

Hidden History

The Unsung Saga of the Black Man

as told by



John P. & C. Buck West

SPONSORED BY



FREDERICK DOUGLASS

Ex-Slave Who Rose to Be
a Mighty Champion of Freedom
(1817-1895)

(Second of a 4-part series on the great Abolitionist as annotated by the last historian-anthropologist, J. A. Rogers, in Vol. II of the author's "Worlds Great Men of Color")

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"IN SPITE OF THE cruelty he suffered, his spirit remained unbroken. One day, Covey, in a greater fit of anger than ever, seized him by the leg to tie him up in order to beat him and he pushed Covey away. The latter's cousin, Hughes, came rushing up to help Covey but Douglass, with his six feet of brawn, charged Hughes and sent him flying, then, regardless of consequences turned on Covey and gave him the thrashing of his life.

"To strike a master meant death but after what he was experiencing even death seemed welcome. However, to his great surprise, nothing came of the affair. Covey, knowing that it would hurt both his reputation and his income if the story were known said nothing. He never tried to beat Douglass again.

"SIX MONTHS later, Douglass was hired out to a less brutal master, but, still untamed, he incited his fellow-slaves to revolt, for which he was tied to a horse and dragged fifteen miles to jail where, after several weeks, he was released at Auld's request.

"He was then sent to a shipyard to learn caulking. His orders were to obey all of the carpenters, who would send him on dozens of errands, kicking and beating him when they considered he did not move fast enough. On one occasion he was knocked down and kicked in the eye, as a result of which, he could not see for days.

"Another time, four of his tormentors jumped on him at once. 'Dear reader,' says Douglass in his autobiography, 'you can hardly believe this statement, but it is true, and therefore I write it down; no fewer than fifty men stood by and saw the brutal and shameful outrage, and that one's face was beaten and battered most horribly, and no one said, 'that's enough,' but someone shouted, 'kill him, knock his brains out.' After this, Auld took him away from the shipyard, not from sympathy but because his property was being damaged.

"DOUGLASS WAS NOW allowed to hire himself out with orders to turn over his wages each Saturday. Able to move about now with much more freedom, he began to plan his escape. If only he could reach Philadelphia, ninety miles away! But how was he to get there? The regulations on the railroads and steamships were so strict regarding Negroes that it was difficult for even a free one to buy a ticket. To get one he would have to show his "free" papers to the ticket-agent.

"Douglass at last got hold of a sailor's uniform and a passport. To avoid buying a ticket, he waited until the train had started and then caught it. He had taken the further precaution of learning sea lingo and imitating a sailor's walk. However, the description on the passport was that of one much darker than he. Fortunately

Miss Alice Key
Las Vegas VOICE

Alice:
The attached is sent along for your info.
I enjoyed your piece in last week's VOICE on the same subject.

Earle
* * * * *

Mr. Bryn Armstrong
Executive Editor
Las Vegas Sun
900 South Commerce
Las Vegas, Nevada

Dear Mr. Armstrong:

Reference is made to the article in November 17th issue of the Sun which dealt in part with Governor-elect Paul Laxalt's position regarding the future of civil rights in the State of Nevada. I was appalled and disgusted by his statement that "in the whole area of civil rights as far as I'm concerned Woodrow Wilson will supplant the existing leadership, if there is any in West Las Vegas." The insensitiveness of the Governor-elect to the plight of his less fortunate Negro brethren was amplified by his statement that he himself intends to emasculate the Nevada Equal Rights Commission by making it a largely ineffective conciliation board as it was prior to the Nevada Civil Rights Act of 1965.

If Mr. Laxalt thinks for a moment that the election of Mr. Wilson to the Assembly has provided him with a house pet, then I am confident that the Governor-elect is sadly mistaken. The

for him the conductor merely glanced at it. Then another thought worried him; suppose some white man who knew him should be on the train. This was just what happened. There were two such: one a German ship-carpenter with whom he had once worked and another with whom he had talked only two days before. Both, however, to his great relief, made no move to betray him.

"THE NEXT DAY he arrived in New York. But he was not yet free. There was the Fugitive Slave Law. Slave-masters had Negro spies in the North to report runaways and the judges who received ten dollars a head for each slave returned to the South, readily issued orders returning them there.

"He found work shovelling coal. He was now twenty-one and hoping to find work at his trade he went to the ship-yards at New Bedford, Massachusetts, but color prejudice was very strong in the North and he was forced to take a job blowing the bellows in a foundry.

"The bellows was to be pumped continually in order to keep the furnace at a heat that would make the metal run. Since this was purely mechanical, he determined to use the time in bettering his education and nailing a newspaper or other printed matter to a post, he would read as he worked the bellows.

"Up to now he had no surname. He had been known only as Frederick. He now decided to call himself Douglass after the hero of Walter Scott's Marmion. He also married a free woman, Anna Murray.

"With freedom he had increasing desire to help those still in slavery. This determination grew as he read "The Liberator," published by William Lloyd Garrison, famous abolitionist, whose motto was, "Color prejudice is rebellion against God."

"HIS OPPORTUNITY came three years later. He was attending an anti-slavery meeting in Nantucket when someone said that an escaped slave was present. His name was called and shouts came back for him to speak.

"Douglass got up in great confusion. He had never spoken in public before. His first words were stammering but soon his nervousness was lost in his tale and he was pouring out a story such an anti-slavery audience had never heard before. Its force and fervor held everyone present spell-bound.

"When he was finished there was a rush to him. Parker Pillsbury, who was present, says: 'The crowded congregation had been wrought up almost to enchantment as he turned over the terrible apocalypse of his experience in slavery.'

"Emotion fairly boiled over when Garrison arose and thundered: 'What I want to know is: Have we been listening to a thing, a piece of property, or a man?'

"A man! A man!' shouted the audience.
"Shall such a man be sent back to slavery

EDITOR'S MAILBOX

record of Mr. Wilson as NAACP Branch President, as an active participant in past efforts to obtain civil rights legislation in Nevada, and as a dedicated and honest citizen is known to all his friends and associates. I have had the personal pleasure of serving with Mr. Wilson on the Nevada State Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights and certain NAACP and civic activities. Unless Mr. Wilson has been very recently afflicted by some strange malady, I cannot conceive of him being a party to Laxalt legislation which would turn the hands of the clock back four years. Mr. Wilson's commitment to justice, equality and equal opportunity is too strong for him to become a pawn in the hands of a man who has no knowledge of the problems of intergroup relations and who steadfastly chooses to remain abysmally ignorant.

The progress toward racial equality which has been made in Clark County during the past two years has not resulted from the efforts of one man or one race or one section of the community. Since one monkey does not make a zoo, there is still time for Paul Laxalt to join with the enlightened citizens of Clark County to make this area a better place within which to live, work, and raise families. If Mr. Laxalt continues to close off all communication channels and to keep his head in the sand, he can rest assured that he will be vulnerable to a sound kicking in his most exposed area.

Very truly yours,
Earle W. White, Jr.

from the soil of Old Massachusetts?' demanded Garrison, swept away by the storm of enthusiasm. 'No, a thousand times, no! Sooner let the lightnings of Heaven blast Bunker Hill monument until not one stone shall be left on another.'

"The abolitionists, quick to realize the worth of this escaped slave, engaged him on the spot. What better than to have a slave of such intelligence and commanding personality and conviction to plead the cause of his own people!

"DOUGLASS TOOK the field and at once it became clear that a newer, greater, and more relentless foe than ever had arisen against slavery. Across the Northern states he thundered. Raging mobs attacked him in Faneuil Hall, Boston, and at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. At Richmond, Indiana, he was rotten-egged. But everywhere he showed the spirit he had shown against Covey, the slave-killer. At Pendleton, Indiana, when a mob tore down the platform on which he was speaking, he fought back until his arm was broken and he was battered into unconsciousness but the same night with his arm in a sling, he was again on the platform. During the Draft Riots in New York, when the greatest massacre of Negroes probably known in American history, occurred, he faced frenzied white mobs with the same courage.

"As for jim-crow in the North, he never yielded to it. When the conductor of a train in Massachusetts sent him to the jim-crow section, he refused. The conductor sent for the train-hands to oust him but he held on to the seat so firmly that it came loose and he was thrown off the train still holding it.

"ONE WINTER night while on a steamboat plying between Boston and New York, he was put out on deck although entitled to a berth. A compassionate white steward, wanting to admit him, hintingly said: 'You're an Indian, aren't you?' 'No,' replied Douglass resolutely, 'only a damned nigger.'

"Everywhere his courage stood as firm as
(See HISTORY, page 4)

LAS VEGAS
Voice

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