

ABOLITIONIST SPEECHES AND NEWSPAPER EDITORIALS

Source 1: “The Meaning of the Fourth of July for the Slave”

Frederick Douglass, Speech, 1852

... Fellow citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask—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?

... I am not included within... this glorious anniversary! The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, [given to you] by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought light and healing to you has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth of July is yours, not mine...

... At a time like this... 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 [awakened]... the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed.

... What, to the American slave, is your Fourth of July?... To him, your celebration is a sham... your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery... a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the Earth more guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of the United States at this very hour.

Source: Douglass, F. (1852). The meaning of the fourth of July for the slave. Retrieved from: <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/what-to-the-slave-is-the-fourth-of-july/>

Source 2: "Defense of His Positions"

William Lloyd Garrison, Speech, 1854

Let me define my positions...

I am a believer in that portion of the Declaration of American Independence in which it [states], "that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." [Therefore], I am an abolitionist. [Therefore], I cannot but regard oppression... that which turns a man into a thing, with [anger] and [disgust]... They who [wish] me to be dumb on the subject of slavery, unless I will open my mouth in its defense, ask me... to stain my soul... Convince me that one man may rightfully make another man his slave, and I will no longer [follow] the Declaration of Independence. Convince me that liberty is not the inalienable birthright of every human being, of whatever [skin color], and I will give [the Declaration of Independence] to the consuming fire. I do not know how to [support] freedom and slavery together...

... Every slave is a stolen man; every slaveholder is a man stealer. By no precedent, no example, no law, no compact, no purchase... is slaveholding right or justifiable... The law that makes [the slave] a [personal possession] is to be trampled [upon]; the [law] that is formed at [the slave's] expense, and cemented with his blood, is [invalid]...

If [enslaved people] are men... I am bound, by every principle of honor, by all the claims of human nature, by obedience to Almighty God, to "remember them that are in bonds as bound with them," and to demand their immediate and unconditional [release from slavery]...

Source: Garrison, W. L. (1854) Defense of his positions. Retrieved from: <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/garrisons-defense-of-his-positions/>

Source 3: "To The Public"

William Lloyd Garrison, Newspaper Editorial, 1831

... In defending the great cause of human rights, I wish to [get] the [help] of all religions and of all [political] parties...

... [Accepting] the "self-evident truth" maintained in the American Declaration of Independence, "that all men are created equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights—among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," I shall [strongly argue] for the immediate enfranchisement of our slave population...

... I am aware that many object to the severity of my language, but is there not cause for severity? I will be as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject, I do not wish to think, or speak, or write with moderation. No! No! Tell a man whose house is on fire to give a moderate alarm... tell the mother to gradually [free] her babe from the fire into which it has fallen—but urge me not to use moderation in a cause like [slavery]. I am in earnest—I will not [be vague]—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—and I will be heard...

... It is pretended that I am [slowing] the cause of emancipation by the [harshness] of my [attack], and the [extremity] of my measures. The charge is not true. On this question my influence... is felt at this moment to a considerable extent, and shall be felt in coming years... not as a curse, but as a blessing; and [future generations] will [know] that I was right.

Source: Garrison, W. L. (1831). To the public. The Liberator. Retrieved from: <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/to-the-public/>

Source 4: “Our Paper and Its Prospects”

Frederick Douglass, Newspaper Editorial, 1847

We are now about to assume the management of the editorial department of a newspaper, devoted to the cause of Liberty, Humanity and Progress... It has long been our anxious wish to see, in this slave-holding, slave-trading, [prejudiced] land, a printing-press and paper, permanently established, under the complete control and direction of the immediate victims of slavery and oppression...

... That the man who has suffered the wrong is the man to demand [it be put right]—that the man struck is the man to cry out—and that he who has endured the cruel pangs of Slavery is the man to [fight for] Liberty. It is evident we must be our own representatives and advocates... —not distinct from, but in connection with our white friends. In the grand struggle for liberty and equality now waging, it is... right and essential that there should arise in our ranks authors and editors, as well as [speakers], for it is in these [ways] that the most permanent good can be [done for] our cause.

... Nine years ago, as most of our readers are aware, we were held as a slave, shrouded in... ignorance of that [cruel slave] system... [seen the same as] four footed beasts and creeping things—regarded as property—[forced] to [work] without wages—with... a spirit crushed and broken... We finally succeeded in escaping from the grasp of the man who claimed us as his property, and succeeded in safely reaching New Bedford, [Massachusetts]... Friends, as unexpectedly [and] as generously, placed in our hands the necessary means of purchasing a printing press and printing materials. Finding ourselves now in a favorable position for aiming an important blow at slavery and prejudice, we feel urged on in our [newspaper business] by a sense of duty to God and man, firmly believing that our effort will be crowned with entire success, [the abolition of slavery].

Source: Douglass, F. (1847). Our paper and its prospects. The North Star. Retrieved from: <https://glc.yale.edu/our-paper-and-its-prospects>