

Argumentative essay on frederick douglass' the meaning of july fourth for the neg...

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Frederick Douglass' The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro

In Frederick Douglass' speech "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro," the noted abolitionist and speaker called for an end to slavery using several different strategies of oratory and persuasion. By humbling himself before his audience, comparing the plight of slavery to the British rule they had only recently escaped, and placing a moral imperative on the ending of slavery, Douglass makes an effective and strong appeal for his cause on July 5, 1852.

Douglass' opening and closing strategies involve qualifying himself personally as an orator - he humbles himself before them in order to make him seem more approachable and relatable, and not someone who is lecturing them. "I do not remember ever to have appeared as a speaker before any assembly more shrinkingly, nor with greater distrust of my ability, than I do this day." By making it known that he feels unprepared, and that he is humbled before his audience, prepares them for criticism by making it established that he respects them as individuals. This makes the suggestion more constructive, as opposed to confrontational.

Douglass notes, first and foremost, the youth of the country as a factor in dictating new policies and discovering what the country is made of. "The eye of the reformer is met with angry flashes, portending disastrous times; but his heart may well beat lighter at the thought that America is young, and that she is still in the impressible stage of her existence." Douglass also notes that his audience may be acting hypocritically by noting their very own escape from servitude in the Revolutionary War - "The simple story of it is, that, 76 years ago, the people of this country were British subjects." By

likening the anniversary of the Revolution to the plight of slavery, and making it a 'simple,' matter-of-fact realization, Douglass points out the hypocrisy of acting as the British did towards them while dealing with the slave problem.

Douglass also appeals to their sense of morality to not oppress the weak, making it seem as though it is their duty to do the right thing, even though that does not seem to be the popular thing. " To side with the right against the wrong, with the weak against the strong, and with the oppressed against the oppressor! here lies the merit, and the one which, of all others, seems unfashionable in our day." Eventually, he uses matter-of-fact and strong language to note the consequences of the continued existence of slavery to the national identity; " The existence of slavery in this country brands your republicanism as a sham, your humanity as a base pretense, and your Christianity as a lie." By placing the negative consequences in such a stark light, Douglass also makes the ending of slavery necessary to prove their honor and righteousness, not just to help enslaved blacks.

In conclusion, Douglass' speech on the Fourth of July uses both humility and strong language to appeal to his audience to do something about the problem of slavery. Douglass links the occasion for which he is speaking (Independence Day) to this current issue, noting the sense of responsibility that Americans must feel in order to end slavery and preserve their national identity. By making himself one with the audience, and making himself relatable, the message is more strongly felt and comes from a more acceptable source.

Works Cited

Douglass, Frederick. " The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro." Rochester, New York, July 5, 1852.