

What To A Slave Is The 4th Of July?

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Introduction

Frederick Douglass delivered a famous speech, "What to a Slave is the 4th of July," on the fifth of July in 1852. In this speech, he is referring to the carnival of American Independence Day a day before, and as it progresses, the arguments about the Constitution and values against the act of slave trade in the United States are explored. The main emphasis was on the fact that there are many strong and positive recommendations about the values of America, including citizenship, freedom, and liberty. However, this is against the enslaved people in America who are deprived of this citizenship, freedom, and liberty. The point of concern was not only about the captivity of people enslaved but about the cruel exploitation and torture that they suffered during their time of slavery.

This speech focuses on every frustration that has spread because of the gap in US ideals and the real-life standards that people witness every day. It was opposing the nation that pursued the idea of a free world while enslaving its citizens. The high ideals and dark realities were brought together in the hope that people would come together and ring a bell against the unsettling power prevailing around them. This essay discusses critically all the points of his speech and how he incorporated parts of the Constitution and its preamble.

Discussion

In the speech, "What to a Slave is the 4th of July", a passionate argument of Frederick Douglass is shown where it is no more than a mockery even for a free American. Many rhetorical strategies were used in this speech that proved effective in conveying powerful emotions to the people he was addressing. Sarcasm was also used in these questions by declaring independence as "that" rather than "the," which shows that it separates the oppressed people from those who are not. The purpose of these rhetorical questions was to provide a perspective to the audience about the things that are presented and what they are. The speech was not given on holiday because he did not want to remind his people of the injustice they experienced and because he did not share any joy or independence with them. The address was particularly made for the black population of America. He considered himself a citizen who was equal to the spectator listening to his speech. The theme of the speech was to incorporate the true ideas of equal rights and justice.

The speech starts by praising the founding father and what he has done for the nation, and then slowly, it turned into the condemning attitudes of US society towards slavery. However, a positive attitude is conveyed by saying that the nation is still susceptible and it can bring positive changes.

The history of the revolutionaries of the American fight for freedom is also touched on, including where they fought under their legal boundaries under British rule. He highly supported the actions of those revolutionaries. He maintained an argument about freeing the slaves. The thought of many people about the danger of revolt was reminded of people that happened in 1776 against British domination. These were the same reasons for the slaves of America in 1852. However, people considered it dangerous to abolish. The stance of future generations was also presented by saying that it will be regarded as an act that is just, reasonable and patriotic (Douglass, 2014). By clearing all these things, he made a clear line about what was clear and just.

The people who signed the Declaration of Independence were respected and praised by Douglass because they put the interest of their country above their concerns. However, it was made clear to him that the purpose of his speech was not to praise those men but to appreciate the deeds they had done for their nation in their emotions of patriotism. People were given a lesson to continue the movement started by those amazing revolutionaries who played a great role in bringing peace, democracy, and freedom to their country. He proposed a motivational statement by saying, "This Fourth of July is yours, not mine" (Hollitz, 2016). The main idea behind this statement is that for a black person to celebrate the freedom of whites on the Fourth of July is a mockery because he is doing it in tyranny and oppression. This irony raises evil questions about the sacred American principles of equal rights, freedom, and democracy.

These things make clear that the main subject of this whole speech was slavery in America. America was being condemned for not being true to the founding principles of its past and present. The audience and residents of the country must abide by the principles made by the founders; however, 4 July was a shame and unholy license to those principles.

Douglass also addressed the questions that might arise in the minds of theoretical opponents. According to him, no person on this planet will be in favour of being a slave himself. It is not true for some people to impose such horrible conditions on others that they do not like for themselves. Some of the people also believed that slavery was a plan that was predetermined by divinity. Douglass presented the argument against this point that not nothing that is as inhuman as slavery can be justified as divine. It was considered as blasphemy because, due to slavery, cruelty is given the place that is against the nature of God.

He also made a clear point on the profit that is made out of slavery. The treatment that is done to slaves is like that of animals. Awareness about the responsiveness of anti-slavery activism in Baltimore was provided to these people so that they would be motivated. In Baltimore, slaves were now travelled and traded in the night with chains because of the initiatives taken by activists. Douglass was so affected by all these things because he heard the cries of slaves in chains when he was young, and this had an unsettling and chilling effect on him.

In this speech, the ministers and churches of America were also condemned because they were not speaking against this act of cruelty. They were playing an even crueller role by not taking any action

against them. However, they have the power to do so. This power made them guilty on the superlative level because it was in their control to condemn and eradicate slavery from their nation. The legislation was not doing justice, and there was no religion, humanity or justice for a black man. There was a Fugitive Slave Act, and according to the act, even the black men who were freed could be taken to the South by easily accusing them of being fugitive slaves. Douglass did not consider the church that declared this law effective a real Christian church because of this inhuman act.

The theme of American freedom and democracy is repeatedly discussed in the speech. The ideology of America is inconsistent because it may profess freedom, but not all the people in America were given the same rights. America declares the Democrat law in Europe and everywhere else when their people are deprived of this right. The Declaration of American Independence has a clear statement that “all men are equal,” however, American society itself creates an underclass for men and women, which is not justified and complying with their statement. The opponents of Douglass believed that the Constitution permitted slavery. Douglass responded to activists, including Goodell, Smith, Spooner, and Sewall, who believed that the founding fathers of the nation and the Constitution believed in eliminating slavery from Great America.

The speech was then concluded on a positive note. Douglass had a clear belief that anti-slavery sentiments would defeat pro-slavery forces. Most nations, especially the Western world, were against slavery in the mid-nineteenth century. Slavery was declared banned in 1834 in British colonies, and French colonies banned it in 1848. The political personalities of those countries were not able to defend human rights while slavery was allowed in their territory. Douglass provided the argument that the slavery of Americans could not be hidden from the world for long. Once this is brought to light, there will be an end to this unjust condition. The political ideas had no boundaries at that time, and the borders for trade were opened.

The power of slavery was declared something that is even beyond words, and Douglass presented it persuasively and subjectively (Miller & O’Neale, 1998). The idea of the Constitution and its preamble was brilliantly incorporated in his speech. The Constitution was referred to as a Glorious Liberty document, and if its preamble is looked into in detail with a clear purpose statement, then there is no slavery in it (Ball, 1989). All these things showed that America was false to its past and present policies because the idea of a declaration of independence was put falsely into practice. There is a fact very few people know that there were twelve American presidents who owned slaves while they were serving. It means that 50 years before the Civil War, slave owners resided inside the white house. The abolishment of the slave trade took place in 1850 in the Constitution of Washington D.C. However, owning slaves was still permitted for 15 more years when the household labour of the White House was done by slaves.

The arguments against slavery were proved by using simple opinions. The foremost point stated that the holiday of the Fourth of July is for liberty and freedom that is not presented to the blacks living in America. This holiday was considered a mockery where Americans could rejoice while the blacks still mourned in their distressed time of slavery.

Conclusion

The central idea of this speech revolved around slavery. Clear arguments were provided to prove that slavery was prohibited not only morally but also according to the Constitution of America. The preamble of the Constitution does not contain any evidence according to which slavery can be justified. The churches and ministers were said to be clear culprits for not taking any steps against this cruel act. The American attitude towards slavery in other countries was also discussed. The refugees from Russia were celebrated by Americans while they held slaves in their own country. The Fugitive Slave Act was still working when slavery was an immoral practice. All the arguments were constructed well, and the double meaning of the holiday on 4 July was made clear in Douglass's speech. The message of carrying a moment rightfully by following the Constitution was delivered. People were persuaded to argue and persuade rather than just denounce and rebuke. These steps will lead to a right cause that will have better chances of success, and all his predictions were correct.

References

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