

Speech by Frederick Douglass 1878

I am not here to fan the flame of sectional animosity, to revive old issues, or to stir up strife between races; but no candid man,
5 looking at the political situation of the hour, can fail to see that we are still afflicted by the painful sequences both of slavery and of the late rebellion. In the spirit of the noble man whose image now looks down upon us we should have "charity toward all, and malice toward none."^{*} In the language of our greatest soldier, twice honored
10 with the Presidency of the nation, "Let us have peace."[†] Yes, let us have peace, but let us have liberty, law, and justice first. Let us have the Constitution, with its thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments, fairly interpreted, faithfully executed, and cheerfully obeyed in the fullness of their spirit and the completeness of their
15 letter. Men can do many things in this world, some easily and some with difficulty; but here are some things which men cannot do or be. When they are here they cannot be there. When the supreme law of the land is systematically set at naught; when humanity is insulted and the rights of the weak are trampled in the dust by a lawless
20 power; when society is divided into two classes, as oppressed and oppressor, there is no power, and there can be no power, while the instincts of manhood remain as they are, which can provide solid peace. [...]

Good, wise, and generous men at the North, in power and out of
25 power, for whose good intentions and patriotism we must all have the highest respect, doubt the wisdom of observing this memorial day, and would have us forget and forgive, strew flowers alike and lovingly, on rebel and on loyal graves. This sentiment is noble and generous, worthy of all honor as such; but it is only a sentiment after
30 all, and must submit to its own rational limitations. There was a right side and a wrong side in the late war, which no sentiment ought to cause us to forget, and while to-day we should have malice toward none, and charity toward all, it is no part of our duty to confound right with wrong, or loyalty with treason. If the observance of this
35 memorial day has any apology, office, or significance, it is derived from the moral character of the war, from the far-reaching, unchangeable, and eternal principles in dispute, and for which our sons and brothers encountered hardship, danger, and death.

^{*} This speech was delivered near a statue of Abraham Lincoln that stood in Union Square in New York City.

[†] The speaker refers to Ulysses S. Grant.



Figure 1: Photo of Lincoln statue in Union Square (1876), from Library of Congress

40 *Source:* Frederick Douglass, "There Was A Right Side in the Late War: An Address Delivered in New York, NY," 30 May 1878, *Frederick Douglass Papers*, vol. 4, 480-489.