

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS VOL. II

Edited by Dr. Philip Foner
and read by Ossie Davis

SIDE I

- Band 1 — **THE NORTH STAR**
- Band 2 — **ROCHESTER, N. Y.**
- Band 3 — **THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD AND
THE FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW**
- Band 4 — **THE ABOLITIONIST**
- Band 5 — **FREE SOIL CONVENTION**
- Band 6 — **JOHN BROWN**
- Band 7 — **FIGHTING ABOLITIONISM**
- Band 8 — **JOHN BROWN'S INSURRECTION**
- Band 9 — **ESCAPE TO CANADA AND ENGLAND**
- Band 10 — **RETURN TO THE UNITED STATES
AND JOHN BROWN'S LEGACY**

SIDE II

- Band 1 — **ELECTION OF LINCOLN**
- Band 2 — **SECESSION OF THE SOUTH**
- Band 3 — **CIVIL WAR**
- Band 4 — **EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION**
- Band 5 — **NEGRO TROOPS**
- Band 6 — **DOUGLASS MEETS LINCOLN**
- Band 7 — **DEATH OF LINCOLN**
- Band 8 — **FREEDOM AND EQUALITY**
- Band 9 — **FOURTEENTH AND FIFTEENTH
AMENDMENTS**
- Band 10 — **AFTERMATH**
- Band 11 — **SUMMATION**

COVER DRAWING BY B. VALLOTON, 1855

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INTRODUCTION

This is the partial autobiography of one of the greatest figures in American history, a man born a slave in Maryland in 1817, who escaped from slavery 21 years later, joined the ranks of the Abolitionists, and devoted a long and fruitful life to the winning of freedom of all Negroes. Born in the lowest position in society, Frederick Douglass educated himself and became an orator, an editor, a political figure, and a man of international renown.

In the abolitionist movement Douglass worked with William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and John Brown. He broke with Garrison over differences on the best methods to be used to achieve the emancipation of the slaves, and made important contributions of his own to the struggle against slavery. During the Civil War, Douglass prodded the famous "Slow Coach at Washington." Long before Lincoln perceived it, Douglass raised the slogan of emancipation of the Negro slave to assure a Union victory over the Southern Confederacy without coming to grips with slavery. Lincoln acknowledged the truth of much that Douglass was saying, and, on one occasion, called him "the most meritorious person I have ever seen."

After the Emancipation Proclamation was issued, Douglass immediately raised the demand for complete freedom – not merely legal freedom – for the Negro people. He demanded ballots for the freedmen, land distribution, and civil rights. He fought for the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments, but even then he was not satisfied. Unless the laws of the country were fully enforced and the Negro enjoyed freedom in life as well as in the statute books, the battle must be continued. In 1883, he denounced the Negro's "so-called emancipation as a stupendous fraud, a fraud upon him, a fraud upon the world." America, he declared, had abandoned the Negro, ignored his rights, and left him "a deserted, a defrauded, a swindled, and an outcast man – in law, free; in fact, a slave." And he continued to press the claims of the Negro. In the last year of his life, 1895, he was visited by a young negro student who asked: "Mr. Douglass, what shall I do with my life?" Douglass answered with one word: "Agitate!"

Douglass was a universal reformer as well as the greatest spokesman for the Negro people in American history. He refused to allow himself "to be insensible to the wrongs and sufferings of any part of the great family of man." He fought for woman suffrage, freedom for Ireland, improved conditions for workingmen and for women; and he opposed flogging in the Navy, monopolies, and capital punishment.

This record tells the story of Frederick Douglass, in his own words, during the last 48 years of his life. It is based on material in three autobiographies Douglass wrote: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave, published in 1845; My Bondage and My Freedom, published in 1855; and Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, published in 1881. The text accompanying this record was edited by Dr. Philip S. Foner.

SIDE I, Band 1: The North Star

In December, 1847, I began the publication of The North Star in Rochester, New York. There were many times when in my experience as editor and publisher I was very hard pressed for money, but by one means or another I succeeded to keep my anti-slavery banner steadily flying during all the conflict from the autumn of 1847 till May, 1863, when the

union of the States was assured, and emancipation of the slaves was an accomplished fact.

Editing and publishing a weekly paper, with its nights and days of toil and thought, compelled often to do work for which I had no educational preparation, was a difficult project. But I have come to think that, under the circumstances, it was the best school possible for me. It obliged me to think and read, it taught me to express my thoughts clearly, and was perhaps better than any other course I could have adopted. Besides, it made it necessary to lean upon myself, and not upon the heads of our anti-slavery church – to be principal, and not an agent. I had an audience to speak to every week, and must say something worth their hearing, or cease to speak altogether. There is nothing like the lash and sting of necessity to make a man work, and my paper furnished the motive power.

If I have at any time said or written that which is worth remembering or repeating, I must have said such things between the years 1848 and 1860, and my paper was a chronicle of most of what I said during that time. However, I found it hard to get credit in some quarters either for what I wrote or what I said. While there was nothing very profound or learned in either, the low estimate of Negro possibilities induced the belief that both my editorials and speeches were written by white persons. I doubt if this skepticism does not still linger in the minds of some of my democratic fellow-citizens.

SIDE I, Band 2: Rochester, New York

My pathway was not entirely free from thorns in Rochester. The vulgar prejudice against color, so common to Americans, met me in several disagreeable forms. My children were not allowed in the public school in the district in which I lived, owned property, and paid taxes; but were compelled, if they went to a public school, to go over to the other side of the city, to an inferior colored school. I hardly need say that I was not prepared to submit tamely to this proscription, any more than I had been to submit to slavery, so I had them taught at home for a while. Meanwhile I went to the people with the question and created considerable agitation. I sought and obtained a hearing before the Board of Education, and after repeated efforts with voice and pen, the doors of the public schools were opened and colored children were permitted to attend them in common with others.

There were barriers erected against colored people in most other places of instruction and amusement in the city, and until I went there, they were imposed without any apparent sense of injustice or wrong, and submitted to in silence; but one by one, they have gradually been removed, and colored people were allowed to enter freely all places of public resort without hindrance or observation. This change has not been wholly effected by me. From the first, I was cheered on and supported in my demands for equal rights by a number of white and Negro men and women of Rochester.

SIDE I, Band 3: The Underground Railroad and The Fugitive Slave Law

One important branch of my anti-slavery work in Rochester, in addition to speaking and writing against slavery, must not be omitted. My position gave me the chance of hitting the old enemy some telling blows, in another direction than these. In Rochester I was on the southern border of Lake Ontario, and Canada was right over the way – and my prominence as an abolitionist, and as the editor of an anti-slavery paper, naturally made me the station master and conductor of the Underground Railroad passing through the city. Secrecy and concealment were necessary conditions to the successful operation of this railroad, and hence its prefix "underground." My agency was all the more exciting and interesting, because not altogether free from danger. I could take no step in it without exposing myself to fine and imprisonment, for these were the penalties imposed by the Fugitive Slave Law for feeding, harboring, or otherwise assisting a slave to escape from his master; but in face of this fact, I can say, I never did more congenial, attractive, fascinating, and satisfactory work. True, as a means of destroying slavery, it was like an attempt to bail out the ocean with a teaspoon, but the thought that there was one less slave, and a fugitive slave – brought to my heart unspeakable joy. On one occasion I had eleven fugitives at the

same time under my roof, and it was necessary for them to remain with me, until I could collect sufficient money to get them on to Canada. So numerous were the fugitives passing through Rochester, that I was obliged at last to appeal to my British friends for the means of sending them on their way, and when these good people took the matter in hand, I had never any further trouble in that respect.

The assistance to fugitive slaves escaping from the South was only part of my work in the Underground Railroad. For the vicious Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 endangered the security of Negroes who had escaped to the North. Fugitive slaves, who had lived for many years safely and securely in western New York and elsewhere, some of whom had by industry and economy saved money and bought little homes for themselves and their children, were suddenly alarmed, and compelled to flee to Canada for safety so as not to be returned to slavery, and to take up a dismal march to a new abode, empty-handed, among strangers.

The hardships imposed by this atrocious and shameless law were cruel and shocking, and yet only a few of all the fugitives of the Northern States were returned to slavery under its infamously wicked provisions. The thing which more than all else destroyed the Fugitive Slave Law was the resistance made to it by the fugitives themselves. A decided check was given to the execution of the law at Christiana, Pennsylvania, where three colored men, being pursued by Mr. Gorsuch and his son, slew the father, wounded the son, drove away the officers, and made their escape to my house in Rochester.

The work of getting these men safely into Canada was a delicate one. They were not only fugitives from slavery, but charged with murder, and officers were in pursuit of them. There was no time for delay; I could not look upon them as murderers. To me, they were heroic defenders of the just rights of man against man-stealers and murderers. So I fed them and sheltered them in my house.

This affair, at Christiana, and the Jerry Rescue at Syracuse, inflicted fatal wounds on the Fugitive Slave bill. It became thereafter almost a dead letter, for slaveholders found that not only did it fail to put them in possession of their slaves, but that the attempt to enforce it brought odium upon themselves and weakened the slave system.

SIDE I, Band 4: The Abolitionist

When I established my paper in Rochester, I was a faithful disciple of William Lloyd Garrison, and fully committed to his doctrine touching the pro-slavery character of the Constitution of the United States, also the non-voting principle, of which he was the known and distinguished advocate. With him, I held it to be the first duty of the non-slaveholding States to dissolve the union with the slaveholding states, and hence my cry, like his, was "No union with slaveholders."

With these views, I came into western New York, and during my first four years of labor there, I advocated them with pen and tongue, to the best of my ability. After a time, a careful reconsideration of the subject convinced me that there was no necessity for dissolving the "union between the Northern and Southern States"; that to seek this dissolution was no part of my duty as an abolitionist; that to abstain from voting was to refuse to exercise a legitimate and powerful means for abolishing slavery; and that the Constitution of the United States not only contained no guarantees in favor of slavery, but on the contrary, was in its letter and spirit an anti-slavery instrument, demanding the abolition of slavery as a condition of its own existence, as the supreme law of the land. By a course of thought and reading I was conducted to the conclusion that the Constitution of the United States - inaugurated "to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty" - could not well have been designed at the same time to maintain and perpetuate a system of slavery, especially as not one word can be found in the Constitution to authorize such a belief. Then again, if the declared purposes of an instrument are to govern the meaning of all its parts and details, as they clearly should, the Constitution of our country is our warrant for the abolition of slavery in every state in the Union. It would require much time to set the arguments which demonstrated to my mind the unconstitutionality of slavery; but being convinced of the fact, my duty was plain upon this point in the further conduct of my paper.

SIDE I, Band 5: Free Soil Convention

As I became convinced that it was necessary to use all weapons in the struggle against slavery, including political action and voting, I became increasingly interested in the political movement being organized against the Slave Power.

In 1848 it was my privilege to attend, and, in some measure, to participate in the famous Free Soil Convention held in Buffalo, New York. It was a vast and variegated assemblage, composed of persons from all sections of the North, and may be said to have formed a new departure in the history of forces organized to resist the growing and aggressive demands of slavery and the Slave Power. Until this Buffalo Convention, anti-slavery agencies had been mainly directed to the work of changing public sentiment by exposing through the press and on the platform, the nature of the slave system. Anti-slavery thus far had only been sheet lightning; the Buffalo Convention sought to make it a thunderbolt.

This Buffalo Convention of Free Soilers did not come out against the system of slavery as it existed in the South, confining itself to opposing the further extension of slavery under the slogans, "Free Soil," "Free States," "Free Speech," and "Free Men." But however low was the standard of the Free Soilers at Buffalo, they did lay the foundation of a grand super-structure. It was a powerful link in the chain of events by which the slave system has been abolished, the slave emancipated, and the country saved from dismemberment.

In all this, and more, it illustrates the experience of reform in all ages, and conforms to the laws of human progress - measures change, principles never.

SIDE I, Band 6: John Brown

Just as I had come to differ with the Garrisonian school of abolition on such questions as the interpretation of the Constitution, dissolution of the Union, and political action, so too I differed on the important issue of the possibility of the peaceful abolition of slavery. For years I had believed in the Garrisonian doctrine that through moral suasion and peaceful methods alone, the slave system could be abolished. But I gradually lost confidence in this doctrine, especially after I came to know and discuss this issue with a man whose character and conversation, and whose objects and aims in life made a very deep impression upon my mind and heart. This man was Captain John Brown, whose name has now passed into history, as one of the most marked characters and greatest heroes known to American fame.

I first met this remarkable man at his home in Springfield, Massachusetts, in the year 1847. In our conversation after dinner, he denounced slavery in language fierce and bitter, thought that slaveholders had forfeited their right to life and that the slaves had the right to gain their liberty in any way they could, and did not believe that moral suasion would ever liberate the slave. He thought the practice of carrying arms would be a good one for colored people to adopt, as it would give them a sense of their manhood. No people, he said, could have self-respect, or be respected, who would not fight for their freedom. When I suggested that we might convert the slaveholders, he became very much excited, and said that could never be; that they would never be induced to give up their slaves, until they felt a big stick about their heads.

SIDE I, Band 7: Fighting Abolitionism

From this night spent with John Brown, while I continued to write and speak about slavery, I became all the same less hopeful of its peaceful abolition. My utterances became more and more tinged by the color of this man's strong impressions. Speaking at an anti-slavery convention in Boston in June, 1849, I expressed the belief that slavery could only be destroyed by bloodshed, and said that I should welcome the intelligence tomorrow, should it come, that the slaves had risen in the South, and that the sable arms which had been engaged in beautifying and adorning the South, were engaged in spreading death and devastation.

Later at an anti-slavery convention in Salem, Ohio, when I expressed the same view that slavery could only be destroyed by bloodshed, I was suddenly interrupted by a good old friend of mine, that courageous colored woman, Sojourner Truth, with the question, "Frederick, is God dead?" "No", I answered, "and because God is not dead slavery can only end in bloodshed." My quaint old sister was of the Garrison school

of non-resistants, and was shocked at my sanguinary doctrine, but she too became an advocate of the sword, when the war for the maintenance of the Union was finally declared.

SIDE I, Band 8: John Brown's Insurrection

During my first meeting with John Brown, he told me that he had long had a plan which would accomplish the abolition of the slave system. He called my attention to a map of the United States and pointed out to me the far-reaching Alleghenies, which stretch away from the borders of New York, into the Southern States. "These mountains," he said, "are the basis of my plan. God has given the strength of the hills to freedom, they were placed here for the emancipation of the Negro race. My plan is to take at first about 25 picked men, and begin on a small scale; supply them with arms and ammunition, post them in squads of five on a line of 25 miles, the most persuasive and judicious of whom shall go down to the fields from time to time, as opportunity offers, and induce the slaves to join them, seeking and selecting the most reckless and daring." They would run off the slaves in large numbers, retain the brave and strong ones in the mountains, and send the weak and timid to the North by the Underground Railroad; his operations would be enlarged with increasing number, and would not be confined to one locality. He further proposed to have a number of stations from the line of Pennsylvania to the Canadian border, where such slaves as he might, through his men, induce to run away, should be supplied with food and shelter, and be forwarded from one station to another till they should reach a place of safety either in Canada or the Northern States.

Hating slavery as I did, and making its abolition the object of my life, I was ready to welcome any new mode of attack upon the slave system which gave any promise of success. I readily saw that this plan could be made very effective in rendering slave property in Maryland and Virginia valueless by rendering it insecure. Hence, I assented to this, John Brown's scheme or plan for running off slaves.

Late in September, 1859, John Brown wrote to me, informing me that a beginning in his work would soon be made, and that before going forward he wanted to see me, and appointed an old stone quarry near Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, as our place of meeting. When I reached Chambersburg, we talked over the enterprise which was about to be undertaken. Captain Brown now declared that it was his settled purpose to take the federal armory at Harper's Ferry, and he wanted to know what I thought of it. I at once opposed the measure with all the arguments at my command. To me, such a measure would be fatal to running off slaves, as was the original plan, and fatal to all engaged in doing so. It would be an attack upon the federal government, and would array the whole country against us.

Our talk was long and earnest. We spent the most of Saturday and a part of Sunday in this debate - Brown for Harper's Ferry, and I against it; he for striking a blow which would instantly rouse the country, and I for the policy of gradually and unaccountably drawing off the slaves to the mountains, as at first suggested and proposed by him. When I found that he had fully made up his mind and could not be dissuaded, I told him that his old plan was changed and that I could not go with him. In parting he put his arms around me in a manner more than friendly, and said: "Come with me, Douglass, I will defend you with my life. I want you for a special purpose. When I strike, the bees will begin to swarm, and I shall want you to help give them." But my discretion or my cowardice made me proof against the dear old man's eloquence - perhaps it was something of both which determined by course. When about to leave, I asked Shields Green, a fugitive slave from South Carolina who had joined Brown, what he had decided to do, and was surprised by his coolly saying in his broken way, "I b'lieve I'll go wid de ole man." Here we separated; they to go to Harper's Ferry, I to Rochester.

On the evening when the news came that John Brown had taken, and was then holding, the town of Harper's Ferry, I was speaking to a large audience in National Hall, Philadelphia. As I expected, the next day brought the news that with two or three men he had fortified and was holding a small engine house, but that he was surrounded by a body of Virginia militia, who thus far had not ventured to capture the insurgents, but that escape was impossible. A few hours later, and word came that Colonel Robert E. Lee, with a company of United States troops had made a breach in Captain Brown's fort, and had captured him alive, though mortally wounded. His carpet bag had been secured, and it was found to contain numerous letters and documents which directly implicated me along with several others.

SIDE I, Band 9: Escape to Canada and England

This intelligence was soon followed by a telegram saying that we were all to be arrested. My friends urged me to move out of Philadelphia at once. I reached New York at night, still under the apprehension of arrest at any moment, and by devious means I finally reached Rochester in safety, but had been there but a few moments when I was informed that the Governor of the State would certainly surrender me on a proper requisition from the Governor of Virginia. My friends advised me to quit the country, which I did - going to Canada. From Canada I sent a letter to the Rochester Democrat and American, in which, among other things, I wrote:

"I may be asked why I did not join John Brown - noble old hero whose one right hand has shaken the foundation of the American Union, and whose ghost will haunt the bed-chambers of all the born and unborn slaveholders of Virginia through all generations, filling them with alarm and consternation. My answer to this is - 'The tools to those who can use them!' Let every man work for the abolition of slavery in his own way. I would help all and hinder none."

Though in Canada, and under British law, it was not impossible that I might be kidnapped and taken to Virginia. England had given me shelter and protection when the slavehounds were on my track 14 years before, and her gates were still open to me now that I was pursued in the name of Virginia. So on the 12th of November, 1859, I took passage from Quebec on board the steamer "Scotia," bound for Liverpool.

On reaching Liverpool, I learned that England was nearly as much alive as to what had happened at Harper's Ferry as the United States; and I was immediately called upon in different parts of the country to speak on the subject of slavery, and especially to give some account of the men who had thus flung away their lives in a desperate attempt to free the slaves.

SIDE I, Band 10: Return to the United States and John Brown's Legacy

After six months in England, news reached me from home of the death of my beloved daughter Annie, the light and life of my home. Deeply distressed by this bereavement, and acting upon the impulse of the moment, regardless of the peril, I at once resolved to return home, and took the first outgoing steamer for Portland, Maine. After a rough passage of seventeen days, I reached home by way of Canada.

Great changes had now taken place in the public touching the John Brown Raid. Virginia had satisfied her thirst for blood. She had not given Captain Brown the benefit of a reasonable doubt, but hurried him to the scaffold in panic-stricken haste. Emerson's prediction that Brown's gallows would become like the Cross was already being fulfilled. The old hero, in the trial hour, had behaved so grandly that men regarded him not as a murderer, but as a martyr. His body was in the dust, but his soul was marching on.

In a letter to a group of Abolitionists assembling on July 4, 1860, to do honor to the memory of John Brown, I wrote: "To have been acquainted with John Brown, shared his counsels, enjoyed his confidence, and sympathized with the great objects of his life and death, I esteem as among the highest privileges of my life. We do but honor to ourselves in doing honor to him, for it implies the possession of qualities akin to his."

SIDE II, Band 1: Election of Lincoln

Though called home from Europe by one of the saddest events that can afflict the domestic circle, my presence here was fortunate, since it enabled me to participate in the most important and memorable presidential canvass ever witnessed in the United States, and to labor for the election of a man who in the order of events was destined to do a greater service to his country and to mankind than any man who had gone before him in the presidential office. That man was Abraham Lincoln, the candidate of the then young, growing, and united, Republican party. Against both Stephen A. Douglas and John C. Breckenridge, candidates of the divided Democratic party, Abraham Lincoln proposed his grand historic doctrine of the power and duty of the national government to prevent the spread and perpetuity of slavery. Into this contest I threw myself, with firmer faith and more ardent hope than ever before; and what I could do, by pen or voice, to achieve the election of Lincoln was done with a will.

The most remarkable and memorable feature of this presidential campaign was that it was prosecuted under the portentous shadow of a threat. Leading public men of the South openly proclaimed that they would proceed to take the slaveholding states out of the Union in the event of the election of Abraham Lincoln. This threat frightened the timid, but stimulated the brave; and the result was – the triumphant election of Abraham Lincoln.

SIDE II, Band 2: Secession of the South

Then came the question, what will the South do about it? Will she eat her bold words, and submit to the verdict of the people, or proceed to secede from the Union? The inquiry was an anxious one, and the blood of the North stood still, waiting for the response. It had not long to wait. The response of the slaveholders to the glorious assertion of freedom and independence on the part of the North in the triumphant election of Abraham Lincoln was the dismemberment of the Republic, and the establishment of the Confederate States, a government based upon human slavery.

As a result of the shameful and shocking course followed by President Buchanan, one after another the Southern states were allowed to secede. Even men who had heretofore resisted the Slave Power bent before the Southern storm, and were ready to purchase peace at any price, especially at the expense of the Negro slaves. Everything that could be demanded by insatiable pride and selfishness on the part of the slaveholding South, or could be surrendered by abject fear and servility on the part of the North, had able and eloquent advocates.

Happily for the cause of human freedom, and for the final unity of the American nation, the South was mad, and would listen to no concessions. They had made up their mind that they would secede from the Union. They had come to hate everything which had the prefix "free" – free soil, free states, free territories, free schools, free speech, and freedom generally, and they would have no more such prefixes. And so the slaveholders plunged madly into the bloody vortex of rebellion and war. On April 12, 1861, the batteries of Charleston harbor in South Carolina were opened upon the starving garrison at Fort Sumter.

SIDE II, Band 3: Civil War

In a moment the Northern lamb was transformed into a lion. Gone were the months of appeasement when politicians and businessmen had vied with each other to purchase peace and prosperity for the North by granting the most demoralizing concessions to the Slave Power. The cannons booming over Charleston compelled everyone to elect between patriotic fidelity and pro-slavery and treason. As the North took to arms, I wrote in my paper: "We say out of a full heart, and on behalf of our enslaved and bleeding brothers, thank God."

From the first, I, for one, saw in this war the end of slavery; and truth requires me to say that my interest in the success of the North was largely due to this belief. True it is that this faith was many times shaken by passing events, but never destroyed. When Secretary Seward instructed our ministers to say to the governments to which they were accredited, that "terminate however it might, the status of no class of the people of the United States would be changed by the rebellion – that the slaves would be slaves still, and that the masters still" – when General McLellan and General Butler warned the slaves in advance that if any attempt was made by them to gain their freedom, it would be suppressed with an iron hand – when the government persistently refused to employ colored troops – I still believed, and spoke as I believed, all over the North, that the mission of the war was the liberation of the slave, as well as the salvation of the Union; and hence from the first I reproached the North that they fought the rebels with only one hand, when they might strike effectively with two – that they fought with their soft white hand while they kept their black iron hand chained and helpless behind them – that they fought the effect while they protected the cause, and that the Union cause would never prosper till the war assumed an anti-slavery attitude, and the Negro was enlisted on the loyal side. In every way possible, in the columns of my paper and on the platform, by letters to friends, at home and abroad, I did all that I could do to impress this conviction upon the country.

Many and grievous disasters on the field of battle were needed to educate the loyal nation and President Lincoln up to the realization of the necessity, not to say to the justice, of the

position that the war could only be won by freeing the slave and arming the freedman.

SIDE II, Band 4: Emancipation Proclamation

The first of January, 1863, was a memorable day in the progress of American liberty and civilization. It was the turning-point in the conflict between freedom and slavery. A death-blow was then given to the slaveholding rebellion. And now, on this first day of January, 1863, the formal and solemn announcement was made that thereafter the government would be found on the side of emancipation.

As I studied the Proclamation more carefully, it became clear to me that it was extremely defective. Its operation was confined within certain geographical and military lines. It only abolished slavery where it did not exist, and left it intact where it did exist. Nevertheless, I took the Proclamation, first and last, for a little more than it purported; and saw in its spirit, life and power far beyond its letter. Its meaning to me was the entire abolition of slavery, wherever the evil could be reached by the federal arm, and I saw that its moral power would extend much further. It was in my estimation an immense gain to have the war for the Union committed to the extinction of slavery, even from a military necessity.

SIDE II, Band 5: Negro Troops

On January 20, 1863, Governor John A. Andrew of Massachusetts received permission from Mr. Lincoln to raise two colored regiments, the 54th and 55th. Immediately I wrote my call, "Men of Color, to Arms," addressed to the colored citizens of the North. It appeared in my paper and was published in the leading journals. I concluded on the following note: "The chance is now given you to end in a day the bondage of centuries, and to rise in one bound from social degradation to the plane of common equality with all other varieties of men. Remember Denmark Vesey of Charlestown; remember Nathaniel Turner of South Hampton; remember Shields Green and Copeland, who followed noble John Brown, and fell as glorious martyrs for the cause of the slave. Remember that in a contest with oppression, the Almighty has no attribute which can take side with oppressors. The case is before you. This is our golden opportunity. Let us accept it, and for ever wipe out the dark reproaches unsparingly hurled against us by our enemies. Let us win for ourselves the gratitude of our country, and the blessings of our posterity through all time..."

The raising of these two regiments – the 54th and 55th – and their splendid behavior in South and North Carolina with the beginning of good things for the colored people of the whole country; and not the least satisfaction I now have in contemplating my humble part in raising them, is the fact that my two sons, Charles and Lewis, were the two first in the State of New York to enlist in them.

I continued to assist in raising regiments of Negro soldiers, using every argument of which I was capable, to persuade every colored man able to bear arms, to rally around the flag, and help save the country and save the race. But the attitude of the government at Washington caused me deep sadness and discouragement, and forced me in a measure to suspend my efforts in that direction. I had assured colored men that once in the Union Army they would be paid upon an equal footing with other soldiers; that they would be paid, promoted, and exchanged as prisoners of war. But thus far the government had not kept its promise, nor the promise made for it.

SIDE II, Band 6: Douglass Meets Lincoln

In my efforts to secure just and fair treatment for the colored soldiers, I went to Washington to lay the complaints of my people before President Lincoln and the Secretary of War, and to urge upon them such action as should secure to the colored troops then fighting for the country a reasonable degree of fair play. I was never more quickly or more completely put at ease in the presence of a great man, than in that of Abraham Lincoln. As I approached and was introduced to him, he rose and extended his hand, and bade me welcome. Proceeding to tell him who I was, and what I was doing, he promptly, but kindly, stopped me, saying: "I know who you are, Mr. Douglass; Mr. Seward has told me all about you. Sit down. I am glad to see you." I then told him the object of my visit, and that there were three particulars which I wished to bring to his attention. First, that colored soldiers ought to receive the

same wages as those paid to white soldiers. Second, that colored soldiers ought to receive the same protection when taken prisoners, and be exchanged, as readily, and on the same terms, as any other prisoners; and if Jefferson Davis should shoot or hang colored soldiers in cold blood, the United States should retaliate in kind and degree, without delay, upon Confederate prisoners in its hands. Third, when colored soldiers performed great and uncommon service on the battlefield, they should be rewarded by distinction and promotion, precisely as white soldiers are rewarded for like services.

Mr. Lincoln listened with patience and silence to all I had to say. He began his earnest reply by saying that the employment of colored troops at all was a great gain to the colored people; that the measure could not have been successfully adopted at the beginning of the war; that the wisdom of making colored men soldiers was still doubted; that their enlistment was a serious offence to popular prejudice; that they had larger motives for being soldiers than white men; that they ought to be willing to enter the service upon any conditions; that the fact that they were not to receive the same pay as white soldiers seemed a necessary concession to smooth the way to their employment at all as soldiers, but that ultimately they would receive the same. On the second point, in respect to equal protection, he said the case was more difficult. Retaliation was a terrible remedy, and one which it was very difficult to apply. He thought that the rebels themselves would stop such barbarous warfare, and less evil would be if retaliation were not resorted to. On the third point he appeared to have less difficulty, though he did not absolutely commit himself. He simply said that he would sign any commission to colored soldiers whom his Secretary of War should commend to him. Though I was not entirely satisfied with his views, I was so well satisfied with the man and with the educating tendency of the conflict, that I determined to go on with the recruiting.

I was not satisfied either with my interview with Secretary of War Stanton, yet I left in the full belief that the true course to the black man's freedom and citizenship was over the battlefield, and that my business was to get every black man I could into the Union armies. Both the President and Secretary of War assured me that justice would ultimately be done to my race, and I gave full faith and credit to their promise.

SIDE II, Band 7: Death of Lincoln

It was my good fortune to be present at Abraham Lincoln's inauguration in March, 1865, after his re-election as President, and to hear on that occasion his remarkable inaugural address.

A series of important events followed soon after the second inauguration of Mr. Lincoln, conspicuous amongst which was the fall of Richmond. The collapse of the rebellion was now not long delayed, though it did not perish without adding to its long list of atrocities, one which sent a thrill of horror throughout the civilized world, in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln; a man so amiable, so kind, so humane, and honest, that one is at a loss to know how he could have had an enemy on earth. I was in Rochester when news of the death of Mr. Lincoln was received. Our citizens, not knowing what else to do in the agony of the hour, betook themselves to the City Hall. Though all hearts ached for utterance, few felt like speaking, but I was called upon and spoke out of the fullness of my heart; and, happily, I gave expression to so much of the soul of the people present, that my voice was several times utterly silenced by the sympathetic tumult of the great audience. I have resided long in Rochester, and made many speeches there which had more or less touched the hearts of my hearers, but never till this day was I brought into such close accord with them.

SIDE II, Band 8: Freedom and Equality

When the war for the Union was substantially ended, and peace dawned upon the land; when the gigantic system of American slavery was finally abolished and for ever prohibited by the organic law of the land, a strange feeling came over me. My great and exceeding joy over these stupendous achievements, especially over the abolition of slavery - which had been the deepest desire and the great labor of my life - was slightly tinged with a feeling of sadness. The anti-slavery platform had performed its work, and my voice was no longer needed. What should I do?

The answer was not long in coming. Though slavery was abolished, the wrongs of my people were not ended. Though they were not slaves they were not yet quite free. No man can be truly free, whose liberty is dependent upon the thought, feel-

ing, and action of others; and who has himself no means in his own hands for guarding, protecting, defending, and maintaining that liberty. Yet the Negro, after his emancipation, was precisely in this state of destitution. The law, on the side of freedom, is of great advantage only where there is power to make that law respected.

The government felt that it had done enough for the former slaves. It had made them free, and henceforth they must make their own way in the world. Yet they had none of the conditions for self-preservation or self-protection. They were free from the individual masters, but the slaves of society. The old master class simply drove them off the old plantation, and told them they were no longer wanted there.

I, therefore, soon found that the Negro still had a cause, and that he needed my voice and pen with others to plead for it. I called upon the government to assist the landless Negroes of the South by colonizing them on land abandoned by the slaveholders as they had retreated before the advancing Union Army. I urged, further, that these former slaves be equipped with implements to till the soil and arms to defend themselves.

From the first I saw no chance of bettering the condition of the freedman, until he should cease to be merely a freedman, and should become a citizen. I insisted that there was no safety for him, nor for anybody else in America, outside the American government; that to guard, protect, and maintain his liberty, the freedman should have the ballot; that the liberties of the American people were dependent upon the ballot box, the jury box, and the cartridge box, that without these no class of people could live and flourish in this country; and this was now the word for the hour with me, and word to which the people of the North willingly listened when I spoke. However, regarding as I did, the elective franchise as one of the great powers by which all civil rights are obtained, enjoyed, and maintained under our form of government, and the one without which freedom to any class is delusive if not impossible, I set myself to work with whatever force and energy I possessed to secure this power for the recently emancipated millions.

SIDE II, Band 9: Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments

Unlike the movement for the abolition of slavery, the success of the effort for the enfranchisement of the freedmen was not long delayed. In addition to the justice of the measure, it was soon commended by events as a political necessity. As in the case of the abolition of slavery, the white people of the rebellious states have themselves to thank for its adoption. Had they accepted with moderate grace the liberal conditions of peace offered to them, and united heartedly with the national government in its efforts to reconstruct their shattered institutions, instead of sullenly refusing as they did, their counsel and their votes to that end, they might have easily have defeated the argument based upon the necessity for the measure. But their apparent determination to re-enslave the Negro in some new form of slavery, made it essential that the freedmen obtain their apparent determination to re-enslave the Negro in some new form of slavery, made it essential that the freedmen obtain the shield of the ballot box. Consequently, there came in due time the great amendments to the Constitution, the fourteenth and fifteenth, which invested colored men with citizenship and the right to vote.

The adoption of the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments, and their incorporation into the Constitution of the United States, caused many of my former associates in the cause of the Negro to believe that their work was finished. Some even cautioned me against demanding too much for the colored people. They reminded me that only a decade ago Negroes were slaves without any right, and that in an amazingly short time, they had been freed and transformed into American citizens and even given the right to vote.

SIDE II, Band 10: Aftermath

But even as they spoke, a new pattern of oppression, replacing the old slave system, was growing up in the South. The plantation owners, shorn of their source of power by emancipation, devised new methods of reducing the freedman to a state of peonage that would keep him bound hand and foot to the plantation. Terrorist societies such as the Ku Klux Klan swept down upon Negroes who dared to protest the violation of their rights. Any Negro community which sought to defend its civil liberties soon found its churches and schools a smoking shambles. Soon, as a result of this terror, the constitutional amendments adopted after the Civil War became little better than a mockery of freedom.

When I met delegates at Negro conventions who had lived through the horrors of seeing their families massacred, their churches and schools burned to the ground, and their homes left in smoking ruins, I realized the ridiculousness of the contention that my work was over. Constitutional amendments guaranteeing the Negro equality and fair play looked very well in print, I reminded my friends, but law on the statute book and law in the practice of the nation are two very different things, and sometimes very opposite things. What were the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments worth to the victims of the Klan terror? What did the ballot mean to men reduced to a state of peonage?

At the South, I argued in speech after speech, "The Negro dependent upon his enemy for his daily bread cannot long vote or act contrary to the will of those to whom he must necessarily look to for that food and raiment which he must have. It is a grand thing to have rights secured by constitutional provisions and by legal enactments, but without a public opinion and a government to enforce them, they are a mockery. To be one half freeman and the other half a slave, to be a citizen and yet treated as an alien, to be a man, and yet not be a man among men, may do for a monster but not for genuine manhood."

To those who called for a halt to agitation on the Negro question, I replied, "We certainly hope that the time will come when the colored man in America shall cease to require the special efforts to guard these rights and advance their interests as a class. But that time has not yet come, and is not even at the door. When the doors of nearly every workshop in the land are closed against the colored race, and the highest callings opened to them are of a menial character; while a colored gentleman is compelled to walk the streets of our large cities like New York unable to obtain admission to public hotels; while staterooms are refused in our steamboats, and berths are refused in our sleeping cars on account of color, and the Negro is a byword and a hissing at every corner, the Negro is not abolished as a degraded caste, nor need his friends shut up shop and cease to make his advancement in the scale of civilized life a special work."

SIDE II, Band 11: Summation

Instead of retiring from the field, I once again flung myself into the battle to assist, through my speeches and writings, in the removal of the hardships and wrongs which continued to be the lot of the colored people of this country. What I said and wrote during these years can best be summed up in the statement I made during my speech in Washington, D. C., in April, 1883: "What Abraham Lincoln said in respect of the United States is as true of the colored people as of the relation of those States. They can not remain half slave and half free. You must give them all or take from them all. Until this half-and-half condition is ended, there will be a just ground of com-

plaint. You will have an aggrieved class, and this discussion will go on. Until the public schools shall cease to be caste schools in every part of this country, this discussion will go on. Until the colored man's pathway to the American ballot box, North and South, shall be as smooth and as safe as the same is for the white citizen, this discussion will go on. Until the colored man's right to practice at the bar of our courts and sit upon juries, shall be the universal law and practice of the land, this discussion will go on. Until the courts of the country shall grant the colored man a fair trial and a just verdict, this discussion will go on. Until color shall cease to be a bar to equal participation in offices and honors of the country, this discussion will go on. Until the trades unions and the workshops of the country shall cease to proscribe the colored man and prevent his children from learning useful trades, this discussion will go on. Until the American people shall make character, and not color, the criterion of respectability, this discussion will go on."

With this warning to the American people I bring my story to its end. I can remember when as a boy I sat on Kennard's wharf, at the foot of Philpot Street in Baltimore, and saw men and women chained and put on the ship to go to New Orleans. I then resolved that whatever power I had should be devoted to the freeing of my race. Thereafter, in the midst of all opposition, I have endeavored to fulfill my pledge. Forty years of my life have been given to the cause of my people, and if I had forty years more they should all be sacredly given to that great cause.

Dr. Philip S. Foner, a distinguished American historian, is the author, among many books, of The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass (four volumes) which contains the definitive biography of Frederick Douglass and the only collection of his writings and speeches. Dr. Foner is also the author of a four volume History of the Labor Movement in the United States and of biographies of Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, Abraham Lincoln, Mark Twain and Jack London.

Ossie Davis, the noted actor, made his Broadway debut in Jeb, presented by Herman Shumlin. Subsequently he appeared with Helen Hayes in The Wisteria Trees, with Lena Horne in the musical Jamaica, and he replaced Sidney Poitier in A Raisin in the Sun. On the screen, he has appeared in Otto Preminger's The Cardinal, in The Zulu and the Zayda, with Sean Connery in Sidney Lumet's The Hill, and co-starred with Burt Lancaster in The Scalphunters. He is the author of Purlie Victorious, in which he appeared on Broadway, co-starring with his wife, Ruby Dee. Mr. Davis was host and narrator of the National Educational T. V. series on The History of the Negro People, was Master of Ceremonies at the historic March on Washington in 1963, and has written and directed the annual Negro History Show for Local 1199, Drug and Hospital Workers Union.