

Frederick Douglass:

What, to the American Slave, Is Your Fourth of July?



Escaped slave from Louisiana, 1863.

“What to the American slave, is your Fourth 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 is 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 denunciations 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.

“There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of these United States, at this very hour.

“Go where you may, search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the Old World, travel through South America, search out every abuse, and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me, that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival.”

Frederick Douglass, a former slave and a leader in the fight against slavery, 1852