

Echoing Greatness: Douglass's Reputation as an Orator

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Possibly one of the most revealing facts about Frederick Douglass's public career is that Douglass burst upon the scene with a powerful oration that we know only by the reactions it provoked. Douglass's speech in Nantucket in 1841 was by all accounts deeply moving and memorable, and it launched one of the most remarkable careers in American history, but it is not a speech available for careful study. It is appropriate, though, that we approach this speech through the eyes and ears, the reconstructions and recollections, the memories and memoirs, of people like William Lloyd Garrison, James N. Buffum, Samuel Joseph May, or John A. Collins, and that we encounter the speech, indirectly but with real power, in the ongoing legends of Douglass's modest beginnings and in accounts by such writers as R. R. Raymond or James McCune Smith.¹ This speech, and its subsequent legend, remind us that a significant aspect of Douglass's career as orator involved not only his eloquence and rhetorical skills but also the occasions and forums for his public performances, the social environment in which they operated, the print culture in which they were recorded, celebrated, or dismissed, and the responses they generated. Something important is lost about Douglass's oratory when his public speeches are removed from their public dynamics, from the oratorical performance itself, for Douglass himself was deeply attentive to those dynamics, and deeply aware of the extent to which the significance of each speech had to do with how it reframed not only the speaker but even the platform on which he spoke. To fully appreciate Douglass's career as orator, then, we need to pay attention to those who witnessed and responded to his performances on the public stage.²

We can begin with someone who claims to have anticipated Douglass long before he ever spoke in public. Douglass's presence was so powerful that R. R. Raymond, a White Baptist minister very active in abolitionist and other reform efforts in Syracuse, anticipated it even before he ever actually encountered Douglass in person. Looking back to the "castle-building day-dreams" of his youth, Raymond recalls, "A favorite image of my creation was an Africo-American for the time,—a colored man, who had known by experience the bitterness of slavery, and now by some process free, so endowed with natural powers, and a certain degree of attainments, all the more rare and effective for being acquired under great disadvantages,—as to be a sort of Moses to his oppressed and degraded tribe."³ Raymond emphasizes the unlikelihood of ever encountering such a being, one "gifted with a noble person...and refinement of manners, and some elegance of thought and expression," observing that "by what unprecedented miracle such a paragon was to be graduated through the educational appliances of American slavery, imagination did not trouble

¹ Responses to Douglass's inaugural antislavery speech are included in John Ernest, *Douglass in His Own Time* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014), 49, 109–111, 177.

² I agree with Andrea Deacon concerning the strange absence of a full body of scholarship focused on Douglass's career as an orator, and I agree to some extent as well that "although this dearth of critical analyses, coupled with Douglass' reputation, is indeed curious, one possible reason for this lack of serious attention may stem from Douglass' rhetoric being perceived merely as epideictic or ceremonial in nature." Andrea Deacon, "Navigating 'The Storm, The Whirlwind, and the Earthquake': Re-Assessing Frederick Douglass, the Orator," *The Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 57 (January 2003), 65.

³ Robert R. Raymond, "Outline of a Man" (1853), in Ernest, *Douglass in His Own Time*, 56.

herself to inquire. She was painting fancy-pieces, not portraits.”⁴ Miraculously, though, Raymond encountered just such a paragon in 1844 on Hartford’s Main Street, at an assembly of the American Anti-Slavery Society. “The orator,” he reports, to no one’s surprise, “was FREDERICK DOUGLASS, the most remarkable man of this country, and of this age; and—may I not dare to add—the almost complete fulfilment of my early dream!”⁵ While I don’t wish to detract from Raymond’s achievements as a clairvoyant, I think it’s safe to take this imaginative account as an example of the force of Douglass’s presence.

Raymond might have been ahead of the game, but he had a pretty good sense of what Douglass faced in his career. There were many among Douglass’s audiences who knew exactly what Douglass needed to say and who he needed to be, and there were many who opposed Douglass on the same grounds before he ever said a word. It’s not surprising, then, that the records of Douglass as orator speak of a man intensely aware of the performative dimension of oratory, including the occasion of his appearances, the theatre and staging of orations, the audiences with whom he needed to interact and whom he sometimes needed to convert for his own safety, and the reviews that would follow the oration. “To be fully appreciated,” James Gregory observed in 1893, a time when Douglass had long since moved from primarily extemporaneous speeches to written ones, “Mr. Douglass must be seen and heard. The fire and action of the man could not be transferred to paper.”⁶ In 1853, Raymond made largely the same point, suggesting that Douglass’s “addresses lose a large proportion of their effect in reading. They require the living voice, and the magnetic presence of the orator.”⁷ Raymond, though, takes the point further, observing that “Douglass is not uniform in his performance, but is quite dependent on his surroundings, and the inspiration of the moment.”⁸ Raymond is right to take in the entire scene, to locate Douglass’s greatness as an orator within a dynamic scene of complex variables, and to suggest that an understanding of the occasion for and environment of Douglass’s public appearances are essential to understanding Douglass’s achievements as an orator.

Of course, it is not surprising that both Douglass’s environment and his self-presentation, his performance not only as an orator but as a Black man and former slave on the antislavery stage, were very much at the foreground of his attention. Whatever his rhetorical gifts, Douglass needed to work with and against the impression made by his physical and symbolic presence. What mattered, in effect, was not only what he said, but also how he played the role he was forced to play and how he interacted with the assumptions and expectations of those around him. And at that, he was something of a genius. As William Wells Brown observed, identifying Douglass as “one of the best mimics of the age, and possessing great dramatic powers,” Douglass often had reason to think carefully about his environment and reception. “He often travelled with others,” Brown observes,

but they were all lost sight of in the eagerness to hear Douglass. His travelling companions would sometimes get angry, and would speak first at the meetings; then they would take the last turn; but it was all the same—the fugitive’s impression was the one left upon the mind. He made more persons angry, and pleased more, than any other man. He was praised,

⁴ Raymond, “Outline of a Man,” 56.

⁵ Raymond, “Outline of a Man,” 57.

⁶ James M. Gregory, *Frederick Douglass the Orator. Containing an Account of His Life; His Eminent Public Services; His Brilliant Career as Orator; Selections from His Speeches and Writings* (Springfield, Mass.: Willey & Co., 1893), 92.

⁷ Gregory, *Frederick Douglass the Orator*, 59–60.

⁸ Gregory, *Frederick Douglass the Orator*, 60.

and he was censured. He made them laugh, he made them weep, and he made them swear. His “Slaveholders’ Sermon” was always a trump card.⁹

It is, of course, not at all surprising that any practiced orator is, in fact, practiced, or that he might have a trump card. A jazz performer will work long hours to prepare for a few minutes of improvisation, and will not be able to help noting what works and doesn’t work with his audiences. Similarly, Douglass was aware of himself as performer, and he prepared carefully for his extemporaneous speeches.

For Douglass, preparation for a speech was a matter not simply of planning the substance of his remarks but also of guarding his public image. This is not at all unusual for those who find themselves frequently in the public eye, but we do not always account for the ways in which Douglass worked on his image in planning his public appearances. His former Rochester neighbor, Jane Marsh Parker, offered in a reminiscence published in 1895 a revealing glimpse into Douglass’s consideration of his speaking style. She reports that Douglass stated once, “One of the hardest things I had to learn when I was fairly under way as a public speaker was to stop telling so many funny stories. I could keep my audience in a roar of laughter—and they liked to laugh, and showed disappointment when I was not amusing—but I was convinced that I was in danger of becoming something of a clown, and that I must guard against it.”¹⁰ Douglass’s preparation to be in the moment, Parker suggests, was his greatest strength as an orator. “His keen sense of the ludicrous saved him from many a mistake,” she observes, and “his quick wit in repartee could effectually silence his antagonists.”¹¹ But Douglass’s careful calibration of these strengths was an essential dynamic in his ongoing efforts to control his image. Each speech was another opportunity to strengthen his response to racist assumptions and degrading caricatures, but each speech therefore also carried with it the dangers that came with exposing himself once again to a threatening social environment ready to exaggerate his least fault.

Physical presence and performance were so central to Douglass’s success as a public speaker that many found him lacking when he turned from extemporaneous to written orations. Parker, for example, was clear in her assumption that Douglass needed the moment and the cause to realize his potential greatness as a speaker. “Composition was never easy for him,” she wrote, “unless his soul was stirred in its depths; nor was public speaking, unless his tongue was on fire.”¹² Indeed, for Parker, Douglass’s success in life came at some cost to his oratorical skills. “His literary lectures upon subjects foreign to his personal experience were largely disappointing,” she stated, adding, “The Honorable Frederick Douglass’ was never the orator that ‘Fred Douglass’ had been in the old pre-emancipation days.”¹³ William Wells Brown agreed, and suggested that the difference had to do with extemporaneous speeches versus written lectures. “Mr. Douglass has obtained a position in the front rank as a lyceum lecturer,” Brown noted in a biographical sketch of his former colleague on the antislavery lecture circuit; “his later addresses from manuscripts, however, do not, in our opinion, come up to his extemporaneous efforts.”¹⁴ This was the opinion as well of James M. Gregory, who concluded in his study of Douglass’s career as orator, “Mr.

⁹ William Wells Brown, *The Rising Son; or, The Antecedents and Advancement of the Colored Race* (1864; repr., Westport, Conn.: Negro Universities Press [Greenwood Press], 1970), 436–437.

¹⁰ Jane Marsh Parker, “Reminiscences of Frederick Douglass” (1893 [in Ernest, 2014]), 1893, 48–49.

¹¹ Parker, “Reminiscences,” 49.

¹² Parker, “Reminiscences,” 49.

¹³ Parker, “Reminiscences,” 49–50

¹⁴ Brown, *Rising Son*, 438–439.

Douglass, as an extemporaneous speaker, was much more impressive than he has been since he began to write out his speeches and deliver them from manuscript.”¹⁵

Even those who praised his more formal speeches did so in a way that highlighted his improvisational style of delivery. Looking back in 1880 at Douglass’s early career, when he lived in Lynn, Massachusetts, David N. Johnson observed, “He was not then the polished orator that he has since become.”¹⁶ But when Johnson describes Douglass’s early speeches, one wonders whether “polished orator” is actually intended as the compliment that it seems to be. Johnson highlights Douglass’s physical presence, his “majestic form” and “flashing eye,” and a voice “that rivaled Webster’s in its richness, and in the depth and sonorousness of its cadences,” all of which “made up such an ideal of an orator as the listeners never forgot.”¹⁷ Johnson highlights as well Douglass’s performance, observing that “his eyes would now flash with defiance, and now grow dim with emotions he could not control; and the roll of his splendid voice, as he hurled his denunciations against the infamous system, would pass to the minor key whose notes trembled on his tongue.”¹⁸ Moved by the bluesy modulations of this imagined speech, it is difficult to be satisfied by any polish we might find in Douglass’s later orations.

For others, what was great about Douglass was the larger story of his rise from slavery to the public stage, a story that is almost never told without some degree of racial condescension. I have in mind, for example, the assessment Samuel J. May offers in his 1869 memoir, *Some Recollections of Our Antislavery Conflict*. Recalling Douglass’s career following his 1841 inaugural speech in Nantucket, May observed, “Mr. Douglass henceforth improved rapidly. He applied himself diligently to reading and study. The number and range of his topics in lecturing increased and widened continually. He soon became one of the favorite antislavery speakers.”¹⁹ For May, Douglass is a study in ongoing development, and you can hear in his praise the ongoing surprise that someone born in slavery could go so far towards accomplished oration. Other admirers similarly emphasized Douglass’s ongoing education as an orator. In 1895, J. E. Rankin observed that as Douglass traveled abroad, “it was his privilege to hear such men as Cobden and Bright and Disraeli and O’Connell and Lord John Russell and Lord Brougham. These men Mr. Douglass studied, admired, analyzed. His more elaborate addresses, too, show the influence of that first and greatest of New England orators—Daniel Webster.”²⁰ What distinguishes Douglass from these established models? “The quality of fervor and fire.”²¹ In other words, even for those who emphasize Douglass’s development over time, what matters is the fire for which he was known from the beginning.

I don’t mean by this to undervalue Douglass’s fervor; I mean only to note that almost any speech he gave was going to meet with a loaded assessment. The nineteenth century was not, after all, a time of enlightened perspectives on Black ability, even among White abolitionists who counted themselves the most devoted allies to the African American cause. I needn’t go over here the many examples of racism in the antislavery movement, and I needn’t linger long over Douglass’s complaint in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, “I was generally introduced as a ‘chattel’—a ‘thing’—a piece of southern ‘property’—the chairman assuring the audience that it

¹⁵ Gregory, *Frederick Douglass the Orator*, 93.

¹⁶ David N. Johnson, *Sketches of Lynn, Or, The Changes of Fifty Years* (Lynn, Mass.: Thos. P. Nichols, 1880), 230.

¹⁷ Johnson, *Sketches of Lynn*, 230.

¹⁸ Johnson, *Sketches of Lynn*, 230–231.

¹⁹ Samuel Joseph May, *Some Recollections of Our Antislavery Conflict* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, & Co., 1869), 294.

²⁰ Jeremiah E. Rankin, “Frederick Douglass’s Character and Career” (1895), in Ernest, *Douglass in His Own Time*, 170.

²¹ Rankin, “Frederick Douglass’s Character and Career,” 170.

could speak,” nor do I need to underscore the significance of Douglass’s inclusion of some of his addresses as an appendix to that autobiography.²² As Frances Smith Foster has observed, many even today think of nineteenth-century African American writers as something like “the dog who walks on two legs”: “the wonder is not what or how well they wrote but that they wrote at all.”²³ The sister sentiment of this perspective is that African Americans had natural presence and power, something in danger of fading when too much education or refinement enters the picture. Between Uncle Remus at the end of the century and the fumbled attempts at eloquence by the dandies on the blackface minstrel stage earlier in the century, the possibilities for understanding African American eloquence were firmly contained.

It is important, then, that in addition to White assessments of Douglass’s natural power, his ongoing education, and his standing among the most notable White orators of his time, African Americans weighed in on oratory generally and on Douglass specifically. One of the most striking attempts to establish African American authority over the oratorical field was William G. Allen’s address “Orators and Oratory,” presented on 22 June 1852 at New York Central College, where Allen was a professor. In this remarkable speech, Allen argues that “the art of oratory is consequent upon the introduction of sin.”²⁴ Following that line of argument, Allen finds in the condition of oppression both the necessity and the proper subject of oration. For since “the art of oratory is consequent upon the introduction of sin,” Allen argues, “and since the sin of sins is the oppression of the weak by the strong, it follows that no other subject can beget the highest efforts of oratory than that of personal or political liberty.”²⁵ By this means, Allen locates the United States as the home of true oratory, and he implicitly identifies African Americans as the truest orators. “Orations worthy the name must have for their subject personal or political liberty,” Allen asserts, “and orators worthy of the name must necessarily originate in the nation that is on the eve of passing from a state of slavery into freedom, or from a state of freedom into slavery. How could this be otherwise? Where there is no pressure, the highest efforts of genius must lie undeveloped.”²⁶ With this as his framework, Allen examines various examples of oratory, from the times of Cicero to the present moment of Samuel Ringgold Ward, Henry Highland Garnet, and Frederick Douglass.

An earlier consideration of African American oratory was William J. Wilson’s 1849 sketch, “A Leaf from My Scrap Book,” in which Wilson offers a comparative analysis of the oratorical skills of Samuel Ringgold Ward and Frederick Douglass. It was a reasonable pairing. Ringgold, like Douglass, had been born in slavery and later became a well-known lecturer and newspaper editor, one of the most admired Black men of his time, known for his eloquence. Like many others, Wilson finds power in Douglass’s presence, though his take on that power offers an interesting contrast to what others observe. In Douglass’s “very look,” Wilson writes, “in his whole manner, there is so much of genuine, earnest eloquence that they leave no time for reflection. Now you are reminded of one rushing down some fearful steep, bidding you follow; now on some delightful stream, still beckoning you onward.”²⁷ Those in the audience who follow this beckoning

²² John W. Blassingame, John R. McKivigan, and Peter P. Hinks, eds., *The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series 2: Autobiographical Writings* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999–2012), 2:207.

²³ Frances Smith Foster, “Introduction,” in “Minnie’s Sacrifice,” “Sowing and Reaping,” “Trial and Triumph”: *Three Rediscovered Novels by Frances E. W. Harper*, xi–xxxvii, ed. Frances Smith Foster (Boston: Beacon, 1994), xx.

²⁴ William G. Allen, “Orators and Oratory” (1852), in *Lift Every Voice: African American Oratory, 1787–1900*, ed. Philip S. Foner and Robert James Branham (Tuscaloosa, Ala.: The University of Alabama Press, 1998), 231.

²⁵ Allen, “Orators and Oratory,” 231.

²⁶ Allen, “Orators and Oratory,” 232.

²⁷ William J. Wilson, “A Leaf from my Scrap Book,” in *Autographs for Freedom*, ed. Julia Griffiths (Auburn, N.Y.: Alden, Beardsley & Co., 1854), 166.

momentarily “forget the justness or unjustness of [Douglass’s] cause and obey the summons,” but they are not necessarily satisfied at the end of their journey.²⁸ Ultimately, Wilson suggests, Douglass’s presence, his rhetorical and performative force, becomes the main point, and presence can only go so far. “At last,” Wilson writes, “the cataract which roared around you is hushed, the tornado is passed, and you find yourself sitting upon a bank,” where you are left to wonder “why, amid such a display of power, no greater effect had really been produced.”²⁹ So while Douglass has a power “rarely to be found in any other man,” for Wilson that power ultimately falls short of its purpose.³⁰

For Wilson, then, Ward emerges as the more substantial speaker, and in that way is a reminder that Douglass should not be celebrated for singular achievements. While Wilson continually acknowledges Douglass’s power of presence, and his power over words, he also continually draws attention to the presence of Ward’s ideas, the power of his arguments. Of the two, Ward is the one, for Wilson, who puts his rhetorical gifts at the service of his reason, for “ideas form the basis of all Mr. Ward utters. Words are only used to express those ideas.”³¹ “Douglass says much, at times, you regret he uttered,” Wilson states, but he finds this quality to be part of Douglass’s charisma: “This, however, is the real man, and on reflection you like him the better for it. What Ward says you feel to be but a necessity, growing out of the case,—that it ought to have been said—that you would have said precisely the same yourself, without adding or diminishing a single sentence.”³² In the end, then, Wilson’s admiration for Douglass is clear, but he sounds more like a cheerleader for Douglass than a genuine admirer of Douglass’s oratorical abilities. “If Douglass is not always successful,” he concludes, “in his attempts to heave up his ponderous missiles at his opponents, from the point of his descent, he always shows determination and spirit.”³³

My point is not to assess the merits of Wilson’s conclusions but rather to note the significance of the comparison itself, the attempt to respond to the culture that anticipated Douglass, positioned him, celebrated him, contained him. Like William G. Allen, Wilson was determined to establish the authority of African American oratory and orators, and in doing so to fight against the tendency of the dominant culture to view Douglass and others as wholly exceptional individuals, two-legged dogs who had made it to the public stage. Even in the nineteenth century, African Americans were rightly suspicious of the early version of the still-persistent practice of praising African Americans for being articulate and educated. They were aware as well of the need to battle the tendency to marvel over African American physical presence. While they didn’t want to in any way diminish the public appreciation for Douglass’s rhetorical talents and imposing physical presence, they worked against any assumption that Douglass was alone in his ability to wield such power. For Wilson, Douglass’s presence was certainly part of the power of his oratorical style, but it was a power that, in Wilson’s estimation, Douglass relied upon too heavily, at least when compared to another African American orator, Samuel Ringgold Ward. In his comparison of Douglass and Ward, Wilson shifts both speakers

²⁸ Wilson, “A Leaf from my Scrap Book,” 166.

²⁹ Wilson, “A Leaf from my Scrap Book,” 167.

³⁰ Wilson, “A Leaf from my Scrap Book,” 167.

³¹ Wilson, “A Leaf from my Scrap Book,” 168.

³² Wilson, “A Leaf from my Scrap Book,” 170.

³³ Wilson’s essay was published five years after he wrote it, so he added this closing thought: “Note.—It has been some years since the above sketch was drawn; and though my impressions, especially of Mr. Douglass, has undergone some slight change since,—seeing in him enlarged, strengthened, and more matured thought, still I think, on the whole, the careful observer will attest substantially to its correctness.” Wilson, “A Leaf from my Scrap Book,” 172–173.

into the framework of African American oratory, where Allen locates the heart of oratorical purpose and power. Wilson and Allen worked to claim authority not simply over oratory but over the cultural theaters in which oratory functioned, the environment Douglass found himself addressing in virtually every speech he delivered.

Wilson's critique, however extreme it might seem, can give us a way to understand why Douglass's extemporaneous speeches were so greatly favored over his more formally prepared orations. James Gregory identifies the turning point in Douglass's oratorical career as starting initially in 1854 and expanding in 1860, when Douglass began to write most of his speeches, a turning point that was, for Gregory, not only one of performance but also of substance. "His former style is what we call extemporaneous," Gregory explained, "but we do not wish to convey the idea that he spoke without preparation. On the contrary, he gave much thought to the topics which he intended to discuss, and then prepared notes under the different divisions of his subject. By not being confined to his manuscript, he caught the inspiration of his audience. This inspiration, so essential to true eloquence in the orator, can never be secured by the essayist, however finished and perfect he may be."³⁴ The problem with the later speeches was not merely that Douglass was not a good reader, as he acknowledged once to Gregory. The problem was that written orations required a different kind of preparation, of logic, of organization, and of eloquence than could be managed through an extemporaneous approach. More to the point, though, the extemporaneous speech was simply better suited to the complex situation Douglass faced as the most prominent African American of his time, the first Black man to enter into social and political arenas from which African Americans were largely excluded. How does one account for the contradicting and even paradoxical logics required for the maintenance of a White supremacist system? How does one confront racism while also appealing to one's audience as potential allies? How does one function within a nation that had abandoned all philosophical coherence and stability for the sake of racial dominance? For Douglass, the extemporaneous speech provided the right balance of focus and flexibility he needed for his nearly impossible position.

But while one can appreciate the strategic advantages of being able to account for the dynamics in the room, making those dynamics part of one's speech, integrated into one's message, it would still be a great injustice to identify Douglass's greatest achievements as moments that cannot be fully captured. What I am suggesting instead is that we read his orations with a greater emphasis on the conditions from which they emerged and the environments within which they functioned.³⁵ Some speeches make such readings eminently possible, including comments from audience members and Douglass's engagement with those responses. Virtually all of Douglass's speeches, though, carry the traces of Douglass's ongoing attempts to build and manage his reputation. Reading the orations in this way, one can appreciate the fact that Douglass was an avid admirer of photography, as John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier have observed, and "the most photographed American of the nineteenth century."³⁶ Douglass was easily

³⁴ Gregory, *Frederick Douglass the Orator*, 93.

³⁵ In one of the best of the surprisingly few sustained considerations of Douglass as orator, Sarah Meer observes, "Seeing Douglass's oratory as part of ongoing discussions between abolitionists and their opponents, we grasp more of his contribution – not only to the antislavery movement, but also to the social, cultural, and political possibilities for African Americans in the United States." Meer demonstrates that there is a close relation between Douglass's editorial work and his speaking career, and I would simply extend that analysis to the many dimensions of Douglass's public life. Sarah Meer, "Douglass as Orator and Editor," in *The Cambridge Companion to Frederick Douglass*, edited by Maurice S. Lee (New York: Cambridge, 2009), 57.

³⁶ John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York: Liveright, 2015), ix.

one of the great students of photography in the nineteenth century, and he was also one of photography's most careful subjects. He thought carefully about how to pose, with what props, if any, and for what kind of effect. "His portraits," Stauffer, Trodd, and Bernier observe, "suggest that he understood his role as an artist or performer, part of a pas de trios with the photographer and camera."³⁷ Similarly, I am suggesting that his speeches can be read as revealing but highly posed snapshots of his handling of his public career, artistic renderings which he achieved in concert with the audience, the immediate environment, the historical moment, and his own reputation. As with the photographs, he is always deeply aware of the potential for misrepresentation, even racist caricatures, and at the slightest misstep. Accordingly, he crafted his performances carefully, incorporating into them his genius for measuring the moment and taking stock of the crowd. To remember Douglass as orator is—or, at least, should be—to remember the world that received him, responded to him, rejected him, denounced him, celebrated him. When we do so, we rediscover the heart of his genius as an orator.

³⁷ Stauffer, Trodd, and Bernier, *Picturing Frederick Douglass*, ix.