

*I Have Come to Tell You Something  
About Slavery: An Address*  
FREDERICK DOUGLASS

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I feel greatly embarrassed when I attempt to address an audience of white people. I am not used to speak to them, and it makes me tremble when I do so, because I have always looked up to them with fear. My friends, I have come to tell you something about slavery—what *I know* of it, as I have *felt* it. When I came North, I was astonished to find that the abolitionists knew so much about it, that they were acquainted with its deadly effects as well as if they had lived in its midst. But though they can give you its history—though they can depict its horrors, they cannot speak as I can from *experience*; they cannot refer you to a back covered with scars, as I can; for I have felt these wounds; I have suffered under the lash without the power of resisting. Yes, my blood has sprung out as the lash embedded itself in my flesh. And yet my master has the reputation of being a pious man and a good Christian. He was a class leader in the Methodist church. I have seen this pious class leader cross and tie the hands of one of his young female slaves, and lash her on the bare skin and justify the deed by the quotation from the Bible, “he who knoweth his master’s will and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.”

Our masters do not hesitate to prove from the Bible that slavery is right, and ministers of the Gospel tell us that we were born to be slaves:—to look at our hard hands, and see how wisely Providence has adapted them to do the labor; and then tell us, holding up their delicate white hands, that theirs are not fit to work. Some of us know very well that we have not time to cease from labor, or ours would get soft too; but I have heard the superstitious ones exclaim—and ignorant people are always superstitious—that “if ever a man told the truth, that one did.”

A large portion of the slaves *know* that they have a right to their liberty.—It is often talked about and read of, for some of us know how to read, although all our knowledge is gained in secret.

I well remember getting possession of a speech by John Quincy Adams, made in Congress about slavery and freedom, and reading it to my fellow slaves. Oh! what joy and gladness it produced to

know that so great, so good a man was pleading for us, and further, to know that there was a large and growing class of people in the north called abolitionists, who were moving for our freedom. This is known all through the south, and cherished with gratitude. It has increased the slaves' hope for liberty. Without it his heart would faint within him; his patience would be exhausted. On the agitation of this subject he has built his highest hopes. My friends let it not be quieted, for upon you the slaves look for help. There will be no outbreaks, no insurrections, whilst you continue this excitement: let it cease, and the crimes that would follow cannot be told.

Emancipation, my friends, is that cure for slavery and its evils. It alone will give to the south peace and quietness. It will blot out the insults we have borne, will heal the wounds we have endured, and are even now groaning under, will pacify the resentment which would kindle to a blaze were it not for your exertions and, though it may never unite the many kindred and dear friends which slavery has torn asunder, it will be received with gratitude and a forgiving spirit. Ah! how the slave yearns for it, that he may be secure from the lash, that he may enjoy his family, and no more be tortured with the worst feature of slavery, the separation of friends and families. The whip we can bear without a murmur, compared to the idea of *separation*. Oh, my friends, you cannot feel the slave's misery, when he is separated from his kindred. The agony of the mother when parting from her children cannot be told. There is nothing we so much dread as to be sold farther south. My friends, we are not taught from books; there is a law against teaching us, although I have heard some folks say we could not learn if we had a chance. The northern people say so, but the south do not believe it, or they would not have laws with heavy penalties to prevent it. The northern people think that if slavery were abolished, we would all come north. They may be more afraid of the free colored people and the runaway slaves going South. We would all seek our home and our friends, but, more than all, to escape from northern prejudice, would we go to the south. Prejudice against color is stronger north than south; it hangs around my neck like a heavy weight. It presses me out from among my fellow men, and, although I have met it at every step the three years I have been out of southern slavery, I have been able, in spite of its influence, "to take good care of myself."