

The Perils of Peace

FREDERICK DOUGLASS, WINONA, AND CIVIL RIGHTS IN MINNESOTA AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

WAYNE GANNAWAY

of reconstruction and the salvation of the Union.”¹

Achieving Douglass’s vision (shared by the Radical faction of the Republican Party) was in no way certain. Already Northern unity was wavering while a Southern political and paramilitary insurgency was coalescing. In the lecture he delivered on March 16, 1867, in Winona, entitled “The Sources of Danger to the Republic,” Douglass warned his audience that the federal government’s institutions were fragile and the fate of African American suffrage was bound up with preserving the costly gains won by the North. In fewer than 20 years, the dangers Douglass foresaw would, in fact, consign African Americans in both the North and South to almost a century of racial bigotry throughout white society—as Douglass put it, an insidious “feeling of color madness” and an “atmosphere of color hate.”²

On that Saturday evening, Douglass stood before a supportive audience numbering more than a thousand. It was his first visit to Minnesota. The *Winona Daily Republican* reported: “Philharmonic Hall, the most spacious assembly room in the city, was fairly crammed with people, many of whom came from distant points in the county and from neighboring towns.” As adoring as his audience was, Douglass had only

shortly before been refused lodging at a local hotel. While this caused a stir among Winona’s enlightened citizens, Douglass was neither surprised nor intimidated. Throughout his years on the lecturing circuit in Northern cities, his sponsors often struggled to find accommodations for him and could do little when railroad conductors or coachmen refused him a seat with the rest of the passengers. The legacy of slavery and bigotry lingered even in the North, as Douglass wrote in his autobiography: “It was in the air, and men breathed it and were permeated by it often when they were quite unconscious of its presence.”³

Still, Minnesotans had fought for the Union and had advanced the politics of emancipation. Dozens of Winona men had volunteered to serve in what became Company K of the First Minnesota Regiment. They were among the Minnesotans who fought at Gettysburg in 1863, engaging in a costly but decisive attack on Confederate forces at Plum Run. After the war, Winonans celebrated, healed, and busied themselves in commerce. With its burgeoning lumber interests, rich farmland, enviable wheat trade, and a busy port, the city on the Mississippi River 113 miles south of the Twin Cities exemplified the new state’s optimism and

In 1867, Frederick Douglass left his home in Rochester, New York, to begin a lecture tour of western states, which would include two Minnesota stops: Winona and St. Paul. With the 1845 publication of his first book, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, Douglass had become perhaps the most powerful spokesperson for the destruction of the institution that had enslaved him for the first 20 years of his life. The assassination of President Lincoln and the lingering moral ambiguity about the purpose of the Civil War cast shadows over the glory and achievement of emancipation and the defeat of the Confederacy. With the Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution removing the chains of bondage from his brothers and sisters in the South, Douglass advocated for yet-to-be-obtained full citizenship and suffrage for freedmen as the only safeguards to ensure their newly gained freedom and “the safety

ABOVE: Frederick Douglass, 1868.

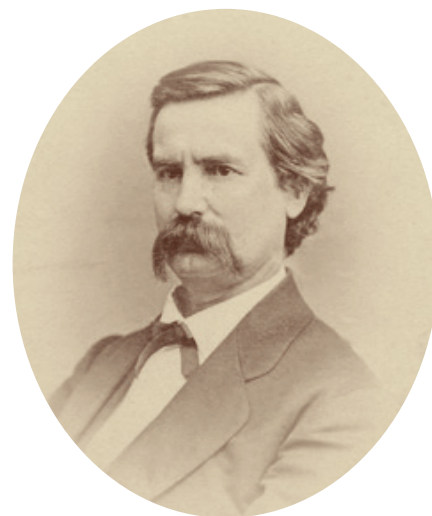
prosperity. At the close of 1866, the *Winona Daily Republican* pointed to “a steady and healthy rate of progress in population. There is but one other prominent town in the state—Minneapolis—whose growth at all compares.” The editors noted that since the first rail shipment of wheat from western Minnesota in 1859, “the trade has steadily grown, year by year, until it has now assumed mammoth proportions, fully entitling Winona to rank among the leading grain exporting cities of the world.”⁴

Black role in public life debated

Like Americans in other Northern communities, Winonans debated Reconstruction and the role of African Americans in public life. In politics and the press (in particular, the *Winona Daily Republican*), Radical Republicans, who advocated for equal treatment and enfranchisement of the freed slaves, dominated the discourse. Minnesotans were divided, however, on how to bring the Southern states back into the fold and how much freedom should be conferred to emancipated slaves or any African Americans. Indeed, Winona’s own Daniel S. Norton, a moderate Republican and US senator, condemned Reconstruction under a Radical Republican congress, which was

demanding that Southern states be compelled to grant African American male suffrage. Norton exclaimed to the 1868 Winona County Democratic convention: “When I consider the monstrous course of the Republican Party for these three years past, I am overwhelmed with astonishment and I renounce it.” Other convention speakers attacked Republicans for expanding federal power and spending to enforce civil rights and fund the Freedmen’s Bureau, established by Congress in 1865 to assist freed slaves, echoing the positions of the national Democratic party.⁵

Democrats had enjoyed a leg up in Minnesota’s territorial politics, with practically no competition until the Republican Party coalesced in 1855 with an antislavery platform. Statehood in 1858 pitted Democrats against the newly formed Republicans; the two parties wrestled to control natural resources and draw state boundaries. After the war, black suffrage was another key dividing point. In Minnesota, where African Americans comprised less than 1 percent of the population, this was more a matter of abstract principle. (The 1870 census counted just 50 African Americans among the 22,319 persons living in Winona County.) Heralding Winona as a leading edge of suffrage, the *Winona Daily Republican* boasted



Daniel Sheldon Norton, Republican US senator from Winona, backed away from the Radical Republican Reconstruction plan.

that it was “the first paper in the State to advocate impartial suffrage.”⁶

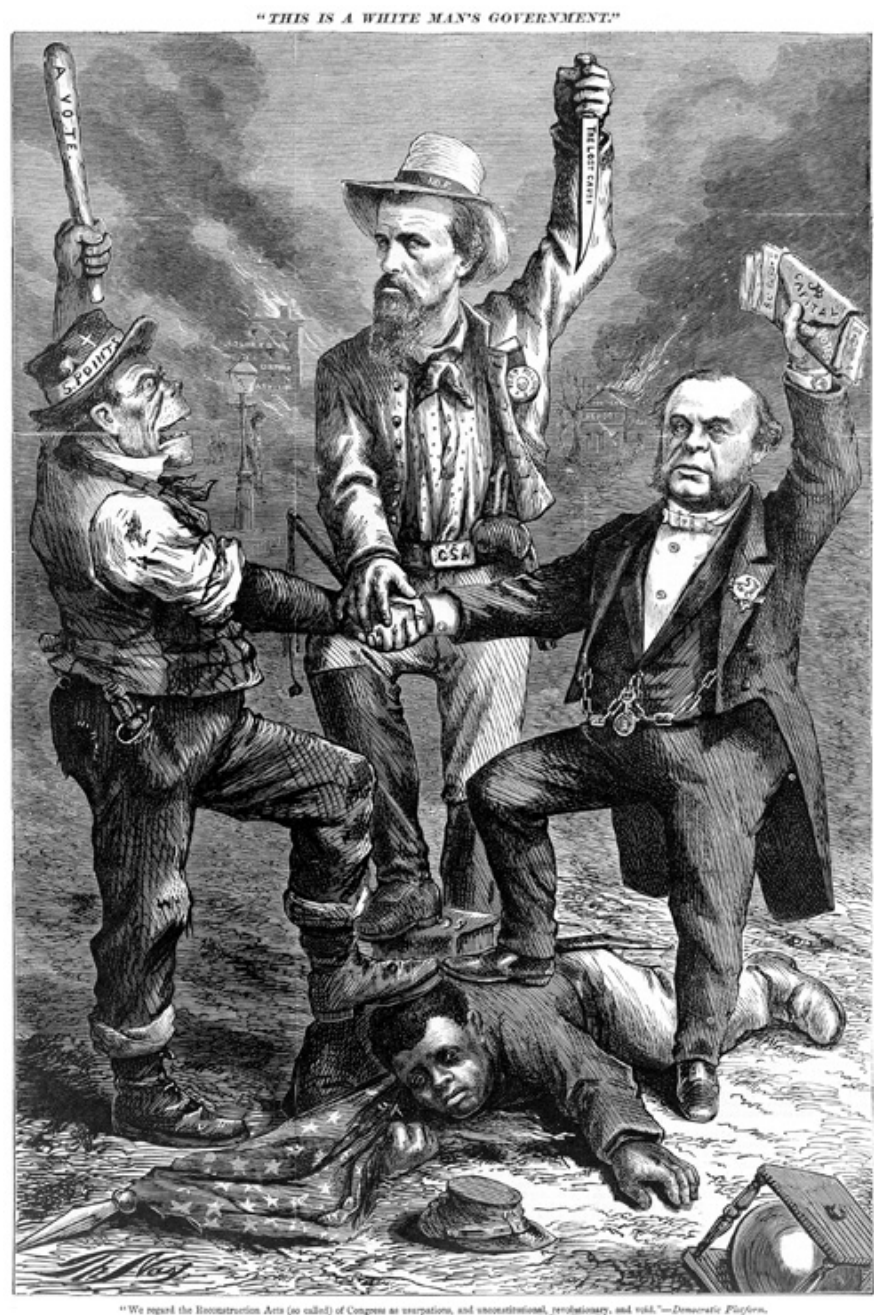
Black Minnesotans made their opinion on suffrage known in 1865 when the members of the Golden Key Club, a literary association for African American men in St. Paul, delivered a petition to the legislature demanding voting rights. In making their case, club members cited the taxes they paid, their belief in “American civilization . . . Industry, Intelligence, Sobriety and Religion,” and their service in and “hallowed memories” of the Civil War: “It is our boast that no colored man has yet proved traitor to our beloved country.” A white Winona County politician, Charles Griswold, joined in their cause. In 1865, Griswold—Civil War veteran, clergyman, and Minnesota house legislator from St. Charles—introduced a bill to strike “white” from the suffrage provision of the state constitution. He believed that the timing was right for voters to approve a constitutional amendment, arguing to house members: “Seven years full of stirring events ha[ve] passed since [the constitutional convention]. The result of the war has been an entire revolution in public opinion. . . . The fortunate moment has arrived.”⁷

Second Street, Winona, 1870.



While Griswold's general premise—that the Civil War had created a sense of unity among Northerners and disposed of America's slave society—was correct, his confidence in a newly enlightened white citizenry proved overly optimistic. Minnesota Democrats and their press held nothing back in attacking pro-suffrage Republicans and black Minnesota civil rights groups. The *Chatfield Democrat* regularly published grotesque taunts of black Minnesotans and Republicans and beseeched readers to "Stand firm for your sacred rights—for the dignity and good name of your state. Stand firm for white man's government." When a committee of black Minnesotans presented Griswold with a statement of support and gift of an "elegant gold-headed cane" in appreciation for his legislative leadership, the *Chatfield Democrat* sarcastically noted the cane was "black ebony (appropriate that)," derided the Winona County legislator as "Brudder Griswold," and cast his speech in a caricatured dialect. The suffrage measure fell short when put before the voters in November 1865.⁸

Minnesota was not alone among Northern states that voted to deny suffrage to African Americans at this time; voters in Wisconsin, Ohio, and Connecticut also rejected extending full citizenship, while other states would not even put it on the ballot. Meanwhile, in 1866 Radical Republicans took full advantage of decisive election gains in the US Congress by passing both the Civil Rights Act, which conferred citizenship to all persons born in the United States, and the Reconstruction Act, which established military rule in the South and stipulated the steps by which former Confederate states could re-enter the Union, then overrode President Andrew Johnson's vetoes of both measures. This repudiation of John-



Thomas Nast's 1868 cartoon, "This is a white man's government," illustrates the Democratic Party alliance to block black suffrage: Irish American immigrants, Confederate sympathizers of the "Lost Cause," and wealthy "Fifth Avenue" vote buyers.

son and his lenient Reconstruction plan in November 1866 gave Douglass hope and a reason to push for suffrage for African American men. Holding Republicans' feet to the fire, he wrote in an article for *The Atlantic*: "The South must be opened to the light of law and liberty, and this session of Congress is relied upon to accomplish this important work."⁹

As the political skirmishes between Radical Republicans, Democrats, and a Southern-sympathizing Johnson continued, Douglass mobilized his energies for what he viewed as key to advancing African American rights: suffrage. To make that happen, Douglass could not let Johnson and other Unionists turn away from the evils that precipitated the war. He

Minnesotans were divided on how much freedom should be conferred to emancipated slaves or any African Americans.

began his work in 1867 by warning in another *Atlantic* article, “The young men of the South burn with the desire to regain what they call the lost cause. In fact, all the elements of treason and rebellion are there under the thinnest disguise which necessity can impose.” The South, in its quest to “have the negro left under its political control,” stood ready to game the Constitution. Indeed, the antebellum South “early mastered the constitution, became superior to the Union, and enthroned itself above the law.”¹⁰

If race polarized Democrats and Republicans in Minnesota and the nation, citizenship was the tool party partisans used to gain political advantage. The Civil War had ruptured antebellum norms regarding citizenship and the right to vote. Property-owning white men had enjoyed exclusive suffrage. After the war, those who had joined the Confederate cause lost their citizenship, at least temporarily, while freedmen moved closer to it with the passage of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments. Both parties consid-

ered “uncivilized” Indigenous people to be largely incompatible with citizenship. While Dakota men seeking citizenship had to abandon their culture and speak English, immigrants (i.e., white aliens) did not. Women’s suffrage was another wedge used to political advantage. Democrats looked for any opportunity to conflate women’s suffrage with that for black men, thereby hoping to derail the efforts.¹¹

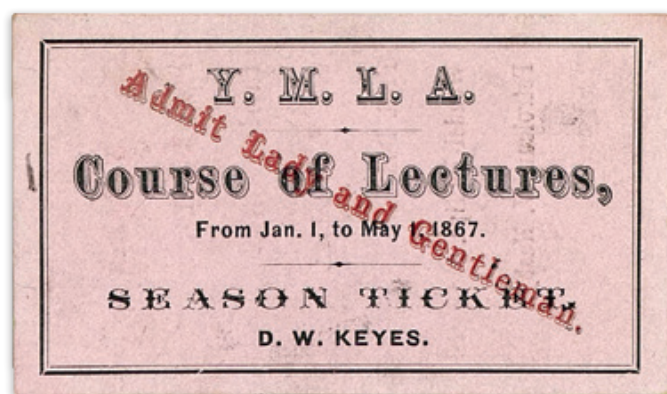
Douglass knew his conservative adversaries sought to use the right to vote to divide excluded groups, particularly between women and black men. He advocated a capacious view of American citizenry and suffrage, as outlined in his 1869 “Composite Nation” speech. As he arrived in Winona, Douglass was focused on voting rights for black men and had reason to believe that his lecture would be well attended by a generally supportive audience. The Young Men’s Library Association of Winona sponsored his visit as part of its 1867 lecture series. Other speakers included Ralph Waldo Emerson,



Future Minnesota supreme court justice William Mitchell (shown here in 1870), was one of the Douglass lecture organizers.

Theodore Tilton (a New York poet and newspaper editor), prominent abolitionist Wendell Phillips, and “Petroleum V. Nasby,” a shameless Confederate sympathizer, portrayed by satirist David Ross Locke.¹²

Why was Winona a stop on the circuit of such well-known writers and speakers? As a gateway to Minnesota, one of the largest cities in the state, and location of the first teacher’s college west of the Mississippi River, in Winona a lecturer from the Northeast could expect a sizable, engaged audience. For this reason, Winona’s Young Men’s Library Association, possibly the only chapter in Minnesota at the time, was able to draw the marquee writers, many of whom lectured at library associations in the East. Douglass traveled the same lecture circuit as these men and admired them for standing with him as he faced bigotry in the North. The *Winona Daily Republican* reported that Tilton, who spoke in Winona one month before Douglass, had been scathing in his criticism of President Johnson’s lenient treatment of the South, suggesting that the entire nation would express great relief with his impeachment.¹³



Season ticket for the 1867 lecture series that included Douglass, sponsored by the Young Men’s Library Association of Winona.

Lecture organizers, which included future Minnesota supreme court judge William Mitchell, expected a heavy turnout for the Douglass lecture. The audience likely included those less interested in African American suffrage than intrigued by Douglass's notoriety and physical presence. Over six feet tall, he would have appeared even more impressive on the stage. Years later, one Winonan remembered Douglass as having "a massive frame and brain with a mat of hair like a lion's mane, a deep bass voice like a lion's growl or the low rumble of distant thunder." Another observer noted, "He spoke calmly and deliberately at first; but as he went . . . his voice grew louder, clearer and deeper." John W. Blassingame, editor of *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, observed: "Douglass was a master of this introductory technique and used it effectively to establish rapport with his audiences." As he continued, he impressed audiences with his "rising crescendo . . . matched by [his] increasing gestures, changes in facial expression, and movements about the platform."¹⁴

Winona turns out for Douglass

Speaking to the packed Winona hall, Douglass began by dispelling any notion that the Civil War or the Union victory affirmed the strength of the US Constitution. "I know of fewer misfortunes that can happen to a nation greater than an over confidence in the perfection of its government," Douglass warned. He declared that he no longer spoke to the American people as "the advocate merely of an enslaved race, but in the high and commanding character of an American citizen, having the interest that every true citizen should have in the welfare, the stability, the permanence and the prosperity of our free institutions, and in this

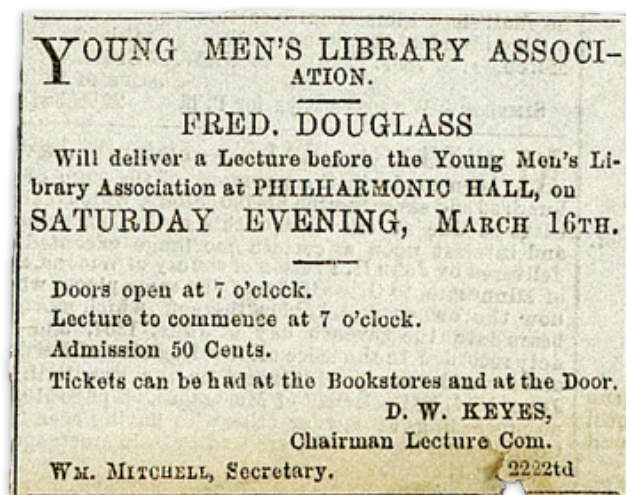
Incidents of discrimination were so common as Douglass traveled from town to town that he regarded them as a genre.

spirit, I shall criticize our government tonight."¹⁵

Douglass praised the Founding Fathers for devising the US Constitution: "In the eye of that great instrument, the Constitution, we are neither Jew nor Greek, Barbarian nor Cythian, black nor white, but fellow citizens of a common country, embracing all men of all colors." Nevertheless, he believed the war represented a failure of both the Constitution and the political institutions born of it. In describing the political crisis, he had one person in mind: President Andrew Johnson. For Douglass, Johnson's ascension to the presidency after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln epitomized the weaknesses of the Constitution, the compromises rife in Washington, DC, and the vulnerability of Reconstruction; the vice presidency, he said, was "a useless piece of governmental furniture—a mere inducement to assassination."¹⁶

While Johnson was a Unionist and had no love for the antebellum planter class, the native Tennessean and former slaveholder had no interest in African American citizenship, much less suffrage. On inauguration day for Lincoln's second term, Lincoln pointed out Douglass to Johnson and the two men acknowledged each other from a distance. From that memorable encounter, Douglass discerned Johnson's character and where his sympathies lay. Douglass recalled: "[Johnson's] first glance was the frown of the man; the second was the bland and sickly smile of the demagogue." To a companion standing by him, Douglass observed, "Whatever Andrew Johnson may be, he certainly is no friend of our race."¹⁷

Douglass's reading of Johnson proved prescient and became widely shared and affirmed by an overwhelmingly Republican congress. After overriding Johnson's vetoes of robust Reconstruction measures



Advertisement from the Winona Daily Republican promoting the 1867 lecture by Frederick Douglass sponsored by the Young Men's Library Association.



The Republican Building, on the southwest corner of Third and Center streets, home of the Winona Daily Republican, 1875.

intended to provide federal aid and protection to freedmen and -women, Republicans attempted to impeach him in 1868, falling just one vote short of convicting and removing him from office. The *Winona Daily Republican* was lukewarm on impeachment, noting that Johnson's "usurpations and defiance of the will of the people can last but a little over a year."¹⁸

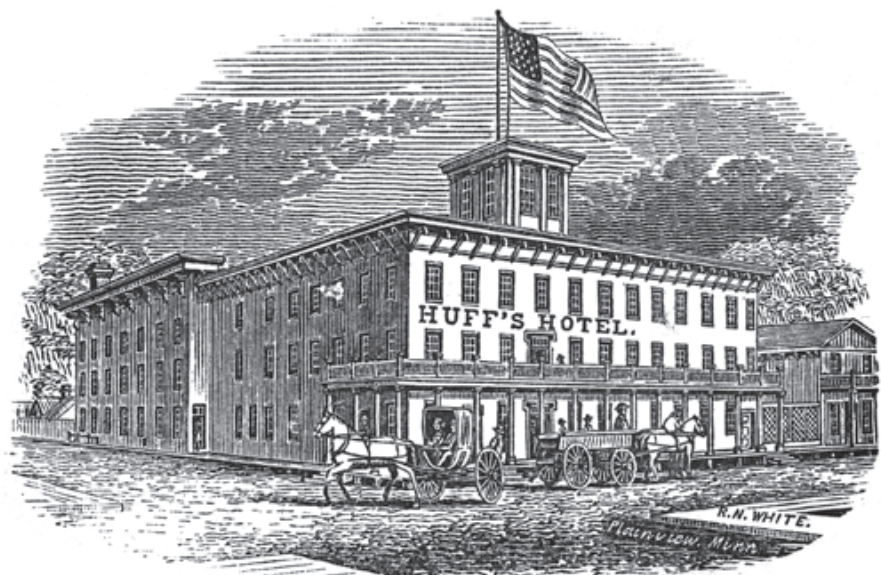
Douglass's Winona speech was about more than political skirmishes. "The growing antagonisms" between Radical Republicans and Johnson, as serious as they were, paled in comparison to the retribution being visited upon loyal Americans in the South, namely, African Americans, Douglass said. "Loyal men by the score, by the hundred, have been deliberately and outrageously, and in open daylight, slaughtered by the known enemy of this country and thus far the murderers are at large; unquestioned by the law, unpunished by justice, unrebuked even by the public opinion of the localities where the crimes were committed."¹⁹

In the midst of his lecture, Douglass paused "to rebuke a mean and cowardly insult which had been pub-

licly cast upon him in coming here," referencing the hotelier who refused to serve him. The *Winona Daily Republican* speculated that if the offender "was present and heard Mr. Douglass's scathing rebuke, [he] will feel his long ears tingle in consequence down to the latest moment of his existence." As noted above, such episodes were hardly new to Douglass. Douglass papers editor Blassingame notes that "Incidents of discrimination were so

common as Douglass traveled from town to town that he regarded them as a genre." Douglass never hesitated to call out bigotry, whether to offenders as they sought to treat him differently than his fellow passengers or diners, or during a lecture, where he would use "sarcasm, invective, and ridicule." He subverted insults with humor: "'How do you feel,' said a friend to me, 'when you are hooted and jeered on the street on account of your color?' 'I feel as if an ass had kicked, but had hit nobody,' was my answer."²⁰

In Winona, Douglass's sponsors secured alternative, and no doubt superior, accommodations in the home of W. S. Drew, a prominent local lawyer and businessman (and ironically, a Democrat), who would later serve a single term as a state senator. Joining Douglass and the Drew family for dinner at the Drew house were an impressive list of local and state notables, including Thomas Wilson, chief justice of the Minnesota supreme court; district court judge William Mitchell; the mayor of Winona, Royal D. Cone; publisher of the *Winona Daily Republican*, D. Sinclair; and the Reverend Dr. William McKinley, who later wrote about Douglass's



Winona's Huff's Hotel denied Douglass accommodations.

Newly enfranchised blacks throughout the state planned to attend a mass meeting at St. Paul.

visit in the *Winona Daily Republican*. The *Winona Democrat* gleefully noted the hotel's rejection of Douglass and mocked the Young Men's Library Association's efforts to accommodate "the African gentleman of American descent." The editor sneeringly reported that Douglass's sponsors finally "found quarters for the 'sweet scented cuss' in a house which will result in a decided saving of perfume for some time to come."²¹

For Douglass, the challenges and threats he spoke of that evening were far greater than any scorn or insult that the *Winona Democrat* could inflict upon him. As historian David Blight notes, Douglass was aware that "winning the peace would be a matter of power, but it would also be a struggle over moral will and historical consciousness." He realized that how the public remembered the war was critical to consummating full citizenship and human dignity for African Americans. The *Winona Daily Republican* noted Douglass's frequent reference to patriotic motifs, depicting the Civil War as the prelude to a final struggle, fusing this theme to the civil rights he pleaded for on behalf of African Americans: "Happy will it be for us—happy for the land—happy will it be for coming generations—if we shall now complete, from choice, the work which we began under the pressure of a stern military necessity."²²

Despite Douglass's candor in criticizing the government and singling out a Winona hotelier for bigotry, his audience at Philharmonic

Hall responded to him favorably: "Such were the views of the lecturer. They were presented with force, and in most instances commended themselves to the approval of the audience." As Douglass continued his lecture tour, Minnesota Republicans once again put impartial suffrage on the ballot for the November 1867 elections; once again the measure failed. In Winona County voters opposing suffrage (1,953) outnumbered those in favor (1,119). Suffrage advocates took heart in the fact that the statewide margin between those for and those against the measure was narrower, less than 2 percent, than the year before. In a speaking engagement with women's suffrage activists, who were critical of Republicans' stance against their cause, Douglass defended his close alliance with Republicans, pointing out that "Minnesota lacked only 1,200 votes to carry negro suffrage. All Democrats

voted against it, while only a small fraction of the Republicans did." The *Winona Daily Republican* also took an optimistic view, insisting the loss at the county level "is but temporary, and which, by the grace of God and the energy of the Republican party, will be fully restored within one short year."²³

Minnesota extends the franchise

If an energetic and massive convention rally could be seen as an indicator of success at the polls, then Winona Republicans had reason to be cheered. The *Minneapolis Daily Tribune* reported that 4,000 attended "The Great Republican Meeting at Winona" on September 16, 1868. "Cheer after cheer greeted every speaker," including Senator Alexander Ramsey, Congressman Ignatius Donnelly, and the governors of Minnesota, William R. Marshall, and Wisconsin, Lucius Fairchild, among other politicians and civic leaders. As election day 1868 approached, the *Winona Daily Republican* exhorted readers: "Show your regard for the glorious principles of the freedom enunciated in the Declaration of American Independence by voting tomorrow for Impartial Suffrage in Minnesota." The *Winona Democrat*, meanwhile, derided voting rights for

Philharmonic Hall, site of Douglass's Winona lecture.



black men and declared the national Democrats “the white man’s ticket and poor man’s friend.”²⁴

This time, voters passed the measure to strike “white” from the suffrage provision in Minnesota’s constitution, joining Iowa as the only Northern state to extend the franchise to African American men. The *Winona Daily Republican* quickly poked its adversaries, noting that, while the *Winona Democrat* conceded the measure had prevailed, “It consoles itself, however, with the reflection that the whole thing was a ‘Radical fraud,’ and that the people of the State did not know what they were voting for.” Nevertheless, Winona Republicans had to keep their crowing in check given that the measure’s margin of victory in the county was only 61 votes out of 4,317 cast; at the state level the margin was more than 9,000 votes. In all likelihood, Republicans could thank the presence on the ballot of popular war hero and presidential candidate Ulysses S. Grant for spurring turnout.²⁵

Republicans and black Minnesotans had real reasons to celebrate. African American men had the vote, and with Grant’s election, both groups had an advocate in the White House. In his autobiography, Douglass recalled that the state-by-state struggle for suffrage became nationalized and “a part of the policy of the Republican party, and President U. S. Grant, promptly recommended the great amendment to the Constitution by which colored men are today invested with complete citizenship—the right to vote and to be voted for in the American Republic.” But that reality, ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment (which stated that the right to vote could not be denied by race or skin color), was still two years away; meanwhile, black and white Republicans in Minnesota savored the crucial victory on the state level.²⁶

Shortly after the 1868 election, African Americans in St. Paul formed a committee “to celebrate the victory and show gratitude to the politicians who had championed the cause.” Newly enfranchised blacks throughout the state, including representatives from Winona, planned to attend a mass meeting at St. Paul to be held on the first of January, Douglass’s likeness, as well as those of other abolitionists, festooned the hall. Calling it a “Jubilee of Emancipation and Enfranchisement,” the *Minneapolis Daily Tribune* reported: “About 300 colored people were

present, all neatly dressed, and show an aggregate of intelligent faces equal, from all accounts, to what would be presented by any miscellaneous congregation of white people.” The African American participants of the gathering elected officers of the convention, including Winona barber and entrepreneur A. Miles as one of the vice presidents. Between 1866 and 1870 Miles posted dozens of advertisements for services and his special hair tonic in the *Winona Daily Republican*. One even poked fun at the fallen slave-owning class in an ad headlined “Will Jefferson Davis Live?”²⁷

**GRAND
MASS MEETING
OF THE
COLORED PEOPLE OF MINNESOTA,
JANUARY 1st, 1869.**

COME ONE! COME ALL!

There will be held in the city of St. Paul, on January 1st, 1869,
at noon, in Ingersoll's Hall, A GRAND

MASS MEETING OF THE COLORED PEOPLE
Of the whole State, to celebrate the
EMANCIPATION
Of Four Million Slaves, and to express our gratitude for the bestowal of
the elective franchise to the Colored People of this State, and to perfect a
State Organization of the Sons of Freedom.

Gov. Wm. R. Marshall, Hon. Morton S. Wilkinson,
Dr. J. H. Stewart, Mayor of St. Paul, Lt.-Gov. Thos. H. Armstrong,
Hon. I. Donnelly, Gen. Levi Nutting,

And others, are expected to be present and address the people.
In the evening, after the meeting, there will be served a Splendid SUPPER, tickets to
which will be distributed during the afternoon by the Committee.

NO CHARGE FOR ANYTHING.
Friends from abroad come and help us rejoice. Let there be a grand turn out.

MAURICE JERNIGAN, ROBERT HICKMAN, THOS. A. JACKSON, GEO. B. WILLIAMS, JOHN A. JACKSON, DAVID EDWARDS, GEORGE DENNIS, CLIFTON MONROE, EDMOND JAMES,	ENASE WALKER, PHELAN COMBS, Sr., JOHN H. MOFFIT, HENRY TROTTER, WM. SINGLETON, ROBERT BANKS, GEO. ANDERSON, ADDISON DRAKE, HENRY GILES,
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(St. Paul Press.) Committee.

Some 300 delegates attended the "Jubilee of Emancipation and Enfranchisement" meeting in St. Paul, January 1, 1869.

White politicians and supporters offered advice and congratulations. Charles Griswold, the Winona County state representative who had initiated impartial suffrage in the legislature four years prior, proclaimed that the victory acknowledged black Minnesotans as “men among men” who had a “bright future with the promise of better things.” Robert Banks, an African American barber from St. Paul, offered advice to young black men: “Be sober; be industrious; accumulate property. Keep your children at school.” Other speakers made clear that black men in Minnesota would now be more closely watched. Jacob Stewart, the mayor of St. Paul, a Democratic-dominated city, foresaw a skewed bargain: “There would be whites who ‘shut [blacks] out’ from schools, but would raise a ‘hue and cry’ if a black voter could not read his ballot; whites would provide little in the way of ‘openings and opportunities for work’ but would be quick to insist on the ‘sin of colored idleness.’”²⁸

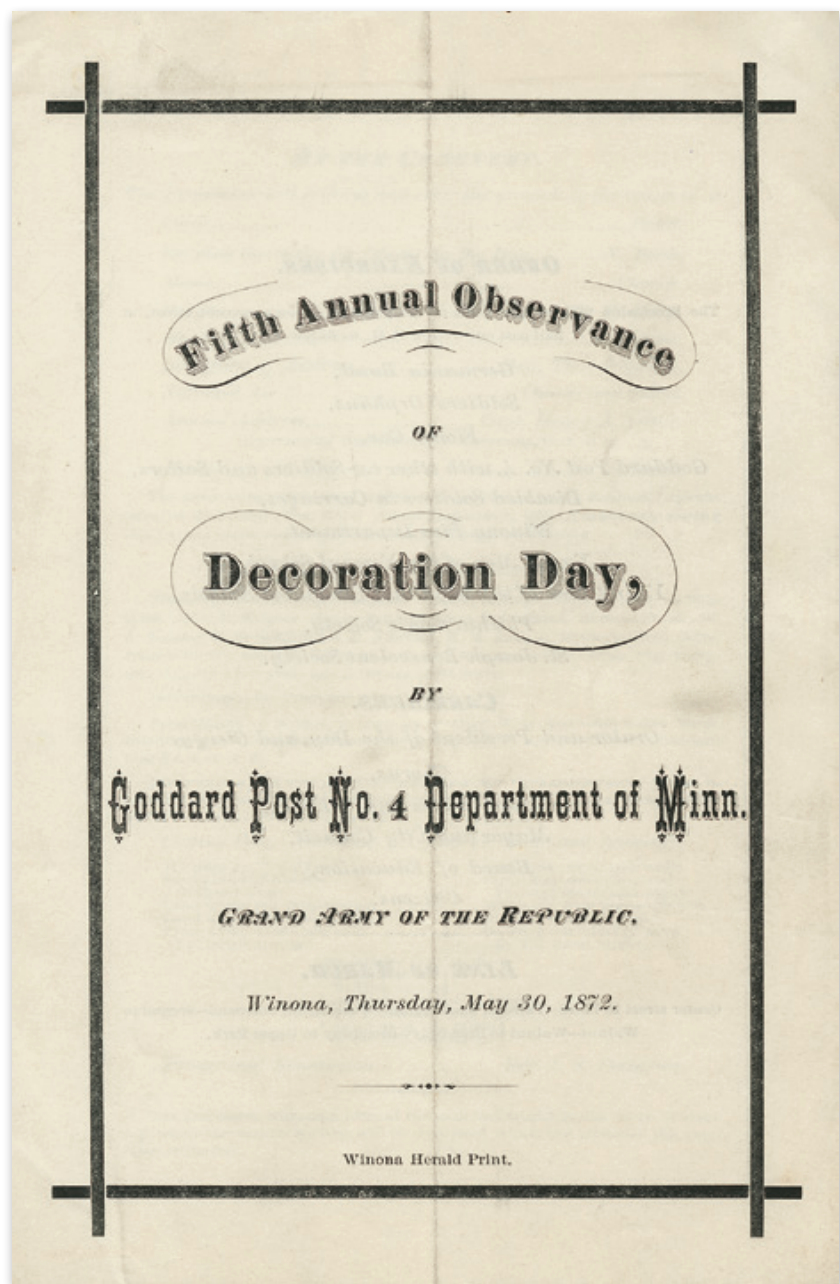
Douglass would likely have agreed with Stewart’s cautious sentiments. David Blight sums up the dilemma: “So conditioned were whites to see blacks as inferior, said Douglass, that ‘in his [the Negro’s] downward course he meets with no resistance, but his course upward is resented at every step of his progress.’” As disastrous US Supreme Court rulings eroded equal protection laws for African Americans and as the Republican Party retreated from Reconstruction and civil rights policies with the Compromise of 1877 that installed Rutherford B. Hayes as president, Douglass saw hard-won gains slipping away.²⁹

Resisting moral lessons of the war?

Douglass laced his 1867 talk in Winona with vivid references to the Civil War because he was convinced that the nation was resisting

the moral lessons of the war. He was fully aware that a segment of America, primarily Democrats, loathed attempts “to go into their closet and drag out ghastly skeletons.” They preferred reconciliation. Douglass wondered, “If the war among the whites brought peace and liberty to the blacks, what will peace among the whites bring?” Douglass argued that the Civil War was not just about saving the Union but also about saving the soul of America by emancipating

the enslaved and creating a more just society. He told his Winona audience: “It is sad to think [. . .] that half the glory, half the honor, due to the great act of emancipation was lost in the tardiness of its performance. It has now gone irrevocably into history, not as an act of sacred choice by a great nation, of the right as against the wrong, of truth against falsehood, of liberty as against slavery, but as a military necessity!” Douglass realized that if Americans viewed the war and



Winona Decoration Day program, 1872, conveys the formality of the ceremony.



Douglass's last appearance in Minnesota was probably in 1892.

Douglass argued that the Civil War was not just about saving the Union but also about saving the soul of America.

emancipation as an expedient measure to save the Union, they would see full citizenship and equality for African Americans as secondary.³⁰

For its part, the *Winona Daily Republican* called out Northern (typically Democratic) voices seeking to bury the meaning of the Civil War. In 1870, as Decoration Day (now Memorial Day) approached, the editors took issue with the *Cincinnati Enquirer's* solicitation of funds to erect a statue in Lexington, Virginia, of Confederate general Stonewall Jackson—whom the *Enquirer* called “a good man and heroic antagonist.” The *Winona* newspaper retorted: “We have yet to hear of a federal soldier who would find any great enjoyment in contributing to a memorial monument to ‘Stonewall Jackson.’”³¹

A month later, a large procession of Winona veterans, politicians, and other community members paraded to Woodlawn Cemetery to present “a floral tribute to the brave, who rest from the labors.” After the flowers had been laid and remarks made by veterans and officials, Reverend Samuel Fallows spoke for an hour. He recognized immigrants, whose service to the Grand Army of the Republic meant that they were “no longer foreigners, but fellow citi-

zens,” and African American troops, noting, “Graves will be decorated today containing the precious dust of those belonging to a once despised and enslaved race, but now rising and free. . . . The colored man has won his freedom and conquered his right to the proudest position of American citizenship.” While Fallows insisted that the South must encourage and protect the liberty of freedmen and -women, he also spoke of a magnanimity among all parties at the end of the war. “We come in no sectional spirit to honor our own patriotic dead. The spirit animates us, I think, which animated the soldiers and the nation when the war was ended; the spirit of forgiveness and love. And this is not a spirit of weakness or injustice.”³²

Despite the good intentions of Fallows and others, Douglass recognized the dangers of magnanimity expressed by white political and religious leaders. In an 1878 Memorial Day speech delivered to a New York City chapter of the Grand Army of the Republic, Douglass once again reminded Republicans that gains for freedom and civil rights won on the battlefield were slipping away. He acknowledged, “Good, wise, and generous men . . . would have us forget and forgive, strew flowers alike and lovingly, on rebel and loyal graves,” and while such expressions have their place, “there was a right side and wrong side in the late war, which no sentiment ought to cause us to forget.” But, in fact, many Americans did want to forget.³³

The *Winona Daily Republican* continued to report on the nation’s ambivalence with Reconstruction and civil rights. In 1881 the newspaper reprinted a review by the *Philadelphian* of “Fool’s Errand,” a political play depicting Ku Klux Klan violence and intimidation against black Southerners. In addition to noting the casting of a Winona native in the performance, the *Daily Republican* highlighted the conservative *Philadelphian’s* “caution and coolness.” Reflecting the mood of the time, the reviewer claimed the issues the play dealt with were no longer relevant; Reconstruction was a story about “an ephemeral phase of political excitement that has passed away, and that nobody cares to recall.” But white supremacist terrorism was not receding as the reviewer implied; it was being codified into law.³⁴

At what was probably his last appearance in Minnesota, Douglass attended the 1892 Republican National Convention in Minneapolis. By this time, African Americans could see that the war to end slavery and the Republican Party of Lincoln and Grant had faded into distant memory. Despite the recognition he received at the convention, Douglass, too, was fading from the scene; he noted, “I don’t belong to the rising generation.”³⁵

Shortly after Douglass’s death on February 20, 1895, at the age of 77, the *Winona Daily Republican* published an article in which Douglass lamented the prospects for civil rights

in the coming presidential election: “I have my fears that the victory of the Republicans may make them even a little more indifferent about protecting human rights under the constitution than when they were in power before.”³⁶

In the wake of a bloody civil war, Douglass saw the perils of peace for African Americans. Because Amer-

ica’s happiness had always been intertwined with racial slavery, he warned that the tragedy of abandoned Reconstruction policies and civil rights laws would be felt by the entire nation for generations to come. As Douglass receded, first from the lecture halls and stages, then from public memory, former slave owners and their scions gained and consolidated

power. They would go on to shape sectional and national policies—and the historical record, just as Douglass feared. Douglass’s remarks in an undated speech encapsulate the fate of African American civil rights well into the twentieth century—and arguably beyond: “Slavery has always had a better memory than freedom, and was always a better hater.”³⁷ ■

Notes

1. Frederick Douglass, *The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, Vol. 4: 1864–1880, ed. John W. Blassingame, et al. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 178. Douglass escaped and became a fugitive slave at the age of 20.

2. David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 308. The lecture Douglass gave in Winona, as reported by the *Winona Daily Republican*, was representative of his lecture tour and tracks very closely to the lecture he gave in St. Louis on February 7. The full text can be found in *FD Papers, Series One*.

3. “Frederick Douglass’s Lecture,” *Winona Daily Republican*, Mar. 18, 1867; Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2003), 330.

4. Richard Moe, *The Last Full Measure: The Life and Death of the First Minnesota Volunteers* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1993), 272; “Population,” *Winona Daily Republican*, Dec. 31, 1866; “Wheat Trade: The Season’s Operations,” *Winona Daily Republican*, Dec. 31, 1866; “Building Operations in Winona the Past Year,” *Winona Daily Republican*, Dec. 31, 1867.

5. Norton had been originally elected to the US Senate as a Unionist (one who supported preservation of the Union but not necessarily political and social rights for blacks) and later aligned himself with the moderate Republican faction. “The Democratic Gathering,” *Winona Daily Republican*, Sept. 22, 1868.

6. Eugene V. Smalley, *A History of the Republican Party from Its Organization to the Present Time* (St. Paul, MN: E. V. Smalley Publishing, 1896), 149–50; Social Explorer, “US Demography 1790 to Present”; “Whom Shall We Allow to Vote?” *Winona Daily Republican*, Nov. 20, 1868.

7. William D. Green, *A Peculiar Imbalance: The Fall and Rise of Racial Equality in Early Minnesota*. (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2007), 142; “Negro Suffrage: Memorial of Colored Citizens of Minnesota to the Legislature,” *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Jan. 20, 1865; “Legislature of Minnesota: Seventh Session,” *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Feb. 7, 1865.

8. “An Interesting Scene,” *St. Paul Press*, Mar. 1, 1865; “Presentation of Cane,” *Chatfield Democrat*, Mar. 18, 1865; “Stand Firm,” *Chatfield Democrat*, June 3, 1865.

9. Frederick Douglass, “Reconstruction,” *The Atlantic* (Dec. 1866).

10. Frederick Douglass, “An Appeal to Congress,” *The Atlantic* (Jan. 1867).

11. “Legislature of Minnesota.”

12. *FD Papers, Series One*, Vol. 4, 240–259; “Lecture Course for the Season,” *Winona Daily Republican*, Jan. 12, 1867.

13. “Theodore Tilton on Reconstruction,” *Winona Daily Republican*, Feb. 23, 1867.

14. “Frederick Douglass: Rev. William McKinley Writes an Interesting Article,” *Winona Republican Herald*, Jan. 11, 1902; Frederick Douglass, *The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, Vol. 1: 1841–1846 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), xxx–xxxi; *FD Papers, Series One*, Vol. 4, 240–59.

15. *FD Papers, Series One*, Vol. 4, 149–52.

16. “Frederick Douglass’s Lecture.”

17. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 264.

18. “The impeachment resolution,” *Winona Daily Republican*, Dec. 10, 1867.

19. *FD Papers, Series One*, Vol. 4, 151.

20. “Frederick Douglass’s Lecture”; “Frederick Douglass,” *Mantorville (MN) Express*, Mar. 22, 1867; *FD Papers, Series One*, Vol. 1, xxxiii, xxvi; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 338.

21. For McKinley’s reminiscence on this visit, see “Interesting Reminiscence: Visit of Fred. Douglass to Winona Recalled by Dr. McKinley,”

coverage by *Winona Democrat* as reported in *Winona Daily Republican*, Mar. 25, 1895.

22. “Happy will it be . . .,” quoted in *Winona Daily Republican*, Mar. 15, 1867; David Blight, *Frederick Douglass’ Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 221; “Frederick Douglass’s Lecture.”

23. “Frederick Douglass’s Lecture”; Green, *A Peculiar Imbalance*, 147; *FD Papers, Series One*, Vol. 4, 179; “The State,” *Winona Daily Republican*, Nov. 7, 1867, 2.

24. “The Great Winona Republican Meeting,” *Minneapolis Daily Tribune*, Sept. 17, 1868; *Winona*

Daily Republican, Nov. 2, 1868, 2, as quoted in *Chatfield (MN) Democrat*, July 18, 1868.

25. *Winona Daily Republican*, Nov. 13, 1868, 2; *Minnesota Legislative Manual: 1869* (St. Paul, MN: Office of the Press Printing Co., 1869), 89.

26. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 289.

27. Green, *A Peculiar Imbalance*, 148, 151; *Winona Daily Republican*, Dec. 8, 1868; “The Jubilee of Emancipation and Enfranchisement,” *Minneapolis Daily Tribune*, Jan. 5, 1869, 2; “Will Jefferson Davis Live?” *Winona Daily Republican*, Dec. 27, 1866. Conference committee members had invited Douglass, but he was not able to attend.

28. As quoted in Leslie A. Schwalm, *Emancipation’s Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 199, 200; “The Jubilee of Emancipation and Enfranchisement.”

29. Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 308.

30. *FD Papers, Series One*, Vol. 4, 578; Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 98; “Frederick Douglass’s Lecture.”

31. *Winona Daily Republican*, Apr. 29, 1870, 2.

32. “The Day,” *Winona Daily Republican*, May 29, 1870, 3; “Oration,” *Winona Daily Republican*, June 1, 1870, 2 (emphasis in original).

33. “There Was a Right Side in the Late War: An Address Delivered in New York, New York on 30 May 1878,” *FD Papers, Series One*, Vol. 4, 491.

34. *Winona Daily Republican*, Nov. 2, 1881.

35. Iric Nathanson, “African Americans and the 1892 Republican National Convention, Minneapolis,” *Minnesota History* 61, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 79.

36. “Just Criticism: The Late Frederick Douglass on the Enforcement of Human Rights,” *Winona Daily Republican*, Feb. 23, 1895, 2.

37. As quoted in Blight, *Frederick Douglass’ Civil War*, 234.

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