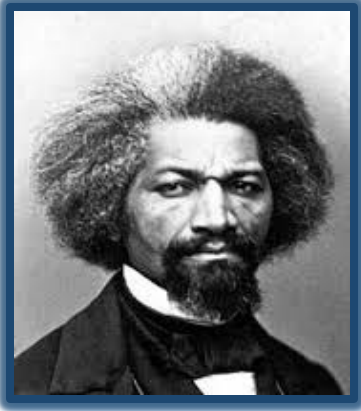


## Life and Times of Frederick Douglass

1881



Douglass described his daring escape on a train ride from Baltimore to Philadelphia in his autobiography. For the journey, Douglass disguised himself as a sailor wearing a red shirt, a tarpaulin hat, and a black scarf tied loosely around his neck. He also had to be able to talk like a sailor.

Along with the other black passengers, Douglass had to show his "free papers"— a document proving he was free and could travel - along with his ticket. Because Douglass was a runaway slave, he didn't have free papers. Instead, he had borrowed what was called a Seaman's Protection Certificate, which proved that a sailor was a citizen of the U.S.

Douglass described his nervousness when the conductor came by to collect tickets and look over papers: *"My whole future depended upon the decision of this conductor."*

"I suppose you have your free papers?" asked the conductor.

Douglass replied, "No sir; I never carry my free papers to sea with me."

"But you have something to show that you are a freeman, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir, I have a paper with the American eagle on it, and that will carry me around the world."

A quick glance at the paper satisfied the conductor and he took Douglass's fare and went on to the other passengers. This moment was one of the most anxious Douglass had ever experienced.

"Though I was not a murderer fleeing from justice, I felt perhaps quite as miserable as such a criminal. The train was moving at a very high rate of speed for that period of railroad travel, but to my anxious mind it was moving far too slowly. Minutes were hours, and hours were days during this part of my flight. After Maryland, I was to pass through Delaware - another slave State, where slave-catchers generally awaited their prey, for it was not in the interior of the State, but on its borders, that these human hounds were most vigilant and active. The borderlines between slavery and freedom were the dangerous ones for the fugitives. The heart of no fox or deer, with hungry hounds on his trail in full chase, could have beaten more anxiously or noisily than did mine from the time I left Baltimore till I reached Philadelphia."



"My free life began on the third of September, 1838. On the morning of the fourth of that month, after an anxious and most perilous but safe journey, I found myself in the big city of New York, a *free man* - one more added to the mighty throng which, like the confused waves of the troubled sea, surged to and fro between the lofty walls of Broadway. But my gladness was short-lived, for I was not yet out of the reach and power of the slave-holders."

"The fifth day after my arrival, I put on the clothes of a common laborer, and went upon the wharves in search of work. On my way down Union Street I saw a large pile of coal in front of the house of Rev. Ephraim Peabody, the Unitarian minister. I went to the kitchen door and asked the privilege of bringing in and putting away this coal. 'What will you charge?' said the lady. 'I will leave that to you, madam.' 'You may put it away,' she said. I was not long in accomplishing the job, when the dear lady put into my hand *two silver half-dollars*. To understand the emotion which swelled my heart as I clasped this money, realizing that I had no master who could take it from me, -- *that it was mine -- that my hands were my own*, and could earn more of the precious coin."

## *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*

### Questions

1. "The train was moving at a very high rate of speed for that period of railroad travel, but to my anxious mind it was moving far too slowly. Minutes were hours, and hours were days during this part of my flight." What is Douglass trying to say when he describes his anxious mind this way?

2. "To understand the emotion which swelled my heart as I clasped this money, realizing that I had no master who could take it from me, -- *that it was mine* -- *that my hands were my own*, and could earn more of the precious coin." What conclusions can you make about Douglass' emotional state of mind? Use evidence from any previous readings to support your response.