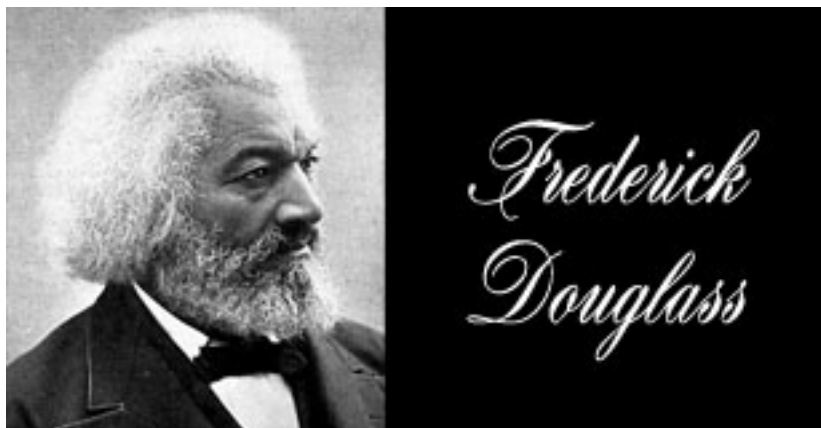


Demanding More from Ourselves

Written by James Clingman
Wednesday, 29 May 2013 00:00



Frederick Douglass' words – “Power concedes nothing without a demand” – have been haunting me lately, because of the pressing issues we face in today's political world, the dire economic straits in which many of our families find themselves, and the ever-present social problems Black people deal with every day. The key word in that admonishment is demand.

Ever since Douglass uttered those words, we have used them to determine how and what we must demand from others. Our responses have been external. My question is: What is our internal response to Brother Frederick's words? Are we demanding anything from ourselves as we seek power instead of mere influence in this society?

Although we seldom follow through on much of the knowledge passed down to us by our forebears, we sure do like to quote them. I guess it makes us feel good; but as I always say, “There is a big difference between feeling good and doing good.” Yes, words make us feel good, but they should also make us “do good,” too. Too many of our ancestors have sacrificed too much of themselves for us to merely repeat what they said without following through on what they said.

Thus, the “demand” that Douglass spoke of is magnified to an even larger degree and should be – must be – taken on an internal basis as well as an external one. Our elder also said, “People might not get all they work for in this world, but they must certainly work for all they get.” That statement is more suited for an internal response, which is probably why we don't use it as much as the one that has to do with power.

On an economic level, Black people are deserving of repair, or reparations, as some would say. There is no doubt and no lack of truth about our history in this country as it pertains to the

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wealth we created for others with our free labor, and the intellectual contributions our forefathers and mothers made to this society. Those contributions, including inventions that are still used today, along with a couple of centuries of free labor, are definitely worth billions, if not trillions of dollars. We should at least have a discussion at the highest level of government, from the president on down, about how to make up for such a wrong. Apologies are not enough.

Beyond that ideal, I believe we must also consider and act upon what Conrad Worrill and Ken Bridges called “Internal Reparations,” which speaks very directly to the internal demands we must be willing to make upon ourselves. Are we willing to demand that we support one another? Are we willing to demand that we become the primary educators of our children? Are we willing to demand much more of ourselves when it comes to loving one another, respecting one another, and trusting one another more? Are we willing to demand of ourselves a sense and practice of Black-on-Black love rather than hate and destruction? Are we willing to demand of ourselves, especially our leaders, a high level of integrity, dedication, and sincerity? Are we willing to stand against the lies, divisiveness, and evil tactics of those among us who are only bent on selfish opportunism?

Those are just a few questions related to the demands we must make on ourselves, individually and collectively. We must be willing to acknowledge our internal faults and deal with them head-on if we want to make educational, political, social, and economic progress. Yes, it will take the backbone of a Marcus Garvey, the resolve of a Harriet Tubman, the fearlessness of an Ida B. Wells, the strength of a Maynard Jackson, and yes, sometimes even the willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice, as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. did.

Fittingly, I end with some MLK quotes and ask you to think about and act upon what he and others have said; and then demand from yourself the internal fortitude to stand against the “wiles of the devil” by doing the right things for the right reasons – all the time.

“History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people.”

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

“In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.”

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“He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it. He who accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating with it.”

“Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men.”

“He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it. He who accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating with it.”

Amen, Brother Martin, that sure is right!

Jim Clingman, founder of the Greater Cincinnati African American Chamber of Commerce, is the nation's most prolific writer on economic empowerment for Black people. He is an adjunct professor at the University of Cincinnati and can be reached through his Web site, blackonomics.com.