

Exploring the Hypocrisy of American Slavery with Frederick Douglass' "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?"

"Go where you may, search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the Old World...search out every abuse, and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without rival." ~Frederick Douglass

Overview

On July 5, 1852, Frederick Douglass, former slave and abolitionist, delivered a groundbreaking speech in Rochester, NY, entitled "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" In this lesson, students will read and discuss an excerpt of Douglass' July 5th oration, examining the contradictions and hypocrisies he raised regarding a nation who owned slaves while celebrating the ideals of liberty and equal rights. Students will apply their understanding of the speech and its themes by planning their own modern day Fourth of July celebration for the White House.

Grades

High School

Essential Questions

- Who was Frederick Douglass and in what ways did he contribute to the abolitionist movement?
- What was the purpose of Douglass' speech, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?"
- What examples of American contradictions and hypocrisy does Frederick Douglass point out in the speech?
- What techniques does Douglass employ to highlight the barbarity of slavery to his audience?
- How can America celebrate the Fourth of July today while also being accountable to our nation's full history?

Materials

- "Exploring the Hypocrisy of American Slavery" Power Point accompaniment, available (in PDF format) in the Database of K-12 Resources at <https://k12database.unc.edu/files/2012/05/WhattotheSlaveistheFourthofJulyPPT.pdf>
 - To view this PDF as a projectable presentation, save the file, click "View" in the top menu bar of the file, and select "Full Screen Mode"
 - To request an editable PPT version of this presentation, send a request to cnorris@unc.edu.
- Optional: "Frederick Douglas Mini Bio" Video; laptop with Internet access, speakers, and a projector will be needed for sharing with students
 - Available for free viewing at www.biography.com (search "Frederick Douglas" and videos will populate in a box on the right)
- Instructions for Reading and Discussing "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July," attached
- Edited Excerpt – "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July," attached
- Optional: "Frederick Douglass' Fourth of July Speech", a Podcast including a dramatic reading of excerpts from the speech with historian commentary; available at <https://www.backstoryradio.org/shows/independence-daze-2015>
- Culminating Assignment: "Celebrating All Americans, Past & Present," attached

Duration

- 60+ minutes for lesson
- Additional time may be needed for the completion and presentation of the culminating activity

Preparation

Students should have an understanding of slavery, governmental decisions and actions regarding slavery, and the abolitionist movement. Students should also have a basic knowledge of Frederick Douglass, his life during enslavement, and his work as an abolitionist.

Procedure

Warm Up: What Does the Fourth of July Mean to You?

1. As a warm up, ask students to consider America's 4th of July holiday. Discuss:
 - What does July 4th mean to many Americans? (chart answers on paper)
 - What does it mean to you personally?
 - How do you or others you know typically celebrate the 4th of July?
 - Why is July 4th considered a national holiday?
 - Many of our responses to these questions have involved patriotism, pride, and other positive connotations. Is there anyone who may feel differently than this about the 4th of July? Who and why? (If students initially only consider who in modern times may feel negatively towards the holiday, prompt them to consider this question historically as well.)
 - Consider the history of slavery in the US. Why might an enslaved person during the 1800s view the 4th of July differently than did white Americans?
 - What does it say about our nation in the 1800s, for it to celebrate freedom and independence, while slavery was legal and widely practiced?
 - The 4th of July is considered a patriotic holiday. In what ways is asking questions, learning a full and comprehensive American history, and demanding your country to be even better an act of patriotism?

Who Was Frederick Douglass?

2. Tell students that when considering the 4th of July, it is important to reflect on this national holiday from multiple historical perspectives, rather than just taking it at face value. Explain that one such alternative perspective comes from the famous Frederick Douglass, with his speech "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" Ask students if anyone is at all familiar with the speech, or with Frederick Douglass and the time period in which he lived. Chart what students already know about Frederick Douglass and the time period in which he lived on the board or chart paper. Go through [slide 2](#) of the Power Point to provide a review/overview of Frederick Douglass. Afterwards, discuss:
 - Based on what you already know about Douglass, how would you characterize him and why?
 - Why do you think Frederick Douglass chose to write and speak about his experiences as an enslaved person?
 - What might have been difficult to write or speak about such hard experiences? What might have been positive about writing or speaking about his experiences?
 - Why is it important to study Frederick Douglass and his writings today, even though he lived over 160 years ago?
- **Optional:** As an alternate or additional review of the life of Frederick Douglass, play the short 3-minute overview video available at www.biography.com (search "Frederick Douglass" and videos will populate in a box on the right.) After showing the video, discuss:
- What did you learn about Frederick Douglass in that clip?
 - What difficulties were noted that Frederick Douglass faced?
 - The video notes that Douglass became an abolitionist. What is an abolitionist? What do you already know about the abolitionist movement?
 - How was Frederick Douglass characterized by other slaves? By masters? What does this characterization tell you about him?
 - What risks did Frederick Douglass take by becoming an abolitionist and advocating for emancipation of all people?
 - What other causes did Frederick Douglass advocate for in addition to the end of slavery?

- **Teacher Note:** For a detailed lesson on Frederick Douglass, see the Consortium’s lesson plan, “The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave,” available in the Database of K-12 Resources or by sending a request to CarolinaK12@unc.edu.

Who Was Frederick Douglass?

3. Move on to slides 3-5 to discuss what the atmosphere was like in 1852, the year Frederick Douglass delivered “What to a Slave is the Fourth of July?” Discuss:
- Slide 3: Why do you think Frederick Douglass was particularly bothered by the Fugitive Slave Act?
 - Slide 4: Why do you think so many people were reading Stowe’s novel? Since this book attempted to show some of the cruelty in the institution of slavery and with so many people reading it, how might it have affected the public?
 - Slide 5: Why do you think Douglass would only speak on the 5th of July, rather than the 4th? Given everything we’ve just discussed regarding who Douglass was and what the atmosphere was like in 1852, and considering the title “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” what do you imagine his speech is going to be about?

“What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”

4. Tell students that they are going to read the first part of Douglass’ speech then discuss it in groups. Divide students into groups of 4-5 then provide them with the attached 6-page speech excerpt and the instructions for reading and discussing. Teachers can determine whether to have the students read individually or as a group before discussing the material. (If reading individually, students will likely finish at different times. Teachers should thus have an assignment for students to work on while waiting for others to finish reading. For example, instruct students to illustrate what they feel would have been the most impactful or moving moment of the speech.)
5. Teachers should also assign one student in each group to facilitate the discussion, ensuring everyone in the group participates in answering the questions provided. Since there are 25 questions provided, teachers may want to divide the questions among all of the groups, so that each group only answers an assigned 5 or more questions. Students can then report back to the remainder of class regarding their discussion on those particular questions.
- **Teacher Note:** A wonderful option is to have a black performer or performer of color from the school or community who is skilled in oration to portray Frederick Douglass and do a dramatic reenactment of the speech for students. Students can follow along on their own copy of the speech then move into group discussions after the performance. After students have read and discussed the speech, another option is to play the Podcast available at <https://www.backstoryradio.org/shows/independence-daze-2015>, which includes pieces of the speech read dramatically, interspersed with commentary by historian David Blight.
6. After the students have completed their discussions and discussed some of their thoughts as a class, project the interior image of Corinthian Hall on slide 6 of the Power Point and ask:
- Imagine stepping up on this podium, in this grand auditorium, and preparing to speak these words you just read to 600 people. Remember that the year was 1852. How do you imagine Frederick Douglass would have been feeling?
7. Go over slides 7-9 to give students further information about the speech they just read. When reaching slide 10, explain to students that they only read the beginning of the speech, and give them some information regarding the remainder of Douglass’ oration by going over slides 10-11.

What to Frederick Douglass is the Fourth of July?

8. Ask students to think back on what they have learned and read, and to share their thoughts about what they think the Fourth of July meant to Frederick Douglass. After students have responded, share the information on slide 12 then further discuss:
 - Who else might have shared Frederick Douglass' opinion of the Fourth of July and why?
 - Who may have held an opposite opinion and why?
 - What impact do you think the speech had? (Teachers may want to review the 1857 *Dred Scott* decision, when the US Supreme Court affirmed the constitutionality of slavery. This would have served as a serious blow to Douglass' determination to read the Constitution as an anti-slavery document. Teachers may also want to discuss how the nation continued to drift closer to Civil War, with the issue of slavery being at the forefront. Remind students that on January 1, 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation was issued but it was not until after the Civil War that slavery was finally ended.
 - Considering Douglass' opinion and this history, should we change the way we celebrate the Fourth of July today? Why or why not? Is there a way to make the holiday more inclusive of the entirety of our nation's history? Explain.

Optional Culminating Assignment: Planning the Next Fourth of July Celebration for the White House

9. As a culminating activity, have students get into groups of 3 or more and pass out the attached culminating assignment. Go over the assignment with students and let them know when they should plan on presenting their proposal. (This will likely need to be during the next class meeting.) Answer any questions students may have about the assignment and if time permits, allow them to begin their brainstorming process.
10. On the day students present, go over the expectations of respectful audience members, allow groups to volunteer to present their proposal, and instruct the class to take notes regarding each presentation. Once all groups have presented, students can vote on which celebration proposal was most creative and best addressed the assigned theme.

INSTRUCTIONS: Reading and Discussing “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”

- I. **Visually Inspect:** First, silently skim the 6 pages provided to you. Does anything pop out first? (i.e. do you see any clues as to what the speech may be about; is there anything that catches your attention or that you find interesting or confusing?; etc.)
- II. **Read:** Carefully read through the document provided to you. The language or particular words may be confusing to you. Take your time and reread as needed. As you read, mark the text:
 - Circle any words that are unfamiliar.
 - Underline any parts of the document that you think are most important or that stick out to you.
 - If you are confused by any part of the document, write a question mark by that line or section. You can also write out questions on the text.
 - If anything surprises you or evokes a strong emotional response from you, you can write an exclamation mark by the line or section.
 - If a particular thought pops in your head that connects to the reading, write it in the margins.
- III. **Group Up:** When you meet with your group, arrange yourselves in a circle where everyone can see and effectively communicate with everyone else.
- IV. **Discuss:** The “Facilitator” will lead your group in discussing the following questions. You can also raise your own questions for discussion.
 1. After reading this speech, what word or phrase comes to mind when now considering the 4th of July?
 2. In the first three paragraphs of the speech, what message does Douglass’s choice of language convey? What is his purpose in these first three paragraphs? Is there any disharmony you sense between his words and his true message? Explain.
 3. In the fourth paragraph, and throughout the speech, what pronoun does Douglass employ when describing the Fourth of July? Why is the repeated use of this pronoun significant? What effect do you think this had on Douglass’s audience?
 4. In paragraphs 5-14, how does Douglass describe the “founding fathers?” (Note specific phrases.) Why do you think he presents this positive portrait?
 5. According to paragraph 6, what risk were those who spoke out against England’s oppression taking? To what group of people in 1852 might Douglass be drawing a parallel?
 6. What does Douglass say regarding oppression in paragraph 10? What double message is he trying to convey?
 7. How does Douglass present the founding fathers’ choice to demand their freedom from England? What message do you think he is sending by detailing the Patriot fight for freedom?
 8. In paragraph 16, Douglass encourages his audience to “Stand by those principles, be true to them on all occasions, in all places, against all foes, and at whatever cost...” What is he really asking his audience to do?
 9. In paragraph 18, Douglass says that the Founding Fathers “loved their country better than their own private interests...” Do you think he would say the same for the people living in 1852? Why or why not?

10. In paragraph 22, as he concludes his discussion of the Founding Fathers and their fight for independence, Douglass refers to it as “a branch of knowledge in which you feel, perhaps a much deeper interest than your speaker?” What does he mean?
11. In paragraph 23, Douglass says that “...as a people, Americans are remarkably familiar with all facts which make in their own favor” and that “...whatever makes for the wealth or for the reputation of Americans, and can be had cheap, will be found by Americans.” Do you see examples of this today? Explain. What might Douglass’ statement say about how our history is written and passed down?
12. What change in the tone of the speech takes place after paragraph 24, as Douglass moves into discussing the present?
13. What message is Douglass conveying when he asks in paragraph 26, “...why am I called upon to speak here today? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence?”
14. What does Douglass mean in paragraph 28 when he refers to the “sad sense of disparity” between he and the audience? Why does he say that “This Fourth of July is yours, not mine...”?
15. In paragraph 30, how does Douglass respond to criticism that he is not advocating for the end of slavery in an appropriate way? Do you agree with his answer? Why or why not?
16. What details does Douglass share that affirm the “manhood of the Negro race?” How does he feel about having to “prove that we are men...”?
17. Douglass says that “scorching irony, not convincing argument is needed” in regards to considering those enslaved men who are entitled to liberty. What is he trying to say?
18. How does Douglass answer his own question of “What to the slave is your 4th of July?”
19. Why does Douglass say that “America reigns without a rival” in terms of “revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy?”
20. How does Douglass’ portrayal of the Fourth of July change from the beginning of the speech to the middle and end? Explain using quotations from the document.
21. How does this speech compare to the typical message conveyed in speeches at 4th of July celebrations?
22. How do you think the audience responded to this speech and why?
23. Choose what you feel is the most striking phrase, sentence, or passage from the speech and explain why.
24. Do you feel that this speech is anti-American? Why or why not?
25. In your opinion, who else should read this speech and why?

Name: _____

Assignment: "Celebrating Freedom"

The **White House Social Secretary** is responsible for the planning, coordination and execution of White House events. Your team works for the Social Secretary and has been given the important job of planning the White House's next Fourth of July celebration. This year's theme is "Celebrating Freedom," and the goal is to plan an inclusive celebration that honors the historical fight for freedom and perseverance in the face of adversity (from 1619 until today) shown by Black Americans and people of color. Together, brainstorm and create a plan for a 2 -hour (or longer) celebration that will fit this theme. You will present this proposed plan to the White House Social Secretary. The most creative plan that best fits the theme will win!

When planning your event, consider:

- Make sure your event fits the theme, "Celebrating Freedom," with the goal of creating an inclusive celebration that honors the historical fight for freedom and perseverance in the face of adversity shown by Black Americans and people of color from 1619 to today. (Remember our discussion of Frederick Douglass' "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" when brainstorming!)
- Where will the event take place and why?
- How will the location be decorated? (What items will be used for decorating? What colors will be used? Will there be any displays as part of the decoration (i.e. particular art, historical pieces, etc.?)
- What are the key themes, events, concepts, etc. that attendees need to learn about and understand regarding past and present struggles and accomplishments regarding freedom?
- What will take place throughout the event? Will there be entertainment? If so, who and what? (i.e. music; dramatic monologues by actors; speeches by politicians, famous/prominent people, or average Americans; etc.) Will food be served? If so what and why? Will you use any typical Fourth of July entertainment, such as fireworks?)
- How will this event be creative and original? How will this be unlike any Fourth of July celebration that's taken place before?
- Who will be invited to attend the event and why? What should attendees get out of the event? Will anything be asked of attendees?

After brainstorming, prepare the following:

- A 3-5 minute **pitch** that you will deliver to the White House Secretary explaining your event and how it matches the theme of "Celebrating Freedom." Your pitch should be persuasive and include as many details as possible regarding the questions above. Make sure you show the Social Secretary why your idea should be chosen for the next White House Fourth of July celebration. Be as creative as you want to be!

**Student responsible for writing down & delivering final pitch: _____*

- Share your **agenda** for the 2-hour (or longer) celebration. For example, if your event is scheduled to last from Noon- 5 PM, outline what will take place during that time. If it's to last over an entire weekend, make sure you share how each day and evening will be spent.

**Student responsible for writing down and summarizing final agenda during pitch: _____*

- Prepare a **visual** to accompany your presentation. Your visual should assist others in imagining what your day would be like and it should further encourage the Social Secretary to choose your idea.

**Student responsible for creating and sharing visual during pitch: _____*

**All group members should assist in planning all three aspects of the event (pitch, agenda, and visual); while the students assigned to each aspect are responsible for ensuring a final draft of the pitch, agenda, or visual is created, they should also make sure all group members contribute ideas.*

Questions/Brainstorming:

***What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?* by Frederick Douglas**
Delivered on July 5, 1852, at Corinthian Hall in Rochester, N.Y.

- 1 Mr. President, Friends and Fellow Citizens: He who could address this audience without a quailing sensation, has stronger nerves than I have. I do not remember ever to have appeared as a speaker before any assembly more shrinkingly, nor with greater distrust of my ability, than I do this day. A feeling has crept over me, quite unfavorable to the exercise of my limited powers of speech. The task before me is one which requires much previous thought and study for its proper performance. I know that apologies of this sort are generally considered flat and unmeaning. I trust, however, that mine will not be so considered. Should I seem at ease, my appearance would much misrepresent me. The little experience I have had in addressing public meetings, in country schoolhouses, avails me nothing on the present occasion.
- 2 The papers and placards say, that I am to deliver a 4th [of] July oration. This certainly sounds large, and out of the common way, for it is true that I have often had the privilege to speak in this beautiful Hall, and to address many who now honor me with their presence. But neither their familiar faces, nor the perfect gage I think I have of Corinthian Hall, seems to free me from embarrassment.
- 3 The fact is, ladies and gentlemen, the distance between this platform and the slave plantation, from which I escaped, is considerable and the difficulties to be overcome in getting from the latter to the former, are by no means slight. That I am here to-day is, to me, a matter of astonishment as well as of gratitude. You will not, therefore, be surprised, if in what I have to say, I evince no elaborate preparation, nor grace my speech with any high sounding exordium. With little experience and with less learning, I have been able to throw my thoughts hastily and imperfectly together; and trusting to your patient and generous indulgence, I will proceed to lay them before you.
- 4 This, for the purpose of this celebration, is the 4th of July. It is the birthday of your National Independence, and of your political freedom. This, to you, is what the Passover was to the emancipated people of God. It carries your minds back to the day, and to the act of your great deliverance; and to the signs, and to the wonders, associated with that act, and that day. This celebration also marks the beginning of another year of your national life; and reminds you that the Republic of America is now 76 years old. I am glad, fellow-citizens, that your nation is so young. Seventy-six years, though a good old age for a man, is but a mere speck in the life of a nation. Three score years and ten is the allotted time for individual men; but nations number their years by thousands. According to this fact, you are, even now, only in the beginning of your national career, still lingering in the period of childhood. I repeat, I am glad this is so. There is hope in the thought, and hope is much needed, under the dark clouds which lower above the horizon. The eye of the reformer is met with angry flashes, portending disastrous times; but his heart may well beat lighter at the thought that America is young, and that she is still in the impressible stage of her existence. May he not hope that high lessons of wisdom, of justice and of truth, will yet give direction to her destiny? ...
- 5 Fellow-citizens, I shall not presume to dwell at length on the associations that cluster about this day. The simple story of it is that, 76 years ago, the people of this country were British subjects. The style and title of your "sovereign people" (in which you now glory) was not then born. You were under the British Crown. Your fathers esteemed the English Government as the home government; and England as the fatherland. This home government, you know, although a considerable distance from your home, did, in the exercise of its parental prerogatives, impose upon its colonial children, such restraints, burdens and limitations, as, in its mature judgment, it deemed wise, right and proper.
- 6 But, your fathers, who had not adopted the fashionable idea of this day, of the infallibility of government, and the absolute character of its acts, presumed to differ from the home government in respect to the wisdom and the justice of some of those burdens and restraints. They went so far in their excitement as to pronounce the

measures of government unjust, unreasonable, and oppressive, and altogether such as ought not to be quietly submitted to. I scarcely need say, fellow-citizens, that my opinion of those measures fully accords with that of your fathers. Such a declaration of agreement on my part would not be worth much to anybody. It would, certainly, prove nothing, as to what part I might have taken, had I lived during the great controversy of 1776. To say now that America was right, and England wrong, is exceedingly easy. Everybody can say it; the dastard, not less than the noble brave, can flippantly discant on the tyranny of England towards the American Colonies. It is fashionable to do so; but there was a time when to pronounce against England, and in favor of the cause of the colonies, tried men's souls. They who did so were accounted in their day, plotters of mischief, agitators and rebels, dangerous men. To side with the right, against the wrong, with the weak against the strong, and with the oppressed against the oppressor! here lies the merit, and the one which, of all others, seems unfashionable in our day. The cause of liberty may be stabbed by the men who glory in the deeds of your fathers. But, to proceed.

7 Feeling themselves harshly and unjustly treated by the home government, your fathers, like men of honesty, and men of spirit, earnestly sought redress. They petitioned and remonstrated; they did so in a decorous, respectful, and loyal manner. Their conduct was wholly unexceptionable. This, however, did not answer the purpose. They saw themselves treated with sovereign indifference, coldness and scorn. Yet they persevered. They were not the men to look back.

8 As the sheet anchor takes a firmer hold, when the ship is tossed by the storm, so did the cause of your fathers grow stronger, as it breasted the chilling blasts of kingly displeasure. The greatest and best of British statesmen admitted its justice, and the loftiest eloquence of the British Senate came to its support. But, with that blindness which seems to be the unvarying characteristic of tyrants, since Pharaoh and his hosts were drowned in the Red Sea, the British Government persisted in the exactions complained of.

9 The madness of this course, we believe, is admitted now, even by England; but we fear the lesson is wholly lost on our present ruler.

10 Oppression makes a wise man mad. Your fathers were wise men, and if they did not go mad, they became restive under this treatment. They felt themselves the victims of grievous wrongs, wholly incurable in their colonial capacity. With brave men there is always a remedy for oppression. Just here, the idea of a total separation of the colonies from the crown was born! It was a startling idea, much more so, than we, at this distance of time, regard it. The timid and the prudent (as has been intimated) of that day, were, of course, shocked and alarmed by it.

11 Such people lived then, had lived before, and will, probably, ever have a place on this planet; and their course, in respect to any great change, (no matter how great the good to be attained, or the wrong to be redressed by it), may be calculated with as much precision as can be the course of the stars. They hate all changes, but silver, gold and copper change! Of this sort of change they are always strongly in favor.

12 These people were called Tories in the days of your fathers; and the appellation, probably, conveyed the same idea that is meant by a more modern, though a somewhat less euphonious term, which we often find in our papers, applied to some of our old politicians.

13 Their opposition to the then dangerous thought was earnest and powerful; but, amid all their terror and affrighted vociferations against it, the alarming and revolutionary idea moved on, and the country with it.

14 On the 2nd of July, 1776, the old Continental Congress, to the dismay of the lovers of ease, and the worshipers of property, clothed that dreadful idea with all the authority of national sanction. They did so in the form of a resolution; and as we seldom hit upon resolutions, drawn up in our day whose transparency is at all equal to

this, it may refresh your minds and help my story if I read it. "Resolved, That these united colonies are, and of right, ought to be free and Independent States; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown; and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, dissolved."

- 15 Citizens, your fathers made good that resolution. They succeeded; and to-day you reap the fruits of their success. The freedom gained is yours; and you, therefore, may properly celebrate this anniversary. The 4th of July is the first great fact in your nation's history - the very ring-bolt in the chain of your yet undeveloped destiny.
- 16 Pride and patriotism, not less than gratitude, prompt you to celebrate and to hold it in perpetual remembrance. I have said that the Declaration of Independence is the ring-bolt to the chain of your nation's destiny; so, indeed, I regard it. The principles contained in that instrument are saving principles. Stand by those principles, be true to them on all occasions, in all places, against all foes, and at whatever cost. ...
- 17 Fellow Citizens, I am not wanting in respect for the fathers of this republic. The signers of the Declaration of Independence were brave men. They were great men too great enough to give fame to a great age. It does not often happen to a nation to raise, at one time, such a number of truly great men. The point from which I am compelled to view them is not, certainly, the most favorable; and yet I cannot contemplate their great deeds with less than admiration. They were statesmen, patriots and heroes, and for the good they did, and the principles they contended for, I will unite with you to honor their memory.
- 18 They loved their country better than their own private interests; and, though this is not the highest form of human excellence, all will concede that it is a rare virtue, and that when it is exhibited, it ought to command respect. He who will, intelligently, lay down his life for his country, is a man whom it is not in human nature to despise. Your fathers staked their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor, on the cause of their country. In their admiration of liberty, they lost sight of all other interests.
- 19 They were peace men; but they preferred revolution to peaceful submission to bondage. They were quiet men; but they did not shrink from agitating against oppression. They showed forbearance; but that they knew its limits. They believed in order; but not in the order of tyranny. With them, nothing was "settled" that was not right. With them, justice, liberty and humanity were "final;" not slavery and oppression. You may well cherish the memory of such men. They were great in their day and generation. Their solid manhood stands out the more as we contrast it with these degenerate times. ...
- 20 Fully appreciating the hardship to be encountered, firmly believing in the right of their cause, honorably inviting the scrutiny of an on-looking world, reverently appealing to heaven to attest their sincerity, soundly comprehending the solemn responsibility they were about to assume, wisely measuring the terrible odds against them, your fathers, the fathers of this republic, did, most deliberately, under the inspiration of a glorious patriotism, and with a sublime faith in the great principles of justice and freedom, lay deep the cornerstone of the national superstructure, which has risen and still rises in grandeur around you.
- 21 Of this fundamental work, this day is the anniversary. Our eyes are met with demonstrations of joyous enthusiasm. Banners and pennants wave exultingly on the breeze. The din of business, too, is hushed... Prayers are made, hymns are sung, and sermons are preached in honor of this day...
- 22 Friends and citizens, I need not enter further into the causes which led to this anniversary. Many of you understand them better than I do. You could instruct me in regard to them. That is a branch of knowledge in which you feel, perhaps, a much deeper interest than your speaker. The causes which led to the separation of the colonies from the British crown have never lacked for a tongue. They have all been taught in your common

schools, narrated at your firesides, unfolded from your pulpits, and thundered from your legislative halls, and are as familiar to you as household words. They form the staple of your national poetry and eloquence.

- 23 I remember, also, that, as a people, Americans are remarkably familiar with all facts which make in their own favor. This is esteemed by some as a national trait - perhaps a national weakness. It is a fact, that whatever makes for the wealth or for the reputation of Americans, and can be had cheap! will be found by Americans. I shall not be charged with slandering Americans, if I say I think the American side of any question may be safely left in American hands. ...
- 24 My business, if I have any here to-day, is with the present...We have to do with the past only as we can make it useful to the present and to the future. To all inspiring motives, to noble deeds which can be gained from the past, we are welcome. But now is the time, the important time. Your fathers have lived, died, and have done their work, and have done much of it well. You live and must die, and you must do your work. You have no right to enjoy a child's share in the labor of your fathers, unless your children are to be blest by your labors. You have no right to wear out and waste the hard-earned fame of your fathers to cover your indolence. Sydney Smith tells us that men seldom eulogize the wisdom and virtues of their fathers, but to excuse some folly or wickedness of their own. This truth is not a doubtful one. ... Washington could not die till he had broken the chains of his slaves. Yet his monument is built up by the price of human blood, and the traders in the bodies and souls of men, shout - "We have Washington to our father." Alas! that it should be so; yet so it is.
- 25 "The evil that men do, lives after them,
The good is oft interred with their bones."
- 26 Fellow-citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here to-day? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us? and am I, therefore, called upon to bring our humble offering to the national altar, and to confess the benefits and express devout gratitude for the blessings resulting from your independence to us?
- 27 Would to God, both for your sakes and ours, that an affirmative answer could be truthfully returned to these questions! Then would my task be light, and my burden easy and delightful. For who is there so cold, that a nation's sympathy could not warm him? Who so obdurate and dead to the claims of gratitude, that would not thankfully acknowledge such priceless benefits? Who so stolid and selfish, that would not give his voice to swell the hallelujahs of a nation's jubilee, when the chains of servitude had been torn from his limbs? I am not that man. In a case like that, the dumb might eloquently speak, and the "lame man leap as an hart."
- 28 But, such is not the state of the case. I say it with a sad sense of the disparity between us. I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary! Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us. The blessings in which you, this day, rejoice, are not enjoyed in common. The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought life and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth [of] July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn. To drag a man in fetters into the grand illuminated temple of liberty, and call upon him to join you in joyous anthems, were inhuman mockery and sacrilegious irony. Do you mean, citizens, to mock me, by asking me to speak to-day? If so, there is a parallel to your conduct. And let me warn you that it is dangerous to copy the example of a nation whose crimes, lowering up to heaven, were thrown down by the breath of the Almighty, burying that nation in irrecoverable ruin! I can to-day take up the plaintive lament of a peeled and woe-smitten people! ...
- 29 Fellow-citizens; above your national, tumultuous joy, I hear the mournful wail of millions! whose chains, heavy and grievous yesterday, are, to-day, rendered more intolerable by the jubilee shouts that reach them. If I do

forget, if I do not faithfully remember those bleeding children of sorrow this day, "may my right hand forget her cunning, and may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth!" To forget them, to pass lightly over their wrongs, and to chime in with the popular theme, would be treason most scandalous and shocking, and would make me a reproach before God and the world. My subject, then fellow-citizens, is AMERICAN SLAVERY. I shall see, this day, and its popular characteristics, from the slave's point of view. Standing, there, identified with the American bondman, making his wrongs mine, I do not hesitate to declare, with all my soul, that the character and conduct of this nation never looked blacker to me than on this 4th of July! Whether we turn to the declarations of the past, or to the professions of the present, the conduct of the nation seems equally hideous and revolting. America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future. Standing with God and the crushed and bleeding slave on this occasion, I will, in the name of humanity which is outraged, in the name of liberty which is fettered, in the name of the constitution and the Bible, which are disregarded and trampled upon, dare to call in question and to denounce, with all the emphasis I can command, everything that serves to perpetuate slavery-the great sin and shame of America! "I will not equivocate; I will not excuse;" I will use the severest language I can command; and yet not one word shall escape me that any man, whose judgment is not blinded by prejudice, or who is not at heart a slaveholder, shall not confess to be right and just.

- 30 But I fancy I hear some one of my audience say, it is just in this circumstance that you and your brother abolitionists fail to make a favorable impression on the public mind. Would you argue more, and denounce less, would you persuade more, and rebuke less, your cause would be much more likely to succeed. But, I submit, where all is plain there is nothing to be argued. What point in the anti-slavery creed would you have me argue? On what branch of the subject do the people of this country need light? Must I undertake to prove that the slave is a man? That point is conceded already. Nobody doubts it. The slaveholders themselves acknowledge it in the enactment of laws for their government. They acknowledge it when they punish disobedience on the part of the slave. There are seventy-two crimes in the State of Virginia, which, if committed by a black man, (no matter how ignorant he be), subject him to the punishment of death; while only two of the same crimes will subject a white man to the like punishment. What is this but the acknowledgement that the slave is a moral, intellectual and responsible being? The manhood of the slave is conceded. It is admitted in the fact that Southern statute books are covered with enactments forbidding, under severe fines and penalties, the teaching of the slave to read or to write. When you can point to any such laws, in reference to the beasts of the field, then I may consent to argue the manhood of the slave. When the dogs in your streets, when the fowls of the air, when the cattle on your hills, when the fish of the sea, and the reptiles that crawl, shall be unable to distinguish the slave from a brute, there will I argue with you that the slave is a man!
- 31 For the present, it is enough to affirm the equal manhood of the Negro race. Is it not astonishing that, while we are ploughing, planting and reaping, using all kinds of mechanical tools, erecting houses, constructing bridges, building ships, working in metals of brass, iron, copper, silver and gold; that, while we are reading, writing and cyphering, acting as clerks, merchants and secretaries, having among us lawyers, doctors, ministers, poets, authors, editors, orators and teachers; that, while we are engaged in all manner of enterprises common to other men, digging gold in California, capturing the whale in the Pacific, feeding sheep and cattle on the hill-side, living, moving, acting, thinking, planning, living in families as husbands, wives and children, and, above all, confessing and worshipping the Christian's God, and looking hopefully for life and immortality beyond the grave, we are called upon to prove that we are men!
- 32 Would you have me argue that man is entitled to liberty? that he is the rightful owner of his own body? You have already declared it. Must I argue the wrongfulness of slavery? Is that a question for Republicans? Is it to be settled by the rules of logic and argumentation, as a matter beset with great difficulty, involving a doubtful application of the principle of justice, hard to be understood? How should I look to-day, in the presence of Americans, dividing, and subdividing a discourse, to show that men have a natural right to freedom? speaking

of it relatively, and positively, negatively, and affirmatively. To do so, would be to make myself ridiculous, and to offer an insult to your understanding. There is not a man beneath the canopy of heaven, that does not know that slavery is wrong for him.

- 33** What, am I to argue that it is wrong to make men brutes, to rob them of their liberty, to work them without wages, to keep them ignorant of their relations to their fellow men, to beat them with sticks, to flay their flesh with the lash, to load their limbs with irons, to hunt them with dogs, to sell them at auction, to sunder their families, to knock out their teeth, to bum their flesh, to starve them into obedience and submission to their masters? Must I argue that a system thus marked with blood, and stained with pollution, is wrong? No! I will not. I have better employments for my time and strength than such arguments would imply.
- 32** What, then, remains to be argued? Is it that slavery is not divine; that God did not establish it; that our doctors of divinity are mistaken? There is blasphemy in the thought. That which is inhuman, cannot be divine! Who can reason on such a proposition? They that can, may; I cannot. The time for such argument is past.
- 33** At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed. O! had I the ability, and could I reach the nation's ear, I would, to-day, pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke. For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake. The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be proclaimed and denounced.
- 34** What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy - a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour.
- 35** Go where you may, search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the old world, travel through South America, search out every abuse, and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me, that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival.