**Abolition Documents**

**Frederick Douglass: “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” (1852)**

**Part 1: A Fourth of July Oration**

*“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…”* Citizens, your fathers made good that resolution. They succeeded; and today you reap the fruits of their successes. 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…

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….

**Part 2: Slavery in America**

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 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...You may rejoice, I must mourn.

Fellow-citizens, above your national, tumultuous joy, I hear the mournful wail of millions! whose chains, heavy and grievous yesterday, are, today, rendered more intolerable by the jubilee shouts that reach them.

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.

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.

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 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—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 the United States, at this very hour.

**Part 3: Reasons for Hope - The Constitution**

“Fellow Citizens! There is no matter in respect to which, the people of the North have allowed themselves to be so ruinously imposed upon, as that of the pro-slavery character of the Constitution. In that instrument I hold there is neither warrant, license, nor sanction of the hateful thing; but, interpreted as it ought to be interpreted, the Constitution is a GLORIOUS LIBERTY DOCUMENT.

… If the constitution were intended to be, by its framers and adopters, a slave-holding instrument, why neither slavery, slaveholding, nor slave can anywhere be found in it?

Now, take the constitution according to its plain reading, and I defy the presentation of a single pro-slavery clause in it. On the other hand it will be found to contain principles and purposes, entirely hostile to the existence of slavery…

**Harriet Beecher Stowe - Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1852)**

**Chapter 45** | The excerpt below was included as the last part of the book. It is Harriet Beecher Stowe’s personal thoughts on slavery.

“For many years of her life, the author avoided all reading upon or allusion to the subject of

slavery, considering it as too painful to be inquired into, and one which advancing light and

civilization would certainly live down. But, since the legislative act of 1850, when she heard, with

perfect surprise and consternation, Christian and humane people actually recommending the

remanding escaped fugitives into slavery, as a duty binding on good citizens,—when she heard,

on all hands, from kind, compassionate and estimable people, in the free states of the North,

deliberations and discussions as to what Christian duty could be on this head,—she could only

think, These men and Christians cannot know what slavery is; if they did, such a question could

never be open for discussion. And from this arose a desire to exhibit it in a living dramatic reality.

She has endeavored to show it fairly, in its best and its worst phases. In its best aspect, she has,

perhaps, been successful; but, oh! Who shall say what yet remains untold in that valley and

shadow of death, that lies the other side?

To you, generous, noble-minded men and women, of the South,—you, whose virtue, and

generosity and purity of character.... Have you not, in your own secret souls, in your own private conversations, felt that there are woes and evils, in this accursed system, far beyond what are here shadowed, or can be shadowed? Can it be otherwise? Is man ever a creature to be trusted with wholly

irresponsible power? And does not the slave system, by denying the slave all legal right of

testimony, make every individual owner an irresponsible despot? Can anybody fail to make the

inference what the practical result will be? ...Are the honorable, the just, the high-minded and compassionate, the majority anywhere in this world?

Do you say that the people of the free state have nothing to do with it, and can do nothing?

Would to God this were true! But it is not true. The people of the free states have defended,

encouraged, and participated; and are more guilty for it, before God, than the South, in that they

have not the apology of education or custom.

If the mothers of the free states had all felt as they should, in times past, the sons of the free states

would not have been the holders, and, proverbially, the hardest masters of slaves; the sons of the

free states would not have connived at the extension of slavery, in our national body; the sons of

the free states would not, as they do, trade the souls and bodies of men as an equivalent to

money, in their mercantile dealings. There are multitudes of slaves temporarily owned, and sold

again, by merchants in northern cities; and shall the whole guilt or obloquy of slavery fall only on

the South?

Northern men, northern mothers, northern Christians, have something more to do than

denounce their brethren at the South; they have to look to the evil among themselves.

But, what can any individual do? Of that, every individual can judge. There is one thing that

every individual can do,—they can see to it that they feel right. An atmosphere of sympathetic

influence encircles every human being; and the man or woman who feels strongly, healthily and

justly, on the great interests of humanity, is a constant benefactor to the human race. See, then,

to your sympathies in this matter! Are they in harmony with the sympathies of Christ? or are

they swayed and perverted by the sophistries of worldly policy?

But, still more. On the shores of our free states are emerging the poor, shattered, broken

remnants of families,—men and women, escaped, by miraculous provinces from the surges of

slavery,—feeble in knowledge, and, in many cases, infirm in moral constitution, from a system

which confounds and confuses every principle of Christianity and morality. They come to seek a

refuge among you; they come to seek education, knowledge, Christianity.

What do you owe to these poor unfortunates, oh Christians? Does not every American Christian

owe to the African race some effort at reparation for the wrongs that the American nation has

brought upon them? Shall the doors of churches and schoolhouses be shut upon them? Shall

states arise and shake them out? Shall the church of Christ hear in silence the taunt that is

thrown at them, and shrink away from the helpless hand that they stretch out; and, by her

silence, encourage the cruelty that would chase them from our borders? If it must be so, it will be

a mournful spectacle. If it must be so, the country will have reason to tremble, when it

remembers that the fate of nations is in the hands of One who is very pitiful, and of tender

compassion…