



The Black Intellectual Tradition and the Great Conversation

with Dr. Bryan Williams, Dr. Angel Parham, Danielle Bennette Dukes, Dr. James LaGrand

Panel 1: The Legacy of Frederick Douglass

Outline:

The Life, Example, and Writings of Frederick Douglass

- **Dr. Brian Williams (00:21):** Douglass's connection to the classical tradition:
 - Douglass read *The Columbian Orator*, but also references Herotodus, Sophocles, Scripture, Cicero, Shakespeare, and Milton.
- **Dr. Brian Williams:** What does Douglass's example suggest about tending to the classical tradition for the least advantaged students?
- **Dr. Brian Williams:** Could Douglass be a model for our contemporary schools? What does he teach us about the importance of the tradition?
 - **Dr. Angel Parham:** Douglass talks in the narrative about the woman who started to teach him his letters. Her husband jumps in to say that if he reads it will forever unfit him to be a slave.
 - Reading is a window into freedom.
 - Douglass saw a route to freedom when he was denied literacy.
 - **Dr. James LaGrand:** If we could tell Douglass's story...that literacy (developing a relationship with other texts) is related to freedom and power.
 - **Danielle Bennette Dukes:** Literacy helps us transcend our place and time. Classical education can help to heal illiteracy on multiple levels.
 - **"Without truth there is only power,"** James Schall, *On Liberal Learning*.
- **Dr. Brian Williams (13:25):** Speak on the juxtaposition in Douglass between the classical tradition and the contemporary forms. How important was it that he was educated in classics?
 - **Dr. Angel Parham:** The rhetorical tradition that you see in Douglass' writing comes from the classic speeches seen in *The Columbian Orator*. *The Columbian Orator* contains dialogues about freedom and freeing slaves.
 - It wasn't just the form of *The Columbian Orator*, but also the content that influenced Douglass.



- Douglass was also very steeped in the Gospel.
 - Memory and music go together. Set epics to music (raps and beats). Let the children be creative and do their own versions.
 - **Danielle Bennette Dukes:** Plato warns about writing things down.
 - **Dr. Brian Williams:** Shakespeare was written to be performed.
 - **Dr. James LaGrand:** There are problems for a Christian if we have a dismissive attitude about the vernacular.
- **Dr. Brian Williams (24:12):** The content through which Douglass was learning the particular method of oratory was significant.
 - Educators were using particular passages to teach the children to live, but they also contained moral maxims that would teach the children how to live.
 - **Danielle Bennette Dukes:** Douglass had been caught by the notion of freedom and related it to himself. We have to make connections.
 - **Dr. Brian Williams:** Everything we do is formative of the student.
 - **Dr. Angel Parham:** The passages you use for copy work can reinforce moral lessons. The commonplace books help you to pull the best from what you read. Everyone needs to learn to write in cursive.
- **Dr. Brian Williams (32:37):** *The Blessings of Liberty and Education*, Frederick Douglass, 1894
 - What do you hear Douglass trying to do when he is saying that he does not despise manual labor, but leave it if you can?
 - What about those who do not have access to this education?
 - How do we help our students that we do educate and have opportunities to go on to understand those who do not have this opportunity?
 - **Dr. James LaGrand:** We live in times where for good reasons, perhaps the 4 year college program is not for everybody. We need to figure out ways to support students who go on as well as tradespeople.
 - **Dr. Angel Parham:** There is a difference between menial labor and working with your hands. There is little to redeem menial labor. Working with your hands may be a skilled craft. Ora et labora, work and prayer, this works well together.
 - **Dr. Brian Williams:** He seems frustrated for those who only have access to menial service.
 - **Danielle Bennette Dukes:** A liberal education gives you the freedom to choose. Education that directs you to be free, directs you to a full life.
 - **Dr. Angel Parham:** The goal is not to make cogs in the economy, but to craft persons.