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Professor

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Title: History Book Review

**Part 1**

Fredrick Douglass is among the most famous black men in U.S. history known for his lifetime of struggle against slavery. He himself was a slave who escaped and lead efforts against slavery through his writings, speeches and activism, eventually becoming a key figure in the abolitionist movement. In the paper, his autobiography *The Life and Times of Fredrick Douglass* will be reviewed to explore what inspired and enables his escape from slavery and examine the ways he contributed to the abolitionist movement.

Fredrick Douglass was born in Talbot County, Maryland as a slave child to a white father. He did not know much about his father nor could count his age exactly. Slave children in his times would be separated from their mother after being born, while they would commonly be traded or sold by their fathers. The only memory Fredrick had about his mother was that she was a slave woman who would sometimes visit him late at the night. Instead, he was taken care of by his grandmother, who was a kind-hearted woman and brought him up lovingly. Douglass cherished the memories of spending time with his grandmother describing these times as an unforgettable memory. He was, however, soon separated from his grandmother when he was around seven years of age and taken away. Heartbroken at the separation, it made him realize the price of slavery even as a child.

His first introduction to the horrors of slavery began soon after he began living on the plantation, when he saw his Aunt Hester being beaten by Aaron Anthony, her master. It was the first of many that he would continue to observe or be subjected to. Later, he was sent to Baltimore to stay with Sophia and Hugh Auld. These times were significant for him as he began to learn how to read from Sophia Auld. Her husband later barred him from reading, however, he had read enough to see that freedom and literacy were linked. He is later sent to live with Hugh’s brother, Thomas Auld, who could not control him. Douglass was then transferred to a man known as the ‘nigger-breaker’, Edward Covey, which was another turning point in his life. Covey tried to beat Douglass but he fought back and challenged the man to a standoff. These events eventually lead him to be transferred to William Freeland, who was considerably better than his earlier Masters. Freeland ran a school which had forty or more slaves being taught. Here, he began to plan his escape; however, that ended in failure and he was returned to Hugh Auld who trained him as a caulker. The work also provided him with a small taste of independence and freedom inspiring him to continue his journey.

Douglass was the person who mind had already liberated while he was a slave. He saw ignorance to be a tool to enslave a people, as they become mentally dominated by their white slave owners who instill a fear within them and deny them an education. When he was barred from reading, he understood the extent of their deprival, and understood how the road towards freedom was illuminated by learning. His learning made him mentally resolute that he would not be whipped by his owner again, which led to his fight with Covey. It rekindled within him his sense of individuality and manhood and served as another turning point in his journey, motivating him to plan his escape.

After it became clear to Douglass that his reading abilities were key to his freedom, he began to focus his efforts on attaining freedom, making his first escape plan in 1836 with four other slaves. He forged passes for everyone which suggested that permission had already been granted to them to travel to Baltimore. However, he was arrested after one of the slaves betrayed him. Two years later, he planned another escape after he was denied the right to hiring himself out. This time, Douglass was successful in his plan and escaped to New York after borrowing protection papers from a black sailor. After he had arrived in New York, he breathed a sigh of relief and built upon his success to become a powerful abolitionist leader.

After his escape, Fredrick Douglass became a key figure in the movement to abolish slavery. He became a charismatic public speaker developing strong positions and arguments against slavery, while deriving credibility and authority from his own past experiences. Most of his efforts in life were then dedicated to making the abolishment movement a success. Experiencing the horrors of slavery first had, he could not bear to see other people live a life of constant violence and humiliation as a slave. Therefore, he began to devise some powerful arguments in which he used logic and reasoning to refute some of the common arguments that slave owners commonly presented to justify enslaving the black community. His writings were also powerful as he would share his personal experiences of being a slave and gave his readers a very personal insight into how difficult life is for a slave. His powerful rhetoric and style of narration would draw readers in, who would empathize with his experiences and feel truth emanating from his stories. Moreover, Douglass in his writings would typically describe the common and usual practices and treatment of slaves instead of focusing too much on narrating extraordinary stories. The multiple accounts he narrated helped the readers gain and idea of how slavery impacts individuals and society.

Besides his own writings, Douglass also worked with other key abolitionist leaders such as Abby Kelly, John Brown and Wendell Phillips. He, however, disagreed with John Brown whose tactics he deemed violent. He discouraged incidents such as the one on Harper’s Ferry and suggested a more democratic approach. Moreover, he also focused on addressing the religious aspect of slavery and provided counter arguments to those who thought that slavery was sanctioned by Christianity. He reprimanded those who were silent about slavery because of it and held the interpretation which sanctioned slavery as a form of blasphemy that infringed upon Christian liberty.

Furthermore, he also led achieved foreign support for his movement He traveled to Ireland and Britain in 1845, spending two years of his life there giving lectures in different chapels and churches. His speeches would draw in large crowds and it was within the same time that he attained legal freedom using the funds his British supporters had raised for him, to help him purchase his freedom from Thomas Auld. His British supporters also provided him funds to start his own newspaper *North Star* which served as a key abolitionist newspaper, which continued to actively publish literature against slavery until the Civil War. In his further visits to Britain, he advocated his anti-slavery stance among British Christians asking them never to support those Churches or leaders that allowed or encouraged slavery.

Douglass disagreed with some of the radical elements and leaders within the abolitionist movement, such Garrison who held that the U.S. Constitution permitted and encouraged slavery. Although, he earlier agreed to the same idea, however, he realized the error in this reasoning and spitted with Garrison, taking a strong stance that the Constitution of the United States is not and should be seen as pro-slavery and rather be used in the battle against slavery.

In the civil war, Douglass was a strong Unionist, who played an active role in recruiting soldiers for the 54th Infantry Regiment in Massachusetts. During the civil war, he also actively advocated using African American soldiers in the Union army, and actively recruited them for the U.S. Colored troops. Owing to his role, activism and prominence in the Civil War, he received different political appointments. For him, the civil war was a critical point in ending slavery, and urged Abraham Lincoln, along with other black leaders to emancipate all slaves to ensure that the U.S would never see slavery again. After the Civil war, he increased his advocacy for bringing amendments to the U.S Constitution, which eventually changed the status of Black Americans in the U.S. The change came through the enactment of the 15th and the 14th amendment to the U.S. Constitution. It granted the right to vote to all citizens and granted citizenship to all Black Americans. In the reconstruction era, Douglass used his political appointments, position and status to advocate and demonstrate that Black Americans had equal capabilities as White Americans. After slavery was abolished, he increased his attention to improving the integration of the black community into different aspects of American economic and political life.

In conclusion, Douglass was born a slave, who educated himself and used his education to lead him, and others out of slavery. His recorded his life events and the atrocities of slavery in the his autobiography *The life and Times of Fredrick Douglass* which not only provided a detailed account of how he escaped from slavery but provided insights to the reader about how dehumanizing slavery can be. Throughout his life, he fought for abolishing slavery and worked with notable leaders to advocate his cause.

**Part 2**

The experiences shared by Douglass in his autobiography described the conditions he felt as a black person, fearing that any turning point, road or bridge some white person may be following him. He describes the feelings of being petrified out of fear of being discovered. A similar account was related by Eric Foner who explained that each white person according to law was asked to keep an eye open for fugitive slaves. Therefore, any black person could be stopped and asked to show their documents to prove that they are a free person, or have been given permission to venture outside (Foner). The feelings of fear described by Douglass were a result of suspecting every white person to be searching for him.

The slaves wanted to escape because of two main reasons. One main factor was the physical abuse which involved being whipped, mistreated and abused in a harsh and violent manner. Another key reason for wanting to escape was the fear of being sold. Most fugitive slaves hailed from the upper south, where they were comparatively treated better than the lower South. Moreover, they feared being separated from their families and people they knew. Moreover, they also feared having other members of their families sold and the possible brutal conditions that they might face in the place where they are relocated to.

In New York City, slaves were estimated to be sold for more than $100 in the market, where the average earnings for a working-class individual was close to $250. Foner estimates that about one dozen people would have been involved in aiding fugitive slaves in New York City, but who continued to do so very effectively for a few months. There were documented records for 200 slaves who passed New York City. Although the people in the Underground Railroad who were involved were not too many, but they were actively working. Between 1835 to 1860, Foner estimates that more than 5000 fugitives were aided nation-wide (Foner).

According to Foner, the Fugitive Slave Act was very important in the way that it affected the black population living in the North. The population became vulnerable and as a result saw a mass exodus of fugitive slaves, wanting to escape Northern cities, such as New York. Moreover, the Fugitive Slave Law also applied to those who had already escaped a dozen years ago and were living peaceful lives in the North with their families and earning a wage. Those people also became vulnerable as a result of the law and feared being relocated to the South after being captured. Also, the person who was accused was not provided the right to testify, therefore it became very easy to be picked up, captured and relocated by means of the law. Furthermore, the 186 Civil Rights Act was a very important law that, for the first time, provided equal rights to African Americans without distinction of their race. The fugitive Slave Act also helped provide a model for the Civil Rights Act, since it was a federal law that overrode state law. The Fugitive Slave Law constitutionally established the South’s right despite the opposition from the North, and now the Civil Rights Act was modeled after the same law to penalize any state officials who were looking to put Blacks back into slavery again.

The information used by Eric Foner was obtained from personal memoirs, and from Howard Gray’s manuscript ‘Record of Fugitives’ that were published in Northern newspapers. The entire record was maintained by the journalist, Howard Gay, that was based on his personal meetings with fugitive slaves, and which documented their histories and accounts of escape.