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ENG 202 – Global Literature II  
April 29, 2023

*What credibility did Frederick Douglass have to qualify him to speak at an anti-slavery convention?*

In questioning what credibility Douglass had qualifying him to speak at an anti-slavery convention, surely his experience as one who lived the burdensome existence for so many years must bear weight in evaluating his credentials for such an opportunity? Perhaps, the force with which he chased after the life of an active abolitionist was a seemingly innate understanding of seeing the weakness in this system of subjugation and merely exploiting it. Regardless of either, Douglass would need to be able to sue both effectively in order to impact the organization comprehensively. Knowledge would be the necessary component to aggregate who he was as a slave, with a desire to live such a life no longer. Having only that self-awareness would be useless without the ability to operate in the arena of those who wielded power.

If Sir Francis Bacon's Idea that "knowledge itself is power," from his *Meditations Sacre* (1597), then surely Douglass' realization of the same as well as his execution in proving the theory true, must be accepted as admissible supporting evidence. The kind of power exerted from its use, however, was also an important factor. Consider the Aulds, the Baltimore family that Douglass lived with as a child. Frederick states in his autobiography, "Going to live in Baltimore laid the foundation and opened the gateway to all my subsequent prosperity. (Puchner 487) He does so because of the transcendental encounter which took the self-knowledge of his faith in his freedom and finally met with the key to unraveling its restraint. "A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master." (Puchner 489) So, according to Mr. Auld, learning would lessen the *niggers* value. "It would forever unfit him to be a slave, [and] become unmanageable." (Puchner

489) Like a two-way door with mirrored perspectives on either side, or the shaft of a pendulum swinging the weight to its antagonistic polars, yet originating from a singular source, a fixed point, a place of unity, our humanity.

Douglass caught “the master’s” mistake, his lapse in integrity. What would happen to someone unfit to be a slave? Education would make someone no longer capable of being enslaved. It was an idea like this which set the distance in the arch of the two sides. Now, they both understand the weight of education to all people, in this moment, between the two of them, the scale is balanced, equal in knowledge and understanding. The difference was encapsulated in what they did with that insight. Integrity was a quality Douglass exhibited with this newfound understanding. Armed with the comprehension of this principle, he was able to use this to free the slaves with peace, though at times, his journey was violent and bloody. The mindset of Mr. Auld, however, was to use its withholding as a weapon of mass impotency toward an entire race of people. Samuel Johnson, the English writer, stated in his work, *The History of Resselas, Prince of Abyssinia*, “Integrity without knowledge is weak and useless, and knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful.” Here in these tangled juxtapositions rests the representation of each view. The master’s lack of integrity, coupled with the knowledge of the true value of education multiplied by the generations of practitioners and purveyors of slavery, managed to produce the “dangerous and dreadful” outcome for an entire race of people who mirrored them in physical appearance but not in the capacity to use the knowledge he gains with integrity he was able to see.

Doctor Leonard Azamfirei wrote in the abstract to his article *Knowledge is Power*: “When Sir Francis Bacon published in his work, *Meditationes Sacrae* (1597), the saying: “*knowledge itself is power*,” he most likely wanted to transmit the idea that having and sharing

knowledge is the cornerstone of reputation and influence, and therefore power; all achievements emanate from this.” This statement encapsulates Frederick Douglass’ ability to effectively represent the change he desperately desired as he used what he learned both about knowledge leading to freedom and also provided the education necessary for other slaves to acquire the same understanding. It is in breaking the shackles of the mind first which leads to true freedom of the self. How can one be truly free in society while bound mentally?

Frederick Douglass could not only see the negative impact slavery had on his “brethren,” as he referred to those still enslaved but also how it impacted those who exerted its toxic power. In the case of his mistress at the time, Mrs. Auld, who was, upon his initial arrival, kind and tender as Frederick described her. Treating him as the human being he was, resulted in her chastisement as well as his disconnection from his source of learning. However, the aftermath of that incident between the Aulds and Douglass, as evidence, did not yield the results of their expectation because, while Frederick did what he could to sneak and feed his hungry min. Mrs. Auld, who was the picture of piety and charity, began to exhibit traits similar to the men who, like Mr. Auld, wanted to keep him bound. Douglass writes: “Slavery proved as injurious to her as it did to me.” (Puchner 491) Empathy for the ones who treated him as poorly as they did also qualifies him to be someone who speaks for those awaiting their emancipation.

Ariel F. Eaton, in her 2016 undergraduate thesis: *The Abolitionist Archetype: Andrew Delbanco and the Ethics of Political Protest*, her conclusion concerning Douglas and if he fits the mold of “abolitionist,” states, “While possessing a similar awareness of both society’s and the self’s moral fallibility,” she continues, “He reminds the contemporary reader that responsible action is possible and does not have to dismiss those who are suffering.” (Eaton 50-51) It is his insight into how equality is viewed. An idea easier said, thought, and yearned for but almost

impossible to put into practice that of first accepting the shortcomings of society as they are, which is fed from the same source that resulted in the difference in views between himself and Mr. Auld. “The ethical for Douglass is not inherently separate from the practical.” (Eaton 51) In closing, what qualified Douglass to present at the anti-slavery movements was his experience and the integrity, ethics, and empathy with which he sought his freedom and that of others.

Works Cited

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