

ARTI FACT

In the Key of Hope



"HE PASSED A STREET IN A DESPONDENT MOOD, . . . SAW A VIOLIN . . . [AND] BOUGHT IT. He then went home, shut himself up, played for three days until he was in tune himself and went out into the world a cheerful man." This telling episode from the life of Frederick Douglass appeared in an account of the abolitionist's exile in Europe. He had just published an autobiography chronicling his treatment as a slave in Maryland—which named names—and with the Civil War still a decade away, he fled the United States fearing for his safety. The violin apparently eased what must have been a burdened mind. **THESE AND OTHER DETAILS FROM HIS LIFE** can be viewed in the newly updated online exhibit produced by the National Park Service Museum Management Program and Frederick Douglass National Historic Site—a virtual tour of the man's legacy through the personal items at his house. **DOUGLASS MOVED TO CEDAR HILL,** as his property is known, in 1878, now a monument to the civil rights pioneer who was called the "Sage of Anacostia" after his Washington, DC, neighborhood. The exhibit includes furniture, dishware, portraits—even the great man's hats and shoes—describing his career as an activist, author, public speaker, diplomat, and family man, the power of his story rendered all the more real by the historic photographs and finely photographed objects. **FROM HIS YOUTH IN RURAL MARYLAND TO HIS ESCAPE NORTH,** his flight to Europe, and his rise to perhaps the most influential African American voice of the 19th century, the exhibit gives an unparalleled view of the mark he made on American history. **AS AN OLD MAN FREDERICK DOUGLASS WOULD APPEAR** in the doorway of the dining room, violin in his hand, to play slave songs for his grandchildren. The children clapped their hands while he kept time with his feet—redeeming the past, celebrating the truth, and finding joy in the telling, the mark of an indomitable spirit. **THE EXHIBIT IS ONLINE AT** www.nps.gov/history/museum/exhibits/frdo/index.html.