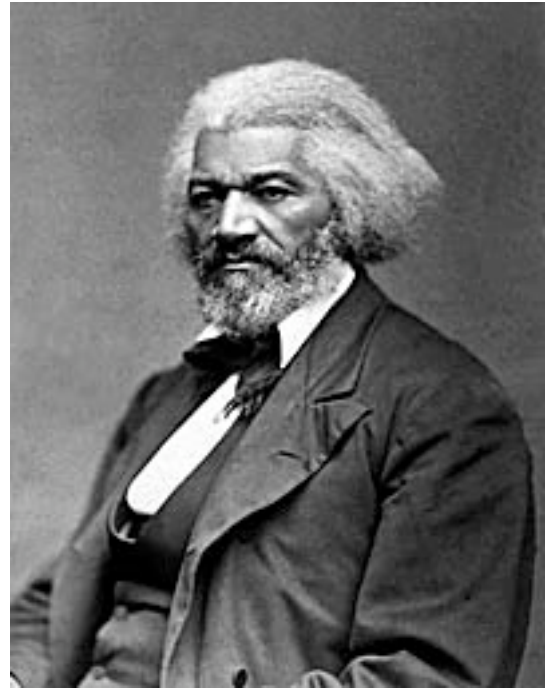


FREDERICK DOUGLASS

PROPHETIC WITNESS, 1817-1895

Observed 20 Feb

Harriet Bailey was a slave in Maryland when she gave birth to her son Frederick. As is not unusual, it was never clear who the boy's father was. He was extraordinarily bright and took advantage of opportunities to learn to read, even though that was illegal. Once he could read, he shared the knowledge with many other slaves as part of their Sunday worship together. For this he was severely punished, and sent from owner to owner to decrease his 'negative influence', eventually being handed over to an owner famous for 'slave busting.' Throughout his youth of hard labor, he continued to educate himself and to teach others about the ideals of liberty, equality, and the worth of every human spirit. In 1838, he managed to escape slavery after several attempts. He headed first to New York City and then into New England. In order to avoid being captured and returned to slavery, he changed his last name several times, finally settling on Douglass, but he always kept the first name his mother had given him, to provide consistency in his history and identity.



His commitment to his fellow human beings of all races and both genders was unflinching, both in his service as a minister of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and as a lecturer and political organizer. He is credited with inspiring many to activism for the linked causes of abolition of slavery and women's suffrage, working side by side with many heroes of both movements. He famously said that as a black man he could not accept the right to vote if it were still denied to women. Douglass not only inspired people in his own country, but also in Europe where he traveled and spoke, gaining advocates for the abolition and suffrage movements. He became legally free in 1845 when a group of British supporters bought his freedom from his last owner. Douglass was a man of great intellect and extraordinary eloquence whose advice was sought by both President Lincoln and his successor President Andrew Johnson. Douglass continues to inspire people with his description of his own life journey. He first wrote his autobiography in 1845, before he was 30. His *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* sold widely, and he added to it as he lived on, publishing entirely new versions in 1855 and 1881, again revising the latter in 1892, so that his narrative spanned the struggle for emancipation, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. This great spiritual leader changed the hearts of many and gave courage to countless individuals seeking the full lives denied them by law and social custom.

Lessons Isaiah 32:11-18, Psalm 85:7-13; Hebrews 2:10-18; John 8:30-32

Collect Almighty God, whose truth makes us free: We bless your Name for the witness of Frederick Douglass, whose impassioned and reasonable speech moved the hearts of a president and a people to a deeper obedience to Christ. Strengthen us also to be outspoken on behalf of those in captivity and tribulation, continuing in the Word of Jesus Christ our Liberator; who with you and the Holy Spirit dwells in glory everlasting. Amen.