

**INTRODUCTORY REMARKS  
TOWN OF CARRBORO READING OF  
FREDERICK DOUGLASS' "WHAT TO THE SLAVE IS THE  
FOURTH OF JULY"**

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GOOD AFTERNOON TO ALL OF YOU, AND THANK YOU FOR THE INVITATION TO BE HERE WITH YOU AS WE AGAIN EXAMINE THE WORDS OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS WHO SPOKE SO ELOQUENTLY ON JULY 5, 1852 IN ROCHESTER, NEW YORK AT THE OCCASION OF THOSE CELEBRATING THE 76<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE SIGNING OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. DOUGLASS LET IT BE KNOWN WITH CLEAR DISTINCTION THAT IT WAS A CELEBRATION THAT DID NOT INCLUDE MORE THAN THREE MILLION ENSLAVED BLACK PEOPLE IN THE UNITED STATES, AND I WOULD ARGUE ANOTHER NEARLY ONE HALF MILLION FREE BLACKS WHO DID NOT CONSIDER THEMSELVES INCLUDED IN THIS CELEBRATION. DOUGLASS EXCLAIMED THAT, "I AM NOT INCLUDED WITHIN THE PALE OF THIS GLORIOUS ANNIVERSARY! YOUR HIGH INDEPENDENCE ONLY REVEALS THE IM-

MEASURABLE DISTANCE BETWEEN US.” JUSTICE, LIBERTY, PROSPERITY, THIS NEWLY FOUND INDEPENDENCE IS ONLY SHARED BY WHITES, NOT DOUGLASS AND NOT THE MORE THAN THREE MILLION ENSLAVED PEOPLE WHO FACED THE TORTOROUS HAND OF THE MASTER’S WHIP, THOSE FORCED TO WORK IN THE TOBACCO FIELDS OF ORANGE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA, THE BACK BREAKING NAVAL STORES INDUSTRY IN NEW HANOVER COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA, THE RICE FIELDS IN LOWCOUNTRY SOUTH CAROLINA, THE COTTON FIELDS IN GEORGIA, ALABAMA, AND MISSISSIPPI, AND THE SUGAR PLANTATIONS IN LOUISIANA, AND FORCED LABOR IN ONE OF THE OTHER 15 STATES WHERE LEGALIZED SLAVERY EXISTED. DOUGLASS SO ELOQUENTLY POINTED OUT THAT SLAVERY WAS SUPPORTED BY THE UNITED STATES CONSITITUTION WRITTEN IN 1787, AND TO BE MORE SPECIFIC, **ARTICLE 1, SECTION 2, (THE THREE-FIFTHS AMENDMENT), ARTICLE 1,SECTION 9 (THE EXTENSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL SLAVE TRADE TO 1808), AND ARTICLE 4, SECTION 2 (THE FUGITIVE SLAVE CLAUSE).** THE CONSTITUTION THEN ALLOWED FOR THE PASSAGE OF LEGISLATION THAT FURTHER SEALED THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT’S COMPLICITY WITH THE SLAVEHOLDING STATES. DOUGLASS WAS ANNOYED THAT THE UNITED STATES

CONGRESS PASSED THE FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW, FIRST IN 1793, AND AGAIN IN 1850. THE 1793 LAW MADE IT UNLAWFUL FOR ENSLAVED PEOPLE TO RUNAWAY FROM A SLAVE STATE TO A FREE STATE. THE PENALTY FOR WHITES AND FREE BLACKS WHO AIDED A RUNAWAY WAS FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS IF CONVICTED.

PRIOR TO 1842, SEVERAL NORTHERN STATES PASSED “PERSONAL LIBERTY LAWS” DEMANDING THAT ENSLAVED RUNAWAYS BE GRANTED A TRIAL BY JURY. THE SAVING GRACE FOR MANY ENSLAVED PEOPLE WHO ESCAPED TO THE NORTH WAS THAT THE STATES DID NOT RIGIDLY ENFORCE THE 1793 FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW. THOUSANDS OF ENSLAVED RUNAWAYS ENJOYED MEASURES OF FREEDOM FOR YEARS BECAUSE OF THE INCONSISTENCY AND OUTRIGHT DEFIANCE BY SOME STATES TO ENFORCE THE FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW OF 1793. THIS, OF COURSE, OUTRAGED SOUTHERNERS WHO LOST THOUSANDS OF MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN WHO MADE THEIR WAY TO THE NORTH. IT IS NOT A STRETCH TO SAY THAT SOUTHERNERS WAGED A YEARLY CAMPAIGN TO PASS STIFFER FUGITIVE SLAVE LEGISLATION. IN 1842, THE UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT RULED IN THE CASE ***PRIGG V PENNSYLVANIA*** THAT FEDERAL LAW SUPERSEDED ANY ATTEMPT BY THE STATES TO INTERFERE WITH THE FUGITIVE SLAVE

LAW. THIS WAS A SETBACK FOR ABOLITIONISTS AND OBVIOUSLY FOR THE ENSLAVED. BUT SLAVEHOLDERS WAGED A RELENTLESS CAMPAIGN TO PASS STIFFER LEGISLATION

AND AS DOUGLASS POINTED OUT IN HIS SPEECH, THEY WERE SUCCESSFUL IN DOING SO IN THE COMPROMISE OF 1850. THE NEW FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW OF 1850 DOUBLED THE PENALTY TO \$1000.00 AND ADDED A SIX-MONTH JAIL SENTENCE FOR THOSE WHO AIDED ENSLAVED RUNAWAYS IN THE NORTHERN STATES. AS AN INCENTIVE, FEDERAL JUDGES WERE GIVEN \$10.00 FOR EVERY CONVICTION.

DOUGLASS WAS OUTRAGED BY THIS NEW LEGISLATION THAT WITHIN TWO YEARS OF ITS PASSAGE HAD BROUGHT HUNDREDS OF SLAVE CATCHERS TO THE NORTHERN STATES IN SEARCH OF ENSLAVED PEOPLE WHO FLED FROM THE WHIP, FROM THE RAPE BY THE MASTER AND OTHERS, AND EVERYTHING THAT ENSLAVEMENT ENTAILED. HE PLACED BLAME ON SOCIETY IN GENERAL, BUT SPECIFIED INDIVIDUALS WHEN HE SAID:

“YOUR LAW-MAKERS HAVE COMMANDED ALL GOOD CITIZENS TO ENGAGE IN THIS HELLISH SPORT. YOUR PRESIDENT, YOUR SECRETARY OF STATE, YOUR LORDS, NOBLES, AND ECCLESIASTICS ENFORCE, AS A DUTY YOU OWE TO YOUR FREE AND GLORIOUS COUNTRY, AND TO

YOUR GOD, THAT YOU DO THIS ACCURSED THING. SOME OF THESE HAVE HAD WIVES AND CHILDREN, DEPENDENT ON THEM FOR BREAD; BUT OF THIS, NO ACCOUNT WAS MADE. THE RIGHT OF THE HUNTER TO HIS PREY STANDS SUPERIOR TO THE RIGHT OF MARRIAGE, AND TO ALL RIGHTS IN THIS REPUBLIC, THE RIGHTS OF GOD INCLUDED! FOR BLACK MEN THERE IS NEITHER LAW NOR JUSTICE, HUMANITY NOR RELIGION. **THE FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW** MAKES MERCY TO THEM A CRIME; AND BRIBES THE JUDGE WHO TRIES THEM.”

TO DOUGLASS AND TO ANTI-SLAVERS AND ABOLITIONISTS, THE FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW WAS ONE OF THE MOST BARBARIC LAWS PASSED ANYWHERE AROUND THE WORLD. BECAUSE IN ADDITION TO TARGETING ENSLAVED RUNAWAYS, FREE BLACKS WERE ROUNDED UP IN THE STREETS OF NEW YORK CITY, PHILADELPHIA, BOSTON, AND OTHER PLACES AND TAKEN TO THE SOUTH. THIS HAPPENED TO FOLKS WHO HAD NEVER BEEN ENSLAVED. DOUGLASS WAS DISMAYED WITH SO MANY SEGMENTS OF SOCIETY, BUT HIS CONSTERNATION WITH THE CHURCH, WITH “CHRISTIANS” SEEMED TO AGITATE HIM MOST.

THE CHURCH’S SUPPORT OF SLAVERY IN GENERAL AND OF THE FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW OF 1850 IN PARTICULAR INFURIATED DOUGLASS. HE

SAID:

“BUT THE CHURCH OF THIS COUNTRY IS NOT ONLY INDIFFERENT TO THE WRONGS OF THE SLAVE, IT ACTUALLY TAKES SIDES WITH THE OPPRESSORS. IT HAS MADE ITSELF THE BULWARK OF AMERICAN SLAVERY, AND THE SHIELD OF AMERICAN SLAVE-HUNTERS. MANY OF ITS MOST ELOQUENT DIVINES, WHO STAND AS THE VERY LIGHTS OF THE CHURCH, HAVE SHAMELESSLY GIVEN THE SANCTION OF RELIGION AND THE BIBLE TO THE WHOLE SLAVE SYSTEM. THEY HAVE TAUGHT THAT MAN MAY, PROPERLY, BE A SLAVE; THAT THE RELATION OF MASTER AND SLAVE IS ORDAINED OF GOD; THAT TO SEND BACK AN ESCAPED BONDMAN TO HIS MASTER IS CLEARLY THE DUTY OF ALL THE FOLLOWERS OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST; AND THIS HORRIBLE BLASPHEMY IS PALMED OFF UPON THE WORLD FOR CHRISTIANITY. “

**THIS FOURTH JULY IS YOURS, NOT MINE. YOU MAY REJOICE, I MUST MOURN.**

ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF FEDERAL INTERVENTION AND SUPPORT OF SLAVERY OCCURRED FIVE YEARS AFTER DOUGLASS' SPEECH IN ROCHESTER. ON MARCH 6, 1857, THE UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT HANDED DOWN ITS DECISION IN THE DRED SCOTT CASE. DOUGLASS, OF COURSE, HAD MUCH TO SAY AND TO WRITE ABOUT

THIS DECISION THAT RULED THAT AN ENSLAVED PERSON WAS NOT A CITIZEN OF THE UNITED STATES AND COULD NOT SUE IN FEDERAL COURT. THIS DECISION FURTHER POLARIZED THE NATION AND IS SURELY ONE OF THE UNDERLYING CAUSES OF THE U.S. CIVIL WAR. DOUGLASS SAW HYPOCRISY IN THE FOURTH OF JULY CELEBRATION. HE ADMONISHED THOSE WHO DENOUNCED THE FOREIGN SLAVE TRADE, BUT SAID NOTHING OF THE DOMESTIC SLAVE TRADE, THE TRADE BETWEEN THE STATES, THE TRADE IN HUMAN BEINGS BETWEEN HILLSBOROUGH, NORTH CAROLINA AND FAYETTEVILLE, BETWEEN GREENSBORO AND RALEIGH. THE THOUSANDS OF EXTANTBILLS OF SALE ATTEST TO THIS TRADE THROUGHOUT THE SOUTH, AND EVEN IN WASHINGTON, D.C. UNTIL 1850.

DOUGLASS SAID OF THE INTERNAL TRADE:

“IT IS, HOWEVER, A NOTABLE FACT THAT, WHILE SO MUCH EXECRATION IS Poured OUT BY AMERICANS UPON ALL THOSE ENGAGED IN THE FOREIGN SLAVE-TRADE, THE MEN ENGAGED IN THE SLAVE-TRADE BETWEEN THE STATES PASS WITH OUT CONDEMNATION, AND THEIR BUSINESS IS DEEMED HONORABLE. BEHOLD THE PRACTICAL OPERATION OF THIS INTERNAL SLAVE-TRADE, THE AMERICAN SLAVE-

TRADE, SUSTAINED BY AMERICAN POLITICS AND AMERICAN RELIGION. HERE YOU WILL SEE MEN AND WOMEN REARED LIKE SWINE FOR THE MARKET. YOU KNOW WHAT IS A SWINE-DROVER? I WILL SHOW YOU A MAN-DROVER. THEY INHABIT ALL OUR SOUTHERN STATES.”

BLACKS, SLAVE AND FREE, WERE SO KEENLY AWARE THAT THE COLONISTS WERE IN A STRUGGLE WITH GREAT BRITAIN IN THE 1760S AND 1770S, WELL BEFORE THE OUTBREAK OF THE REVOLUTION, AND THE SIGNING OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. BECAUSE THEY THEMSELVES WERE IN A CONTINUOUS BATTLE TO BE FREE. DURING THE EARLY 1770S, BLACKS BEGAN PETITIONING NORTHERN LEGISLATURES FOR THE EMANCIPATION OF SLAVES IN THEIR RESPECTIVE COLONIES. PETER BESTES, SAMBO FREEMAN, FELIX HILBROOK, AND CHESTER JOIE PETITIONED THE MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL COURT TO ABOLISH SLAVERY IN THAT COLONY. THE FREE BLACK POPULATIONS IN NEW YORK, PHILADELPHIA, AND BOSTON WERE VOCAL IN THEIR OPPOSITION TO SLAVERY. BLACKS SAW HYPOCRISY IN THE COLONISTS’ STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM AND THEIR CONTINUED ENSLAVEMENT.



THE REVOLUTIONARY FERVOR HAD MADE ITS WAY TO BLACKS THROUGHOUT COLONIAL AMERICA. IN THE SOUTHERN COLONIES, THERE WAS FEAR THAT THE BRITISH WOULD USE SLAVERY AS A WEAPON TO KEEP THE PATRIOTS WEDDED TO THE CROWN. THE NORTH CAROLINA LEADER, JOSEPH HEWES, COMMENTED THAT THE BRITISH WERE GOING “TO LET LOOSE ON OUR FRONTIERS, [AND] TO RAISE THE NEGROES AGAINST US...” JAMES IREDELL, ANOTHER NORTH CAROLINA LEADER, ASSERTED THAT, BRITAIN’S “DIABOLICAL PURPOSE OF EXCITING OUR OWN DOMESTICS TO CUT OUR THROATS, AND INVOLVE MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN ONE UNIVERSAL MASSACRE...”

IN 1774, JAMES MADISON, THE FUTURE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES WROTE: “IF AMERICA & BRITAIN SHOULD COME TO A HOSTILE RUPTURE I AM AFRAID AN INSURRECTION AMONG THE SLAVES MAY AND WILL BE PROMPTED. IN ONE OF OUR COUNTIES LATELY A FEW OF THOSE UNHAPPY WRETCHES MET TOGETHER AND CHOSE A LEADER WHO WAS TO CONDUCT THEM WHEN ENGLISH TROOPS SHOULD ARRIVE---WHICH THEY FOOLISHLY THOUGHT WOULD BE VERY SOON AND THAT BY REVOLTING TO THEM THEY SHOULD BE REWARDED WITH THEIR FREEDOM.” BLACKS FROM GEORGIA TO

MARYLAND REALIZED THAT THE CRISIS IN WHICH COLONISTS' FOUND THEMSELVES, SERVED AN ADVANTAGE FOR THEM. SLAVE CONSPIRACIES WERE UNCOVERED IN SEVERAL SOUTHERN COLONIES IN THE MID-1770S.

JOHN ADAMS COMMENTED THAT THE "NEGROES HAVE A WONDERFUL ART OF COMMUNICATING INTELLIGENCE AMONG THEMSELVES; IT WILL RUN SEVERAL HUNDREDS OF MILES IN A WEEK OR FORTNIGHT."

DOUGLASS' SPEECH IS FILLED THE SENTIMENT OF "HOW" "HOW" "HOW" HOW COULD YOU ON ONE HAND DRAFT A DOCUMENT FREEING YOURSELVES FROM THE TYRANNY OF GREAT BRITAIN AND YET HOLD ONE HALF MILLION BLACK PEOPLE AS YOUR SLAVES? IN 1800 AT THE TRIAL OF GABRIEL, THE SLAVE WHO PLOTTED A REBELLION IN RICHMOND, VIRGINIA, WHERE IT WAS BELIEVED THAT UPWARDS OF 10,000 ENSLAVED PEOPLE WOULD PARTICIPATE, STATED THAT WHAT HE PROPOSED TO DO WAS NOT DIFFERENT THAN WHAT GEORGE WASHINGTON HAD DONE AGAINST THE BRITISH. THIRTEEN YEARS AFTER DOUGLASS' SPEECH, LEGALIZED SLAVERY ENDED IN THE UNITED STATES, AND SO THE JUBILEE HE HAD HOPED FOR HAD

ARRIVED. AN END TO THE INHUMANE SLAVE LAWS, LIKE THE EARCROPPING LAW PASSED IN NORTH CAROLINA IN 1741, ALLOWING LAW ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITIES TO SEVER A PORTION OF A SLAVE'S EAR FOR THE SLIGHTEST INFRACTION, AN END TO THE PASS OR TICKET SYSTEM OF WHICH A SLAVE MUST BE IN POSSESSION BEFORE LEAVING THE FARM OR PLANTATION, AN END TO LAWS THAT FORBADE SLAVES TO READ AND WRITE, LAWS WHICH FORBADE FREE BLACKS AND WHITES TO MARRY, AN END TO LAWS PROHIBITING SLAVES AND FREE BLACKS FROM CARRYING GUNS OR WEAPONS, EVEN FOR HUNTING. AND WHAT ABOUT AN END TO LAWS WHICH PROHIBITED ENSLAVED PEOPLE FROM RAISING LIVESTOCK, THEIR OWN GARDEN, OR PREACHING IN PUBLIC? AN END TO OUTLAWRY LEGISLATION, AND DOUGLASS WOULD SEE AN END TO LAWS IN THE SLAVE STATES THAT DID NOT ALLOW SLAVES AND FREE BLACKS TO TESTIFY AGAINST WHITES IN COURT. **OR WOULD HE SEE AN END TO SUCH PERNICIOUS LEGISLATION??**

DOUGLASS WOULD SEE THE SLAVE CODES BECOME THE BLACK CODES IN THE FORMER SLAVE STATES. IN 1866, NORTH CAROLINA PASSED NINE PIECES OF LEGISLATION THAT MADE UP ITS BLACK CODE.

AND SO TOMORROW, 167 YEARS AFTER FREDERICK DOUGLASS SHOOK UP THE NATION WITH HIS ELOQUENT, INSIGHTFUL WORDS, WE CELEBRATE THE WORDS THAT STILL RING AS LOULDY TODAY AS THEY DID IN 1852. THE LEGACY OF SLAVERY CONTINUES TO HAUNT US IN SO MANY WAYS TODAY.

**MUCH HAS CHANGED, BUT LITTLE HAS CHANGED. BUT DOUGLASS' WORDS SPOKEN IN CANANDAIGUA, NEW YORK ON AUGUST 3,1857, JUST FIVE YEARS AFTER THE JULY 5<sup>TH</sup> SPEECH REMINDS US THAT THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM, JUSTICE, AND EQUALITY IS A SEEMINGLY NEVER ENDING STRUGGLE. DOUGLASS SPOKE TO A CROWD OF 1,000 PEOPLE THAT DAY AND TOLD THEM THAT: "IF THERE IS NO STRUGGLE, THERE IS NO PROGRESS. THOSE WHO PROFESS TO FAVOR FREEDOM, AND YET DEPRECIATE AGITATION, ARE MEN WHO WANT CROPS WITHOUT PLOWING UP THE GROUND. THEY WANT RAIN WITHOUT THUNDER AND LIGHTNING. THEY WANT THE OCEAN WITHOUT THE AWFUL ROAR OF ITS MANY WATERS. THIS STRUGGLE MAY BE A MORAL ONE; OR IT MAY BE A PHYSICAL ONE; OR IT MAY BE BOTH MORAL AND PHYSICAL; BUT IT MUST BE A STRUGGLE. POWER CONCEDES NOTHING WITHOUT A DEMAND. IT NEVER DID AND IT NEVER WILL." MEN AND [WOMEN] MAY NOT**

**GET ALL THAT THEY PAY FOR IN THIS WORLD, BUT THEY MUST  
CERTAINLY PAY FOR ALL THEY GET.” GOD SPEED.**

