



**What to the Slave is Your Fourth of July? (Abridged)**  
**Frederick Douglass**  
**July 5, 1852 Rochester, New York**

Fellow Citizens, I am not wanting in respect for the fathers of this republic. 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.

Fellow Citizens... allow me to ask, why am I called to speak here today? What have I or those I represent to do with your national independence?

Are the great principles of political freedom and natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us?

I say it with a sad sense of disparity between us... Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us. The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity, and independence bequeathed by your fathers is shared by you, not by me.

This Fourth of July is yours, not mine. 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 jubilant shouts that reach them....

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 Fourth 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.

What to the American slave is your Fourth of July I answer, a day that reveals to him more than all other days of the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim.

To him your celebration is a sham...your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless... 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....

There is not a nation of the earth guilty of practices more shocking, and bloody than are the people of these United States...