



The Black Intellectual Tradition and the Great Conversation

with Dr. Angel Parham

Lesson 4: Frederick Douglas, Part II

Outline:

Douglass's Works

- Is the **Declaration of Independence** for everyone (black and white)?
 - Senator Stephen Douglas is clear that this was never meant to apply to black people.
 - The signers had slaves and they didn't free them.
 - He argues that blacks cannot be citizens, but they should also not be slaves. They don't have a natural right to freedom, this would depend on what each state decides.
 - Lincoln comes to very different conclusions than Douglas did. Jefferson was ambivalent about owning slaves.
 - Lincoln thinks there is a moral essence to what it means to be human. We are essentially meant to have the dignity of liberty and freedom.
 - *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?* Frederick Douglas
 - Douglass likens the request of asking him to come and give celebratory words on the fourth of July, to another time in history when an oppressed people were called upon to sing and dance in the face of their oppression.
 - He gives a biblical reference to the oppressors who took the people of Israel into captivity.
- **The Constitution**
 - Was it an instrument of oppression and slavery or an instrument of freedom?
 - Douglass was with a group of abolitionists led by William Lloyd Garrison.
 - The Garrisonian position was that the Constitution was wicked and it enshrined slavery.
 - Therefore abolitionist should not embrace the Constitution.
 - However, the Constitution should be scrapped and remade.
 - In 1851, Douglass changes his position and states that the Constitution is a liberating document for everyone.
 - The south was still in effect punished by counting slaves as three fifths of a person.



- The new Douglass says that there was clearly a desire to end the slave trade (not to end slavery though).
- There is nothing that says specifically that slavery is right. We need to look at the words that plainly stated.
- **The 1619 Project**
 - 1619 was our true founding.
 - This aims to reframe the country's history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of our national narrative.
 - There are historical echoes in this contemporary debate.
 - Where do I stand on the American project? Where do I stand on the Constitution? Was it freeing and good, or was it worked for their oppression.
 - **We have to learn to dwell in the tension. This is an important skill in discernment that we have to learn to cultivate in our students.**