks and timbers in the shipyard. He used to listen while his mistress read the Bible, and asked her to teach him

to read it for himself. All the while he was in the shipyard he continued to pick up secretly all the information he could. It was while here, too, that he heard of the abolitionists, and he made his escape from slavery on Sept. 3, 1838, moving to New Bedford, where he married.

Working To Abolish Slavery

In 1841, he made a speech at an anti-slavery convention in Nantucket and became the agent of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. Afterward, he traveled for four years through New England, lecturing against slavery.

He went to England in 1845, where his lectures on behalf of the slave won a great deal of attention. Mr. Douglass' friends in England feared that he might be captured and forced back into slavery, and so they raised enough money so as to have him formally released.

On returning from England, Mr. Douglass founded Frederick Douglass' Paper, a weekly journal. Later, the title was changed to the North Star, and he continued its publication for several years until it was taken over by his sons.

Mr. Douglass urged upon President Lincoln, when the Civil War began, the employment of African-American troops and the proclamation of emancipation. Permission for organizing such troops was granted in 1863, and Mr. Douglass became active in enlisting men to fill the African-American regiments, notably the Fifty-fourth and the Fifty-fifth Massachusetts.

Popular Author, Lecturer

After slavery had been abolished, Mr. Douglass returned to the lecture field, attracting great crowds wherever he went. His speeches were characterized by his earnestness, and he made few gestures and used simple language.

Mr. Douglass also wrote several books that have met with considerable sale, including "Narrative of My Experience in Slavery," 1844, and "Life and Times of Frederick Douglass," 1881.

He was kindly disposed to all, courteous, and of gentle bearing, and the news of his death will meet only with genuine regret by all.

At the end of a speech he gave to a group of African-American schoolchildren, Mr. Douglass said: "What was possible for me is possible for you. Don't think because you are colored you can't accomplish anything. Strive earnestly to add to your knowledge. So long as you remain in ignorance so long will you fail to command the respect of your fellow men."