

Kendall russell

Sociology, Slavery



Kendall Russell AP English-8th Mrs. Guthrie Nov-30-2012 Junior Theme: "Inhuman mockery and Sacrilegious irony!" This is the description The Fourth of July received from one of the many heads of the abolitionist movement. The day commemorated by many Americans as a day to celebrate freedom and independence was described by Frederick Douglass as "bombast fraud." through the use of rhetorical questions, emotional appeals and visual imagery Douglass hammered to expose to his audience the hypocrisy of their celebrations. Angered by the persistence of slavery (Woodbridge Commentary), Douglass denounced the hypocrisy he saw in American society, represented forcefully by The Fourth of July, at the 76th anniversary of The Declaration of Independence (Frederick Douglass). Standing before a gathering of the ladies' anti-slavery society in Rochester, NY Frederick moved his audience with the force of his argument when he Posed the question "What, to the slave, is the fourth of July?" Beginning his speech, Douglass leads in with clear intentions making it clear: "I am not wanting in respect for the fathers of republic... the point from which I am compelled to view them is not the most favorable." Douglass' goal was not to discredit them for the men that they were or the works that they did; he actually does the exact opposite and credits them for laying the frame of a great age; but to honor the memory of them through a different pair of lens'. Douglass moves into the beginning of the argument with "Fellow Citizens..." and continues to do this throughout his speech. He coins this starting line to equal the playing field, lowering those that think they are above the african-americans from their pedestals and to point out the view of all of their equality in Gods eyes. He follows this sentence with a series of questions in

order to outline the goals he wishes to reach in his speech. Douglass' first line articulates the purpose of his speech: " 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 The Declaration of Independence, extended to us? " Douglass asks these questions not looking for an answer but to open the eyes of his audience. Is the holiday their celebrating extended to everyone? Sarcastically, he leads into his next paragraph by stating that there is no clear answer to give or at least not one that satisfies the question or the questioner. If that were the case, he says, then his task would be " light" and " his burden easy and delightful", but its not. If that were truly the case what would be the need for his bitterness and cold shoulder towards the day? Despairingly, he admits that he is not part of the " glorious anniversary". Though he has disdain for the day he feels great sorrow because of it. Throughout the entire paragraph Douglass exploits the anniversary with very opposite parallels. Using words like glorious, admiration, prosperity, illuminated, and jubilee he follows them with very strong contradicting words like despair, burden, obdurate, mourn, smitten, pale and disparity. This shows that he does not oppose the day, but on the contrary, he would want nothing more than to be apart of it, but that there is only one other option if not to rejoice and celebrate in freedom. " Douglass' question articulated the dilemma of black americans struggling to stake a place in the National narrative- a patriots progress of ambition and triumph, even as they were being written, legislated and defined out of it" (Asim, Jabari) and so was the purpose of his speech. Douglass tells the crowd that " over [their] tumultuous joy, [he] hears the mournful wail of Millions! " He

describes the slaves as being in mourning, wailing at their lack of freedom; bound by heavy and grievous chains. Through all of this Douglass has painted a picture of horrible delight and has created a tone of affliction and bondage; agonizing pain. Being the avid speaker he was, Douglass was able to stir the emotions of his audience by the end of this paragraph and even had them jumping from their seats with overwhelming agreement. Closing the paragraph Douglass skillfully used a crescendo of repeating anaphoras and bold statements making way for his grand Closing paragraph: " Standing with God and the crushed and bleeding slave 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 slavery and the great sin and shame of America! " I will not equivocate!; I will not excuse!; I will use the severest language I can command!; and yet not one word shall escape me that any man, whose judgment is not blinded by prejudice, or who is not at heart a slaveholder, shall not confess to be right and just! " Hitting the climax of his speech, Douglass reiterates the question posed at the start of the speech and forcefully follows it with his answer. Douglass like the great man that began his journey, William Lloyd Garrison, had the same idea in mind " I do not wish to think, or speak, or write with moderation..... urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present. I will not retreat a single inch and I WILL BE HEARD! " (Sharman Russell) and continues on to say : " What, to the American slave, 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 [has been] 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 denunciation 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... "

Nonetheless, Douglass' challenge has continued to respond, fertilizing the roots of black cultural nationalism and influencing contemporary calls for reparations for descendants of slaves (Jabari Asim); by Vigorously plowing his audience with questions they were once ignorant to, Douglas addressed the great evil of the country, : " It [was] an great evil of which it [was difficult]to rid the country. it [was] not the creature of a moment, which today is and tomorrow is not; it [was] not a pigmy, which a slight blow may have demolished... no: it [was] an evil of gigantic proportions and of long standing"