



# The Meaning of the 4th of July for the Negro

*Frederick Douglass*

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## **The Meaning of the 4th of July for the Negro** Frederick Douglass

Before radio and television, Americans flocked to churches, tents and lecture halls to be entertained and enlightened. In that age of oratory, many judged Frederick Douglass to have had the greatest voice. The Rochester (New York) Ladies Anti-Slavery Society in 1852 invited Frederick Douglass to give a Fourth of July Oration commemorating the United States 76th birthday. Mr. Douglass agreed to speak, but not on that date, saying, "This Fourth of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn." Delivered on July 5th, 1852 at Corinthian Hall in Rochester, The Meaning of the Fourth of July for the Negro is considered the greatest anti-slavery speech leading to the Civil War. One can only imagine what a magnificent trial lawyer Frederick Douglass would have been! On that July 5th, speaking to a primarily white audience, Mr. Douglass opens by reminding his listeners of the noble truths upon which their forefathers founded the United States. Having drawn his audience in, he proceeds to delineate the horrors of the slave system. Listen at that point for one of the album's highlights, a poignant and horrifying description of a forced slave march to the New Orleans Slave Auction. Mr. Douglass concludes with a breathtaking call upon all Americans, and especially people of color, to make the freedoms and justice celebrated on the 4th of July a reality for all Americans.

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