

Many people located in Maryland don't realize how many icons the state has delivered that have paved the way for individuals like myself. There are a select number of African-Americans native to Maryland that were figures of their time and whose bravery still inspires today. One significant woman who was born not 27 miles away from me almost 200 years ago continues to act as a role model. Her name is Frances Ellen Watkins Parker and through me and any individuals influenced by this, her legacy lives on so she can continue to motivate, encourage, and influence just as she did for those in 1859 when she became the first African American woman published in the United States.

Although today Maryland is a place where anyone can freely embrace themselves, in 1825 it was a slave state and Frances Ellen Watkins Parker was born free in Baltimore. Except this did not mean her adolescence would be a lap of luxury as her parents died when she was only three. It is said to believe her love of books was developed at the age of thirteen when she became employed as a seamstress and nursemaid for a white family who owned a bookshop. She picked up books, became enchanted and bewitched by them, and decided to write her own. Today, the phenomenon of a reader like myself, becoming so captivated by words they decide to form some of their own isn't anything new or never done before. Except for Parker, it was something very new and she was courageous enough to take it to the next level despite her disadvantage as a black woman in a country that still needed tremendous growth and change. Parker taking that risk has given young black women who express themselves using words a voice in America. The knowledge that she lived so close to me as well only gives me more drive as it shows if she can make a change in a society that didn't accept her I can make a change in the society that she helped to better.

Harper's published pieces in anti-slavery journals caused her to become a well-known abolitionist voice. In 1858 she even refused to give up her seat to sit in the colored section of a segregated trolley car 97 years before Rosa Parks. "The Two Offers" a short story published in a weekly forum for debate for abolitionists caused Parker to become the first African American woman to publish a short story in 1859. She went on to publish 80 poems.

Although I'm not much of a poet, I am a reader just as Parker was and I am a writer. Hearing Parker's story in the fourth grade, inspired me hugely. Enough that at the age of eight, I decided to write and publish a short story of my own. Ever since then, I've published several more works and her story only pushes me to create more and improve as I go so that one day I can make a big impact using my words just as she did. I hope to inspire people with my words and create things that help to better my community. If not for Parker's bravery, I might not have been able to publish a story myself, and becoming an author at such a young age is what shaped me into the young woman I am today who still holds a passion for writing.

She wrote not just about abolitionism but about woman's suffrage. In 1892, when Parker was 67 she wrote a book called "Lola Leroy" dealing with many serious social issues at the time surrounding women. "Lola Leroy" is the first novel published by an African American woman. She used more than just words to talk about social issues but her actual voice. Combining the racial issues of the time with advocacy for women's rights she spoke out often, giving speeches, and demanding change. One day I hope to do the same.

In conclusion, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper is a woman whose courage and drive we should all take inspiration from as she was a resident of Maryland just like you and me.

