

Moral Reasoning 74:
The Theory and Practice
of Republican Government

Lecture 19:
Slavery, Race and Republicanism

Professor Daniel Carpenter
Harvard University

Major Themes (Today & Next Week)

Generally, consider historical extensions to, philosophical and historical alternatives to republicanism.

- I. **TODAY:** Free Labor Critique of Slavery (Abolitionists and early **R**epublicans); Abolitionist Critique of Republicanism
- II. Free Labor Critique of Wage Labor (Jacksonians & Knights of Labor)
- III. Emergence of Voluntarism in Law
- IV. Emergence of Progressivism

Abolitionism versus Anti-Slavery (1830s)

A. Most “Abolitionists” = “immediatists.” [William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips]

- Immediate and uncompensated emancipation
- Full voting rights for “freedmen”



Abolitionism versus Anti-Slavery (1830s)

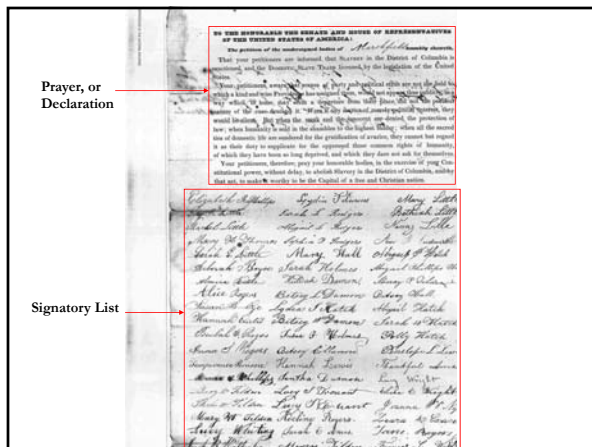
- B. Colonizers (e.g., the early Abraham Lincoln)
- C. Anti-Southerners – hate the South as much or more than they hate slavery
- D. Conservatives – restrict spread of slavery, but do not upset institutions.

Republican Tropes in Abolitionism

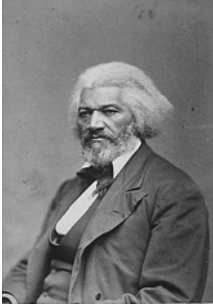
Abolitionism about republican liberty.

- (1) “Our” freedom depends upon theirs [reminiscent of whom?].
- (2) Slavery not worthy of a “free and Christian republic.”

Look at abolitionist petitions.



Douglass as Literary and Philosophical Figure



Douglass:
Antislavery lecturing, 1841-1845
Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass; An American Slave, Written by Himself
[autobiography, 1845]
Continued speaking and publishing
[from Rochester], 1847-1859
May-June 1851: Break with Garrison and Garrisonian abolitionists

Douglass, 4th of July Oration

I. Begins with Praise of

To say *now* that America was right, and England wrong, is exceedingly easy. Everybody can say it; the dastard, not less than the noble brave, can flippantly discard on the tyranny of England towards the American Colonies. It is fashionable to do so; but there was a time when, to pronounce against England, and in favor of the cause of the colonies, tried men's souls. They who did so were accounted in their day, plotters of mischief, agitators and rebels, dangerous men. **To side with the right, against the wrong, with the weak against the strong, and with the oppressed against the oppressor! here lies the merit, and the one which, of all others, seems un-fashionable in our day. The cause of liberty may be stabbed by the men who glory in the deeds of your**

Douglass, 4th of July Oration

B. Indicts his Audience

Fellow-citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here today? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us? and am I, therefore, called upon to bring our humble offering to the national altar, and to confess the benefits and express devout gratitude for the blessings resulting from your independence to us?

Douglass, 4th of July Oration

C. Is Independence a Fiction?

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 July is *yours*, not *mine*. *You* may rejoice, I must mourn.

Douglass, 4th of July Oration

D. 1. Slavery Incompatible with Liberty

Would you have me argue that man is entitled to liberty? that he is the rightful owner of his own body? You have already declared it. **Must I argue the wrongfulness of slavery? Is that a question for Republicans?** Is it to be settled by the rules of logic and argumentation, as a matter beset with great difficulty, involving a doubtful application of the principle of justice, hard to be understood? How should I look today, in the presence of Americans, dividing, and subdividing a discourse, to show that men have a natural right to freedom? To do so, would be to make myself ridiculous, and to offer an insult to your understanding.-There is not a man beneath the canopy of heaven, that does not know that slavery is wrong *for him*.

Douglass, 4th of July Oration

D.2. Slavery Makes Mockery of Supposed Republican Liberty

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. **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.**

Fellow-citizens, this murderous traffic is, to-day, in active operation in this boasted republic.

Douglass, 4th of July Oration

E. Douglass: Slavery Inherent to American Capitalism

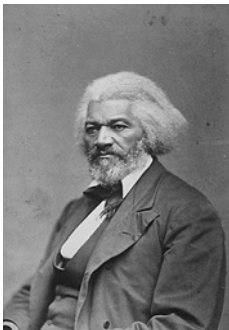
Behold the practical operation of this internal slave-trade, the American slave-trade, sustained by American politics and American religion. Here you will see men and women, reared like swine, for the market. You know what is a swine-drover? I will show you a man-drover. They inhabit all our Southern States. They perambulate the country, and crowd the highways of the nation, with droves of human stock. You will see one of these human flesh jobbers, armed with pistol, whip and bowie-knife, driving a company of a hundred men, women, and children, from the Potomac to the slave market at New Orleans. These wretched people are to be sold singly, or in lots, to suit purchasers.

Douglass, 4th of July Oration

E. Douglass: Slavery Inherent to American Capitalism

...Follow this drove to New Orleans. Attend the auction; see men examined like horses; see the forms of women rudely and brutally exposed to the shocking gaze of American slave-buyers. See this drove sold and separated for ever; and never forget the deep, sad sobs that arose from that scattered multitude. Tell me citizens, WHERE, under the sun, you can witness a spectacle more fiendish and shocking. Yet this is but a glance at the American slave-trade, as it exists, at this moment, in the ruling part of the United States.

Douglass – Break with Garrison



Questions from
Douglass and Abolition

- (1) From Montesquieu: was anybody really free in the early 1800s?
- (2) Is the founding point of American liberty 1776, or 1863, or 1964?
- (3) Was the slave system abhorrent to the commercial republic or an expression of it?
