

## Frederick Douglass: A Novel

**Sidney Morrison**

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Sidney Morrison's biographical novel *Frederick Douglass* follows the famed abolitionist from slavery to international stardom.

Frederick Douglass dreams of escaping enslavement for years. But after completing the long and dangerous journey to the North, he finds that freedom comes attached to the insidious strings of segregation and prejudice. He channels his frustration into activism, joining the abolitionist movement and sharing his own experiences with the horrors of slavery. His activism takes many forms, with his writing, especially his autobiographical work, playing a prominent role in his work and personal life.

Throughout Douglass's story, he deals with white people who are patronizing at best and cruel at worst. Their goodwill is conditional on factors that are often outside of his control. His alliances shift over time, sprouting and flourishing only to snap under the weight of political differences and clashing personalities. Still, though he's sometimes laid low, Douglass never recognizes total defeat.

Morrison's understated prose conveys this alongside the major events of Douglass's life, from the triumphs of his greatest speeches to the devastating deaths of his relatives and friends. Douglass is a complicated hero who devotes himself to his crusade at the expense of his growing family, leaving them for stretches of time to recruit supporters and raise funds. Strong-willed and accustomed to having to fight, he alienates friends and allies, picking arguments where there are none; he struggles as long as he can to resist his desire for violent revolution. And the transcendent final chapter, which is rife with symbolism, emphasizes the justness of his mission and his visionary spirit, which saw him through to the end of his long, productive life.

*Frederick Douglass* is a sprawling biographical novel about a complex man with a singular objective: to achieve full racial equality for all Americans.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (May / June 2024)

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