TIMELINE OF THE LIFE OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS

(All dates are approximate since slaves were kept ignorant of the concept of time or dates.)

**1818** Frederick Bailey (Douglass) born in Tuckahoe, near Hillsborough, Maryland. Mother—Harriet Bailey,

a slave; father—a white man, perhaps the master. Separated from mother in infancy.

**1824** Harriet Bailey dies; seen only by son four or five times when she’d travel twelve miles by foot at night.

**1817-1825** Lived on the “Great House Farm” plantation of Colonel Edward Lloyd; master was Captain Anthony,

Colonel Lloyd’s clerk.

**1825** Moved to Baltimore, Maryland, home of Mr. Hugh Auld, brother of Colonel Lloyd’s son-in-law,

Captain Thomas Auld.

**1825** Mrs. Sophia Auld, new mistress, begins to teach Frederick to read; Mr. Auld finds out and forbids it,

calling it “unlawful” and “unsafe.”

**1825-1832** Lives with Aulds; continues to learn to read and write, often bribing the poor white children to help him.  
**1828** Returns to Colonel Lloyd’s plantation after death of Captain Anthony and his youngest son Richard

so that property, including horses and slaves, can be divided between two surviving children, Mrs.

Lucretia and Master Andrew; falls to the portion of Mrs. Lucretia and is returned to Baltimore.

**1829** Reads “The Columbian Orator,” giving words to his feelings about slavery; learns the meaning of the

word “abolition”; meets two kind Irishmen who advise him to run away to the north; “from that time

on I resolved to run away” (p. 57).

(The following dates are more accurate since Frederick has learned to read and understands dates.)

**March, 1832** Mrs. Lucretia and Master Andrew have both died; Master Thomas Auld, Lucretia’s husband, remarries

and has a misunderstanding with Master Hugh. As punishment of Hugh, Frederick goes to live with

Master Thomas in St. Michael’s, Maryland. Master Thomas is not as good a master; he feeds his slaves

very little.

**Jan. 1, 1833** Sent to live with Mr. Covey who has the reputation “for breaking young slaves” (p. 70); Frederick is

frequently whipped. He writes, “Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and

spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the

cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold

a man transformed into a brute!” (p. 75).

**Aug. 1833** Frederick becomes ill in the fields; Mr. Covey whips him. Frederick runs away from Mr. Covey and

files a complaint with Master Auld which is rejected. When Frederick returns to Mr. Covey’s he vows

to fight which he does; Mr. Covey’s treatment toward him begins to change; Frederick vows that he

never will be whipped again. “This battle with Mr. Covey... rekindled the few expiring embers of

freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood” (p. 82).

**Jan. 1, 1834** Moved to home of Mr. William Freeland, three miles from St. Michael’s. Mr. Freeland was “an

educated southern gentleman” and much kinder to the slaves. Frederick begins a Sabbath school for

slaves; if they were caught they would be whipped, but they wanted to learn to read and write.

**Jan. 1835** Mr. Freeland again hires Frederick from his master. Frederick and several other slaves plot an escape

but are discovered and sent to jail. For a reason unknown to Frederick, Master Thomas Auld decides

to send him back to Baltimore to Hugh Auld.

**1835** Sent to learn the trade of caulking at a shipyard; severely injured in fight with white carpenters; Mr.

Hugh Auld takes Frederick to work in shipyard where he is foreman; Frederick learns quickly and is

soon earning wages which he must turn over to Master Hugh Auld.

**Spring 1838** Frederick applies to Master Thomas to allow him to hire his time; Thomas refuses; however, later Hugh

agrees making a deal which guarantees him more money. Frederick agrees to the plan since it is the only

way he can earn money to escape. When Frederick goes out of the city on work without permission,

Master Hugh tells him to “bring my tools and clothing home forthwith” (p. 109). This makes Frederick

more committed to find a way to escape.

**Sept. 3, 1838** Frederick escapes to New York; he does not reveal the means in his narrative, stating that it could

embarrass some and keep others from escaping; he is helped by Mr. David Ruggles who houses

Frederick in his boarding house and helps him get Anna Murray, a free black woman, to New York.

**Sept. 15, 1838** Anna Murray and Frederick Johnson (name changed from Frederick Bailey) marry; this is particularly

important since slaves were not permitted to marry; they leave for New Bedford. In New Bedford the

couple is helped by Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Johnson. Frederick asks the Johnsons to help him pick a new

name; Mr. Johnson who is reading “Lady of the Lake” selects Douglass.

**Aug. 11, 1841** At the anti-slavery convention at Nantucket Mr. William C. Coffin urges Frederick Douglass to speak.

Douglass writes, “It was a severe cross, and I took it up reluctantly. The truth was, I felt myself a slave,

and the idea of speaking to white people weighed me down” (p. 119).