

## This Day in History... February 14, 1818

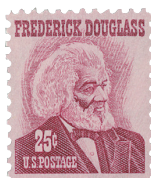
# Happy Birthday Frederick Douglass

While the exact date of Frederick Douglass's birth is unknown, it's generally considered to be February 14, 1818. Douglass chose the date himself, reportedly because his mother used to call him her "little valentine."

Born Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey (he adopted the surname Douglass years later), he was separated from his mother, who was enslaved, at a young age. He lived with his maternal grandmother who was free. At the age of seven, he was taken from his grandmother's and sent to the Wye House plantation, where he was enslaved.



*Issued on Douglass's 149th birthday.*



*Magenta color variety of the 1967 Douglass stamp*

From there, Douglass was given to the Aud family in Baltimore. Mrs. Aud taught him to read against her husband's wishes, before she was eventually discouraged from doing so. Douglass continued to learn from neighborhood children and the men he worked with. Douglass then began teaching other enslaved people to read for about six months, until their owners found out and broke up their meetings.

Douglass was loaned out to several different enslavers during his life in Maryland. In 1837, Douglass met Anna Murray – a free Black woman living in Baltimore – and fell in love. Her free status gave Douglass the motivation he needed to escape Maryland on September 3, 1838. He ended up in New York City less than 24 hours after he left. After Murray arrived they got married and took the name of Johnson. They then moved to New Bedford, Massachusetts, and adopted the name Douglass, after the character in the poem, *The Lady of the Lake*.

Douglass joined the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and became a licensed preacher in 1839. He gained valuable experience as an orator and eventually traveled the country with other speakers talking about his life as a slave. In 1845 Douglass published his first autobiography. It was an instant bestseller that was reprinted nine times. However, the book brought attention to his former enslaver, so Douglass, at the suggestion of his friends, went to Ireland and Britain for two years to deliver rousing lectures. His supporters then raised the funds to buy his freedom, allowing him to return to America in 1847. At this time he began publishing his first abolitionist paper, *The North Star*.

The following year, Douglass was the only Black person to attend the Seneca Falls Convention on women's rights. At first, many at the convention did not want suffrage included in the "Declaration of Sentiments." They thought it was too radical a step and that it would discourage people from taking their cause seriously. Douglass stepped up and spoke in support of the idea. He even went so far as to say he wouldn't feel right about being able to vote if women couldn't also. His words inspired the attendees and ultimately persuaded them



*Issued for the 100th anniversary of the Seneca Falls Convention.*

## This Day in History... February 14, 1818 continued

to keep the right to vote in the document.

Throughout the 1850s, Douglass worked with several abolitionist groups. He also became an early supporter of school desegregation. He was appalled at the poor conditions of Black educational facilities compared to those for white children. He considered the matter to be more important than suffrage. Also in the 1850s, Douglass befriended John Brown, but declined to participate in his raid on Harpers Ferry, calling it suicidal. He fled the country for a time, fearing he might be persecuted just for knowing and meeting with Brown, though he didn't participate in the raid. Prior to fleeing he'd nearly been arrested on a Virginia warrant.



*From the 1995 Civil War sheet*

By the time the Civil War began, Douglass was one of the most famous Black men in the country. President Lincoln sought his advice on the treatment of Black soldiers and called Douglass the most meritorious man of the nineteenth century. Douglass also helped recruit men to fight for the North. Though Douglass had a good relationship with Lincoln, he supported John C. Frémont in the election of 1864 because Lincoln's didn't publicly endorse suffrage for Black freedmen. However, after Lincoln's death, Douglass called him America's "greatest president."

On April 14, 1876, Douglass was the main speaker at the unveiling of the Lincoln Emancipation Statue in Capitol Hill Park, Washington, DC. He spoke briefly of President Lincoln's imperfections, but mostly talked about how everything had led to slavery's end and the restoration of the Union. Over 25,000 people attended the event, including President Ulysses S. Grant, his cabinet, and members of Congress.



*Stamp pictures the memorial Douglass dedicated in 1876.*

Douglass continued to work for equality for both Black people and women. He also received several political appointments, including president of the Freedman's Savings Bank and chargé d'affaires for the Dominican Republic. He was an ardent supporter of Ulysses S. Grant's run for the presidency and applauded his Civil Rights and Enforcements Acts. In 1872, Douglass was the first Black person to be nominated for vice president.

In 1877, Frederick Douglass became the first Black US marshal. He was appointed by President Rutherford B. Hayes and was responsible for marshal duties in Washington, DC. The only duty Douglass did not take on was that of introducing visiting dignitaries to the president.

On January 2, 1893, Douglass dedicated the Haiti pavilion at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Illinois. Douglass, who had served as the United State's minister to the country from 1889 to 1891, made a crowd-pleasing speech about Haiti and its people. He talked about their fight for independence and the effect it had on the country and its people. Douglass spoke about the greatness of their success and how it resembled the United States' own revolution.

Douglass made his final public appearance on February 20, 1895, at a meeting of the National Council of Women, and died after returning home that day.

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