

Focus on an Orator: Frederick Douglass

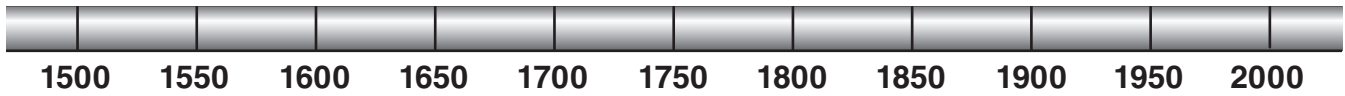
Frederick Douglass was born a slave in Tuckahoe, Maryland, on February 1818. The son of a slave woman and her white owner, Douglass was raised by his grandmother until he was eight years old. He only saw his mother a few times in his lifetime because she lived on a different plantation. At the age of eight, he was given to the Auld family, who lived in Baltimore. The family gave him better clothes and food, and the mother taught him to read until her husband stopped the practice. It was illegal to teach slaves to read in many slave states. Douglass continued to teach himself to read from newspapers.

At the age of fifteen, he was sent away to a plantation where he worked in the fields for a brutal “slavebreaker” named Edward Covey. Here, he witnessed and experienced the brutal reality of slavery. He was frequently whipped and left hungry and cold. He fought with the overseer and eventually ran away or “stole himself,” as he later described his escape. A friend, Anna Murray, made him a sailor suit and helped him escape. He reached New York City in 1838 where he married Anna. Friends raised money to help him buy his freedom from his owner. It cost \$711.66, a sum worth at least ten times as much in today’s currency.

Douglass started giving dynamic speeches at abolitionist meetings. He also attended and spoke at anti-slavery conventions. One of Douglass’s most famous speeches was given at an event celebrating the signing of the Declaration of Independence. During this address, he said, “This Fourth of July is *yours*, not *mine*. You may rejoice, I must mourn.”

In Douglass’s lifetime, he wrote three autobiographies, but his most famous one was written in 1841, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*. He started three different newspapers advocating the emancipation of slaves. Douglass was a friend and trusted advisor of President Lincoln. He strongly advocated allowing African Americans to fight in the Civil War. In 1877, he became a U.S. Marshal for the District of Columbia. Douglass died in 1895 at his home in Washington, D.C.





“The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro”

The text below contains selections from the famous speech by Frederick Douglass. It was delivered at Corinthian Hall in Rochester, New York, on July 5, 1852.

Fellow Citizens, I am not wanting in respect for the fathers of this republic. The signers of the Declaration of Independence were brave men. They were great men, too—great enough to give frame to a great age. . . . The point from which I am compelled to view them is not, certainly, the most favorable; and yet I cannot contemplate their great deeds with less than admiration. They were statesmen, patriots and heroes, and for the good they did, and the principles they contended for, I will unite with you to honor their memory. . . .

Fellow-citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here to-day? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us? And am I, therefore, called upon to bring our humble offering to the national altar, and to confess the benefits and express devout gratitude for the blessings resulting from your independence to us?

Would to God, both for your sakes and ours, that an affirmative answer could be truthfully returned to these questions! Then would my task be light, and my burden easy and delightful. . . .

But such is not the state of the case. I say it with a sad sense of the disparity between us. I am not included within the pale of glorious anniversary! . . . The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought light and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn. . . . Do you mean, citizens, to mock me, by asking me to speak to-day? . . .

Fellow-citizens, above your national, tumultuous joy, I hear the mournful wail of millions whose chains, heavy and grievous yesterday, are, to-day, rendered more intolerable by the jubilee shouts that reach them. . . . My subject, then, fellow-citizens, is American slavery. I shall see this day and its popular characteristics from the slave’s point of view. . . .

What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery. . . . There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of the United States, at this very hour. . . .

Allow me to say, in conclusion, notwithstanding the dark picture I have this day presented, of the state of the nation, I do not despair of this country. . . . I, therefore, leave off where I began, with hope. While drawing encouragement from “the Declaration of Independence,” the great principles it contains, and the genius of American Institutions, my spirit is also cheered by the obvious tendencies of the age. Nations do not now stand in the same relation to each other that they did ages ago. . . . Walled cities and empires have become unfashionable. . . . Intelligence is penetrating the darkest corners of the globe. It makes its pathway over and under the sea, as well as on the earth. . . . Oceans no longer divide, but link nations together. . . .

In the fervent aspirations of William Lloyd Garrison, I say, and let every heart join in saying it:

*God speed the hour, the glorious hour,
When none on earth
Shall exercise a lordly power,
Nor in a tyrant’s presence cower;
But to all manhood’s stature tower,
By equal birth!
That hour will come, to each, to all,
And from his Prison-house, to thrall
Go forth.*

*Until that year, day, hour, arrive,
With head, and heart, and hand I’ll strive,
To break the rod, and rend the gyve,
The spoiler of his prey deprive—
So witness Heaven!
And never from my chosen post,
Whate’er the peril or the cost,
Be driven.*

Focus on an Orator: Sojourner Truth

“Children, I talk to God, and God talks to me.” Sojourner Truth often began her remarkable speeches with these words. She was an electrifying orator who thrilled audiences with her message and presence as she lectured throughout the North during the years preceding the Civil War.

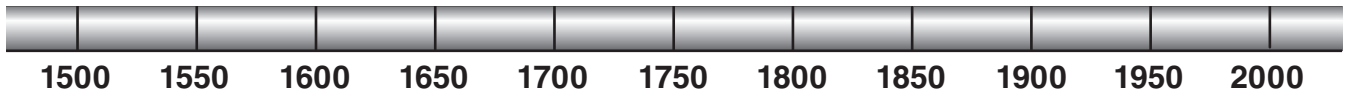
Sojourner Truth was a former slave who escaped in 1826 and who began her crusade for the abolition of slavery and the rights of women in 1841. She could neither read nor write, and many advocates of women’s suffrage were afraid she would hurt the women’s rights movement. Her “Ain’t I a Woman” speech—similar to those she gave over many years—at the Ohio Women’s Rights Convention in 1851 earned her the respect of most of the suffrage leaders.



Sojourner started life as a Dutch-speaking slave named Isabella in New York State. She watched her twelve brothers and sisters be sold at different times, and Isabella was sold as a teenager to John Dumont who chose her slave husband for her when she was seventeen years old. They had five children.

Isabella was entitled to freedom in ten years due to the New York Emancipation Act that took effect in 1827. Dumont promised to free her a year early if she worked hard for him for nine years. She fulfilled her part of the bargain, but he refused to let her go. Isabella ran away with her baby, Sophia. A Quaker family bought her and her baby and then freed them. She discovered that her five-year-old son, Peter, had been sold to Alabama planters against New York State law. She sued Dumont and won her case, becoming the first African American woman in America to win a lawsuit against a white man.

She adopted the name Sojourner Truth in 1843 when she followed voices in her head that told her to become a traveling preacher. She spoke about religion in parts of New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. Sojourner became a powerful voice for God’s love, despite the fact that she could neither read nor write. She soon became a strong voice for the abolition of slavery and the rights of women. Sojourner (which means *traveler*) journeyed through the western states, including Ohio, Kansas, and Indiana, delivering her unique message. *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth* was written by a friend and widely read. She met President Lincoln in the White House in 1864 and tried to help freed African Americans after the war.



“Ain’t I a Woman?”

The speech below is a version of the one Sojourner Truth gave to the Ohio Women’s Rights Convention in 1851.

Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that ’twixt the negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what’s all this here talking about?

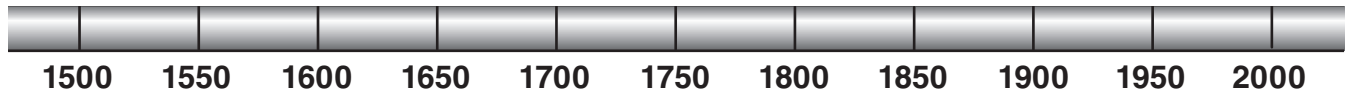
That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain’t I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have plowed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain’t I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash, as well! And ain’t I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain’t I a woman?

Then they talk about this thing in the head; what’s this they call it? [Intellect.] That’s it, honey. What’s that got to do with women’s rights or negroes’ rights? If my cup won’t hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn’t you be mean not to let me have my little half-measure full?

Then that little man in black there, he says women can’t have as much rights as men, ’cause Christ wasn’t a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him.

If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them.

Obliged to you for hearing me, and now old Sojourner ain’t got nothing more to say.



Famous Speeches by African Americans

Assignment

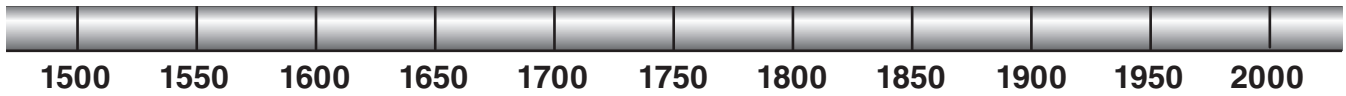
1. Prepare the “The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro” speech by Frederick Douglass, the “Ain’t I a Woman” speech by Sojourner Truth, or one of the speeches given by African Americans or famous Americans listed below. You can find these speeches on the Internet, in books of famous speeches, in encyclopedias, in books about the speaker, and other sources.
2. Deliver the prepared speech to your class.

African American Speeches

- Keynote Speech to the Democratic National Convention in 1976 by Barbara Jordan
- Speech against the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850 by the Reverend Jermain Wesley Loguen, an escaped fugitive slave who refused to go to Canada or to pay his former master for his freedom
- An address given at the annual meeting of the Niagara Movement in 1906 by W. E. B. Du Bois
- Shirley Chisholm’s first speech to Congress in 1969 as the first African American woman elected to the House of Representatives
- Senator Barack Obama’s speech to the 2004 Democratic National Convention
- President Barack Obama’s Inaugural Address on January 20, 2009
- Speeches by Martin Luther King Jr., Barbara Jordan, Ida B. Wells, James Forman, Booker T. Washington, James Baldwin, Jesse Jackson, and others

Other American Speeches

- “The Gettysburg Address” by Abraham Lincoln
- President Kennedy’s Inaugural Address
- Franklin D. Roosevelt’s First Inaugural Address
- Abraham Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address
- Ronald Reagan’s *Challenger* Disaster Address
- Patrick Henry’s “Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death” Oration



Write Your Own Persuasive Speech

Choosing a Topic

Throughout American history, American citizens have heatedly discussed and debated the great issues of their times. Choose a topic for your speech about which you feel passionate. It may deal with the great issues of the day, such as the treatment of minorities, the rights of women, the behavior of the government, war and peace, the care of the environment, global warming, the treatment of animals, or other issues. It could also deal with more personal issues, such as children’s rights, school, or local problems.

List your possible topics below.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Outline Your Speech

Your speech should have at least four to six paragraphs organized like this:

Introduction

Create an opening paragraph that clearly expresses your opinion and indicates why the subject is important to you. Clearly state the purpose of your speech. Include an attention-grabbing sentence to capture the interest of your audience.

Arguments

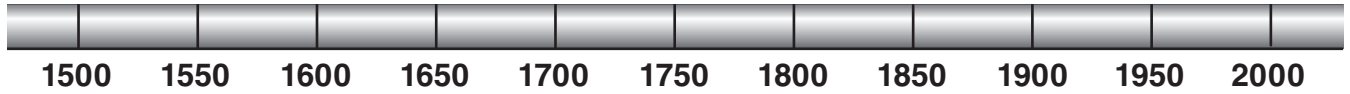
The second and third paragraphs should describe all of the evidence you can think of to support your position. You should include personal experiences, the opinions of experts, and careful reasoning.

Counter-arguments

A fourth paragraph should describe the arguments and evidence against your position and your response and reactions to these arguments.

Conclusion

The concluding paragraph should briefly restate your position and clearly draw together all the elements of your thinking.



Write Your Own Persuasive Speech *(cont.)*

Refining Your Speech

1. Keep your sentences rather short, easy to state, and simple to understand.
2. Use one or two quotes from famous people or others if they fit the meaning of your speech.
3. Cut out any repetition or side comments that don't reinforce the message of your speech.
4. Include a humorous line or two if they fit the intent of your speech.
5. Check your facts carefully and include sources for these facts.
6. Use anecdotes or stories to illustrate some of your main points.
7. Provide evidence and facts to support each of your main points.
8. Use an attention-getting opening sentence and a sharply focused closing sentence.

Delivering Your Speech

- You may choose to memorize your speech and simply use your paper as a reference if you forget something.
- Another method is to use notecards and speak extemporaneously, or in an impromptu manner, as if you were speaking to friends.
- Rehearse out loud. Give your speech out loud in full voice to a mirror, a friend, a sibling, or your parents. Practice several times.

Persuasive Speech Outline

Introduction

Arguments

Counter-arguments

Conclusion
