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Speaking Out

by Harold Brown

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Many times, we try to think of new words and new ways to express our feelings on the racial issues. But these feelings have been expressed many times before by people who said it ever so much more eloquently than, perhaps, we can.

One of these men, by the name of Frederick Douglas, stated the inner feelings of our people so well that we would like to bring his words to you as they are most applicable today.

It seems to me that the colored man has now almost as much need of a faithful advocate as in the time of slavery. Though no longer bought and sold in the market we are still a proscribed, oppressed and maltreated race at nearly all points.

These are the words of Frederick Douglas: **"My friends,** the present is a critical moment for the colored people of this country; our fate for weal or for woe . . . trembles now in the balance. No man can tell which way the scale will turn. There is not a breeze that sweeps to us from the South, but comes laden with the wail of our suffering people. (This is an hour) when the American people are once more being urged to do from necessity what they should have done from a sense of right, and of sound statesmanship. It is the same old posture of affairs, wherein our rulers do wrong from choice and right from necessity.

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"If (federal officials) can protect the rights of white men they can protect the rights of black men; if they can defend the rights of American citizens abroad, they can defend them at home; if they can use the army to protect the rights of Chinamen, they can use the army to protect the rights of colored men. The only trouble is the will! the will! the will! Here, as elsewhere, 'Where there is a will there is a way.'

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"The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be proclaimed and denounced.

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"Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, or it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will . . . Men may not get all they pay for in this world, but they must certainly pay for all they get. If we ever get free from the oppressions and wrongs heaped upon us, we must pay for their removal. We must do this by labor, by suffering, by sacrifice, and if needs be, by our lives and the lives of others.

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"It is more than a mere figure of speech to say, that (Negroes) are as a people, chained together. We are one people—one in general complexion, one in common degradation, one in popular estimation. As one rises, all must rise, and as one falls all must fall . . . Every one of us should be ashamed to consider himself free, while his brother is a slave.—The wrongs of our brethren, should be our constant theme. There should be no time too precious, no calling too holy, no place too sacred, to make room for the cause.

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"The relation subsisting between the white and black people of this country is the vital question of the age . . . Here, a man must be hot, or be accounted cold, or perchance something worse than hot or cold. The lukewarm and the cowardly, will be rejected by earnest men on either side of the controversy. The cunning man who avoids it, to gain the favor of both parties, will be rewarded with scorn; and the timid man who shrinks from it, for fear of offending either party, will be despised. To the lawyer, the preacher, the politician, and to the man of letters, there is no neutral ground. He that is not for us is against us.