

Frederick Douglass was born Frederick Bailey. His mother was a slave but the identity of his white father is unknown. When he was eight he was sent to the household of Hugh Auld in Baltimore. Auld's wife taught him to read but Hugh put a stop to Frederick's education, arguing that if a slave learnt to read he would become dissatisfied with his lot and seek freedom. Douglass continued to educate himself secretly. When he was 15, he was rented out to a local farmer, Edward Covey, a vicious slave breaker. Douglass was nearly crushed psychologically by Covey's beatings but finally fought back, defending himself so effectively that Covey never beat him again.

Born February 1818, in Maryland.
To mark Independence Day in July 1852,
Frederick Douglass was invited to make a
speech by local dignitaries in his home town
of Rochester, New York. He delivered a
passionate invective against the hypocrisy of
celebrating the principle of liberty while so
many black Americans were still not free to
enjoy it.
Died 20 February 1895, in Washington DC.
Frederick Douglass is one of 21 exceptional
Americans celebrated in the Extra Mile Points
of Light Volunteer Pathway in Washington.

Frederick Douglass

Address to the citizens of Rochester, New York, 4 July 1852

Fellow-citizens. Pardon me, and allow me to ask, why am I called to speak here today? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and 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?

... But such is not the state of the case. I say it with a sad sense of 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 today? 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, towering up to heaven, were thrown down by the breath of the Almighty, burying that nation in irrecoverable ruin.

What to the American slave is your Fourth of July? I answer, a day that reveals to him more than all other days of 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 denunciation 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's thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation of the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of these United States at this very hour.

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.