

12 Years in the making, Frederick Douglass film debuts at Lewis Museum

Mary Carole Mccauley | July 9, 2026



Lance Morris of the Easton Economic Development Corporation, left, narrates excerpts from Frederick Douglass' three autobiographies in the movie "Bear Me Into Freedom: Frederick Douglass and the Struggle for America's Promise." He is pictured with photographer Jeffrey C. McGuinness, the film's director and producer. About a dozen years ago, McGuinness began photographing places in the Eastern Shore's Talbot County that Douglass had described in his autobiographies and elsewhere. (Courtesy: Jeffrey C. McGuinness)

A 12-year passion project that culminated in a film about abolitionist and orator Frederick Douglass' Talbot County roots will debut Saturday at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture.

"Two hundred years ago, a young Frederick Douglass lived here on Maryland's Eastern Shore," begins the trailer for "Bear Me Into Freedom: Frederick Douglass and the Struggle for America's Freedom: Frederick Douglass and the Struggle for America's Promise." Promise."

"In 'Bear Me Into Freedom,' we walk where he walked, see what he saw, share the dreams he would dream..."

The words are set against a moody background of a choir singing Black spirituals, alongside black-and-white images of the fields and Black spirituals, alongside black-and-white images of the fields and pastures where Douglass (1818–1895) was enslaved. St. Michaels-based photographer Jeffrey C. McGuinness created the movie and features Douglass descendant Marshall Bailey IV portraying the young freedom fighter.

"Frederick Douglass challenged America to live up to its highest ideals, and his words continue to resonate today," Lewis Museum President Terri Lee Freeman said in a news release.

"As we commemorate America250, this immersive experience offers visitors an opportunity to reflect on Douglass' extraordinary journey and the enduring pursuit of freedom, equality, and justice that continues to shape our nation."

About a dozen years ago, McGuinness began photographing the specific places named in Douglass' three autobiographies, the release said. The photos later were consolidated into an exhibit in the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in St. Michaels that opened in March and will run through 2027.

"The story of Frederick Douglass is inextricably linked with Talbot County, and as we celebrate America250, this is the perfect time to explore those connections through this exhibition," McGuiness said in a Maritime Museum news release.

But Mc Guinness wasn't finished telling Douglass' story.

Production on the film began five years ago in collaboration with the Easton-based Frederick Douglass Honor Society. The release said that whenever possible, the film quotes Douglass' actual words to tell the story of his birth in Talbot County through his escape from enslavement (in 1838) to his rise as an internationally acclaimed writer and orator.

Maryland film audiences may recognize other familiar faces; excerpts from Douglass' three autobiographies are narrated by Lance Morris, communications coordinator for the Easton Economic Development Corporation, while the Declaration of Independence is read by former Lewis Museum board chairman W. Drew Hawkins.

The hour-long film will be shown panorama-style on three screens at 11 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. from July 11-13 and 16-20 and is free with museum admission. A panel discussion will be held following the 1 p.m. July 18 screening that will feature McGuiness, Morris, and Freedom Society co-founder Harriet Lowery. Tickets are required for that screening and talk. For details, visit lewismuseum.org.



"The story of Frederick Douglass is inextricably linked with Talbot County...",
photographer Jeffrey C. McGuiness said. (Courtesy: Jeffrey C. McGuiness)

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