



# FREDERICK DOUGLASS FAMILY FOUNDATION

## **Women For Women: Nettie Washington Douglass Summons the Strength of Her Gender**

It was August 1941 and the menacing shadow of World War II, which had already eclipsed much of the world, now threatened America. Hitler rolled across the whole of Europe and down into North Africa while Japan was invading China. A sense of fear and uncertainty was mounting steadily on this side of the Atlantic as well. For one auspicious moment, however, on a balmy Alabama afternoon, an unanticipated light of providence shined brightly on the campus of [Tuskegee Institute](#).

She was [Nettie Hancock Washington](#), granddaughter of the *Great Educator* and the Institute's founder, [Booker T. Washington](#). Her smile was more like that of a Hollywood starlet. She was back home at Tuskegee visiting from California.

He was as handsome as he was brilliant with a pedigree to match. Frederick Douglass, III by name, he was the great grandson and namesake of the famed abolitionist, journalist and orator. He had been commissioned as a surgeon by the Veterans Administration to serve at Tuskegee during the war. Now, walking across campus, on course for what could be termed an impossibly random celestial event, he -- deep in thought, stroking his Clark Gable mustache, she -- in a hurry to connect with old friends, they -- the progeny of two of America's most influential leaders... collided. Frederick and Nettie fell in love instantly.

Unfortunately, this is not a story of romantic love, but a love defined by a mother's strength. Frederick and Nettie were [married](#) three months after they met. And, when Nettie was three months pregnant with the couple's first and only child, Frederick took his own life, perhaps, due to the profound burden of having to earn his famous name. We'll never know for sure.

The child, Nettie Washington Douglass, was born fatherless but nurtured with love, devotion and determination on the part of three amazing women: her mother, her mother's mother, also named Nettie Hancock Washington, and her paternal grandmother, Fannie Howard Douglass. Together, they all did their best to make up for that which had been lost.

"I get my name from two great American men, but I have been defined by the strong women in my life." says Ms. Douglass. "It's fairly well known that [Frederick Douglass](#) was one of the first and most influential male supporters of the Women's Rights movement, but, what a lot of people don't know is that, without his wife -- my great-great grandmother, [Anna Murray-Douglass](#) -- the world may never have known Frederick Douglass. She not only encouraged but she funded his escape from slavery. She also raised their five children mostly on her own as her husband traveled the world with his message of abolition. It goes to show that history, in many ways, has also been defined by strong women."

Ms. Douglass is now Chairwoman for the Atlanta-based public charity, the [Frederick Douglass Family Foundation](#). The organization celebrates the legacies of her famous ancestors and works to end contemporary forms of human trafficking and modern-day slavery both in the United States and abroad.

“Frederick Douglass fought a lifetime for his own freedom and for the freedom of others,” Ms. Douglass continues. “With millions around the world living in one form of bondage or another his work is not finished. What tears at my heart is that the largest numbers of those being exploited for sex and for labor are girls and women. Today’s slave owners prey on the most vulnerable among us. As a mother, a grandmother and as a woman, I’m sickened by the rape, exploitation and violence against girls and women by johns, traffickers and corporate profiteers as well as the indifference of good people that allow it to happen. “

Citing the urgency to rid communities of human trafficking-related crimes, Ms. Douglass is challenging women everywhere to join her in an anti-trafficking revolution this fall.

“Women must stand up for women. We must speak out for girls that are being broken. Start by sending me a single paragraph from you or your organization and I will assemble them so that we are all heard as one voice.”

Sharon Fisher, President of [Sorooptimist International of the Americas](#), responded with this paragraph as a simple yet powerful first step:

*As an organization working for almost 90 years to improve the lives of women and girls, Sorooptimist vehemently denounces the heinous crimes of sex trafficking and prostitution. Both trafficking and prostitution find their roots in gender inequality, which allows demand to flourish in the belief that there is no harm in purchasing the bodies of women and girls. The first step to ending trafficking and prostitution is to change society’s views about the value of women and girls, and to end the demand. The second is to ensure that women and girls are educated and have choices where their own futures are concerned. Trafficking and prostitution constitute modern day slavery. We must do everything possible to end these demeaning, violent, horrible crimes.*

[Gloria Allred](#), Discrimination Attorney, Feminist Lawyer, also adds:

*Advocating for the rights of women has been a focus of my career. I recently represented a victim of sex trafficking who was a minor. She found that the scales of justice were weighted on the side of the perpetrators. Human trafficking victims deserve support and so I lend my voice to the Frederick Douglass Family Foundation and their campaign to prevent this crime.*

Very few little girls are lucky enough to be born into famous and loving families like Nettie Washington Douglass. Every little girl, however, is equally as precious and must be protected, if not by loving parents, by her community, her state or the laws of her nation. When she’s not being protected, it’s time to demand change.

## **Voices joining Ms. Douglass:**

*As a child advocate, I've talked about human trafficking with former foster girls who turn to prostitution for lack of transitional housing once they "age out" of foster care. We must find support for our former foster youth!!*

Amina Merritt  
Attorney-at-Law  
The Merritt Law Clinic

*The trafficking of girls in the U.S. for purposes of commercial sexual exploitation is abhorrent. As an assistant professor in the School of Social Work at Baylor University, I devote a significant amount of my time researching, writing, and presenting on this issue in order to raise awareness of the abuses that hundreds of thousands of American children are suffering through exploitation in prostitution, pornography, stripping, escort services and massage parlors. We must acknowledge that these atrocities are happening across the country, that no community is immune from it and that more and adequate services needed to help these children recover are desperately needed.*

Kim Kotrla, Ph.D., LCSW  
Assistant Professor  
School of Social Work  
Baylor University

*A Slave, Me? Since sharing my story of being a survivor of domestic minor sex trafficking, the most difficult part has been seeing my face on the nightly news along with my name and the words "Former Sex Slave". I never saw myself as a slave. However, 'slavery' exceeds the color of one's skin and is no longer about race. It is about the vulnerable, those who take advantage of people, control them and economics. It is crucial that our society learn that teen, juvenile or child prostitution does not exist, but that slavery has become epidemic. This is why I lend my voice to the Frederick Douglas Family and their campaign to prevent this crime. Because even a white girl from the suburbs can become a slave these days.*

Theresa L. Flores, LSW, MSed  
Survivor, Author of "The Slave Across the Street", creator of S.O.A.P. (save our adolescents from Prostitution)

*I was born to a heroin-addicted woman in bondage to prostitution and at the age of 5 she sold me to a mafia organized child pornography studio in exchange for her heroin. Had it not been for my God-fearing grandmother who taught me to grab hold of the hand of God and not let go, I don't know where I would be today. I know it did not end with me and am praying that we can unite and end it in all countries, especially our own.*

Gail Watson  
A Survivor Reaching Out

*My great-great-great grandfather, John Brown, the abolitionist of Harpers Ferry fame, not only considered Frederick Douglass a close personal friend, but also a fellow soldier in the war against slavery. Brown's passions against the oppression of non-whites and his enlightened vision of a truly egalitarian society have been passed down through the generations. During my speeches, I emphasize that slavery did not end with the Civil War, nor with the Emancipation Proclamation – rather it has never ended. It is estimated that there are more enslaved people today than in the 1800's. I am often asked what one person can do to stop slavery. My answer is always the same: Talk to your neighbors, talk to your family, talk your friends, stop strangers on the street and talk to them about the atrocity of modern slavery. Never, never, never stop talking and educating people. Remember, John Brown and Frederick Douglass were each "just one person," and look what they accomplished. Together, we can end the issue of slavery.*

Alice Keeseey Mecoy  
Great-Great-Great Grand Daughter of John Brown, Abolitionist

*As a young person with a desire to see the end of modern day trafficking, I firmly believe that the most important thing for people to understand is that we are the same, we are equal. A woman in slavery is no different in value than I, nor did she choose this life for herself. We all deserve the right to choose how we lead our own lives. Every woman deserves access to an education. We all deserve the chance to be loved and respected for our personhood. Trafficking, prostitution, indentured servitude; people may call it what they will, but in the end it is all the same- it is all slavery. It is a crime that is demeaning to all women and needs to be abolished once and for all.*

Allyson Davis

*In our society today, many people are too busy with work, sports, or possessions to notice what is happening around them. We only care about what is happening in our lives and are "too busy" to invest our concern in others. It is time for us to pay attention to what is going on in the world, starting with our communities. Many people don't realize that human trafficking is happening every day all around us. If you ask people about it, they brush it aside and don't believe it is happening. We need to wake up and understand that many girls and boys, young and old, are being sold into slavery. Some victims are forced into working endless hours in awful conditions while others are forced to be sex slaves. They are beaten, physically as well as mentally, starved, and mistreated in countless ways. Victims are promised things such as possessions or wealth if they follow a person, only to find that they are taken away from their homes, families, and lives, and have to obey every command of their "owner". No one should ever be treated so horribly. If we become more aware about what is going on around us, we can spot the signs of human trafficking. Everyone needs to work together on this important issue to end human trafficking for good.*

Caroline Norelli  
FDFD Student Board of Advisors  
Lancaster, PA

*If there was a disease that indiscriminately selected and infected children, that slowly deteriorated them from the inside out. If there was cancer that first ate away at their trust, their innocence, their hope, and then slowly consumed their future until they had no other fate but death, wouldn't we put every charitable dollar and every effort of science into curing it?*

*There is such a disease, and it's growing rampant in our country. It's the exploitation and commercial trafficking of our children. It's a disease that is hidden by deception and oblivion, and fueled by denial and greed. It's now a formidable and resistant strain of disease that we ourselves created.*

*There's no pill that is going to cure it. We can't use violence to forcibly remove it. We have to reverse it by opposing the very forces in us—in our society and in our human condition--that gave it power and got us to this state.*

Jeanne Allert  
Chair, The Maryland Coalition  
Executive Director, The Samaritan Women

*I took my first trip to Lusaka, Zambia during the summer of 2006. It was during this trip that I learned of the half a million children who are orphans and are living on the streets due to the HIV/AIDS endemic, malaria, and drought that has devastated this country. It was on this trip that I was able to visit The Chisomo Drop in Center, a place where street children can receive shelter, food, clothing, counseling, and an education. During my visit I met a number of young girls who shared their stories of living on the streets. They shared how they were forced into having sex with numerous men in exchange for food. These young girls, desperate to stay alive, were selling their bodies to men who used their power to take advantage of their hopeless situation. Although facilities such as The Chisomo Drop in Center are available to these children, many have been brain washed to believe that this is the only lifestyle that they are worth having. It is because of stories like these that I have been actively involved in making a difference in the lives of the Zambian children and to share stories such as these with those around me. We must be the voice of these young children until each and every child is safe and off the streets.*

Alicia Orloff  
Teacher  
Lake Elsinore, CA

*I have been fortunate - even blessed - to live in a very safe environment, secure in the knowledge I was loved by some and respected by others. It took an experience living in another country while serving as a U.S. Ambassador to introduce me to the terrible scourge that is human trafficking and modern day slavery. The greed and the lust for power by the people who operate the "supply" chains that traffick in persons - disproportionately women and girls - is so overwhelmingly evil it requires people to speak out - and to take any action they have available to them. Thank you to the Frederick Douglass Family Foundation for providing an opportunity to speak out publicly.*

Mary Kramer, Former Ambassador to Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean

*I stand with women leaders around the world in declaring the right of all men, women and children to be free from bondage. Humanity requires an end to the hidden tragedy of modern slavery and trafficking in persons. Human trafficking is a crime often committed against those least able to defend themselves.*

Barbara Barrett  
Former Ambassador to Finland

*The financial state of our country has everyone watching their wallets. Therefore, not enough support is going towards programs that decrease human trafficking and increase awareness. We must fight for our children, their safety and healthy futures.*

Erica W. McDonald  
Master Educator  
404-794-2244

*The Black Jack Battlefield is committed to telling the stories of the abolitionist's cause in the Kansas Territory with the hope that those stories contribute to the quest for freedom for all oppressed and enslaved people.*

Carol von Tersch  
Black Jack Battlefield Trust

*I am the great, great, granddaughter of Florella Brown Adair. Florella is half-sister to John Brown, the Abolitionist. Florella and her husband, Samuel, came to Kansas Territory to help make sure that Kansas came in to the Union as a Free State.*

*In December of 1858, during a time when a person could be sentenced to 3-5 years of hard labor for simply having a piece of anti-slavery paper, Florella took eleven slaves into her home, saying, "No matter what danger their presence puts us in, we have no choice but to shelter them." I pray that the spirit of Florella's Abolitionism lives on in America today. That people will step up, look for the need, and answer the call.*

Mary Ward Buster

*As a world community, we must do everything in our power to prevent human trafficking and slavery, and respond with compassion and concern to its countless victims and survivors.*

Anne Seymour  
National Crime Victim Advocate  
Washington, DC

*All children and women deserve and need to be honored and respected as world citizens that add value to society, instead of being judged as burdens or replaceable resources. The growth and secret spread of child slavery and human trafficking in the United States and worldwide, that is condoned through non-action to stop it by world leaders, and brushed aside by an apathetic society is the most damaging of all evils. Any attempt to build a functioning society where*

*members of it, with a right to protection and dignity, are knowingly abused and used for profit, is futile. Human trafficking and the allowing of any form of child slavery and child abuse are the roots of warring, crime producing, unproductive citizens of society, as it tears the fabric of the most essential ingredients for peaceful human co-existence - respect and love. Solutions reside in education and human rights for women and children, and serious consequences for individuals and governments engaged in any form of human abuse. Support effective projects for sustainable education practices, and supporting human rights with your dollars, talents and time. And make your voice heard to those elected to office.*

Sprtye Lorianio  
Executive Director  
Manifest Foundation  
[www.manifestfoundation.org](http://www.manifestfoundation.org)

*Historians Against Slavery strongly endorses this call to mobilize against this particularly horrific form of exploitation. As teaching scholars on hundreds of campuses in the United States and abroad, we are working hard to bring precisely these concerns to the attention to our students, our colleagues and to the wider community.*

James Brewer Stewart  
James Wallace Professor of History Emeritus  
Macalester College  
Director, Historians Against Slavery

*We have many evils in this world that must be ended, and Human Trafficking is one of the worst. Our anger must remain strong, focused, and effective at ending this serial abuse of humans for labor and sex. Slavery is not just illegal and immoral, it is not acceptable at any level or any amount. There can be no gap between wishing and working to end slavery. We must all feel bound until all are free.*

David Voth  
Executive Director  
Crime Victim Services