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Typescript version of Frederick Douglass speech given in New York on May 11, 1847

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New York, May 11, 1847.

I am very glad to be here— I am very glad to be present at this anniversary—glad again to mingle my voice with those with whom I have stood identified—with those with whom I have labored for the past seven years for the purpose of undoing the burdens of my brothers and hastening the day of their emancipation. I do not doubt that a large portion of this audience will be disappointed, both by the manner and the matter of which I shall this day set forth. The extraordinary and unmerited eulogies which have been showered upon me—here and elsewhere, have done much to create expectations which I am well aware I can never hope to gratify. I am here a simple man, knowing what I have experienced in slavery, knowing it to be a bad system—and desiring by all Christian means to seek its overthrow—I am not here to please you with an eloquent speech—with a refined and logical address, but to speak to you the sober truth of a heart overborne with gratitude to God—that we have in this land, cursed as it is with slavery, so noble a bond to secure my efforts and the efforts of others in the noble work of undoing the bondage with which the majority of the states of this union are now unfortunately cursed.

Since I have the pleasure of mingling my voice with the voices of my friends on this platform many interesting and even trying events have occurred to me. I have experienced within the last eighteen or twenty months many incidents all of which it would be interesting to communicate to you, but many of these I shall be compelled to pass over at this time and confine my remarks to giving a general outline of the spirit and manner with which I have been hailed abroad and welcomed at the different places I have visited during my absence of twenty months.

You are aware doubtless that my object in going from this country was to get beyond the clutch of the man who owned me for his property. I have written a book giving a history of that portion of my life spent in the gall and bitterness and
degredation of slavery, and in which I also identified my oppression as the perpetrators of some of the most atrocious crimes. This had deeply incensed them against me and stirred up within them the purpose of revenge -- and my whereabouts being known -- I believed it necessary for me if I would preserve my liberty to leave the shores of America and take up my abode in some other land at least until the excitement occasioned by the publication of my narrative had subsided. I went to England, Monarchial England to get rid of Democratic Slavery. And I must confess that at the very threshold I was satisfied that I had come to the right place. Say what you will of England of the degredation and poverty and there is much of it there, say what you will of the oppression and the suffering going on in England -- at this time -- there is liberty there -- not only for the white man, but for the black man also -- The instant that I stepped upon the shore and looked into the faces of the crowd around me -- I saw in every man a recognition of my manhood and a perfect absence of that disgusting hate, with which we are persued in this country. I looked around in vain to see in any man's face a token of the slightest aversion to me on account of my complexion -- Even the cabmen demeaned themselves to me as they did to other men, and the very dogs and pigs of old England treated me as a man -- I cannot, however, my friends dwell upon this anti prejudice or rather the many other illustrations of the absence of prejudice against color in England, but will proceed at once to defend the right and duty of making English aid and English sympathy for the overthrow of American slavery, for the education of colored Americans and to furnish in every way the interest of humanity in as much as the right of appealing to England for aid in overthrowing slavery in this country has been called in question in public meetings and by the press in this city.

I cannot agree with my friend Mr. Garrison in relation to my love and attachment to this land -- I have no love for America as much, I have no patriotism -- I have no country. What country have I? The institutions of this country do not know me, do not recognize
me as a man—I am not thought of or spoken of in any direction out of the anti slavery ranks as a man—I am not thought of or spoken of except as a piece of property belonging to some christian slave holder, and all the religious and political institutions of this country alike pronounce me a slave, and a chattel. Now in such a country as this I cannot have patriotism. The only thing that links me to this land is my family and the painful consciousness that here there are three million of my fellow creatures groaning beneath the iron rod of the worst depotism that could be devised even in Pandemonium. That here are men and brethren who are identified with me by their complexion; identified with me by their hatred for slavery; identified with me by their love of and aspirations for liberty; identified with me by the stripes on their backs—their inhuman wrongs and cruel suffering. This and this only attaches me to this land and brings me here to plead with you—and with this country at large for the disenthralment of my oppressed countrymen and to overthrow this system of slavery which is crushing them to the earth. How can I love a country which dooms three million of my brethren, some of them my own kindred, my own brethren my own sisters who are now clanking the chains of slavery upon the plains of the South whose warm blood is now making fat the soil of Maryland and Alabama, and over whose crushed spirit rolls the dark shadow of oppression—shutting out and extinguishing forever the bright sun of liberty lighted in the souls of all God's children by the omnipotent hand of Deity itself. How can I say I love a country—thus cursed, thus bedewed with the blood of my brethren. A country, the church of which and the government of which—and the constitution of which is in favor of supporting and perpetuating this monstrous system of injustice and blood. I cannot have any love for this country as such or for its constitution I desire to see its overthrow as speedily as possible and its constitution shattered into a thousand fragments rather then this foul curse should continue or remain as now.

In all this my friends let me make myself understood. I do not hate America as against England—or against any other country or
land--I love humanity all over the globe—I am anxious to see righteousness prevail in all directions—I am anxious to see slavery overthrown here but, I never appeal to Englishmen in a manner calculated to awaken feelings of hatred or disgust or to influence their prejudice toward America as a nation or in a manner provocative of national jealousy or ill will but I always appeal to the conscience to the higher and nobler feelings of that country to enlist them in this cause.

I always appeal to their manhood that which preceded their being Englishmen. I appeal to them as men and I had a right to do so—they are men and the slave is a man and we have a right to call upon all men to assist in breaking his bonds let them be born and live where they may. But it is asked what good will this do? Have you not irritated have you not annoyed your American friends and the American people rather than done them good. I admit that we have irritated them, they deserve to be irritated. I am anxious to irritate the American people on this question. As it is in physics, so it is in morals there are cases that demand irritation and counter irritation. The conscience of the American people needs this irritation and I would blister it all over from center to circumference until it shows signs of a purer and better life than is now manifesting to the world.

But why expose the sins of one nation in the eyes of another why attempt to bring one people under the odium of another people—there is much force in this question—I admit that there are sins in almost every country that can best be removed by means confined exclusively to their immediate locality. But such evils and such sins presupposes the existence of a moral power in his immediate locality sufficient to accomplish the work of renovation. But where pray can we go to find moral power in this nation sufficient to overthrow slavery. To what constitution, to what party shall we apply for aid. I say we admit that there are evils which can best be removed by influences
confined to their immediate locality. But in regard to American slavery it is not so. It is such a giant crime, so darkening to the soul, so blinding in its moral influence, so well calculated to blast and corrupt all the human principles of our nature so well adapted to infuse its own accursed spirit into all around it, that the people among whom it exists have not the moral power to abolish it. Shall we go to church for this influence we have heard its character described. Shall we go to politicians or political parties? Have they the moral power necessary to accomplish this mighty task? They have not. What are they doing at this moment? Voting supplies for slavery—voting supplies for the extension, the stability, the perpetration of slavery in this land. What is the press doing? The same. The pulpit? almost the same—I do not flatter myself that there is moral power in the land sufficient to overthrow slavery and I welcome the aid of England—and that aid will come—the growing intercourse between England and this country by means of steam navigation the relaxation of the protective system in various countries in Europe, gives us an opportunity to bring in the aid, the moral and the Christian aid of those living on the other side of the Atlantic. We welcome it in the language of the resolution we entreat our British friends to continue to send in their remonstrances across the deep against slavery in this land. And these remonstrances will have a powerful effect here. Sir, the Americans may talk of their ability, and I have no doubt but that they have it, to keep back the invaders heeds to repulse the strongest force that its enemies may send against this country It may boast and it may rightly boast of its capacity to hold its ramparts so high, that no foe can hope to scale them, to render them so impregnable as to defy the assault of the world—Sir, there is one thing that it cannot resist, come from what quarters it may. It cannot resist the truth. You cannot build your forts so strong, nor your ramparts so high, nor arm yourself so powerfully as to be able to withstand sentiment against slavery
noe flowing into this land. For example--prejudice against color is constantly growing weaker here and why. Because the whole European continent denounces this sentiment as unworthy a lodgment in the breast of enlightened community. And the American abroad dare not now, even in public conveyance to lift his voice in defence of this disgusting prejudice. I do not mean to say that there are no practices abroad which deserves to receive an influence favorable to their extermination from America I am most glad to know that democracy which while loved in its protestations of regard for liberty and equality builds up slavery, and in the name of freedom fights the battle of despotism in making great strides in this land. We see abroad in England especially happy indications of American principles, a little while ago England was cursed by a corn monopoly, by that giant monopoly which snatched from the mouths of the famishing poor the bread which you sent them from this land.

The community the people of England have demanded its destruction and they have triumphed.

We have sided then and they aid us--the mission of the two nations henceforth is to serve each other.