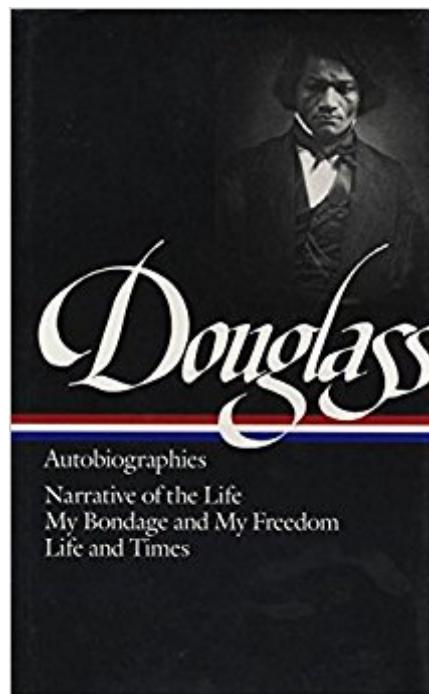


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Frederick Douglass : Autobiographies : Narrative Of The Life Of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave / My Bondage And My Freedom / Life And Times Of Frederick Douglass (Library Of America)



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Customer Reviews

Frederick Douglass (1818?-1895) was the greatest African American leader of the Nineteenth Century. He was born a slave on the Eastern Shore in Maryland and grew up on plantations on the Eastern Shore with several years in Baltimore. He was a physically powerful, highly intelligent, and spirited youth and developed quickly a hatred of the slave system. As a slave, he taught himself to read and write, and learned the art of public speaking from the church and from a book of orations popular at the time that fell into his hands. He escaped from slavery at the age of 20 and moved to New Bedford, Massachusetts. He became part of the Abolitionist Movement and achieved fame as a public speaker. He became a newspaper editor and writer. During the Civil War, he assisted in the recruitment of black troops. He met President Lincoln on several occasions and became a great admirer. In later years, Douglass was aligned with the conservative "stalwart" wing of the Republican party and continued to speak out for the rights of African-Americans, to oppose

(somewhat belatedly) the end of Reconstruction, and to work for the life of the spirit and the mind. Frederick Douglass wrote three autobiographies which are given in this volume. The first, shortest, and best was written in 1845, seven years after Douglass had escaped from slavery. It tells in graphic and unforgettable terms the story of Douglass' life as a slave, the growth of the spirit of freedom in himself, and the early part of his life as a free man in New Bedford. The second autobiography was written in 1855. It repeats much of the earlier story and describes Douglass's visit to Great Britain.

President Lincoln regarded Douglass as "one of the most meritorious men, if not the most meritorious man, in the United States". Douglass thought it grossly unfair that black Union troops were getting paid less than whites. He went to the White House and managed to meet Lincoln in private to present his argument. Lincoln agreed and told Douglass that he would sign any executive order and any other documents necessary to assure that it would be done. They became friends and, to my knowledge, he was the first black man to be invited to the White House for a social engagement. He attended the evening celebration at the White House following Lincoln's second inaugural. Douglass spent his first 20 years of life as a slave and was totally self-educated. He purchased his freedom (with some financial assistance) and wrote two best selling autobiographies before the age of 20. Thereafter, edited his own newspaper and gave brilliant orations in the days when great orators were famous. Douglass's home overlooking Washington is now an historic landmark open to the public. As an old man he sat in his rocker on the front porch and greeted an endless string of young black men asking him how they could further the civil rights movement. His only advice was to "agitate", "agitate" and "agitate". As a kid I recollect walking around with an "I Like Ike" sign. Winston Churchill was around then and was occasionally interviewed. Eleanor Roosevelt was a driving force in Adlai Stevenson's presidential campaign. We kids thought her voice was very strange. The only name for niggers was niggers, who lagged closely behind Jews and Catholics in the society from which I came. It's amazingly wonderful how much society has changed during my own lifetime. Diversity is America.

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