



**Smithsonian Institution**

*Anacostia Community Museum Archives*

## **Oration by Frederick Douglass Delivered on the Occasion of the Unveiling of the Freedmen's Monument, April 14, 1876**

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Professor Langston when receiving the statue, said :

In behalf of our entire nation, in behalf especially of the donors of the fund with whose investment you and your associates of the "Western Sanitary Commission" have been charged, I tender to you, sir, and through you to the Commission, our sincere thanks for the prompt and wise performance of the trust and duty committed to your care. The finished and appropriate memory and honor of him who is to be forever known in the records of the world's history as the emancipator of the enslaved of our country. We unveil it to the gaze, the admiration of mankind.

Fellow-citizens, according to the arrangement of the order of exercises of this occasion, it has fallen to my lot to unveil this statue which we dedicate to-day ; but we have with us the President of the United States, and it strikes me that it is altogether fit and proper to now ask him to take part in the exercises so far as to unveil this monument.

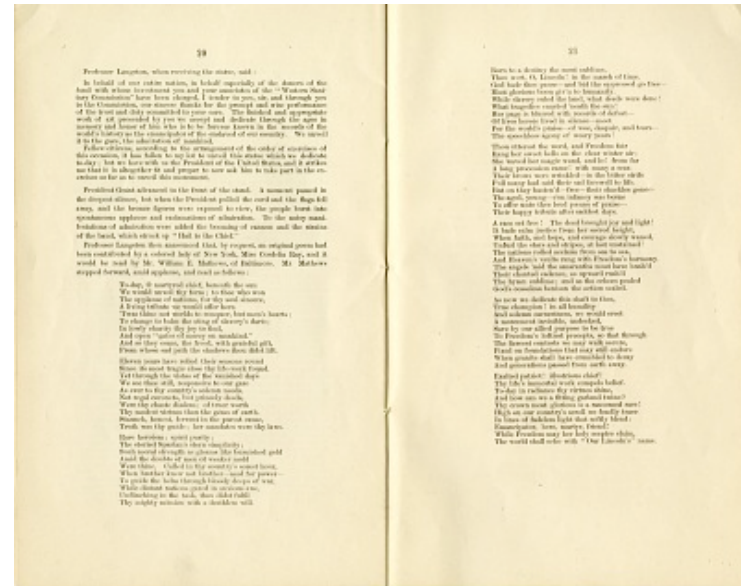
President Grant advanced to the front of the stand. A moment passed in the deepest silence, but when the President pulled the cord and the flags fell away, and the bronze figures were exposed to view, the people burst into spontaneous applause and exclamations of admiration. To the noisy manifestations of admiration were added the booming of cannon and the strains of the band, which struck up "Hail to the Chief."

Professor Langton then announced that, by request, an original poem had been contributed by a colored lady of New York, Miss Cordelia Ray, and it would be read by Mr. William E. Mathews, of Baltimore. Mr. Mathews stepped forward, amid applause, and read as follows:

To-day, O martyred chief, beneath the sun  
We would unveil they form ; to thee who won  
The applause of nations, for thy soul sincere,  
A living tribute we would offer here.  
'Twas thine not worlds to conquer, but men's hearts;  
To change to balm the sting of slavery's darts;  
In lowly charity thy joy to find,  
And open "gates of mercy on mankind."  
And so they come, the freed, with grateful gift,  
From whose sad path the shadows thou didst lift.

Eleven years have rolled their seasons round  
Since its most tragic close thy life-work found.  
Yet through the vistas of the vanished days  
We see thee still, responsive to our gaze  
As ever to thy country's solemn needs.  
Not regal coronets, but princely deeds,  
Were thy chaste diadem ; of truer worth  
Thy modest virtues than the gems of earth.  
Staunch, honest, fervent in the purest cause,  
Truth was thy guide; her mandates were thy laws.

Rare heroism; spirit purity;  
The storied Spartan's stern simplicity;  
Such moral strength as gleams like burnished gold



Amid the doubts of men of weaker mold  
Were thine. Called in thy country's sorest hour,  
When brother knew not brother—mad for power—  
To guide the helm through bloody deeps of war,  
While distant nations gazed in anxious awe,  
Unflinching in the task, thou didst fulfil  
Thy mighty mission with a deathless will.

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Born to a destiny the most sublime,  
Thou wert, O, Lincoln! in the march of time.  
God bade thee pause—and bid the oppressed go free—  
Most glorious boon giv'n to humanity.  
While slavery ruled the land, what deeds were done!  
What tragedies enacted 'neath the sun!  
Her page is blurred with records of defeat—  
Of lives heroic lived in silence—meet  
For the world's praise—of woe, despair, and tears—  
The speechless agony of weary years!

Thou utterest the word, and Freedom fair  
Rang her sweet bells on the clear winter air:  
She waved her magic wand, and lo! from far  
A long procession came! with many a scar.  
Their brows were wrinkled—in the bitter strife  
Full many had said their sad farewell to life.  
But on they hasten'd—free—their shackles gone—  
The aged, young—e'en infancy was borne  
To offer unto thee loud pœans of praise—  
Their happy tribute after saddest days.

A race set free! The deed brought joy and light!  
It bade calm justice from her sacred height,  
when faith, and hope, and courage slowly waned,  
Unfurl the stars and stripes, at last unstained!  
The nations rolled acclaim from sea to sea,  
And Heaven's vaults rang with Freedom's harmony.  
The angels 'mid the amaranths must have hush'd  
Their chanted cadence, as upward rush'd  
The hymn sublime; and as the echoes pealed  
God's ceaseless benison the action sealed.

As now we dedicate this shaft to thee,  
True champion ! in all humility  
And solemn earnestness, we would erect  
A monument invisible, undecked,  
Save by our allied purpose to be true  
To Freedom's loftiest precepts, so that through  
The fiercest contests we may walk secure,  
Fixed on foundations that may still endure  
When granite shall have crumbled to decay  
And generations passed from earth away.

Exalted patriot! illustrious chief!

Thy life's immortal work compels belief.  
To-day in radiance thy virtues shine,  
And how can we a fitting garland twine?  
Thy crown most glorious is a ransomed race!  
High on our country's scroll we fondly trace  
In lines of fadeless light that softly blend:  
Emancipator, hero, martyr, friend!  
While Freedom may her holy sceptre claim,  
The world shall echo with "Our Lincoln's" name.

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