
A Study Of The Racial Discrimination: Frederick Douglass' Speech and a Children's ABC Poem

What does it mean to be a citizen? Prejudice has always been a problem in history. As depicted in 19th century literature, the Native Americans and slaves endured hardship acquiring human rights as well as citizenship. For example, Elias Boudinot's "An Address to the Whites", Douglass' "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" and a children's ABC poem, "To Our Little Readers". In all of these pieces, it depicts how these particular races were isolated due to the color of their skin and their origin. Though "Americans", they did not receive their rightful privileges of citizenship, although they fought to achieve what was rightfully theirs.

In Elias Boudinot's "An Address to the Whites", is a plea for the acceptance of Native Americans for they were often referenced to as "savages" or in any other condescending manner as they attempt to be accepted into the society as "Americans". Boudinot describes how the Native Americans have improved, from the ability to read and write not only their own language, but English as well. As he states,

"She will become not a great, but a faithful ally of the United States. In times of peace she will plead the common liberties of America. In times of war her intrepid sons will sacrifice their lives in your defence. And because she will be useful to you in coming time, she asks you to assist her in her present struggles. She asks not for greatness; she seeks not wealth, she pleads only for assistance to become respectable as a nation, to enlighten and ennoble her sons, and to ornament her daughters with modesty and virtue" (1451).

He depicts such a clear idea and plea that the Native Americans are not different from anyone else. Only the color of their skins as well as the emotions that are placed on skin color, religion and "lack of" education isolates them from being accepted as citizens.

As he states, "a period is fast approaching when the stale remark-'Do what you will, an Indian will still be an Indian,' must be placed no more in speech" (1445), clearly depicts how Indians were segregated. As the Native Americans fight for their right to be treated with equality, they ask "will you push them from you, or will you save them? Let humanity answer" (1452).

In Frederick Douglass' "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July", he portrays a powerful message depicting the slaves for they have nothing to celebrate on the Fourth of July. The Fourth of July celebrates the freedom of the United States, however, for a slave, what do they have to celebrate on this day? They are captive with their free will and freedom taken away to serve the White men. As Douglass states on page 1954,

"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; you boasted liberty, and unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; you shouts of liberty and equality, 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" (1954).

These slaves, kidnapped from their home country and sold, as though they were a piece of property into a life filled with servitude and abuse. They must endure this for most of their lives, with not even a hint of freedom in sight. Therefore, on the Fourth of July, what is different? How is this day any different than any other day in a slave's life?

As the people celebrate this day, it merely states that they do not have freedom. They are not one of them, different who do not deserve to become "citizens". He also states,

"This Fourth of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn. To drag a man in fetter into the grand illuminated temple of liberty and call upon him to join you in joyous anthems, were inhuman mockery and sacrilegious irony" (1952).

This particular quote awakens the slaves of this cruelty and the loss of hope of ever regaining their freedom. They will never be "citizens".

Another piece depicting the hardship of the slaves is the poem "To Our Little Readers". Using graphic words as well as imagery, it portrays the life of a slave to a young child. For example, "E is the Eagle, soaring high; / An emblem of the free; / But while we chain our brother man, / Our type he cannot be", clearly portrays how a White man is free while the Black slave is not, once again, revealing the struggle of acceptance for the slaves.

As clearly depicted in these three works, whether it is the Native Americans or the slaves, they both had difficulties finding acceptance. They were isolated due to the color of their skin and their origin. Though "Americans", they did not receive their rightful privileges of citizenship. Boudinot and Douglass' pieces are similar with the depiction of segregation, it however, differs for the victims being portrayed are different. Boudinot portrays Native Americans while Douglass portrays slaves. As Boudinot states, the Native Americans were discriminated for the color of their skin. They were thought to be "savages" and non-educated who also were not Christians. The slaves on the other hand as Douglass portrays, were not accepted merely because they were men/women of servitude. They were considered "property" not human beings who did not deserve equality and rights.

Whether one is a Native American or a slave, the hard reality is that if they are not "White", they will face discrimination. Whether it is because of skin color, religion, origin or who they are, or all of the above. Although they are "Americans", claiming citizenship that is rightfully theirs will be problematic. All three texts portray this hardship.