

"Distance between This Platform and the Slave Plantation": Dissociation in Frederick Douglass's "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?"*

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I. Introduction

It is no doubt that slavery was the biggest controversy which swept over the whole nation of the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. In the eye of this storm stood Frederick Douglass, who was born a chattel slave and escaped from slavery at the age of twenty, as one of the most articulate orators in the history of abolition and black liberation movement.¹⁾ Since Douglass delivered his first speech informing his (predominantly

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1) Douglass was not only a prominent public speaker but also a writer, newspaper publisher, editor, and political leader. He actively engaged with the Anti-Slavery Society as an agent of its Massachusetts chapter and wrote three autobiographical slave narratives from 1845 to 1881. After he broke with

white) audience of the evils of slavery, which he had suffered himself, at a convention of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1841, he devoted his entire life to bringing freedom and equality to his race. Among hundreds of speeches he made in and out of the country for almost fifty years, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?," a speech delivered on July 5th 1852 in Rochester, has been acclaimed as "perhaps the greatest antislavery oration ever given" (McFeely 173). Enraged by the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 that required any citizen in the North and the South to catch and return runaway slaves to their owners under the penalty of a fine or imprisonment, Douglass eloquently articulates his speech as not only a thundering call for abolition but also a personal declaration of independence from the nation that boasts of its release from bondage but leaves blacks in fetters through his masterful use of rhetorical strategies and devices.²⁾ Furthermore, in demonstrating high intellect and

William Lloyd Garrison, the leader of the American Anti-Slavery Society, and uncompromisingly devoted himself to immediate emancipation without colonization, because of his "growing doubts about the practicality of Garrisonian non-resistance as a means for overcoming the slave power" (Lauter 1839), Douglass began to publish his newspaper, *The North Star* (later renamed *Frederick Douglass's Paper*), in 1847. After the Civil War in which Douglass encouraged blacks to enlist in the army to fight for their freedom, he also worked for the enfranchisement of blacks. In his later career, Douglass held various political appointments including minister and consul to Haiti.

- 2) The Fugitive Slave Act is part of the Compromise of 1850, a set of bills to resolve divisions between Southern slave states and Northern free states over whether to allow slavery in newly acquired land as a result of the Mexican-American War of 1848. The compromise includes laws that admitted California to the Union as a free state and organized land acquired in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo into the territories of New Mexico and Utah with no federal prohibition of slavery; adjusted the boundary between Texas and New Mexico; prohibited slave trading but not slavery itself in the District of Columbia; and enforced the Fugitive Slave Act ("Compromise of 1850" 210). Even though the Compromise helped the Congress avoid "sectional and slavery issues for several years" ("Compromise of 1850" 210), the Fugitive Slave Act caused protests from many abolitionists in the northern states. For example, Harriet Beecher Stow immediately responded to the law by writing a story titled

linguistic prowess, qualities white abolitionists as well as white audiences did not expect a former slave would have, Douglass's speech marks his independence from white control in the anti-slavery movement where white abolitionists used him merely as a living witness of the evils of slavery and patronized him to "sprinkle his speech with a little plantation language to maintain his credibility as a former slave with his audiences" (Lauter 1881).

My question is then what makes his Fourth of July speech so appealing and memorable. More recently drawing critical attention than Douglass's autobiographies, his orations have been noted and analyzed by scholars in the fields of rhetoric and communication. For example, John Louis Lucaites argues that Douglass "employs an ironic framework to craft a usage of equality that would reconstitute the national public forum as a dialogue between past, present, and future, and thus enact a legitimate public space for the articulation of a uniquely African-American political voice" (49). Likewise, Robert E. Terrill analyzes Douglass's use of irony whose detached and multiple perspective allows the audience to see "conflicting images that are made to occupy the same field of vision" that is necessary to provoke action (221). James Jasinski demonstrates that Douglass appropriates "the epideictic genre" to rearticulate "the forgotten heritage of the revolutionary experience" (72). Kevin R. McClure identifies Douglass's strategy as "comparison via thesis and antithesis" (427). Some scholars such as Bernard W. Bell and Sarah Meer situate the speech in the tradition of the American jeremiad, an oratory style in which the speaker like the prophet Jeremiah in the Old Testament exhorts the sins of a community with a warning of God's wrath to follow and at the same time celebrates God's punishment as a corrective guide "toward the fulfillment of their

as "The Two Altars, or Two Pictures in One" in which she shows how the altar of liberty of 1776 is degraded into that of a slave auction in 1850 as well as the first installment of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

destiny, . . . individually toward salvation, and collectively toward the American city of God" (Bercovitch 9).³⁾ In the speech, Douglass as a black Jeremiah admonishes the audience for failing to live up to the principles of the republic and urges them to take actions to undo the evils of slavery.

While I recognize and acknowledge the contributions made by those scholars to the appreciation of Douglass's speech, I propose that Douglass's rhetorical process and strategies can better be understood by Belgian scholars Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca's rhetorical theory of argumentation. Considered as "one of the most influential modern formulations of rhetorical theory" (Vickers 591), *The New Rhetoric* by Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteca provides useful critical tools for analyzing Douglass's rhetorical process in which he affects the audience with his strong anti-slavery voice by foregrounding the radical inconsistencies between the national ideals and the reality of slavery as he appropriates the occasion of a Fourth of July oration that was traditionally filled with praises of the national ideals of the Independence. If the object of argumentation, as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca state in *The New Rhetoric*, is to "influence the intensity of an audience's adherence to certain theses" (14), the question is how Douglass obtains the audience's adherence to his antislavery argumentation. As the title of the speech implies, Douglass, on the platform of the Corinthian Hall in Rochester, on the very next day of the Independence Day, argues how incompatible the two realities—slavery and the celebration of freedom, justice as the

3) One can argue Douglass's speech is more specifically black jeremiad. According to Willie J. Harrell African American jeremiad discourse has two apparently distinct characteristics: the first, and most widely accepted, is that "the African American jeremiad is an interpretation of its American predecessor that is heavily centered on Christian values" to "criticize traditional white Christian ethics," and the second is that African American jeremiadic discourse is "more fundamentally politically based, calling for social changes in lieu of social prophecy" (9).

American national ideals, and Christianity—are and how these incompatibilities have been ignored in the racially biased American society. His main rhetorical strategy for securing the adherence of an audience is what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca call "dissociation" that separates a previously regarded unitary concept (411–12). While the other argumentation technique Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca offer, that is "association," is concerned with "bring[ing] separate elements together and allow[ing] to establish a unity among them" (190), dissociation is concerned with modifying some system of thought by "disuniting elements which are regarded as forming a whole" within that system and revealing the incompatibility of such elements (190). In the process of dissociation, according to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, conceptual pairs are modified and our conception of reality is modified accordingly. In so doing, dissociation brings about "a more profound change" that results in "a compromise" on the practical level or "a solution that will also be valid for the future," preventing "the reappearance of the same incompatibility" (413).

For Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, "the prototype of all conceptual dissociation" (415) is the dissociation between appearance and reality. They observe that appearance is "the manifestation of the real," but some appearances are illusory and erroneous (416).⁴ To get rid of incompatibilities among appearances and "to distinguish, out of a number of appearances of doubtful status, those which are merely appearance and those which represent reality" (417), they conceptualize reality as the norm by which appearances may be judged, and those aspects conforming

4) They give an example of a stick that is partly immersed in water in explaining the dissociation of appearance and reality: "it[the stick] seems curved when one looks at it and straight when one touches it, but in reality it cannot be both curved and straight. While appearance can be opposed to each other, reality is coherent: the effect of determining reality is to dissociate those appearances that are deceptive from those that correspond to reality" (416).

to the real are considered valuable. Generalized into a pair of term I and term II, the apparent corresponds to term I and reality to term II that "provides a criterion, a norm which allows us to distinguish different aspects of term I which are of value from which are not; . . . [and] establishes a rule that makes it possible to classify the multiple aspects of term I in a hierarchy" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 416). As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca note that "very often the effort in argument will be directed not to the rejection of established pairs but to their reversal" (427), what Douglass is doing is the reversal of the established system of conceptual dissociations between appearance and reality on which slave-holding America is based. In other words, his reversal shows that "the vision of the world and hierarchies" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 420) constructed by the system of the conceptual pairs operating in proslavery American society is false. His argumentation aims to subvert the values imposed on the system by revealing the paradox of the Fourth of July that "the rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence" (*Frederick Douglass Papers* 368) is celebrated and boasted while slavery is rampant.⁵⁾

Incorporating Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's "insights on dissociative arguments," Neil Leroux asserts that the main strategy of the speech is the attention shift that turns the audience's attention "from a national celebration of joy to a time of national mourning for slavery" (45). His research, however, does not fully engage with their concept of dissociation since he applies it to only the first section of the speech. In this paper, I examine how Douglass dissociates the three ideals of the nation—liberty, justice, and Christianity—which take the position of the term II in the appearance–reality pairs of racist American society at that time and shows they are not realities but appearances while taking into account the

5) Hereafter references to "What to the Slave" will be cited in the text by page number.

immediate and larger contexts of the speech including the 76th anniversary of the Independence, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, Douglass's break with Garrison in 1847, and his departure from Garrison's view on the Constitution as a proslavery document and his position of moral suasion as a viable way of abolition. Douglass's purpose is to challenge this accepted order and bring forth a profound change to that order, which is to abolish slavery, by dissociating the system of conceptual pairs upholding the racist American society. I argue that the power of Douglass's speech derives from his subversion of the privileged ideals of liberty, justice, and Christianity in the white dominant society by means of dissociation. As the main organizing principle and rhetorical tactic of the speech, dissociation provides a mechanism by which Douglass resolves incompatibilities that demand changes in conventional ways of thinking and leads to "a new structuration of reality" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 415) through which his audience comes to have a truer understanding of their own society. It is by articulating the "distance" between the national ideals and the reality of slavery that Douglass is able to not only narrow the gap between himself and the audience but also affirm his credibility as the speaker and finally attain the audience's adherence to his anti-slavery argument.

II. Dissociations of the American National Ideals

As the first object of his dissociation, Douglass brings out the notion of liberty which has been championed as the foremost principle of the nation when he addresses his audience "citizen" (359) who has the right to enjoy the very liberty. Narrating how the audience's ancestors fought against the tyranny of the British Crown and obtained liberty, Douglass emphasizes the

situation of white people under British oppression, which was not different from that of slaves in America of 1852. As he follows the rhetorical traditions of Fourth of July speeches in praising "the virtues of American independence" (DeSantis 66), he emphasizes the dissociation of the notion of the government into the destructive government (term I) and the good government (term II) that the audience's revolutionary "fathers" constituted in the beginning part of the Declaration of Independence in order to declare their independence from the British government as a natural consequence of events. In this dissociative scheme where the latter functions as the norm by which the value of the former is judged, the British government is not a good one since its "unjust, unreasonable, and oppressive" "restraints, burdens and limitations" imposed upon "its colonial children" do not satisfy the criteria of the good government that is established by the consent of its people and guarantees them the inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness (361).⁶⁾ Douglass continues to praise the founding fathers' dissociation from their despotic home country by pointing out how they courageously put into action "the then dangerous thought" of "a total separation of the colonies from the crown" and succeeded in laying "the corner-stone of the national superstructure" whose "eternal principles" are "justice, liberty and humanity" (362, 365). As a result of independence from Britain, the people of the United States gained citizenship, which refers to the position of exercising rights and privileges as a member of a nation. To put it another

6) According to Shelley Fisher Fishkin and Carla L. Peterson, Douglass was well versed in and used "the Enlightenment discourse of liberty—the discourse of the dominant culture—to shape it into a powerful counter discourse that would challenge the proslavery arguments of the period" (193). He encountered "a vision of human rights—self-evident, universal, and inalienable"—in the pages of *The Columbian Orator* (a collection of pieces designed to instruct the art of oratory) and in the rhetoric of the Declaration of Independence (Fishkin and Peterson 193).

way, what endows Americans "the style and title of . . . sovereign people" (361) is liberation from the tyranny of Britain. Douglass's addressing the audience "citizen" thus not only emphasizes the fact that the status and rights like liberty they are enjoying are the result of their ancestors' resistance but also functions as a wake-up call to the collective forgetting that they once were in the state of subordination no better than slaves.

In this recollection of the past struggle for freedom, Douglass's appellation further points to the present state of the nation that defines millions of black people not as citizens but as chattel slaves. Dissociating the concept of the citizen into the disenfranchised black as term I and the sovereign white as term II in Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's scheme, Douglass challenges the audience to confront the gap between the whites who exclusively own citizenship and the slaves who are denied even their humanity. Douglass himself is an embodiment of this dilemma of "slavery in the midst of freedom" (Colaiaico 35): even though he is a free black man, he does not have the full rights of citizenship.⁷⁾ The fact that Douglass an ex-slave is to deliver a Fourth of July speech transforms the ceremonial event into a site for revealing the disconcerting contradiction. The expectation that he is to present a nationalistic and patriotic speech of lauding the virtues and ideals of the nation conflicts with his intention of castigating one of the great evils of the nation, slavery. Douglass's co-presence with the audience he addresses "citizens" therefore gets the

7) Colaiaico explains the life of free blacks like Douglass in the North like the following:

By 1830, about 125,000 free blacks lived in the North, the number swelling to 250,000 by the outbreak of the Civil War. Nevertheless, though nominally free, blacks in the North and West were denied full citizenship in the antebellum period. They had no right to vote in Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Indianan, Ohio, Illinois, or Michigan. New York imposed on blacks a special property qualification for voting. Moreover, free blacks were subjected to discrimination and legal segregation in public facilities similar to that which plagued the South from the late nineteenth century. (49)

audience ready to confront the hypocrisy of the nation that cried out for freedom but tolerates black enslavement.

On this basis, he also applies his slave-citizen dissociation to the notion of "We the people of the United States," which the Constitution begins with, and the notion of "men" in the Declaration of Independence. By this application Douglass points out that these concepts such as "we" and "men" cannot claim their universality as long as they actually exclude another member of the nation by skin color. Douglass does not attack the two founding documents themselves, but rather considers them as a legitimate ground for abolition. He depicts the Declaration of Independence as "the ring-bolt to the chain of your nation's destiny" and "[t]he principles contained in that instrument" as "saving principles" which the nation should follow and fulfill (364). For him, the problem is that the practices of the nation are not "true to them" (364). Douglass also has changed his opinion on the Constitution as from a pro-slavery document to an anti-slavery document.⁸⁾ When he was in the moral suasion abolitionist camp led by Garrison, he shared a view that the Constitution was proslavery because it was framed by those who were slaveholders and thus intended to "maintain legal slavery" (Garvey 230) and that "any participation in political institutions, such as voting, represented the recognition of the legitimacy of the Constitution, the political system itself, and by extension, the institution of slavery" (McClure 428). After he decided to leave Garrison and the American Anti-Slavery Society and to publish his own newspaper in 1847,⁹⁾ Douglass began to question whether the non-participation

8) For a detailed discussion of this topic, see Garvey.

9) Douglass was frustrated by his white colleagues' racism against him. According to John Stauffer,

He received about half the pay of white lecturers even though he was the most effective speaker in the organization. His white colleagues treated him as a spectacle or symbol rather than as a person: "I was generally introduced as a 'chattel'—a 'thing'—a piece of southern 'property'—the chairman assuring the

doctrine of the moral suasion camp can be effective in the abolition movement and to think that "the Constitution could serve the ends of the abolitionists" (*Frederick Douglass Papers* 331). In the last section of the speech, Douglass advocates the Constitution as "a GLORIOUS LIBERTY DOCUMENT" (385 capitalization in original): "Now, take the constitution according to its plain reading, and I defy the presentation of a single pro-slavery clause in it. On the other hand it will be found to contain principles and purposes, entirely hostile to the existence of slavery" (386). What deeply troubles Douglass who has embraced the Constitution as anti-slavery is that the very principles manifested in the two documents are not being carried out by the actions of the institutions. The incompatibility Douglass discloses here is that even though the United States declared that "all men are created equal" and have "certain inalienable rights,"¹⁰⁾ those "men" are in actuality the privileged few, and "We the People of the United States" do not include the blacks. Douglass attacks the hypocrisy of the white dominant society which boasts itself as the defender of the right to liberty of mankind, and redefines liberty as not what every man can claim but what the only American "citizen" can claim.

Douglass enforces his dissociation of slave-citizen by using the second-person pronoun rather than creating a bond with his audience. In the first section of the speech, he pretends to celebrate the Fourth of July with the minute description of the history of the Revolution in a eulogistic tone as if he were one of the "citizens." Douglass, however, carefully

audience that it could speak" (*My Bondage and My Freedom* 366). He hated the way some of his white colleagues patronized him: just "give us the facts," John Collins told him: "we will take care of the philosophy" (*My Bondage and My Freedom* 367). "People won't believe you ever was a slave, Frederick, if you keep on this way," another white colleague warned. "Better have a little of the plantation manner of speech than not; 'tis not best that you seem too learned." (16)

10) "The Declaration of Independence: A Transcription." U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. <<http://www.archives.gov>>.

keeps himself distant from them by calling them "you" not "we." His frequent use of 'you' such as "your National Independence," "your political freedom" (360), and "your fathers" (361–66) indicates that Douglass is purposefully excluding himself from the deliverance of "British subjects" into "sovereign people" (361), which has been triumphantly celebrated on every Fourth of July anniversary.¹¹⁾ Unlike conventional Fourth of July orations that "mask disturbing ambiguities and contradictions in the new republic . . . [and] assert the ideologized (but dubious) unity of the American people" (Travers 7), this second-person pronoun "you" creates a difference and distance between himself and the attending audience and by extension southern slaveholders who do not follow the example of Washington who "had broken the chains of his slaves" while boasting that "[w]e have Washington to our father" (367). As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca argue that association and dissociation "are complementary and are always at work at the same time" (190), Douglass instead establishes an association between their ancestors who were under the British yoke in the past and the blacks who are enslaved in the present. This results in the reappearance of the black people who have been erased the apparently ideal nation in which universal ideals such as equality, liberty, and justice seem to be realized to the eye of the world. Douglass's intentional separation, therefore, points to the existence of other people who are completely alienated from those ideals and rights and thus to whom the Independence Day means something different.

As the counterpart of the (white) citizen, Douglass brings to the fore the slave, who is not entitled to be even a human being, and argues that "justice, liberty, and humanity" (365), which 'their fathers' fought for with great courage and perseverance, are forbidden fruits to the slaves in the present. So, as the representative of the slaves, he refuses to celebrate

11) Throughout the speech, Douglass uses the pronoun "your" seventy-eight times and "you" thirty-four times.

the birthday of the nation with his "fellow-citizens" (367) and asks an ironic question why he is called upon to speak on 'their' Independence Day. After long laudatory remarks upon their founding fathers' great deeds, he pegs down "a sad sense of the disparity" (368) between the slave, or Douglass, and the citizen, or his audience in a blistering tone:

I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary!
Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance
between us. The blessings in which you, this day, rejoice, are
not enjoyed in common. The rich inheritance of justice, liberty,
prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is
shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought life and
healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me. This
Fourth [of] July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must
mourn. (368)

At this point of the speech when Douglass shifts his focus away from the glorious past to the present, he raises the real exigency of his speech, which is to denounce slavery that he worries will reenter the free northern states with the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and thus make it more difficult for the republic to fulfill its ideal of liberty. Through this passage, Douglass disillusiones his audience as he asserts that what has been believed as the reality or truth that all the people of America are equal and free is a mere appearance, or fiction. Furthermore, by stressing the fact that for him the Independence Day is not a day of joy but of lamentation, Douglass suggests that the blacks like him are not included in the notion of "we" in the Declaration of Independence and thus denied the right of liberty. In this way, he shows the term "we" is actually used in a racially discriminatory way and subverts the value which is imposed upon liberty as universal and eternal. For Douglass, liberty is white liberty,

which is exclusionary and only partial, and the Independence Day signifies the reality that what the whites profess does not correspond to what they practice.

Douglass now foregrounds the other part of the pair—the slaves—who has been defined as non-human and thus never been regarded as the rightful owner of freedom and equality throughout the nation's history. Nevertheless, as expressed in the question, "do you mean, citizens, to mock me, by asking me to speak to-day?" (368), it is easy to imagine that what the "fellow-citizens" (368) expect from Douglass is the same "joyous enthusiasm" (365). Keeping silent of the fact that runaway slaves are being pursued by a "slave-hunter" (375) somewhere on the day of July 4th, they are proudly celebrating their own liberty and independence. They might not have even thought what slaves would feel about the Independence Day before Douglass brings out the question that compels them to face what lies behind the "facts which make in their own favor" (366). So, he articulates the meaning of the Fourth of July "from the slave's point of view" (368):

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 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. (371)

This climax of the speech highlights Douglass's dissociative rhetoric that attacks the value of liberty held as authentic and true by white America and reverses the reality of liberty into an appearance. In other words, his argument is directed to the reversal of the appearance–reality pair on which racist America is based. Douglass dissociates the meaning of the Fourth of July into pairs of contrasting concepts listed in the passage above such as sham/celebration, unholy license/boasted liberty, vanity/greatness, and impiety/prayers. For him, those term I's—sham, unholy license, vanity, impiety, and so forth—that describe the Independence Day from a slave's perspective provide a "blacker" but truer depiction of the present reality of American society (370). Douglass's dissociation enables his interpretations of America to have more critical and persuasive power. At this point, the panorama of the nation's birth that he makes the audience recall with pride loses its privileged position as a norm by which appearances are distinguished. With the repetitive use of the accusatory pronoun "your," he tears away the aura of liberty that "their fathers" bequeathed to the present "citizens" by emphasizing the distance between black and white America. In Douglass's words, slaves are not the beneficiaries of "the blessings resulting from your independence" (367) but victims, and the audience or Americans are not the legitimate heirs to the legacy of the Revolution as long as the nation tolerates slavery.

The inconsistencies between the national principles and practices that Douglass tries to resolve get worse when he denounces the ways in which law is in complicity with the operation of slavery and legitimates injustices against blacks. Again, law, which is supposed to "establish justice" and "secure the Blessings of Liberty"¹²⁾ as specified in the preamble of the Constitution, serves "to perpetuate slavery" (369). Along with liberty, justice is what the founding fathers struggled to win against the injustices

12) "The Constitution of the United States: A Transcription." U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. <<http://www.archives.gov>>.

of the British government and thus the bedrock of the nation. Douglass, however, argues that it is the very justice system American citizens venerate that justifies slavery and betrays the founding principle of justice. After his conversion to the Constitution inspired by encounters with political abolitionists such as Gerrit Smith who believed that "the Constitution should be embraced an egalitarian, antislavery charter" and that political party action could be an important means for emancipation (Crane 95), Douglass believes that laws that support slavery (nothing but, for Douglass, a violation of human rights) are unconstitutional and unjust since the Constitution, which establishes "the institutional framework to implement the natural rights proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence" (Colaiaco 85), is anti-slavery. In order to unmask the hypocrisy of the American law system, Douglass dissociates the concept of justice into the appearance/reality pair.

The first example of the paradox of justice supporting slavery is the internal slave trade. Douglass criticizes how law is applied unjustly to the nation's interests by illustrating the situation where the foreign slave trade is condemned whereas the internal one is sustained by the same law of justice:

That trade[the foreign slave trade] has long since been denounced by this government, as piracy. It has been denounced with burning words, from the high places of the nation, as an execrable traffic. To arrest it, to put an end to it, this nation keeps a squadron, at immense cost, on the coast of Africa. Everywhere, in this country, it is safe to speak of this foreign slave-trade, as a most inhuman traffic, opposed alike to the laws of God and of man. (372)

The other face of justice, however, bears itself as "a terrible reality"

(373) when Douglass delineates the horrifying sights—a young mother with her baby in her arms and a weeping girl torn from her mother—and sounds—"the sound of the slave-whip" (373) and "the piteous cries of the chained gangs" (374)—of the internal slave trade to the audience in great details. By observing the reality that "this murderous traffic is in active operation in this boasted republic" (374), Douglass illuminates the chasm between justice in an ideal state and justice in a real state. The justice that operates by double standards and that permits human trafficking is the "real" justice governing racist America. The true ugly face of justice that Douglass shows is sharply contrasted with the spurious justice that America brags about to the world. Douglass thus raises a question whether the value attached to justice is valid and whether the justice that the American public claims they realized has such value as "authentic, true, real" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 437). With this example of the internal slave trade, Douglass debunks the complacent self-conception of America as a just nation.

The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 is another example which shows the system of justice backs up "more inhuman, disgraceful, and scandalous state of things" (375). This reactionary law, which was established at the time when antislavery atmosphere was spreading in the North, allowed escaped slaves to be captured and brought back to their masters. Douglass, as a former fugitive slave to whom this legislation was particularly abominable, puts this situation like this: "By an act of the American Congress, . . . slavery has been nationalized in its most horrible and revolting form" (375). Far from abolishing slavery, the law enforces this peculiar institution by legalizing the capture of runaway slaves and affirming the ownership of slaveholders. In addition, the testimony of a runaway slave is denied; bribery of judges is sanctioned. As a result of this legal obliteration of the Mason-Dixon line, Douglass asserts, slavery

becomes a national disgrace. The justice that "tyrant-killing, king-hating, people-loving, democratic Christian America" defends is no less than a "glaring violation of justice" itself (376). In this way, Douglass demonstrates that the notion of justice operating in the system of racially biased America is deceptive and thus a mere mask of justice. And this results in the subversion of the superior position that justice takes in the system. Justice which is supposed to distinguish right from wrong loses its privileged status as a criterion and falls into the status of injustice by supporting slavery.

The next notion that is proven the apparent is Christianity. Christianity has been an important source that provides America with causes to fight against oppression and injustice in the sense that Americans think resort to God's authority is prior to any other human authority. Christianity also represents love and care for others. However, what Douglass sees in the present religious practice is not the final guard of humanity, liberty, and justice, but the silent accomplice with the Fugitive Slave Act. He laments that religious liberty, which is what the American forefathers originally sought in the New World, is not being exercised to the direction of helping fugitive slaves, advocating their human rights, and calling for abolition. Douglass thus accuses American Christianity of being "an empty ceremony, and not a vital principle" (377). He criticizes the American church's neglect of its essential duties:

It esteems sacrifice above mercy; psalm-singing above right doing; solemn meetings above practical righteousness. A worship that can be conducted by persons who refuse to give shelter to the houseless, to give bread to the hungry, clothing to the naked, and who enjoin obedience to a law forbidding these acts of mercy is curse, not a blessing to mankind. (377)

According to his view of religion, a true religion practices "active benevolence, justice, love and good will towards man" (377); however, the American church fails to live up to those virtues. Douglass's dissociation of the American church from a "pure and undefiled religion' which is from above" and his redefinition of it as "an engine of tyranny, and barbarous cruelty" (377) challenges the established notion and unquestioned authority of the church.

He does not stop his blade of criticism and goes deeper into the hypocrisy of the church where it becomes "the bulwark of American slavery, and the shield of American slave-hunters" (377). He explicates how ministers justify slavery in reference to the Bible and how slaveholders use Christianity for the ideological ground which "favors the rich against the poor; which exalts the proud above the humble; which divides mankind into two classes, tyrants and slaves" (378). According to Douglass, this kind of religion sympathetic to and supportive of slavery is abomination to God. He declares that "the American church is guilty" (378) on the ground that the church takes the opposite direction to its ability to abolish slavery. As a part of the indictment on the church, he names guilty clergymen who comply with the Fugitive Slave Act. He also acknowledges those who are helping the anti-slavery movement. By displacing the church of hypocrisy and anticipating the role of religion in abolition, Douglass dismisses the false image of religion and urges the audience to reform the church and seek a true religion.

III. Conclusion

What makes Douglass's speech strikingly impressive to the audience is the ways in which he presents his anti-slavery message through the

dissociation of the three basic notions which had been highly valued as the ideals of the United States: liberty, justice, and Christianity. Douglass reverses the appearance/reality pairs of those ideals which sustain, explicitly or implicitly, slavery and mask the "terrible reality" (373). Uncovering the incompatibilities between these ideals being celebrated and boasted and at the same time the realities of slaves being chained and whipped, Douglass shows that the three ideals of the nation by which values are imposed and hierarchies are established are not authentically true. They work as the ideological bases of slave-holding American society. As a result, the reality that the audience believes the United States is a free and just republic also turns out to be a mere appearance. Douglass refutes the authenticity and authority of liberty, justice, and Christianity because these ideals are being used to justify slavery, or to veil the cruelty, injustice, and inhumanity of slavery. He, therefore, subverts the position of the three ideals as criteria and their values such as real, coherent, essential, and authentic. Through his dissociative argumentation, Douglass subverts the oppressive established order which distorts and exploits liberty, justice and Christianity and offers "another outlook and another criterion of reality" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 413). Marking an important turning point in his career as an abolitionist orator and activist, Douglass's Fourth of July speech displays his rhetorical power to urge the audience to reconstruct their conception of reality and fundamentally "act in the living present" (366) by accepting and supporting abolition as a solution to the national dilemma.

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Abstract

"Distance between This Platform and the Slave Plantation": Dissociation in Frederick Douglass's "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?"

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This paper examines the ways in which Frederick Douglass in his speech "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" obtains the audience's adherence to his thundering call for abolition to the nation that boasts of its liberation from bondage but leaves blacks in fetters through his masterful use of the rhetorical device Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca call "dissociation." Concerned with modifying some system of thought by "disuniting elements which are regarded as forming a whole" within that system, dissociation reveals the incompatibilities of such elements that demand the modification of our conventional conception of reality. Douglass argues that the celebration of liberty, justice, and Christianity as the American national ideals on the Independence Day is incompatible with the existence of slavery. By showing that blacks are not part of the "We the people of the United States" that is proclaimed to have human rights, that liberty is white liberty, that the injustices of slavery are reinforced by the very system of justice, and that the church is an alliance with slavery, he reverses the appearance/reality pairs of those ideals upholding the racist American society. Douglass pushes the audience to recognize that the reality that they believe America is a free and just republic true to God's word is a mere appearance. In so doing, he subverts the normative position of the three ideals and their universal values.

Douglass's dissociative speech deconstructs the oppressive established order which distorts and exploits liberty, justice and Christianity and reconstructs the audience's conception of reality.

Key words: Frederick Douglass, dissociation, Fourth of July, slavery, oration

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