

"Inheritance: The Struggle and The Power" by rev. Lori Staubitz

- A Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration Sunday Sermon 1/18/09

Opening reading:

Robert Hayden was born Asa Bundy Sheffey in 1913. Hayden was raised in a Detroit ghetto nicknamed "Paradise Valley". However this single poem we are about to hear is far from Hayden's only accomplishment. Robert Hayden's most famous quote was, "There is no such thing as black literature. There's good literature and bad. And that's all." In 1976, Hayden was named consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress. He died in 1980

Poem Frederick Douglass BY ROBERT E. HAYDEN

When it is finally ours, this freedom, this liberty, this beautiful and terrible thing,
needful to man as air,
usable as earth; when it belongs at last to all,
when it is truly instinct, brain matter, diastole, systole,
reflex action; when it is finally won; when it is more
than the gaudy mumbo jumbo of politicians:
this man, this Douglass, this former slave, this Negro
beaten to his knees, exiled, visioning a world
where none is lonely, none hunted, alien,
this man, superb in love and logic, this man
shall be remembered. Oh, not with statues' rhetoric,
not with legends and poems and wreaths of bronze alone,
but with the lives grown out of his life, the lives
fleshing his dream of the beautiful, needful thing.

Sermon: Inheritance: The Struggle and The Power; Rev. Lori Staubitz 1/18/09

This morning I want to share some details of a life that I believe are essential to our understanding of both freedom and justice and the achievements inherent in the life work and ministry of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Our celebration this day is also marked by this historic time in our history as President Elect Barack Obama will be sworn into office as the first person of color to serve as President of the United States on Tuesday.

I want to share a life with you that no one shared with me.... I want to tell you the story of a man....

(special thanks to Wikipedia for the following:)

"Frederick Douglass (born Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey, February 14, 1818 – February 20, 1895) was an American abolitionist, women's suffragist, editor, orator, author, statesman and reformer. Douglass is one of the most prominent figures in African-American history and United States history. In 1872, Douglass became the very first African-American nominated as a Vice Presidential candidate in the U.S., running on the Equal Rights Party ticket with Victoria Woodhull, the first woman to run for President of the United States.

He was a firm believer in the equality of all people, whether black, female, Native American, or recent immigrant. He was fond of saying, "I would unite with anybody to do right and with nobody to do wrong."

However, he was not born a free man

Douglass first tried to escape from slavery twice and failed. On September 3, 1838, Douglass successfully escaped by boarding a train to Havre de Grace, Maryland, dressed in a sailor's uniform and carrying identification papers provided by a free black seaman.

He crossed the Susquehanna River by ferry at Havre de Grace, then continued by train to Wilmington, Delaware. From there he went by steamboat to "Quaker City" — Philadelphia, Pennsylvania — and eventually reached New York; the whole journey took him less than 24 hours.

Douglass continued traveling up to Massachusetts. There he joined various organizations and regularly attended abolitionist meetings.

In 1843, Douglass participated in the American Anti-Slavery Society's Hundred Conventions project, a six-month tour of meeting halls throughout the Eastern and Midwestern United States. He participated in the Seneca Falls Convention, the birthplace of the American feminist movement, and signed its Declaration of Sentiments.

Douglass' best-known work is his first autobiography *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, published in 1845. Skeptics attacked the book and questioned whether a black man could have produced such an eloquent piece of literature. It became an immediate bestseller. -translated into French and Dutch and published in Europe.

The book's success had an unfortunate side effect: Douglass' friends and mentors feared that the publicity would draw the attention of his ex-owner, who might try to get his "property" back. They encouraged Douglass to tour Ireland, as many other former slaves had done. On August 16, 1845, and arrived in Ireland as the Irish Potato Famine was beginning.

Starting in August 1845, Douglass spent two years giving lectures abroad. Douglass remarked that in England he was treated not "as a color, but as a man." He met and befriended the Irish nationalist Daniel O'Connell.

It was during this trip that Douglass became officially free, when his freedom was purchased from his owner by British supporters[3].

Douglass conferred with President Abraham Lincoln in 1863 on the treatment of black soldiers, and with President Andrew Johnson on the subject of black suffrage.

In 1877, Douglass was appointed a United States Marshal. In 1877, he bought his final home in Washington D.C., on a hill above the Anacostia River. He named it Cedar Hill (also spelled CedarHill)

His wife, Anna Murray Douglas, died in 1882,

In 1884, Douglass married Helen Pitts, a white feminist from Honeoye, New York. Pitts was the daughter of Gideon Pitts, Jr., an abolitionist colleague and friend of Douglass. Helen Pitts was a graduate of Mount Holyoke College (then called Mount Holyoke Female Seminary). She had worked on a radical feminist publication named Alpha while living in Washington, D.C. The couple faced a storm of controversy with their marriage,

But feminist and Unitarian Elizabeth Cady Stanton congratulated the couple

At the 1888 Republican National Convention, Douglass became the first African-American to receive a vote for President of the United States in a major party's roll call vote.[10][“

-Information on Frederick Douglas has been accessed from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

My first introduction to Fredrick Douglas was in high school; Thanks to a few progressive public school initiatives made in the 60's and 70's Douglas was hailed, along with Harriet Tubman as an historic figure in the anti-slavery movement. I believe that was the end of lesson.

It wasn't until I entered graduate school at the historically black Virginia Union University in Richmond that became aware of the breadth and depth of knowledge, wisdom, leadership and entrepreneurial spirit that is so much a part of the ongoing heritage of people of color.

Yet, much of what we know and what our children learn from our history is largely confined the contributions made by those of European decent.

Let's check our own familiarity of famous names and people for a moment:

Raise your hand if you when you recognize these names:

Humanitarians and Social Reformers:

John Quincy Adams, Jane Adams, Susan B. Anthony, Julia Ward Howe, Clara Barton, James Reeb, - Christopher Reeves.

From science: Issac Newton, Joseph Priestly, Alexander Graham Bell, Charles Darwin,

From literature: Louisa May Alcott, Charles Dickens, Edgar Allen Poe, Rolph Waldo Emmerson, Walt Whitman, Henry David Thearou...

Political figures: Abigail Adams, Ethan Allen, Ben Franklin, Paul Revere, Daniel Webster
...Almost all of these names ring a bell for Unitarian Universalists, but also for most Americans.

But what do we know of Francis Ellen Watkins Harper September 24, 1825 - February 22, 1911 born Baltimore, Maryland Orphaned at 3, married, widowed after 4 years, daughter died young, early poet and well-known Black author, spoke out for abolition and women's rights, aided fugitive slaves, lectured for Maine Anti-Slavery Society, toured eastern states 1850s, after war lectured in South on temperance, Black morality, and against white racial violence, attended 1875 and 1887 suffrage conventions

Lewis Latimere, Whitney M. Young, Jr. (1921-1971), educator, civil rights leader. He spent most of his career working to end employment discrimination in the South and turning the National Urban League from a relatively passive civil rights organization into one that aggressively fought for justice

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- Both important Unitarian /Universalists, more important; they are each important to OUR U.S. history.

Here are a few more people of color that may be news to us this morning...

Dr. Charles Drew: father of the blood bank,

NASA Inventor- George Alcorn;

Dr. Mae C. Jemison blasted into orbit aboard the space shuttle Endeavor on September 12, 1992, the first woman of color to go into space.;

This past year Mildred Loving passed away. She never saw herself as a trailblazer, yet in 1967 in a Supreme Court Case Loving v. The State of Virginia, she and her white husband took issue with having been thrown out of the state by daring to wed. Loving wrote Robert F. Kennedy who moved to action. Interracial marriage ban was struck down. (Time Magazine, January 5th; Farwell article page 152)

The segregation of our American history has deprived many of us of developing a more holistic vision in the ways we understand who we are as a united people.

If all American History had been applied in this same segregated and marginalized way, many of us would have had to seek out special classes or do the independent study necessary to find out all we could about the "English History in America" to discover the noteworthy contributions of our founding fathers and historical figures like Ben Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson.

As a result, there is a more hidden message imbedded in our social and educational norms that perpetuate the idea that significant contributions arise from the intelligence, ingenuity and ability of Americans of European decent who are either well-born, well educated and / or well connected.

Fortunately, contributions made by people of color are more visible and accessible than in any other time in our history.

James Earl Jones, Morgan Freeman, Will Smith, Maya Angelo, Alice Walker, Oprah Winfrey, Colin Powell, are just a few who are a part of our shared collective history and consciousness.

What we know affects the ways we perceive and proceed in our efforts to make changes here at home and in the world.

Ultimately, our cultural and educational limitations affect the ways we choose to engage.

The following story was shared as part of this worship service:

If you would like to access this story please go to Google to find "Down Wind from Flowers; By Lee Paton ; Submitted by Linda Ross Swanson

© 2000, from Chicken Soup for the Gardener's Soul by Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Marion Owen, Cindy Buck, Cynthia Brian, Pat Stone and Carol Strugulewski.

I include this home grown miracle story today because it lifts up some essential elements that I believe are important to the ways we go about addressing needs and doing the hard work of reconciling the atrocities of our past so we can move forward together in community as a unified people.

- 1) Good people often offer assistance without recognizing the inherent wisdom and abilities of those whom they are trying to serve. While striving to uplift the oppressed; their often are elements of oppression imbedded within our process.
- 2) Real change requires more than the implementation of "treatments" : physical, psychological, economic, social and education reform, legislation or programs ...However significant our work, the building up of trust and yes, even love are essential to lasting change.
- 3) Transformation occurs on multiple levels. It is most powerful where both the giver and receiver undergo a process of growth...where the constructs of power dissolve into mutual exchange, support and giving of oneself to the process of creative good that is good for all.
- 4) The healing of pain and the coming of Justice arise when there is a growing understanding that when one suffers, we all suffer. When one is healed, we all heal.

The following comes from Former UUA President and Executive Director of Amnesty International Bill Schulz as quoted in his book "In Our Own Best Interest: How Defending Human Rights Benefits us all" He writes

"Nearly every movement to change the world frames the benefits of what it offers in both visionary and practical terms. Almost everyone, except, more often than not, the human rights movement."

It seems that we have far to go before we understand that when we lift up others, we are also engaged in the process of improving our own quality of life.

Tomorrow morning, hundreds of community leaders, students and people of faith will gather for the annual MLK Celebration Breakfast at St. Mary's College. I believe this will be my fourth year, and I have learned to get there very early...So if you would like to join me...I hope to be there by 7:00am-Breakfast is at 8:00.

I go to represent our congregation and to pay homage to MLK. I go to learn and look for ways to participate breaking down the barriers that separate us from one another. Each year, I have carry with me a hope...that something more will come from this joint experience, this one, single morning of sharing, mutual respect, kinship and community.

While some efforts are being made, I know first- hand that racism is alive and well here on peninsula.

When our leaders attended a UUA Anti-oppression conference in D.C. last year we learned of the racial violence that occurred right here in our own backyard within our own life time- including the systematic lynching of African Americans and leaders of color –a fact that remains hidden from the general public about the history of this region.

But today, the words of MLK continue to call us forward:

"Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, today, my friends. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all are created equal."

As we move forward into this new year and this new era as American citizens, let us join all others to raise up "that beautiful needful thing" as partners to the spirit that resides in the hearts and minds of all people and indeed emanates from the whole of life upon the earth – home to us all. Amen and Halleluiah!!