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The Biggest Hero During Slavery: Frederick Douglass

When I was in high school, the name of Frederick Douglass was mentioned several times in my US History and AP English class. By that time, I did not know who he was and what he accomplished during his lifetime. I heard several times that he was an African American; I also heard that he was remembered through his speeches; I remember once I heard his name when someone asked for an address. “Frederick Douglass... who was this guy?” I kept saying during my high school days, but no one gave me an answer. Until I watched his little biography and watched James Jones’s interpretation of *What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?* I learned three things from both videos, such as his early life, message, and contributions from the past to the present day. Those three things made me realize the type of person he was, a hero.

Initially, I had a brief idea of who Frederick Douglass was and his accomplishments but learning his life through the video inspired me. Frederick Douglass was born in 1818 as a slave, became educated through his master’s wife and himself, and escaped for freedom. Moreover, in 1838, Douglass fled to New York and started to work as a preacher one year later. Even though Frederick Douglass was a slave, he had the opportunity to be literate. However, literacy was forbidden for African Americans, but if they could learn how to read and write, they would use it to write passes, helping them move from place to place for their freedom. Instead, if African Americans were illiterate, they would not escape easily, and they would continue being repressed by the system they were living in before. Although Frederick Douglass was the exception of all of them, he used his intelligence to help others after he escaped from the South and spoke for the

silent voices. He was genuinely impactful for his period. The dream he had for making other African American slaves freed and educated has been praised for many decades.

When I listened to the video of his famous speech, *What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?* I found a relationship between Douglass' message with his role as a preacher interpreted by James Earl Jones. As a preacher, he did not necessarily preach on the streets passages of the Bible but his social worldview of slavery or philosophy for the African American's civil rights. In relationship with *What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July*, the delivery of Douglass' idea of African American slaves not being identified with the 4th of July was a compelling approach by his own experience. For instance, in the next quote, I noticed how Douglass' feelings towards Independence Day, "I say it with a sad sense of the disparity between us. I am not included within the pale of glorious anniversary! Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us." In his speech, he had revolutionary thinking about the founding fathers' hypocrisy when they wrote in the Declaration of Independence the famous quote "Life, liberty and pursuit of happiness." He acknowledged their past efforts but disagreed with the quote by not giving the African American slaves the most awaited thing: freedom. Likewise, many people identified by his way of expressing himself. As a result, they bravely joined with him to spread his ideals to abolish slavery.

Last, Frederick Douglass's contributions from the past are still remembered today. He is a person who is still being talked about in schools, politics, and per diem. For example, many books and online searches commemorate Frederick Douglass as the only African American to attend the Seneca Falls Convention, the first women's rights convention in New York, in 1848. Also, part of his most outstanding contributions to southern culture were the two subsequent autobiographies, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) and *The Life and Times of Frederick*

Douglass (1881). Both written as anti-slavery propaganda and personal observation, they are well known universally as classics of American literature. Even when there was a brutal Civil War in the still-young United States, Douglass continued to speak with his political pragmatism for the end of slavery and the civil rights of African Americans and women.

Frederick Douglass was and is the hero for many people. He started from the bottom to be the most memorable person for over a century. Indeed, he was a brilliant and influential person, and still on today. Furthermore, in many of Douglass' speeches, he always aimed to provide hope for his people by embracing antislavery politics and preached his American ideals about "Liberty, freedom and the right of Happiness." If I lived during that period as a slave, I would have supported him. Although slavery ended around 155 years ago, we still face social issues today, such as discrimination and racism. Nevertheless, when Frederick Douglass was still alive and the rise of racism due to slavery's abolishment, he never stopped advocating for a more united and equal country. Therefore, many people still refer to Frederick Douglass' speeches and use them as social criticism.

Works Cited

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