

FREDERICK DOUGLASS: In the Shadow of Slavery

February 28, 2014
Zeiterion Performing Arts Center

Curriculum tie-ins include: English/Language Arts, Social Studies and American History, Grades 5-12

Frederick Douglass: In the Shadow of Slavery is an original one-man show by Tom Dugan which captures the life of Frederick Douglass, who has been called the father of the civil rights movement. Frederick Douglass, portrayed by veteran actor Mel Johnson Jr., received its world premiere during the 06-07 season.

Included in study guide created for show:

From PBS Africans in America, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p1539.html>

Two years later, while living in Baltimore and working at a shipyard, Douglass would finally realize his dream: he fled the city on September 3, 1838. Travelling by train, then steamboat, then train, he arrived in NYC the following day. Several weeks later he had settled in New Bedford, Massachusetts, living with his newlywed bride (whom he met in Baltimore and married in New York) under his new name, Frederick Douglass.

Always striving to educate himself, Douglass continued his reading. He joined various organizations in New Bedford, including a black church. He attended Abolitionists' meetings.

From other sources:

Immediately after his arrival in New York, he married a free African American woman he had met in 1837 in Baltimore and who came to New York with him, Anna Murray. As a slave, of course, he would not have been permitted to marry without his master's consent. To avoid being discovered and returned to slavery, he stopped using the last name Bailey, and called himself Frederick Johnson. The newlyweds moved on north to New Bedford, Massachusetts, and were assisted by a black couple, Mary (Polly) and Nathan Johnson, who were associated with the abolitionist movement.

Frederick decided to change his last name again, and asked Nathan Johnson to choose a new one for him. He insisted, however, that he keep his first name. Johnson had been reading Sir Walter Scott's epic narrative poem *The Lady of the Lake*, a literary sensation of the nineteenth century. He picked the name of the leader of the Scottish clan Douglas, one of the poem's key figures. Frederick chose to spell his new last name with a slight difference – a double's'. With his new wife Anna he thus adopted the new name he would keep for the rest of his life and would make world famous – Frederick Douglass.

Frederick and Ann's first child, Rosetta, was born in 1839 in New Bedford. They would eventually have four more children together: sons Lewis Henry, Frederick Jr., Charles Remond, and daughter Annie. In New Bedford he joined and became a licensed preacher in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and he began, as well, to attend abolitionist meetings. He met William Lloyd Garrison and was encouraged to speak, at first informally, then as a featured guest at the annual convention of Garrison's Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. He was only 23, but was already becoming an accomplished and eloquent public speaker. <http://www.frederickdouglasshonorsociety.org/douglass-history.html>

Buildings/Places in New Bedford associated with Frederick Douglass

The Nathan and Mary (Polly) Johnson Properties are located at 17-19 and 21 Seventh St., in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Both buildings are privately owned, and are not open to the public.

Nathan and Mary (Polly) Johnson were free blacks living in New Bedford, Massachusetts, who owned a block of properties including their longtime home and the neighboring old Friends meetinghouse. Nathan Johnson was an active abolitionist who assisted numerous fugitive slaves, including famous abolitionist Frederick Douglass. The Johnson home was Douglass's first residence after his escape from slavery in 1838--the only one of Douglass's three homes in New Bedford that remains today. These properties have been recognized as National Historic Landmarks.

At the end of 1853, the population of New Bedford was comprised of a higher percentage of African Americans than any other city in the Northeast, and almost 30% of those residents claimed they were born in the South. New Bedford was attractive to fugitive slaves and free blacks in part because of its major industries, the whaling and maritime trades, which have historically been the most welcoming occupations to people of all races. New Bedford also demonstrated a certain tolerance of diversity, and black leaders of the time were impressed with the political activity and degree of social organization among the city's people of color, coupled with some access to capital and integration in schools and some neighborhoods and workplaces. This black community was composed of vehement abolitionists and abolitionist supporters who were the audience of every principal antislavery lecturer in the United States. The city was appealing to fugitive slaves, and their population in New Bedford ranged at any time from 300 to 700.

Nathan and Mary (Polly) Johnson married in New Bedford in 1819 and by the 1840s had well established economic means. They owned a confectioner's shop and other businesses were well read in the political and social conditions of the nation and willing to help the abolitionist cause in many ways. Nathan Johnson was a steadfast delegate to the annual convention of free people of color from 1832-1835 and was elected the president of the 1847 National Convention of Colored People in Troy, New York. He and his wife also supported the movement by harboring fugitive slaves in their home. William C. Taber and Joseph Ricketson, two New Bedford Quakers, brought Frederick Douglass and his family to the Johnson home in September 1838. They resided there until 1839. The fact that Taber and Ricketson brought the Douglass family to the Johnsons suggests that the Johnson household was a common safe house for slaves in search of their freedom. Douglass himself attests to Nathan Johnson's regular practice of assisting fugitive slaves in all three of his well-known narratives. It is believed that the old Friends meetinghouse was a safe house for runaway slaves as well, however this has not been confirmed. The meetinghouse was not only the first house of public worship in New Bedford, but also the site of Benjamin Lundy's 1828 antislavery address. <http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/underground/ma6.htm>

Frederick Douglass Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

William and Eighth Streets

This church was organized in 1850. It is believed this sect may have existed as far back as the 1830s, and was the church Frederick Douglass and his family attended while he lived in New Bedford. The church was first known as the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. In the 1930s it was changed to the Douglass AME Zion Church. Many of New Bedford's West Indian Community attended this church. The first church was on the corner of Mechanics Lane and Eighth Street.

<http://www.newbedford-ma.gov/Tourism/DestinationNB/BlackHeritage.html>

New Bedford Abolitionist Liberty Bell - Bronze Tablet.

Mounted on the southeast corner Purchase and William Streets

Liberty Hall once stood on this site.

Here several of America's great figures, including Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Charles Dickens and Ralph Waldo Emerson delivered speeches and participated in public forums on the issues of the day. Mounted atop the Hall's roof was a bell, which, during the 1850s and '60s, was used to warn runaway slaves that the U.S. Marshals were approaching the city in search of fugitives. <http://www.frederickdouglasshonorsociety.org/douglass-history.html>

Frederick Douglass: In the Shadow of Slavery

STUDY GUIDE

CREATED BY
Tom Dugan Plays
CONTENT BY
Jess Block
MA Communications

JOURNEY HEAD-FIRST INTO AMERICAN HISTORY...

Frederick Douglass: In the Shadow of Slavery is a one-man adventure that barrels head-first into the dramatic complexities of American history. Journey through Douglass's heartbreaking childhood as a plantation slave to his pivotal friendship with Abraham Lincoln.

Bibliography.

Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass: The Story Behind an American Friendship. First Edition. Clarion Books: 2012.

America's Black Founders: Revolutionary Heroes & Early Leaders with 21 Activities (For Kids series). Original edition. Chicago Review Press; Original edition (January 1, 2010).

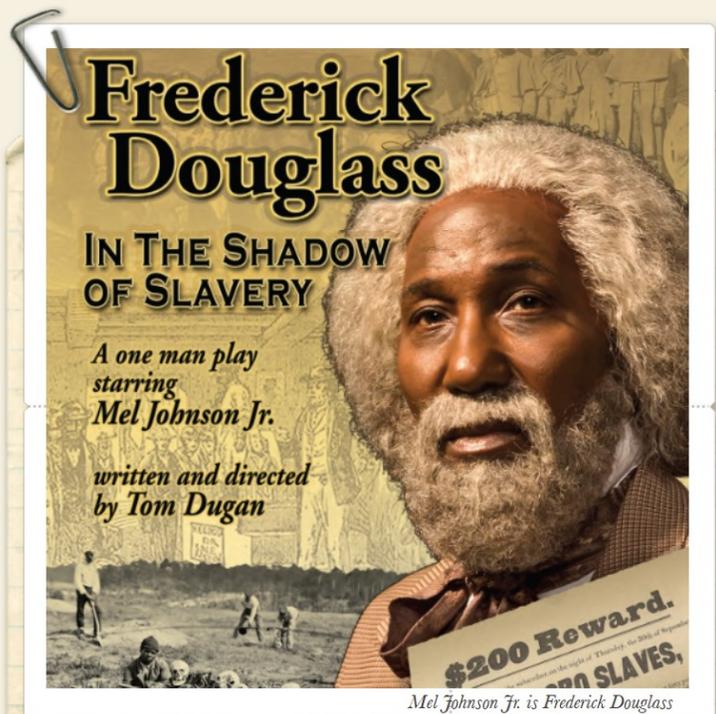
Douglass, Frederick. *My Bondage and My Freedom.* New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2005.

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written By Himself.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997.

Frederick Douglass for Kids: His Life and Times, with 21 Activities (For Kids series). Chicago Review Press: 2012.

Frederick Douglass: Abolitionist Hero (Childhood of Famous Americans). Original edition. Aladdin: 2008.

An in-depth study guide for
teachers and students.



**“The audience, the actor,
and the character
Frederick Douglass came
together with silent
appreciation of all the
tragedies that we share as
human beings.”**

Edmond Chibeau - Chibeau

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

STUDY GUIDE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Things to think about before and when watching the performance

What does freedom mean? Is it more than just being legally free?

What role do women play in Douglass's world? Pay close attention to when or if female characters speak, to how female characters relate to Douglass, and to the depiction of women.

Questions for After the performance:

What does it take for a slave to become free?

How can the United States be the "land of the free" if it tolerated slavery?

Why is education so important to Douglass?

How does Douglass describe New Bedford, Massachusetts? How does this description undermine economic arguments in favor of slavery?

PLAYBILL

FREDERICK DOUGLASS IN THE SHADOW OF SLAVERY



WORD SCRAMBLE

1. SEALV _____
2. RFEE _____
3. OETV _____
4. EAULQ _____
5. SHGIRT _____
6. BREITYL _____

(Key with teachers' guide)

LIFE IN NEW BEDFORD: In September of 1838, a young Frederick Douglass began his life as a free man in New Bedford. One of the first things that struck Douglass about New Bedford was the high standard of living enjoyed by people in the town. Douglass pointed out people in the laboring class often enjoyed a better lifestyle than many slave-owners in the south. Another striking quality of New Bedford was the racial tolerance. New Bedford's black community grew to over a thousand people who were attracted to the prosperity of the town as well as its tolerant policies. At the time, Massachusetts was one of only five states that allowed blacks to vote. This fact alone attracted many free blacks and runaway slaves to the state.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY FREDERICK DOUGLASS

from PBS Africans in America, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p1539.html>

Frederick Douglass stood at the podium, trembling with nervousness. Before him sat abolitionists who had travelled to the Massachusetts island of Nantucket. Only 23 years old at the time, Douglass overcame his nervousness and gave a stirring, eloquent speech about his life as a slave. Douglass would continue to give speeches for the rest of his life and would become a leading spokesperson for the abolition of slavery and for racial equality.

The son of a slave woman and an unknown white man, "Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey" was born in February of 1818 on Maryland's eastern shore. He spent his early years with his grandparents and with an aunt, seeing his mother only four or five times before her death when he was seven. (All Douglass knew of his father was that he was white.) During this time he was exposed to the degradations of slavery, witnessing firsthand brutal whippings and spending much time cold and hungry. When he was eight he was sent to Baltimore to live with a ship carpenter named Hugh Auld. There he learned to read and first heard the words abolition and abolitionists. "Going to live at Baltimore," Douglass would later say, "laid the foundation, and opened the gateway, to all my subsequent prosperity."

Douglass spent seven relatively comfortable years in Baltimore before being sent back to the country, where he was hired out to a farm run by a notoriously brutal "slavebreaker" named Edward Covey. And the treatment he received was indeed brutal. Whipped daily and barely fed, Douglass was "broken in body, soul, and spirit."

On January 1, 1836, Douglass made a resolution that he would be free by the end of the year. He planned an escape. But early in April he was jailed after his plan was discovered. Two years later, while living in Baltimore and working at a shipyard, Douglass would finally realize his dream: he fled the city on September 3, 1838. Travelling by train, then steamboat, then train, he arrived in New York City the following day. Several weeks later he had settled in New Bedford, Massachusetts, living with his newlywed bride (whom he met in Baltimore and married in New York) under his new name, Frederick Douglass.

Always striving to educate himself, Douglass continued his reading. He joined various organizations in New Bedford, including a black church. He attended Abolitionists' meetings. He subscribed to William Lloyd Garrison's weekly journal, the *Liberator*. In 1841, he saw Garrison speak at the Bristol Anti-Slavery Society's annual meeting. Douglass was inspired by the speaker, later stating, "no face and form ever impressed me with such sentiments [the hatred of slavery] as did those of William Lloyd Garrison." Garrison, too,

was impressed with Douglass, mentioning him in the *Liberator*. Several days later Douglass gave his speech at the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society's annual convention in Nantucket—the speech described at the top of this page. Of the speech, one correspondent reported, "Flinty hearts were pierced, and cold ones melted by his eloquence." Before leaving the island, Douglass was asked to become a lecturer for the Society for three years. It was the launch of a career that would continue throughout Douglass' long life.

Despite apprehensions that the information might endanger his freedom, Douglass published his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written By Himself*. The year was 1845. Three years later, after a speaking tour of England, Ireland, and Scotland, Douglass published the first issue of the *North Star*, a four-page weekly, out of Rochester, New York.

Ever since he first met Garrison in 1841, the white abolitionist leader had been Douglass' mentor. But the views of Garrison and Douglass ultimately diverged. Garrison represented the radical end of the abolitionist spectrum. He denounced churches, political parties, even voting. He believed in the dissolution (break up) of the Union. He also believed that the U.S. Constitution was a pro-slavery document. After his tour of Europe and the establishment of his paper, Douglass' views began to change; he was becoming more of an independent thinker, more pragmatic. In 1851 Douglass announced at a meeting in Syracuse, New York, that he did not assume the Constitution was a pro-slavery document, and that it could even "be wielded in behalf of emancipation," especially where the federal government had exclusive jurisdiction. Douglass also did not advocate the dissolution of the Union, since it would isolate slaves in the South. This led to a bitter dispute between Garrison and Douglass that, despite the efforts of others such as Harriet Beecher Stowe to reconcile the two, would last into the Civil War.

Frederick Douglass would continue his active involvement to better the lives of African Americans. He conferred with Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War and recruited northern blacks for the Union Army. After the War he fought for the rights of women and African Americans alike.

See <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/tguide/4index.html> for the full Civil War teachers guide created by PBS.

photo credit: Collection of the New-York Historical Society