

Northern Region Essay Winner

Angela Gyane
Potomac Senior High School
Prince William County

I know how it feels to not want to get up after being knocked down – with “You can’t do this,” “You are not worth it,” or “You don’t belong” ringing in your head at every turn. I reached rock bottom once, feeling like I was being judged at every single step. In spite of that, I looked to those who had been in worse situations, and they gave me courage.

Frederick Douglass and Sergeant William H. Carney, former slaves, were degraded and treated as property. They were restricted of their freedom and of all of their opportunities. Through all of this they didn’t let it hinder their hopes and dreams, and that’s what makes them great role models.

Sergeant Carney caught the flag before it hit the ground, remarking, “Boys, the old flag never touched the ground,” thus showing his patriotism. Though a former slave, he fought for a united country in which he could be free to follow his dreams. He saw it not just as his duty, but a sacred responsibility, and served with his whole heart. He had so much pride in what the flag represented that he wouldn’t let it fall.

Frederick Douglass was raised in a similar environment as Sergeant Carney. He refused to accept his status as a slave, took every opportunity, and made the best of it. He escaped from slavery and became an abolitionist, published three autobiographies, and founded *The North Star*. Even through hardships, he stuck to his beliefs, saying, “No man can put a chain about the ankle of his fellow man without at last finding the other end fastened about his own neck.” He went from being a lowly slave to having private talks with President Abraham Lincoln about abolishing slavery from the Union. Despite having the cards stacked against him, he rose above it.

Through people like Sergeant Carney and Frederick Douglass, we learn that the sky is the limit. They taught us to strive to make ourselves better and empowered us to help others. Society might knock us down, but it is our choice to make whether or not we get up. Because life is a mountain of different ranges, when you work hard and climb through the rough terrain, you will eventually get to the smoother ones.