

## 4th of July 2020

The Bethlehem Gadfly Uncategorized July 4, 2020

*Gadflies are never satisfied. Gadflies, seeking perfection,  
always see the glass only half-full.*

*For a black American, for a black inhabitant of this country, the Statue  
of Liberty  
is simply a very bitter joke, meaning nothing to us.  
James Baldwin*

*“I shall see this day . . . from the [people-of-color] point of view.”  
Frederick Douglass*

In 1852 the people of Rochester, NY, did an audacious thing.

They asked a slave — Frederick Douglass — to give the annual 4th of July oration.

Douglass had escaped slavery. And until quite recently, when a friend purchased his freedom, he was still the property of another, subject to arrest and return to his Master.

Douglass was “Other.”

In that oration, Frederick Douglass did an audacious thing. He spoke as a slave and asked, **“What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”**

In that oration, Frederick Douglass had the audacity to tell his mostly white audience [“us”] what the slaves would think and say hearing the pious and patriotic 4th of July orations.

Followers will know that Gadfly feels the pain of others. Especially the pain of the underdog. Especially unjust pain.

When he wrote **last 4th of July**, the national mind was full of images of the treatment of and the conditions of migrants along the Southwest border.



This 4th of July it's urban racial violence.

Gadfly will ask you to do an audacious thing.

Imagine if we asked an inner-city Black from, say, Minneapolis to give the 4th of July oration here today.

And imagine he or she answered in **Frederick Douglass's words**.

*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 contended for, I will unite with you to honor their memory. . . .*

*Fully appreciating the hardship to be encountered, firmly believing in the right of their cause, honorably inviting the scrutiny of an on-looking world, reverently appealing to heaven to attest their sincerity, soundly comprehending the solemn responsibility they were about to assume, wisely measuring the terrible odds against them, your fathers, the fathers of this republic, did, most deliberately, under the inspiration of a glorious patriotism, and with a sublime faith in the great principles of justice and freedom, lay deep the corner-stone of the national superstructure, which has risen and still rises in grandeur around you. .*

..

*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. . . .*

*Above your national, tumultuous joy, I hear the mournful wail of [thousands?] whose chains, heavy and grievous yesterday, are, to-day, rendered more intolerable by the jubilee shouts that reach them. If I do forget, if I do not faithfully remember those bleeding children of sorrow this day, "may my right hand forget her cunning, and may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth!" To forget them, to pass lightly over their wrongs, and to chime in with the popular theme, would be treason most scandalous and shocking, and would make me a reproach before God and the world. . . .*

*I shall see this day . . . from the [people of color] point of view. . . . 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. Standing with God and the [people of color] on this occasion, I will, in the name of humanity which is outraged, in the name of liberty which is fettered, in the name of the constitution and the Bible, which are disregarded and trampled upon, dare to call in question and to denounce, with all the emphasis I can command, everything that serves to perpetuate [this treatment] — the great sin and shame of America! . . .*

*I submit, where all is plain there is nothing to be argued. What point in the [need for racial justice] creed would you have me argue? On what branch of the subject do the people of this country need light? Must I undertake to prove that [people of color are human beings]? . . .*

*What, then, remains to be argued? . . . The time for such argument is passed. At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed. O! had I the ability, and could I reach the nation's ear, I would, to-day, 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 proclaimed and denounced. . . .*

*What to [people of color] 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 denunciations 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 these United States, at this very hour.*

Like getting hit with a bucket of boiling oil.

A message addressed with equal fervor to members of all political parties.

This, in Gadfly's opinion, is the kind of soul-rattling voice we need to hear on this 4th of July as we think at the next City Council meeting and later about our local response to what a morning newspaper article called "the nation's searing reckoning with racial inequality."

We need to hear this soul-rattling voice when we meet the voices of resistance and status quo and fatigue, as we surely will.