

V. Self-Evident Truths

Frederick Douglass: A Constitutionalist Speaks the Fourth of July

by Dennis Speed

July 3—This Fourth of July, Helga Zepp-LaRouche’s call for a worldwide health platform to fight pandemics, involving the collaboration of Russia, China, India, and the United States, among other nations, may help Americans remember the international characteristic of the American Revolution, from France’s Marquis de Lafayette, Germany’s “Baron” von Steuben, and Poland’s Casimir Pulaski and Thaddeus Kosciuszko, to the monarchs Catherine the Great of Russia and Carlos III of Spain. It may also call to mind that revolutionary world mission that Franklin Delano Roosevelt had enunciated, prior to America’s entry into World War Two, in his 1941 “Four Freedoms” speech:

In the future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms.

The first is freedom of speech and expression—everywhere in the world.

The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way—everywhere in the world.

The third is freedom from want—which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants—everywhere in the world.

The fourth is freedom from fear—which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggres-

sion against any neighbor—anywhere in the world.

That is no vision of a distant millennium. It is a definite basis for a kind of world attainable in our own time and generation....

Two of FDR’s freedoms—Freedom from Want, and Freedom from Fear “everywhere in the world,”—are



The Four Freedoms carved in stone at the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial in Washington, D.C.

CC

addressed directly by that world health proposal. Only an international defense against pandemics can keep any nation truly safe. “We are only as healthy as our sickest nation.”

Why don’t many Americans get FDR’s message any longer? What blocks them from acknowledgement of their own revolutionary history? For example, when talking about the “threat” and “challenge” posed by today’s Russia and China, would Americans be startled to know that the post-Revolutionary United States pio-

neered work in 1840s Russia and in 1860s China to create the beginnings of transcontinental rail systems as part of an alliance against “Rule Britannia,” the colonial naval power of the British Empire?

Would they be embarrassed to admit that the Belt and Road Initiative, and the improved alliance between Russia and China, were the intended, desired outcome of Abraham Lincoln’s diplomatic missions to both nations between 1861 and 1865, and that both of those nations supported the Union cause just as fervently as America’s “special relationship ally” today, Great Britain opposed and sought to undermine America at every turn?

Declaration of Independence Co-Signers Convention

American citizenship, from the time of the Revolution, has carried implications beyond mere privileges of birthright. As the Rev. James Luther Bevel, Director of Direct Action for Martin Luther King and the intellectual author and organizer of the May, 1963 Birmingham Children’s March, said to his friend, fellow civil rights organizer, Rev. Alonzo Shepherd, at a meeting held in Shepherd’s Philadelphia church on the early evening of King’s birthday, January 15, 1993, “You have to ask the American people whether or not they have actually co-signed the Declaration of Independence. Because, judging from the present state of America, I don’t know whether they actually agree with it.”

Bevel never believed in, and often preached against blaming the government of the United States for anything, “because the people are the government. We have the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. What else do you need? The American Revolution was already made for you. If you still find yourself oppressed by injustice, the first thing you have to do is take out the 51% that you are contributing, at least, to the condition that you must have, somewhere along the line, agreed to go along with.”

He suggested that there be an annual Declaration of Independence Co-Signers Convention, in which, after a reading of the Declaration, people go up and co-sign it.

This might be one way to begin to remedy the true problem of the sorry state of American politics, education, and daily life: the failure to take responsibility for citizenship. He believed that, as Cassius says in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, “The fault, dear Brutus, lies not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings.”

To illustrate: The suppression of true American History is a condition that is tolerated by, not imposed upon, its citizens. Lies are told today about the Founders, and Preservers, of the nation, starting with who they even are. The lies stand because the citizens do not dispute them. Names like Alexander Spotswood of Virginia, Matthew and Henry Carey of Philadelphia, or

Friedrich List of Pennsylvania and Germany, are unknown. The roles of others, like Frederick Douglass for example, are greatly distorted. This must be corrected.

One might argue that the United States has developed such disregard for its Revolutionary history these days that virtually no one has stopped to consider that we may be neglecting to even commemorate the actual process leading up to the 250th birthday of our nation. One might ask, for example, whether the focus given to 1619, the year when slavery officially commenced in the American colonies, a fact recently twisted into the “America was founded on racism” falsehood by the *New York Times*’s 1619 project, is less an attack on the Pilgrims landing from the *Mayflower* at Plymouth in 1620, than on the American Revolution’s pro-



EIRNS/Stuart Lewis

Rev. James Bevel, at a rally calling for the removal of the statue of Confederate General and Ku Klux Klan leader Albert Pike in Judiciary Square, Washington, D.C., October 7, 1992.

cess of birth.

The 1763-1776 organization of the American Revolution was the most successful conspiracy for freedom in recorded human history, a conspiracy that angered the British into creating in 1782 the Foreign Office, to prevent the American Revolution from being repeated anywhere in the world, ever again.

I Shall Never Prove a Traitor

More study, writing, publishing, and preparation went into the 1776-83 process than has accompanied any comparable process in history—if there even be another process that could be called comparable. And per-



A 19th-century lithograph depicting the killing of Crispus Attucks in the Boston Massacre of March 5, 1770.

haps that is exactly why no one consults those original sources to learn the truth. Perhaps never in history has such a record of success at not only conducting but perpetuating a revolution through a process of Constitutional government been so thoroughly ignored by so many people that simultaneously purport to hold undying fealty to that very Revolution of which they know nothing. Whether one agrees or not, for example, that the March 5, 1770 Boston Massacre, in which five colonials were killed including an escaped slave by the name of Crispus Attucks, were the appropriate event from which to date the “end of the beginning” of that process, the fact that it came and went in 2020 without any significant attention being called to it, is what must be immediately remedied in defense of not only the true history, but the very sanity of our citizens.

A note about Attucks. Consider that Attucks, born in Framingham, Massachusetts, appears twice in history books—once in the fall of 1750, twenty years before the Boston Massacre, as “Ran away from his master William Brown of Framingham, a mulatto fellow, 27 years of age, named Crispus, 6 feet 2 inches high.” and then in 1770, in an account of the bloody events of March 5 by the *Massachusetts Gazette*, quoted and recounted by authors Sidney and Emma Kaplan:

burying-ground.”

To understand what this meant, consider that African-American war veterans were not allowed to be buried together with white veterans at Arlington National Cemetery until 1948, 84 years after it was established.

The latest “critical race theory” fads notwithstanding, Crispus Attucks at Boston, Salem Poor at Bunker Hill, the First Rhode Island regiment, Boston’s Bucks of America, the Volunteer Chasseurs from Haiti, and Colonel John Glover’s Marblehead fishermen, many of whom were Indians and never enslaved or newly free Africans, were American Revolutionary patriots. When the 15-year-old James Forten, captured by British sailors when his ship, the *Royal Louis* was defeated by the British frigate *Amphion*, was adopted as a playmate by the captain’s son and offered “the life of an aristocrat, he replied,” I am here a prisoner for the liberties of my country; I never, never shall prove a traitor to her interests!”

Our 250th Anniversary

In any case, it is certainly indisputable that in less than four years from now, on April 18 of 2025, the an-

It was then that another group of citizens, apparently led by a tall robust man with a dark face, appeared on the scene.... Five martyrs fell that night: Samuel Gray, ropemaker; James Caldwell, mate; Samuel Maverick, apprentice joiner; Patrick Carr, an Irish leather worker; and the “stout man,” the first to die, “named Attucks, who was born in Framingham, but lately belonging to New Providence (Bahamas)... killed on the spot, two Balls entering his breast.” On Thursday, the corpse of Attucks was taken from Faneuil Hall, “all the Bells tolled a solemn Peal,” and the five were interred “in one Vault in the middle

niversary of “Paul Revere’s ride,” even the most historically parsimonious will have to admit that the 250th anniversary is upon us. Preparations are already being made for the Olympics which will take place in Paris in 2024, and Los Angeles 2028.

How are we, the citizenry, preparing our nation, and other nations, for the 2020-2026 world-historical turning point we are already in? Will we, perhaps instigated by the British forces we fought a quarter millennium ago, launch a new set of population wars against the modern-day-equivalent of colonial populations in Africa or Asia? Or will we, in four years, be members of a depopulated, sick nation that has lost the moral fitness to survive, having abandoned the original purpose of the American Revolution—the promotion of the General Welfare of all humanity? The whole world would prefer to celebrate *that* anniversary, but will not be able to do so, unless the citizens of the United States take back their revolutionary history.

This history is readily available in source material and in the writings of those who worked to found the country. This is a body of work unlike any in any other nation in the world. The *Federalist Papers* alone, that series of essays written jointly by Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, supplied the people of the emerging state of New York with a public presentation of a Platonic dialogue, as in a drama, a dialogue carried out among the three authors, as well as with fellow delegates from the other newly forming states, and, as representatives of the committee advocating the Constitution, with the American citizenry as a whole.

American society after seven years of conflict, and four of questionable self-government, required to be so addressed, and so convinced, through a density of argument and vigorous discussion that few among today’s electorate are literate enough to follow. (It should be a prerequisite that anyone in today’s United States, and particularly the Congress, who attempts to argue for a Constitutional Convention, should be required to read

the *Federalist Papers* aloud, and then simply asked to state in their own words what those essays mean. The same should be required of history teachers, judges, and lawyers, among others.)

Familiarizing students in our junior high and high schools, as well as colleges, with the source-documents revealing the “untold history” of pre-colonial, colonial, and revolutionary America, would immediately dissipate the most insipid of “critical theory” movements. This means, for example, discovering the ideas behind the 17th century colonial movements associated with Alexander Spotswood of Virginia, John Winthrop’s Commonwealth of Massachusetts, et al., the United States of the two American Revolutions 1776-1783 and 1861-1865, and the aborted third American Revolution 1932-45.

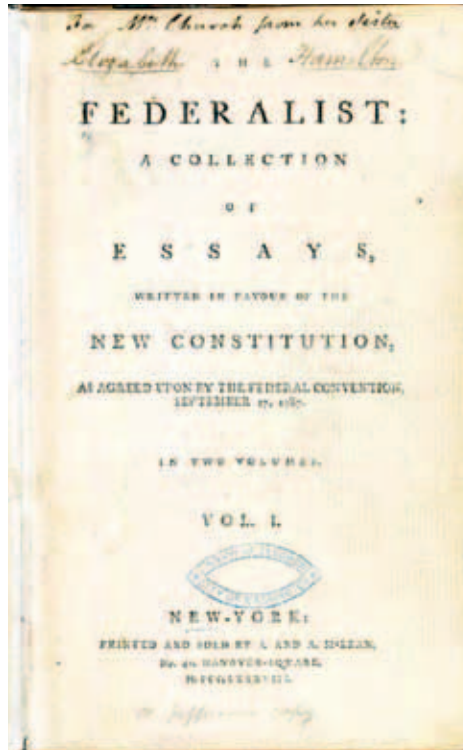
To Honorably Return

Today, however, to paraphrase Frederick Douglass:

What, to the American mind, presently enslaved in the service of British imperial/financial policy, and militarily deployed in no-win warfare, whether in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq or in unacknowledged conflicts and clandestine operations, in Africa and other parts of the world, is the Fourth of July?”

We have made a mockery of the words spoken by our greatest Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams, exactly 200 years ago, on July 4, 1821:

[America] has, in the lapse of nearly half a century, without a single exception, respected the independence of other nations, while asserting and maintaining her own. She has abstained from interference in the concerns of others, even when the conflict has been for principles to which she clings.... She goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-



Title page of “*The Federalist: A Collection of Essays, Written in Favour of the New Constitution, as Agreed upon by the Federal Convention, September 17, 1787.*”

wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own. She will commend the general cause, by the countenance of her voice, and the benignant sympathy of her example....

How, at this late hour, might we honorably return to the original mission of this nation and its brilliant leadership that strove to attain, in a self-perfecting process of self-government, a higher standard than that characterized by their personal inadequacies or their momentary political practice?

This July 4, we supply, in opposition to the intentionally false representations of American history that have become epidemic in the past three decades, and to the various fad-flavors of the Frankfurt School's "critical theory" now running amuck, an accurate account of Frederick Douglass' 1852 "Fourth of July" address. This exercise will hopefully inspire the reading of the words of other true founders, and re-founders of the republic, as Douglass, in fact, was. This speech is one of the clearest presentations of the Socratic (Platonic) method of education, and its use in early American politics.

The speech, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" while usually represented as an attack on the Constitution, is, in fact, a defense of the Constitution. Today's illiteracy in, and unfamiliarity with the 19th century practice of the ironical-polemical style in public speaking, along with downright lying about the speech's content, has allowed it to be so grossly misrepresented as to cause its actual intended message to be unrecognizable.

The Douglass speech, divided in three distinct sections, required of the more than 500 people that crowded Rochester, New York's Corinthian Hall on July 5, 1852 to hear it, a level of objective introspection born of careful listening to a nuanced argument, presented in

multiple voices by a single speaker, that would be summarily rejected by the "unmusical" narrow-mindedness of any comparable audience assembled in today's United States.

The multiple oratorical and literary devices employed by Douglass throughout his speech were usual and familiar to an American audience of that time. From *The Columbian Orator*, Caleb Bingham's "text-book" on "the art of eloquence" owned by Douglass from a very young age, to the *Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory* delivered by John Quincy Adams at Harvard in 1806-1808, everyone that intended to persuade others

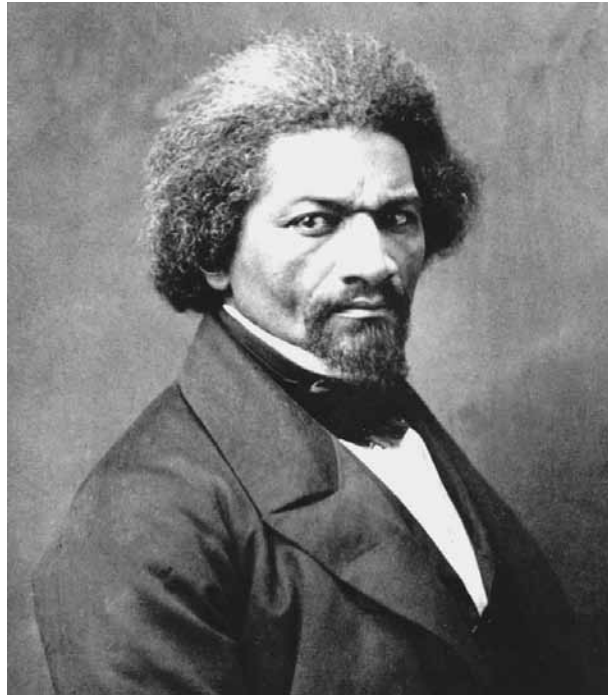
knew vocalization was an essential part of elementary literacy. The collapse of spoken language in contemporary America, now ongoing for about a century, has allowed idea-comprehension to be severely compromised, mugged, and "hacked."

With that proviso, we present some excerpts from the Douglass Fourth of July Speech in the hope that during this Fourth, after reading, perhaps aloud, the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, that families and groups, as well as individuals, might read the Douglass speech, preferably in its entirety, to correct the misrepresentation

which you are virtually certain to hear.

The Constitution Is Greater than our Present Practices

So that there can be no doubt on where Douglass stood with respect to the Constitution of the United States, we quote the following from that third and final speech-section that Douglass called "The Constitution." To set the context, we first quote the section immediately preceding, in which Douglass excoriates his audience, using the voice of one who is part of the one-seventh of the country that were still enslaved, as the freed slave Douglass stood there, speaking to that New York audience in 1852:



New York Historical Society

Frederick Douglass, c. 1865.

Fellow citizens! I will not enlarge further on your national inconsistencies. The existence of slavery in this country brands your republicanism as a sham, your humanity as a base pretense, and your Christianity as a lie. It destroys your moral power abroad; it corrupts your politicians at home. It saps the foundation of religion; it makes your name a hissing, and a bye-word to a mocking earth. It is the antagonistic force in your government, the only thing that seriously disturbs and endangers your *Union*. It fetters your progress; it is the enemy of improvement, the deadly foe of education....

Then, there is a complete break with this stream of argument. First, Douglass “sets up”—prepares—his audience, by first seeming to strengthen his denunciation of the Constitution and its authors:

But it is answered in reply to all this, that precisely what I have now denounced is, in fact, guaranteed and sanctioned by the Constitution of the United States; that the right to hold and to hunt slaves is a part of that constitution framed by the illustrious fathers of this Republic....

This is the inevitable conclusion, and from it there is no escape....

Douglass then says:

But I differ from those who charge this baseness on the framers of the Constitution of the United States. *It is a slander upon their memory*, at least, so I believe....

In *that* instrument I hold that 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. Read its preamble, consider its purposes. Is slavery among them? Is it at the gateway? Or is it in the temple? It is neither. While I do not intend to argue this question on the present occasion, let me ask, if it be not somewhat singular that, if the constitution were intended to be, by its framers and adopters, a slaveholding document, why neither slavery, slaveholding, nor slave can anywhere be found in it. What would be thought of an instrument, drawn up, legally drawn up, for the purpose of

entitling the city of Rochester to a track of land, in which no mention of land was made? (All emphasis in the original.)

This Fourth of July, if you hear this “Douglass speech” either referred to by various commentators, or as either a “sound-byte” or text, they will not tell you this context. What you will hear, instead, is this passage:

What, to the American slave, is your Fourth 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 denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence.... 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.

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 stay with me, that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival.

Our Constitutional Responsibilities

You will not be read, or told about, this paragraph, which comes immediately before the above, and will be omitted:

At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed. O! Had I the ability, and could I reach the nations ear, I would, today, pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke. For 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 roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be denounced.

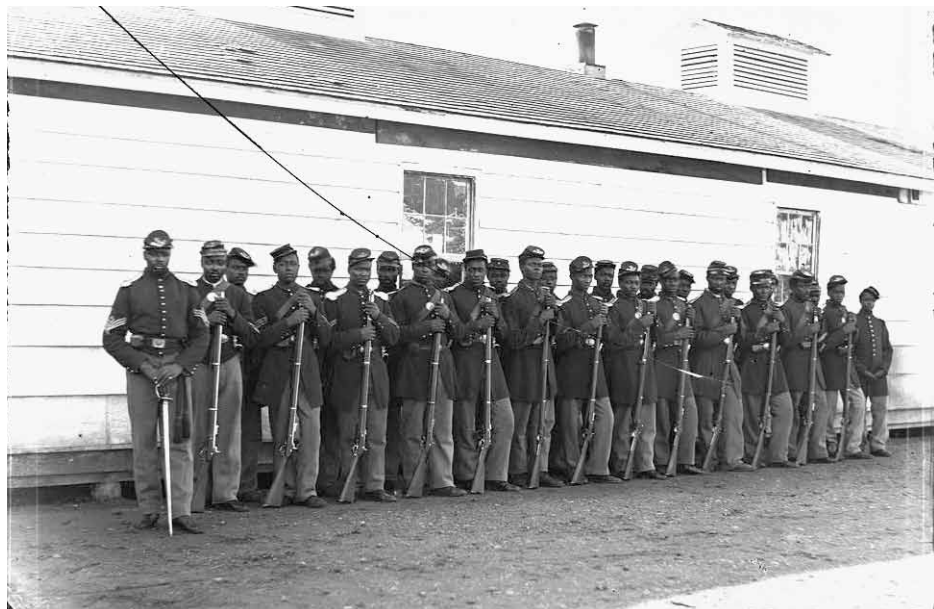
And that is exactly what Douglass does, in voicing the ensuing passage, which we intentionally quoted here in reverse order from its appearance. Douglass states his method, then, using a change of voicing, demonstrates his method in the ensuing section, then shifts his voice again. Douglass employs three voices, alternately—that of the slave, that of the present citizen of the slavery-compromised United States, and that of the free American citizen of the future, though presently endangered, revolutionary American Constitutional republic—that promise of the Constitution which had yet to be fulfilled, to be brought into existence. That

America of the future was the America of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, and was physically represented by the 19th century “Apollo Project” known as the Trans-Continental Railroad.

In conclusion, we will now refer to Douglass’ beginning voicing, that of Douglass, the “fellow citizen” of the compromised republic:

Fellow citizens, I am not wanting in respect for the fathers of this republic. The signers of the Declaration of Independence were brave men. They were great men too—great enough to give fame to a great age. It does not often happen to a nation to raise, at one time, such a number of truly great men. The point from which I am compelled to view them is not, certainly, the most favorable; and yet I cannot contemplate their great deeds with less than admiration. They were statesmen, patriots and heroes, and for the good they did, and the principles they contend for, I will unite with you to honor their memory....

They were peace men; but they preferred revolution to peaceful submission to bondage. They were quiet men; but they did not shrink from agitating against oppression. They showed forbearance; but that they knew its limits. They believed in order, but not in the order of tyranny. With them, nothing was “settled” that was not



Library of Congress

Douglass catalyzed the recruitment of 179,000 African-American troops to fight in the War of the Secession in the two years, 1863-65.

right. With them, justice, liberty, and humanity, were “final,” not slavery and oppression. You may well cherish the memory of such men. They were great in their day and generation. Their solid manhood stands out the more as we contrast it with these degenerate times....

The complex country of which we are the descendants requires that this generation of Americans, Frederick Douglass’ fellow-citizen descendants, have as much dedication to the Constitution, and to the Republic now, as Douglass had then—in his case, even in the face of the then-extant practice of slavery. His support for the Constitution, rather than for self-destructive purgative violence like John Brown’s doomed-to-fail 1859 raid at Harpers Ferry (or the present-day “police action antics” of Antifa, etc.) is how Douglass found himself able to catalyze the recruitment of 179,000 African-American troops to fight in the War of the Secession in the two years, 1863-65.

By means of this caliber of dedication, only, can the Four Freedoms—the gift that Franklin Roosevelt wanted to give to the world, after fascism nearly destroyed it in 1945—be extended to humanity. Such dedication is given only to those whose knowledge of the history of ideas is extensive enough to allow them to know who they are, not only as individuals, but as the higher process of current history of which they are truly comprised.