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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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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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