

THE FOURTH OF JULY

THE greatest orator of them all, Frederick Douglass, proclaimed eloquently on the Fourth of July, eighty-one years ago—“What to the American Slave is the Fourth of July?”

Douglass was the apostle of frank and biting speech. In his day, as in ours, there were timid souls who trembled to speak the truth for fear of offense. Douglass, realizing this, told those who thought, “Would you argue more and denounce less, would you persuade more and rebuke less, your cause would be more likely to succeed,” that “I submit that where all is plain there is nothing to argue.”

Douglass continued: “I will not equivocate; I will not excuse; I will use the severest language I can command, and yet not one word shall escape me that any man, whose judgment is not blinded by prejudice, or who is not at heart a slave-holder, shall not confess to be right and just.”

With prophetic vision the great Douglass pointed the way for his people who have polluted his memory by spineless excuses: “For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake. The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be denounced.”

The American Declaration of Independence was made possible by the reckless disregard for everything except liberty and justice. Had they substituted expediency for human values, the conflagration which gave the world the Grand Republic would never have started. Patrick Henry who shouted and meant, “Give me liberty or give me death,” is the spirit which sent an underfed and ragged army to victory.

The Fourth of July can mean much to colored Americans, if they will catch the inspiration of those who gave all upon the altar of liberty, justice and equality.